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**RACE
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DOUBLE
DATE**

by **CARROLL
JOHN DALY**

DON JAMES
JOHN D. MacDONALD

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EVERY STORY NEW—NO REPRINTS

Vol. 57

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- Cover Painted by Norman Saunders.**
 The incredible story of a ruthless monster of intrigue.

The September issue will be out August 4th

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DOCKET



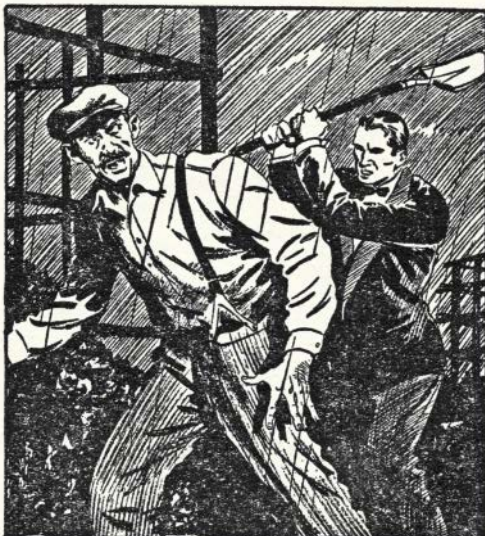
When Burt Chance, smoothest self-made heel in town, heard the cops were suspicious about his business rival's fatal accident, he audaciously dropped in at Headquarters—unannounced. Grinning with the assurance of his iron-clad alibi, he heard Detective Captain Dixon grate: "Some day we'll see you fry!"



Chance was secretly flattered to learn Dixon had hired a glamorous Mata Hari to work on him. His blood-pressure rose in anticipation when he spotted the high-voltage brunette alone at the bar. And his delighted suspicions were confirmed when he overheard her phone conversation: "Chief? No dice tonight. . . ."

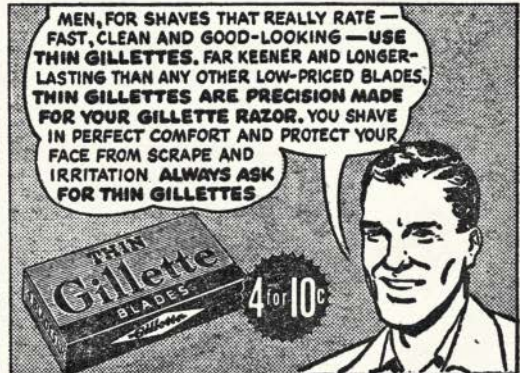
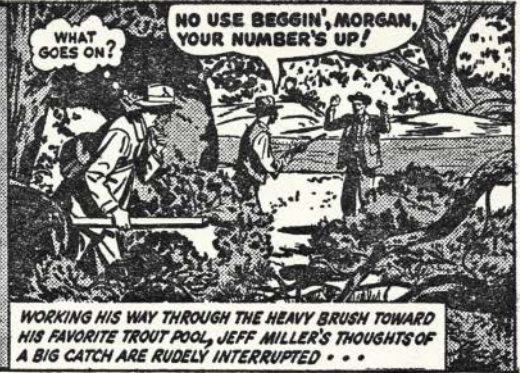


In response to a note, the luscious spy, Elza Lyle, slipped off to a rendezvous in his apartment. Suddenly scared silly by this too-tempting bait, Chance told her off. Then Elza slipped her arms around him. "I'm not here as a cop—" she whispered—"but as a woman in love."



Even the most debonair of murderers must dispose of corpses. Chance was busy at his ghoulish work when the night watchman got nosy. Chance raised his shovel and moved in. . . . The complete story will be told by Frederick C. Davis in—"Man About Murder"—in the September issue . . . out August 4th.

JEFF LOST INTEREST IN FISHING WHEN...



RACE WILLIAMS'

Action-Packed Detective Novel

CHAPTER ONE

The Lady and the Hood

I SUPPOSED it was stock or bonds, but someone had left them at my office with a fifty-dollar bill if I delivered them to the clerk of the Astoria Hotel down town. The Astoria had a nice bar and served you draft beer that would float you up and down, it was that smooth.

From where I sat I could look down into the dining room and see the row of tables below street level along the windows. It was pretty well crowded, but not enough for the scene that was going on.

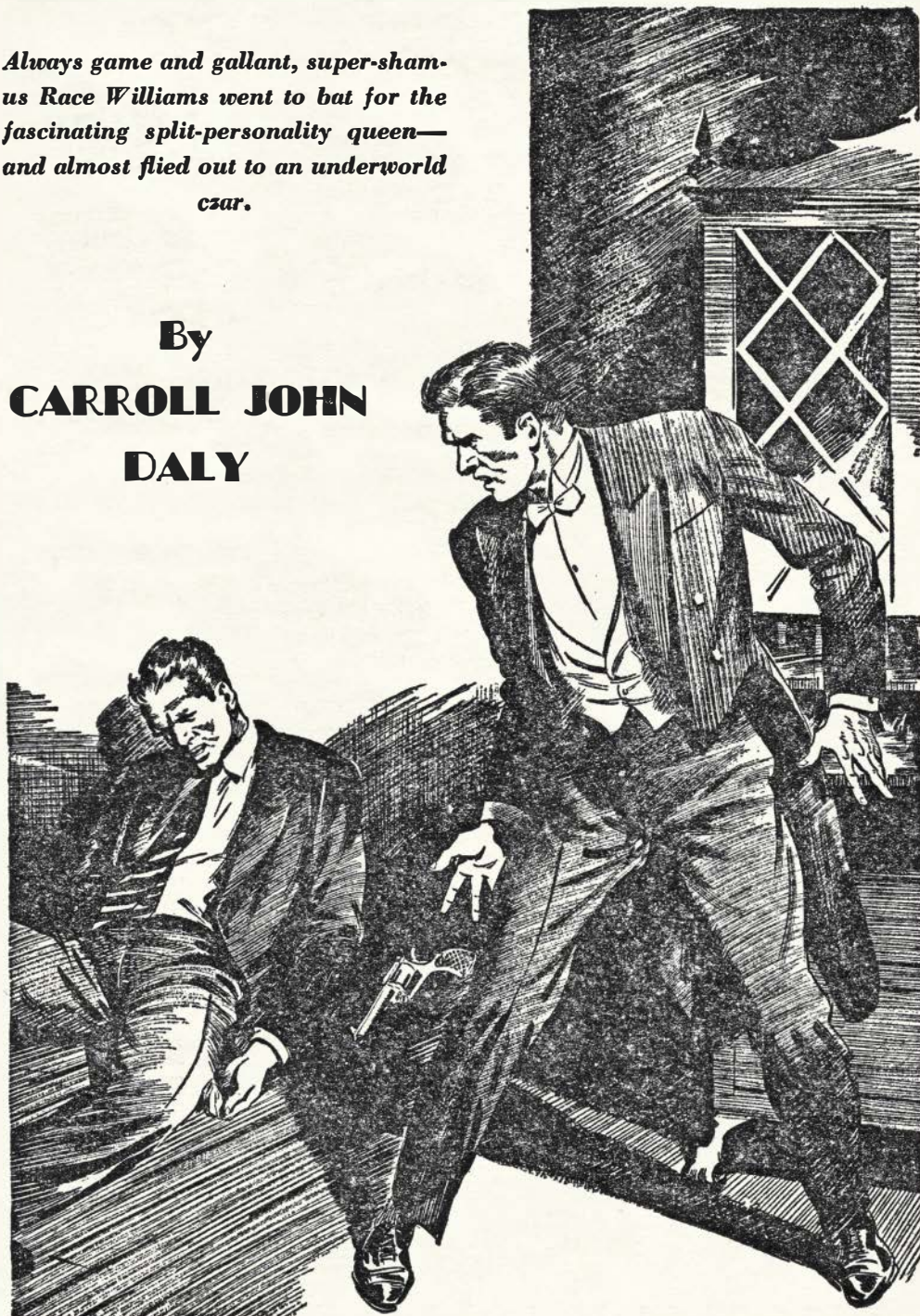


She seemed to fire it without aiming. . . .

DOUBLE DATE ●

Always game and gallant, super-shamus Race Williams went to bat for the fascinating split-personality queen—and almost fled out to an underworld czar.

By
**CARROLL JOHN
DALY**



I have seen lads who get mad enough to play bumpy with the back of another lad's chair when they think he is hogging all the room, but now I was seeing it being played rather viciously. So much so that the waiter had to move the last customer from the corner table entirely. The man who had been banging his chair against the other's was now satisfied. He leaned back comfortably and smiled at his companion—who looked as though she shouldn't have been found dead with the guy.

I knew the man. He was Jake Haggerty, a common gangster in anybody's language—except that he worked for Ward Anderson: slick racketeer, night club owner and trying to mix with society.

The more I looked at the empty chair behind Haggerty, the more I wanted to go sit in it. He had been shooting off his big mouth about me lately, and it is not good for my business to have gangsters telling tall yarns as to why I leave them alone.

The more I thought of the idea the better I liked it. I walked into the dining room from the far end, and before a captain got hold of me, was almost at the corner table directly behind Haggerty.

The captain tried to steer me away, but finally pulled out the distant chair so that I would not be within bumping distance of Haggerty. I wiped off his satisfied smile by taking the chair with its back to Haggerty.

The captain was apprehensive and whispered: "The gentleman behind you, sir—a little gay perhaps. He may annoy you. . . ."

"Hell," I said with a sort of twang in my voice, "I'll sit here no matter who doesn't like it. Free country, isn't it?"

Nothing happened until I got my soup. I was leaning over for the first sip when I got a push that nearly buried my face right in the plate. That was not quite so funny as I expected. But if Haggerty wanted to play bumpy then I could play bumpy. That's what I'd come there for.

I moved my table well forward—then I shot back my chair against Haggerty like a bus hitting a truck. I heard him grunt. Dishes rattled and a glass fell to the floor. I held my breath. When I heard his chair

squeak, I slid forward hard and fast against my own table four or five feet away.

The crash told me that Haggerty had put all he had into this bump—missed me and crashed to the floor. A few old ladies gasped and several people burst out laughing.

I started buttering a roll just as if I didn't know anything had happened.

Then Haggerty's hand fell on my shoulder. His face was twisted in rage as he swung me around and jerked me to my feet. I let him have it. I doubt if anyone in the room saw the blow. Certainly not Haggerty until it caught him on his chin and straightened him up.

Another man would have gone down. Some would have stayed down. But Haggerty stayed on his feet, although his eyes were glassy and his legs were rubber. I could have knocked him down and kept him down then with a smack across the mouth.

But I didn't. I watched Haggerty do his dance of the rubber legs and get ready for a comeback. Then his eyes began to clear and see—yes, see plainly. His words choked in his throat.

"Williams—Race Williams! I thought you were a—a stranger."

"Oh come, come Haggerty," I said. "We don't play games with strangers." Then in a lower voice: "Maybe you'd like to pull a gun and have some real fun. . . . Beat it, punk."

Haggerty turned and left without even a look at the girl.

A waiter lifted up the chair, set it by the table. The girl looked up at me at an angle. Her eyes weren't wide and they weren't wondering. I grinned.

She said: "Very pretty, sir. Good clean fun. But what about me? Darkness coming on—and the dinner to be paid for."

I sat down and looked at the girl.

"Tell me about yourself," she said slowly "Did you come up from unspeakable poverty? Did you build yourself up alone, flouting law and order—laughing at mere man?"

"Maybe," I told her. "At least I've got a better line than Haggerty. He was surprised, I presume. And you?"

She smiled. "Haggerty looked surprised. Stunned, too, or he wouldn't have

left me. As for me—I don't know. I saw you come along the back of the room close to the wall and take the seat at that table."

"And you didn't tell him?"

"I didn't think he would be interested."

She paused. "If you slapped Mr. Haggerty around for pleasure, then I think you might pay for my meal."

I liked the girl. That is I liked to look at her. It was such a strange sort of face, the eyes slightly narrowed. She had a strange smile which I have no description for. I thought there was a trembling to the lips, and though it looked like derision I had an idea it wasn't. Her lips were much too red, and her eyes were shaded, her eyebrows overdrawn.

"And if," I said, "I slapped him around by accident?"

SHE shook her head. "That might have been true if you had originally been at that table. Jake was doing his chair bumping without the slightest idea who he was bumping." She let her eyes open a bit. "It was the first time I ever laughed out loud at him. There was terror in his face—a surprised sort of terror like a man who expects to pick up a bit of clothesline and finds it is a high voltage wire."

I was about to crack wise, but she stopped me. "Don't—please. Take me very seriously. It may be worth real money to you."

And damned if she didn't place her elbows on the table, put her chin on her delicate hands and stare directly at me. After a bit she said:

"So you're Race Williams, the private detective. Okay, Mr. Williams, I think you'll do. Played right—and it will be played right—I can get my hands on two hundred grand within the month. Honest money, every penny of it. How would you like to have a share of it?"

I'm not often thrown, but she sure tossed me a bit. For a moment, I was sure I had the secret of her eyes. She was hopped up to the gills.

She came slowly to her feet, picked up her purse and gloves. Her eyes were narrow slits. Now she was not beautiful—she was not even pretty. Or perhaps she was. . . .

She laughed, and there was something mighty cold about it—nice but cold. "So

you don't want to share that money with me. Well, perhaps you are right. You couldn't spend it if you were dead. Good evening." She turned, then swung back. "Thanks for the show. I was amused."

She was gone and I was left holding the fort—that is, holding the table. I watched her walk down the room. She was rather tall and most of it was legs. Nice legs that had a long stride to them.

I tossed a ten-dollar bill on the table and went after her. But I was no further than the door when I looked out one of the windows and saw her long legs climbing into a taxi.

The waiter approached me with the manager. The manager said, "Ten dollars, sir? The bill was eighteen-fifty."

"What bill?"

"Mr. Haggerty and—er—the young lady."

"What have I got to do with Haggerty?" I asked him. "The ten bucks was a tip to the waiter. I liked his face."

I turned up my collar and went out into the rain. . . .

It was pretty late, so I decided to go home, fix up a bit and wander around a few of the spots. Maybe Haggerty wanted to make something out of the smack he had. I always like the boys to have their chance early before someone talks them into a lot of courage. Also, I was wondering if I would see the girl again.

Thinking a little of Haggerty and more of Ward Anderson, his boss, I buzzed my boy Jerry at my apartment. He was slow to answer the phone. Though his voice was about right, there was a little bit of—oh, bitterness in it.

"It's all right, Jerry," I told him. "I'll be coming home right away. By the way, we've wound up our case with Mrs. Mof-fet—did you make the train reservations for her?" And when he gulped that he had, I asked casually, "For what time tomorrow afternoon?"

He said it was half past two. I let it go at that and hung up.

I MADE sure that no one was sitting on my tail and jumped a taxi. I got out half a block away from my apartment.

I went in the side door and grabbed off one of the automatic elevators in the rear. It is one of those apartments where

you pay high for the service at the front door and more for the lack of service at the side door. It gives me real privacy, and no copper can find out from the help when some one visited me or left.

The car took me to the seventh floor. I let myself out and went whistling toward my door.

My gun was in my hand when I swung the door open and stepped into the small foyer. I could look straight down the length of the hall into the living room, and see the heavy curtains by the window and the wide double doors, now open.

All this took only a couple of seconds. Then I pulled the other gun from under my armpit and, with a gun in each hand, went down the hall at my usual even pace. "Jerry," I called. "Did Milligan call up about the suitcase stolen out of his car?"

I went on talking, watching the curtains ahead. They were flat against the window and did not move. So I took a peek at the cracks between the double doors and the wall. With a final "Hi, Jerry," and a sigh of contentment about being home again, I stuck a gun through the large crack in each door and I fired two shots.

The results were immediate and pleasant. To my right a man screamed out in pain and thudded to the floor. To my left a man staggered out into the room as though doing a dance. His left hand was held against his chest, his right hand waved a gun. If it weren't for the blood, you might have thought it was a Russian ballet.

I looked at the other man on the floor. He was holding his leg and his gun was beside him. I picked it up and kept my eye on the dancer. I recognized him, of course. It was Jake Haggerty.

"Drop the rod," I told him. But he had already fallen full length on his face and the gun had shot across the floor—just to the edge of the couch where I could now see legs kicking.

That would be Jerry. But I looked around the room, at the closed doors that led to the kitchen, the bedrooms, my den.

Somewhere in the apartment another figure lurked. Not too dangerous—for Jerry had said *half past two*, which meant two tough birds and one that didn't count too much.

Stupid things, gunmen, to think they could hide in my apartment and plug me. Of course I had called Jerry first. He had tipped me off easily with that time business.

The wounded boy by the door was scared stiff. And he had reason to be. Guys couldn't go around trying to blast me out of the picture and get away with it. He wasn't over twenty, a juvenile delinquent of the war years developed into a full-fledged gunman, or so he thought.

"You're going to kill me," he kept crying over and over.

"You knew that when you came, kid." I patted him gently on the shoulder. "Don't you worry—you're no more than a child. I'll blow you out easy—a single shot in the mouth."

I got Haggerty's artillery, then watching both doors, I backed over to Jerry and tore the rag out of his mouth. It took him a full five seconds to get his breath. Then he let out some of the foulest language I ever heard.

"Jerry," I said, "I pulled you out of the gutter some years back. You talk like that again and I'll toss you back. Now, where is the half?"

"The frail," he said. "She's in the kitchen. She didn't come with me. They forced in on her heels. . . . Get these damned ropes offa me, will you?"

"Got to get a knife," I told him. I walked into the kitchen, slamming open the door. A lad can be just as dead from lead squeezed by the dainty fingers of a woman as he can be by a man.

The kitchen was deserted. One glance told me that. It was one of these kitchens you don't have to hunt around in.

THE window was open. I looked out—and I gasped for breath. She was walking along the ledge. She had her back close against the cement of the building and was moving very slowly.

What to do? Go after her? Sure, very noble. But I lay no claim to being noble. Besides, if I went after her she might jump. This way, she would try to pass my bedroom window and make the fire escape.

Of course I could call softly to her to come back, that all was forgiven. But I didn't. I had a plan. It might break her

heart, but it wouldn't break her head.

I went back into the living room. Things hadn't changed much, except that Haggerty had reached a chair and was trying to pull himself up. I cut Jerry free and rubbed his hands and legs until I had him on his feet. Then I walked him into the little hall and got the truth out of him.

"The girl came to the door," he told me. "She was a pippin and she squeezed by in a hurry like a lot of them do." He killed my raising eyebrows there. "And then I was rushed from behind her. I had my gun drawn and—"

"Never mind that. They rushed you. What about the girl? She was part of the racket for them to get in, eh?"

"I didn't think so, boss. She whispered something about not letting anyone in. And then she lit out for the kitchen."

"Did they search the whole apartment?"

"Over and over, boss, until you telephoned. They told me to talk natural." He grinned.

I said quickly: "Watch over this team, Jerry. I have business back in my room. And if someone pounds hell out of the door, tip me off and I'll be telephoning the police."

I went down the hall to my bedroom. I wasn't in any special hurry. Not a great distance for her to travel, of course—but under the circumstances almost a marathon. Sure I was worried; that was natural. No one likes a girl to fall from the 7th story window of his apartment.

I didn't switch on the light but felt my way across the room and took a tiny flash from a desk drawer. I used it carefully. I got the curtains drawn well back from the window—and then silently opened the french window. I left one window closed for the girl to pass, the other open to bar her progress. I wanted her to fall, all right—but I wanted her to fall in, not out.

I was tempted to look out but I was afraid. I tried listening, but couldn't even hear a squeak of moving feet. Nothing but the distant toots of cars.

She came, faster than I expected. I saw her slim legs. They moved like a wooden soldier's, side-stepping. I didn't see the whiteness of her hands; she had them

both buried hard against her sides.

I stood close to the open window and waited for her to fall in. Then she was there. I almost laughed as she started leaning backward into the room, and stepped forward to catch her.

I didn't catch her. There was the sharp intake of breath. Her falling body straightened—went too far forward—and started to pitch into the outer darkness.

CHAPTER TWO

My Favorite Client

I SHOULD have grabbed her when she first appeared by the window. I leaped forward and caught her just back of the knees. I braced my feet, bent backward and tried to hold her.

I'm as strong as the next guy, but believe it or not, I went forward with the girl and damn near went over. We seasawed back and forth for what seemed ten years, and neither one of us said a word. One thing was certain—she didn't want to die.

I gave it to her straight as I felt my arms begin to tear apart in the sockets. "Toss yourself backwards when we come in," I gulped.

We teetered back—and she gave a quick spasmodic twist of her body.

Here we go! I thought, and then I laughed. We were on the floor.

I quit laughing as I took a cute little toy gun from the handbag she'd dropped. The cute little toy was a .25 automatic. I came to my feet and half held her in my arm.

She clung to me and cried softly, which wasn't too bad. She was very limp and wobbly. I laid her down on the bed and snapped on the lamp.

And there she was—the little lady of the affair with Haggerty.

That is, she was a spitting image of her, figure, features and—but I didn't know. There was something softer about her face, about her lips, and certainly her eyes were wide open. And she wasn't wearing any lipstick or other make-up.

"Where am I?" She sat up and ran a hand across her forehead. She didn't act as if she ever saw me before. "I—the bathroom, please?"

That was hardly what Emily Post would suggest for teen-age etiquette for a girl who'd just been snatched from death. But I like people who are not trite, so I showed her to the bathroom—and went back to the living room.

I didn't mention the girl. I looked things over. Haggerty had pulled himself up and was half leaning on the couch.

Jerry said, "Look at the blood—the rug's ruined. Tough guy," he turned to the kid who sat across the room, "has been crying that you're going to kill him. Haggerty told him you wouldn't."

"Haggerty told him that?" I took a look at Haggerty. He didn't look too bad. His eyes were glassy, but he knew what was going on. "Haggerty," I said, "wouldn't bet with the kid on that."

The phone rang then and Jerry answered it. He turned to me.

"Ward Anderson," he said.

I lifted the phone, spoke easily.

"How are you, Ward? Haven't been around to your place for a long time. Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes," Ward said. "You can come around here right away. I've got a case for you—real money in it."

"I don't work for muggs."

"*What?*" I think Ward was genuinely surprised.

"I don't work for muggs," I told him again. "Muggs that send punks out to knock me off."

"You—you mean Haggerty?"

"No one else," I said. "Want to listen to his last breath?"

"Is Haggerty in your apartment?"

"With a slug in his chest," I told him. Muttered stuff came over the phone.

When he paused, I said:

"Theres' a kid with Haggerty—I don't know him. Killer something, probably. He's right out of a horse opera. Maybe I should have the cops take him away."

"Suit yourself." Ward had his breath back now. "I didn't send Haggerty and a punk after you. What do you think I am?" When I told him, he gave in suddenly. "Okay. Deliver them both here to me at the club—side entrance—and I'll give you a grand for each of them."

"They're not in very good condition."

"I don't care what condition they're in."

"And the girl?" I tossed it in casually.

"What girl?" He said it as if it had no significance, and then suddenly it had. He gasped. "I'll be right over!" The phone went dead.

I said: "Don't mention any girl to him, Jerry. I didn't see any. You didn't see any. And the two muggs didn't see any. Ward Anderson would slaughter them if he thought they even saw the shadow of a girl. He's coming over."

When I went down the hall and saw the bathroom door open, I hurried to my room. Maybe the girl was on the loose again.

She was sitting in front of my mirror fixing up her hair. And I could really see the difference. Not that she wasn't the same girl of the window sill and the *affaire* Haggerty—but it was as if she had recovered from, well, a long illness or—Damn it, I couldn't put a name on it.

She turned, stood up, and faced me.

"You're Race Williams, aren't you?" she asked.

I said that was true and then asked her pointblank why she was on my window ledge. She knitted her brows and said nothing.

Then I asked bluntly: "What brought you here—to help two men to trap me to my death?"

HER eyes opened even wider. They were deep and green, and sort of blue, too. And she really did look surprised.

She didn't deny it. She said simply, "It can't be true. It—it doesn't make sense."

She came closer to me, and I saw how small and dainty she was and how she looked right up into my eyes. She said, "I don't think you'll lie to me. Did I—did I bring two men here to—to kill you?" And when I didn't answer right away she put both her hands up to my shoulders and shook me slightly. "I wouldn't like to believe that. Did I?"

I shrugged off her hands. "I don't know if you did or not, but it sure looked like it. Why did you come, then?"

"To see you. That is, I was coming. I had a note to come—" A pause. "I did come—" She shuddered suddenly. "There were shots—and then I was falling and

you were holding me." She bit her mouth. "I guess I better talk to you—when I'm more composed."

"Your name?" I knew an act was going on, but I had come in late and the curtain had gone up. She was the girl of the restaurant and yet she wasn't. She certainly didn't act the same, and she wasn't wearing any make-up now. But unless identical twins were in the picture, ten could get you fifty it was the same girl.

"Must I tell you that? My name?"

"I have no way of making you," I said, nodding toward her bag. "Unless of course there are some cards or letters in the bag you carry."

She looked startled.

"Alyce Joyce Reed," she said. When I reached out for the bag, she tried to pull it away. The struggle was not much of a one—and I don't mean because she didn't try. But I opened the bag and emptied the contents on my bed.

There was the usual junk a woman carries. Mirror. Comb. Lipstick. A handkerchief with initials *A. J. R.* No cigarette case. No vanity. A wad of dough and two letters.

She stood there and watched me read the letters. One was from a girl friend inviting her to spend a couple of weeks at her Booth Bay home in Maine. The second envelope had no postmark and was simply addressed *Alyce*. I opened it and read aloud:

"Go see Race Williams. Pay him to watch over me. My life is in danger and your life is my life. Go see him."

It was signed *Martha*.

I shook something else out of the envelope. It was a check for twenty-five hundred dollars and was made payable—yes, to me. And it was signed *Alyce Joyce Reed*.

"Who is Martha?" I asked.

"Martha." She thought a moment. "They call her Martha Dale. You'll find her at the Crescent Club."

"Ward Anderson's place." I straightened a bit. "Do you know him?"

"Yes," she said. "I am engaged to be married to him. It's not public yet."

"Good Lord." I took a good look at her now. "You know who he is—what he is? Does he know you are retaining me—

for Martha?" She really had me going.

She surprised me with her first laugh, and it was a nice one. Her lips and teeth came into the picture and she looked good. In fact she looked good all over.

"Yes," she said, "I know who he is and what he is." She paused. "And you might as well know now that—that my uncle is William Evans. Yes, the politician." She bit her lips. "He has taken care of me and I love him. I'd do anything for him."

I tossed back lightly, "Ward Anderson thinks you are here and is coming over. Do you want to see him?"

She seemed to pull back.

"All right, you don't have to. He can't search the place, you know." When she seemed about to say Ward Anderson could do anything, I told her, "I think I can convince him I haven't seen you if you leave now. By the fire escape with Jerry—that's my boy. But you'll have to hurry."

"And you'll watch over Martha?"

"Yes."

She turned toward the hall. "It's Martha's money, too, you know. She won't like it if you don't understand. And when Martha gets sore she raises hell with me."

"Everything back in your bag?" I asked.

"Yes. Yes, thank you." She was closing the bag.

"All but this." I took the small gun and tossed it over on the bed. "Now tell me that belongs to Martha."

"Yes—it must," she said. "She must have slipped it in my bag."

"Martha," I said, "is quite a girl."

I went and got Jerry and gave him his instructions. When Jerry was gone with the girl, I listened to Haggerty tell me about how he was dying.

The kid was sullen now. He was pretty sure I wasn't going to kill him. The phone rang and Anderson was downstairs, doing everything gentle and above board. He said he had two men with him.

I said, "All right. Park the rough stuff downstairs and come up alone. I mean alone, Ward. I'm deep into it now and one or two more wouldn't bother me."

"All right." He didn't argue—just hung up.

Ward Anderson was a chesty guy, not too little or too large—just a chesty guy who didn't talk too much around things. He was alone. He preceded me down the hall and looked at his two stoogies. He noted the punk's leg and sniffed. Then he went and bent over Haggerty.

He straightened up, looked down at Haggerty and said, "Get up."

Haggerty floundered and got to one knee and fell back again.

Ward Anderson turned to me. "Let me bring up the boys and help them out—no one need know."

"No."

"Okay." Ward Anderson used snap judgment. "I'll stand them up against the wall in the hall, and let the boys take them from there. Good boys. You know them—Charlie and Eddie."

I knew them and nodded.

Ward said, "Give me a hand."

"Not me." I sat down on the window seat.

"You want the cops here?" he said. When I said that was all right with me—which it wasn't—he turned to the punk and said, "Get up—get up on your feet." And the punk did. At least he stood on one foot.

"Now you, Haggerty," he said, "you would come here to knock Williams off! Get up, damn you! Get up!"

Haggerty thought he couldn't, but he did, just the same. Ward Anderson literally kicked him to his feet. Then Anderson led Haggerty down the hall and to the door, the young punk hopping on one foot after them. He came back and lifted the house phone and spoke into it.

"Put Mr. Charles Emons on the phone, please." Which was the first time I ever heard Charlie's last name. "Oh, Charlie, They're here in front of the door. Suite 720. Drunk, I suppose. Get them out the back. You and Eddie take them over, understand? Take Haggerty over—now!"

"NOW, Race." Ward Anderson turned to me as if he had come for a little chat. "Tell me what happened. And what's this about a girl?" The easy indifference was not so good about the girl.

"Well," I told Ward, "I walked in and

they had guns in their hands and my boy was tied up—and I shot the pair of them. They had some story that they followed a girl in—but they could have lied." Then with a shrug, "Or the girl could have jumped out a window."

"Nothing to be funny about," Ward Anderson scowled.

"Maybe not," I told him. "You and I haven't crossed yet—but if this is the way it's going to be, it's all right with me."

Ward changed his tune. "Come now, Race—how did you get that way?"

"Well," I told him, "Haggerty and I had a little cross talk down town. There was a girl with him and—"

"That's it!" Ward Anderson cut in quickly. "He's on his own, see? There was this girl. He liked her—you know how Haggerty is to talk himself up. Well, you knocked him around. It doesn't do a lad good to get knocked around in front of his girl, so he pulled at his vest. You won't have to worry about Haggerty any more—I'll promise you that."

"Haggerty wouldn't worry me."

"Well," Ward got up and walked toward the door, "Come down to the club sometime. Look it over—put it on the cuff." He started toward the long hall to the door and swung suddenly back. "Oh, Race." He was familiar and friendly. "I got a little business to throw your way."

"I don't want your business."

He laughed pleasantly and pulled out a wad of bills. "There's five grand here, Race—just for *not* taking a case."

"Sold." I put the money in my pocket. "I'll think up a case not to take."

"A *certain* case." The humor had gone out of his eyes.

"Not Haggerty's girl friend?" I prodded him.

He stared at me then for a long time. "Haggerty hasn't any girl friend. You see—by now there isn't any Haggerty to have any girl friend."

"As fast as that."

"Your bullet in his chest. I'd accept that five grand if I were you, Williams."

I tossed the money back to him just as Jerry came in the front door. I called Jerry over. I took the gun that had plugged Haggerty and the boy and handed it to Jerry.

"Take that up to—well, our little friend.

If he can't fix it up so that bullets that came out of it before will never come out of it again—okay. If not, let him melt it down and make a bracelet for Mr. Anderson here."

I turned to the night club man. "Sit down a few minutes, Ward. I'd like to talk things over with you."

Ward Anderson had been around. I didn't even need the simple gesture of exposing my left arm pit and the holster there. He sat down leisurely, took a cigarette, lit it and said easily, "Sure, Race."

I was pleasant, too. "This girl's name is Martha Dale. You know her?"

"Yes," he said, very, very evenly. "I know her."

"Is there any reason why you object to my giving her protection?"

He laughed out loud.

"We'd get along, boy. Really get along. . . . No, I can see no objection to you giving her protection. I'll give it to her myself, any time you wish."

"Then it is not you she fears."

"Now, now." His finger was playful. "You can ask her about all that easy enough."

"If she gets to see me again."

He frowned then, and he looked at me for a full minute.

"If I could keep her from seeing you again—if I could lift her by the throat and squeeze every bit of evil out of her—I'd do it."

"You'd strangle her?"

"I'd give my right arm to strangle her!" he said viciously. "Yet I'd shoot you to death, Race, if I thought you were going to harm her—any harm, do you understand?"

"Guys don't harm their clients," I told him.

"Don't they?" He was still looking at me. "You stick to that idea and we'll be friends. I might toss you a few grand myself."

The phone rang. It was Jerry. All things were arranged. The gun would never tie me to Haggerty's corpse.

"Was that the all-clear signal?" Ward asked. When I nodded, he got up and straightened his tie. "Maybe I'll see you at the club," he said. "That is where your client will probably be."

CHAPTER THREE

Two-Time Queen

I MET her at the Crescent Club, all right. She was sitting at a table off in the corner where great drapes hid her from view of most of the people. I didn't see her until the waiter came to me and said she wanted to talk to me.

The girl smiled up at me. "I'm Martha, you know."

I sat down and said, "No, you're Alyce Joyce Reed and putting on an act."

"I'm not putting on an act—and I'm not Alyce. How could I be that damned little society prude? Look," she said, "did you ever hear of dual personality?"

"I know lots of guys with it. They treat all the boys to dinner. Smile all over the place and go home and beat the children—and the wife, too, if she isn't too big."

"That," said Martha, "is a double life. Have you ever heard of Dr. Raymond Halton?"

"The psychiatrist?" I asked. "He must be a hundred years old."

"He's very famous. Also, have you heard of Dr. Johnston—another psychiatrist? Rather young, though he's the coming man in the profession."

"Doctors are not much in my line. Generally when I finish up a case we use the medical examiner."

She leaned over and let her two hands rest on my left one. "I talked about a lot of money this afternoon, Race, and you didn't believe it. But it's there. We've got to get our hands on it. Suppose we did—I'm not bad to look at. We'd split it—get married and travel around the world."

"What," I said, "made you think that I'd marry for money?"

"Haggerty gave me trouble—was about to give me real trouble—and you killed him. They picked him out of the East River less than half an hour ago."

"How distressing."

"Hmmm." She took her hand away.

"Martha," I told her. "I'm just a regular guy trying to make a living. I don't go much for this hocus-pocus business. If anyone is holding out money you're legally entitled to, I'll get you the

best lawyer in this city—and ten to one you get your dough. All your dough, outside of his fee.”

“And your charge?”

“Nothing. I’ve been paid. But for the life of me, I don’t see why you play these two parts. I like you much better this way. Personally, if there weren’t that mean streak in you and your eyes opened a little wider and you took off some of the paint—I’d say you were a better-looking girl than Alyce Joyce. . . . Now, if you’ll give me that gun in your bag and ask to go places where you won’t be known, I’ll take you.”

“Why?” she demanded. “To find out things—to cause me to make slips?”

“No.” I shook my head. “I won’t try to trip you. But I want to see this Dr. Johnston and ask him what’s what.”

She looked at me for a long time, then said, “Yes, I think maybe you better see him. Yes—see him tonight. Tell him that I know he’s planning to murder me.”

“Tell him that?”

“Yes,” she said. “He’ll admit it if you corner him.”

She excused herself and was gone. . . .

Inspector Nelson nailed me before I even got to the bar. He went into a long recital about the trouble I had with Jake Haggerty down at the restaurant and that I was right to slap him around. And suddenly he shot it at me.

“So we dragged Haggerty out of the East River. He had a slug in his chest. Your slug.”

“No.” I shook my head. “My slug and his chest—but they are not mixed up together.”

Nelson understood. He grinned. “He went gunning for you. You killed him in self-defence. He’s better off dead. Just tell the truth, and you won’t have much trouble.” He paused a moment. “Just the way you disposed of the body. That’s not like you, Race.”

“No,” I agreed, “it isn’t.”

“It isn’t much of a crime—leaving the body.”

I leaned over. “You still want my licence, don’t you?”

“So you have an alibi? Who?”

“Well—” I pulled at my chin. “It might be the mayor.”

“And it might be a racketeer—the

owner of this club, Ward Anderson.”

“It might be that,” I said. “Or maybe he saw me toss the body into the river.”

“You’d have a lad like Ward Anderson give you an alibi?”

“Nelson,” I said, “I don’t know quite what you are talking about. I don’t know what time I need an alibi for. But if Ward Anderson—or even a guy like you—can give me one that will stick, I’ll take it.”

A waiter was bringing us a drink. Nelson barked at him, “I don’t drink free. And I wouldn’t drink here at any price. Come on, Williams. Now, waiter, the shortest way to Ward Anderson’s private office.”

Nelson disliked me all right, and I guess I wasn’t exactly stuck on him. He was a rough, tough cop of the old school. We got to Ward’s office the shortest way. I guess Ward had warning ahead—but he didn’t try to cross Nelson up.

HE WAS standing at his desk when Nelson pushed himself in. He wasn’t in a friendly mood.

“Don’t like it, eh?” Nelson said.

“No,” Ward Anderson said very slowly, “I don’t like it. And I’m not going to take it much longer.”

Nelson wasn’t feeling friendly, either. “I want to know something about Haggerty.”

I went over to the bookcase and looked over the books. I was surprised at Ward’s reading habits. I didn’t listen to Nelson shooting off.

The phone rang and I heard Ward say after a moment, “It’s for you, Inspector.”

Nelson lifted the phone, barked his name into it. After a few moments, he jammed the phone down. He walked straight to the door—turned and looked at me.

“There was water in his lungs, Williams. Haggerty died of drowning.” Then he walked out, slamming the door behind him.

Ward Anderson looked at me.

“I’ll get him broke one of these days. I gave you an alibi, Race.”

“And yourself one.” I nodded. “Nelson is anything but a dumb cop.”

Ward Anderson was thoughtful. “You think he had something on his mind about my alibi?”

"Sure." I nodded. "My bullet and your water."

Ward Anderson shrugged his shoulders.

"It's your body," he said in great seriousness. "He must have got away from the boys. Been delirious from the shot—and tumbled into the river."

I nodded. I was looking at a book called "The Dissociation of a Personality." Anderson grabbed it from me.

We eyed each other for a few minutes; then the little door behind him opened and the girl came in. It was Martha, all right—if you went by the make-up. And you did because there wasn't anything else to go by.

She smiled at me and looked at Ward Anderson a long time before she spoke. Then she said:

"I'm short of money, Ward. Can you give me that couple of hundred I asked you to keep for me?"

He handed it out to her, peeling it off a large roll of bills without hesitation. His eyes never left the girl.

She said: "I think Race better go up and see Dr. Johnston tonight. Damn it, Ward, don't look so despondent. We like you a lot. Joyce and I are going to marry you. Joyce, poor fool, because she loves you, and I—" She laughed then. "You see that I have the money—and you won't wake up some morning with a knife in your back."

Ward Anderson was sort of pale as the girl and I left his room. His body swung slowly and his fixed gaze followed us.

"You see," Martha said when we reached the stairs, "this is hard on Ward. He loves Joyce and he hates me. He'd kill me in a minute—but he'd have to kill Joyce, too. At first—well, he nearly strangled me. It gave him quite a shock later when he saw the marks on Joyce's throat. I never told her, though. . . ."

* * *

Dr. Edward H. Johnston was a rather young man to have the degrees he had. I asked to see every diploma, and he showed them to me without hesitation. He was a tall thin man, slightly stooped and very pleasant, but his eyes were certainly direct and penetrating.

"You needn't apologize, Mr. Williams,

for asking for my credentials. If more patients would do the same thing, they'd soon put the quacks out of business. We'll sit here in the library. There now, begin your questions."

"Well—" I started right in—"what is a dual personality? A sort of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde affair?"

"Not at all." He laughed. "That was a fancy of Stevenson's—an impossible chemical and physical metamorphosis as science understands it today. With Miss Reed, the change is entirely in the personality. Joyce is tempered in her dress, gentle in her manner. Martha, on the other hand, goes in for startling creations, daubs herself with lipstick and blackens her eyebrows. Their thoughts and motives are different. They—"

"Have there been any other such cases?"

"Yes, although they are not numerous. However, in that book you mentioned, there is a case of a young lady with four separate personalities. The girl herself was a very religious but sickly young lady."

"Is this case on record?"

"My dear man, it's medical history. One of the personalities was a child of nine; she would go on long hikes. Another personality was a rather unpleasant character who used to frequent disreputable drinking places and abandon the girl there to resume her own personality."

THIS was all pretty much over my head. I said, "You are being paid for attending this case?"

He nodded. "My regular fee. As a matter of fact, I would be glad to spend twenty-four hours a day on it for nothing if that were possible. Some of these cases make medical history, you know. But Miss Reed and her uncle and some owner of a night club she is engaged to wish to avoid all publicity."

"Martha," I said abruptly, "said you wished to murder her."

He leaned back and laughed.

"Quite right," he said. "Psychological murder. I would like to shove her back into the subconscious mind where she came from. I have also consulted with Dr. Raymond Halton. It is his considered opinion that my treatment is correct—and

that it is quite safe for Miss Alyce Joyce Reed to travel around as she pleases."

"Miss Reed wasn't always like this, was she?"

"No," he said, "she wasn't. It came on her suddenly, almost immediately before her engagement to this Ward Anderson."

"You draw conclusions from that?"

"Yes, we do—although this, Mr. Williams, is in the strictest confidence. I have told Miss Reed's uncle but not Miss Reed. But I think this personality Martha is a defense mechanism set up to prevent her marriage."

"She doesn't want to marry Anderson, is that it? You think the marriage may be under pressure?"

"I thought of that." He shook his head dubiously. "But she has given me no reason to accept such a theory. It is my belief that she loves the man consciously—but something inside of her revolts at marrying such a man. And that something suddenly developed as Martha. Not a pleasant defense, perhaps—but certainly an effective one. Ward Anderson, I believe, more than hesitates about marrying under the circumstances."

"He's afraid of Martha," I admitted. "I saw it in his eyes. He believes in this thoroughly?"

"He should." Dr. Johnston smiled. "He's questioned every authority of note in the country on the subject. A very interesting character, Martha. Don't you think so, Mr. Williams?"

"You talk as if she were a real person—a real and separate person."

"And so she is, to all purposes." He looked straight at me. "I have to keep Martha in line by threatening her at times with confinement in an institution."

"Does Anderson know all this?" I asked.

"Of course." Dr. Johnston nodded. "I told him everything. He is engaged to her. It was my duty to tell him." He added with a tired smile, "I imagine you could talk to him. I don't doubt that by now he is almost as well informed on dual and multiple personalities as I am. Good day, Mr. Williams."

Now you've got to admit that was a tough jolt to swallow. Sure, I had heard of cases of amnesia when lads got hit on the head. I knew other lads who got tired of

living home and took a powder, and when they got picked up pulled the blank act. But this was pretty hard to believe.

I slept on it that night. Most of all it was Ward Anderson who bothered me. As far as the human mind could be, he was out on a limb. Yet he had checked up around and found out it was gospel. For a guy like Ward Anderson to believe such stuff was—was—I went to sleep.

The next day I got around and was amazed. I hired a research specialist I knew, and he went down to the library and got the dope. There were several such cases on record. I don't recall one being exactly like Joyce Reed but some were worse.

I even went and saw the old doctor who had taught Dr. Johnston what he knew. Dr. Raymond Halton wasn't seeing as well as he used to, and he was crowding eighty. I started to toss questions at him.

"My dear man," he said. "You are attempting to seek knowledge that your life and habits—and may I say from some of your questions—your intellect has not been prepared to receive. Science has always sought that which is behind the curtain of the mind. These are questions which man has studied for centuries, and you request me to solve them in five minutes."

"Okay, doctor." I didn't crack wise. I wanted information. "Just the simple question then. Is this girl's condition—two separate people—possible?"

He hesitated a long time. Then said slowly, "One person, two separate personalities—that I presume to your limited vision is two separate people in one body. The answer is yes. Good afternoon."

CHAPTER FOUR

Say "Uncle," Uncle

I LEFT the doctor's old Madison Avenue house. It was raining, and the few people plodding along that street were ducking under umbrellas. That was all the atmosphere there was—nothing exciting or terrifying or leading up to sudden and violent death. I half slipped on a deep depression in one of the stone steps—and a guy poked a gun out from the next alley.

I ducked and he fired. He fired once more as I crawled to the sidewalk. My gun exploded twice as I half ran, half crawled into that alley.

My third shot was carefully aimed and carefully placed, even if I had but part of a second to do it in. I had nothing more to shoot at than a leg, a leg disappearing over the fence in the rear of a stone yard, but a buck would get you ten that the bullet hit the whiteness of flesh above the short dark sock.

I came to my feet, not too steadily, and I put my hands up to my neck. It was wet and warm, and when I looked at my fingers they were red.

I didn't try to run. I don't leave scenes of shooting—at least not like this one. People were gathering around. A cop was on the job—and an ambulance was making a hell of a clatter.

Some said the lad who fired was masked. Others that he had a handkerchief over his face. He wore everything from a funereal black coat to a pea-green raincoat. I wouldn't go to the hospital, but I let the intern get a little practice bandaging up my neck.

A cop that knew me showed up. Someone discovered that I had fired a few shots myself. But there was nothing to that.

I had learned something. This was no ordinary warning to lay off. This lad had popped up and shot to kill. There aren't

many guys who are interested in doing that to me—and those that were are dead.

What would you figure? In the Alyce Joyce Reed—Martha personality disassociation case, there was only one man that I knew was a killer.

I was surprised at how easy I got up to see Ward Anderson. He was sitting behind his desk. His humor was not good.

"Look, Williams," he said. "I wanted to see you. I've decided that Martha doesn't need any more protection from you—and she's not going to get it. That's final." If he had nicked me in the neck an hour before, he didn't take much notice of it. He was sitting down and so I couldn't examine his leg.

"And," I asked him, "how are you going to stop me?"

"First," he said, "I'll try and appeal to your sense of justice. I am going to marry this young lady. I'm going to be her husband."

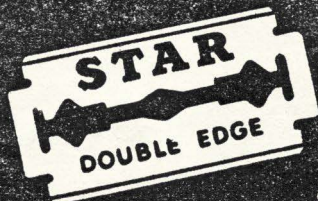
"Why don't you want me to protect her?"

"Because," he leaned forward, "I have made a decision. I have read the books and I have listened to the men of medicine. It's in the books—and it's gospel. There will be no fuss about it. A simple wedding with her uncle there—and maybe Doc Johnston. Then I'm her husband and you are out."

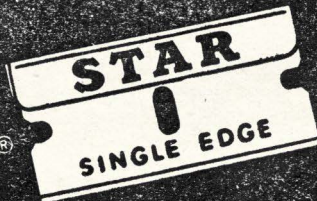
"You're marrying Alyce Joyce Reed,"

**YOU HAVE
SUCH A
BOYISH FACE!**

**DON'T LET THAT
STAR SHAVE
FOOL YOU, SISTER!**



4 for 10¢
also 25¢ pack
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I told him. "She paid me to protect Martha."

"I'm marrying both of them. If a woman had four feet or three eyes or two hearts, I'd be marrying just one woman. Now if I marry a woman who simply believes she is someone else at certain times, I'm still marrying one woman."

"You sound like a lawyer."

"Sure," he nodded, "I'm quoting. Benny Zisson gave me those facts. I got an author to ask him. This thing isn't coming out in the papers."

"Well," I looked at him, "I've got a couple of thousand dollars to ride on yet."

"You can keep the money." He graciously tossed away the girl's money. "You see, we're going on a honeymoon—just the two of us. And no one will know where we are."

"You mean the three of you, don't you?" The thing would seem ridiculous if it weren't so terribly tragic. I changed the subject suddenly. "I got shot in the side of the neck this afternoon."

"You did?" He wasn't very interested.

"I came to ask you if you did it—and to tell you that if you did, there isn't going to be any wedding. You'll be too dead."

"Give me the time of the shooting and I'll fix an alibi up for myself."

"Never mind, Ward," I said. "I want you to take off your shoes and stockings. Silly, isn't it?" I added, at his blank look. "But I've got a gun and I'll use it if you don't."

HE HESITATED a moment, sat down in a big chair and lifted up one of his feet. Then he stopped.

"You're nuts, Williams," he told me. "There's a man by the door you came in with a gun in his hand. It would be inconvenient to kill you here—but I've been inconvenienced before."

"I know." I moved my pocket up slightly. "But I'm covering you."

"Not much good if he plugged you."

"Not much good for you either, Ward." I let the gun slip into view now. "We'd both be too dead to attend the wedding."

"Don't shoot, you fool!" Anderson called over my shoulder. "Well, what sort of a deal do you want to make?"

"Take off your shoes and socks," I told him. "I'm looking for a hunk of lead I

lost before—or the foot it went through."

He didn't spar for time. He jerked off his oxford and the sock—and then it happened.

The girl's voice: "Drop the rifle, Shorty. Tell him to, Ward. I'm not half as bad as you paint me—yet."

A buzzer went off somewhere in the room. The man at the door spoke.

"The police, boss—and only Nelson would come through like that."

We moved after that. The girl led me by the arm, through the door in the rear, along a narrow hallway to narrow stairs. We raced down them and made the alley.

Her frail form trembled on my arm. In the dimness the make-up didn't seem so heavy. The dress was conservative—the dress of Joyce Reed. But the face was the face of Martha.

She held my arm tightly I hailed a taxi.

"Some little restaurant," I said as we climbed in.

"No, no," she said. "Home. Oh, Race—" She flung her arms about me. "He's going to marry me. He's going to marry me although I've warned that he'll always have me, never Alyce Joyce."

"He told me so today. Told me that he's going to commit a psychological murder of his own. He's giving me twenty-four hours to go back where I came from. He said he'd bought a whip—and he'd beat me back where I belonged. He said if the doctors could do it with psychiatry, he could do it with a whip. He'd beat me back!"

And damned if she wasn't clinging to me, crying. This terror of the night—this mad little devil who took over another woman's body and mind.

"Maybe," I said slowly, "it would do you good. Maybe it would be the best thing for you."

Something shut me up. Martha was sitting up. She was looking at the mirror, and she was sobbing.

"Again!" she cried. She grabbed at the door, but I caught her arm.

"Mr. Williams," she said desperately. "Race Williams, I'm not—I'm not Martha. I'm Joyce Reed." She shook me by both shoulders. "I tell you I'm Joyce Reed! You see that—you know that. What happened? How did I get here?"

Well, it was like a guy being half drunk

—or all drunk for that matter. "Well," I tried again, "you *were* Martha. . . ."

"Of course—I'm used to that now. She didn't use to leave me this suddenly. It would be only in the morning when I'd wake up. Have—I done anything? Were you with Martha—every minute of the time?"

I wasn't and I didn't see how I could be. I watched Alyce Joyce fix her hair and wipe off the make-up. And I got to wondering about other things. Something, maybe, that no one had thought of. It burst into words.

"Suppose," I said, "Martha didn't wear any make-up and opened her eyes wide—how would anybody know who you were? Why, you might be Martha now."

"You know better than that." She wiped tears away. "This make-up business is part of us, I guess. I don't know. But I can't stand the horrid stuff—and I suppose she must have it."

The taxi stopped at the Park Avenue apartment. "You're not coming in," she said, when I followed her.

"Yes," I said. "I am. I want to talk to your uncle."

"Oh," she said slowly. "Do—do you think that is wise?"

"Wise or not I'm going to talk to him. Does he approve of your marriage?"

"Uncle William," she said, "would approve of anything that would make me happy."

And that was as hammy as any melodrama. You know where the girl says to save the mortgage, "Father, I love him," and everyone in the audience knows it's a lie. But here was Joyce Reed's uncle, reputed to be one of the cleverest politicians in the city, playing the heavy sucker in the drama. Hard to believe that. But the rest was harder to believe still.

She didn't want me to come in. And she didn't think her uncle was home and she thought he was awfully busy with something, and—

We went up in the elevator. Still objecting, she opened the door of William Evans' apartment. There he was. Heavy of jowl, moist of eye, and taking her in his arms and saying how worried he had been about her.

If it was an act, it was a good one. I was wondering if I hadn't seen a lot of

good performances since I met Alyce.

WHEN he suddenly looked up and saw me, it was a masterpiece. One could almost see his brain working smack through his forehead, trying to place me. His eyes were cold and unfriendly, and then suddenly they weren't. He put his hand out.

"Mr. Williams—our well known investigator. This is indeed a pleasure."

I said, "Mr. Evans, I want to talk to you."

"I told him you were busy, Uncle." "I see." He looked down at the girl. "And the nature of our talk, Mr. Williams?"

"Your niece here."

"I see. In the interest of my niece . . . Run upstairs, dear."

He pushed her away and led me into a little library. He closed the door behind him and locked it.

"This check my niece made out—they called me from the bank. It was for you. You are working for her then?"

"Yes," I said. "At least at present. "You might say I was working for Martha."

"Martha." He took off his glasses, twirled them around a few times, and finally said, "I have never met Martha."

This was sort of a foul blow, but I staggered back quickly.

"But you believe in Martha? You understand the whole situation fully?"

"Fully?" He hung on that word a bit. "I don't think anyone understands it fully. But I am sure I understand it quite as well as you do—and this Anderson. And better than Dr. Johnston thinks I do."

"Johnston and his colleagues," I went a little high hat, "have been toying with the idea that it might have something to do with you. Something Anderson has on you—something that makes you agree to this marriage." I stopped and waited for his indignant reply.

I didn't get it.

"Go on, Mr. Williams," he said. "Let me have it all. Proof—evidence—guess work." He smiled a little. "Come on, throw the book at me. You haven't the reputation of being timid."

Here was no indignant uncle—no hurt politician.

Well, if he wanted it that way, I would give it to him. "Anderson might be in love with your niece. Or he might wish to have your political influence behind him."

"He might even be paying me money." Evans smiled. "No, no, Williams, don't leave that out of all your calculations about me."

"Let me try to take this up reasonably. I am pretty well known—and fairly well respected, which is rare in politics. I call some of our best citizens by their first names. I also know the underworld from which Ward Anderson has sprung. I doubt that any underworld character would be so foolhardy as to try to blackmail me."

"That," I told him, "is a matter of opinion. Isn't it possible there is something in your life you'd give a great deal a great deal indeed—to keep secret?"

"We all have our soiled linen. Few of us enjoy having it washed in public. But if you mean by a great deal that I would sacrifice my niece's happiness—the answer is no!"

"What would you do if the issue were forced?"

He smiled. "I'd hire you, of course, to eliminate the holder of my great secret." While I tried to swallow that one, he went on: "I sometimes wonder if Dr. Johnston or his colleagues have reached the wrong conclusion. You know my niece was not always brought up in ease and comfort."

"Really?" I was surprised.

"Her mother, a very charming woman, was my sister. She married—well, it sounds a little melodramatic—a scoundrel in a carnival show. Alyce Joyce was born in a tent. When she got old enough, she rode bareback, I believe, while shooting glass globes tossed into the air. My sister loved him and the child did, too. He was the only man who ever blackmailed me—and it was not really blackmail. Occasionally he would write me that my sister was ill and needed money—or the child needed this and that. I always sent it, of course."

"And then," he went on, "my sister was killed." His lips set tightly. "He left Alyce Joyce with me and sailed to fill an engagement in England. It was war then—and

he went down with the ship. Alyce Joyce was sixteen."

Evans straightening slightly. "I have never said one harsh word to her about her father. She has to me. Indeed, Mr. Williams, the story is all rather hush-hush stuff. A man in my position avoids such publicity. I might say that I would be glad to pay you ten thousand dollars if you brought to a satisfactory conclusion this unholy mess."

"And just what is the satisfactory conclusion?"

"I'm sure I don't know," he told me, shaking his head. "If she wants Ward Anderson, I suppose she must have him. I know, I know — he's a disreputable scoundrel. But if she wants him, she can have him."

"Do you think she does?"

"I'm sure I don't know. She seemed until lately a sensible girl. I know men. I know women. I know life. But no man knows love."

I put my last question.

"You have not thought then of sending her some place—not exactly an institution but—"

"I have not," he said emphatically. "Neither an institution or anyplace else. She may not be a very fine woman in the eyes of others, but she is all I've got and I'll stick to her."

I didn't see the girl on the way out. I inquired of one of the servants, but she was lying down.

CHAPTER FIVE

I.O.U. a Murder

I WENT over every sentence, every word—yes, and every thought that might be behind what Evans had just said. Had he been sincere? Just one thing—he said he had never met Martha. Why? And then I shrugged. I'd met Martha.

I went toward the elevator and saw the leg of a man draw back on the stairs. I got into the automatic lift, but instead of going down, I went up one flight.

No one was in the hallway. I took off my shoes and tucked them in my overcoat pockets and crept silently down the stairs.

I peeked around the corner and there he was—still looking out toward the ele-

vator. Hymie Rath. Not one of Ward Anderson's boys. Hymie Rath was in business for himself. He was the last of those really high-class professional murderers who worked alone.

I soft-footed down the stone steps, hesitated as the man moved and reached for his gun. Then I let him have it—with my gun barrel against his forehead.

Hymie Rath's eyes rolled like an old time comedian's; his legs grew rubbery. I caught him easily and sat him down on the stairs. I grabbed the gun from his loosening fingers and found another under his right arm—and a knife in his belt.

An elevator door opened. Footsteps beat it straight for the Evans' apartment. I took a careful look-see and there was Ward Anderson swinging a cane. He heard my stockinged feet and muttered: "Back, Hymie. Back—"

I cracked him. A little more finesse to this. It was in the approved fashion—just behind the right ear. Perhaps this blow was a little more vicious, for Hymie was only earning his living while Ward Anderson was paying him to earn it.

I eased him down gently. I didn't bother about his artillery. I simply lifted his trouser leg—the left foot—and pulled down his sock. I got up then, walked over to Hymie and put one of my cards in his hand. Then as I saw Ward Anderson beginning to twist a little, I pressed the button for the automatic lift.

I went down and outside onto Park Avenue. I had given Hymie Rath a big clue—my card in his hand. But I had given Ward Anderson a little clue which should have been big enough. I had left his pants leg turned up and his sock turned down. Also, I hadn't bothered to put the bandage on again.

I went whistling down the street.

It was late in the afternoon when Hymie Rath called me on the phone.

"I found your card, Race. I was wondering—what's it mean?"

"It means what you think it means, Hymie. On sight."

He coughed, cleared his throat. "As a matter of fact," he tried, "I was only body-guarding someone."

"No, Hymie," I told him. "That's not your business."

"Suppose," he tried again, "suppose I

told you I had no idea it was to be you?"

"Hymie," I said. "You and I go the same places in the city a lot. I'm sure to meet up with you—and my business will be your business . . . on sight."

"You mean that, Race?"

"Yes."

"No kidding?"

"No kidding."

"Okay. I'll be visiting my folks up state for a bit." He gave me a phone number. "You can find me there with my Aunt Grace. I'll come back in a week, eh?"

"You'll come back," I told him, "when I'm sure you no longer have a financial interest in me."

Funny conversation. Hymie, the killer, believed that I would shoot him on sight. Was it bluff? Hymie was one of the wisest boys along the Avenue—and he believed it.

Things were coming to a head. Ward Anderson was getting cocky. He had enough people of his own to do his killings for him—but not too long ago he had taken a pot shot at me himself.

I didn't like it. If the underworld thought a guy could have two chances at me, I'd have been dead years ago. A couple of blazing guns are all right when you are surprised into an attack. But when you know a guy intends to kill you—has tried it once—law or no law, it's self-defense to get that guy before he gets you.

I took a shower and was getting ready to go out when Jerry nailed me.

"Both of them girls—I mean—well, there is one of them in the library to see you now."

"Which one?" I asked.

"The best one—the one who paints up and looks nice and don't put on airs."

I walked in and there was Martha.

"Race," she said. "Do you want any more money?"

"What for?"

"To protect me. You might get killed."

"No." I shook my head. "You haven't used up the twenty-five hundred bucks yet. There's been only one attempt on my life so far, plus one killer hired. I don't charge extra for that."

SHE leaned way across and took my hand. I looked at her and I thought that if it wasn't for the paint, she'd be a

better looking dame than the real one. And then I saw the paint wasn't so much. It was just that the hair was different. She looked nice—and for the first time she looked natural. I said without thinking:

"How do you know that you aren't the real girl and the other one the fake?"

She sat back suddenly and stared at me.

I said, "Well, if you wouldn't twist your lips and let your cigarette hang down, if you'd talk somewhere between the tough style and the high-hat way you put on when Alyce Joyce takes over, I'm damned if you wouldn't be not too bad a bit of goods."

She sort of stiffened, and for a moment I thought maybe she really was half-way between. But she said, "Where did you get such a ridiculous idea?"

I said, "I got it out of the books the doctors told me about—those cases had four different personalities." She looked sort of disturbed and I laughed. "You strike me as a girl who might like to do it in a big way."

"Wouldn't you find just one extra personality a little terrifying—if it happened to you?" she asked.

"Yes," I admitted, thinking it over. It would be tough if I turned soft at times, and guys got to gunning for me hoping I'd be in the sissy mood. "But it would be sporting," I added. "They couldn't tell when I'd turn back to Race Williams and pull a couple of guns and lay them out."

Then I got serious and asked her what she came to see me about.

"Ward's going to marry us. Alyce Joyce or me— whoever it happens to be. He says he'll beat hell out of me if I ever appear."

"Nuts." I was in it again. "He'd only be hurting Alice Joyce."

"What good would that do me? Alyce Joyce is at a stage where she will go through anything to be rid of me. That's where Haggerty came in. . . . I think she loves Ward. I think she'll marry him. I think she has to. It couldn't be me because I know everything I ever did and Anderson fears me. It couldn't be Alyce Joyce—" with a tinge of bitterness—"because she is too sweet. And too weak."

"Then?"

"Then it is my uncle. Alyce Joyce loves

him. And I guess I love him—because I've never let him see me."

"You think the shock would be too much for him?"

"For Uncle William?" She laughed. "No, but it might be for me." She came to her feet. "I've stayed too long." She opened her bag and took a bit of paper from it.

"Here's the address of the hideout Ward will take Alyce Joyce to. If you don't hear from me by ten tonight, you'll know the worst has happened—that he's married her, just to scare me into oblivion. I'll call you every night by ten o'clock. If I don't—come for me at that address. Enter through the basement window." She pointed to a spot on the little drawing she had made. "Then do as you please—for me."

"How?" I asked, "do I know you won't be at that window and shoot my head off?"

"You don't," she said. "That was why I asked if you wanted more money. But I really have only a minute. I must go."

"Listen," I told her. "You killed a lot of time here for someone who had only a minute—and a single message. Why?"

"Because—" she looked straight at me — "I want you to like me . . . maybe more than like me." And with that she came quickly forward, put both arms around my neck and kissed me on the mouth. Then she was gone.

I licked my lips. Her mouth had been real enough. I ran my hand across my mouth. The lipstick had been real, too. I jerked myself together and went out into the hall. But she was already out the door.

Yes. The kiss had been real enough. In fact it was a honey. . . .

Along around dinner time, I put through two calls to Ward Anderson. Neither stirred him up, so I went down to his classy dive. On my second drink, Ward Anderson came in. He didn't make any bones about it. He sat down and said simply:

"You could hardly kill a man here and get away with it."

I said, "It could be done. You'd be surprised how quick I could start a fight, force out a gun, and blow holes in you."

He didn't laugh any more. "Are you on the kill, Race?"

When I said I was, he spoke his piece like Hymie. "No kidding?"

"No kidding."

"You wouldn't believe I'd hired Hymie only as a bodyguard?"

"Hymie," I told him, "has his pride. Besides, from the way you frame that question you haven't spoken to Hymie lately."

He paled slightly and looked around the bar. But he wasn't yellow—not Ward. He said:

"You knocked him over—already?"

"I came here to discuss you, not Hymie."

"Well—" he said. "I'll settle on your terms. How can I convince you it won't happen again?"

I gave it to him just as I gave it to Hymie. "The city isn't big enough for both of us any more, Ward. And I'm not getting out."

"So that's how it is." He came to his feet.

"Okay," he said. "You pushed me into it, Race. I'm not leaving either." He turned around and left the bar—his back to me.

That was a new one on me. I sure had to admire Ward Anderson's guts.

I got up and left the bar too. He had a hundred men to draw from, and I—I shrugged my shoulders as I passed out into the street.

IT WOULD be self-defense, of course. Ward Anderson would pull a gun as soon as he saw me again. I don't bluff with guys like Ward—and Anderson didn't bluff either.

Within a few days, maybe within a few hours, our kill-or-be-killed pact would be known through the city. Then the cops would hear of it. What would they do? What *could* they do? No crime had been committed. They would sit down and wait for a body and then arrest—me, I hoped.

If I happened to have a bullet or two in me, that would help. If Ward died with a gun in his hand and a couple empty shells that had gone off into the night—that would be better still for me. Sure, he had the advantage there. I would give him a chance to draw, but he wouldn't give me one. But I didn't think I needed to be given one. Maybe it's my conceit—but I'm

still alive and a lot of other lads who had the first draw are dead.

That night by ten o'clock, Martha hadn't called me. I used the phone. I even put a couple of buzzers on Ward Anderson from a private agency. And how those guys can charge!

I put down the phone, adjusted my shoulder holsters under each arm pit, and jerking on a dark gray fedora, went out again into the night. I moved fast. I didn't want any cop on my tail—what with information going around the way it was. It looked like the showdown.

I had Jerry take my car out of the garage and park it down from Alf's Drug Store for me. Seven minutes later I looked at my watch. It was ten minutes after twelve, and I was on my way uptown in the car.

I swung over and passed the zoo and shot over to the Bronx. That was when I began to think a bit—although I was still going ahead no matter what conclusions I reached. I was paid to protect the girl and this was it. Ward didn't like Martha and he was going to beat her back to where she belonged. Where she belonged! I took a gulp at that one, but who was I to pooh-pooh the great of the scientific world?

Then I got mixed up in the scientific world myself. Wouldn't it be possible for Ward to get it out of Martha and have a few guys at the cellar windows I was supposed to hop through?

I decided it was very possible. The chances were even that I'd be nailed or fired on by the time I got within ten yards of the house.

Though dark, there was moon enough to see the place. It was an old, three-story affair with a slanting roof. I bent low and ran toward it.

When I came to a tree, I stood up and kept close in its shadow. I looked the house over. The window was there all right, and occasionally there was a light on it from the fading moon. Maybe I was wrong, but the cellar window seemed to be swinging a bit free.

I slipped around the house, approaching it from the other side. Then I saw the ladder. It ran straight up the side of the house to the roof—and close to a window.

The next moment I was climbing up it.

Not the instructions I had, certainly. But what was to prevent Martha from suddenly turning into a child and slipping out a pail of water for me to drop into? Or even taking on another personality as a gun moll?

I climbed up the ladder, found the distance to the window was a little greater than I thought. I made the stretch over. The ladder held steady. I got one foot on the sill. The window was wide open and it wasn't screened.

I caught the frame and stepped over onto the sill. Not a bad way to come on a guy who had tried to kill you. I stood spread-eagled in the window and laughed silently.

The laugh died as a gun was thrust in my stomach. A rope or a belt jerked under my knees, and I fell sprawling into the room.

Then they knocked me silly. Maybe I was kicked a few times on the head, maybe a couple of times in the stomach to knock the wind out of me. But nothing serious.

I CAME around fast enough. My arms were tied behind my back. Both my guns gone, and I was being marched out into a hall and down a flight of stairs.

I must have been a pretty sight half bent from the kicks in the stomach. There was blood running down my face, too. I could feel it and taste it. And my hat was pushed down on my head. Nothing jaunty about my appearance. Though when I saw the light from the room to the left on the second story, I tossed a bit of a swagger into my walk.

Ward Anderson was alone. He was balanced against a high-backed desk that must have been brought in so he could lean against it. He had a half smile on his face, and he was all dolled up in full evening dress.

"Smart fellow, Race." He took the cigar out of his mouth. Then I saw that two guns lay on the desk and that they were my guns.

"You can't get away with this one, Ward," I told him. "It's already along the Avenue that the city isn't big enough for both of us. The cops will know."

"Yes, I know." He nodded easily. "The boys from Gregory Ford's Agency were inquiring around. But they only know you

are on the kill for me. I saw that it was put that way."

He looked over at the clock on the desk. The time was close to one. "Alyce Joyce," he said easily, "is resting. I gave her a sleeping pill."

He dismissed the two hoods from the room with a wave of his hand. "Close the door but stand by."

"Now, Race." He opened the desk and took out another gun. "I'm not a guy to drag things out. You've been in a lot of people's hair. They've always been afraid of you because they said you had a charmed life. I always knew better. You've had a hell of a lot of nerve and a magic trigger finger. That's all."

"How did you know I would come here?"

"I put the hose to Martha. She squealed like a stuck pig. But she told me before—before she turned back to—Do you believe that, Williams?"

I gave him a hoarse laugh, hoping for some break.

"You'll find out Martha's not so easy to handle," I said, "when you wake up some morning with a knife in your back."

"I've thought of that. I'll see to it that knives won't be too easy to get." He grinned. "So the smart Race Williams had suspicions about our dual Martha. I thought you would. That's why I set the ladder to make things easy for you."

He stopped as a slight scratching came from a closet door to his left.

"Remember Hymie Rath?" he asked.

"Killer-rat," I told him. "He got out of town this afternoon."

"He wanted to, but he didn't. He's in the closet now, Race. Nice and convenient for the kill between you two."

He kept his eyes and his gun on me as he went to the closet and unlocked the door. Hymie Rath crept out. He wasn't too sure of himself, and he blinked in the sudden light.

Then he saw me and started to cringe back. He stopped and straightened, and his killer eyes widened. His tongue came out and he licked at his lips.

"It's Williams. Race Williams. And you've got him trussed up like a steer ready to be slaughtered."

"That's right." Ward Anderson nodded at him. "But you see—now I can do the

job myself, and it will cost me nothing."

"No, Ward," Hymie protested. "Let me kill the dirty rat. I'll do it for nothing—my way."

"Listen," Ward said slowly, "I'm not in a hurry. I want Williams to take it slowly. I want you to put a shot through his left shoulder—close to his side."

We both gasped. Ward Anderson didn't go in for vengeance, he killed simply for convenience. But Anderson said:

"Maybe I want him to talk a bit, Hymie. You're mighty sharp with a gun."

And Hymie was, particularly when my hands were tied behind my back. He simply tossed up his right arm. Yellow flame belched. There was a stab under my left arm pit as cold as an icicle. That was the only way I knew I was hit. Just the coldness and the quick flow of warm water that I knew was blood.

"Nice, eh?" Hymie turned to Ward Anderson. "Now what?"

"Now—" Anderson raised one of my guns from the desk—"now it's over, Hymie. Like this." He raised his right hand slowly, took careful aim while Hymie grinned.

Then Hymie didn't grin any more. He knew.

The gun swung suddenly in Ward Anderson's hand, and he shot Hymie almost straight between the eyes.

CHAPTER SIX

Gun Moll Gal

THE room reverberated with that shot. The bullet went through Hymie's head as if it were paper. It picked him right up off the floor and

tossed him against the wall. Even then he didn't fall right away. He stood there looking at us with sightless, glass-like eyes before he slid slowly to the floor. Then he fell forward on his chest as if he slept.

"You see," Ward Anderson smiled at me, "Hymie and you were gunning for each other. He was killed with your gun—but he shot you before he died." He crossed, still watching me, and leaned down to take Hymie's gun from him.

I thought of making a dive for him. It wasn't my style and wouldn't help my rep to be shot like—

We both paused and listened. The noise was a simple creak. Then suddenly the door opened, slammed closed again, and a was useless, of course—but better than lock clicked into place.

Both of us stared at the girl—her face touched heavily with make-up. Her eyes were ablaze and her red lips pale even through the thick red. There could be no doubt that it was Martha.

"Good evening, Martha," Ward Anderson said quietly. "There has been a fight here. And Mr. Williams is leaving us."

It was death then, I thought—but it was not death for me. Martha's hand came from behind her back, and the thing it held was black and small.

She seemed to fire it without aiming. It went off like a tiny machine gun—and every one of the shots bounced straight into Ward Anderson's right side. He went down slowly, dancing slightly to each bullet, looking surprised.

I hollered at the girl, "The door! Bolt it!"

She ran to the door, and I heard the bolt shoot home. I stepped forward and

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kicked my gun from Ward Anderson's hand. He looked up at me with soft inquiring eyes. There was no hate in them. They were the surprised eyes of a child.

I looked over at the girl. She was going through the desk. She found a penknife and walked over to me and hacked at the cord around my wrists.

"No, Martha!" I cried out. Ward's hand was stretching out to Hymie Rath's gun.

I tore myself free. Fingers stiff, body really hurting, I bent forward swiftly and grabbed up my gun.

It was as if Martha saw the gun in Anderson's hand and not the gun in mine, for she suddenly tossed both arms about my neck and cried:

"No, no, Ward! Not Race!" She clung to me.

The danger to the girl didn't stop him. He fired once, and hot lead ran across my right cheek.

I had nothing else to do. It was my life and the girl's life. . . .

I squeezed lead once. I hit him just about where he hit Hymie—in the center of the forehead. He caught his heels against Hymie's dead feet and crashed upon the floor like a trap door with a heavy spring.

"Is he dead?" the girl whispered against my chest. "Oh, Race—I killed him. I—I killed him for you."

"No," I told her. "I killed him."

Then she saw the blood on my arm. She took my coat off, snatched a handkerchief from my pocket.

"Is it bad?" she asked. "If I had come sooner—"

"Not too bad," I told her. "Is there a phone here?"

"A phone? Here? What would you want a phone for?"

"The police," I said, "and Dr. Johnston."

"The police?" she gasped. "But they—that's what we want to avoid." She looked at the two bodies. "We can slip out."

"Lady," I said to her, "I have spent a great deal of my life explaining to clients not to leave the scene of a crime. What's the matter? What is it you can't take?"

She came close to me and looked straight up at me. I'm telling you Martha was better to look at than her other self.

Even with the smear of red lipstick and a bit of powder; and half-closed eyes that were opening. She said slowly:

"I can't take remembering that I told him you were coming because of a few slaps. I thought Race—Race, hold me in your arms."

I did. It wasn't so bad. It wasn't so good either, what with a couple of stiffs lying on the floor, my arm aching like the blazes, trying to watch the windows—hell! I was hanging on to her more like a drunk to a street lamp than Race Williams in a big love scene.

BESIDES, I was beginning to think. She had saved my life all right, but I couldn't quite see the lady-like action of walking into the room and emptying her gun in Ward's side. Still she was a very nice bundle, and her lips were suddenly warm. I pulled her closer. She dropped back off her toes and said:

"Race—could you just let me go and— and sort of fix things up yourself?"

I shook her off. I walked over to the desk and picked up the phone. I said to Martha:

"Doc Johnston's number, kid. I know—I made a mess, but we're in it together." After she gave me the number and I had dialed it, I said, "If you can pull a third personality out of yourself—better make it the governor. . . . Oh, hello, Doc Johnston. Williams speaking." I gave him the direction how to get there. "It's a mess," I said. "A couple of stiffs—and our play-fellow Martha."

"But I—from what you say I don't think I want to be there."

"Okay," I told him. "Lots of guys don't like to sit in the chair either, but they sit down just the same. Make it here fast."

I jammed down the receiver and turned to the girl.

"Race," she said, "deal me out of this and I'll give you fifty-thousand dollars. I—"

She must have seen the expression on my face. Then she did it. She put her hands over her face and fainted.

She seemed comfortable enough. I took a look at the little gun she had put on the desk, saw that it was empty, then went quickly through the pockets of the two stiffs. Neither of them carried anything in-

criminating except that Hymie had a blackjack, a pair of brass knuckles and a knife that when it folded out looked like *something*.

The girl still sat where she had slid down against the desk. I went to the door, carrying enough hardware for any emergency, and looked out. A great silence. The others had left at the shooting. If things had gone right, I would be dead. If things had not gone as planned and they burst open the door to see how things were—then they would be dead. And they were wise guys of the night who didn't want to die.

I heard the car pull up. Going down through the dimly lighted hall, I opened the front door. It was Dr. Johnston. He looked in bad shape.

"Dead. People killed. Who killed them? Who?" He got his hand on my shoulder and shook me—more like a hysterical woman than a learned psychiatrist.

I didn't say anything. I led him up the stairs. We were almost at the door when she flew out at us, put her arms around the doctor's neck.

"Oh Doctor! Ward—he gave me something to drink. And I woke up here—like this."

Yes, the girl was Alyce Joyce now. Not rough. Little lipstick, eyes wide open, mascara gone. The niece of a well-known politician, William Evans.

"Okay," I said. "Let us hear anything you have to say, Doc. And you Miss Reed." I looked at my watch again. "Just a minute or two. You can't stall the cops." Then I gave Johnston the whole story.

I don't know what he wanted to say when I finished, but I cut in on it anyway. "No time, Doc. I got to get the cops. She can't walk out on the show because—well, there are five or six small bullet holes in Ward Anderson."

"But that's awful!" Her voice came rich and musical. "I was not myself—"

"You'd be locked up as a dangerous criminal anyway. They can't keep one half of you in jail and one half of you out. Okay, Doc. What do you know about such instances? I mean the law. Where do you stand—and how far will you back the girl up?"

"We're engaged to be married." The girl went over to the doctor and clung to

his arm. He pulled back like he never saw her before.

She turned to me frantically. "Martha will never appear again—I know it! I can feel that her personality is dead. And after all, she saved your life and—"

I hesitated a moment. "Yes, she saved it all right. But, damn it, I killed Ward Anderson for her—for Martha!"

"No, no." Dr. Johnston jerked himself away. "It wasn't Martha. It was she—Alyce Joyce."

When I stared at him, he cried, "Don't you see? Don't you understand? There never has been a Martha! Just the one girl. She was acting a part—a part that needed no disguise and very little acting. She simply acted herself. Williams, don't you see? Don't you understand? I taught her how to do it. Told what to say to old Dr. Halton, the famous psychiatrist. Half-deaf, half-blind—Lord! I—I thought I loved her."

"Thought?" The girl turned on him now. "You did love me! What you *thought* was that I loved you!"

I picked up the phone while the incriminations were still flying back and forth. Johnston was through with her, all right. He kept saying so. But she wasn't through with him.

When I put down the phone, I saw that they were whispering quietly together.

I said simply and in a sort of daze, "I knew all along there was something fishy about this dual personality."

But I knew even as I said the words that I was lying. I had believed it right up to that moment—what with the books, the learned men, Ward Anderson consulting every authority. Well, the answer was simple. It *could* be—but it *wasn't*.

I didn't have much time to think about it because the girl was talking—or a mixture between Martha and herself was. She was talking about money. She was pointing out how we could all profit by being careful, and how her Uncle William would clear the decks if we made it look on the up and up.

The girl was right, she made sense. After all, it wasn't a bad set-up with the girl there to give testimony. Two hoods were wiped out. The papers would give me a good play for that. I even had a wound of my own. The girl shooting to save me—

her fear and terror and my calling her doctor—it could be explained.

"Okay," I told her. "I don't know what he had on you but he deserved to die."

I BUZZED her uncle. A little political influence couldn't be bad. He listened, asked one or two questions, then said he'd be right over, as if his niece were mixed up in a murder a day.

The police arrived, including Inspector Nelson. The assistant medical examiner was there, too. He said in his jovial manner:

"I'd recognize your work any place, Williams. Clean as a whistle right through the head. But the stitching up the side with a small gun? Tut, tut. You'll be going in for embroidery next."

"Would he have died of those side wounds?" I asked.

"Tut, tut," said Steel. "That is like shooting a man off the top of the Empire State building and asking if the fall would have killed him. He's dead—and the bullet in his forehead did the trick. And if you were to take another shot at him now, he wouldn't be any deader."

Just then William Evans was shown into the room by a cop. David Edward Goamer, the big-shot lawyer, was walking softly behind him.

My story was a good one. The truth—at least most of the truth. William Evans, the big politician, had hired me to protect his niece, Alyce Joyce Reed, who was being seen too much with Ward Anderson and even talking of marriage. Miss Reed had disappeared on me. I was searching the city for her. Then I got a call where she was. I thought the call was from some stoolie that I knew and would collect from me later—and came rushing out to this house.

I climbed the ladder. They could see the busted plane of glass there. I rushed down the stairs and met Hymie in the room. I shot him after he winged me. Then the gang was on me. Ward Anderson had them tie my hands behind my back. Then he chased them—told me he was going to kill me. He had fired one shot when the girl came into the room, screamed and fired. Then she cut me loose and Anderson grabbed a gun, smeared lead across my face, and I put a slug in him.

The girl did her part. She sobbed hysterically, "It was to save my life! I was clinging to him—clinging to Mr. Williams. I didn't think Ward would shoot me—but—but he would have. I saw it in his eyes!"

"Just a minute," Inspector Nelson cut. Not even William Evans could frown Nelson down when he thought he was doing his duty. He had a question to ask. It was a nasty question.

"Miss Reed—just why were you in this house here with the notorious Mr. Ward Anderson?"

She said, "I think he was afraid. He wanted to keep hidden until we could get out of the city."

"But that doesn't answer my question," said Nelson. "Why were you here alone with a notorious gangster?"

"Oh—" she opened her big eyes wide—"Ward and I were married this afternoon. Very quietly, in Greenwich, Connecticut."

That bombshell about broke up the party. It hit me a little below the belt. She said it so quietly and easily and simply—as if it were the most natural thing in the world for us to expect. Which it wasn't—not by a barrelful it wasn't.

WE LEFT after that. Everyone seemed to fade away in different directions. I had my wound fixed up by my doctor and went home.

I saw my friend Sergeant O'Rourke the next morning but not the reporters. O'Rourke had some of the early editions of the morning papers. It didn't look too bad.

One of them read:

TRAPPED, BEATEN AND TIED WITH THICK ROPES, RACE WILLIAMS BREAKS FREE AND SHOOTS NOTORIOUS MURDERERS.

I didn't care much for the second one, though:

BRIDE OF A FEW HOURS SEES KILLER AND HUSBAND SHOT DOWN BY NOTORIOUS DETECTIVE.

Yes, that could have been better. Another headline put it much more nicely:

TWO OF THE CITY'S WORST HOODLUMS SLAIN IN TERRIFIC

GUN BATTLE BY THE FAMOUS
RACE WILLIAMS.

I liked that one and read a bit more of the article, which had me lying at death's door and a "grateful young widow who had been forced into wedlock crying on the hospital stairway."

"It doesn't mention," said Sergeant O'Rourke, "That you got up, served me liquor, then laughed yourself to sleep. Don't get livid, Race. Nothing will come of it. So far Nelson has heard that the girl could turn herself into five or six women at once—and I think a snake or two. And a fortune teller claims to have predicted Anderson's death to the minute."

"Nelson's thinking," said O'Rourke, "what I'm thinking. You said you'd kill them and you did. And I don't care."

* * *

I hated like hell staying in the house for a couple of days but I did want to make it look like a real gun battle.

Then who walks in on me but William Evans himself—the big-shot in person.

I chased Jerry, folded up the note I had just received and looked up at Evans.

"Here is a check for ten-thousand dollars." When I started to refuse, he said, "No, no. You remember me? I'm the man who never saw Martha. I don't read those kind of books and if I did I wouldn't believe them. But it's the nice way you handled things—your taking all the blame."

Evans grinned there and tossed me the evening paper he was carrying. "That ten grand you earned—consider it a fee for not worrying too much why things happened as they did. I offered you that much for bringing things to a satisfactory conclusion."

He picked up his hat and cane. "Incidentally, Williams, here's some plain advice from an old guy. There isn't any Martha—so don't bother going out with her."

He turned and left the room.

I looked down at his check. Then I picked the note I had so hastily thrust in my pocket. Was Evans a mind reader? The note was simple enough.

Hi, Race!

You and I will dine out tonight.

Meet me at the Astoria at seven-thirty. I'll be the best-dressed and best-looking woman there. Two personalities mixed into one—for you.

Martha.

Of course I wouldn't go. I was indignant. But I called Jerry and told him to get out the soup and fish.

Then I opened the paper to see if I was still on the front page. I wasn't. But the front page rocked me just the same. I read:

SLAIN RACKETEER'S WIDOW TO
INHERIT OVER HALF A MILLION.

Ward Anderson's will, made a few hours before his death, left everything to his widow. . . .

Did Ward Anderson have something on the girl that forced the marriage—even a threat to kill her? Did Ward Anderson have something on her uncle, despite William Evans' simple and assured denial that he could ever be blackmailed?

Was it all coincidence that I met Martha and she talked about two-hundred grand? Did she misjudge the amount and mean half a million? Did she plan the marriage and his death like that? It all seemed too clever? Still, Martha was a clever girl.

I sort of liked Martha. But I like the truth, too—and I hoped I'd find it out at the Astoria that night.

"You look swell." Jerry came over and straightened my tie.

The phone rang. I hesitated at the door, then strode back into the room and answered it myself. It was Inspector Nelson. His lips smacked with pleasure, so I knew that something very unpleasant was coming up. He said:

"So you think you are having dinner with Miss Alyce Joyce Reed at the Astoria, do you?"

"Why not?"

"Because," Nelson spoke very slowly, "even you don't dine with the dead, Race. . . . It just happened. That psychiatrist Johnston went nuts and pumped five shots into her body—then swallowed the last slug himself. What do you think?"

I wasn't thinking. I dropped the phone.

I got up and walked toward the kitchen to open a can of beans. Then I changed my mind. Come to think of it, I had never had dinner at the Astoria.

THE END

QUICK BUCK— QUICK KILL

*Thanks to the bright-eyed murder witness,
angle-playing Johnny was in line for a
windfall—but he'd have to cash them both
in to collect.*

●
"One of them put a gun
to his head. . . ."



By **DON
JAMES**

I THOUGHT about the girl in the guest room. Her name was Terry Lane. She was about twenty-three. She had tawny hair and she wasn't very tall—just over five feet—but she was slim and curved in all the right places. Her blue eyes had a shimmering quality that made them clean as sunshine. Her nose was short and straight. Her mouth was generous and ready to smile.

As I stared into the darkness of Tom

Ben's room, she was something to think about.

I kept remembering that she had drunk too many of Tom's gin drinks. Those blue eyes had been too bright and then too sultry. The lips that were ready to smile had been ready to kiss.

I hadn't kissed her. I'd talked with her, danced with her, drunk with her, but I hadn't kissed her. The party had been the noisy, extroverted kind.

Around midnight, Tom got the idea of returning to the city. I was too tired by then. I'd had a tough week and wanted sleep. I watched the party pile into cars and take off for Portland, and I went back to empty ash trays and pick up glasses.

The Oregon coast can be chilly at night in August. I let cool, salt air sweep through the sprawling living room and it began to smell better.

Tom had bought the beach house from a lumber man who had used plenty of his products. The house had seven rooms, knotty pine, a massive fireplace, a rustic flavor.

Apprehensive of smoldering cigarette butts, I checked the place. In the second guest room I found Terry Lane.

She was on the bed sound asleep. She had pulled a blanket over her and was curled up on one side. She'd kicked off her shoes onto the floor. Evidently she still wore her thin sport dress.

Somehow they'd missed her when they left. There wasn't anything I could do about it. I didn't have a car because I'd come with Tom. I spread another blanket over her, opened the window, turned out the light, and left her there.

That was fine and noble and gentlemanly.

An hour later I was still thinking about her; that her lips had been ready to kiss and her eyes sultry.

Finally I got up and dressed. Outside, the surf sounded lonesome and tired in the night.

In the kitchen I made coffee. Terry Lane had killed the sleep I had anticipated. I poured my coffee. Then I turned, and she was in the doorway. She looked puzzled and her smile was hesitant.

"Where is everyone?" she asked.

"They went back to Portland. They overlooked you."

She looked surprised and angry. Then she shrugged and glanced at my cup.

"Is there more?"

"Sure. I'll pour it. Feel rocky?"

She crossed to the table and sat down, smoothing her hair and brushing at lint on her dress. "A little," she said. "But the coffee will take care of that. You're Johnny Wire, aren't you?"

I said I was and brought the coffee to

the table. I sat down on the other side.

"Tom said you're a private detective," she smiled.

"Yes."

"I'm Terry Lane."

"I know."

She sipped coffee and took the cigarette I offered. "Thanks for everything."

"I haven't done anything," I grinned.

"The coffee is on the house."

"That's what I mean. You haven't done anything. No passes. You've been swell."

I let that ride. There was no point in telling her that I felt noble about it myself. She drank more coffee and began to look awake. I remembered ten years back when I had been twenty-three and could recover from an over-slug of gin with a cup of coffee and a nap.

Her eyes became thoughtful, and she twirled her cigarette so that smoke spiraled up. "I don't usually go on beach parties," she said. "Tom Ben and his crowd are over my head. I'm just a stenographer in his office. Marybelle, his secretary, asked me to come."

"That's Marybelle," I smiled.

"I'm in so much trouble, I thought I might as well. I guessed what kind of a party it would be. That's office talk—Tom Ben's parties. But I had to do something to get my mind off things."

I filled the cups again. When I sat down and didn't say anything, she frowned. "You don't ask what kind of trouble I'm in."

"Sometimes a girl doesn't want to explain."

SHE blushed and shook her head. "It's so early in the morning and everything is so strange. . . . I get like that when it's so late—or so early. I mean, I want to talk. I guess you don't want to listen. . . ."

"If you want to tell me, go ahead. Maybe it will help."

She went through the ritual of sipping coffee and carefully put down the cup. She looked at me thoughtfully.

"I saw a man murdered," she said.

"And I'm afraid to tell the police!"

She wasn't lying. There was too much worry and fear in her eyes.

"Look, Terry," I said quietly. "That's

saying a lot. Are you sure about that?"

"It's the truth. I saw a man murdered."

"Who?"

She shook her head. "I don't know."

"Who murdered him?"

She shook her head again. "Two men. I don't know them."

I shook out fresh cigarettes. Her fingers trembled as she took one.

"You'd better tell me about it," I said finally.

"Thursday I had a date with a boy. We went out to Club High on Mt. Hood highway. The boy drinks too much—he did that night. I tried to get him to let me drive home. We quarreled in the parking lot and he said neither of us would drive. He acted childish. He threw away the car keys and then I couldn't find them. A man had come out and saw it all. He helped me look for the keys. When I couldn't find them, I told the boy what I thought about the way he acted and—well, he slapped me."

"Nice boy," I said.

She shrugged impatiently. "I knew him back home. He's all right—he just hasn't grown up."

"What happened then?"

"The man offered to drive me to town."

"And you were so mad, you accepted his offer?"

"He didn't act like a wolf. And I was mad."

"Then?"

"About a mile from the club, a sedan overtook us and crowded us off the road. Two men got out. They made him get out. One of them put a gun to his head—and—and shot him. It was awful!" She shuddered.

"Then they saw you?"

She nodded. "One wanted to kill me. He said I'd put the finger on them. The other said, 'We got Jake. That was our job. Let's give the kid a break. She doesn't know us. We don't know what we'd get into. I don't like erasing dames.'"

"He took my purse and found my driver's license. He read it and said, 'I don't know where Jake picked you up, but forget this. If you talk, we'll know and it's curtains for you.'"

"They left then?" I asked.

"He hit me on the jaw. That's all I remember until I came to on the edge

of town in a vacant lot. I was all right. I walked until I found a bus line."

"That's all?"

She nodded. "I've watched the papers, but there hasn't been anything. I've been half crazy trying to decide what to do. I—I can't go on this way all my life—wondering if I should have gone to the police. But if I do, I'll be afraid that those men will find me. . . ."

"It's a tough spot," I admitted. "What did the man who was killed look like?"

"He was about fifty and gray at the temples. He had a long, thin nose and a tight, straight mouth. He had nice eyes and his voice was soft. I liked him and wasn't afraid of him."

I thought about it and a deep excitement began to stir through me. "Terry, will you trust me?" I asked. "Maybe I can clean this up if you do what I tell you to do."

The hesitation was slight, but it was there. "I guess I have to trust you—now that you know."

"You realize how it will be if you don't do something about it. You'll never be able to live with yourself."

"Can you promise that those two men won't find me?"

"I'll keep you safe."

She nodded. "Then go ahead—I'll trust you."

"It'll be all right," I assured her.

I WENT into the living room and picked up the telephone to call Portland. Packy Dermot's sleepy voice answered.

"Get awake," I told him.

"That you, boss? What's wrong?"

"You were at headquarters this morning. Was there anything on Mark Linn?"

"Sure! Didn't I tell you? Pat Donner is worried about Mark and asked the boys to look for him. Seems Mark hasn't been seen since Thursday night."

"Anyone have ideas?"

"The cops think he's just on another of his parties. Donner doesn't. He's really worried."

"Okay, Packy. I may call back."

I hung up and placed another call to Portland. It was two o'clock. A man's voice said, "Donner's."

"Is Pat there?"

"Who's talking?"

I told him and the voice said, "Yeah. Just a minute." The sounds of a crowd and music came over the wire, and then I heard Pat Donner's deep voice.

"What's wrong, Johnny?"

"You're like Packy," I told him. "If I call, he thinks something's wrong."

"Trouble follows you," Donner said dryly.

I let my voice become serious. "It's about Mark."

There was a small silence and then he said guardedly, "What about Mark?"

"You're looking for him?"

"Yes. Is this a fee job, Johnny?"

"That's up to you."

I'd get a check from Pat. You had to play him with reverse English. That was my angle.

He asked, "You know something?"

"I think Mark's dead," I said quietly.

"The cops haven't—"

"The cops don't know it yet. A girl just told me. Answer a question. Where's Mark's car?"

"He keeps it at the Excel Garage. The boys there found it parked in front Friday morning."

"It adds. Beat the brush along the highway about a mile this side of Club High. Call me at Tom Ben's beach house at Nelscott if you find anything."

"But what—?"

"Call me back. If you find Mark, I'll give you the rest."

I hung up and looked at Terry Lane. She started to speak but I shook my head.

"I'll build a fire in the fireplace," I said.

"We can talk then."

She watched me build the fire, hugging herself in the chill. The fire caught and filled the room with its red cast. I stood

and brushed my hands. She was staring at the unscreened flames, and she looked good, even in the wrinkled dress and with her hair mussed a little.

"I'm scared," she said.

"It's all right. Leave it to me."

She shook her head doubtfully. "I had to tell you," she said. "I had to tell someone. A girl can't go around with a secret like that."

"No."

"But now that I've told you—"

"Look," I said quietly. "Do you have a boy friend?"

She shook her head.

"Any family in Portland?"

"I'm from Boise. I live alone. Dad passed away in 1941 and Mother died last year. I'm all that's left."

"Come here," I said.

She came as obediently as a little kid and looked up at me.

I said, "Don't get this wrong. It's because I like you and you're in a jam and I want you to know I'm your friend and will help you."

She wet her lips with the tip of her tongue, her eyes wide.

"It's not a pass," I said.

She waited.

"It's because you're a hell of a nice girl who's in trouble and needs to know that someone is going to look after her."

That was exactly how I felt about it when I held her shoulders in my hands and bent to kiss her. I felt that way until something happened and her arms went over my shoulders and around my neck. Then I was holding her tight and she was responsive and trembling in my arms.

I held her away and we didn't speak. Panic was in her expression.

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"It's all right," I said huskily. "Don't be frightened."

"Nothing ever—like that. . . ."

I knew how she felt.

"We're going to make more coffee and talk about baseball," I said, grinning. "I'll tell you about the Beavers and the Coast League, and how they play percentage ball. That's safe to talk about."

Slowly she began to relax. She smiled, almost timidly. "Yes, let's talk about baseball," she agreed. "But I feel better now. I'm not so frightened. Who was it, Johnny?"

"Wait until I'm sure."

WE TALKED about baseball, then about Boise, and she told me about herself and the familiar pattern of an average, middle-class, American girl growing up in a small city. It might have bored me, but it didn't.

The ringing of the telephone startled us. I found myself gripping the receiver too hard when I picked it up. Pat Donner's voice came over the wire, tight and filled with grit.

"We found him, Johnny. Shot through the head."

"I thought you might."

"I want to know everything you know about it."

"That's for the cops, Pat."

"No. For me first. He was my partner."

I said, "I'm a cop at heart, and I've got to let the law handle it. What did you do with Mark's body?"

"It's still there. I'm calling from Club High. We just found him."

"Call the cops, Pat. It's theirs from here out."

There was a short silence and then Pat Donner sighed. "Okay. You're right. Are you coming back?"

"I haven't a car. I got left here by a party."

"I'll come after you in the morning. I want you on this. You're hired. We'll talk on the way in. Shall I tell the cops how I got the tip to find him?"

I smiled. I'd got my job out of it. I was all set to make a fast buck. "Yeah. Tell them I'm coming in." I gave him instructions to find the isolated beach house, adding, "A girl is going with us."

"Cruncher will drive. We'll be there around seven."

We broke the connection. My angle was played, but now I'd better clear with the cops.

The call went through at once and I explained things. While I talked, the desk sergeant said the call from Pat Donner had just come in.

"Where did *you* get the tip?" the sergeant demanded.

"It's too complicated to explain over the phone. I'll be there in the morning. Tell Crozier I'll give him all the dope." Crozier was chief of detectives.

The sergeant agreed and the line clicked dead. Terry Lane looked at me expectantly.

"It was Mark Linn—a gambler," I said. "He was Pat Donner's partner. They owned the Donner Club together. It's probably a racket killing. The eastern boys have been moving in, but Donner and Linn have been bucking them."

"Racketeers?" She sounded frightened now.

"Don't worry about it. Donner is coming after us. Meanwhile, you'd better get some sleep. The cops and D.A. will want to talk with you. You can sleep on the couch by the fire."

"I can't sleep now!"

"You can try," I said, smiling.

She was asleep within ten minutes. It was three o'clock. Donner would arrive at about seven. I decided to get a little sleep in a chair.

I'd been quite a guy—a good citizen. I'd reported a murder and I'd taken only one short cut. That little angle to get a job and a check out of Donner. The fast dollar.

The only thing that worried me was Terry Lane. Perhaps I had put her in a spot.

If I had gone straight to the cops, they could have handled it quietly. The body would have been found, but without mention of the girl. She could have remained in the background until the tips she might give them had helped to tag Jake's murderers.

That would have been the safe way to protect her. But it didn't pay off for me. Going to Donner first meant a check for me. But it also meant that Donner would

be looking for the men who killed his partner, and the grapevine would spread it. Somewhere two muggs would know that a girl had talked, and would talk some more. They'd want to silence her.

When I finally went to sleep I dreamed about Pat Donner writing a check for me. The check disappeared when I tried to pick it up.

THE sun was rising when I awoke and piled logs on the fire. It was a little after five o'clock. When I looked outside, Cruncher was wheeling a sedan up the trail of a road through fir and brush. Donner was with him. I went to the door.

Pat Donner was large, middle-aged, gray-eyed. Cruncher looked small beside him, although Cruncher had once fought as a light heavy.

As they walked toward the house, I heard Terry Lane get up and come across the room.

"Mr. Donner?" she asked.

"They're early," I said and opened the door wider for the two men. They glanced sharply at the girl as they came in and I made introductions. Cruncher's wise smile brought a frown from me.

"Okay," Donner said. "Let's have it."

For a second I hesitated. I could still hold out and save Terry for the cops, but I had to remember my angle. Pat Donner was going to pay me for information. With reasonable luck I could keep Terry safe from the two muggs. Donner probably could strike faster than the cops. What he would do was his business.

"Terry saw them kill Mark," I said, and explained what had happened.

Donner listened attentively, his large face empty of expression. When I finished he looked at Terry.

"Would you recognize those two if you saw them again?"

She nodded decisively. "One had a scar on his chin. The other's nose was crooked, as if it had been broken once. I'd know them anywhere."

Donner was thoughtful. He glanced at Cruncher, who shrugged his broad shoulders.

I asked, "Some eastern boys moving in?"

"Maybe," Donner said. "Did you call the cops from here?"

"Yes. I had to clear myself. I have a license to keep."

"Tell them about the girl?"

I shook my head. "That's your information first. You're paying for it."

"Got a copy of last night's final?" Donner asked.

"No. Why?"

He brought one from a coat pocket and unfolded it. Silently he spread the paper out and showed it to us.

There was a picture of two men with sullen expressions. The caption read: CAPTURED BY SERVICE STATION ATTENDANT.

The story explained that the two, who said they were from Detroit, had attempted to hold up a service station, but ran into an ex-GI who had neatly managed to capture them, using commando tactics in a fight that had all but wrecked the station. A picture of the attendant showed him grinning with a cut mouth.

Terry gasped, "Those are the two men!"

"You're sure?" Pat asked curtly.

"Positive!"

Donner slowly folded the paper and returned it to his pocket. He and Cruncher exchanged glances again and neither smiled. Cruncher suddenly looked alert and tense.

A premonition of danger swept over me. Something was wrong. Very wrong.

"What's the pitch?" I asked.

"A bad pitch," Donner said quietly. "It went wrong."

"What did?"

"Those two muggs getting caught. They should have known better. They should have known better that to let this girl get away. They were dumb."

"Sure, but—"

"Now she can identify them to the cops for a murder rap. They'll probably talk. They're not heavy with brains, or they wouldn't have let her go and they wouldn't have tried a stickup before they left town. They're two-bit muggs. Now it's all loused up."

"Isn't that what you want, Pat?"

"No."

I stared at him in surprise. Then it hit me like an atom bomb.

"You hired them to bump Mark!" I said. It could have been a question, but

it wasn't. The way Donner watched me made it too certain. There was no friendliness, nor elation, nor satisfaction. There was nothing but bleakness.

I said, "You're afraid they'll talk if the D.A. tags them for Mark's murder. You don't want them identified. They might spill who hired them to kill Mark!"

He just looked at me.

I said, "Did Mark cross you? Do you want the club to yourself? Have you sold out to the eastern boys? And when I called, did you have to follow through and find him to make it look good, even when you knew where he was?"

"You're a smart operator, Johnny."

It was beginning to make sense to Terry Lane. She backed away. Cruncher watched her with eyes as cold as Donner's.

I thought, *This is it. I'll get my check, all right! Paid in full—with a lead slug. Both of us. . . .*

I tried to keep my voice normal. "Take it easy, Pat. The cops know who tipped you. They'll add things up if—"

"Cruncher and I are at the club right now with five boys who will swear we're there. There aren't any houses on the road up here from the highway. No one saw us. There are thousands of sedans like the one we're driving. It doesn't carry its own license plates. We borrowed them from a parked car."

"You think of everything, Pat."

"I even remembered to bring a gun." He smiled tightly and brought it out. "I thought this dame you mention might be the one those two mugs told me about."

Terry screamed.

I tried to put an arm around her, but she jerked away, staring at me with wild eyes. "You said it would be all right!" Her whisper was laden with fright.

"I know, Terry. I made a mistake."

You had to play an angle, I told myself. You had to make a fast dollar. And it's buying you murder!

It was the first time I ever loathed myself. It was greater than the fear of death. Or maybe it was part of it. You don't know how much you'll have to explain out there. . . .

Donner wasn't worried about Terry's terror, nor my conscience. He was in a hurry to get a job done. He said, "Johnny, this is the payoff."

HIS finger tightened on the trigger. I was to be first. My stomach muscles curled; I fought panic.

My mind was a storm-lashed boat torn from its moorings. *Anything—anything! A fast angle now—any fast angle. . . .*

I spoke and the words were harsh and desperate: "Hold it, Pat! You can't beat it this way. You'll only buy the gas chamber! Listen—"

I glanced at Cruncher. He watched us without expression, expectant, ruthless.

My voice was tense. "Pull that trigger, Pat, and police'll be on you like a pack of wolves. I know how their minds work—that's my business. This time it's for my life. And it's *your* life, too. So you're going to listen while I tell you why they'll get you if you kill us. You're going to let me tell you the cops' viewpoint and exactly what they'll do."

"They won't have a viewpoint of me."

"Yes, they will. You found the body and they know I tipped you. I called the cops after I called you."

"So what? Why should I bump you?"

"It's too pat. I tip you. You find the body. I get bumped. They'll wonder if you came down here to ask questions."

"I have an alibi."

"Not for your car."

"The license plates—"

"Yes, but not the tires. You'll leave plenty of tire marks for them to examine and cast.

"So they find out my car was here," Donner snapped. "I don't think they will, but if they do—so what? Someone stole it."

I shook my head. "They'll still be suspicious. So they take a paraffin test of your hand and learn you've fired a gun. It starts to close in on you."

"I've got my alibi. Five alibis."

"That's too many, Pat. There aren't many men who can get five guys to perjure themselves for him. The cops will be tough about it. Your five men won't be ordinary peaceful citizens. You don't use that kind. The cops won't be satisfied until they're *sure*, and they know how to put on the heat. The odds are against you. If only *one* of the five breaks—it's curtains for you."

He tried to smile self-assurance, but there was sudden doubt.

"So you've tire marks to beat," I said. "A paraffin test to beat. The questionable loyalty of five punks to beat. It's getting tougher all the time."

Somewhere there has to be a break, I thought. It's got to come.

We stood in front of the fireplace and its roaring blaze, but the blood was cold in my veins. Cruncher watched Terry. She had shrunk back against the wall and her eyes were on the door.

"Don't try it," he warned. She shrank even closer to the knotty pine.

Cruncher said to Donner, "Hell, you can beat the tire rap. The car was stolen. And you can beat the paraffin rap. Put gloves on and throw 'em away afterwards. The cops won't be so tough on the alibis if the paraffin test doesn't tip them off."

Donner gave him a quick look and I moved inches closer to him. About a yard separated us.

Maybe this is the break, I thought.

"The gloves are a good idea," Donner said. "You talk too much, Johnny."

He slipped his free hand into a coat pocket and pulled out gloves.

I waited until he started the awkward task of slipping one on his gun hand. I could have told him that he was making his greatest mistake—Cruncher wasn't covering us. I didn't.

The big break came. Donner's fingers fumbled with the gun for a second as he pulled on the glove. I rushed him, hitting viciously at his gun hand.

He stumbled back. The gun cracked sharply, and missed. I hit him with my right and he floundered back into the enormous fireplace. Flame licked about him and he scrambled wildly to get out. The gun was forgotten.

I kicked him in the chest, shoving him back into the blazing fire. Instinctively he dropped the gun, yelped as the flames scorched him.

Cruncher hit me and I staggered sideways. He ignored me and reached for Donner to pull him from the flames. Donner screamed as hot embers burned into his flesh.

I hit Cruncher with my shoulder and he sprawled over his employer. There was confusion, flailing bodies, the stench of burning clothing. Donner's cries became

animal-like as he tried to get from under Cruncher's sprawling body—away from the searing flames.

The door was open. Terry was running wildly toward the underbrush and fir.

We were out of sight of the house when I caught her. She fought me with silent intensity until I pinioned her arms. Donner's screams still sounded behind us, and then there was the sharp report of exploding shells.

Slowly, sanity returned to Terry's eyes. She began to shudder with the morning chill and the reaction.

"Be quiet," I told her softly. I led her back until we could watch the house.

We saw Cruncher lead Donner out. The fire had taken all the fight out of them. They had discarded most of their clothing, and Donner wore one of Tom's raincoats carefully draped over his shoulders as if its touch was excruciating pain. His eyes were burned. Cruncher, in a beach robe, guided him into the car and slipped behind the wheel. The engine roared. Silently we watched the sedan disappear down the road.

"It's safe," I said. "They're headed for Portland and a doctor who won't ask questions. We can go back."

Smoldering clothing was scattered in front of the fireplace. The gun was stained from heat, its shells exploded.

I took the burned clothing out and then called the Portland police and talked for ten minutes. When I hung up, Terry was standing in the doorway, pale and shaken.

"I've made coffee," she said. "I—I had to do something."

"Terry—" I groped for words—"I have to tell you what a heel I am. I—"

"Don't," she said and gave me a small smile. "No man who admits he's a heel can really be much of a heel. Besides—we're here, aren't we? And safe. And you fought our way out. Isn't that enough for right now?"

I went to her and took her arms and looked down at her.

"I made a mistake about you and me," I said. "I wanted to make a fast dollar."

"The coffee is ready," she whispered, but she didn't really care. Her lips were soft, her arms were around my neck again.

The coffee could wait.

Powerless to protest, Dick Sterner watched the stealthy stranger stir his pal's war-brewed hatred into a . . .

GENTLEMAN'S VENGEANCE

By
RODERICK LULL



"It was not my fault. . . .
There was nothing I could
do."

IT WAS Monaghan who first saw the photograph. My phone rang and Monaghan's voice, low and blurred, said, "Dick? I wonder if you could come down here. Now."

"Look, Jack, it's damn early for drinking. You started already?"

His voice lifted with impatience. "Hus-

tle along, Dick. Something queer's happened."

It was only a short elevator ride to Monaghan's office. He was sitting at his desk and a small man with black hair was facing him. Even sitting down, Monaghan, who is a big man, seemed tremendously taller than his visitor. His square

face was tired, and the lines around mouth and eyes stood out strongly. But his hands were taut and quick.

I said, "At least, you could have the bottle out and a glass ready."

Monaghan ignored that. "Dick, this is Angeles Flores. Mr. Flores, Mr. Sterner."

The dark man rose, and I saw that he was a Filipino, and shorter than is average for a short race. He was dressed very quietly in a dark gray flannel suit with a white shirt, blue tie and black shoes. There was a mottled area on the left side of his face, as if it had been badly burned or scalded at one time.

He said, "How do you do, sir?" in one of the most musical voices I have ever heard. When he sat down again I noticed that he was amazingly relaxed, in the complete way a tired dog relaxes. His hands lay easy and open in his lap, and there was no movement in him anywhere.

"How do you do, Mr. Flores?" I said. He smiled, and moved his head, and I thought that his name would not be Flores at all.

Then it was quiet in the office, and the scene had an unreal, slightly ridiculous aspect. There was Monaghan with his tired face, and the wonderfully relaxed Filipino, and the air of unexplained, underlying excitement.

Monaghan said, "I'd like you to tell Mr. Sterner just what you told me, Mr. Flores." Then he looked at me. "This goes back quite a way, Dick. I think you'll be interested."

It had to go back to the war, of course—the presence of Flores was proof of that. Monaghan had served in the Infantry in the Pacific, and he'd come out with most of the decorations the Army had to offer. I'd completed a brief and undistinguished military career in the European Theatre. We'd both made captain, starting the commissioned life via the OCS route.

Flores looked thoughtfully at the floor. He reached into the vest pocket of the dark flannel suit and produced a curious little knife, of the size you wear on a watch chain. His thin fingers moved with amazing swiftness and the knife's small blade appeared.

It was a miniature Batangas knife—the kind where you release a catch, pull the split sides of the case away from each

other, and so produce the blade. Monaghan had given me one for a souvenir when he returned from the Philippines. Some of the Filipinos, he had said, became astonishingly dexterous with them. Flores' gesture with the knife made the scene all the more fantastic because it was such a tiny knife, barely large enough to sharpen a pencil, and there was no menace in it.

"Of course, Captain Monaghan," Flores said softly. The title had a strange sound; Monaghan, naturally, never used it. Flores closed the Batangas knife and returned it to his pocket. Once again, he was entirely relaxed. He turned to me. "I will make it brief, Mr. Sterner—"

It was a simple, familiar story. You've read the essence of it a hundred times. He had lived in the Philippines, on Luzon and the lesser islands, all during the Japanese occupation, and he had been a guerilla. He had experienced many things—most of them very unpleasant. He had been nearby when the battalion to which Monaghan was assigned had liberated 1500 white interned civilians in spite of the presence of enemy troops.

He had come to this country finally. Here he waved a hand in the air, a gesture that said plainly that how he had evaded the immigration authorities was no one's business but his own. He had learned that Captain Monaghan was in business in Portland. And he had brought a photograph.

"A photograph," he repeated in that beautiful voice. "And a very ugly photograph."

Monaghan said, "The photograph." It was lying, face down, on the desk, and now he picked it up and looked at it briefly with expressionless eyes, then tossed it to me.

I think I knew what the photograph would show before I looked at it. It would have to do with Lieutenant Frederick Monaghan, Jack's younger brother, who had parachuted from a burning plane over Mindanaro in the early days of the campaign for the Philippines. Nothing had ever been heard of him after that. And, in time, he'd been officially presumed dead—leaving all the questions unanswered.

Anyway, Flores was right. It was an ugly photograph, and it was very clear. There was a young white man in torn

U. S. Army khakis, with his hands bound behind him. There were some Japanese soldiers in their usual shapeless uniforms, one with a great beheading sword. And then, there was a Filipino whose face was turned toward the camera. This face was serene and smiling, and every feature was recorded with great distinctness.

Monaghan swung his swivel chair toward the window. It squeaked from lack of oil on the springs. He said quietly, "That's Fred, Dick. My brother."

I PUT the photograph down, its face to the desk. I had never known Fred, but Monaghan had told me much about him. He had been twenty-four, with excellent prospects, engaged to be married—it was that sort of a dossier.

Monaghan would never look at me directly when he was talking about Fred. He would talk slowly, almost haltingly, looking at a wall or a door or a picture, at anything but me. His face would soften when he talked about how he had helped raise Fred, being fifteen years the elder, and how he had told him, going against their mother, that it was right for him to try to become a fighter pilot if that was what he felt he should do.

Then he would shake his head and say something about Fred being still missing, with the war long over, and presumed dead by the War Department. "But there's no proof of that," he'd say. "And they do make mistakes.

"Lord, people show up years after a war. You've read about it. They get lost on some little island or in some wilderness and it takes them a long time to find out what's happened and to get out. That could happen with Fred. And even if it doesn't, even if the War Department's right, I still think I gave him the only advice I could. It was what he thought he had to do."

Then he would look at me and smile. "I'm a damn bore, Dick. Look, let's catch a drink at the club and go have dinner somewhere."

Well, the young officer in the photograph was Fred. The only thing left to hope, now, was that the Jap with the beheading sword had been an accomplished technician.

I looked at Monaghan. He was still

turned away, staring out of the window as if the empty sky held something of great significance. I looked over at Flores, and said, "Well?"

The Filipino tapped with his right hand on the desk top. I noticed that he wore a heavy gold ring on his fourth finger. It had an odd design—an orchid-like flower of some kind—chased on the flat surface where normally there would have been a monogram.

He said, "I call your attention to the Filipino in the picture, Mr. Sterner. He earned, and he received, the reward the Japanese paid for betraying flyers. I know where this Filipino is."

So it began to make sense—and, on the other hand, it had more loose ends than the brain could quickly track. It was the kind of thing that might happen, but was damned unlikely. But Monaghan, who had been devoted to his brother, would have his mind all made up.

I said, "What is your interest in the matter, Mr. Flores?"

There was another silence. Monaghan packed and lighted a pipe. Flores smiled at me. "You might say it is a family matter, Mr. Sterner. A matter of obligation. Perhaps that is not clear, but I must leave it there for the present."

It was the cops-and-robbers note. Still, you could make the mistake of judging other peoples by your own, easy-going racial characteristics. You could say that nobody fervently remembered things this long, obligation or no obligation, that no one crossed 7,000 miles of ocean and ran great risks to pursue a traitor.

You could say all that, and you would be denying the fact of the exceptions to the rule who did just those things and more. You would be forgetting that there are peoples more passionate and patient than your own.

In other words, you would be working on the theory that after a war all memories grow short. As a generality, that is sound enough. But there are always the exceptions, the ones with the long memories. Their anger is fed by the knowledge that those who betrayed for a price would betray their countrymen no less than their allies.

Monaghan said, "According to Flores, this—this man's in Portland. He worked

his way over a ship which is docked here now. It seems he bribed the first mate, a man named Verden who has a damned smelly record on his own hook. Verden's been on the Tokyo-Manila-Pacific Coast run with a McClaskie Line freighter for a long time. Mr. Flores thinks—well—that I might be able to persuade our lad to talk.

"Mr. Flores couldn't possibly handle it alone. The man never goes ashore without the mate along for protection and company. Probably the mate—assuming that all this is true—is making a hell of a good thing of it. He can milk the man dry of his money and exploit him in any way he likes. A threat to put in a word to the authorities would make our lad turn good dog in a hurry."

"Just so," Flores said gently. "Just so, Captain Monaghan."

"What about the police?" I said.

Monaghan shook his head. "Flores couldn't go to them, for obvious reasons. And if I went—Well, damn it, what have I actually got in the way of proof? The best they could do is pick this boy up. And he tells a story and the mate supports it and all he gets is expulsion from the country for illegal entry."

"Then what do you want to do?"

Monaghan spread his hands wide. "If we had a confession to support this photograph—well, the war criminal trials are still in business, Dick, and they haven't run out of rope yet."

"How did you know the officer in this photograph was Mr. Monaghan's brother?"

"I was told, sir. Does it make any difference who told me? Captain Monaghan has seen the photograph. He has made the

identification. Therefore, my informant told me the truth, and that is what is important."

I thought that it was wonderful how relaxed the little Filipino was. "All right," I said. "What the hell have you in mind?"

Flores leaned forward. "This," he said, "is what I suggest, and I believe Mr. Monaghan agrees." Yes, he had a beautiful voice, and he spoke with an elaborate, literary perfection in the kind of English that is learned from books.

STANDING there waiting I knew there was no sense in any of this.

It had all sounded authentic and necessary when the Filipino had been telling it with his careful words in his musical, compelling voice. He was an amazingly passionate and single-purposed man. When you thought about it, you could see that his appearance of utter relaxation could in itself be a subtle form of tension.

It was raining and cold, with an east wind blowing; the street was lonely and dead gray. I turned up my coat collar and thought that the proper thing to do was to go to the authorities. They could certainly find some way to handle the job. We had let Flores dominate us, turn everything into channels of his own choosing. Then I thought of Monaghan's devotion to his brother, who had died the wrong kind of death.

It was curious that the Japs should take pictures of such things, but they always had. They valued those pictures, and they carried them about in their pockets. They regarded them as symbols of manhood and the imperial way.

Then Monaghan's car, very dark and

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silent, came around the corner and stopped.

Flores was sitting next to Monaghan, and he moved a little to his left to make room. There was no crowding—the Filipino was hardly larger than a child between us.

He smiled at me, and bowed his head politely, and said, "Good evening, Mr. Sterner. I hope it was not too unpleasant waiting. You have a wet country here." He laughed softly.

Monaghan drove slowly ahead. The dash clock said seven. It wasn't too late to take the whole business to the police and dump it in their laps. The photograph, coupled with Flores' testimony, would certainly be impressive enough to justify a thorough-going investigation. As for protecting Flores, it shouldn't be—

"I know what you're thinking," Monaghan said. "I've thought it myself. But we'll try it Flores' way anyhow. It can't do any harm. If the boy talks it will simplify matters enormously. As for the mate—well, Flores has told me some more about the mate. He isn't a person you'd like, Dick."

So there was nothing to argue about, because Monaghan had made up his mind.

Flores put a cigarette in his mouth and struck a match. His ring glinted in the sudden light and I said something inane about the curious, flower-like design. He held his hand steady so I could see it clearly.

"The sampaguita," he said. "The Philippine national flower. My father gave it to me when I graduated from high school. He thought a great deal of education, having had none himself."

"It's like an orchid," Monaghan said. "A little orchid. I've seen them climbing the trees. The blooms are mostly white and blue."

The match went out; Flores struck another and lighted his cigarette. "We think it is a very lovely flower," he said. "We are very proud of it."

We were close to the docks now, and the streets were mean. The buildings were old and rundown—warehouses, cheap lodging houses, dubious hotels, bad corner restaurants and taverns. It was too warm in the car with the heater going and the windows closed. I opened my coat.

I thought about Flores' plan. It was full of holes. Even if the mate and the Filipino we wanted had made a habit of leaving the ship and going into town after dinner, it didn't mean it would happen every night. Or, maybe, tonight the mate would come ashore alone, and he would be no good to us without his companion.

Flores, of course, had thought of that. "We may have to go back again," he had said in Monaghan's office, his eyes bright and his lips smiling slightly, his hands relaxed in his lap, his voice like good music. "We may have to be patient, and that is difficult. I know, because I have had to be patient too long. But it is a thing you can learn, and it is often essential."

"I know a little about patience," Monaghan had said.

"Of course, Captain." Then Flores had put his fingers into the vest pocket where he carried the tiny Batangas knife. But he hadn't withdrawn it. He had just let his fingers remain there, hooked around the cloth. And once more he had been completely quiet, with never a muscle moving where you could see it.

We came to the docks, and the wide street that runs their length, and the squat, graceless freighters looked dull and uninteresting in the dark. There was a waterfront strike on, no ship had been worked for more than a week, and the docks seemed deserted. The few watchmen were inside shelters, out of the dirty weather.

Flores said, "To your left, please, Captain."

The McClaskie Line dock was at the extreme end of the row. There was a closed warehouse, with the house flag—a red "M" in a chocolate brown circle—painted on its side. The paint was peeling, and the colors had become indefinite from rain. A single freighter, of about the 10,000-ton class, was tied up at the dock. A side road, perhaps two hundred yards long, ran from the street to dockside.

Flores said, "If you will stop a minute, Captain."

Monaghan braked the car to a halt.

"I think that if you will drive down that road about fifty yards you will find an excellent place to park," Flores said. "There is a little turn and a wide space at one side. I don't think anyone will notice

us. But if we should be questioned—we are picking up a friend.”

“Look,” I said, “does this make any sense at all? These people will have every right to think we’re bandits of some sort. They could cave our heads in with entire justification. We haven’t really been thinking it out. It’s—”

“We’ll take a crack at it, Dick,” Monaghan said. His voice was far away. I couldn’t see his face, but I noticed that his fingers were tight around the wheel. He turned the car, we went down the side road and found the open space. He backed into and killed the engine. He turned off the headlights, but a small light still illuminated the clock on the dash.

I didn’t say anything more. I smoked cigarettes and waited. The clock said seven-thirty and seven-forty and seven-fifty. The probability was that they wouldn’t leave the ship tonight.

That was a relief. With another day, and the harsh reality of daylight, we could do some serious thinking. I might be able to talk Monaghan out of Flores’ strange influence. We could bring some sense into the affair.

“I hear someone coming,” Flores said softly, and I’d have sworn that there was a lilt to his voice. It was the voice of a happy man. “If you would let me out of the car, Mr. Sterner—I have a flashlight. Please do not turn on the car lights unless I request it, Captain; it will be safer to do without them if we can.”

The car door opened quietly. I stepped out and Flores followed.

Monaghan’s voice, very low, said, “Flores—one minute. I don’t want any—”

“It is quite all right, Captain,” the Filipino whispered.

NOW, for the first time, I heard men coming down the road from the ship. Flores, I thought, must have the ears of a highly developed animal—ears that could seize upon sounds too weak for the average human ear to catch.

He stood near me, small as an undeveloped boy in the darkness, and even then he seemed completely relaxed, a man waiting, motionless, with a monumental patience. And I thought uneasily of what Monaghan had been about to say before Flores stopped him. We had blundered

into this, and whatever came of it must be laid to our own docile stupidity. There was something about Flores. . . .

Two dim figures came into view. One was a big man, almost as big as Monaghan; the other was slight and no taller than Flores. They saw the bulk of the car and slowed.

Then Flores snapped his light on, holding it steady in his left hand, and said, “Just a moment. I would not do anything foolish.”

His right hand was outstretched, ahead of the hand with the flashlight, and the medium-caliber revolver it held showed clearly. The hand gripped the revolver lightly and easily, with no perceptible waver of the barrel, the way a man who understands the proper use of firearms holds a handgun.

I looked at the pair in the light from the flash. The Filipino was undoubtedly the man in the photograph, but there was something I had not noticed until now—his cast of feature and his build were startlingly like Flores’. He was staring into the beam of light, seeing nothing, of course, and his face was creased and frightened.

The mate’s face was darkly heavy and it had no expression at all. When he spoke his voice was level. “If it’s a stick-up,” he said, “you’ll get damn little from us. If I was pulling a job I’d look for more prosperous customers. You want us to hand it over to you, or are you going to take it off us?”

Flores said, in that easy, musical voice, “Move to one side, please. I mean you, Mr. Verden. Over there—that is good. Now, you know who I am. José.”

The Filipino called José made a little motion with his hands and arms. It was the reflex action of a man who has suddenly lost all hope.

He said, “Filip, how did you get here, Filip?” It was a voice filled with fear and a curious wonder. He made that little motion once more. “You must let me explain to you, Filip. It was not my fault. The Japs—they made me, Filip. There was nothing I could do.”

Behind me Monaghan said something I did not catch. I took a step toward Flores, and he moved. He moved with wonderful, sharp precision. He moved so swiftly that

it was all blurred. I saw the revolver go inside his coat, and the flashlight shift to his left hand, and I saw the Batangas knife open.

But this was not the tiny knife he carried in his vest pocket—a thing fit only for opening envelopes and sharpening pencils and slicing the ends from cigars. It was a long knife, and I knew that it would have a very sharp double-edged blade with a point as fine as a razor's edge.

I saw his small body come between me and the small body of the man he called José, and I heard a sound I had never heard before and would not like to hear again. It was something between a gurgle and a suddenly suppressed cry for help. I heard his body fall, quite lightly, and I knew that he was dead. The whole action had been completed in half-a-dozen ticks of a clock.

The mate had broken for the ship, but he had lost a precious second and Flores was too fast for him. The light found his bent, moving figure, the revolver, steady and well-aimed, was back in Flores' right hand.

Flores said, "I would not run if I were you. You should know better than to run."

The mate stopped and came slowly back. He didn't look frightened or angry. He didn't look as if he felt anything at all. Obviously, he was a man who'd been in many a close scrape, and he was too experienced to chance odds that were hopelessly against him.

"You've got the guy you came after," the mate said, speaking into the beam of light toward a man he had not seen. "What more do you want? It's no skin off me. I'll make you a deal. I'll—"

Monaghan, standing beside me now, said, "Damn it, Flores, you had no right. You promised there'd be no violence. You said—"

There was a curious uncertainty in Monaghan's voice. It was the remote voice of a man who spoke because of an ingrained sense of the right way and the wrong way to do things, and not because of a burning compulsion.

They both had the same kind of long memories, Monaghan and Flores, but there the similarity ended. Monaghan had thought in terms of capturing a criminal, of perfecting the case against him if

possible, and then turning him over, unharmed, to the proper authorities.

While Flores . . . But it made no difference now; the business was over. And Flores was speaking to us again and he had it all his way.

"Please be quiet, gentlemen," Flores said. "All of you. There is one more thing." His voice had changed, and it was no longer musical. It was cold and beautifully controlled, with the sound of metal touching metal.

He turned his light on the body of the man he had called José. José looked unbelievably small lying there, and very much like a bundle of old, discarded clothing. Flores bent down, and again he moved with that blurred swiftness. He found the man's hand, fumbled with it, then dropped it. His flashlight never moved from the mate. And when he straightened again, the gun was in his hand.

"Captain Monaghan," Flores said. "I am very sorry I lied to you. It was necessary. But I do not think I have made serious trouble for you. This man here will get into your car. I will sit in the back with him. We will then drive where I tell you. And it would not do to argue."

Flores' voice dropped a note, but the sound of metal touching metal was still there. "I am sorry, Captain Monaghan, but there is nothing else I can do."

Monaghan took a short step toward Angel Flores. At once the revolver swung to meet him, level and steady.

"Captain Monaghan, please. I would not want any—any difficulty with you. I have grown most fond of you, sir, but this business has begun and now it must be finished. There is no other way. We will all get in the car. At the street you will turn right and you will not drive too fast."

THERE was nothing to do but obey. Monaghan and I got into the front seat. The mate got into the back and Flores followed him. The car moved, turned right, and proceeded down the street. In the light from the dash I saw Monaghan's strong profile, and it told me nothing.

The mate said, very suddenly, his voice urgent, "I know about you. He told me. He was scared to death of you. But he

thought he was safe here. He wouldn't have gone back to the Islands if you'd offered him the mint. As for me, I'll never do any talking. So this doesn't have to go any farther—"

Flores said, "Be still."

The mate grunted, the way a man grunts when a gun barrel bites hard against his ribs. And I thought that the mate was a dead man. He was breathing and talking, and he could look out of the car window and see what little there was to see in the darkness, and he could think and feel hope. But all these things made no real differences, because he was the same thing as a dead man, and there was nothing any of us could do about it.

Flores said, "I regret I had to involve you gentlemen in this. But I needed help. It would have been too risky alone—and I needed a car. And so— Turn left at the next street, please. Go on up the hill."

We moved along a deserted street, the houses and docks and taverns left behind. They had laid this area out in the hope that it would become a factory development, but nothing had ever happened. So there were streets and street signs, and sidewalks with cleared, leveled ground moving back from them, and there was nothing else.

I thought about what we might be able to do. It all depended on how fanatical Flores really was. He'd got the one man—his family obligation, whatever that meant, had been discharged—and—

Then there was no longer any need to think about it. Flores said sharply, "Stop here, Captain," and then the shot came, a tremendous, shocking sound in the closed car. After the shot there was silence, and it too seemed loud and echoing.

"He is dead, Captain," Flores said. "The bullet went through his heart. He knew about my family in Manila, and he might have found some way to bleed them if he had lived. He was the kind of man who is very clever at things like that. He was the kind of man who should have been killed long ago."

Monaghan's hands dropped from the wheel. He turned in his seat. He said, "I'm going to turn you in, Flores. I didn't bargain for any of this. I don't give a damn if you have got a gun. Every-

thing you say about these people is true, but this isn't the way I like things done. We're going back to town."

I saw Flores rise from his seat. He was so short that he could stand in the car with very little stooping. He leaned quickly forward and held his right hand so the light from the dash illuminated it. I saw the ring with the floral design glint on his finger. Then he turned his hand over, and there in the palm was another ring, identical with his own.

"Perhaps this will interest you, Captain," and his voice was musical and soft once more. "You see, my father bought two rings and gave one to my brother. I took it back from him just now, and when I get the chance I shall destroy it. Yes, he was my brother, Captain. It was my brother who betrayed yours to the Japs, and got money for it, and now the circle is quite complete at last."

I looked down at the ring, and after a moment Flores' hand drew back.

He said, "I am going now, Captain. Perhaps you could capture me—I am not sure whether I would defend myself or not. And I know I could not frighten you. You might consider all the phases of the matter. I shall not need this gun again and I will leave it here on the seat. It could be made to look as if this man attempted to rob you—But that is your affair, gentlemen."

The door opened, Flores stepped out silently, and the door closed. Monaghan sat staring at the wet windshield. "It isn't our duty to chase him," he said slowly. "He'd be too quick for us anyway, here in the dark."

"Yes," I said.

"We'll tell the police. Though I know they'd never find him. You don't find people like Flores. Not alive at least."

"I know."

He turned to me. "Nothing can be corrected now," he said. "It's all finished. And if you get down to cases as to what justice is—well, he wasn't so bad as its agent, Flores wasn't. He wasn't bad at all."

* * *

The police didn't offer any great problem. We were both well known, Monaghan had the status of a local hero, and

(Continued on page 95)

SALT ON A SIREN'S

Smooth operator Kim Boden was ready, willing and able to slug it out with the big-league smugglers—but first he had to polish off their Judas sweetheart.



CHAPTER ONE

Exotic Miss X

IT BEGAN very quietly, with a knock on the door. Just an ordinary, prosaic knock, that might have been Tony, the shoe-shine boy, or the man to fix the radiator, or even—by some miracle—a heaven-sent client with desperation in his eyes and green stuff in his pocket.

At first glance it wasn't any of these. Boden sighed and told the woman: "Dr. Jergen's office is down the hall. Third door on your—"

"You're Kim Boden?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm in the right place."

Boden straightened and gave her another look. White hair; delicate, faint-

ly lined features; a dull green suit that was all quality and no style. A nice friendly old soul you could picture tucking grandchildren into bed or posing for "Whistler's Mother." But mixed up in crime?—Boden's imagination balked.

"The rest of the sign," he said patiently, pointing to the door, "is 'Confidential Investigations.' That means I'm a private detective. You know, like Sherlock Holmes."

TRAIL

The door gave way with an ear-splitting crash. . . .



The woman's brown eyes twinkled. "I hope so. Mr. Holmes would be a great help now." She moved quietly past him into his office.

Boden followed hastily and pulled out a chair. This might not lead to anything, but at least it was a change from playing tit-tat-toe on unpaid bills all afternoon. He sat down at his desk and waited for her to begin.

The woman seemed in no hurry. She looked around the office with undisguised

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interest—and just as open disappointment. Her mouth quirked humorously.

"I'm looking for your bottle of scotch," she confessed. "Or do you keep it in your bottom drawer like 'Keyhole' McGinty?"

Whatever Boden had expected, this wasn't it. He grinned at her.

"I'm no storybook private eye—I work for a living," he told her. "No scotch—in the office anyway—and no blonde secretary. I don't even have an old body in the closet. Am I destroying all your illusions?"

She laughed. "Frankly, yes. But of course I didn't come here just to meet a real, live detective." Her face, suddenly very serious, showed signs of severe strain. She studied him a moment in silence, frowning a little. She said: "Do you mind if I ask a few questions?"

"Fire away," Boden said.

"Good. First, you were in the service, weren't you, Mr. Boden?"

"Check."

"In Europe, by any chance?"

"Check again."

"You saw your share of the destruction over there, I suppose? The bombed-out cities, the shell-pocked fields, the misery and hopelessness those people face?"

"I saw my share," Boden admitted. "Maybe more." He looked at her curiously. "But why the big build-up? Who are you, anyway?"

She smiled apologetically. "Oh, I'm sorry. Mrs. Kingsley—Mrs. J. O. Kingsley."

She said it quietly, without fanfare or heroics, but it was not a name that could be heard quietly. It meant that this unassuming little woman was the widow of J. O. himself—and thus heiress to a cool six million. If, of course, she hadn't given it all away already.

A series of newspaper pictures flashed through Boden's mind. Mrs. J. O. Kingsley, affectionately known as "Aunt Liz," entertaining scores of grinning East Side youngsters at her seaside summer home. Mrs. J. O. Kingsley, her sleeves rolled up, cheerfully attacking a stack of dishes in a USO kitchen while the boys danced with the pretty, laughing girls she'd rounded up. Mrs. J. O. Kingsley, looking very little and lost and in earnest on

the brightly lit platform at Madison Square Garden, making an impassioned plea for food for a hungry world.

"May I make a guess?" he asked softly. "Could what you're worried about have something to do with *Lifeline to Europe*?"

"Why, yes!" Mrs. Kingsley looked surprised, then a little embarrassed. "Forgive the sales talk, please, but it's difficult to know if people are going to laugh at me. . . ."

Boden said gruffly: "Who's laughing? What's so funny about keeping a few million people from starving? Or doing what you can to keep World War III from getting into the history books?"

A glint came into the woman's eyes. "Nothing funny at all, Mr. Boden. But it's a rare, well fed American who realizes just how important it is. . . . But to the point. Mr. Boden, if you were president of *Lifeline* and you discovered that somebody in the organization was a crook, what would you do?"

Boden grinned. "Just what you're doing—hire the best private eye in town."

"Check," said Mrs. Kingsley. "But it's not quite that simple. You see, this particular crook is engaged to a very good friend of mine—a girl who's practically been my right arm this last year. It will take delicate handling to check on Jacques without her knowing it."

"But you think this guy is using her?"

Mrs. Kingsley bit her lip. "Using her—or working with her. That's what I want you to find out." She shook her head. "It was quite a shock to find out about Jacques, the Count de Charlebois. He's a very likeable fellow. But then, confidence men usually are."

"A con man, eh? And that title of his?"

"Phony as a chorus girl's smile—and just as effective. I understand he did rather well in Chicago."

"I see. But now the Windy City nobleman has suddenly developed a touching interest in *Lifeline*—and you'd like to know his angle. Any ideas, Mrs. Kingsley?"

The brown eyes twinkled. "Millions of ideas, Mr. Boden! But seriously, *Lifeline* packages stream across the Atlantic almost daily—and are not, naturally, very carefully checked by the customs officials. If

you wanted to get something past customs, the kits would be a—a 'natural.' It could be almost anything—drugs, stolen jewels—” She broke off.

“You see, Mr. Boden, how fantastic my guesses are.”

“Maybe not so fantastic,” he said slowly. “Men will do almost anything if it pays well enough.” Involuntarily, his mind raced ahead, exploring her suspicions, adding a few of his own. He checked himself abruptly.

“You’ve got me doing it, too,” he said, grinning. “But, after all, what do we know except that Jacques is a phony?”

“There’s more to it than that.” Mrs. Kingsley reached into her purse and withdrew a letter. “I received this yesterday. I think you will find it interesting.”

The letter was postmarked Brussels.

Before I say another word, I must first express, on behalf of myself and my five motherless children, our intense gratitude for the food and other things you sent us. Please believe me, your package has helped more than I can possibly say to lighten the terrible burdens on our bodies—and on our hearts.

Do not think me ungrateful, then, if I am puzzled by one item (which shall go unnamed). Could it have been included by accident? Or is Lifeline, realizing its incalculable value over here, deliberately breaking the law to send it? I confess I almost cried with joy when I saw it, realized what it could do for my family. And yet—forgive me for wondering. We over here are so used to suspicion and treachery, we read black meanings into everything.

But I will close; I have already said too much. But, please, I beg of you—never, never doubt that I am anything except—

*Yours in deepest gratitude,
Henri Beauclaire*

Boden looked up to see Mrs. Kingsley studying him, all trace of levity gone from her face.

“That’s a funny one, isn’t it?” she said quietly.

The detective nodded soberly. “Yes, Mrs. Kingsley, a funny one. So funny I’m going to kiss a fat fee good-by—and send you over to talk to somebody at the FBI.”

MRS. KINGSLEY sat motionless, her eyes probing him. “I knew you would say that,” she said. “You’re right, of course. Only—” She stopped, shivered slightly. “Only—there’s Claire. . . I—I’m very fond of her, Mr. Boden. I’ve never had a daughter of my own and—”

She smiled pathetically. “Doesn’t the law say that a person is innocent until proven guilty?”

“The Federals won’t railroad an innocent person, Mrs. Kingsley.”

“I know but—suppose she should learn I had told them?”

Boden rose and walked over to the window. Hell, he knew how the old lady felt. He knew how he felt, too—every nerve, every fiber itching to get into action on this case, so like the ones he had handled during the war. But he had been a secret agent with the OSS—and now what was he? A private eye. A two-bit shamus. A trailer of errant wives and playful husbands. Damn it, he wanted this case!

He turned abruptly, before his better sense could gain control. “Okay, Mrs. Kingsley—with a deadline. I’ll give it everything I have for a week, if you’ll



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promise to hand it over to the Federals if I fail."

There were tears in the brown eyes. "You have my word, Mr. Boden."

"And if I should find out she's guilty?"

"Then, Mr. Boden, you may consider your fee equally well earned. . . ."

Two hours later, Boden sat with his feet up on the desk, studying the notes he had taken on Mrs. Kingsley's descriptions. In his pocket was a photostat of the Belgian's letter; the original was by now, he hoped, safely locked away in Mrs. Kingsley's brother's safe deposit box. He read the notes through once more, then fired his cigarette lighter and burned them, destroying the ashes carefully. An unnecessary precaution, perhaps, but the OSS had trained him to take unnecessary precautions.

The more Boden thought about the case, the more thankful he was for his background. There were overtones to this job—ominous overtones. With a charity like *Lifeline*, one whiff of scandal—and no more contributions, no more packages.

More ominous still, if the European recipients caught on that there was something fishy—as Monsieur Beauclair obviously had—their already wavering faith in American motives would be seriously undermined, perhaps even shattered beyond repair. And with the world as tense and keyed-up as it was, that could be bad, very bad, indeed. . . .

He wrenched his mind back to the business at hand. The trouble with the way he'd spent his war, he thought wryly, was that you got to thinking every penny-ante crook was as menacing as a Nazi spy. The Count de Charlebois might be, but Boden wasn't quite ready to swear to it yet.

He ran over Mrs. Kingsley's description: "A great big bear of a fellow, very attractive. And very intelligent. Don't underestimate him, Mr. Boden. Luckily, you won't have any trouble recognizing him. Look for a distinguished-looking man of about six feet four with a dark brown goatee and a boutonniere—and, of course, Claire at his elbow."

"And where do I find this Claire?"

She laughed. "Probably at Jacques' supper club, the Chateau Charlebois. He

just opened it a few weeks ago. As to Claire Dorné herself, I'm probably prejudiced, but I'd call her one lot of woman. Rather the exotic type, and much too beautiful for her own good. Specifically, five feet seven, one hundred and twenty-odd pounds in the right places, and black hair and eyes. Oh, yes, I almost forgot. Her most striking feature is a lock of pure white hair."

"And you're paying me for this!" Boden said. "Anybody else who might need checking?"

She'd given him the names of two men the count had won to the cause: a retired British career officer, a Major Bluffington, who now owned a steamship line; and a George Whitney, whose business she did not know. Boden decided to let them wait—temporarily.

* * *

The Chateau Charlebois was a plush, chalet-like establishment in the East Fifties, with a choice list of wines, a subdued atmosphere and a langorous blonde singer who murmured subtle French songs into a hidden microphone. Boden ate the best dinner he'd tasted since he left France, and eyed the decor with appreciation. The soaring, carved-wood arches must have cost the count a pretty penny—pretty pennies that once belonged to rich Chicagoans, no doubt.

As yet he had seen nothing of the exotic brunette with the white streak in her hair. He sat smoking a leisurely cigarette and idly noted that a door near the bar led into a chic little liquor store. Charlebois apparently sold his imported wines and liqueurs for home consumption, too.

Boden filed the thought and resumed his waiting, feeling no impatience. Half of this game of espionage was waiting, anyway: sitting around hour after hour pretending to be absorbed in your own business, while every sense was tuned to catch the slightest enemy move, the faintest whiff of danger—and every nerve in your body screamed out that you couldn't stand living on this damn tightrope much longer.

Tightrope—who had called it that? Ah, he remembered. Adele. Adele Chandler, in a field outside Paris. Wonder what

ever happened to her? A hell of a woman, Adele, and a damn fine agent, too. . . .

His glance rested idly on a girl who had just entered. She was standing in profile to him—and a very attractive profile it was. Boden took in a wolf's-eye view: long, shapely legs in dark, misty stockings; a beautifully filled black dress cut low in a creamy-shoulder effect; a dramatic pearl choker around a white throat and a cameo-like face that—

Damn it, it couldn't be!

You didn't just think of a girl and have her materialize right out of thin air! And yet it must be Adele—he'd know her anywhere. He got up and hurried across the room.

He was almost upon her before she turned. And then the whole world exploded in a blinding, numbing flash.

Starting at her widow's peak and bisecting the midnight black of her hair was a streak of shocking, pure white.

CHAPTER TWO

For Auld Lang Syne

IT'S funny how a man's training will stick by him in moments of shock. Boden could have sworn he did a mental black-out, and yet afterward he could remember every detail of the scene: how the big, distinguished-looking man had turned, one hand lifted to his goatee, and how his eyes had narrowed.

He remembered too, how the girl's eyes had flickered in recognition. Pleasure, first—or was it?—and then confusion, and then nothing. Nothing at all. Within a split second, her eyes had shifted past him, her face a mask of polite indifference.

And yet he had to try. Without volition, he moved forward, spoke her name. "Adele—Adele Chandler!"

She glanced toward him, faintly surprised. "Pardon, you were speaking to me?"

"Good grief, Adele, you must remember—" He broke off as he saw it—the quick gesture of her hand. The old OSS high sign. *Play it dumb*, it said. *Don't let on you know me.*

Almost automatically, Boden went into his act. Lurching slightly, he passed a hand over his eyes and blinked rapidly. "Shorry, lady, no offensh. Thoughtcha

wash somebo'y I knew. . . You sure don't 'member me—ol' Al Kepler from 75th Street—403 Wes' 75th Street?"

The big, bear-like man stepped in and put a hand on Boden's shoulder. He was even bigger than Boden had expected, and not at all the silky, too-handsome type phony counts usually run to. Very vital, very vigorous, very male, he could even get away with his beautiful, mahogany-colored beard.

He said in a low, vibrant bass: "The ladee does not know you, *non*. Pairhaps the wine?"

"Wine, hell!" Boden retorted loudly. "I bin drinkin' boilermakers." He brightened. "Thash what I need now!"

The count smiled understandingly. "May I suggest, Monsieur, O'Leary's Bar and Grill? Directly across the street."

Throwing a big arm across Boden's shoulder, he escorted him to the door. The girl walked into the powder room, not looking back. . . .

He made an artistically staggering beeline for O'Leary's. It could be that he really needed one. Besides, Charlebois was probably watching him.

A smart cookie, that Charlebois. He might have fallen for Boden's drunk gag—and he might not. But that was not the point. The point was Adele. Rather, Claire Dorné. Mrs. Kingsley's friend, Claire Dorné—and the only woman Kim Boden had ever let get under his skin.

He downed his drink and lit a cigarette from the butt of the last one. That high-sign—that was the thing to concentrate on. Why didn't she want to know him? Because she was in with the count on whatever it was? Or could it be that she was working on the case herself, for the Feds or somebody?

Yes, that must be it. She was on a job, and she couldn't afford to let him queer the game. But just as soon as she could, she'd get in touch with him and give him the pitch. . . .

But since when did Federal agents get tangled up in engagements with the people they suspected? And why hadn't any of the gang heard she'd tied up with the FBI? Why, in fact, had nobody heard one word from her since the war was over?

Well, he'd soon know where she stood. He'd given her his real address with the

phony name. Case or no case, security or no security, if she were on the level, he would hear from her.

For the first time in years, he felt jumpy, impatient. He flipped a bill on the bar and headed outside. It was a warm misty night, with just a hint of breeze. A good night for walking home. Adele wouldn't be able to contact him for a couple of hours anyway.

His heels made soft scuffing sounds on the pavement. He pushed his hat back and looked up at the sky, luminous with the reflection of hundreds of multi-colored neons. . . . Adele—a strange girl. The Chief himself had told Boden her history. . . .

"The best woman agent I've ever known, bar none," he'd said. "She knows Europe like a Baedeker—five languages like a native."

"What is she?" Boden asked.

"American. By birth, that is." The Chief smiled faintly. "But by parentage she's French, by upbringing a half-dozen nationalities, and by marriage English." He frowned abruptly. "And by the Germans, a widow and a bereaved mother. . . . Well, that's how it goes, I guess. The Jerries messed up her life but good—but they sure gave us one hell of an agent!"

Boden found out just how much of one she was in Marseilles, where, as a black-eyed, laughing wench, Adele had had a way with German officers—and the secrets they possessed. In Heidelberg, she had been a sober towhead in flat heels and glasses. The laboratory there never did know how the Allies got hold of certain data.

After that, he had met her only in the shop-talk of his colleagues—strangely glowing talk that was already making her a legend among these men and women who took superhuman nerve and exploits for granted. And then, one spring, had come that assignment near Paris, and that last, unforgettable scene. . . .

They were waiting beside a wheat field for an Allied plane to land with supplies for the Underground; they had orders to bring it down and distribute the stuff. Or rather, he had orders to distribute it. Adele was going back on the plane for briefing on a new assignment. He had a feeling this was their last job together.

Maybe that's why, waiting in the soft, silent night, he had tried to kiss her.

She had pulled away gently. "No, Kim. This isn't the time for that."

He had not touched a woman in months and he got a little rough. "If you can kiss Germans you can spare me one," he said fiercely. She had struggled a while in silence and then she wrenched free.

"If you try that again, I'll kill you!" she said savagely.

He let her go and she walked over and stood on the edge of the field, her back to him. He stood looking at her, thinking of how her mouth had felt under his, and of what the Chief had told him, and then he went over to her.

"I'm sorry, Adele. It's your husband, isn't it?"

When she didn't answer, he took her shoulders and gently turned her around. Her eyes were brimming with unshed tears. She smiled shakily.

"I'm sorry, Kim. I don't know what's wrong with me. This damn tightrope's finally got me, I guess."

"Sure," he said, "sure. It gets us all once in a while. Come on back and have a cigarette."

They had smoked, then, shielding the glowing tips with their hands, and after a while Adele had told him about Roger, her husband.

"You remind me a little of him, Kim," she'd said. "Maybe that's why— You can do so much better, Kim. I—" she laughed unsteadily—"I'm really nothing but a hussy these days, Kim. Buying every enemy I can with Judas kisses."

Boden grinned wryly. "It's almost enough to make me sell out." He shrugged "Well, if you're ever in the market for a good patriotic American, let me know."

She leaned over suddenly and kissed him on the cheek. "Thanks, Kim. I'll let you know. . . ."

BODEN'S apartment was in a remodeled brownstone—or at least the landlord claimed it was remodeled. Boden had his doubts. As he keyed open the door and stepped into the dingy entrance hall, however, he saw that something new had been added.

Two somethings new, in fact. They

were not particularly decorative. One was a six-footer-plus with a punch-scarred face; the other a quick-moving little man with restless eyes. Hoods, obviously, and obviously waiting for him.

Restless Eyes moved to the stairs, blocking Boden's way, and Punch Scars took the door. They stood looking him over in silence. Finally the little man said: "Sure, this is the guy, Blitz."

Blitz grunted: "Don't look like much."

Restless Eyes shrugged. "The boss don't take no chances."

Boden was beginning to feel like a store-window dummy. "You gentlemen looking for me?" he asked pleasantly.

"You Al Keppler?"

"Maybe yes, maybe no. What's it to you?"

"Nuttin'. Nuttin' at all. Only we got a message Al Keppler oughta know. Lay off the doll, see?"

"*Mais si je ne veux pas?*"

"Huh?"

Boden laughed. "Tell the count he doesn't have a worry in the world. I have no intention of seeing his girl. Especially if it means getting worked over by a couple of his—er—friends."

Restless Eyes thought that over a minute. Blitz grunted: "Aw, let's blow, Trig. The guy's yella clean through."

The other looked at Boden suspiciously, then shrugged. "Not yella, Blitz, just smart." He swaggered out.

Boden waited until they had gone, then rubbed his knuckles. One more minute and those knuckles would have gone into action. And he didn't particularly want to go calling on a lady with his face all marked up.

Up in the apartment, he thought a minute; then called Mike Flannery. He didn't get an answer and left a message at the switchboard for Mike to call back. He put down the receiver, and picked it up again.

The Chief sounded as if he were in the next room instead of California. "Who? Boden? Kim, you old son!"

"Hi, Chief, how are you?"

"Vegatating, Kim—and loving it. When are you going to smarten up and come out here?"

"The day I get sick of New York sunshine, pal. Say, Chief, I ran into Adele

Chandler the other day, and got the old lay-off sign. I didn't speak to her, naturally, and I wondered if you'd know if she's on a job for the F.B.I."

"Yes, I'd know all right," the Chief said. "Haven't heard a thing, though. Hmmm. That's a funny one, isn't it?"

"Well, I could have been wrong," Boden said. "She was a long way off, and that signal's a pretty ordinary gesture." His voice did not betray him.

He chewed the rag with his ex-boss until the time limit was up, then put down the receiver.

Well, that did it. Hoods plus no case equalled funny business. Adele was the last one in the world he would have expected to sell out, but life was funny that way. That nice, clean-cut kid from Utah hadn't seemed like a German spy, either. He sighed, thinking of the time a demolition job had gone wrong and he'd been ready to take that little white pill when Adele had come through with a spitting tommy gun.

He shrugged and lit a cigarette. *Okay, Boden, he told himself. Go ahead and give her one more chance for Auld Lang Syne. But it won't do any good. . . .*

He jumped like a stuck pig when the phone shrilled. It was Mike—Mike Flannery, the detective-story writer with the soul of his most do-or-die hero. A funny, wizened-up little guy, Mike, who would toss his typewriter out of the window any day for a crack at a real case. He tried to be casual when he spoke:

"Got a job for me, Kim?"

"Just some pure research at the moment," Boden told him and waited for the groans to subside. He outlined the case briefly and set the old guy to digging up all he could find on Major Bluffington and George Whitney.

He stood looking at the phone for a long time after he put it down, and then he gave up. A half hour later, he let himself into an apartment marked *Claire Dorné*. He slipped his set of keys in his pocket and looked around.

The apartment was a lot like Adele, he thought—a trifle exotic with its dark green modern furniture but plenty nice.

Boden went over the place, lavishly decorated with smiling photographs of the very dashing Count de Charlebois—

and found nothing except a few personal letters postmarked Chicago. He pulled out a pack of cigarettes and settled down to wait again.

The clock was chiming three when the taxi drove up. Boden slipped noiselessly into the kitchen closet and prepared to wait out the fond good-nights amid the pots and pans.

A half hour later, he bitterly regretted his role of eavesdropper. Not that he could hear much—just a few whispers and the creak of sofa springs. But what he couldn't see or hear his imagination supplied vividly. He gritted his teeth. Hearing the girl's husky, increasingly feeble protests about the lateness of the hour didn't help much either. . . .

The luminous minute hand on his watch had made a full circuit before the count finally left. Mopping the sweat from his face, Boden stepped out and watched the girl lock the door and lean back against it a minute. The private hell he'd just been through seemed like nothing to what he felt then, when he saw her expression. She really had it bad.

He thrust his hands in his pockets to keep them from slapping the star-dust out of her eyes and sauntered over to her.

"Hello, Adele."

Her eyes went wide with shock. "Kim! What are you doing here?"

"Waiting to talk to you. I seemed to embarrass you in public so I thought I'd—That's all right; I didn't enjoy it much either."

Her voice was cold with anger. "You were watching the whole time, I suppose?"

"No, just listening. What's the matter? It's no secret you kiss your fiancé good night, is it?"

"No-no, of course not." She struggled with herself a minute, then turned on her radiant smile. "But Kim—it's so good to see you! Here, let me have a look."

She took his hands in hers and led him to the divan, her lovely dark eyes recording his every feature as though the sight of him were balm to her soul. "There," she said. "Make yourself at home while I rustle up a drink."

"No, thanks, Adele," Boden said. "I came to see you, not a scotch and soda." He took her left hand in his and blinked

at the glittering, blue-white diamond there. "Congratulations, Adele. He seems like quite a guy."

She did not pull her hand away. "He is, Kim—quite a guy. But you didn't come up here at this hour to tell me that."

"No," Boden said. "I was just afraid I'd lose track of you again if I waited. You're on a job now, are you?"

"Yes. F.B.I. I shouldn't be telling you this, should I, Kim?"

"No, Adele. Especially since it's not true."

"Not true?" She leaned back and laughed, a soft, musical laugh that explained where the sun had been the last few weeks. "Touché, Kim," she said. "No, I'm not on a case. I just didn't want to come right out and admit it was a brush-off."

"No? Then what would you call it?"

"Let's just say I couldn't have you hanging around, Kim—at least till we'd straightened things out. You see, Jacques is a Frenchman, and Frenchmen are notoriously jealous. . . ."

Boden grinned. "You flatter me, Adele. I'm not much of a threat."

Her voice was very soft. "And maybe you underrate yourself, Kim. I—" She broke off and pulled her hand away. She stood up, smiling brightly. "But that was a long time ago, wasn't it, Kim?"

"Yeah," Boden said slowly. "A long time ago." He rose. "It's almost four, Adele. I won't keep you up any longer. But sometime you must let me take you and Jacques to dinner and we'll rehash old times."

"Of course, Kim. Soon."

He looked at her a moment. "Love agrees with you Adele," he said softly. "And also your hair."

She laughed and touched the white streak. "This? Hardly a new acquisition, Kim. I was born that way. Although, of course, I took great pains to keep it hidden from even the Chief during the war."

"Yeah," Boden said. "Of course." He walked to the door, then turned suddenly and kissed her hard on the mouth.

"Just in case I'm not around to kiss the bride," he said.

He thought she was shaken; whether by the brief embrace or the veiled threat, he could not tell—and no longer cared.

CHAPTER THREE

Death Moves In

MIKE FLANNERY was waiting in his room. The little man's plain, Irish face was alight with triumph. "Got the dope for you, Kim," he said. "How's that for a broken-down hack writer?"

"Pretty damn fast," Kim said. "What gives?"

"Aw, it was right up my alley. That Whitney is a publisher—puts out pocket-sized reprints of mystery and adventure books for foreign markets. His firm is pretty new, I understand, but it must be doing okay. I hear he's bought out the big Atlas printing plant up in the Poconos. How do you figure he ties in with the smuggling angle?"

"Distribution, I suppose. He must have a lot of foreign contacts. What about the major?"

"Not much. His steamship line is old—been in the family for years. Seems to be on the up-and-up. Want me to hang around down at the pier and see if anything queer is going on?"

"That can wait. Right now I want you to tail my friend Claire Dorné. I have a feeling she's going to try to skip. You're not too tired?"

"Hell, no!" Mike looked offended. "What's the dame's address?"

Boden gave it to him. "Watch her, Mike," he warned. "The gal's been around; she knows all the tricks."

Mike looked twice as offended. "Cripes, Kim, you'd think I never shadowed a squab before!" He was still muttering when he went out.

He woke Boden at seven the next morning to report.

"She flew, all right, Kim. Boy, what a tomato! She's at the Parker Hotel on Broadway now—Room 716. What's next?"

"Sleep, Mike. Ever heard of it? Some people do it every night for eight blissful hours."

"Hell, I can't stand that much, Kim! What'll I do when I wake up?"

Boden sighed. "Hit the major's pier, then, Fathead. Meanwhile, let me go back to bed even if you won't, will you?"

Mike called him some fond, unprint-

able names and hung up the receiver.

Approximately three hours later, Boden rose, showered and consumed a quick breakfast of scrambled eggs and coffee. On his way out, he pocketed a copy of Mike's latest book, *The Clue of the Crimson Quill*. With it, Boden hoped to write his own ticket with a certain Mr. George Whitney.

The Whitney Publishing Company was a moderately impressive-looking outfit with a very impressive-looking receptionist. She preened and expanded under five minutes of the best Boden line before she admitted that the president was in. The rest was easy. Mr. Whitney did know Mike Flannery's work, and yes, he could see Mike Flannery's agent.

When the publisher rose at his entrance, Boden got a shock. George Whitney was one of the tiniest men he had ever seen. He stood just under five feet in his elevator shoes, and his hand was like a child's in the detective's big one. There was nothing childish about his narrow, clean-shaven face, however, or about his bright, zircon-chip eyes.

Boden fed him the best line he could dream up without getting Mike hopelessly entangled in a reprint deal, and, as far as he could tell, got away with it. Even the icy blue eyes had thawed perceptibly by the time the interview came to an end. But that was small consolation for the fact that none of Boden's tactful questions about foreign markets elicited any response at all.

"Well, I'll have to talk it over with Mike's publisher, of course," Kim said, rising. "But I think we can work something out. . . . By the way, I hear you've bought out the Atlas plant."

The tiny publisher pressed the tips of his fingers together. "Yes—yes. Planning to open up a bit. When paper's easier to get, of course."

"Well, you've got the set-up, all right." He hesitated. "You know, Mr. Whitney, printing's kind of a hobby of mine. I wonder of sometime I couldn't go through the plant—see the operations at first hand."

It was a chance thrust—and it hit a sore spot. The pale, zircon-chip eyes narrowed to glittering pinpoints, and the pinched features froze. Boden didn't even

listen to the expected excuses. He was too busy trying to fit a printing plant into a game of international smuggling.

He was still puzzling over it when he entered the uptown subway. The platform was crowded for an off hour—evidently a train had been held up. Boden stood on the edge of the platform, staring down at the steel tracks, and wracked his brains for ideas.

Smuggling . . . *Lifeline* kits. Hell, what would anybody want to get into Europe that could fit in those? Was Whitney shipping his books in them? But that was silly; no money in that. And dope and jewels and cigarettes and everything else he could think of had no tie-in with publishing.

One thing sure, it had to be small to fit into an eleven-pound package. And, he thought suddenly, pretty damn *big in cash per cubic inch* to be worth the trouble!

Absently, he heard the train coming in, felt the crowd jostle into position. He looked up and moved a little closer to the metal railing.

That move saved his life.

Just as the roar of the approaching train became deafening, he was shoved sharply from behind. He stumbled forward, fighting for balance, clutching desperately at the rail. He missed—but his fingers grasped the metal chain dangling from it and clung. For one long, suspended moment, he hung out over the track at a forty-five degree angle. He saw the blinding lights of the train bearing down on him; heard it thunder and a sudden terrified scream.

Then an arm reached out and hauled him back. The train ground to a screeching, sickening stop ten feet beyond him.

"Jiminy, d'ya see that!" somebody yelled. "Some joker almost knocked this guy in fronta da train!"

Shaking like an old man, Boden turned. A brawny, unshaven man was gaping at him.

"Lucky t'ing fer you I got long arms," he cracked. "Berrudder, that was close!"

"Yeah," Boden said. "Mister, I-I guess I owe you a drink."

"Fergat it!" The man shrugged. "I'm on da wagon anyhow. Hey, da door's closin'!" He pushed hurriedly into the car.

BODEN let the door close with him on the outside. Still shaking, he scanned the platform. No go. His would-be murderer was probably inside the train with the other feverish, hurry-mad strap-hangers—and Lord only knew which one he was.

Right now Boden didn't care. All he wanted at the moment was a nice tall drink—and a chance to figure out what he knew that had almost bought him a one-way trip to the never-never land.

He had his scotch in a quiet, side-street bar. And then, as he stared at his reflection in the dingy back-bar mirror, he suddenly had it. The gimmick. And it scared him so he damn near choked on his drink.

It was big, all right. So big it could wreak mayhem to the delicate balance of international relations—maybe even start the war drums. But profitable for the inside boys—Lord, how profitable! So much so that the murder of a few guys who even came within a mile of queering the deal could be chalked up to overhead and not even be noticed.

He thought of Mike, then, and he got the shakes. That thunderhead was wandering around the major's pier, in the center of the whole mess! Boden made tracks for the phone.

Mike wasn't in his room, of course. Nor at Boden's office. There was a chance he was hanging around Boden's apartment and couldn't get in to answer the phone. Boden headed out of the phone booth fast, mopping his face. He'd never forgive himself if anything happened to Mike.

He kept a sharp lookout for a tail all the way home and felt reasonably sure he was clean. This was no time for chances, though. He dug out his revolver and kept well against the wall as he unlocked his door and shoved it open.

Nothing happened. He moved cautiously inside—and almost shot before he recognized Detective - Lieutenant Vic McClure.

The Homicide man came out of the bedroom, gun in hand. He shoved it into the clip, frowning. "Oh, it's you, Boden. Kind of jumpy, aren't you?"

Boden let his breath out and put away his revolver. "Yeah—a little," he admitted. "What is this—have I murdered

somebody again in my absent-minded way?"

McClure wasn't in the mood for jokes. He glanced at a second man who had stepped out of the kitchen, frowned again and wet his lips. He said: "You know Mike Flannery?"

Here it comes, Boden thought. He said: "Yeah, sure."

"He work for you?"

"Sometimes. Why? Say, Vic, what is this?"

McClure sighed. "This is going to hurt, Kim. Mike was just pulled out of an alley. Dead. Somebody bent a pipe over his head."

Boden sat down slowly. "You—sure?"

McClure nodded. "Hell, I oughta know," he said heavily. "The little guy was always hanging around Headquarters, looking for a story. We figured you could tell us why he got it, Kim."

This was when it got tough to play a part; when your own blind stupidity had put the finger on a friend. Boden shook his head. "No, Vic," he said. "I can't tell you. Mike hasn't done any work for me for weeks. Where did it happen?"

"Over on the West Side—near the riverfront." The lieutenant looked at Boden a minute, eyes hard and probing.

"We figured you'd want to help us get Mike's killer," he said softly. "We figured you'd tell us anything you knew that might be a lead."

"I tell you, I don't know a damn thing!"

"Sure, Kim, sure." He sat looking at him. "I can promise you to keep it confidential—for a while at least."

"I'm sorry, Vic, sorry as hell. I just don't know anything. Vic, can I see him?"

The officer shook his head. "When you come clean, Kim." He rose. "We'll get the guy eventually, of course. But we'd like to make it now. . . . I'll be around, Kim, if you decide to play ball."

Boden listened to the door close, and reached for a cigarette. His hand was shaking. He had thought a lot of Mike.

For a minute, he almost called McClure back. No, damn it, he couldn't mess up the whole thing now. Mike had a right to have his death count for something, and if that right was going to be respected, Boden had to work alone.

McClure would have the exits covered in a matter of seconds; Boden didn't delude himself that his friendship for the man would spare him that. Swiftly, he strode down the hall and ran down the staircase to the basement. This trick had worked in Europe; it probably would work now.

The janitor's spare overalls and cap were hanging on a peg in his empty office. Boden put them on and, grabbing up an armful of dirty laundry, let himself out into the back courtyard. There was a service entrance to the street a couple of apartments down; he scaled a few fences and headed toward it.

As he emerged onto the street, a skinny man in brown glanced at him, then looked away without interest. Boden shucked the soiled sheets and stuff at a nearby laundry; then went to a U-Drive-It place and hired a car. Ten minutes later he was leaning on the bell of Room 716 of the Parker Hotel.

Adele was wearing red today, a deep, smoky shade that didn't hurt her a bit. She was resigned rather than surprised. She looked at him and laughed her wonderful warm laugh again. "Young man," she said, "are you following me?"

Boden stepped inside and shut the door. "Grab your hat, Adele. We're going for a ride."

"A ride, Kim? Why?"

"Because I tell you to and—" he patted his pocket— "I mean it. Get your coat."

She smiled at him puzzledly. "What is this, Kim—a gag? Because I don't get the point—"

He reached out and slapped her smartly in the face. "Maybe that'll convince you I'm not kidding. Are you coming, or do I have to get really rough?"

She stared at him, biting her lips, her face drained of color. Without a word, she reached for her coat.

He could feel her eyes on him all the way up the West Side Highway, but he didn't speak until they were on the George Washington Bridge.

"How long a drive is it to the plant?"

She looked genuinely bewildered. "What plant, Kim?"

"Whitney's. What the hell plant do you think I meant?"

"I don't know. What's this all about,

anyway? Why are we going to Whitney's plant? And why all the rough stuff—what do you *want?*”

KIM BODEN took his eye off the rear-view mirror and relaxed. “You know, Adele,” he said, “you’re really pretty damn good. I could almost believe you don’t know the score—except you were never stupid.”

“Well, I am now. What have I done, Kim? Walked off with the atom bomb?”

Boden jerked his head impatiently. “Cut it out, Adele. Your shenanigans cost a friend of mine his life—and I don’t happen to think that’s funny.”

“A friend of yours his life? Kim, tell me what this is all about!”

He said: “Gladly—if it will convince you I’m on to you and your pretty boyfriend. Yeah, I know the whole thing—how you got tired of playing for peanuts in Chicago, and how you came east for the big pitch. It was nice while it lasted, too, wasn’t it? With Whitney and his printing plant and his foreign contacts, and the major’s steamship line for transport, the whole deal was a cinch.

“And the best part was *Lifeline*, wasn’t it? Poor little Mrs. Kingsley—how could she guess the oh-so-likeable French count could sink low enough to sell his own countrymen short? How could she guess the beautiful, charming Miss Claire Dorné was devoting herself to the cause so unstintingly for only one reason—to line her own pockets?”

“Oh, it was a clever little game, all right—and just about the dirtiest I’ve ever run across!”

The girl had gone very pale. “What—little—game, Kim?”

He laughed shortly, a hard laugh that had nothing to do with mirth. “What gets me is that I was so slow tumbling. I guess I just couldn’t believe that you—

“It was all so beautifully simple, too. All right there in that one little phrase—*cash per cubic inch*. And I knocked my brains out trying to figure out what it could be! What in hell does Europe need above everything else, even food and clothing? What in hell does it have to have if whole nations are to keep from going under? Why, dollars, of course—*American* dollars! Good, old-fashioned

hard-to-get American green stuff.”

The girl’s laugh was shocked, incredulous. “Kim, you can’t mean—That’s ridiculous! Why would Jacques be using *Lifeline* to send over American money?”

“Precisely what stopped me, my friend. No profit. No, Adele, your Jacques isn’t sending over real dollars. He’s rolling his own currency—in a conveniently isolated printing plant—and shooting it over to selected contacts who know just how to get the most for it at the black market rate. That way, he can set himself up in a nice little wine-importing business—and to hell with the damn fool Europeans who don’t even know a counterfeit when they see one!”

The girl stared at him, shaking her head, licking her lips. “Kim—Kim, you’re so wrong,” she murmured. “You don’t know Jacques or you couldn’t even think such a thing!”

Boden grinned at her. “Your act is touching, my sweet—a credit to your training.”

She didn’t seem to hear him “I-I know Jacques isn’t perfect, Kim. It’s true he wasn’t quite—well, honest out in Chicago. I’ll admit he fleeced a few overfed millionaires, yes—but foisting worthless money off on starving people! Kim, I will not believe it!”

Boden reached into his pocket and pulled out the photostat of the Belgian man’s letter. “Maybe this will prove it to you,” he said. “It’s all right—it’s not going to do you any good. This whole thing is going to be tied in a neat little package before you get a chance to use it.”

Her hands shook as she read it; and then suddenly they dropped limply to her lap. She just sat there with the letter in her lap, leaning her head against the cushion, eyes closed.

Mile after mile flashed by, villages and farms and gas stations and woods. The car hummed smoothly, eating up the road. They were riding among thickly wooded hills now; the Poconos could not be far. And still she had not moved, had not spoken.

Boden nudged her when they came to the narrow gorge of the Delaware Water Gap. “Which way out of Stroudsburg?”

She stirred, frowned at him unseeingly.

"I said, which way out of Stroudsburg, Adele. I've got to know."

Her lips moved slightly. "I'll tell you when we get there."

Suddenly she sat up straight and fixed her eyes on his face. "Kim," she said, "you're a good agent. You don't go off the deep end. No, let me talk. You don't have to listen, but let me talk."

"Kim—that night near Paris. I wasn't just stringing you along when I told you how much my husband meant to me, how hard it was to forget him. That's why I stayed away from you, after it was over. I knew you'd say you could love enough for two, but I didn't want that, Kim. A half-dead woman like me—that was nothing to offer a man. Nothing to offer you, Kim."

"And then, I went to Chicago and—I met Jacques."

"Jacques was no good—I knew it. But he was life and hope, and I had been without either for so long. And for all his faults, Jacques had something—something fine and real. He was a great, overgrown baby, with too much charm, too much brain-power, too much everything to ever believe he had to work for a living like everybody else. And yet—oh the conceit of a woman in love! I actually thought he'd be okay if only someone took him in hand, cared enough about him. And when he followed me to New York, I thought I'd won. Funny, how stupid a smart woman can be."

She laid her hand on his arm. "Kim, I know there's no reason why you should believe me. But I swear I knew nothing—nothing at all about this thing. I—Kim, you know how much Roger and my little boy meant to me. Could you believe me if I swore it on their memory?"

Boden did not answer for a long time. At last he said slowly: "It doesn't make much difference whether I do or not, Adele. I've got to play my cards the same either way. I've got to clean this thing up—now, right away—and you've got to help me. Of your own free will—or because you know I wouldn't hesitate to shoot you down in cold blood if you try any tricks."

She said, "I understand, Kim."

"Good. Then here's what you must do, Adele. . . ."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Lady Fights Back

THE Whitney Printing Company was a large, sprawling brick building set halfway up the side of a hill. Dense shrubbery shrouded it, concealing all but a corner of it from the highway. To the casual passerby, it was merely the walled estate of some privacy-loving millionaire.

The guard in the gatehouse stopped the car, but let them on through when Adele, at Boden's coaching but with a flirtatious touch of her own, convinced him that the detective was a production trouble-shooter. It was evident that the man was an old conquest of hers.

He had collected his wits sufficiently to phone ahead, however, because a tall, heavily built man in a startling green suit met them at the door of the massive building. Adele introduced him as Marlin, the head engineer. His greeting was cordial enough, but Boden noticed that his eyes were narrow and speculating. He also noticed that several men were watching them from the windows with ominous interest.

Marlin seemed anxious to get them inside. Boden risked a glance over one shoulder and saw a moving van pull up by the gatehouse. A man inside yelled excitedly. "Stop that damn truck—call the gatehouse. We've got callers."

Boden made a hurried comment to cover it up, but he guessed that Marlin knew he had not missed it.

The big engineer took them to his office and offered them chairs and cigarettes. He himself sat on the edge of his desk, moodily puffing a cigar. He turned to Adele with a yellow-toothed smile. "Now, Miss Dorné, what brings you away out here in this godforsaken wilderness?"

Adele hadn't missed anything, either.

With an almost imperceptible sign to Boden, she switched her story.

"I told Pop Mr. Kimball was a production trouble-shooter—but the trouble he handles isn't printing. He's to go along with the men in the van in case anything goes wrong. The minute Jacques heard the heat was on, he told me to get him out here—fast."

"I see." Marlin flicked an ash on the floor and thoughtfully rubbed it into the rug. "I didn't realize the count confided in you so much."

Adele smiled at him with half-veiled eyes. "Jacques tells me everything, Mr. Marlin. You know how it is. . . ."

Marlin coughed. "Nevertheless, I think I'd like to see Mr. Kimball's credentials."

"Of course," Boden said. His hand moved toward his inside pocket, toward his shoulder clip. The time had come for action.

But Marlin was too quick for him. With a bull-like roar, he started moving before Boden's reply was out. He was on him in a flash, smashing him back across the room with his two hundred odd pounds. Boden got his gun out and snapped off one wasted shot—and then the place was swarming with men. Something crashed down on his skull and his face smacked the floor. . . .

Consciousness returned but sight didn't. He was in a small, cramped place and it was pitch black. He groped with his hands and discovered he was in a closet—with discarded metal type plates for company.

They had not tied him up. Hearing voices just outside, he realized why. He was as secure in here as a payroll in a safe. If he should manage to batter down the locked door, he'd only step out into a faceful of lead. He eased his cramped muscles and decided to listen.

He heard Adele's voice first. "Of course he went for his gun, Marlin—that's a torpedo's credentials. I don't see why you had to cool him off."

"I'm taking no chances," Marlin growled. "With him—or with you."

Adele seemed to be having trouble keeping her temper. "It's a good thing I've always liked you, Marlin—I could make it hot for you with Jacques. But I'm willing to forget it if you'll let me call him."

"Mr. Whitney and the major are already on their way. They can handle it."

"But Jacques may not have had a chance to tell Whitney about Kimball. Jacques' in this too; he has a right to be here." Her voice dropped, took on a soft, coaxing tone. "Please—let me call him."

It was evident that Marlin had never come up against anything like this girl. He was only human. He said finally:

"Well . . . okay. Use this phone here—and don't get cute."

Boden heard her ask for long distance, then give a New York number.

"Hello, Jacques? Listen, darling, there's been trouble. Marlin won't believe that Chicago gunman's on the level. . . . Yes, at Whitney's printing plant. You'd better get here fast. . . . That's right, Route 6 and take the short-cut at Caters-town. Ask anybody for the old Atlas plant—they'll tell you. . . . Yes, the whole gang is on the way. The men are moving the plates and the lettuce out now. . . . Yes, Jacques, I'll be careful. And hurry, will you, dear?"

"Let me talk to him," Marlin said.

"Just a minute, darling, here's Marlin—Oh, I'm sorry, he hung up." She laughed. "Poor Jacques, he get's so upset."

There was a short silence while Marlin made up his mind. Appealing dark eyes won. "Okay," he grunted. "But I'm keeping your strong-arm pal on ice till the count gets here, see?"

Boden could almost hear her shrug. "All right. I'm certainly not going to cry about it."

No, Boden thought, she wasn't. She could put on a sob act, all right, and turn on the tears most effectively. But as for crying over anybody—you might as well expect the Sphinx to burst into tears. He wondered grimly just how she was going to explain him to Jacques, but it was only idle curiosity. She would do it somehow, never fear.

HE BEGAN to think about means of escape. Not that he'd have the life expectancy of a bug in a can of DDT if he did get out, but he couldn't see roosting here in his chicken coop until the count and his friend came along and polished him off.

He got up and ran his hand over the hinges. They were the kind used on shutters instead of the usual door hinges with a pin. That was a break. If he could just get the screws out. . . .

He set to work with his nailfile, patiently, doggedly. It was slow going but he

didn't have anything better to do with his time. And maybe, when the show-down came, he could offer a few surprises before they got him.

He had a sudden thought and he reached down and felt his calf for his reserve artillery. Gone, of course. Adele would know he carried a tiny, small-calibre automatic there. She hadn't missed a bet, that girl.

The minutes inched along, like snails going nowhere and taking their time about it. Boden worked away in silence, sweating a little. Outside, there was a murmur of voices. Boden guessed the room was the inner sanctum of sanctums—where the money was engraved. Marlin, completely won over by now, was showing it to the girl. He was the counterfeit expert himself, and he glowed audibly under her compliments.

"A pretty damn good job, if I do say so," he admitted. "A helluva shame it's wasted on those dumb foreigners. They don't know a watermark from a—Hold it, there's the signal! Whitney must be coming in. Sam, get over by that closet door. Fritz, you open up. All set, now—this may be a trick."

There was a scuffle of feet in the corridor, then a complicated pattern of knocks. "That's it," Marlin whispered. "Okay, Fritz."

Boden heard the creak of a heavy door being opened and Whitney's sharp, cold voice. He loosened the last screw frantically and tensed himself to spring. Putting the driving power of his whole weight behind his shoulder, he smashed against the door.

The door gave with an ear-splitting crash—and Boden sprawled forward on his hands and knees on it and the flattened, swearing guard. Boden smacked the guard's face into the floor with the palm of his hand and Sam stopped cursing. Then, scrambling hurriedly over the splintered debris, Boden pawed for Sam's gun.

Meanwhile, things had been happening across the room. Whitney and a bluff, monocled man had just stepped through the door, closely followed by the count. Their mouths dropped open ludicrously at Boden's dramatic entrance—and their confusion sent Adele into action.

Whipping out Boden's automatic, she leveled it at the men in the door. Her voice was sharp, crisp, deadly: "Easy, boys!"

Marlin, at the far side of the room, swung his gun toward the girl. Boden got Sam's gun free and snapped off two fast shots. Marlin's bullet smacked into the thick wall over Adele's head and ricocheted with a sickening twang. Marlin himself jerked like a roped steer and crashed to the floor.

The girl had not blinked or shifted her gun a fraction of an inch. "All right," she told her prisoners, "come in and shut the door. And don't make the mistake of thinking I won't shoot."

The sheer suddenness of everything had shocked the men into stupefied obedience. They moved woodenly inside, their hands carefully raised. All except Jacques. The big Frenchman stood stock still, his eyes wide with disbelief. Then suddenly he threw back his head and let out a thunderous peal of laughter.

"Oh, Claire, chérie—this is priceless," he roared. His rich, masculine laughter filled the room, echoed rollickingly from the walls. "You, chérie—with that little popgun!" He shoved forward, almost doubled up with merriment. "Here, give it to me."

The girl was trembling like a leaf in a storm but her hand was steady on the little gun. "Stop, Jacques—this is no joke. I'll have to shoot!"

He could not believe her. He kept on coming, hands outstretched, still laughing. "Claire—darling!"

"Please, Jacques—*please!*"

His face changed abruptly but he did not stop coming. "Why, you she-devil, you, I'll—"

A sharp staccato cough cut him off. The tiny report of the deadly midget in the girl's shaking hand. "Claire!" he gasped.

He took a long time going down. He fell back slowly, step by step, keeping his big body erect by sheer will power. He hit the wall and wavered, then slid down it slowly, staring dumbly at the girl. "Claire!" he breathed again. And then his eyes glazed and his massive head fell forward.

Silence. Complete, tomblike silence. The girl looked at the motionless giant, then at the tiny gun in her hand. She let out her breath with a shuddering sigh and closed her eyes.

Boden moved swiftly to her side, his revolver steady on the stupefied men by the door. "You!" he snapped. "Spread out against the wall. Watch your hands. . . . Adele—" he choked—"just one more thing. Frisk 'em, will you? And get that door bolted."

She obeyed silently, woodenly, with heart-breaking slowness. She slid the bolt on the door and moved stiffly toward him, dropped the guns at his feet. She stood, swaying slightly. Her voice was dead, flat. "What—next—Kim?"

Boden swallowed hard. "I-I think I can handle it, kid. You go sit down."

Wordlessly, she moved out of his line of vision.

GEORGE WHITNEY had regained his poise. His zircon-chip eyes flashed contempt. "Handle it, sir?" he sneered. "The plant is swarming with men. They'll be on you like a pack of wolves!"

Boden grinned tightly. "Let 'em come. That door could hold off any army. Meanwhile, your men may be a little occupied with their own troubles. New York Homicide boys, to be exact. A little out of their territory, perhaps—but I don't think that'll stop 'em from investigating the shots."

The monocled man turned beet red. "The devil!" he exploded. "By jove, Whitney, this is a rum deal!"

"Shut up!" Whitney snarled. "They'll never—" He broke off as muffled shots sounded outside. More gunfire followed, and then there was a shrill scream and a string of oaths. Feet pounded down the corridor, and the massive door rocked under a barrage of fists.

"Open up!" a voice bellowed. "Damn it, Boden, it's the law!"

* * *

Detective-Lieutenant Vic McClure sat in Marlin's chair in Marlin's office and smoked one of Marlin's cigars. He glared at Boden through the smoke. "All right,

I know you're tired," he said. "But just one more question. What in hell would you have done if I hadn't stuck my damn-fool neck out and tailed you over two state lines?"

A quiet-looking man in a pin-stripe suit cut in before Boden could answer.

"Considering the fact that the girl's call was bringing the Federals on the run," said John Caffrey of the FBI, "I think your friend would have been quite all right. Although of course he didn't know that."

Boden smiled tiredly. "No, I didn't know. I was banking everything on Vic's bloodhound nose."

McClure snorted. "You're a lucky fool, Kim. Through sheer dumb luck you've managed to blow the counterfeit-smuggling ring higher'n a kite. And the monocled major will wish he'd never left Merry Old England when he fries for the murder of little Mike Flannery. Not bad for a lone private eye, I must admit. In fact, I'd say it called for a celebration."

Sure, Boden thought, a celebration. Another job done, another victory won. But would the girl who'd killed the man she loved feel much like celebrating?

He looked down and saw his automatic lying on the desk, and he sent it flying with a savage swipe of his hand. "Damn it, Vic," he said, "where is she? Where's she been all these hours?"

McClure's grin faded. He cleared his throat noisily. "One of the boys saw her outside, Kim, under that big elm tree. I gave 'em strict orders to leave her alone."

Boden rose, touched his shoulder. "Thanks, Vic. I-I'll see you later. . . ."

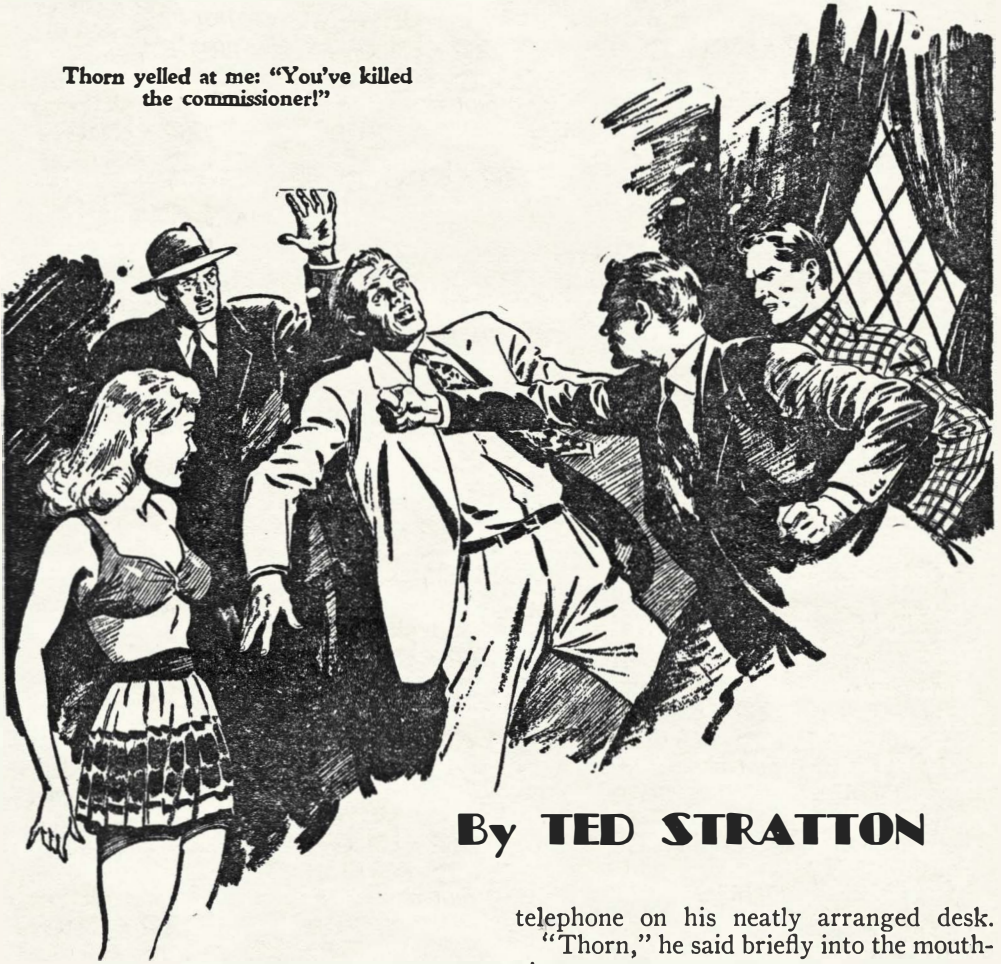
It was very quiet outside, very quiet. Almost as if the nightmare of death and belching guns had never happened. The sun was sinking silently, just as it always did, and the eastern sky was red with afterglow. The only thing out of tune was the girl sitting alone under the tree, staring fixedly into the purpling twilight.

It was as Boden had feared; she had not been able to break down and cry it out. She sat there alone, fighting a woman's heartbreak with a man's stoic calm. He wished with all his soul that Mrs. Kingsley had not come knocking at his door. A husband, a son, a fiancé—that

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BUTTERFLY'S BIER

Thorn yelled at me: "You've killed
the commissioner!"



By **TED STRATTON**

THE phone rang once inside the hot office. I paused long enough to shift a stunted cigarette into one corner of my mouth before asking: "Want me to take it, chief?"

I turned around then. Detective Lieutenant Thorn, my boss, had left the water cooler and was crossing to the ringing

telephone on his neatly arranged desk.

"Thorn," he said briefly into the mouth-piece.

He was a little gray man in a gray suit and black shoes. He had gray hair and steel-gray eyes that could cut like the wind off ice. Middle age had deposited a layer of fat under his belt, but that didn't fool anybody. When Thorn got on a case without interference, he was hard as an octogenarian's arteries.

Like Old Man Vengeance himself, I went after the blonde butterfly's killer—but the chief seemed to think I'd tapped the wrong guy.

"Okay, Abe," he said softly into the mouthpiece. He cradled the phone and whirled toward the door in one brisk, gray movement. "We roll," he warned me over one shoulder.

I turned to the desk, snubbed out the cigarette, and informed the paper I'd been studying: "I'll pick Sunflower to win the Sixth."

I caught up with Thorn in the phone room. He was asking: "Who's nearest, Abe?"

"Car Three on Shore Road," the desk lieutenant grunted.

"They there yet?"

"Must be. I can't raise 'em."

"That's fast and a break, Abe."

The desk lieutenant started to dial on the desk phone. Thorn shoved his chin forward. It would have taken a couple of Ben Thorns to make half of Abe, but that was a physical comparison.

"You calling Hartung now?" Thorn asked.

"I gotta notify him now."

"I want fifteen minutes—without him."

"I like working here," Abe countered.

"You like working here," Thorn repeated. "How long would you last if Hartung knew you rolled the cubes at Tony's?"

"You wouldn't—" Abe put on the brakes. Thorn's chin was set like week-old concrete. "Okay, fifteen minutes," Abe finished bitterly.

Thorn whirled and headed for the door.

Henry Hartung happened to be the new police commissioner in Hemphill City. Twice he'd butted into Thorn's jurisdiction. Twice he'd fouled up what had started like routine cases and should have had speedy solutions. Thorn had been chewing nails ever since. Now he had forced Abe to hold off Hartung a while. "Give me the first fifteen minutes on a case," Thorn had told me often, "and anybody else can have the next twenty-four hours."

"Where's the fire?" I asked Abe.

"Out at Max Cordwall's."

"What's burning?"

"A corpse."

"Thanks, sweetheart."

Abe snarled a couple of words at my back that you don't hear in Sunday School. I piled in alongside Thorn on the front seat of the black sedan assigned to Homi-

cide. I settled back behind the wheel.

"Fast, Mike," Thorn snapped, and settled his chin on his gray necktie

We rolled west along Main Street, and I worked the siren to crowd through two red lights. We swung into Sycamore Avenue on shrieking tires.

"Not that fast," Thorn warned.

"Bad?"

"No tea party."

When the sedan swung off Sycamore and onto the Shore Road, I said: "Secret?"

"You'll find out."

"Okay to push it now?"

"Push it."

The needle on the speedometer arced steadily past the series of red figures on the dial and firmed at seventy. Off to the left, I glimpsed the blue waters of the Long Island Sound sparkling under the hot sun. A couple of star-class boats loafed up-wind. It was all very quiet and pretty, like a color shot in a magazine, but Thorn didn't notice.

A mile further out, I braked the car and shot between twin stone pillars. The sedan whirled along a bluestone driveway lined with tall, symmetrical oaks worth a grand apiece.

Thorn checked his wrist watch. "Four minutes gone," he grumbled. "If Abe holds off Hartung—" He let the thought drift.

The mansion of fieldstone sat in a thick girdle of dwarf yews and cone-shaped arbor vitae. We piled out. Parked near the entrance was a white patrol car with the motor idling and with *Hemphill City Police* in gold letters on the doors. Abe's voice droned over the open short wave set: "Car Three, call in . . . Car Three, dammit! Are you—"

I leaned in through the opened window of the patrol car, said: "We'll send telegrams every ten seconds, sweetheart."

The front door had been opened by a lean, tall man with a bald head. He wore a wing collar, white starched shirt, four-in-hand tie, swallow-tailed coat, and pin-striped pants. Maybe he was going to ask us in for tea and crumpets.

Thorn snapped: "Who phoned in?"

"One of the guests, sir," the butler said.

"Which one?"

"A Mr. Draven, sir."

"How long they been here?"

"You mean the police, sir?"

"Jeez, yes!"

"Five minutes, sir."

"Well, where is it?"

"In the rock garden, sir."

Thorn roared: "Don't stand there, sir!"

The butler scurried along a broad central hallway. Thorn called over his gray shoulder: "Check why it was Draven who phoned, Mike."

WE TURNED into a huge room with striped gold-and-light-blue upholstery that made the room brighter than an August afternoon on the Sound. We rounded a long, carved table where someone had left a wicker basket loaded with freshly cut gladioli spikes. We went into a sun-room, outside through a screened door, and onto a lawn with scalloped edges.

This had been flat land until someone had spent a lot of cash hauling in huge rocks to buttress the lawn on either side higher than a man's head. Flowers curved along the ledges to where the lawn narrowed sharply like the neck on a pinch bottle of scotch. There were enough evergreens to stock six nurseries.

The butler pulled up short. "Around there, sir," he said, and went off toward the house.

We strode through the neck and onto a bay-like lawn. Forty feet away stood a dozen persons as immobile as society groups in the rotogravure.

One of the two uniformed cops strode forward. He was a cop named Rasmussen. Sweat streamed off his beefy face.

"Cordwall wants my scalp already, Thorn," he growled.

"How long's she been dead?" Thorn said.

"Maybe fifteen minutes. She's pretty. You might say pretty dead," he quipped. "Get that Cordwall off me, huh?"

"Anybody have time to touch anything?"

"No."

"They surprised you got here so soon?."

"Sure. We was cruising outside the gate like we was expecting this to happen."

Two persons detached themselves from the group and hurried forward. The tall man was Max Cordwall; the dumpy woman, his wife. Cordwall had wide shoul-

ders, a handsome head, and angry eyes. Or maybe the eyes were just worried. Make him about thirty-five years old, rich, and *the* Max Cordwall of Hemphill City's most exclusive summer colony along the Shore Road.

"That policeman," Cordwall thundered, leveling a forefinger at Rasmussen, "refused to let us move! Why, the poor girl might have been alive! Mrs. Cordwall wished to enter the house and—"

"We don't make the laws," Thorn soothed. "Who's the girl?"

"Miss Ellen Whitlock."

"A guest?"

"Yes." Cordwall boiled over again like cocoa on a hot fire. "Commissioner Hartung is a personal friend of mine! Fire that man and—"

"Please," the middle-aged woman interrupted. She slipped possessive, pudgy fingers inside the crook of his right arm. "I'm sure they will arrest that terrible man."

"The lout murdered her!" Cordwall raged.

"Which lout?" Thorn asked.

There were five male clothes horses by the body. Leave it to Thorn to ask which *lout*.

Cordwall's fingers stabbed at an angular young man who brooded a couple of paces from the others. "That Jad Parkin fellow!"

"Don't point, please," Mrs. Cordwall quavered.

Thorn's eyes grinned at me. As he moved forward, I said to the Cordwalls: "We're sorry about this, folks. Detective Lieutenant Thorn is the smartest dick in Long Island."

"Shut up!" Max Cordwall blared in the manner of a man whose every wish is translated into cowed action. He had a fat face. It had taken a lot of late hours and scotch to acquire those pouches and dark circles under his eyes, but he'd done it. When he tagged after Thorn, I turned my attention to his wife.

Gray silvered her black hair. The beauticians hadn't been able to iron out all the wrinkles that middle age had cut in her face. She wore an abbreviated white playsuit. Somebody should have warned her about that. Her waist was too thick, her knees too lumpy. You can be rich, I guess,

but that won't buy you a movie star's gams.

The girl drew my attention. She was a blonde eyeful, and my heart began to pound. She lay on her side with the right hand and arm upflung across a broken heliotrope plant. One leg formed a right triangle with the other leg. The short green dress, hiked above the knees, revealed the kind of legs men like to see.

She lay completely relaxed like a cat on a rug. A buzzing yellow-jacket hovered on gossamer wings over the powder-burned, ugly hole under her left ear. Impulsively Thorn stooped and brushed the bee aside.

Jad Parkin horned in. Anger flooded his thin face. "Pull her skirt down!" he ordered.

"We haven't taken pictures yet," Thorn said. "What is she to you?"

"My fiancée. Pull her skirt down!"

"Who shot her?"

"One of those jerks!" His hot eyes rode over Thorn. "You can't let her lie exposed like that! It's indecent!"

"We're going to let her lie right there like that."

Parkin's hands came up and pressed against Thorn's chest. He shoved, and Thorn spun backward.

Nobody shoves my boss around. Nobody, that is. I moved in and clipped Parkin a neat one on the chin. Parkin fell sideways and squashed a half dozen of Mrs. Cordwall's pet glads when he landed.

A woman screamed. Max Cordwall yelled: "Good!"

"Call your shots better than that, Mike," Thorn snapped. He whirled on Rasmussen and his voice crackled. "Nobody is gumming up this murder investigation. Take them into the living room and hold them for questioning. And I mean hold them! We'll handle Parkin."

RASMUSSEN and the other cop herded the group toward the house. Parkin stood up, cocked his fists, and told me: "Nobody hits me. Nobody, you got that, copper?"

"I'm somebody," I said. "You want some more, punk?"

"Cops," Parkin said bitterly. "These jerks will lead you two around by the nose. Get it over with. Fetch in the coroner!

Lug her off in a—a basket! Let's have a rich funeral for her! Cover the coffin with roses! Let's—"

He wasn't talking to us. Tears gathered in his eyes. There's something about a man's tears that up-ends your heart. I felt like a heel because I'd hit him.

Thorn asked gently: "Where does she live?"

"In Port Warren. So do I."

"Where do you two work?"

"She's with—was with Verrill and Shaw in New York. I'm only a clerk in a department store. I don't amount to much, but nobody pushes me around."

"They say you killed her," Thorn interrupted.

The fight went out of Parkin as if his anger were a pin-pricked balloon. "No," he said simply. "I loved her."

It had all the dignity of a requiem mass for the dead.

Thorn glanced at his wrist watch. "Who heard the shot?"

"Draven got here first," Parkin explained.

"His shouts brought the others?"

"Yes."

Thorn's eyes swept around the lawn, took in the numerous paths that crawled off through the high ledges. "Easy," he mused, "for the killer to shoot and whisk off."

"The gun," Parkin said. "He had to ditch that. If we can find his gun, there'll be prints!"

"Sure it's a he, Parkin?"

"Yes."

We moved quickly toward the house. Just before we entered, I nudged Thorn and said: "He did it. What a hair-trigger temper! You want I should put the cuffs on him?"

"Wait. Check Draven."

The people were waiting for us in the living room. The cops guarded the doors, hand on hips, eyes watchful. "Come with me, Mr. Cordwall," Thorn ordered, and pointed to a small library off the room.

They went in together, closed the door. Thorn could squeeze information out of a guy quicker than a squeezer working on an orange.

Mrs. Cordwall stood alongside the center table. Someone had fetched a silver vase, and she was busily arranging the

gladioli spikes in the vase as if she expected to win first prize at the Women's Club Garden Show with the exhibit.

It was easy to spot the rabbit man, Mr. Draven, and easier to know he was scared. He looked ready to run if a fly said boo. I took his arm and pressured him past Rasmussen and into the hall out of sight of the others.

"I—I want a lawyer!" Mr. Draven bleated. "I—I know my rights!"

"Sure, you can have a dozen lawyers. You a guest here?"

"Of course."

"For the week end?"

"For the entire week."

"They say you heard the shot, got there first, and called the others. That right?"

"I was, uh—dozing in the sunroom. I—I heard the shot and ran out there."

"Anybody with her? Anybody running off?"

"You can't see because of the ledges. No, nobody."

"Who arrived next?"

"Brian Oakley. Then I saw Max when I ran to the house. Yes, and I think I saw Mrs. Cordwall with a basket of flowers. I didn't kill her!"

"But you were a guest here. You phoned the police. Why you and not the butler or the Cordwalls?"

He swallowed half the air in the hallway. "I don't want anybody to cover up anything!"

"Any particular anybody?"

The words jumped off his lips before he could halt them. "Oakley, that's who." His eyes swept wildly around the hallway. "I want my lawyer!"

"Why Oakley?"

"He was after her like Cordwall was." He plunged toward the phone like a quarterback diving for the goal line.

IN THE living room a ripe blonde in a yellow halter and the briefest shorts I'd ever seen pointed out Brian Oakley. We went into the sunroom. He was the athletic type—tall, broad-shouldered, and narrow at the hips. He had short black hair, firm lips, and eyes that seemed to be measuring me for courage.

"You knew Ellen Whitlock?" I began.

His eyes mocked my physique and his lips said: "None of your business."

"I could make it some of my business."

He laughed. "It's a date. I was heavy-weight champ at Yale."

That's my kind of talk. I like to talk with my fists. "You were running after the dead girl. Did you get in over your head? Someone pull blackmail maybe and you lost your head, champ?"

"Draven's been talking," he drawled.

"*You* talk, champ."

"Why not? Draven ran around with her in the city whenever he could elude his wife. Try him. If Ellen put the heat on him—and believe me she could—he could have killed her. Cornered-rat stuff, copper."

"She corner you, maybe?"

Oakley gave me a long, unworried stare. "I don't know who killed her. Whoever did was justified, you can bet on that." He lounged past me, turned as he reached the door into the living room. "I was shooting on the pistol range beyond the rocks at the time. You can twist that into murder if you wish. I'm going to the phone now to get a lawyer. Want to stop me?"

"Later, champ."

Brian Oakley smiled. "It's a date, sucker."

A voice boomed from the living room. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Cordwall! I'm so sorry to hear about the tragic accident."

I followed Oakley into the living room. There was Commissioner Henry Hartung, Johnny-come-lately on the murder case. Hartung wasn't a man—he was a giant. He was bowing from the hips and scraping his chin on the rug before Mrs. Cordwall. Someday Ben Thorn was going to have to cut him down to size. Maybe this was that sometime.

"You mustn't worry about a thing now that I'm here," Hartung was booming. "Has anyone dared bother you, Mrs. Cordwall?"

"In the library," she quavered. "That little gray detective—he's got Max in there!"

"So," Hartung said. He strode to the closed door, yanked it open. "Thorn," he bellowed, "stop this nonsense!"

We couldn't hear the rest of it because Hartung closed the door. Everybody but me and the two cops started to smile.

Little Mr. Draven stood in the door to the hallway. "I phoned my lawyer." he

bragged. "Nobody pushes me around."

It was like a signal. There was a concerted rush for the hallway. Sure, telephones! Inside a half hour the house would be cluttered with high-priced lawyers spouting legal jargon at so many dollars per word. Good old Commissioner Hartung, running interference.

When the library door opened, Hartung came out with his arm draped around Max Cordwall. "An imposition, sir," he was saying.

Cordwall pointed at Rasmussen. "That man, Commissioner."

"Of course." Hartung wheeled on the cop. "You're fired."

With that tag line, they went into the hallway. Maybe Hartung had spotted the ripe blonde and wanted a closer look.

"Mike," Rasmussen said, grinning, "you think the commissioner ever heard about Civil Service?"

"He don't know from shinola," I growled.

Thorn called: "Mike."

I joined him at the door into the library. Commissioner Hartung had just tied his hands, yet Thorn looked as if he'd downed the Cordwall canary. "What'd you get, Mike?"

I told him everything that Draven and Brian Oakley had told me. "They make her out to be pretty tough," I whispered. "My bet is Parkin."

He stood quietly. I knew him well enough to know that his keen brain was off on a thinking tour. When his brain got back, he said: "I think I've got it, Mike. Hartung tossed Jad Parkin to me when Cordway fingered him. Let's hear what the fall guy has to say."

He turned to Rasmussen. "You and Ager did a good job."

"Sure," Rasmussen said, "and it got me fired."

"Forget it. Go out with the body until the coroner comes." He turned to Ager, the other cop. "Stay right in this room, understand? Don't even leave if Hartung tries to heave you out, understand?"

"I'm important, eh?" Ager asked.

"Yes."

"Important!" Jad Parkin sneered. He had been on the divan by the front windows. Now he came forward. "You four lugs don't have the guts of a flea!"

Even Thorn bristled, and he doesn't lose his cork very easy. "Inside," he said, jerking his thumb toward the library. Parkin glared, but he obeyed.

I grabbed Thorn's arm. "If it was me," I said, "I'd run 'em to town for a nitrate test. If only Oakley has powder on his mit, it's him. If it's Oakley and someone else, then it's this someone else, see?"

"Parkin the somebody else, Mike?"

"For all the tea in—" I stopped. Thorn had a funny look in his eyes. "You know who did it, chief?"

"I just needed the first fifteen minutes."

"Who, chief?"

"You said it was Parkin."

THORN began pleasantly: "Answer the questions as I ask them, Parkin. That will save time and fuss. You and Ellen Whitlock were engaged?"

"No," Parkin said.

"The engagement had been broken off before her death?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Last night."

"That would be Friday night. Why?"

Parkin sat across from Thorn at a king-sized library table. He leaned forward. "I—I did not wish to stand in Ellen's way."

"There was another man?"

"She was young and beautiful. Horses and swank cars and motor boats—those had only been pictures to Ellen before our visit. You must understand that."

"Tell me how you happened to be guests here, Parkin."

"In May—no, June—it happened. Ellen and I went for a picnic on the Sound. Coming back, I drove on Sunset Highway. Ellen saw a stalled car with a man waving and said to stop. It was Max Cordwall. He had a flat and couldn't change the tire. I changed it. He asked when our vacation was and if we would like to come down for a week in August."

"So you came."

"Sure. I didn't think he'd remember."

Thorn leaned forward. "And about the other man or men, Parkin?"

"It wasn't quite like that. She was a sweet kid!"

"The pretty stenographer overwhelmed by the rich boss, eh?"

"Boss?"

Thorn smiled. "A figure of speech, Parkin. Who made a play for Ellen first?"

"That Draven," he said grimly. "I—I didn't like the way he was dancing with Ellen."

"You hit him?"

"I shoved him."

"Hurt him?"

"He slid along the floor and bumped his head against a chair."

"Just Draven and Ellen, eh?"

"Brian Oakley, too. He—he was kissing Ellen one night on the side veranda. I—I hit him."

"Hurt him?"

"He knocked me down."

Thorn shoved a pack of cigarettes across the desk. "Smoke, Parkin?"

"No—no, thanks."

Thorn lit a cigarette. "Any other man?"

"Max Cordwall. That was in the swimming pool. He and Ellen had been swimming under water and—well, I didn't like it. I dove in and held his head under water." Parkin's hands twisted in his lap. "She was sort of intoxicated by the visit. Not drunk—just swept off her feet."

Thorn took a deep pull on his cigarette. Slowly now, like a hunter close to a deer. "Three men and your girl, Parkin. You met her on the terrace last night. It was after midnight. It was quiet and voices in anger carry. Did you say—'Ellen, it's got to stop! I'm going crazy! I'll kill you!' Something like that happen, Parkin?"

Parkin nodded. "I—I was out of my mind."

"You didn't mean to threaten her with death, eh?"

"Lord, no! I loved her. She was slipping out of my hands. Sometimes she'd be gone for hours with one of them! Mrs. Cordwall and some of the other women were—were talking about it. They—

They—"

Thorn stood up. "I'll have to ask you not to leave the house, Parkin. Go into the living room and stay there with the policeman."

Parkin leaped to his feet. "She was just a sweet kid!" Then he stumbled to the door, opened it, and walked out. The

door closed like the clam of a cell door.

"She was just a sweet kid," Thorn said. "She worked at Verrill and Shaw's in New York. Mike, did you know that Max Cordwall is a partner in Verrill and Shaw's?"

That tied it. "Hell," I exploded, "Parkin can't be that dumb. No man can be that dumb. Look at that mallarky out on Sunset Highway! That story stinks. Parkin found out about that gal's goings on and let her have it. A nitrate test will prove it, chief."

"Maybe. Suppose the girl was smart, Mike. She wrapped these three men around her finger. Maybe she had something on each one. Maybe she had itchy fingers and turned on the heat and her death was the payoff."

"You mean she promoted a spot of blackmail?" I asked curiously.

"Why not?"

I shook my head. "It's still Parkin in my book, chief. He could be acting a part. One second he's gonna beat everybody up, the next second he calms down like he was thinking something out. That don't make sense. He's overplaying his hand. Let's run him in before Hartung gets his wind up again, chief."

Thorn snubbed out his cigarette in a tray. "First we're going out to garden, Mike."

"Then run Parkin in to town?"

Thorn looked at me for a long time. "Ever been in love?"

"Sure, lots of times. There was a babe in Great Neck once could make me do figure eights. Another one in—"

He shook his head sadly. "Mike, you think with your fists."

LONG shadows lay across the garden. The sun had lowered into the west. The dead girl was gone, but there were marks in the loam and you could see broken heliotrope plants and squashed glads where Jad Parkin had sat down hard.

"The gun," Thorn said.

"Let's comb the grounds," I offered.

Thorn faced away from the house. He took a few long strides, said: "Twelve paces, Mike." That brought him to a narrow path through the rock walls. Again he paced, this time following the

path. He stopped on the lawn beyond the ledge. "Fourteen paces, Mike. Three or four seconds would do it."

"Do what?"

He turned left. Beyond the walls and the shrubbery, I could see the roof of the house. We were on another walled-in lawn. Thorn walked toward the house. He stopped at the first flower bed and said, "French marigolds." Later, "California zinnias." Then it was petunias.

I followed him from one lawn to another inside the rock ledges. He pointed out a dozen different kinds of flowers. "You on a garden party, chief?" I asked.

"Studying horticulture," he said. "How am I doing?"

"No gun, yet."

"I'm coming to that." His lips twisted in a queer grin. "No salmon-colored glads, either."

"It ain't flowers we're after, chief."

Thorn didn't answer. Maybe he was brushing up on his horticulture so he'd have something to do whenever Commissioner Hartung got around to firing him. Me, I was worried.

Thorn started toward the house. I tagged along. That was me. The great little tagger-after!

Parkin dozed on a divan. Ager sprawled in a lounge chair. "Finished so we can go home?" he asked, and yawned.

"Did you leave this room?" Thorn said.

"Not once."

"I'm counting on that, Ager."

Thorn moved into the hallway. I tagged along. From somewhere, on the side terrace maybe, came the sound of clinking glasses, then laughter. "A tea party," I said, "only they're using Scotch."

Thorn picked up the phone, said: "Operator, please ring this number." As soon as he cradled the phone, the bell began to ring. On the third ring, a swing door at the back opened and a maid in a black uniform and white cap ran forward.

Thorn stepped between her and the phone, blocking her view. He picked up the phone in his right hand, murmured: "Max Cordwall's." After a moment: "Colonel Sterne calling. Just a moment, sir."

He turned and whispered something to the maid that I didn't hear. She nodded

and went off toward the sound of laughter.

"I don't fool like her," I said. "Take your left hand off the dingus and act like you had someone on the wire, chief."

Thorn cradled the phone. "Sometimes I think you might make a detective, Mike. Or a prize fighter."

A moment later, Mrs. Max Cordwall puffed into the hallway. She changed into a bright red dress. Someone should have warned her about that, too. Red was far too bright for her personality.

"Yes?" she said.

"If you would step into the living room," Thorn purred, and took her by the elbow.

"The maid said Colonel Sterne—"

"Only a moment, Mrs. Cordwall."

Parkin opened his eyes and yawned as we entered. Ager stood up, waited. Thorn walked to the long table. "Very pretty flowers, Mrs. Cordwall. You picked them?"

"Uh—yes."

"Salmon-colored glads. Pretty." Then as casually as a blonde combing her hair in public: "You're the only one who handles the flowers here?"

"The servants understand that. I—"

Thorn pulled a gladioli spike from the silver vase. Then a second one. He tossed them both on the rug. The guy had gone nuts!

"What are you doing?" Mrs. Cordwall asked sharply.

Thorn tossed more spikes on the rug. When they all lay there in a salmon-colored blaze, he pulled a handkerchief from his pocket. He rolled up the sleeve on his right arm, plunged the handkerchief into the vase.

Mrs. Cordwall gasped. Ager took two steps forward. I got ready to phone Bellevue.

Thorn's hand came slowly out of the vase. Water ran down his bare arm and dripped onto the table. Water poured from the handkerchief. Yes, and water dripped off the short-barreled gun he held in the handkerchief.

Very carefully he wrapped the cloth around the gun and stuffed the soggy mess into his coat pocket. You could have heard an ant crawling around on the woodwork.

"Clever," Thorn said. "Very careful

planning. Only the police got here too soon, Mrs. Cordwall.

"You had Ellen Whitlock meet you in the secluded garden. Afterward, you put the gun under the glads in the basket and ran around the ledge to the far side. Later, after the alarm was given, you came back. But you should have picked zinnias or marigolds, Mrs. Cordwall. Picking the glads placed you at the spot of the murder."

HER face had turned gray-white. Wrinkles deepened on her forehead, along the curve of her double chin. Suddenly she was an old, tired woman. Not ten years older than Max Cordwall. She looked at least old enough to be his grandmother.

"What are you saying?" she moaned.

"That you killed her," Thorn said.

"No, no!" She seemed to wilt under Thorn's stare. "Oh," she moaned, "if you knew how vicious that girl was, what she threatened! She—"

Parkin snapped: "That woman killed my Ellen?"

"Keep quiet," Thorn warned.

Suddenly the woman grabbed at the lapels of Thorn's coat and clung there like a storm-buffeted butterfly. "He—he was slipping away from me! I had a right to save him from her and her threats!" She

straightened and suddenly screamed: "Max, Max!"

"Ager," Thorn ordered. "Take her to the sedan and downtown. The nitrate test—quick!"

Ager picked up the woman as if she were a bundle of old clothes. He ran around the table, out through the sun-room. We faced the hallway.

Max Cordwall charged in first. Commissioner Hartung was a half-step behind him. Then Brian Oakley, Mr. Draven, the ripe blonde, and a host of blank, scared faces.

"My wife just screamed," Cordwall snapped. "Where is she?"

Jad Perkin shouted: "She killed my Ellen! She hid the gun in the basket of flowers! She—"

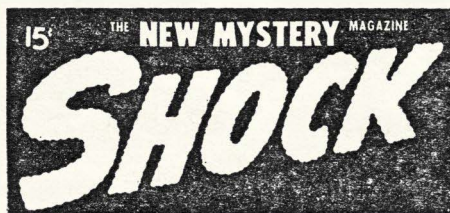
We got action fast.

Max Cordwall charged Parkin, and Parkin hit him in the teeth with a doubled fist. Max back-pedalled into Hartung. Hartung side-stepped, closed in on Parkin. Their faces were inches apart when I moved in.

Yessir, I get around fast. I'm good with my fists. I wasn't a heavyweight champ at Yale, but I could call my shots. I swung a right.

Bong, right on the button. I never landed a truer, sweeter punch. His face went blank. His mouth dropped open like a fish on display in Jerry's Fish Mar-

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ket. His eyes glazed over. One moment he was standing there, and the next moment he was standing there, and the next moment he toppled to the rug. He came to rest with his nose buried among the salmon-colored glads that littered the floor.

Thorn yelled at me: "You've killed the commissioner!"

It got a little mixed up after that. Parkin held his own for a while with a couple of the men. The ripe blonde was enjoying it all. I went looking for a guy. I found him leaning against the door jamb into the hallway.

"We had a date, champ," I said.

Brian Oakley smiled. "So we did, sucker." He slid back into the hallway, retreated. I followed close after him, jabbing with a left, feinting with a right. He stopped, hunched down. His right came out of nowhere and clipped my chin. The small rug under my feet moved, but it was the punch that sat me down.

Brian Oakley asked: "Are you all right, sucker, or do we have to do the whole thing over again?"

Fireworks sizzled inside my head. "You're from Yale," I said.

"Right."

"You were a heavyweight champ."

"Right."

"Let's call it quits, champ." I struggled to my feet. There were buzzing noises and ringing bells inside my head.

"Aspirin?" Brian Oakley asked solicitously.

I didn't answer. I blundered forward to the screen door and went outside. The patrol car with Hemphill City Police in gold letters stood there with the motor still idling. That was a waste of the taxpayer's good money. I climbed behind the wheel, cut the ignition.

The radio started to chatter. Abe growled: "Calling Car Three . . . Car Three, dammit! You staying there for the night?"

More waste of the taxpayer's money. I flicked off the switch and slid behind the wheel.

Ten minutes later Ben Thorn came out and got in the car. "I'm leaving Ager and Rasmussen with the commissioner so there won't be any more fisticuffs. Every-

thing's straightened out at this teaparty, Mike."

I started the engine and we moved off along the driveway to the twin pillars and hit the Shore Road. Thorn looked at me sharply. "You run into a door?" he asked.

I grunted.

"I guess we got the goods on Mrs. Cordwall," Thorn went on pleasantly. "The cops got there so fast she didn't have time to ditch the gun. She slipped that gun from the basket to the vase without anyone seeing her. That took real nerve."

So I said: "Why did she kill the girl?"

"Panicky, maybe. Or the dread of some particularly dirty scandal. I got Draven and Oakley alone in the library and they talked. The girl was vicious. She must have pressured Mrs. Cordwall and the woman went haywire."

Thorn sighed. "That's the trouble with being rich, Mike. Always a bunch of parasites around trying to pick you clean. But with money and a smart lawyer, she'll get out of this, maybe." He turned and gave me a long stare. "And just let Commissioner Hartung butt in on another case! Did I tell him off when I got him alone in the library!"

"You did, eh?"

Thorn laughed quietly. "Mike, sometimes I think you're smart enough to make a good detective."

"Me, smart? I didn't get a whisper of it all along. What's smart about that, chief?"

"I mean with your fists."

"Chief," I said earnestly, "it was all a mistake. They had their heads so close together I missed Parkin and hit Hartung."

Thorn chuckled. "Like fun you missed Parkin, Mike. I've seen you call too many shots with your fists. You aimed at Hartung."

"Does he know that, chief?"

"No, and nobody will tell him. He had it coming, Mike. Yessir, you're smart with your fists."

I said, "Don't tell that to Brian Oakley."

There wasn't anything left to say after that.

STAR-SPANGLED SATAN

By EJLER JAKOBSSON

SINISTER . . . malevolent . . . Mephistophelian . . . malignant—go through Hollywood's glossary of adjectives and you will not exhaust the potentialities of what is probably the most formidable and variedly successful criminal mind this country has ever produced.

The chances are that even the name of Gaston Bullock Means is unfamiliar to you—yet headlines and murder lived in its shadow. Its owner thrived equally on base knavery, keyhole scandal in high places and tragedy stark enough to shock the world—and enjoyed the confidence and esteem of the nation's top officials. He built a simple con-game to the point where he used it to swindle a nation—not once, but repeatedly—yet you would have trusted him with your life.

In fact, a few millions of you did.

Take it back far enough, and your confidence would have seemed justified. Son of a noted Concord, North Carolina lawyer, great-grandson of a state governor, Gaston B. Means gave little evidence, during the first thirty-odd years of his life, of the monster of intrigue—high and low—he was to become. Then he gave up a varied but respectable business career to answer the call of the bright lights of Gotham—only to move in their shadows.

Yet, for the moment, he remained legitimate. He took a job under William J. Burns, probably the foremost detective brain of his day and later head of what was to become the F.B.I. Possibly to prove the old adage that it takes a crook to catch a crook, Means learned rapidly and soon became one of the agency's most reliable operators.

A really big assignment came his way when he was sent across the ocean on the trail of a million-dollar baby—one Maude Robinson King, the young and lively widow of a lumber magnate. The lady had a predilection for high-jinks and headlines. It was Means' job to rescue her from both—and from the toils of a European swindler. So successful was

he that when he brought her safely back he quit his job to devote himself exclusively to the personable Maude's protection.

For three years he looked after her interests—to the tune of some half million dollars. When the money was gone, Means invited Maude to go target shooting with him in his hometown—and brought her back from the range with a bullet through her head. Indicted for murder, he marched into court with six high-test defense attorneys who bullied a jury of farmers and laborers into an acquittal. Means claimed that Maude had accidentally shot herself—*through the back of the head at eye level!*

Dissatisfied with mere acquittal, Means later concocted a story to the effect that Maude King had been murdered by German spies bent upon implicating him—and sued the witnesses against him for a cool million. He got no money, but that wasn't his aim. The suit was merely the opening gun in one of the most flagrant schemes ever concocted by one man to mulct a nation.

The year of Maude King's murder had been 1917. If he had succeeded in protecting a wealthy widow out of a half million, surely the wealth of the wealthiest nation on earth would pay off even better. Means set about to establish himself as a patriot, the saviour of democracy in danger.

He got Army co-operation in his proposed recovery of a trunkful of German espionage documents. The trunk had arrived at its official destination still locked and sealed, but empty. Means blandly claimed the contents had been stolen, but Army Intelligence established that the trunk's weight, when Means shipped it, coincided to the ounce with its weight on arrival, and he was forced to abandon the project. He fell back on his original premise and claimed that, anyway he'd loved Maude like a brother.

He could afford to be a good loser. He had attained his objective. There had been the headlines, and all over the nation

there were millions to whom in the heat of war, Means had become a persecuted patriot!

The payoff was not long in coming. In 1920 the famous Republican convention nominated Warren Harding and the country elected him.

William J. Burns, Means' original boss, became head of the Bureau of Investigation of the Justice Department—and Means became a member in good standing of the top law-enforcement agency of the land! He promptly solidified his footing by looking into the difficulties of the First Family, adroitly shifting his loyalties where they counted—until he won the administration's bootleg concession.

As a special agent in charge of rum runners, Means by his own account collected as much as a quarter of a million in graft at a clip—and estimated his total take at something under a quarter of a billion. Even Al Capone and Johnny Torrio must take a back seat here!

Most of this money, he said, went "upstairs" through his fingers, and was supposed to have led to the shooting of the "collection man," Jesse W. Smith—a shooting the Bureau of Investigation pronounced a suicide, after it was established that Means had been seen near the scene prior to the fireworks.

The Teapot Dome scandal busted many heads—but left Gaston B. Means' cranium temporarily unbloodied and unbowed. He turned state's evidence in a senatorial investigation, and though he amazingly had "lost" documentary proofs of his confessions implicating others, he actually managed to press a thornless facsimile of a martyr's crown upon his ingenious brow. Shortly afterwards, however, he made the mistake of trying to continue his shake-down of bootleggers without the backing of an official badge and wound up in Atlanta—his first conviction.

In prison, Gaston B. Means' resourcefulness didn't desert him. It was only a matter of time before he interested the authoress of a best seller into collaborating with him on a phonily repentant volume of confessions, *The Strange Death of President Harding*—which brought him immense royalties until his enlightened and embarrassed co-worker repudiated it. Gaston, with a smirk and a rustle of legal

tender, did an *apres vous, madame*. Sure, the book was phony, but it paid off!

Out once more, Means remembered he was a patriot. If ever a man had reason to regard his country gratefully, he was that man. Germany was down and had not yet risen as a second threat—so Means picked on Russia to protect his native heath from.

He concocted a sucker list of wealthy men, and to each mailed terrorist letters purporting to have come from Soviet agents. Then he offered himself as private investigator at a C-note a day—and collected! One of his clients is said to have paid him \$25,000, while another went completely broke.

The gag was pretty much the same one he'd used earlier in connection with the Maude King case, only this time he was a bigger patriot. Instead of offering to bring back one document-filled trunk, he promised more than a score, with assorted suitcases—and when the documents once more vanished before reaching their destination, he improved on his explanation. He gave such a convincing account of their violent theft that authorities actually swore out murder warrants for the apprehension of the imaginary bloody Bolsheviks.

Means was still on the lucrative trail of the above evil-doers when the Lindbergh kidnaping case suggested to him what many authorities consider the filthiest bit of conmanship ever perpetuated.

Without compunction, with truly devilish callousness, he stuck while the iron was hot—while the distracted parents of the stolen Charles Jr. were desperately trying to reach the abductors with ransom. Means deliberately started rumors that he had inside information on the case, gleaned from the prison convict pal. As a final recourse he was appointed go-between—and managed to stage an elaborate hoax which netted him \$104,000 from the Lindberghs' sympathizers!

Gaston Bullock Means had finally outaged his hitherto pliant Fates—they decided he'd bagged his quota of suckers. He died in prison some years ago, without divulging what he'd done with the proceeds from his most infamous coop.

The consensus of opinion is, though, that he was foiled at last. It's a cinch he didn't take it with him!

READY FOR THE RACKETS

A Department

Racketeers and swindlers of all sorts are lying in wait for you, eager to rob or cheat you of your hard-earned cash. All you need to thwart them, guard against them, is a fore-knowledge of their schemes and methods of operation. Write in, telling us your own personal experiences with chiselers and con men of various sorts. It is our intention to publicize—withholding your name if you wish—the information you have passed on, paying \$5.00 for every letter used. No letters will be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope, nor can we enter into correspondence regarding same. Address all letters to The Rackets Editor—DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, 205 E. 42nd St., N. Y. 17, N. Y.

Smart Potato

Dear Sir:

Saturday when I tried to start my car motor downtown I got only a wheeze, a snort, and an odor that reeked to high heaven. I raised my hood, tinkered for a while, but got nowhere.

"Bet I know what's the matter, mister. Same thing happened to me last week." The owner of the voice at my elbow was around high school age, and wore denims and a grin that was half apologetic. "You see," he explained, "I'm a mechanic and I'm saving up to join the union. Want me to look her over, mister?"

About that time I was ready for anything. "Go to it, son," I said dismally.

He pulled the distributor-head and began to finger the gadget expertly. "Gotta screwdriver, mister?"

I tossed him the tool from my trunk. He made a few "regulations," all the while explaining, in the venacular of the crack mechanic, what my trouble was. Then he told me to try the starter.

As I seated myself at the wheel he came up to my window. The motor popped off beautifully. "Thanks!" I said. "Nice work!"

"Yeah, I know cars, mister. When I save enough money I'm gonna join the union," he reminded me again. "The dues are pretty stiff for me right now and I have to help my mother."

The inevitable dollar came out of my pocket. "Thanks again, bud," I said and drove off.

Later, a news item aroused my curiosity. Quickly, I went out and examined the end of my exhaust pipe. Yes, there were the mealy remains. Further investigation revealed my young Good Samaritan was in jail for his repair swindle.

You see, a potato stuck on the end of your exhaust pipe stalls your motor—and is easily removed for a dollar.

Most kids are okay, but sometimes you run across one that's mean and cagey.

W. W. Fullerton
St. Petersburg, Fla.

Housekeeper's Hoax

Dear Sir:

I am a professional woman with only one significant asset—my credit rating. Mrs. B.,

posing as a housekeeper, unerringly "hooked" me for that single asset. Here's how:

A few days after taking charge in my house, Mrs. B. pointed out that we were short of a few items such as kitchenware, curtains, etc. Since we lived in the suburbs, I told her to call up one or two department stores and order what we needed.

About two months later it occurred to me that I had received no store bills for some little time. I telephoned each store where I carried an account, and nearly fell on my face when I learned that my total balance due exceeded \$1000! The individual items were things I had never even thought of ordering—jewelry, furs, perfumes, expensive lingerie. "Who in the world signed the sales slips?" I asked.

"The orders were all telephoned in and delivered to your home, madame," was the reply.

I rushed home and confronted Mrs. B. Her little boy was wearing a brand-new suit with a label from one of the stores which carried my account.

She calmly packed and made ready to leave, assuring me that I would never be able to prove anything against her. I called the police; they said they couldn't do a thing unless I had some receipts signed by Mrs. B. to show she took in the packages. Since the delivery service never required such a receipt, I was stuck.

Mrs. B. sailed triumphantly away, unhindered by the guardians (?) of the law. I figured out that she must have received the merchandise in my absence, slipped it out of the house via a friend who was always hanging about, and destroyed the store bills when they arrived in the mail.

Never trust anyone with any information about your charge accounts or give any sort of access to them!

Helen Alexander
Corona del Mar, Calif.

There Ain't No Justice!

Dear Sir:

My first really new car! What a thrill it was as I closed the deal with the garage owner and drove out of the garage and down the street. My uppermost thought was to get this baby insured immediately.

I drove two blocks, turned a corner, driving as carefully as though this new possession of

mine were made of glass. In the middle of the block a car was double parked, so I blew the musical new horn, veered around and passed it.

Just as I had passed and was about to straighten out, the car which had been double parked started off and ran into the right rear side of my car, damaging it considerably.

The several witnesses to the accident insisted it was the other man's fault. When I spoke to him he was very much upset and explained that his side windows were all frozen over and he hadn't seen me pass or noticed my horn, but he readily admitted that he was at fault. A traffic officer, whom someone had summoned, on finding out all the facts, placed the blame squarely on the other man. All agreed that I was the victim, the other wholly to blame.

This man turned our claim over to his insurance company. From them we received a form to fill out. One of the queries was concerned with where we had had our car insured.

Our reply to this was what it had to be. There hadn't been the opportunity to insure it.

There can be no other conclusion than to believe that they based their decision on this. They replied that upon their investigation they found their assuree not negligent.

We know better, of course, but the fact that we hadn't insured our car left us helpless. A private individual can't hope to win a fight with a large insurance company, no matter how right that individual happens to be.

J. T.
Barron, Wis.

Bargain Blues

Dear Sir:

About three weeks ago on the main street of our town, I was approached by a stranger who gave me the following salestalk:

He needed money to eat and get gasoline to continue his trip home. He was thereby willing to sell me an electric shaver that his wife had given him for Christmas, which was plainly marked \$15.00. He offered it to me for \$10.00. Being familiar with merchandise, I recognized it as an article that could be bought for about \$1.20 wholesale. It was wrapped in cellophane with a cheap imitation leather (cardboard) case. I told him I wasn't interested because I had only \$5.00 left to my name. After awhile he was willing to sell it to me for \$5.00. Seeing I was not interested he left, heading towards a restaurant.

After awhile he came out. My curiosity being aroused, I went in for a cup of coffee, and found out that a waitress had bought the electric shaver for \$6.00. I didn't have the heart to tell her that she had been swindled.

The same night my sister's boyfriend came to the house and showed me what a wonderful bargain he got. You're right—an electric shaver and only \$8.00. From his description, it was the same stranger and the same story. These two sales alone had netted him \$12.00 profit.

Sincerely
Joseph A. Tulaba
Saco, Maine

Not So Hot

Dear Sir:

When I mailed my electric iron for factory repairs I became the easy prey of appliance repair racketeers. After waiting three months for the iron to be returned to me, I visited the factory in Philadelphia to inquire.

There a repair man glibly told me that my iron was beyond repair and the payment of \$2.00 for the damaged element would entitle me to a "new" iron. When I balked, he quickly cut the price to \$1.00—enough to replace a useless transformer. Then he altered his shop records and packaged the "new" iron for me. All of this in spite of my holding a year's guarantee on apparatus that is nine months old.

Imagine my anger when I arrived home and discovered that my "new" iron would not heat.

Mrs. June S. Hess
Westville, N. J.

Bank Teller's Torment

Dear Sir:

An easy \$10 a day or more was made by an enterprising get-rich-quick artist with a starting capital of \$10.25.

His procedure was to go into a bank, the bigger and busier the better, push his perfectly good ten-dollar bill under the grille, and say to the teller, "Ten dollars worth of quarters."

Our searcher after easy money then went home, where he carefully undid his roll of quarters, being sure not to tear the paper.

On his way home he had stopped at a hardware store and bought forty iron washers just the size of a quarter. (That is why the odd twenty-five cents is needed in his starting capital.) These washers he carefully wrapped in the bank's paper, so that the result perfectly resembled, outwardly, the roll of quarters.

Next he changed the forty quarters at the grocery store for a ten-dollar bill.

Then he returned to the bank, selected the same teller, and placed himself squarely before the window.

"Ten dollars' worth of quarters, please," he said crisply, as he pushed the ten-dollar bill from the grocer's under the grille.

Holding the roll of washers just beneath the level of the shelf under the grille with his left hand, the swindler, with deft but easy sleight-of-hand, rolled the quarters down into his left hand under the shelf, and rolled the washers up into his right!

Then he pushed the washers toward the teller, "Sorry, I made a mistake. I got quarters this morning. I want half dollars now." The teller unsuspectingly returns the quarters (in reality the washers) to his pile, and slides a roll of half dollars towards our racketeer.

When the swindle is discovered by the teller—or by one of his irate customers to whom he has inadvertently given the roll of disguised washers!—he, the teller, usually makes good out of his own pocket rather than report to his chief that he has let himself be fooled.

George Wilton
New York, N. Y.

Such a Business!

Dear Sir:

I don't know whether or not this is against the law but it sure is a dirty trick.

In one of the national magazines, I saw an advertisement that offered to send me a book showing how to start a mail order business right in my own home. The ad went on to say that this plan was a proven success and that only a small amount of capital would be necessary to start.

Since I needed a little extra income at the time, I answered the ad and sent the price of the book which was two dollars.

The "book" turned out to be no more than a small mimeographed pamphlet. The "mail order business" it described was to print pamphlets exactly like this one and to sell them by mail for two dollars just as they had sold this one to me. In other words, I would have to pull this same rotten racket on somebody else if I wanted to get my money back.

Charles F. Hall
Tulsa, Oklahoma

The Agent Who Wouldn't Talk

Dear Sir:

There ought to be a law enforcing real estate men to be honest. I realize they have to make a living just like everyone else, but can't they be open and above-board like my grocer and shoe-black?

Last fall my husband and I wanted to buy a house in a neighboring city. We found just the one that suited us. We put down a good-sized down payment, went into escrow and stated definitely that this deal could not go through until we had sold our own home in town. The real estate man was quite sure if we made it a 60-day escrow we could sell our home in that time.

Though we put our house up for sale with several real estate agents, put ads in the paper, and even staked out an attractive sign on the front lawn, our house was still ours at the end of the 60 days.

I went out to the neighboring city to plead with the real estate man to give us more time, but nothing doing—our time was up, our \$500 deposit was gone, and also our chances on the new home.

I later found out that a clause could have been inserted in the escrow papers to the effect there was to be a transference of funds from the sale of our home to the purchasing of the new property. But mum was the word—the real estate man claimed he only did what we asked him to do. Yes, he did, but he cared more about lining his pockets with silver than he did about protecting our interests.

E. J. A.
Temple City, Calif.

Carbon Copy

Dear Sir:

Some years ago Mr. Horthy (real names not used) of Bellows & Horthy, consulting engineers, was alone in the office when a young

man entered. His appearance and speech indicated that he was decidedly English, and indeed he introduced himself as John H. Boscombe of London and said he had been recommended to Bellows & Horthy by Major James D. Bartlett, also of London.

Major Bartlett was about the only man in London whom Mr. Horthy knew at the time, and the introduction through him made for friendly relations with Mr. Boscombe at once.

Mr. Boscombe, it appeared, was in business with his uncle and it was their intention in the near future to ship much machinery to Cape Town. They were desirous of having an American representative who could inspect the machinery before it was shipped abroad—and that was where the firm of Bellows & Horthy came in. Mr. Boscombe spent an hour and a half going over in much detail exactly what kind of machinery was to be shipped, what quantities, how often, and of course the fee which he and his uncle were willing to pay for the inspection. A very satisfactory commission arrangement was agreed upon.

As Mr. Boscombe arose to leave, he said: "Oh, by the way, do you know anyone who could use twenty dollars worth of carbon paper? I'm having a little trouble disposing of it because it's not quite the regular size—one-eighth under each way."

Mr. Horthy, thinking of the coming commissions, felt confident that he could either use it or peddle it to friends.

"I'll buy it, if it's good," he offered.

Mr. Boscombe gladly opened his valise and got out a very reasonable quantity of boxes which he showed to Mr. Horthy. The latter, after a brief inspection, handed Mr. Boscombe twenty dollars. Further inspection, after Mr. Boscombe had left, showed the boxes to contain exactly what Mr. Boscombe claimed—good but undersized carbon paper.

Mr. Horthy never saw nor heard from Mr. Boscombe again. How that gentleman obtained the introductory name of Major Bartlett of London is still a mystery.

Later an identical trick, undoubtedly by the same man, was played upon a friend of Mr. Horthy's—a radio engineer. This time, instead of being an exporter of machinery, the trickster claimed to be a representative of the British Government which, he said, was about to erect a broadcasting station on certain islands in the Pacific. When the deal was all but signed, he got out his boxes of carbon paper as before and made a similar sale.

The odd part of these proceedings is that with the exception of misrepresenting himself, "Mr. Boscombe" committed no crime. He sold exactly what he claimed to sell and he agreed to nothing that he did not carry out. Probably Mr. Horthy and his friends are lucky that he did not carry out more than was agreed upon.

G. W. O'C.
Mt. Kisco, N.Y.

Well Matched

Dear Sir:

One day I passed by a small store that had a
(Please continue on page 97)

CAVALIERS MAKE

Suspense-Packed

**I turned just in time to catch the bony fist
flush in my mouth.**

Action Novelette



GOOD CORPSES

While his intended lapful of luxury fumed, chivalrous Devren's double-take on a cigarette gal's alluring vaccination sent him right into the too-cozy arms of the boys in blue.



By **JOHN D.
MacDONALD**

CHAPTER ONE

Switch at the Crazy Mabel

IN A WAY it was tough that it had to happen on the night that I was dating Conny Ballow, the boss's daughter. As a young engineer for the Ballow Corporation, I was in the middle of a campaign, the logical conclusion of which was going to be hearts and flowers and gold cigarette cases for the ushers at the wedding.

Don't think that I was being hard-hearted about it. This Conny Ballow is a cute little bug, and smart as they come. I was more than half in love with her that night that she made me take her to the Crazy Mabel Club out on the Hartbridge Road.

I had never been there before, but I knew the place by reputation. It was Conny's second visit. The place was an old flour mill about a hundred and fifty years ago, and the stone walls are about four feet thick. It is the sort of place I don't willingly go to.

Thick false bottoms on the shot glasses, cut whiskey, overcooked food and a weighty cover charge. It is always filled with the semi-sharp. People with a bit of the rodent about them. Acquisitive and sensual and loud—with beady eyes, pale faces and thick wads of currency. They were the type that were selling thousand dollar bills at a ten percent discount when the Internal Revenue people were cracking down on the black market.

Anyway, I braced myself with a brace of martinis before picking Conny up, and we had the usual argument about whether

we should use her two and a half ton convertible or my shaggy little coupe. I won out, as usual, and we went in her convertible.

There was a damp spring drizzle and it was nice to run from the wide parking lot into the warmth and noise of the Crazy Mabel. A blonde with a white Kemtone face took the coats and the massive head-waiter melted at the feel of a five and put us at a small table at the edge of the dance floor.

Gunner Harrison and his band were beating Sunny Side to death and we were nibbling at a pair of tepid martinis when this voice close to the table said, "Cigahs? Cig-rets? A favah foah the lady?"

I looked up as the automatic "No thank you" rolled forth, and then I slowly opened my mouth. It was one of those things you couldn't help.

She was a good five foot eight, and they had her dressed in a flame red halter with matching red tights and a gauze ballet skirt about twelve inches long. Her black hair was piled high on her head, and her level gray eyes were as I remembered them. As a check, I took a quick look at her long, rounded dancer's legs—the color of cream and honey.

I saw the flick of recognition in her eyes and knew I was right. She turned to go away, and I reached out and hooked my fingers over the edge of the tray she held by a velvet strap that went around the back of her neck.

"You're Della Sanger!" I said loudly, pitching my voice above the dense beat of the Gunner Harrison rhythm section.

"Let go," she said. Beyond her I saw a waiter threading his way between the tables, a determined look on his face. I let go of the edge of the tray of cigarettes and she turned quickly away. The muscles in her slim and lovely back looked tense and rigid as she leaned over a nearby table, peddling her wares. The waiter moved back toward the wall.

"Well, really!" Conny said in a voice like a blouseful of icicles.

"Don't jump at it, lovely," I said. "There's a story goes with it."

"Your past must be completely fascinating," she breathed through clenched teeth.

I grinned, but my lips felt stiff. "Not

like that, honey. This is war stuff. Long ago. I flew a lot of missions with a Boston blueblood off my right wing at five o'clock. He was a very sweet guy named Bob Sanger. While he was in Texas learning how to fly, he married a dancer named Della. He had her picture tacked over his bunk. A picture of that cigarette gal.

"His family was sore as hell at his marrying something beside one of those Boston femmes that look like a glass swizzle stick. Anyway, I promised him that if anything happened to him, I'd check up on her and make sure she got straightened out okay and all that. He was sure his family wouldn't have a thing to do with her."

"And you came back and you and she hit it off delightfully," Conny said.

She annoyed me and I showed my teeth. "Shut up and listen. Bob Sanger caught it on a sweep over Leyte. I got back a year later. She had left the address he gave me. She didn't answer the three letters I wrote her from the Pacific. I spent two hundred bucks on a private detective agency just to hear them tell me that she had faded right out of sight."

In a subdued tone, Conny said, "I'm sorry, Rich. I'm a jealous female, I guess. You did take a nice long look at that vaccination over her knee, you know."

I held her hand tightly and grinned at her. "I had to check the legs to see if she had been a dancer."

She looked into my eyes for a long moment. Then stared at the drowned olive in the bottom of her glass.

"Well, anyway," she said, "you can stop worrying about Mrs. Sanger. She looks in the pink."

I rubbed my chin speculatively. "I'm not satisfied. You can be mad if you want to, but I don't think Bob would care to have her doing this sort of thing."

Conny's eyes got bright and hard. "Aren't you carrying your responsibilities a little far, friend? Aren't you straining yourself a little?"

"I don't think I am. I want to get her alone and ask her if there's anything she needs, anything she wants."

"If you never saw her before, why did she sort of jump when she looked at you?"

"Bob was a camera hound. He sent a few pictures of me back to her."

"Oh!" Conny said.

"You don't sound very cheery."

"Should I sound cheery? I'm sorry if I'm letting you down. Ha, ha, ha. How's that?"

I tried to salvage the evening, but it was no go. We had to leave the Crazy Mabel early, because Conny kept watching me to see if I was watching Della. It made me nervous. I smoked too much. Conny said, "What are you trying to do, dear? Run out of cigarettes?"

We left and I drove her home and switched to my own car. On the porch she put out a cold hand and said, "Thank you for a lovely evening." The door slammed behind her.

I shrugged, got into the coupe and headed for a bean wagon to take the taste of the crummy dinner out of my mouth. I wasn't worried about Conny. Jealousy was a healthy sign. She'd get over it. I was worried about Della Sanger. I knew what Bob would think of me if I ignored the fact that Della was working in a joint like that—giggling mechanically while the drunk salesmen tried to grab her as she edged between the close tables.

I remembered the fragments of her letters that Bob read to me. It was a funny relationship when we were flying together. I had no stateside gal, and it was almost as though she were married to both of us. The fragments that he had read were delicate, sensitive and very much in love. I was half in love with her before Bob was killed. When he died, I wasn't in love with her any more. Things go that way sometimes.

The next day at the Ballow Corporation was a rugged old day. Five of the new machines came in and even though the concrete foundations were all set for them, Gartenhaur, my boss, decided that his original idea was best. I talked myself hoarse talking him out of it, explaining how his layout would lead to eventual bottlenecks in the production line.

BY THE time five o'clock rolled around, I was bushed. I hurried back to my apartment, took a large jolt right out of the bottle, a fast shower and a change to fresh clothes.

I pulled into the nearly empty park-

ing lot at the Crazy Mable at a few minutes after six. Some men were being loud in the bar. The hat-check booth was empty. I strolled into the main room and nearly fell over a puffy old character who was scrubbing the floor. A man was lazily unstacking the tables and chairs and setting them around on the area where she had finished scrubbing.

She looked up at me out of a very red face and said, "How you like this, aye? Spend eight hours a night in the lady's john when half the gals don't even tip you a dime and then he says, 'Scrub the floor, Lucy. Nice and clean we want it.' I ought to tell him to—"

"Hey," I said, laughing, "It isn't my fault. Is the boss around?"

"Mr. Sinzi is in his office. Go through that door back there to the left of the band stand. Turn left just inside the door and knock. Tell him Lucy is about to quit."

I knocked and a voice said for me to come in. Mr. Sinzi sat at a trick circular desk. He was very scrubbed, very gray, very neat. His rimless glasses glittered and he gave me the warm, personal smile of a bank examiner. He was checking a stack of bills payable, a lean gold pencil held tightly in his gray hand.

"Yes?" he said.

"Mr. Sinzi? I'm Rich Bevren. I'm an engineer down at Ballow. I was out here last night and I recognized your cigarette girl as somebody I used to know. I wondered if I could wait around and see her when she comes on duty."

He sat very still for a moment and just looked at me. "Why, certainly! Let me see, Miss Martin comes on at seven. She usually gets here about quarter of, I believe, and changes upstairs."

"Miss Martin?"

He looked at me oddly. "I thought you said you knew her, Mr. Bevren."

"Oh, I knew her under her married name. I didn't know her maiden name was Martin. If I ever heard it, I've forgotten it."

"I see. One thing I don't understand though, Mr. Bevren. Why do you come to me about this?"

"Well, I have a hunch she won't want to talk to me. Pride or something. She gave that impression last night. I had a

girl with me, and I couldn't follow it up. I'm afraid she'll come running to you claiming that I'm annoying her and you'll have me tossed out or something."

"I don't quite understand," he said, "because if she refuses to talk to you, I don't see what I can do about it. You can talk to her in here if you want to. I'll stay or step out, as you wish."

"Fine," I said. "Okay if I wait here for her?"

"Certainly." He stepped to the door, opened it and yelled, "Lucy!"

She came waddling up. "Yes, Mr. Sinzi."

"When Miss Martin arrives, have her come right in here, if you please."

"Yes, Mr. Sinzi."

I sat and smoked two cigarettes while he checked through the papers with methodical speed. He wasn't the sort of person I had visualized as owning and operating the Crazy Mabel Club. Mr. Sinzi looked as if he would be much more at home in an accounting firm. Whenever he came across a bill he didn't approve of, he'd make little clucking noises like a neurotic hen.

At ten minutes of seven there was a light tap at the door. "Come in," Sinzi called. I stood up quickly and she walked in.

She glanced at me and looked inquiringly at Sinzi. "What'd you want, Jack?" she asked.

"This young man is the one who tried to speak to you last night," Sinzi said.

She looked over at me. "Yeah. That's right."

I smiled quickly and said, "I'm sorry. There's some mistake. I meant the other cigarette girl."

Sinzi looked startled. "The other one! Alice here is the only cigarette girl we've had for the last year, Bevren."

I looked at her again. "The hair is right and she's the right size and all, and her eyes are grey but she isn't the girl."

Alice Martin walked over, stood very close to me, straightened my necktie a trifle and said, "Oh, he was a little drunk last night. Don't you remember me, honey? You called me a funny name. Della, I think, and you caught my cigarette tray and wouldn't let go."

I brushed her hands away from my tie and stepped back. "Look," I said angrily,

"this is stupid. I wasn't drunk last night. You aren't the girl I talked to. Let's stop playing games."

Sinzi stood up and said with dignity, "Suppose you stop playing games, Mr. Bevren. I'm a busy man and there's a limit to my patience. This is the only cigarette girl we've had here for a year. She was on duty last night. You talked to her. She remembers you. Now take your fool story and get out."

She was smiling at me, slightly amused, slightly superior. I wondered if maybe the brace of martinis had put me a little off balance. Her face was a little like the face I remembered. Some trick of the light . . .

"Maybe I'm wrong," I said. "I feel like a damn fool."

"You don't have to feel that way," she said, with a little cooing note in her voice.

Sinzi nodded abruptly and we left his office. Lucy had finished with the floor and all the tables were set out.

Alice Martin moved in on me again and straightened my necktie again. She stood so close that her perfume was very heady. Looking up into my eyes, she said, "Maybe I shouldn't have brushed you last night, cutie. You're kinda sweet."

She had a trick of slowly lowering her lashes as she looked up into my eyes. I reached for her.

She slid easily away and said, "Uh-uh! I'm a slow and lazy gal. But not easy. You got to buy a lot of cigarettes before we get to be pals, cutie."

Walking back to the stairway, she moved very nicely, very nicely indeed. A quick backward look over her shoulder and she was gone. I shook my head hard and walked out to the bar. Maybe I had imagined the look she had given me the night before—a look that had fear in it, and surprise. I wondered if maybe I was working too hard down at the Ballow Corporation.

CHAPTER TWO

Who's Cool Now?

I ROAMED out into the bar and had myself a drink. My reflection in the mirror behind the bar showed me a gloomy guy indeed. I left half the drink

and put in a telephone call to Conny.

She was still cool. "What is it, Rich?"

"Oh, Conny. I . . . uh . . . don't be mad, hey?"

"Why do you think I ought to be mad?"

"I want to ask you something that's going to make you mad, I think."

"Go ahead, you soul of tact. What is it?"

"You made a crack about the vaccination on this lassy out here at the Crazy Mabel. Did you really see any vaccination mark?"

"So's that's where you are!" *Click.* Dead line. No answer.

After two more, I wandered into the main room. Alice Martin was talking to a waiter. The costume was the same. I caught her eye and she came slowly over to the door, walking with that special little lilt which says, "And how do you like it?"

I selected my brand, gave her a half a dollar. I took a long, slow look at where the vaccination should have been.

"You can put your eyes back in the sockets, cutie," she said.

"Was I staring? Oh, pardon me, please!"

"I'm used to it, cutie." She strolled away. They were dancer's legs. Clean-muscled and lithe. I felt a little dizzy. The fresh air didn't help much. I bounced and rattled back to town in my asthmatic little coupe.

Conny didn't want to play. She said, "Go away, Rich. Go far away. Go buy some cigarettes or something."

We stood in the hall. I grabbed her wrists before she could twist away and said gently, "Be good, honey. Please be good. I am an indigent engineer who is trying hard to marry the boss's daughter. I'm harmless. Honest."

She stopped struggling so hard, and I pulled her in close and wrapped her up like a present from your aunt. When she came up for air, she breathed, "You make me *so* mad!"

She didn't get annoyed again until I turned out toward the Crazy Mabel. When I got to the parking lot, she wouldn't get out of the car.

"Here it is in words of one syllable," I said with extreme patience. "We will go in for five minutes. I will get you one close look at the cigarette gal. All you

have to do is tell me if it's the same one we saw last night. Then we leave. Just that one little favor."

I got her into the hallway and the big man who had swallowed my five the night before got Alice Martin out into the hallway.

Alice Martin gave me the lazy stare again and gave Conny the quick freeze. "Hello there, cutie," Alice said.

Conny gave her a slow stare from ankles to ears. "Trundle off, Carmen," Conny said. "Go sell something."

Alice grinned at me and said, "Anytime when you haven't got your Ma with you." She drifted off into the main room with a trifle more hip movement than the terrain demanded.

"Come on, cutie," Conny said. "Take Ma home so you can hurry back."

In the car again, I kept the keys in my pocket. "Okay, Conny. Same girl?"

"No. This one is worse. With your taste you ought to write radio advertising."

"You are positive that she isn't the same girl?"

"Of course I'm positive! Last night's baby had her own lashes. This one got lashes out of a box. Besides, no scar on the outside of the thigh, above the right knee. Do you enjoy this anatomical conversation?"

"Conny, beloved, forget your shrewish tendencies for just one moment. The owner and operator of this joint, a Mr. Sinzi, told me this afternoon that the baby you just saw is the same one I talked to last night. The girl claims I talked to her. Between the two of them, I begin to wonder if my brain is turning a bit soft. Now I'm set on one question. She is *not* the gal we talked to last night."

"You talked to. Remember?"

"Okay. I talked to her. Now suppose you tell me why they have to pull this switch?"

The discreet neon in front of the Crazy Mabel painted my girl's pretty face with staccato glints of purest blue. Some delicate wrinkles appeared between her eyebrows.

"Why, it is odd, isn't it?"

"That is what I've been trying to tell you. I understand that you won't go along with my playing godfather to the war

widow. That's just a difference of opinion. But maybe you will go along with a program to find out why they are trying to kid me."

"Is it important?"

"Only to the extent that if we don't find out, we'll always wonder what was behind it."

She thought for a moment. "The regiment is ready, sir. Lead on."

I slid out and opened the door on her side. "Back we go, Conny."

"What are your orders, sir?"

"In the lady's room you will find an ancient character named Lucy who seems to dislike the management. Find out where she lives and we'll have a little talk with her when she's off duty."

"Why?"

"Honey, you're beautiful. You don't have to have brains. If two customers like us could tell the switch in cigarette gals, certainly any employee would know about it."

Conny glared at me. "Are all men so fatuous?"

"Absolutely."

"It doesn't give a woman much choice. Let's go."

When Conny was halfway through her drink at the bar, she went on in to make contact with Lucy. While she was gone, the vision drifted through the bar, propped an elbow on my shoulder and said, "Cutie just can't tear himself away, can he?"

"Go away! Go away! I want to have a happy married life, Alice."

"And you expect to have same with her. Ha!" She went off, giving me one sly look over her bare shoulder. I finished the rest of my drink with an energy that shattered the ice against my front teeth.

Conny took her time. When she at last came back, she looked very smug. When the bartender had gone down the bar a piece, I said, "Gimme the scoop, sleuth."

"One eight one South Amery Street. Second floor rear. One o'clock tomorrow afternoon. Okay?"

"Fair. Passable. Eat here?"

"With your extracurricular love life throwing it around? Not tonight, junior. Take me back to town."

The ice had gone out of her eyes and we had a good evening, forgetting all about cigarette girls and such. Conny

dances in a very fine fashion. None of this floating stuff. You know that her solid little frame is right there every minute. But her rhythm is as solid as anything the Hawk ever put on wax.

Happy and weary and content, I slung her into her manse and whistled my way back to my apartment. Morning would be around all too soon.

IN THE morning I clawed my way out of bed, put the coffee on and found the shower stall without opening my eyes. The cold water drove away the dreams, and I felt almost human as I poured my coffee and spread open the morning paper. In the thriving city of Blair, the early sheet saves a box on page one, lower right, for last minute local news. I read that box and one paragraph in it swelled up so big that it nearly blinded me. Short and sweet.

"At quarter to three this morning, Mrs. Lucy Dugan, employee of the Crazy Mabel Club, a roadhouse outside the city, was struck and killed by a hit and run driver as she was walking toward a bus stop one hundred yards from the roadhouse."

Five minutes later I had my sleepy gal on the phone. "Wake up, Conny. Listen to me," I said.

"Go 'way," she mumbled.

"Lucy's dead!"

She was quiet for a few seconds. "Lucy who? Oh! Oh!"

"She was knocked off by a hit and run driver. What's the first thing you think of?"

All the sleep was gone from Conny's voice. "I think that maybe somebody decided that somebody was taking too much interest in Lucy and too much interest in cigarette girls."

"And carry it one step further, sweet."

Her voice tightened up. "It means that it might be unhealthy to keep prying."

"Go to the head of the class. Now you can tell me to stop prying."

"You beat me by two seconds, Rich. Don't go near that place again. Ever!"

"I don't take orders very gracefully, Conny."

"If you go back there, you needn't come here again." *Click.* Dead line. It was getting to be a habit. I hung up slowly, wondering how close our mutual guess

was. It was almost too clear to be coincidence. Lucy with the red face, hammered into the void by a couple of tons of mean automobile.

Suddenly the office seemed like a pretty dim place. I phoned and told the early birds to tell the department not to expect their golden boy until later in the day. Next I phoned Brad Newlove, the brisk young sergeant on our local gestapo who, during his college years, spent most of his time keeping a bony elbow in my face and taking basketballs away from me.

By luck he was in. "Brad, my boy, this is Rich Beven, your dearest pal."

"That means you want something, Rich, palsy, I won't fix your parking ticket. I won't get your cat out of a tree. I might buy you a beer one of these days."

"I'm a taxpayer, Sergeant. Watch that nasty tongue of yours."

"Oh, yes sir. Pardon me, sir. What can I do for you, sir? Pant. Pant."

"How would you go about finding a girl in this town when you know only the name?"

"Look in the city directory, stupid."

"I have a hunch she won't be in there."

"Know where she works?"

"The Crazy Mabel. But I don't want to ask there."

Mike whistled softly. "Hmmm. We have some people out in that neighborhood this morning cooperating with the State Police. Could be we might already have the address you want. Who's the dish?"

"Alice Martin."

"Very easy, Rich. Hold the line." He was back very quickly. "Crescent Apartments on the corner of Gaylord and Chestnut. Apartment 6 B."

"Thanks, Mike."

I parked the heap around the corner from the Crescent Apartments. It was a red brick pile, semi-Georgian, semi-exclusive. There were three front entrances, each one serving a dozen apartments. 6 B was served by the middle entrance.

I leaned on the bell under the name card which said "A. Martin." I leaned until I began to get a cramp in my thumb. The bronze funnel-mouth of a speaking tube was just over the card. There was a faint click from the tube and a sleepy voice said, "Who the hell is it?"

"It's your pretty friend, the one called cutie. Remember me?"

"Come back in five hours, cutie."

"Uh-uh. Now."

"What do you want?"

"Private business."

I heard her yawn. The front door made a buzzing sound. I pushed it open, stepped into one of the two little self-service elevators and piloted it up to two. 6 B was diagonally across from the elevator.

She opened as soon as I knocked. The shades in the apartment were drawn, but enough light came in to show me that she wasn't at her best. Her face was streaked and puffy, her lips dry and harsh, her dark hair rumped. She wore a dark blue robe and had her hands jammed deep in the pockets. A cigarette bobbed in the corner of her mouth and she squinted through the smoke as she said, "This better not be a gag, cutie."

"I'm not very funny in the morning, Alice."

She yawned and sat down heavily, slumping in the chair. "Get it over and go, Beven."

I felt awkward, not knowing exactly how to go about it. "Alice, you know and I know and a third party knows that you were not the gal I first talked to in the club."

Her eyes widened a trifle. Her control was good. "You're sort of stuck on that story, cutie. I told you that you were a little drunk that first night. Maybe I looked good to you."

"Maybe you still do."

"Flattery will get you no place. I *know* how I look at this hour of the day."

"I have a very good reason for wanting to locate the girl I first saw out there."

"Here I am."

"Drop it, Alice. I'm not that stupid. You must have had a very good reason for making a switch of cigarette girls on that particular night. I checked through the newspapers. At just about the time I was there, a man named Arthur Jalts was killed in his room in a midtown hotel. The paper said that Jalts at one time was a partner of Sinzi until Sinzi bought him out. You work for Sinzi. The odds are that you knew Jalts. Maybe you were there. Maybe you're the one who used the knife on him."

She took the cigarette out of her mouth with great care and inspected the end of it which glowed red in the darkened room. "You shouldn't go around with these deep thoughts, cutie," she said.

"Once I get them I can't give them up. Sinzi must have had a reason for telling a little fib. A pretty good reason. Maybe Lucy Dugan knew it was a fib. Maybe Lucy was browned off at the boss. Maybe she would have talked out of turn. It's hard to tell about these things."

Alice stood up with an easy, graceful motion. She leaned over and stubbed out the cigarette. Her hand was steady. "All the time," she said, "I got to run into people like you. Like flies in the summer, I get them. Go away, cutie. I need my sleep."

"Sure, I'll go away. I'm going right down to headquarters and see my pal Brad Newlove who takes an interest in these things. I'm going to give it to him like a riddle. He sticks to this kind of problem harder than I do."

I stood up when she came over to my chair. She came close, as she had done before. Very close. She hooked her fingers in the side pockets of my jacket and looked up into my eyes.

"Cutie," she said, "you got a job and a girl. You look like a nice smart boy. Someday you'll be a bigshot executive and then if you want to play rough, you got the dough to back yourself. But you can't play rough right now. This isn't a table-stakes game. We got a lot of reserves." She lowered her voice. "You get fancy with us and you and that bratty girlfriend of yours will have the city editors of all three papers wishing they had bigger type for the headlines."

The smile felt stiff on my lips. She was very convincing. "This is a threat?"

Her arms slid around my waist, but she still looked up at me. I suddenly saw that her eyes were as warm as winter light on broken steel. "I like you, cutie. I wouldn't threaten you. This is just lesson *numero uno*. If you haven't got the stakes, you can't play. Now go away and play with nice people and stay damp behind those pretty ears."

"And if I don't?" I asked.

She let go quickly and turned away. "Okay, Jack," she said quietly.

I didn't get it for a moment. Thick in the head. His footstep made a small brushing noise against the pile of the rug. I turned just in time to catch the bony fist of Mr. Jack Sinzi flush in the mouth. It was incredible that such a precise looking individual should know how to swing a punch. His glasses still glistened in the light. It angered me to think that he didn't even bother to take them off.

The blow knocked me back across a chair. I landed on my hands and knees and as I tried to scramble up, he kicked me full in the ribs. Something cracked and my breath went out with a noise like that cigarette ad.

I tried it again. As he came close, I grabbed for his legs and the world turned into a dark whirling pool of nausea as his knee flattened my nose. He kicked me again, but he might as well have been kicking the wall. My nose was making such a fuss that I couldn't feel pain anywhere else.

A LARGE sheep dog was licking my face. That didn't seem quite right. I opened my eyes and saw that Alice was bending over me, swabbing me off with a large wet towel. It was making a bloody mess of the towel.

Jack Sinzi stood behind her. He said in his dry tone, "Another move out of you that we don't like, Mr. Bevren, and we'll bring this little affair up. You got into this apartment under false pretenses and then attacked Miss Martin. Fortunately, I was here. Better go get that nose taken care of. It can cause a lot of trouble."

I sat up. My eyes watered and my throat was full of acid. Each breath gave me a pain like a knife in my side. They looked down at me, their faces cool and matter of fact. It made me feel like a child caught breaking windows. It made me mad. I wanted to weep with anger that had no outlet.

She took my hand and heaved and I got up onto knees from which somebody had removed the bones. They acted like your ankles do when you first try to ice skate.

I squinted through tears of pain and saw the couch. I made one weak step toward it, spun in the air and dropped into it.

"Oh, come now," Sinzi said. "Pull

yourself together and get out of here.”

“Buck up, cutie,” Alice said gently.

I tried to grin. “Don’t rush me,” I said. Beside the couch was an end table. On the end table was a glass ashtray that looked as if it would go two pounds. “Help me up,” I said, holding a hand out toward Sinzi.

He hesitated a moment, then sneered and grasped my hand, pulled hard. I helped him along. I came up out of the couch with the ashtray in my other hand and I smashed it edge first against his upper lip. It made a noise like somebody sitting on a box of corn flakes. He went down, his hand slipping out of mine as Alice Martin hit me with nails and teeth and a high, shrill yell. I backhanded her across the eyes, knocked her down and dropped onto Sinzi. Somewhere I had lost my ashtray. I knelt on his chest and, sobbing like a fool, used my two fists like hammers, smashing his face. The room spun and darkened.

Somebody was pulling at my arm, pulling me away. I felt over backward and then struggled up to my knees. Alice Martin was dead white. She had pulled me off.

“You’ve killed him!” she said.

I looked stupidly at Sinzi. He wasn’t dead. Each time he exhaled, a little bubble of blood grew in the corner of his mouth and broke with a little “pock” sound. I was as weak as a starved kitten. If you have ever experienced murderous rage, you know what I mean. It takes every bit of strength out of you.

“He’s not dead,” I said stupidly. The shards of splintered glass made a pattern of silver and red on his gray cheeks.

“Then you better hope he will be,” she said.

Suddenly I had to get out of there. I was suffocating in the darkened room. I blundered toward the door and when she caught at my arm, I pushed her away. My breathing was loud in my ears as I rode down in the little plush elevator. I got a glimpse of my battered face reflected in the glass of the coupe door. It was somebody else’s face. It couldn’t possibly be mine.

The nurse took one startled look at my face and edged me in ahead of the people in the waiting room. They looked also, and made no objection.

Doc Rausch pursed his lips and said, “Ran into a door, I assume. Lie down here after you get your shirt off.”

Forty minutes later, after he had grated the bones in my nose back into place and slapped adhesive across it, taken two stitches on the inside of my lower lip and taped my rib and given me a sedative, he told me to go home and go to bed before I fell down.

Instead of going home, I went to see Brad. I found him in a golden oak office twice the size of a phone booth. His desk was littered with papers and the little room was blue-gray with smoke.

Brad is a rangy guy with an expression which says he just bit into something sour. His cropped black hair is like a skullcap on his lean head. The skin around his nose is deeply pitted from juvenile acne.

He looked at me calmly. “Hmmm. She was rough, hey?”

“Her pal was.”

“People come to see me, Rich, when they’ve got troubles and want somebody creamed or want a good word put in with the lieutenant.”

“Brad, what happened to the Jalts’ case?”

“Happened to it? It’s only, let me see, the night before last that *Señor* Jalts left this happy clime. We got to keep the boys employed. Even if we knew who it was, it would look too easy if we let it out now.”

“I’m serious Brad. It’s eleven o’clock in the morning and I don’t joke until six at night. I want to know if the force is stopped or if there are plenty of leads.”

He frowned, leaned back, pulled a single cigarette out of his vest pocket and lit it. “Normally I wouldn’t know, but this morning Regan was in weeping on my shoulder about it. Jalts had a suite on the eighth floor of the Blair House. He lived alone. Sometime between ten and eleven he caught a knife in the ribs. The elevator boys all have blank minds. Nobody remembers anything.”

“What is going on right now?”

“We’re checking the alibis of everybody who’s been connected with him for the past five years. If we don’t get anyplace, we’ll go back another five years. This is a dull business, friend.”

"How about Sinzi? Jack Sinzi? Jalts used to be a partner in the Crazy Mabel. Sinzi seems to make money at it. Was he checked?"

Brad scratched his lean jaw. "Look, Rich. You got a good reason for asking?"

"A very good reason."

"Then I'll check with Regan." He picked up the phone, dialed an extension number and waited a few moments. "Dick? This is Brad. Did you people check Sinzi in connection with the Jalts business? What! Yeah. I see. Sure thing. Thanks."

He hung up, leaned in his chair until it creaked and stared at the ceiling. The long ash dropped from his cigarette into his lap. He put his head a little on one side like an inquisitive puppy and looked at me.

"Rich," he said. "Was Sinzi the guy who got rough?"

"Extremely. And I would have bet ten to one I could lick him."

"Sinzi was a good middleweight twenty years ago. But you say he licked you?"

"At first. With the help of an ashtray and some animal cunning, I messed him up a little. Why?"

"Homicide has sent a squad out to the Crescent Apartments. There is a dish there called Alice Martin who says you slightly killed Sinzi. Anyway, he's cooling fast. Somebody made pudding out of the back of his cute little head."

CHAPTER THREE

Eternal Booby-Trap

I WAS frozen to the chair. Everything in the world dropped into slow motion. The smoke from Brad's cigarette rose with painful slowness. "What do you know?" I said lightly. It didn't come out lightly. It sounded more like a scream the way it came out.

"Did you or didn't you, boy?" Brad asked with a coolness I had never seen before.

"I might have killed him but the girl pulled me off him. I hit him in the front of the head where his face was—not on the back like you say."

"They're looking for you all over town." I giggled inanely. "And here I sit in

headquarters—right in the lion's den."

"Yeah, funny," he said absently.

I caught his tone. "Look Brad," I said with painful clarity "Would I come here like this if I killed him? Would I?"

He stared at a spot two feet over my head. "You're not stupid, Rich. It might be just the sort of angle you'd figure. You were after the lassy and found Sinzi in her place and you brawled and in the brawl you knocked him off. It fits good."

"Except that I wasn't interested in the lassy. For my dough, she looks terrible in the morning. Okay, I was there. I hit him. But I didn't kill him."

To my amazement, he said, "No, I don't think you did. Give me all of it. Every last piece. Homicide won't like this at all. Go ahead."

I gave it all to him. Vaccination and all. The longer I talked the more wrinkles he got in his forehead.

When I was entirely through he said, "Oh, that's just dandy!" He picked up the phone. "Dick? Brad again. Fella, I got Bevren here in my office. Did the woman's story get to the press yet? Good! Tell your boss it would be a good idea to keep it quiet for a little while. No damn it. Listen, I know the guy.

"Yes, I'm going to bat for him. Yes, I'm responsible. What do you want? Blood? You want to look good, don't you? Pick up the Martin woman and bring her here to my office. I won't let Bevren out of the building. Yes, I've got an idea. Don't you trust me, you block-headed hound? See you."

He hung up and wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. He pointed a lean finger at me and said, "No matter what I say, just keep your mouth shut. All you got to do is grin a little bit once in a while and look confident. You got it?"

Before I could answer, the door banged open and Alice Martin came in, a stocky redheaded man right behind her.

She pointed a shaking finger at me and went into her act. "That's the man! That's him! I saw him do it! Can I go now?"

"Sit down over there and shut up!" Brad said. She did as she was told. She wasn't wearing a scrap of makeup, and she was wearing her hair down around her shoulders, making her look ethereal.

Dick Regan leaned against the door, looking sleepy and wise. Brad fiddled with the papers on his desk and let the silence grow. The little room tightened up with it. The gray smoke hung motionless. Alice Martin changed position and looked nervously at her fingernails. Twice she glanced at me and I gave her a careful and confident smile.

Brad looked at her. "Alice," he said, "you look like a smart woman. I could use a lot of psychology on you. I could mix up my questions and try to confuse you. In fact, I was going to do just that. But after getting a look at you, I don't think it would work. I think my best bet is just to lay my cards on the table."

He picked up a stack of papers, took the top one and put it carefully on the corner of the desk. "All these are sworn statements, Alice. This top one is by the man behind the magazine desk at the Blair House. He saw a woman answering your description heading for the elevators the night Arthur Jalts was knifed. Here is testimony by the elevator operator. This next one is by someone you thought was a friend of yours. It tells of a pretty intimate friendship between you and Jalts some time ago."

"I was on duty when Art Jalts was killed," she snapped.

"That's the rub, Alice. This next statement is by Miss Constance Ballow. She swears that another girl took your place that night. So does Mr. Bevren here. I have his statement. It makes a pretty tough situation, you know."

"I was there that night. This—person is mistaken. So is his silly girl friend. I remember exactly what he said to me that night."

"This next statement is by one of the waiters at the Crazy Mabel. He says you weren't there that night. Now the girl who took your place could have reported to you just what Mr. Bevren said."

"I was there that night. I know I was there. This is all very silly," she said coldly.

Brad sighed heavily. "I was afraid you'd be stubborn, Alice. We're your friends. Maybe you had a good reason. You see the girl who took your place was picked up ten minutes ago."

"But she—" The office was very still.

Alice put her palm across her mouth and then slowly took it away. She cursed. "That I should fall for a dusty old gag like that!"

"Your sister is a very lovely person, Alice."

Alice's eyes widened. "So you did find her? She's my half sister. How the hell did you do that? She had that hair of hers dyed bright yellow by three A. M. that night. What did the damn fool do? Try to leave town?"

"No, she gave herself up, Alice. Her conscience bothered her. You see, you asked her to do you that favor without telling her that it was to provide you with a clumsy excuse while you went and killed Jalts."

Alice straightened her shoulders. Her lips were scornful. "Okay, so I killed him. He set up the deal at the Crazy Mabel. Distribution. Jack Sinzi packaged the stuff in the back end of cigarette packages and then I made the contacts when the floor show was on. The deal was five hundred bucks for the special packages I kept in the back of the rack.

"Jalts got scared and Sinzi bought him out. I went along with the sale. I was married to Jalts. Once he got his nerve back, he used his knowledge of the way we operated to knock us down for a percentage. Jack got tired of it. When Della showed up, it was perfect."

"And Sinzi too?"

"I could see as soon as Jalts was out of the way, Jack was going to get tired of me. He could ease me out by threatening to spill what he knew of my knifing Jalts. Besides—I think it made Jack feel funny. You know. I think he thought of me with the knife. That sort of thing."

She had a puzzled look on her face. Something about the tone of her voice made me feel sick.

She sighed and continued. "Then this punk here has to recognize Della. He was trying to make trouble about Lucy Dugan because Jack ran her down when she started asking questions. This guy beat up Jack and left with Jack on the floor. It looked perfect. After a half hour, Jack was beginning to moan. I walked around thinking how perfect it was. I could take over the Crazy Mabel deal. This wise punk

would be the murderer. When Jack rolled over and got up on his hands and knees, I swatted him a good one with the ash tray, making sure not to smear up Bevern's prints."

Her face had new lines in it. She turned to me, said in a hoarse voice, "You lucked out, cutie. Kiss that sappy little doll of yours good tonight and tell her what a smart guy you are."

Brad bent over his half-open desk drawer and said, "You get everything all right, Pink?"

A metallic voice clipped back, "Yes. I got it."

"Type it up pretty and the lady'll sign it." Brad sighed and clicked a switch that I hadn't heard click on.

"Keep her company, Dick," he said, and stood up. I walked out into the hall with him. He looked tired.

"I could have been a bum, you know," he said.

"How do I say thank you for a deal like this, Brad?"

"You don't. I was afraid she'd see through the bluff on those statements I said I had."

I laughed. "I knew they were fakes, but you nearly had me convinced. Say, could I see Della for a minute?"

He stared at me, and then the lines around his mouth cracked into a wide grin.

"Why don't you walk out into the woods and let the birds cover you with leaves, Richard? I figure the babe looks like her, maybe she is a sister. I trap her into the first slip and then I can risk the sister line. She falls good. In a little while we'll no doubt find out where to pick up the sister."

"Are they all this easy?"

His grin faded. He looked at me soberly. "And you think it was easy to do that to—even a woman like that?"

"But I—"

That cold, unfamiliar look was back in his eyes.

"Go on home, will you, Rich?" he said. "Come back tomorrow and sign papers. Come at ten and this Della will be here. Maybe we can keep her out of it, if you want it that way. We'll try."

He turned and walked off down the

hall. I walked out into the afternoon sunshine. I went to the nearest phone booth and called Conny.

"Just get up, darling?" I asked when she answered.

She giggled. "You're psychic, Rich. How did you know I'd go right back to sleep?"

"I wanted to tell you something, Conny. You know that girl that . . . well, the one without the vaccination? Remember? Well I just—"

"Rich, have you seen her this morning?"

"Yes, I went—"

Click! Dead line.

Angrily I fished in my pocket for another nickel. That little so-and-so was hanging up on me too often. I found the nickle and dropped it in the slot and listened to the dial tone, my finger wedged in the first digit of Conny's number, ready to dial.

But suddenly I didn't want to dial her. I didn't want to hear her spoiled, petulant voice, combat her eternal jealousy. Sure, she danced well and smelled pretty and kissed with enthusiasm. So do forty million other American women. How many of those women could hear of that Lucy getting run over, hang up on their intended, and then roll over and go back to sleep?

I thought of a pair of gray eyes, very level, and suddenly afraid. I thought of a long-gone voice reading me fragments of letters.

I moved my finger down to the zero and dialed it.

"Operator," an impersonal voice said in my ear.

"Look," I said, "I was about to change from a man into a doormat and I changed my mind. You've still got my nickel. May I have it back?"

"Just one mo-moment and I will re-turn your nickel."

Somehow that nickel made a very happy little sound when it clattered back down the chute to where I could hook it out with my finger.

I headed back toward headquarters. Maybe Brad would let me go along when they went after Della. She'd need somebody on her side. Especially now.

THE END

Gentleman's Vengeance

(Continued from page 49)

what they were able to find out about the mate made them wonder how he'd managed to live so long. At least two governments, and innumerable local authorities, would have paid rewards for him.

Two weeks later Monaghan and I had lunch, and we talked a little about people with long memories.

I said, "Look, Jack. What did you really think Flores would do when you agreed to go with him?"

He looked at me and shook his head. "I don't know. I guess the truth is that I didn't let myself think about that too much. I guess that's it." And we were both glad to let it go at that.

And then Monaghan told me. He leaned forward and smiled, and his eyes looked past me and beyond. "You know that young officer in the photograph, Dick."

"Yes. Of course."

He kept on looking past me. "It wasn't Fred, Dick. It wasn't anyone I'd ever seen. Whoever told Flores that was mistaken. It wasn't at all like Fred."

I didn't say anything.

"But you see, Dick," he went on. "It might have been. It was just as terrible as if it had been Fred. Because it might have happened just that way."

We heard from Flores once. It was a postcard, addressed to Monaghan, and postmarked Manila. It was written in a beautiful, flowing hand—the kind you learn in schools which take pride in old-fashioned standards of penmanship.

"There is much to be done here," the message went. "There is more than anyone can ever do. But one does all one can. One hopes to live to do everything that is possible." It was signed "A.F."



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Paula Elliott

(Continued from page 66)

was too much for one woman to lose.

She stirred at the sound of his footsteps. "It's over, Kim?"

"All over," he said. He hunched down beside her, playing with a stick. Dear Lord, if only she could cry. . . .

She said tightly: "You were right, Kim, about—everything?"

"Yes, Adele. Marlin spilled the whole thing before he died. Whitney was the brains. He started off shipping the stuff in his foreign editions. Then Jacques came along with *Lifeline*."

He hesitated, added awkwardly: "His name doesn't have to be brought into it, Adele. They've agreed to prosecute on the basis of Whitney's books and keep *Lifeline* out of it. I thought it might help to know."

She nodded without speaking.

He knelt beside her, seized her shoulders. "Listen, Adele," he said, "I know it's rough. It wasn't easy for me to go after you, either, when I thought—But that's war, Adele, and the war's not over. Will never be over until the peace is finally won—once and for all—

"I'm saying this badly, Adele. What I'm trying to say is that you did what you had to—and you did right."

She smiled crookedly. "Sure, Kim. Sure I did right. They ought to give me a medal—"

He shook her hard. "Let it go, Adele," he said roughly, "let it go!"

She stared at him a minute, and then the dam burst and she crumpled against him, sobbing. Boden held her tight and stroked her hair and murmured meaningless phrases until it was all over. Then he set her back on her feet and grinned at her in relief.

"All right now, kid?" he asked. "No hard feelings?"

She stared at him incredulously for a minute and then, suddenly, she burst out laughing. "No hard feelings! Kim, you big jerk!" •

A kiss that's all tangled up with laughter and tears may not be the most technically perfect one, but off-hand, Boden couldn't think of any other he'd be willing to settle for.

THE END

Ready for the Rackets

(Continued from page 81)

sign in the window reading, *New Cigarette Lighters—35c apiece*. Needing a lighter, I bought two, one to give to my wife. The lighters were wrapped in cardboard with cellophane around the outside. I was told that they were factory seconds and in good working condition.

When I arrived home, I opened the boxes and found my two cigarette lighters to be eight boxes of penny matches!

I took them back, but no one knew the clerk who sold them to me and the sign had been removed. This sure taught me a lesson. Now I look at everything I buy,

Sylvester Downs
St. Louis, Mo.

Swindle or Swim

Dear Sir:

As I was passing through Louisiana last summer, I ran across a clever swindle.

There was a large lake about eight miles square with an island in the middle. At a small dock was a sign saying, *Free Boat Rides to Rock Island*. Naturally I was interested, so I stepped into the small motor boat with a few other people. A large, husky man started the motor and we were on our way.

About five minutes later we stepped out on the island to look around. The first thing I noticed was that the man had the boat back on the water.

In order to get back to shore, we had to pay him ten dollars each. My advice is to never take a free boat ride for just one way.

Cecil E. Hollamon
Mercer, Tenn.

Three Men and a Wallet

Dear Sir:

I was making a bus trip during the war, and it was a long, hot, dusty trip. We were riding along in the country when a man in uniform stepped up to talk to the driver. After a few moments, the driver stopped the bus, got out of his seat and addressed the passengers. He said the serviceman's wallet had been taken while he was asleep.

The bus was searched, but no wallet appeared. The driver said he was not going to move until something was done about it. Everyone was hot and tired and anxious to get going, so when a man in civilian clothes suggested they pass the hat and try to make up the serviceman's loss, everyone agreed. I donated a dollar, and I know everyone gave as much if not more. The serviceman got off two stops later, after thanking us.

Several months later, I read in the paper that this racket had been exposed. The bus driver, the so-called serviceman, and the civilian who suggested passing the hat had been working together and doing quite well.

Mrs. Jane Bremer
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Ready for the Rackets

Pump-Priming De Luxe

Dear Sir:

A truck with a large pumping apparatus on it pulled up to the door of one of my prosperous neighbors. The driver said he was sent out by the health department to pump out septic tanks, at a cost of \$25 per ton. Being a good, law-abiding citizen, the farmer let the man go ahead.

The man pumped out seven tons. When the farmer went to write a check for \$175, the man said: "Can't you pay me in cash?"

The farmer didn't have that much cash on hand, so he gave his check.

When the farmer's son was told of the transaction, he became suspicious and phoned the sheriff, giving him the name the check was made out to. The sheriff sent his deputy to a local hotel and found a name on the register to correspond with the one on the check. The man gave the check back as bond and promised to appear in court the next morning. But no one ever saw or heard of him again.

Needless to say, the man did not represent the health department, which makes no charge for any work it does.

Mrs. A. W. Hudson
 Ruffin, S. C.

Whoops, So Sorry!

Dear Sir:

During the war, my husband and I were fortunate enough to rent an apartment in a crowded seaport town. When we signed the lease, we were required to make a "deposit" of ten dollars, which was to be refunded when we moved from the apartment. There were approximately one thousand units in the settlement, and, of course, the rent was exorbitant.

A week or so after we left the apartment, we received a check for five dollars, which was marked as the refund of our deposit. We returned the check with a reminder that our deposit was in the amount of ten dollars, all of which was to have been refunded as stated in the lease. Within a few days we received a new check with an apology.

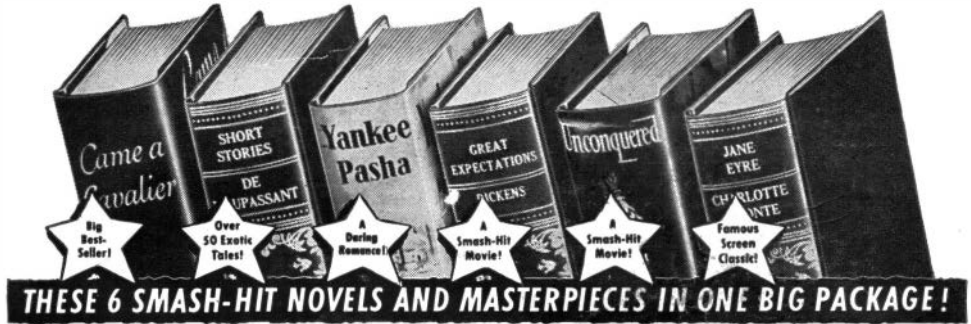
We thought no more about the incident until we had a get-together with a group of our friends who had been our neighbors and who had since moved from the settlement as we had. In the course of conversation, we mentioned the affair and discovered that each of our friends had also received a refund of only five dollars, but had merely accepted it with no questions asked. On further checking, we discovered that everyone who moved from the apartments received a refund of half the amount of the deposit. Some of them had caught the "error," and some had not.

It was quite a neat little racket. With a thousand units and the high turnover the apartments had during the war, five dollars on every apartment surely must have built up a tidy little profit for someone.

Lucy McDonough Powell
 Richmond, Va.

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