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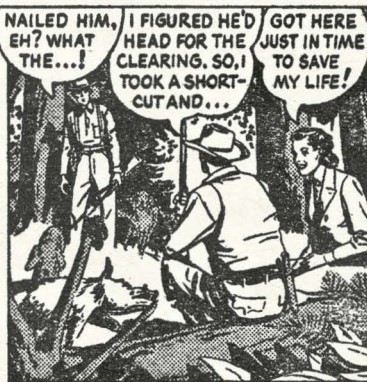


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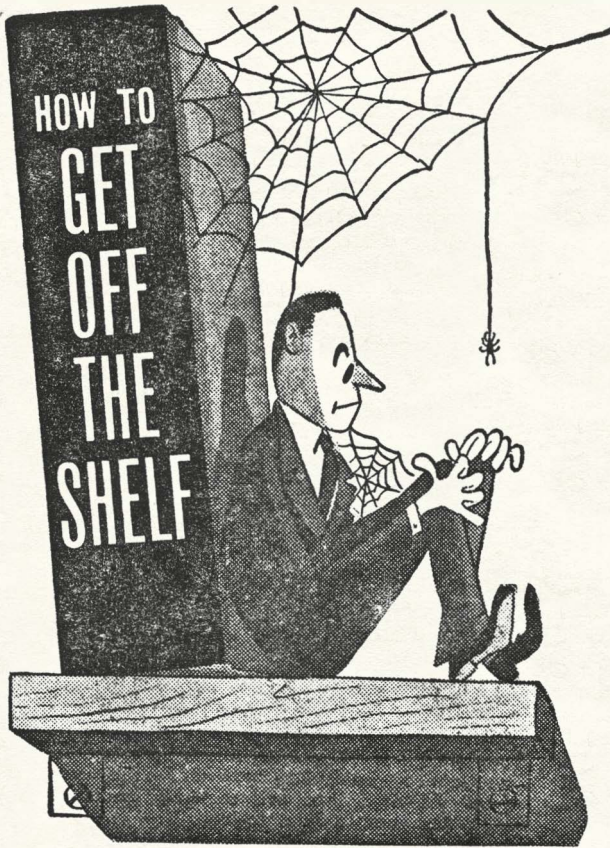
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The February issue will be out December 31st

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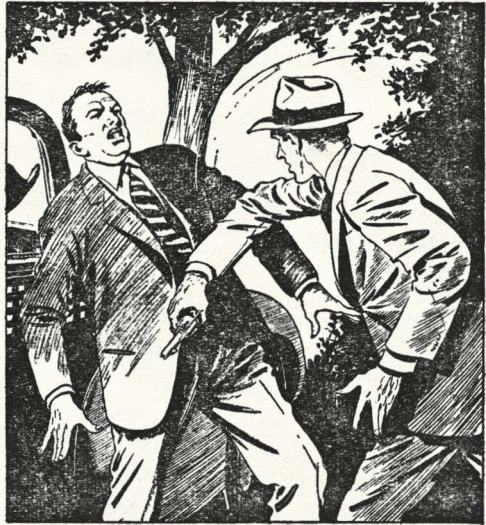
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The medic gave me a hypodermic before I went into the morgue, where Innes said that the stiff would have died of cholera—if some gungels hadn't pumped slugs into him.



To avoid a horrible plague, it was up to me to find the men who'd killed Sanchez. At the shore where the dead man had secretly landed, I knocked a gunman into yapping.



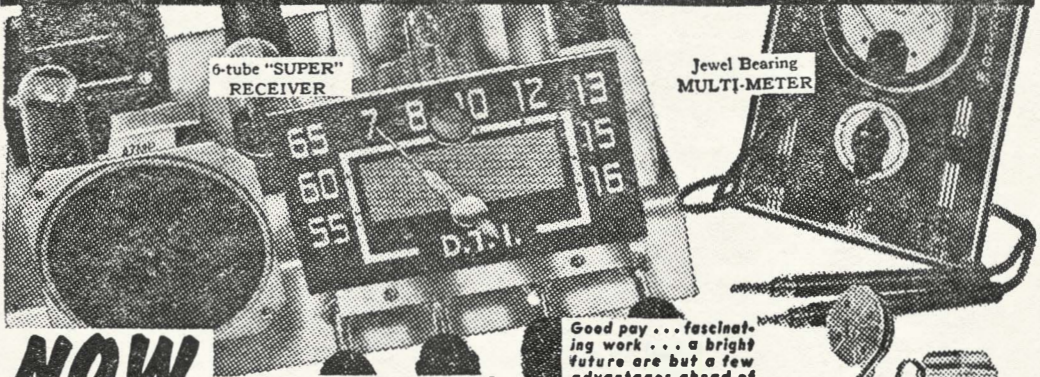
He led the Immigration men and me to the boat Sanchez had been on. Everybody got a shot of serum, while I started searching again, on the East side—with a nifty nurse in tow.



Our hunt landed the nurse and me in the cholera-infected killers' hands. . . . The complete story will be told in Andrew Holt's novel—"Some Like 'Em Cold,"—in the February issue . . .

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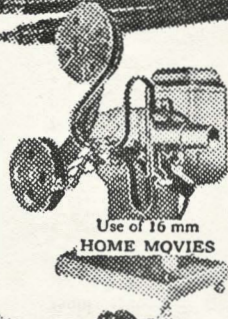
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THE CORPSE AND I

*... would be brothers under the soil . . . unless
I was front-page killer Duke, with a blonde in my
heart—and blood on my hands.*



**Blitz-Paced
Murder
Novel**

By PETER PAIGE



She giggled—and my finger jerked convulsively on the trigger. . . .

CHAPTER ONE

Quick Burn

MY CLIMB up the side of the cliff attracted no particular notice, because dozens of other men were climbing up and down that cliff in the darkness. When I reached the top and leaned against a road sign that said: *Dangerous Curve*, a man standing nearby

asked: "Look as bad down there as it does up here?"

Looking down to the foot of the cliff, I could see tiny flames still struggling against the fire extinguishers playing on what had been an automobile. Fire-glow danced on the circle of faces about the wreck. Beyond them the ocean was a cascade of fluorescent foam leaping over rocks.

I glanced at my interrogator; a state patrolman.

"Just as bad," I nodded, groping in my jacket pocket for a cigarette. Instead of the familiar paper package there was

something hard with a vaguely familiar outline. Instinct prompted me to leave it in the pocket. I gestured toward the sun-dered cables in the guard rail further along the cliff-top and the steep, curving grade beyond. "You would think a driver would exercise rudimentary caution descending that hill." I said.

"Probably tried," the state patrolman frowned, "although if he braked, there's no skid mark. Anything left of him?"

"Pieces," I said.

The patrolman peered into my face. "You look a little banged up yourself, mister."

"I descended the cliff in a hurry," I told him truthfully.

"But nothing you could do to help?"

"Nothing but look."

He drifted away and I removed the hard object from my pocket. A loaded pistol clip, probably from an automatic. I returned it to the pocket, a leather pocket on a leather jacket. None of it seemed familiar in one sense—in another it was all familiar; pistol clip, pocket and jacket.

I could not at the moment understand why I had not told that patrolman more—or, better still, ask him the obvious questions. Such as: was that ocean extending past the breakers the Atlantic or Pacific?

My face did feel stiff and sore. A numbness seemed to be leaving my body and exposing odd aches and pains. My right leg moved stiffly and my right hip was tender to the touch. All of my ribs felt bruised. My fingers were caked with grime—and what may have been dried blood.

Nobody seemed to be paying me any attention. The fire was out below and a huddle of men were carrying something in a tarpaulin to the foot of the cliff. I explored the remaining pockets; found a folded letter, a handkerchief, a book of matches, a tobacco pouch but no pipe, a wallet and some keys on a small chain. There was a lone nickel in the change pocket.

I crossed the road and stood between two parked trucks. About a dozen trucks were parked there. It was from these the fire extinguishers had come. State patrolmen were keeping all other traffic moving, although they couldn't cope with the tendency of each driver to slow down as

his car came abreast of the torn cables.

I read the letter in headlight glare. Addressed to Mr. C. J. Smith. Definitely a familiar name. The question was, *how* familiar? This Mr. Smith lived in New York City, but the postmark read: Pacific City, California—which still didn't help me identify the ocean.

The text was brief:

Duke,

Trig said you'd qualify. We need an out-of-town man for the job. 1011 Pacific Street, in Pacific City. Ask for Rory. It's worth ten G's.

There was no signature, but that didn't seem important. What seemed important was that "Duke" sounded familiar, "Rory" and "Pacific City" were not only familiar—it seemed vital for me to meet Rory in Pacific City as soon as possible.

I had to ask three truck drivers before I found one who would take a rider. He appeared carrying a fire extinguisher, a grayed man in blue denims. He spat out a gob of tobacco and asked: "Where?"

"Pacific City," I told him.

"How come you're loose out here?"

"The man who brought me this far stopped to see what had happened, then drove off before I could re-climb the cliff." I was both amazed and amused at the facility with which I told this lie.

"You go down?"

"There seemed to be nothing I could do to help."

"Not unless you was hungry," the driver grunted. "What I mean, that fella was *cooked!* Okay, mister. I don't make a habit of it, but if you could crawl that cliff to help a stranger, I can give you a lift. Hop in."

Which settled one question. The ocean was the Pacific, which made this U. S. 101 and, since we were heading north, it meant Los Angeles was behind us.

IT WAS a two-hour drive. We parked on a side street in Pacific City. I brought forth my wallet in order to pay the man, but the wallet seemed to be empty. I glanced at my benefactor with a feeling of consternation which grew as he extracted his own wallet and shoved a bill toward me. I realized he assumed I had made a bid for a "hand-out."

In my embarrassment, I was probably rude to him. I waved aside the bill, mumbled my thanks and hastily left his cab.

I walked several blocks, conscious of the flush that heated my cheeks. The wallet was still in my hand. I paused under a street lamp to examine it. There was a draft card made out to Cecil Jonathan Smith and several cards of New York bars. There was a snapshot of a rather sultry looking blonde woman, on the lower right hand corner of which was inscribed: *To my Duke—Kit.*

I returned the wallet to my pocket and felt again the urgency to meet with "Rory". Feeling also that I knew exactly where to go in order to find him, I walked in the direction I somehow knew would bring me to Pacific Street, the city's main thoroughfare.

RORY'S INN winked at me in green and orange from amid all the other neon signs on Pacific Street. I entered through the hanging bamboo rods that filled the doorway and found myself in a synthetic South Sea atmosphere. False palms and a few hula murals and some scattered cocoanuts contributed to the atmosphere. For the rest, it was an ordinary bar, a bit more chrome and polish showing than in most, but the usual cluster of tables around a dance floor, a horseshoe bar to the left and a circular dais in the rear on which stood an upright piano and a microphone. A sign on the wall said: *Dancing after nine.*

Half of the tables were occupied. The bar was full to capacity. A large man with a broken nose appeared before me as I started toward the bar.

"Not in here, Joe," he told me, barely moving his lips. "You're overmatched in here, Joe." He gripped my elbow and attempted to urge me back toward the street. I remained motionless.

"Are you attempting to imply my patronage is undesirable?" I frowned at him.

"The language qualifies, Joe," he grinned good naturedly. "The duds is strictly Skid Row."

"My object is not to patronize your bar," I said, continuing to resist his pressure on my elbow. "I wish merely to communicate with Rory."

"Some other time, Joe," the man

scowled, growing impatient. "Let's not get physical, willya, Joe? You ain't equipped for it."

"Will you at least tell Rory that Mr. Cecil Jonathan Smith asked for him?" I demanded.

My erstwhile bouncer released my elbow as if it had acquired teeth that snapped at him.

"Duke?" he whispered.

"That should suffice," I nodded, reaching toward my pocket for the letter. My gesture seemed to unsettle the man.

"Don't, Duke!" he croaked, pushing his large palms toward the pocket. Perspiration had appeared on his face. He seemed to have difficulty swallowing his Adam's apple. "Mistakes can be made," he croaked.

"True," I nodded.

He wiped his face with a handkerchief. "Okay, Duke. I always heard you was a right guy. Ask Rory McGuire if I didn't say you was tops."

"Splendid." I smiled at the man. "Now shall we see Rory?"

He glanced uncertainly toward my pocket. "Sure. Right away, Duke. You'll make like it never happened, hey, Duke?"

"The unpleasantness is already forgotten," I assured him. He seemed greatly relieved as he led me past the dais and through a door behind it. We mounted stairs to a door on which my guide rapped gently.

"Who is it?" a deep voice boomed from within.

"Monk," my guide replied. "With you-know-who, boss."

"Come in."

Monk flung open the door and grandly announced: "Rory, meet the Duke!"

The man behind the desk snapped: "Shut that door, you oaf!"

Monk hastily closed the door behind us and I advanced to the desk. "Rory McGuire?"

He was studying my face intently. His eyes shuttled between what seemed to be a photograph on his desk and my face. He was a redheaded man with a stub of a nose amid a vast number of freckles. He had a wide, but tightly held, mouth. Mainly, I was taken by Rory McGuire's eyes. They were black, fathomless and disconcertingly direct.

"You certainly take chances," he said tonelessly.

"Don't we all—at one time or another?" I smiled at him.

He failed to return my smile. "Trig's in Tia Juana."

"Good for Trig." I shrugged.

"Did you have to blast that bookie in Times Square?" A dab of curiosity and a dab of anger had entered his voice.

"Will you repeat that—in English?" I requested.

He threw his head back and roared with laughter. When it subsided, he shook his smiling face from side to side and said, "You're just how Trig said you'd be."

"Good for Trig," I said again.

"Bob Ainslee's my mouthpiece," Rory McGuire said, nodding toward the small, elaborately dressed, elderly man who sat in a chair tilted against the wall to my right and regarded me through gold-rimmed glasses. We exchanged nods. "You-know-who, you've met," Rory gestured toward Monk, who flushed.

"That bookie business was bad, Duke," Rory frowned, losing his good humor. "Frankly, I never thought you could cross the country without being picked up. Even if you got here, I didn't know how long you could circulate. It'll be even harder since you got mixed up with that joker who ran his heap off the Oceanville cliff tonight. What's the matter, Duke?"

I was gaping at the man. "You already know about that?"

"Me and the rest of California." He pointed to the small radio on a wall shelf over the attorney, Ainslee's, head. "It was on just before you came up. They found your prints on the car. With your prints on file in every jerkwater drop in the country, it was a quick match. Your prints and your .32." He almost smiled again. "You probably feel naked without it."

I FELT suddenly sick and dizzy, with or without it. Sort of a delayed shock reaction. Several Rory McGuires seemed to be rising from several desks simultaneously. I closed my eyes and felt myself sway, causing me to reach behind me for a chair. There was no chair. I looked behind me for one and saw several blonde women standing just inside several doorways with

the backs of their wrists clamped against their teeth.

"Hold it, Duke! I can explain!" Rory McGuire inexplicably called out from behind me. I had the impression there was a lot of sudden tension in that office.

And the blonde—as I gaped, the figures had merged into one—was crying: "It isn't Rory's fault, Duke. I saw Trig in Frisco and followed him here. If you'd only give me a chance to explain about Victor—"

Blonde, with a pert face featuring large eyes swimming in tears now. The smart tailoring of her powder blue suit couldn't tame the curved liteness of her. She seemed in the grip of a deep emotional tide.

"Anything that can be explained can be forgiven," I said gently, my dizziness evaporating before my interest in the appearance of this girl—and in the fact that I seemed to recognize her. "At this moment, I blame nobody in the world for anything," I told her truthfully—then gasped as she flung her liteness against me and circled my neck with her arms and buried her face in my chest and sobbed: "Oh, Duke, darling! It's been so long!"

Over my shoulder I caught Rory McGuire enacting an inexplicable pantomime. His lower lip was out-thrust. With two fingers he wiped imaginary perspiration off his brow, brightly eyeing the elderly attorney as he so did. He met my astonished gaze and forsook the pantomime for a broad grin. I gently forced the girl away from me and, in the act, remembered where I had seen her picture.

"The clarification of our relationship must wait, Kit," I told her smiling, tear-streaked face, "until my relationship to Rory McGuire is clarified."

"Anything you say, darling," she whispered.

"Duke's cooking with gas, fellas," Rory said to the others. "Take Kit down and feed her a little at the bar. She needs it."

When the men and Kit were gone, I drew a chair to the desk and watched Rory's palm rise to halt my first question.

"Don't say it, Duke," he grinned. "First things first." He produced a small automatic pistol from a drawer and set it on the desk before me. "I didn't know

what makes you favored. Just that you went for .32s."

"A .32 is preferable for rapid fire," I said carefully, taking the piece and testing the cocking mechanism after removing the clip and making certain no round was in the chamber. "The heavier pistols kick too hard for satisfactory speed."

"I like 'em heavier," he shrugged. "I like to stop 'em."

"Better aim compensates for heavier calibers," I pontificated.

"And you're the lad to know." He nodded agreeably. He dismissed the subject with a slight gesture. "Want to explain that over-the-cliff gag, Duke?"

"Suppose you tell me what was broadcast on the radio," I suggested.

"Just that that auto's brake didn't. When it came down the hill this side of Oceanville it was going too fast to make the turn. Belonged to a long hair named Smytherton, Jack Smytherton, who diddled around with radio inventions for a living.

"Later, Smytherton's wife identified what was left of him. But she never saw that .32 before and couldn't explain it, so the local law went over the wreck for fingerprints and found some of yours on top of some of his, putting you in the car real recent. They tested the .32 and the ballistics code matched the slugs from it to the slug they dug out of that bookie in Times Square—which made it you twice." Rory spread his palms. "That's it."

"My memory goes back to the moment I recovered consciousness in a patch of brush alongside the burning car," I said.

"You're kidding," he breathed.

"No," I told him. "I recall nothing distinctly beyond that moment. Vague memories have since returned to me; my identity, you, Kit. But I have absolutely no idea how I got into the car in the first place, or why. In the beginning, laying there in the darkness, I hadn't the vaguest notion who I was. Nothing seemed familiar. In a way, it was like being born."

"Still have any doubts who you are? he asked me curiously.

"Well—"

He turned the photograph on his desk so I could see it. It was a snapshot of the blonde, Kit, and myself, in bathing suits against a background of palms. "You

and Kit in Miami," he said. "She gave it to me. These are out of the local papers this week." He laid a sheaf of newspaper clippings alongside of the photograph.

They dealt with the daylight murder in New York of a racing character. There were several good pictures of the man wanted by the New York police for the murder; all of them undeniably of myself. As I read the accompanying stories, they became increasingly familiar to me. The racing man, Victor Hanson, in brief, had been reputed to have withheld from me a sum of money and had paid for it with his life.

"Muggsy Hanson?" I frowned at Rory McGuire.

"Make no mistake, brother," he smiled. "There's only one Duke Smith—and you're him." His tone grew solicitous. "You need a doc and some grub and a bath and some sleep and—" his black eyes twinkled— "Kit. Monk will handle it. We can deal in the morning."

I rose as he pressed a button on the edge of the desk. "The program sounds adequate," I smiled.

Monk appeared and Rory explained the situation. As I followed Monk to the door, Rory said, "Maybe the heat on you is just what we need. The idea of sending for out-of-town talent is we want no finger put on the locals. You wouldn't mind your prints around a job—now that you've already been tagged on the Coast, would you?"

"I suppose not," I murmured, confused.

This seemed to please him. "Tell you what I'll do, Duke. Along with the ten G's, I'll throw in a ride to Mexico in a tuna boat. That is, if you're still willing to handle the job."

"Is it the sort of—ah—job I could handle?"

"Nobody better than you." He laughed. "Right up your alley—and a cinch. He doesn't expect it. He'll be a sitting duck."

"Who?"

"The man you're going to kill."

CHAPTER TWO

A Dish of Homicide

MODERN psychology explains the human mind in terms of layers, only the top layer of which is aware of itself, the others occupying dark

labyrinths, but influencing the surface layer in devious ways. So only can I explain why, upon arising the following morning, I went to the writing table and, on a piece of hotel stationery, wrote: *6000 meg. 5cm—at least 40,000v with amp. plate at gr. pot.*

And then, when the connecting door to the next room opened and I heard a woman's soft footsteps enter, why I snapped: "I thought I told you never to bother me when I'm—"

I had been turning in my seat—and that was when my subconscious mind plunged back to its hidden labyrinth.

"Why, Kit!" I said.

She was even lovelier with her blonde locks dishevelled in a golden halo about her pixie-like face and her eyes blinking to wakefulness against the morning light than she had been the preceding evening or on the snapshot in my wallet.

"What were you saying, darling?" she asked sleepily.

"Whatever phrases, adjectives and snatches of poetry best add up to *wow!*" I smiled at her as she came up to me, laid a soft arm across my shoulder and pecked my temple.

"You do all right in the word department, darling," she giggled. Then added: "What's that?" This in reference to the cryptic symbols I had inscribed.

"It seems that I was attempting to calculate the necessary plate voltage required to produce a five centimeter wave."

"You and your education!" She smiled, ruffling my hair. "Love me?"

"Desperately!" I told her, bringing her down to my lap and illustrating the sentiment to our mutual and prolonged satisfaction. Several years later she forced my lips an inch away from hers and, holding my gaze close like that, breathed:

"I went to Victor's room to place a bet, darling. So help me, I went there to place a bet—period!"

When I said nothing, she went on: "Rory's all right. He said he wouldn't let you kill me. He arranged it so I'd be behind the door, so you'd have to turn your back to him when you faced me. No, let me tell it," she pleaded as I started to speak.

"I got chicken-hearted, darling, that's what I want to tell you. After I'd followed

Trig here and talked to Rory and explained how it was between us and Rory said I could hang around and try to speak to you when you came, I began remembering the look in your eyes when you found me in the room with Victor and I knew if I stayed in New York you'd kill me. I sent Victor a note telling him to get out of New York also, but I guess he never believed what they said about you and now he's—"

Her eyes widened and I smiled sadly into them. "He's dead," I concluded for her. "Does that make a difference, Kit?"

Her arms tightened around my neck. "You know better than to ask that, darling. All you'll ever have to do is wiggle a finger. I'll come running."

"Consider my finger permanently awiggle." I smiled.

"I almost believe that," she said, wonderingly. "Something about you is different." She cocked her head as if a sudden revelation had dazzled her. "Duke, darling, you haven't even hit me once! . . ."

Rory McGuire said, "Go see a movie, Kit. The Duke and I have words."

This was following lunch the same day. Prudence demanded that I remain in the hotel room, having whatever meals and essentials I required brought to me by Monk or Kit. As added precautions, I wore horn-rimmed glasses with plain glass lenses; my normally sandy hair was dyed black and I wore a two-day growth of mustache, also dyed black.

Local newspapers stated that every law agency in the state was searching for me, as well as a special squad of F.B.I. agents who had been flown to San Francisco from Washington, D. C. One news broadcast I had listened to announced I had been seen crossing the Canadian border dressed as a woman at the same hour of the morning a woman in Los Angeles swore that I was the man who had robbed her. She said I had transformed my features to pass for a Chinese and that I smelled of garlic.

Now, Rory locked the door behind Kit, then faced me in the room's solitary easy chair.

"This is the setup, Duke. I'm a solid citizen these days—and I mean most of my stuff is real legit. I own this hotel, for instance, and three bars, a roadhouse, two

tourist courts, half-a-dozen fishing boats, three poker clubs and real estate all around town—most of it open and above board.”

“Congratulations,” I said dryly.

He shrugged, “Okay, I had to build it. The main dough came out of running Mexicans across the border during the war with the fishing boats. And the dough for the fishing fleet came out of a couple years of sharp bookie-ing around the war plants. All I have to do with horses now is ride ’em on my ranch weekends. And it’s been years since I helped a Mex jump the line.”

“So you are now occupied legitimately,” I said.

“Almost. It gets touchy around the poker clubs, for instance. It’s legal to play draw until midnight. My customers are used to playing stud and blackjack until after midnight—with the shades down and the law greased.”

“That doesn’t seem too bad,” I offered.

“It isn’t—unless some wise punk comes along and tries to make a reputation in state politics by breaking me and maybe juggling me into San Quentin.”

“Could it be done?”

“Not from the outside. Bob Ainslee’s an old-time bootleg mouthpiece who came out of Repeal on his feet, but whittled down. He owns a piece of the organization and, like me, wants it all clean and above board. He took pains to check our every move all the way up the line and now, where anyone on the outside is concerned, we’re too solid to budge.”

“But from the inside?”

“I can be had,” Rory stated grimly.

I said: “There’s a slight inconsistency. If the motive of your enemy is to make a political reputation and if he was associated with you in shady transactions, won’t exposure of you expose him as well and destroy his political ambitions?”

RORY shook his head. “Not how Mike played it, Duke. It goes back to right after the war when Ainslee and I were moving in. The mugs who ran the town then didn’t want any new blood. In a resort town like this, they were pretty much in the saddle. They controlled who got liquor licenses, who could buy real estate and so on.

“They had us frozen out until Ainslee

showed me an angle. I was all set to come in on muscle, but he convinced me muscle is out of date. What he did was put us in politics. We got local vets to front for us. We got ’em elected town commissioners and worked ’em into state organizations and began building up a counter pressure. When arguments came up about new licenses of any kind, we had vets fronting for us.

“Ainslee worked the contracts with these vets so we kept real control of the places their names advertised—but they were legitimate part owners in case anybody tried to raise the question again. And it worked out in other ways, Duke. We needed men to run the bars and clubs and boats and offices anyhow. The vets we got, by working for percentage on top of wages, worked that much harder—and now we’re all sitting pretty. I almost feel patriotic when I think of it.”

“This Mike,” I cut in. “Was he a vet?”

Rory’s face settled into bitter lines.

“Yeah. One of the first. A cutie. Where the other vets saw a reasonably good business deal, he kept his eye on the invisible writing in the contracts that keeps Ainslee and me on top. An all-around cutie. He looks good. He sounds good. He’d been in town only two months when we got him elected one of the commissioners.”

“That’s unusual,” I agreed.

“Not for a California town. Most of Pacific City originated east of the Rockies. But after two months—” Rory shrugged reluctantly—“okay. It was pretty unusual. We kept our connections with him way under cover. He gave us big ideas and we wanted him to go a long way. So when we dealt, it had to be in the back rooms and he couldn’t help getting a whiff of some of the stuff still going on. We still ran a boatload of Mexicans now and then and I still ran the biggest book in this part of California. Also, he got a line on a couple of graves that didn’t have markers.

“And this is it,” Rory said bitterly. “One of ’em was in a part of a street they were paving at the time. And the thing about that particular corpse, it carries a slug in its skull that may or may not still carry the ballistics markings of a revolver registered in my name that year.” Rory

leaned over and tapped the white flannel over my knee with a long finger. "And, Duke—he has the revolver!"

"How did he obtain it?"
"I gave it to a Portugee to toss off a tuna boat into the deep. Then I went to the law and reported it missing."

"That was intelligent."
"The Portugee sold out to Gins. And I didn't find out about it until two weeks ago—from Gins."

"Gins?" I asked, groping through the fog in my memory.

"Mike Gins. He put it on the line two weeks ago. He wants the organization in his hip pocket—with Ainslee and me all the way out of the picture—or he uses that revolver to bust us wide open and ride the publicity to a bigger spot."

"What's the spot he occupies now?"
"Mayor! Can you beat it?"

"And you put him there?"
"With these hands, Duke. With these hands and Ainslee's brain. But Ainslee ran out of ideas. All that's left is muscle."

I said: "Suppose I—ah—dispose of this person—and then it develops that he left the pistol with instructions where they would come to the attention of the authorities in the event of his death?"

"He did!" Rory smiled bleakly. "That Portugee who gave Gins the rod in the first place is out on an extra-long tuna cruise right now—with a crew of my boys. He talked, and some of my boys brought back what he said. He talked straight because the difference between what he said and what I'll find out will decide whether he'll step off that boat onto dry land or into wet ocean—and he knows it."

"And here," Rory's smile acquired humor now, "is where the long arm of coincidence wraps you into the package. Remember that guy who gave you a lift, the Smytherton guy who got cooked in his own car?"

"He had the gun?"
"His wife. Mike must have quite a crush on her, because I never heard of her before—and he was never a guy to be bashful. Maybe he wants to marry her after she sheds her weeds. Maybe even the brake not working on hubby's auto when it rolled down that hill was Mike's idea. He was an automotive mechanic in the army."

"Anyhow, according to this Portugee, she's got the package; rod and instructions. That's why I couldn't use local talent," Rory explained. "I don't want her knocked off; just the package. Which means she'll get an eyeful of you and live to tell about it—maybe about you bumping Mike also, because that's your best chance to catch him alone out there."

"Suppose she hasn't the gun after all?"
"I'm betting ten G's and a boat ride to Mexico she has." Rory grinned at me wryly. "Anyhow, here're the works." He unfolded a map and fingered a spot near U.S. 101 just south of Oceanville. "That's the house; a big house on a hill overlooking the town." He laid a snapshot alongside the map.

"That's him. Big. Blond, wavy hair. Looks like a movie star." He put a thick sheaf of hundred dollar bills alongside the photograph. "Five G's now. The other five when you get on the boat. Monk will be waiting at the north end of Oceanville's beach with a dory. You want Kit on the tuna boat?"

"Does Kit want to come with me to Mexico?"
"You kidding? She'll follow you to hell and then some!"

I pocketed the bills and studied the snapshot of the tall, blond, wavy-haired, tweedy Mike Gins. I pocketed that and traced my probable route on the map to a spot inked X.

"That it?" I asked Rory.
"You'll have a hot coupe." He nodded. "It was hiked in Chi, so there's little chance of a slip. The ownership is made out to Stan Jones, who's spending the next thirty years in San Quentin and won't mind. In case you get lost and have to ask, just say around you want to see Mrs. Phyllis Smytherton. Something the matter, Duke?"

Something was certainly the matter. It was as if the conscious layer of my mind had been peeled back and the subterranean layer lay fully exposed to my inspection. It came in a flood of wild, tumbling, head-long memories.

"Phyllis Smytherton?" I breathed.
"That's right. I don't want to seem like I'm crowding you, Duke, but would tonight be too soon?"

It didn't seem soon enough.

CHAPTER THREE

Don't Widow Me

THE charred and crumpled twist of wreckage that had been the late Jack Smytherton's sedan had an audience of curiosity seekers. I stood among them and listened to their speculations and comments. One fat man drew a general laugh when he said: "Duke Smith might be standin' right here among us now!"

I stood among the rubbernecks and looked at the crazy twist of metal and glass and rubber and heard the comments but ignored them for the conversation taking place in my memory. That conversation had started when a voice spoke from the dahlia bush to Jack Smytherton, who was closing the garage door:

"Jack!"

Smytherton peered into the gloom. "Who is it?"

"Cecil. Surprised?"

Jack Smytherton stood motionless in the darkness and whispered: "Why did you come here?"

Cecil emerged from the shadowy bush, chuckling softly. "Is that a brotherly greeting? Doesn't one, in exigencies, go to one's family? Have I any family but you? Come, come, Jack! Spread the welcome mat and trot out the fatted calf! And it's high time I met my sister-in-law, don't you think?"

"Lord, no!"

The humor left Cecil Smith's voice in the darkness. "I take that most unkindly, brother. After all, if you scratch us, is there much fundamental difference? Didn't we both leave Harvard with the intention of living by our wits? Your first cathode ray tube, the one that substituted a coil for deflector plates; wasn't that my idea in the first place? So you matched your wits against electrons while I went on to pit mine against citizens who lived off other citizens by their wits; each with the same scientific detachment; each with a certain degree of success. Does the mere fact that I occasionally eliminate a two-legged beast instead of the back e.m.f. in a new tube make me unworthy to sit at your table?"

Jack Smytherton, to Cecil Smith's

amusement, seemed very touched by this.

"Listen to me, Cecil. I have no quarrel with the purely philosophical aspects of your—ah—profession. But your presence in my household would suffice to destroy me along with you. Phyllis has somehow learned that Cecil Smith was once Cecil Jonathan Smytherton.

"Should I bring you into the house now and introduce you as, say, a Mrs. Wilson, our great resemblance to one another would immediately inform her of your identity. Knowing my wife, to whom superficial property is the end of all endeavor, I am certain she would attempt to communicate your presence to the local police. I say to you, therefore, please go your way and leave me and mine in peace. If it is money you require—"

Cecil dismissed the question of money with a gesture of annoyance. "You utter," he said curiously, "a most henpecked sound."

"I am happily wed," the other responded stiffly.

"I almost was—once," Cecil mused. Then: "Where were you headed now?"

"Radio supply shop in Pacific City."

"That's a happy coincidence. Know the place, Jack?"

"Somewhat."

"Acquainted with a man named McGuire? Rory McGuire?"

"By hearsay. Mike—a friend of ours—has mentioned him. Why?"

"You can dismiss your fraternal obligations by driving me to Rory McGuire in Pacific City. But before we go, Jack, you'll have to suffer a slight imposition. See this?"

"This," of course, was the shiny black metal of an automatic pistol that stood like a hyphen between the brothers in the darkness.

Later, as the sedan pulled away from the Smytherton residence, Cecil asked: "Your marriage all you hoped it would be, Jack?" When Jack preserved a sullen silence, Cecil went on: "I almost took the plunge. I think even a stuffed shirt like you would have liked Kit. In my eccentric way, I suppose I loved her—until I happened to follow her into a shoddy hotel one day, into a room occupied by an even shoddier gambler, Muggsy Hanson."

"Your last—?"

"Corpse? That was a curious by-product of the situation. Kit—"

Jack Smytherton was never to learn exactly what happened. At that moment the brake, as Rory McGuire so eloquently put it, didn't. The sedan swerved sickeningly into the guard rail. There was the shock of plunging freely into space, then the numbing panic as the car tumbled downward end over end—to the shattering impact that threw me clear into a patch of brush while tiny flames began to lick at the pieces of my brother trapped behind the sedan's wheel. . . .

RORY'S map was accurate, but instead of driving up the road that led to the Smytherton's front door, I continued through the small fishing and tourist hamlet that was Oceanville and turned inland on the first cross-road beyond it. This brought me higher on the hill than the Smytherton house.

I parked alongside the road under a clump of dying Eucalyptus trees and spent a few moments checking, loading and then cocking the small automatic Rory had given me. I closed the safety lever, leaving the weapon cocked, then left the coupe and made my way downhill through the brush toward the rear of the house.

Jack Smytherton had built the house into the hill so you could enter the front door, mount a flight of stairs and crawl out a second-floor window to the ground.

I stood against the green stucco wall, under the red-tiled eave, and listened at an open window and heard nothing. I peered in the window, saw a bedroom that was empty and gave no sign of recent use. I entered the room carefully and listened at its door.

Again I heard nothing. The door opened noiselessly. I found myself in an empty corridor that led to three other doors and to a stairway curving down at the far end.

I went to the head of the stairway and dropped to my knees, peering through the newels where the bannister ended. This gave me a partial view of the living room below and, through the huge window that formed most of the building's front wall, the rooftops of Oceanville and, beyond them, a long pier jutting into the rippled waters.

I could hear the soft crackle of flames

lapping woodsap. I could hear, also, a man and woman conversing in low tones. I crawled further down the stairs until the couple came into view.

The Mayor Gins of the snapshot in my pocket sat nearer the fire. He had a strong profile and a deep tan that stood out against the almost platinum blondness of his wavy hair.

Resting against the brown tweed fabric on his shoulder was an even more dazzling head of hair. This was an impeccably groomed head of orange hair that framed a face that was oddly almost Oriental. Her tremendous eyes slanted up at the corners. Both cheeks were dimpled deeply. She wore an aquamarine dress that seemed to cling to every curve of her like an extra layer of skin.

Her face was turned up toward his profile and she was saying: "I tell you I'm worried. He's Jack's brother, you know."

The man drew back and stared down at her. He nodded thoughtfully. "There is a resemblance, come to think of it. Smith and Smytherton. Well, whaddya know!"

"Don't be so damned casual about it, Mike!"

"So they were brothers. You want me to sprout goose pimples?" He rose to his feet and brought her up with him. They stood embraced. He spoke huskily: "Listen, baby, the hardest part is behind us. From here on in, we coast. Only two things can make it hard again; you getting sentimental, or you getting the jitters—and you'll never get sentimental."

"I didn't say I was frightened, darling. I said I was worried."

"Then stop worrying. If you want to calculate the risks, eighty percent of the odds say Duke Smith is a couple of hundred miles from here and moving fast—away from here. There's a fifteen percent possibility he's holed up around here in some underworld drop nursing some broken bones. I'll get a line on him soon enough if that's the case.

"There's a four percent chance that he's sticking around with an idea of bracing you for some of Jack's leavings. And there's less than a one percent chance he added the brake failure to you and is hanging around for a chance to put us

eight feet under—where we put Jack.”

“That’s the percent that worries me, darling.”

“A gun eliminates that. If he rings your doorbell or raps on a window, it’s legal to shoot him dead on sight. My advice to you, if he shows, is to shoot him dead. As much as possible I’ll be around. Keep a gun handy every minute that I’m not. Still worried?”

“No, darling.”

“The idea pleases you—shooting him, I mean?”

She didn’t answer that. She dug her fingers into the platinum hair behind his ears and drew his face down to her up-turned face. Finally he drew back with a laughing gasp and murmured: “You and that Nazi crematorium dame who made lampshades out of human hides!”

“You’d make a wonderful lampshade, darling,” she breathed, pulling his lips down to hers again. This embrace was even longer than the last. I glanced down at the automatic in my fist and noted dully that the metal sheen of the weapon was damp where I touched it.

“Do you have a pistol, baby?” Mike asked when he drew back again.

“The one you gave me to keep for you.”

“Not that one!” he scowled, stepping back from her. “Under no circumstances use that one!” His voice softened. “That’s the key to our future, baby.”

“But, darling! All Jack had around the house are rifles and shotguns. I can hardly spend my time dragging one of those around.”

“All right,” he murmured reluctantly. “That one, until I bring you another. I’ll do it tonight.” He grinned down into her eyes. “Now you’re giving *me* the willies. Duke Smith is probably in Mexico by now and moving south. Did Jack have any other relatives?”

“No.”

“You check on his insurance yet?”

“Pullease, Mr. Gins! We must preserve some decorum.”

“Like marrying me next week instead of tomorrow?”

She giggled—and my finger jerked convulsively on the trigger of Rory’s automatic. Convulsively—but futilely. The safety lever was still on.

Before I could release the safety, my

rage had spent itself. I am not ordinarily an excitable man. I crouched there on the stairway and closed my eyes tightly until my emotions were again under control.

He was saying, this Mike Gins: “But I promised Gordon I’d have a talkfest with him tonight. He’s a big man in the state organization, baby. I’ll be back around ten. I’ll come up the back road. Leave the guest-room window open for me.”

He walked a thumb-flick from death then, this mayor of Pacific City who had murdered his friend for his friend’s wife’s lips. The barrel of Rory’s automatic followed him across the large living room to the front door—then remained pointed at the door after it closed behind him.

PHYLLIS SMYTHERTON stood looking at the closed door, smiling and humming to herself. She glided toward the stairway. The tap of her high heels was light and quick mounting the stairs. Still humming, she entered her bedroom, which stood across from the guest room.

She moved directly to the bottom-left-hand drawer of her vanity and withdrew a wicker sewing basket from it. From this basket she removed a metal box. From the box she produced a silver-colored revolver. This she put on the vanity alongside a large powder box.

She undid the turquoise neck clasp of her aquamarine dress, then the belt. She swept her soft orange locks back with both hands, admiring her strangely exotic features in the three mirrors of her vanity. She made a little curtsy to her triple image that brought her gaze down and around. Her gaze remained down and around. Her eyes bulged like glassy marbles.

I arose from the floor near her closet where I had been waiting.

“*Jack!*” she breathed.

I regarded her silently.

“No! You’re not Jack! You’re like him—but not—” The cords of her throat stood out violently. “You’re Cecil!” she whispered.

“Hello, Phyllis,” I said quietly.

She snatched for her belt from the bed. That was her reaction as a woman. The next instant she let the belt fall and flung her hand violently toward the silver re-

volver on the vanity—her reaction as Phyllis Smytherton.

She whirled the revolver around—into my waiting hand. And lost it to my hand. I slid it into my pocket and retained the hand from which I had wrested it.

"This is a most unsisterly welcome," I chided gently.

"You even talk like Jack!" she moaned.

"We matriculated from the same university."

"But why come here?"

"Why not?" I shrugged.

Gradually the fear left her face, to be replaced by curiosity. She made no effort to withdraw her fingers from mine. "What do you want?" she finally asked.

"You." I smiled into her large, slanted eyes.

"You're mad!"

"Mad for social security, my dear. I have given it some thought. It's really quite simple; a question of establishing that the corpse in the sedan was actually that of Cecil Jonathan Smith and that I, Jack Smytherton, having been stunned by the shock of the fall, wandered about in a state of temporary amnesia. Until—say—an hour ago, when I found myself wandering up the hill toward this house and suddenly knew who I was."

Her fingers actually squeezed mine. Excitement shone from her dimpled face. "Do you honestly believe you could get away with it?"

"Why not? Shave off this mustache, remove the glasses and wash the dye out of my hair—and who is there to say me nay? Any of my social *faux pas* could be ascribed to after-effects of my shock."

She giggled. It was part nervous reaction, part awareness of how dazzling I found her and part excitement at the irony and danger of the situation. She giggled and eyed me wonderingly.

"You really think I'd cooperate?"

I told her gently: "People generally cooperate with the late Cecil Jonathan Smith, people with a regard for their futures, that is."

She drew close to me and whispered: "Is social security the only reason, Cecil?"

"Jack."

"Jack, then?"

"Absolutely the only reason, my dear." I smiled coldly into her upturned face.

The excitement drained out of her eyes.

"Living with you would be horrible." She shivered.

"But better than dying with me in the gas chamber," I told her softly.

She yanked her fingers from mine. They became entwined with the fingers of her other hand.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Exactly what you fear I mean. Should I fall into the hands of the police, I will tell them how to prove that Michael Gins, with your foreknowledge and consent, tampered with the brake of Jack's car, knowing the curve at the foot of the Oceanville hill couldn't be negotiated by a car going as fast as a brakeless car would have to be going."

"You wouldn't!" she cried.

"Try me." I shrugged.

The poise of her features seemed to collapse into a thousand little pieces then. She flung herself at the door and cried out as bits of wood splintered against her face. She reached for the glass knob—and cried out again as the glass shattered into bits inches from her fingers.

She turned then and gaped at the automatic pistol in my hand with eyes that were pools of blank idiocy. She balled her fists before her eyes, opened her mouth into a perfect O and began filling that room with scream after scream—until her face jerked from the impact of my palm.

Then Phyllis raised her fists to her eyes and sobbed into them with all the convulsive sorrow of a woman who had seen her only child torn to shreds by mad dogs.

I went to the sewing basket and extracted the envelope that had lain with the silver-colored revolver. It was addressed: *To the Attorney General of California*. I opened the envelope. The letter inside began: *The accompanying revolver was used by Rory McGuire, its owner, to murder . . .*

The letter went into my pocket alongside the silver revolver. I glanced at Phyllis Smytherton, whose sobs had ceased. She now stood with her hands stiffly at her sides and with a wry smile forcing its way through her tears.

"I never could stand hysterical women," she said.

"Who can? Shall we inform what powers there be of my happy return?"

She approached me and laid hesitant fingers on the white flannel of my jacket. "Would it be wise—Jack?"

"Wouldn't it?"

"Not until you altered your appearance. And you should have an idea of the people who'll come charging into the house when the news gets around. I have to help you in this. I can't let you fail, can I?"

"Hardly. Then you want me to postpone my official homecoming until morning?"

"Until then or later. You can't just rush into something like this. You have to be careful about things like handwriting, and a lot of Jack's friends are dippy on the subject of electronics."

"I'm dippy on the same subject, but the handwriting will be a problem." I dismissed it with a shrug and regarded her now composed features curiously. "It won't be too bad for you, my dear. You found Jack attractive enough to marry him. The differences between our appearances, as you notice, was negligible."

She put her other hand on my other

arm and drew close, smiling twistedly up into my face.

"You're not so hard to take," she said.

"Nor you," I countered. "Your figure sags a bit unnecessarily here and there—but diet and the proper exercises should remedy that."

She slapped my face.

I slapped her face.

That was at seven-thirty.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Mayor's Goose

I DOUBT if many people in this world ever experience a hatred as virulent as the hatred Phyllis Smytherton felt toward me. She was, of course, off balance emotionally. You cannot urge your sweetheart to murder your husband, then know he *has* murdered your husband without losing some inner equilibrium.

Besides, my appearing as I did, openly contemptuous of her, flicking at her weaknesses, toying with her in cat-and-mouse fashion, destroyed what security she was

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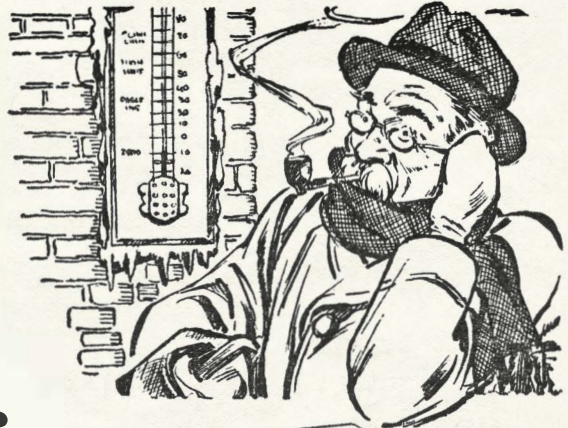
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beginning to feel again, and made her immediate future black and ominous. No effort to wreath her face in smiles or to chatter lightly could disguise the thought that must have been howling through the corridors of her mind; the thought Michael Gins had expressed so bluntly: *It's legal to shoot him dead on sight. My advice to you, if he shows, is to shoot him dead!*

But to shoot you need a gun and the only guns at hand were in my pockets; Rory's automatic and Rory's silver revolver; and her splintered bedroom door and the shattered bedroom doorknob testified to the futility of breaking away from me in search of another weapon.

She tried once by entering the bathroom, then tiptoeing out—until she grew aware of me standing flattened against the wall beside the bathroom door. Another time, she suggested I familiarize myself with Jack's lab. I did—with her at my side.

Now it was nine-thirty and we sat facing each other across the blazing fireplace. She was trying to keep herself from casting anxious glances at her watch. The conversation was a dull resume of Jack Smytherton's social life. I glanced at my watch and rose to my feet.

"Something I almost forgot, Phyllis. There's a man waiting for me nearby. He was to accompany me to Mexico. I'd better tell him to go on alone. It may take me as much as half an hour."

She couldn't repress a yellow glint of anticipation in her eyes. "Half an hour—Jack?"

"That should suffice," I said, guiding her by her elbow toward the stairs. Mounting, I told her: "It would hardly be prudent for me to be seen leaving and entering the front door. I noticed how Jack built this house into the slope. I'll leave by one of the rear windows and return the same way."

Phyllis paused on the stairs. "Wouldn't it be riskier to crawl in and out of a window? This time of night, nobody's likely to notice who uses the front door."

"I prefer the rear window." I smiled, urging her up the stairs.

She resisted my tug at her elbow. "But I don't think—"

I cut in: "The first difference between

Jack and me to which you must become accustomed, my dear, is that while he may have listened to, and abided by, your *but's*—I expect my every whim to be obeyed with alacrity."

She was still not inclined to mount the stairs. I gripped her elbows and ushered her speedily up the stairs, along the corridor and into the guest room. She stood facing me in the darkness, the urgent pounding of her heart almost audible to my ears.

"You beast!" she breathed.

"This window," I said. "If it isn't open for my return, I'll smash it open. If the noise attracts undue interest and I face capture, you will face exposure as a murderess. Concentrate on that if any project to betray me occurs to your impulsive mind."

"It would almost be worth it!" she whispered.

"We'll resume this discussion in half an hour," I said, stepping over the window sill and to the slope beyond. When I reached the first clump of brush, I looked back over my shoulder. She was a motionless shadow framed deeply in the blackness behind the window.

Her final impression of me must have been the white of my flannels moving swiftly up the slope until it was swallowed by the tall brush. . . .

I started the engine of the coupe where it stood in the darkness under the dying Eucalyptus trees. I left its headlamps dark, then crossed the road to a patch of bush shadow and waited.

Patches of fog were drifting in from the ocean and I could feel the chill dampness settle about my ankles and neck. Somewhere nearby, some night-blooming jasmine was filling the air with its odor of sweet decay. Below and behind me I could hear the endless fleets of trucks rumble up and down U.S. 101.

Within my mind threads of memory interwove in tortured patterns: *You kidding? Kit would follow you to hell, and then some! . . . You and that Nazi crematorium dame who made lampshades out of human hides! . . . You utter a most henpecked sound. . . . Maybe Mike expects to move in after she sheds her weeds . . . All you ever have to do is wriggle a finger. I'll come running. . . . My advice*

to you is to shoot him dead! . . . You beast! . . . If you scratch us, is there much fundamental difference? . . . Love me? . . . You beast! . . . Love me? . . . Beast. . . . Beast. . . . Beast. . . .

The headlights swept glaringly up the hill road. They suddenly became motionless, bringing daylight to the drooping gray leaves of the Eucalyptus overhead. They cut off, returning the dying tree to the night. A car door creaked open, then slammed shut.

He came striding up the road, swinging his arms freely, whistling softly to himself. Sight of the "hot" coupe halted his stride, stopped his whistling. He stood on the road, facing the coupe, hearing the gentle rumble of its engine, eyeing the ghostly thread of vapor escaping from its exhaust into the night.

I came up behind him and said: "Surprise!"

HE ACTED surprised. He spun toward me, reaching inside his tweed jacket toward his belt. Then he saw the automatic in my hand. He became a human statue, standing with his legs twisted and his hand near his belt.

"Take your hand away from your belt—slowly and carefully," I said.

"Jack!" he said.

"Your hand." I gestured slightly with the automatic. His hand rose from the belt slowly. "Turn your back to me and raise both hands high," I ordered.

He said: "Wait a minute! I'm Mike—" The words died as my thumb on the safety lever brought a surprisingly loud *click* to the night. He turned away from me and raised his palms over the light waviness of his hair.

I found a revolver wedged in his belt. There was a small automatic pistol in his jacket pocket. I walked around him carefully, dropped both weapons on the front sea of the coupe. I faced him now. I asked: "You were saying—"

"You're not Jack!" he said, leaning toward me to see me more clearly.

"Who I am not is pointless," I told him. "Remove your trousers and jacket."

"You're Duke Smith!" he said in a tone of voice that indicated he found this fact to be pleasant.

"I'm the man who just ordered you to

remove your trousers and jacket," I said.

"Listen, Duke, I was your brother's closest friend. If it's help you want—"

"You can start now by disrobing," I interrupted.

"I see your point." His voice chuckled. "That ice-cream suit stands out like—hey! Don't get itchy-fingered!"

Whether he could see my knuckle whitening on the trigger, or read in my expression the blind rage that his voice stirred within me, I do not know. I know only that his trousers and jacket lay on the coupe's running board a few seconds later.

I transferred the contents of my pockets to his, and his to mine. Shifting Rory's automatic from hand to hand when necessary, I slid out of my trousers and jacket and donned his. They were a trifle large on me, but not excessively. I tossed my clothing to his feet and gestured with the automatic.

"Put them on."

He did. He donned the white flannels swiftly and in silence. As he buttoned the jacket, he asked: "Now what? If you'd only listen to me, I can get you safely across the border."

"Jack Smytherton listened to you," I said quietly, "and you got him safely across the Big Border."

He became motionless there on that lonely road in the darkness, this man who wanted the underworld of his city in his hip pocket.

"Say something glib and witty," I went on quietly. "Tell me how my brother felt when his body lay in crushed sections and the flames dried his final breath from his lungs."

He didn't seem to feel glib or witty, this man who casually killed his best friend for his best friend's wife, this cutie whom no woman could resist, this man who dabbled in murder and love and graft with equal aplomb.

"No comment?" I asked solicitously, hefting Rory's automatic in my palm. "Then my brother will talk to you, Michael Gins," I went on quietly. "But I'll have to send you where you can hear my brother. Good-by, Mike—"

For one breathless instant, he gaped down at my weapon rising toward his face—the next, he was spinning and diving into the brush that bordered the road.

I loped across the road after him, into the brush after the zigzagging white of my flannel suit. His breath came back to me in animal gasps. The brush whipped his face. The descending slope melted from under his feet, sending him plunging, scrambling downwards.

At one point his face was a white oval across his shoulder. He saw me hurdle a low clump of shrubs in pursuit, and whirled and plunged even more desperately down the slope.

He broke into the clearing above the Smytherton house. He took three strides toward the guest-room window—then flung both arms high, spun around and crumpled to the slope in a half crouch even as I heard the explosive blast from the black guest-room window.

A second flash of flame spat from the window. The crouching figure jerked convulsively, then slowly rolled over and spread itself out on the slope.

A third gunshot shattered the night. Michael Gins lay motionless. A fourth blast twitched the white fabric of his jacket. The fifth jab of flame from the window caused the blond head to roll in a half-turn.

That was the clip.

The guest-room window filled with buttery glare.

I stood pressed against the wall alongside it. A glimpse had shown me Phyllis Smytherton with her face down near the phone, the rifle sprawled across the guest bed.

"Sheriff Wiley?" she was screaming into the mouthpiece. "I just shot Duke Smith! He tried to force himself into my house and I—"

I stepped over Michael Gins on my way back up the slope toward the coupe. He didn't seem to mind.

CHAPTER FIVE

Incendiary Blonde

I BRAKED the coupe where the northernmost street of Oceanville ended. My headlights, before I cut them off, splashed over a stretch of sand to a small cluster of men standing about a dory where the phosphorescent waves were breaking.

Now, out of the darkness at my elbow, a large form loomed.

"Duke?"

"Monk?"

"A lotta excitement up the hill, Duke. We better get in the boat fast—before they think of casin' the waterfront."

"You go, Monk. I decided not to go to Mexico just yet. Take the boat back to Pacific City along with these." I handed him my arsenal of four pistols, and the letter. He took them and hesitated.

"Ya ain't comin', Duke?"

"No. Tell Rory I'll drop in on him in Pacific City later."

"And Kit, Duke?"

"Tell her the same. I'll see her—later,"

"Duke, I don't want to butt into your business, but—"

"That's an attitude I appreciate, Monk."

"Okay. I don't need a house fallin' on me."

"One more thing, Monk. Send someone to drive this car back to Rory."

"Whatever you say, Duke."

I watched his burly form cross the sands to the boat. Another figure detached itself from the cluster of men and approached me. The boat sliced through a crashing breaker, then it was riding high. I saw oar blades twinkle. Gradually the dory drew out of sight into the foamy blackness. The approaching figure appeared where Monk had stood.

"I'm Whitey. Monk says do like you say. . . ."

Ten minutes later, I stood at the foot of the hill and watched the red taillight dwindle into the night as Whitey drove the coupe along U.S. 101 toward Pacific City.

Mounting the hill, I had to stand aside while an ambulance passed. A large state trooper tried to block my way into the house.

"I live here," I told him.

He called to an elderly man standing in a group of men before the fireplace. "Hey, Sheriff; this guy says he lives here."

The sheriff approached, with his thick, gray brows raised interrogatively.

"I'm Jack Smytherton," I told him. "Where's my wife? What's the occasion for all this excitement?"

The men around the fireplace ex-

changed intense glances. The sheriff had a seamed, tanned, expressionless face.

I followed him up the winding stairway, conscious that the other men were following me. We went down the corridor to Phyllis' bedroom door. A man came up behind me and passed his hands around my pockets, under my arms and even down my thighs. He shook his head at the sheriff, who nodded and rapped gently on the door.

Phyllis opened it. She seemed oblivious to our presence. Her eyes were swollen from tears. Mascara had streaked, unnoticed, down her dimpled cheeks. She stood in the doorway like that with her fingers writhing among each other like live snakes.

The sheriff cleared his throat and croaked: "Ma'am, this feller says he's your husband."

"He's my husband's twin brother," she spoke loudly. "He is known as Duke Smith. He is a wanted murderer."

"Thought somethin' like that," the sheriff murmured.

"I have ten good witnesses to contradict that thought," I smiled at him, raising my palms toward his eyes and exposing my fingertips. "It shouldn't take you long to check these with my driver's license, my army record and wherever else my fingerprints are on file."

I turned to smile at Phyllis. The triumph in her face had cracked into tiny pieces, leaving her expression haggard as her eyes filled with recognition.

"The man who died in my sedan was my brother," I stated. "Before we started that drive he compelled me to exchange clothes with him, which explains—"

The door slammed in my face.

I reached for the knob, but the sheriff caught my arm in a surprisingly strong grip. "Leave her be!" he scowled. "I don't know what's goin' on around here. Everybody turnin' out to be somebody else. We'll just check your ten little witnesses. A woman ought to recognize her own—"

The blast stopped him then. He grabbed the knob and thrust the door open himself.

He was too late, of course.

After a woman puts the muzzle of a loaded shotgun in her mouth and presses

the trigger, there is nothing else to do but look. After that you bury her. . . .

* * *

"I can figure her not knowing you," Rory McGuire said. "How we had your hair dyed, and the rest of it, and her thinkin' you dead, I can see how she wouldn't recognize you. But how you could go around not knowin' yourself—"

"Part of it was the shock," I explained. "You see, the last memories I had prior to the accident had been of Cecil, and what he had been saying about you and Kit and Muggsy Hanson. It was natural, when the letter brought me to you and I met Kit and saw all those pictures of Cecil, for me to grope out of my foggy confusion toward those tangibles. Even when you mentioned my own name, I was so hypnotized by Cecil's identity that I ignored it. But the following morning, when you mentioned her name—"

"That tore it, hey?"

"What startled me more than anything," I frowned, "was that I wasn't certain I preferred my own identity to Cecil's. Where I had respectability, he had—" I groped for the proper words and Rory supplied:

"Kit?"

"Of course!" I murmured.

He said: "You handled a very tricky situation, Mr. Smytherton."

"I did nothing but talk," I told him quietly. "Had my wife not been a murderess, she would have phoned the police that Duke Smith had been there—instead of waiting at the guest-room window for Duke Smith with my deer rifle. And had Michael Gins not been a murderer, he would have stayed on the road and tried to convince me of that, rather than run."

"There's one more thing," Rory said with obvious embarrassment. "I mean, I like to keep my accounts straight. We had a deal, you and me—and you came across. What I mean, would you take the five G's I still owe you?"

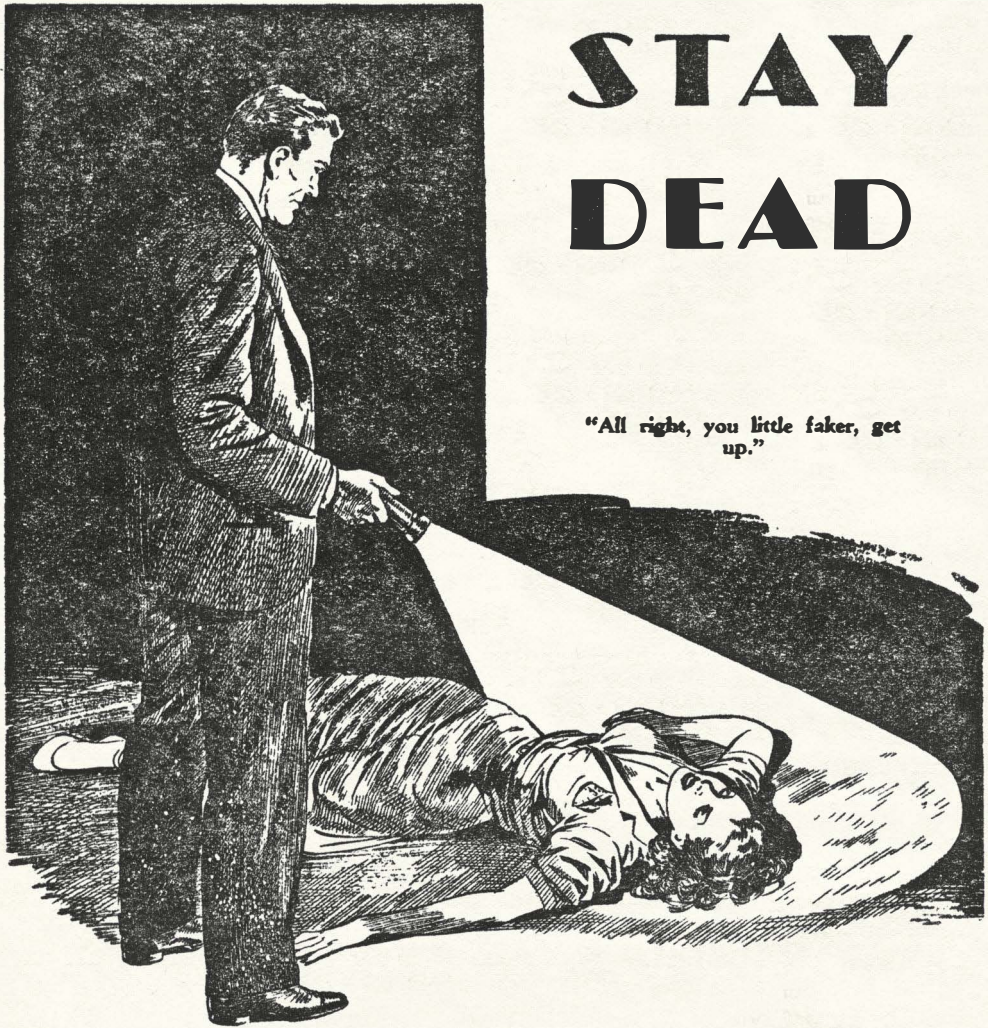
The door of his office opened then and Kit stood there, her pixie-like face regarding me hesitantly.

"Why not?" I smiled at Rory. "It would make a nice wedding gift."

Then I wriggled a finger at Kit and she came running.

THE END

SHE WOULDN'T STAY DEAD



"All right, you little faker, get up."

By **V. E. THIESSEN**

MACKAY paid his check to the slim, pale girl that was Day Random's wife, and shambled out of the restaurant in the desert night, a loose, hulking figure in a tweed suit. He took a flashlight from his pocket and held it

ready, unlighted, as he began to walk down the highway.

Ahead of him a vanishing taillight blinked its brief red warning before the desert distance claimed it. That would be the car whose brakes he had heard a mo-

Mackay knew what a good desert cop should do about chiseling Cherry—but she had gotten into his blood.

ment ago. Mackay grunted almost inaudibly and put his attention to walking without noise.

A deeper shadow in the night was a man's silhouette. Mackay began to stalk this shadow. He had been a prize fighter once, and he walked very softly. He came soundlessly to recognition distance without needing his light. The man he had stalked was Day Random, owner of the restaurant. Random seemed to be stuffing something into his pocket.

"Any trouble?" Mackay rumbled. He thought Random jumped a bit, yet the night was so dark he was unsure.

"Hello, Mackay." Random's voice found quick control. "I was just getting some air. What brings you out?"

"Heard brakes screaming out here a couple moments ago. I thought there might have been an accident."

"Nope. Guy just missed an alley cat." Random's voice was amused. "Come back in and I'll buy you a drink."

"Later. I want to nose around a bit."

"Why?" Random was laughing. "You'll never find that cat. She'll be half way to Indio, the way she took off when that car grazed her."

"I'll nose around," Mackay said. "You go on back in." He thought Random hesitated a moment before turning away.

Mackay stood in the desert night, listening to the little whisperings of the sand, watching Random until he had vanished into the drive-in. Then Mackay began to scuff along in the sand beside the concrete paving, his attitude that of a great woolly dog snuffling after a lost bone.

He found something moments later. A girl lay in the sand, a slim, dark-haired girl in a white starched uniform. Mackay darted the beam of his flashlight down at her.

She lay all awry, her head to one side. Her nose and mouth were red with a thickening scarlet. The front of her uniform was splashed with more of the red. She lay very still.

Mackay hunkered down on his haunches, looking at her, keeping the flashlight on her face. He put out a tentative finger, touched the scarlet and drew the finger back.

He had not known he was so taut inside. He eased out a great soft breath and

said, "All right, you little faker, get up."

There was no response. He took her shoulder in one huge hand and flopped her body about as easily as a child shakes a doll. "I said, get up!"

The girl got up, looked at Mackay. She dabbed at the scarlet on her face, bit at her lip for an instant.

Mackay snapped off the flashlight. "How much did Random get this time?" He knew that if he were to use the light again he would see her lips pouting at him, great soft lips as red as hibiscus.

"I don't know."

"Sure, you wouldn't know." Mackay's voice rumbled into nothing, like a spring-wound toy running down, and then revitalized, said urgently, "Why do you do these things? Why do you help Random with his schemes?"

"I'm afraid of him."

Mackay thrust the beam of his flashlight cruelly at her eyes. Her hands came up over her face and Mackay said, "What was the name of the sucker in the car?"

"I don't know."

"How about Random's wife. Is she in on these deals?"

"I tell you, I don't know."

Her voice was warm, low pitched. Standing so close to her, Mackay could smell her perfume. He said tautly, "I believe you like this kind of life. I don't know why I think you're worth anything better."

"I do." She was closer, baiting him. "It's the same reason you're so angry with me now, so cruel to me. You can't get me out of your blood, can you?"

Savagely, Mackay reached for her. "No! Heaven help me, I can't!"

When she drew away, she said, "I know you want Random. But it's got to be safe, perfectly safe."

"I'll go along with you a little longer," Mackay said. He released her, watched her move across the road to the back door of the restaurant, and slip inside. When the door opened a streak of light lanced out and struck Mackay's car, parked beside the restaurant.

Mackay stumbled back to the car, the sand whispering to him, *Mackay . . . Fool . . . You Fool, Mackay*. He crawled into the car and began to cruise up the road. He made Desert Center, and the stretch

to Indio. When his night's work was done, he went in and slept.

TO SAY that Mackay slept would be an understatement. He hibernated. Like a great bear, he lay in complete slumber from the time he rolled gruntingly into bed until the sharp call of his alarm wakened him.

Now a ringing laid its shrill voice against his sleep, and he struggled awake, glanced at his watch and reached for his alarm. It took him moments to realize that when he pushed the alarm knob the sound continued. Wakened then, he realized that it was not his clock but the telephone. He picked up the phone and grunted into it.

"This is Lieutenant Case, Mackay. Get over to the chief's office. He wants to talk to you."

"Okay." Mackay cradled the phone, swung out of bed, and dressed swiftly. There was an economy to his lumbering movements that made them deceptively fast. Twenty minutes later he was in the office of the chief of police. The chief and Lieutenant Case were sitting there, waiting for him.

The chief was an aging man, as gray as an old beaver, wise to desert violence from years of experience. Mackay liked the chief. He said, "Sergeant Mackay reporting, sir" then darted his glance at Lieutenant Case.

Lieutenant Case was a lean man in a brown gabardine suit. No suit would ever look that well on Mackay and he knew it.

The chief said, "Sorry to bother you, but it's urgent. You know Day Random?"

"Yes."

"What can you tell me about him?"

Mackay worried that a moment in his mind. "You know most of the dope. He's got a record, been mixed in a half-dozen unsavory deals here, though we haven't been able to prove anything. About all

that's new is the racket I ran into last night."

"What's that?" the chief asked.

"A hit-and-run swindle. They pick some sucker that stops for a bite to eat, a guy with a roll, probably a drunk with an out-of-state license tag. When the guy goes out and starts to drive away he hits a dummy figure that's rigged along the highway. By the time the poor sucker has stopped, Random has spirited the dummy out of the way, and has a real girl curled up, with a bottle of ketchup splashed all over her.

"Random scares the guy into paying off and making a run for it. Random promises to give the cops a stall and send them after a phony car. After all, the guy can be out of the state in a few hours."

The chief was watching Mackay. "Who is the girl that helps him?"

"The girl that works there—Cherry."

Mackay could see the chief's eyes getting hard. He said quickly, feeling tension grow in his chest, "I think Random makes her do it. I think if we can get one of the suckers to testify, she'll turn state's evidence. After all, Random is the guy we'd like to get."

Lieutenant Case said, "She's a pretty number, eh, Mackay?"

"Pretty enough," Mackay admitted.

He took time to look carefully at Lieutenant Case. Case was a lean, taciturn man. There was about him a cold elegance which Mackay would never achieve. Case would never get himself involved personally as Mackay did. He was immune to all temptations that Mackay struggled with.

The chief's voice cut in sharply across Mackay's thoughts. "I'm afraid you're wrong, Mackay. We don't want Random. We may want this girl."

Mackay's mouth dropped open, he stared at the chief, then at Lieutenant Case and then back at the chief again.

— TO OUR READERS —

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

"Somebody shot Random last night," the chief said.

Understanding hit Mackay like somebody had slugged him. His voice, when it came out, sounded casual enough. "Yeah."

"You see him last night?" the chief asked.

Mackay's mind was rushing back. "Yeah. That's when I tumbled to the hit-and-run racket. I heard brakes scream, nosed around and I found the girl with the ketchup. Figured out the rest, though I was too late to see the actual shake-down."

"Did Random seem to be disturbed about it?"

"No. He was laughing at me inside. He knew I was wise to him, and couldn't do a damned thing."

"You didn't quarrel?"

"Of course not. Why?" Mackay stopped, looking at the two of them. Anger began to build inside him.

The chief said carefully, "You and Random had some bad trouble a few months ago."

"Yeah. He was cuffing Cherry around. That all blew over."

"What about Mackay's wife. What do you know about her?"

Mackay paused, said thoughtfully. "Damn little come to think of it—too little."

"She's pretty too," Lieutenant Case said.

"Not so pretty," Mackay disagreed. "Sort of thin and pale."

"Look at her again. Little lipstick and good clothes on that figure and she'd surprise you." There was no enthusiasm in Case's voice. He was merely stating facts, a scientific appraisal. After a moment, Case looked questioningly at the chief.

"Yeah," the chief answered the unspoken question. "Take Mackay out where it happened. Maybe he can give you some help."

Mackay said bitterly, "You mean you trust me."

"Easy, son." The chief's voice was level. "You know we have to check all the angles."

"Sure," Mackay said. "Sure I know." He got up, the movement savage and com-

pact, and said, "Okay, Lieutenant. Take me out there."

ANGER still smouldered in Mackay all the way over the desert pavement until they reached the drive-in restaurant. The door was not locked, but a lean man loitered just inside the building. He was smoking a cigar, and when they came in he took the cigar out of his mouth and straightened himself. "Hello, Lieutenant," he said to Case.

"Hi, Brady. Anything new?"

"No."

Case led the way and they walked past the guardian of the door to an office in the rear of the restaurant.

"He was killed in here," Case said.

Mackay pushed inside, glanced around. The room was empty. He said, "You moved him?"

"Yeah. Don't look so surprised, fella. There're other cops beside yourself. We worked on this while you were sleeping this morning."

"You get the gun?"

"The gun will be in the sand out there."

Case waved a hand toward the desert. "Maybe we'll find it maybe not. Anyway, we got the woman that did it."

Mackay felt the breath coming up inside him, crowding his chest. "You got the woman that killed him?"

"Yeah. Random's wife. She was passed out, apparently drunk when we got here. The girl, Cherry, tells a pretty straight story. Mrs. Random will probably get off with self defense."

"Where is Mrs. Random?"

"We took her in. The doc's trying to sober her up. The girl, Cherry, is upstairs, in her room. I reckon you better check her story."

Mackay shambled up the stairs behind Lieutenant Case until they reached the living quarters above the restaurant. Case knocked on the door, and Cherry opened it.

"You know Sergeant Mackay," Lieutenant Case grunted.

"Yes. Come in!"

Lieutenant Case seated himself at one end of the sofa, Cherry sat at the other. Mackay stood, looking down at her, twirling his hat in his hand. He said, "Tell me about it, Cherry."

He listened, watching the curve of her full lips as she talked. The story seemed to be straightforward enough, eye-witness stuff. Both the Randoms had been drunk. When she had finished, Mackay said gently, "Is that all? Nothing else?"

Mackay looked across the room. Case was sitting there trying to read him, watching without seeming to. Now Case came to his feet and said thinly, "Thank you. We won't bother you again today."

They came downstairs to where Brady guarded the door. Case glanced at Mackay, said softly, "You know these people. You think we can wrap it up that way?"

Mackay said, "Wrap it up." He crawled in the car. All the way back to town he kept thinking of Cherry.

He tried to visualize the murder scene as it must have occurred. A thought intruded, and he asked, "You find any dough on Random?"

"No. Only a few dollars, and a bit in the till."

Mackay sighed. It was not so simple after all. "There ought to be some money," he said. "There ought to be the dough that was paid off on the false hit-and-run last night."

Case was thoughtful. "You think maybe the guy found out it was a fake?"

Mackay said, "I wouldn't know. But if he stopped in Indio last night to check his car he might have found out about the racket—or maybe he had the guts to stop and wash his car, and found the ketchup. I think I'd check the filling stations and garages to see if anyone had a car washed late last night."

"What if we found him? That would mean Cherry was lying."

Mackay grunted, "Yeah." His mind was already worrying that, wondering if there was obscure connection between the last swindle victim and Cherry. Something had happened to the money.

He did not know from where the faint fragment of memory had come—something she had said in the distant past—when she had been kidding him about robbers robbing the tavern under his nose. "I know a place where they'd never find my money," she had said.

Mackay said, "I gotta go back."

Case looked at him, compressed thin

lips. "You want me to go back with you?"

"No. I want to find out about the car that might have stopped here last night."

Lieutenant Case was looking at Mackay. The evening light glancing off the lean shape of his face made him look almost gentle. "All right. But don't forget you're a sucker for women, Mac. You can't afford to make a mistake now."

Mackay said, "You sure trust me, don't you?"

As Mackay got out of the car, Case looked at him again. "Good luck, Mac," he said.

Mackay stood a moment, staring after the lieutenant. The quick desert night was falling, and the sands had begun to rustle again, speaking to him, *Good luck, sucker.*

He climbed into his car, kicked it to life. When he pulled out of the drive he gunned it, as if the accelerator were spurs by which he could make the vehicle aware of his own turbulent emotion.

GOING down the paving he let the car run, finding some control of himself in the sweet-running swiftness of the machine. The lights lanced out into the now dark desert, and already the little chill that falls after dark seeped into the car around him.

He made it in something under thirty minutes. A few hundred yards down the road he cut speed, and over the last rise he cut the lights and crawled in.

He had parked and was slipping out of the car before he thought of Brady. Brady would be there, on the door, and his presence might create a problem. Mackay sidled up to the front and listened. The venetian blinds inside the restaurant were drawn, and he could see inside, but he though he could hear the soft murmuring of voices.

He sidled around the place and peered through a small side window. The blinds were not tightly closed, and he could look through the slats and see inside.

Brady and Cherry were sitting at one of the tables. A coffee pot was beside them, and a dirty steak plate and a few shreds of potatoes were just to the right of Brady's elbow. He was drinking coffee now without noticing what he was doing, looking at the girl.

Angrily, Mackay took his eyes from the

window, thinking, *What do you care what she does, Mackay, what do you care?*

The hell of it was, he did care.

He was moving away from the window when motion inside caught his eyes. He peered back in, just in time to see Brady slip quietly down in his chair, his head lolling to one side. He was out cold.

Mackay grunted. A thin edge of bitterness gnawed at him. That would be chloral hydrate. He walked around, hearing the crunch of his feet, and moved around to the front door. He tried it, and it was locked. He knocked softly, and his voice came out soft and unhurried.

"Open up, honey. It's me — it's Mackay."

He wondered while waiting what she would do about Brady. The door opened immediately. She had done nothing.

Mackay stepped inside.

"I'm so glad you came," she said. "I've been worried about your man." She gestured toward Brady.

"Worried?"

"Yes. He's been feeling bad. I fixed him some supper, hoping he'd feel better, but it didn't seem to help. A minute before you came, he said he felt worse, and put his head on the table. I believe he's passed out."

"He been drinking?" Mackay asked. He did not look at her, waiting for the lie.

"No!" That made Mackay look at her. He hadn't expected that. The lie would have been so easy, so logical.

She said simply, "I'm scared, Mackay, I'm scared. I wish I'd never come here, never heard of Random." She touched his arm, and Mackay could feel her tremble.

He began to want to protect her, the

way one looks after a stray cat, or dog. Pity welled in him, and was destroyed by the sharp ringing of the telephone. He moved swiftly across the room, and took the receiver.

Case's voice came over the wire. "You were right about the guy being still in town. Washed the car himself, drove on into Palm Springs this morning."

Mackay whistled when he heard the name. The guy was a movie big shot. Not one of the stars, but one of the big guns in the industry.

Case said, "I just talked to him. After a bit he admitted that Random shook him down last night and that he discovered the fake when he washed his own car. He forked over twenty gees last night."

Mackay said, "You do mighty good work."

"You got anything new?" Case asked.

Looking down, Mackay could see that he was crushing the receiver in his hand. He looked at his hand, concentrating until his grip was normal, almost relaxed, then said, "I'll call you back in fifteen minutes. If I don't call you, you better get out here."

He turned to meet the questioning eyes of the girl. He said very gently, "Cherry, honey, would you draw me a cup of coffee."

"Of course." She moved toward the urn. She took a cup from the rack and held it under the spigot. "It's cold," she said. "I'll make some more in the little pot."

"No," Mackay. "We'll make it in the urn."

From the tension of her body he knew that he had struck pay dirt. He pulled

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the top from the urn, said, "Remember, once you told me what a fine hiding place this would make. Under the coffee." The coffee was indeed cold, for he could thrust his hands into it. In the bottom, under the liquid, he found two coffee cans, with the lids sealed on with scotch tape. He peeled the tape, and tore the lid from one.

HE HAD known what would be there. He had even known that it would hit him hard. Still he said, "You fed Brady knock-out drops. You were going to get on the bus that goes by here in an hour or so. Why?"

Cherry's great brown eyes were fear filled, tear filled. She said, "After Mrs. Random shot Random, she fainted. I knew he had the money and I took it."

"You were afraid we'd find it—is that it?" Mackay asked.

"Yes."

Mackay said savagely, "That's not all of it! That's not why you were so frightened. You killed him yourself, probably after feeding Mrs. Random some of the knock-out drops. You figured you could get away before she would recover enough to tell the truth. You hadn't figured on the police sending Brady to guard the door."

"Mackay, you're mad. I swear it. I only took the money for you, Mackay, for us. I figured we could go to South America. We could be rich there. Everything we've talked about, always wanted. We'd have riches, Mackay, and each other." She was breathing fast.

"You're lying to me," he said.

"Please, Mackay. We could make it. We could drive to Mexico tonight. After that, no one could touch us. The money really wasn't Random's anyway."

Mackay said, "It sounds good to me. But, you killed Day Random for that dough."

"Does that matter?" She was close to him. "You better stall that lieutenant before he comes out here."

"Yeah," Mackay said. "Yeah!"

"We can take your car part way—tonight at least. We'll have to ditch it tomorrow, so they won't know where we've gone."

"You think that would be best?"

Mackay's lungs were crowding him, pushing down until they hurt him.

"Better call the lieutenant."

"Yeah." Mackay picked up the telephone.

He was a big man and when he pulled, the telephone came out by the roots. It took Cherry an instant to completely understand.

"You didn't call," she gasped.

"No," Mackay said. "I didn't call. I can't call now."

She was tearing Mackay up, looking like that. She said, "You couldn't send me up. You're in love with me. You couldn't see me tried for murder."

"Couldn't I?"

She came to him. "You couldn't. No man could do that to the woman he loves."

Mackay said nothing.

"Kiss me. That will show you what I mean."

Her lips were close and soft and red. Mackay kissed her. After that, she drew away and looked at him.

Mackay could see it hit her. She shrieked at him. "Damn you. I thought you were soft." Her voice ran out, leaving her biting her lip. Mackay could see the white teeth fumbling with her lip, biting, bringing blood. For an instant even, he was able to feel some sort of pity for her.

He was glad, when Lieutenant Case and the squad car whirled up outside, that she did not make it necessary for him to use force.

* * *

Lieutenant Case said, oddly, driving back, "I'll give you this, Mac. You've got guts."

For an instant, Mackay almost liked him.

Then, later, after they were alone together, Lieutenant Case said carefully, "One thing, Mac. Mrs. Random will be having a pretty tough time of it. She's a nice gal. I think you ought to look in on her, now and then."

Mackay's tongue crept out, wetting his lips briefly. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah, I'll do that."

THE HEARSE OF THE TURTLE



"You don't want to force me to use
this, do you?"

*The big Palooka would do anything
to date worldly-wise Ellen—who was
headed for a hot time in the sizzle-
seat.*

**By WYATT
BLASSINGAME**

LIVING in a college dormitory you get accustomed to noise, and I knew I had been hearing this sound for a long while before I woke up. The luminous-dialed alarm clock showed one-twenty-five. I rolled over, already half asleep again, and saw that Mark Chapman was standing in front of the window, looking out into the night. He turned, went across the dark room, and sat on the edge of his bed. Then he got up and went back to the window again.

"For Pete's sake," I said, "get some-

where away from here and stay there."

He looked around. "I'm sorry, Ed."

"Go to sleep."

"I—I can't."

"Well go outside if you want to walk."

"All right."

He went back and sat on the edge of his bed. The third bed, the one belonging to Webb Remington, was empty; but that wasn't unusual at one-thirty in the morning. I shut my eyes, sliding head-first toward sleep.

"Ed?"

"Huh?"

"Would you do me a favor?"

"You do me a favor. I've got an eight o'clock class."

"I'm sorry." And he got up and went back to the window again, a powerfully built, awkward boy. I didn't know what troubled him just now but I felt sorry for him. I always felt sorry for him. I reached over and got a cigarette from beside the clock, sat up in bed, and lit the cigarette.

"Hell," I said, "I'm awake now. What is it you want?"

He kept his back to me. After awhile he said, "Would you make a date with Ellen Lanier for me?"

"For you? Why don't you make it yourself?"

"I—I don't know. I—"

"All you've got to do is drive up in a snazy convertible upholstered with fifty dollar bills."

He turned from the window then. "That isn't true," he said.

"I only know what I hear."

I couldn't see his face, just the squat bulk of his shoulders, the dark outline of his head against the window. "It isn't true." And, when I didn't answer, "Will you make the date for me, Ed?"

"I've never had a date with her myself. I scarcely know her."

"You've made dates with girls you didn't know any better."

I didn't know how to answer him. For two weeks I'd known he had a crush on Ellen Lanier, but I hadn't known it would reach the stage where he couldn't sleep at night. So far as I knew he had never spoken more than a few words to her, just seen her on the campus and watched her, his lips parted a little and his eyes wide. If I went to Ellen and asked her to go out

with Mark Chapman, she'd ask who Mark Chapman was—and when I told her, she'd laugh. But I couldn't say that to Mark.

"Get Webb to make you a date," I said. "He's more in her class than I am."

"I—" He didn't say any more, but I had an idea what he was thinking. Webb was too much in Ellen Lanier's class. He did drive a convertible and he was up-holstered with money. He had been a fighter pilot during the war and looked like a man who could have played that role for the movies. It was surprising that Webb Remington and Ellen Lanier hadn't got together before this.

I leaned over and snubbed out my cigarette and stretched. Mark had turned back to the window. For some minutes I watched him, dark against the outside moonlight. The more I came to know about him the more I felt sorry for him, and now after six months of rooming with him I thought I knew him well. Because I was sympathetic, because in a vague way I represented some of the things he wanted to be and couldn't, he'd talked to me more than to any other person in his life.

Even as a child, he'd been awkward. One of the first things he could remember was his mother saying, "Look out! You're just like your father—so awkward you can't get through a door without stumbling"; and saying it over and over all through his youth. He had trouble with his eyes, a lack of depth perception, so that he couldn't play baseball or football with the other kids. To compensate he'd taken to exercise, developing powerful shoulders and arms and hands, getting muscle-bound and more awkward than ever.

This awkwardness of movement had carried over to an awkwardness of behavior around strangers, especially girls. He liked them—and was frightened and helpless in their presence.

He was only thirteen in December of 1941. He had seen the older boys put on their uniforms and go off into a kind of hazy glory. He waited. He dreamed of being a commando, a marine, a fighter pilot. And when he was one month short of his seventeenth birthday, the war ended.

Now he was nineteen and in a college where at least seventy percent of the boys were not boys at all but men, veterans,

with all the advantages that meant, experienced and at ease with women. The girls mostly were Mark's age, but they went with the older boys.

Ellen Lanier was older. In her mid-twenties, perhaps, though just how old no one knew for sure. She had been a Wave during the war. She was a very beautiful and brassy blonde, and very sophisticated for this campus. There was, naturally, a good bit of talk about her. She went with the wealthier boys only, or with men from town.

Now Mark Chapman stood there at the window, tortured and unable to sleep for dreaming of her. Yet he had never spoken to her more than a few words in the bookstore, in classes. She wouldn't know his name.

It was silly. It was funny. It was pathetic.

I went back to sleep, thinking about them. Later I heard Webb Remington come in; I was aware of his voice and of Mark's but I never fully woke up.

IT WAS a few minutes after eight the next night and I had just settled down to some studying when Dick Bond came in the room. He said, "Somebody just phoned from the hospital. They want you and Mark to come out there to see Webb."

Both Mark and I looked up, startled. "What—what's happened to him?" Mark asked.

"I don't know. They just said for his roommates, or somebody who knew him well, to come out." Dick hesitated. "I'll take you if you want."

The hospital was set in a grove of

orange trees and now, in early March, the odor of the blossoms was ether-sweet. Going up the steps, out of darkness into light, Mark said, "He must have been in an accident. He must have been hurt." It was at least the fifth time he'd said it. His face was very pale.

There was a pretty nurse at the desk. I said that someone had called for us to come here to see Webb Remington. The nurse didn't answer; she just looked at me and at Mark and at Dick Bond. "Webb Remington," I said. "Is he here?"

Two men had got up from a sofa in the lobby and had come over to stand by us. One of them said, "He's here. You fellows friends of his?"

And I still didn't know what was wrong. I said that Mark and I were Webb's roommates and that Dick Bond lived across the hall in the same dormitory. The man scratched at his thinning hair. "Any of you with him this afternoon?"

"No." We all said it.

"Do you know who was with him? Did he have a date? Do you know where he was going?"

I shook my head. Mark was saying, "For Pete's sake, mister, what's happened?"

"He's dead," the man said. His voice was quite flat, without emotion. "Somebody beat his brains out with a hammer."

We had to identify the body. There wasn't a great deal of blood. The blood had dried on his forehead, a two-toned blackish red on cheek and mouth. We had to answer questions. His home was in up-state New York. He apparently came of a very well-to-do family for they sent him plenty of spending money.

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"How much money?" the detective asked. "Did he carry a lot of it around with him?"

"Fifty, as much as a hundred dollars sometimes," I said. "No more. He had a checking account with a local bank."

"He didn't have any money on him," the detective said. "A wallet but no money."

"He always had money," Dick Bond said, and his voice was just a little bit bitter.

"He didn't when we found him," the detective said.

"When was it? Where?"

"About an hour ago. Some fellows was out fishing on Lake Ibis and found him, setting in his car." The detective scratched at his head again. His hair was thin and just two shades darker than the flakes of dandruff he dug up. "You know where Lake Ibis is?"

I knew. It wasn't more than two miles from the campus, but it was secluded, good dating grounds. I had parked there with Webb and a couple of girls more than once.

"Probably had some babe out there with him," the detective said. "You wouldn't know who it was?"

"He went with a lot of them," I said. Neither Mark nor Dick Bond said anything.

They released us finally and we went out and got in Dick Bond's ancient automobile and drove back across the town. We went slowly, without talking much. There was a kind of numbness on us. I still wasn't thinking who had killed Webb but about the fact that although death itself is final and unalterable, the effect it has on the observer depends a great deal on circumstances.

I had liked Webb. Still, in the army there had been fellows I liked better, and I had seen some of them killed without the shock that Webb's death had caused. In the army you were prepared for death; to a certain extent you expected it, since there was always the reason for it, and the chance. But for Webb's death there had been no preparation and no apparent reason.

Dick Bond said quite suddenly, "Let's stop and have a beer. We could do that for Webb. I think he'd like it."

Mark made a gasping sound. I said, "No thanks."

"There's no need to get worked up," Dick Bond said. "You've seen men killed before, haven't you? Take a drink and send them on their way. That's how we always felt about it."

I started to answer him, and didn't. I knew something of Dick Bond's history. He was always telling you about his war record. When he was drunk he would cry and curse "the bloody civilians," and tell you about all his friends who had been killed beside him, and how he hated the Japs—though sometimes it was the Germans.

But there were discrepancies in his stories so that Webb, who owned a Navy Cross and didn't talk about it, once took advantage of a chance to look at Dick Bond's service record. It showed that Dick had never been outside this country; he'd had only six months in the service before being discharged as mentally unfit. Although Dick soon realized that all of us knew the truth about him, he never gave up his act. Perhaps he couldn't. Perhaps he believed it himself. He had hated Webb Remington, but I was never sure whether that stemmed from the fact that Webb had found out the truth about him, or from jealousy.

Now he stopped in front of the beer garden. "Come on."

"No, thanks," I said. "I'll walk the rest of the way."

Mark Chapman went with me. His face was still pale, too pale, and his lower lip trembled a little. After a half block he said, "Dick could have killed him. He would have, if he had the chance."

"Possibly," I said. I could feel the numbness, the shock, wearing away. Until that moment I hadn't really thought about who the murderer could be. "Maybe he could have," I said. "But what about the girl? Because Webb wouldn't have been parked out there on Lake Ibis without a girl."

Mark didn't look at me. "He could have gone without a girl," he said. "He—he could have been fishing."

Then I remembered the way the blood had been black on his forehead, reddish black on cheek and mouth. "There was lipstick on him," I said.

BUT I still didn't know. I didn't even guess at it until the next day on the campus, when I saw Mark Chapman talking to Ellen Lanier. They were standing under an orange tree, close together, with the closeness of conspirators.

She was as tall as Mark, but very slender and graceful beside the bulk of him. Her face was pale so that the deep sunburn she had so carefully acquired looked sallow, the lipstick and rouge unnatural blotches of color. And all at once I knew she was the girl who had been with Webb Remington yesterday, and that Mark had known this all along. It was almost as if I could hear again, consciously now, the conversation which I must have overheard in my sleep:

Mark asking Webb to make him a date with Ellen Lanier and Webb saying, "You mean the blonde? Yeah. . . . I should have got around to that before." And Mark, "When? Tomorrow? Will you make me a date with her for tomorrow?" And Webb replying, "I better have a date with her myself first. It'll be better that way, kid. Sure."

They did not see me until I was close on them. Half startled, they moved apart. Mark said, "Hello, Ed."

I stood and looked at them, not yet knowing what I was supposed to do, and what I wanted done. So I just stood there, staring, seeing how clear the girl's skin was, and how bloodless under the sunburn. Her eyes were blue-green, translucent, like the glass in a church window. I said:

"You were with him yesterday. You were with him when he was killed."

"No—" Her lips opened on the word, stayed open.

"You killed him," I said.

This time it was Mark that answered. He put his hands on my arms and his fingers dug in and hurt. I could feel muscle and bone move under the pressure of his fingers and I tried to pull away and couldn't. Until then I hadn't fully realized how much power was in his hands.

He said, "You're crazy, Ed! You're crazy! She wasn't with Webb."

Getting my arms free, I stepped away from him. My arms hurt. I said, "The police will find out sooner or later. There'll be fingerprints in the car, on the hammer

maybe. Could be they can match the lipstick that was on his face."

"It wasn't Ellen!"

I looked from him to the girl. "Then you won't mind if I tell the cops what I think. You can prove you weren't with him."

Mark reached for me. I stepped back and he stumbled a little. His face was twisted as though he were about to cry. His face was like that of a child backed into a corner by a larger child, terrified and about to fight with the fierceness of terror. But the girl was saying:

"I was with Webb yesterday. I—was at the lake with him. But I didn't kill him."

"Who did?"

She looked straight at me. The fear sank deeper in her eyes like a stone in water, and was gone. Her eyes became the soft, lovely eyes of a woman accustomed to lying to men and to having men believe her, or rather to men who knew she was lying and who accepted it nevertheless. "I don't know," she said. "I didn't see who killed him."

"You were with him and you didn't see who killed him?"

She covered her face with her hands. "I've told Mark all about it. I don't like to think about it anymore. Please."

"Let's go tell the police about it," I said. "They are the ones who ought to know."

She uncovered her face, quickly. "I'll tell you about it. But you've got to believe me. You were Webb's roommate, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"You ought to know, you and Mark. I had a date with Webb yesterday afternoon. We—we just rode around for awhile, then about twilight he parked out there at Lake Ibis. We'd had a few drinks—he had a bottle with him—and he started to get affectionate, a little too affectionate. That's when I picked up the hammer."

Her voice got hurried, as though to stop my thinking before it had a chance to formulize. "I didn't mean to hit him with it. It was just a—a gesture. I was still trying to laugh him off. And the hammer was there on the back of the seat where my hand was almost touching it anyway. I said, 'You don't want to force me to use this, do you?' I was joking. But he wasn't

very easy to put off." She bit her lip. "You should have hit him!" Mark said. His voice was thick. "It's my fault. But I didn't know he'd act like that."

She said, "It wasn't your fault, Mark. And I wasn't really afraid of him."

"I wouldn't guess you were," I said, "not judging by the lipstick on him."

She looked straight at me. She was very pretty but there were hard, bitter lines in her face, the kind of lines which are years in forming, but repressed a reply.

Mark was suffering like a child learning the truth about Santa Claus, but not believing, not wanting to believe. I hadn't realized, not even the night when he couldn't sleep, how the thought of this woman had possessed him. It showed in his face now.

"So you picked up the hammer," I said. "Then—"

"It didn't do any good. I got out of the car and told him I was going to walk home. And I did start. I went down to the lake and started around it. I must have gone a quarter of a mile, out of sight of the car through the bushes." She stopped. Her gaze rested on Mark for a moment, then turned away. "I saw a snake. I'm terrified of them. And there were bushes all around. I turned and ran back toward the car."

"Then?"

"He was still sitting there. He was dead."

The rest of it she didn't remember clearly, she said. There was the fear of what had happened to Webb, of realizing the murderer might still be nearby. And with it there was a fear of the police. She was sure they would suspect her; she was sure they would charge her with the murder. So she had run, at first without sense of direction, she said, but later circling the lake and on back to the college.

I LISTENED. I kept thinking that most persons have an impulse to turn to the police in time of trouble. It shows something of a person's conditioning when his instinct is to fear the law and to run from it. It is a result of the past as definitely as the lines in a woman's face.

She said, "I didn't kill your friend, Ed. I swear I didn't."

And Mark said, "He won't tell the

police, Ellen. There is no need you should be dragged through this mess. Ed won't tell them. I promise you he won't."

"You promise I won't?"

"Yes," he said, and he looked straight at me. "I promise you won't."

I almost laughed—because I still didn't take him seriously. I just felt sorry for him: an awkward, muscle-bound, not-too-bright boy who was hopelessly in love with a woman who had been born knowing more than he ever would know. But he took himself seriously, and so I went with him back to our room in the dormitory and we sat on our cots, facing one another, the door closed. He said, "There's no need she should be made to suffer any more, Ed."

"Webb was a friend of mine. He was a friend of yours."

"He should have been killed!"

"A lot of wolves have dated Ellen Lanier." I saw the look on his face. I said, "Wait a minute! If you don't believe me, ask her."

"That's gossip, because she's older than the other girls. And prettier. Her parents weren't rich enough to send her to college. She had to work and earn her own living. But when she had a chance to go to school, on the GI bill she took it because she's smarter than the others and wants to learn. That's why they hate her and talk about her."

"Where did you learn all this?"

"I talked to her this morning before we met you."

"You were getting quite chummy for a guy who couldn't make a date with her two days ago. But now you knew she'd been with Webb. And you were the only person who did know. That would make her more friendly, of course."

He said, "She's had things rough all her life, Ed. She wants to stay here and finish college. It means a lot to her. There's no need to go to the police and cause her more trouble. Because she didn't kill Webb and she doesn't know who did."

"You can't be sure of that."

He didn't look at me. He just looked at the floor. "I'm sure of it," he said. "She didn't kill Webb"

"Who didn't?" It was Dick Bond, his hand still on the half-open door. "Who didn't kill him?"

"That's what we don't know," I said.

He stood there, a tall, gaunt, sour-faced man with a nervous tic in his cheek near the left corner of his mouth. "It could have been anybody," he said. He liked to dramatize things. "It could have been one of us."

"That's what I was thinking," I said. "Where were you yesterday afternoon?"

He glared at me. "I was at the movies," he said slowly. "After that I went out and had a drink." Suddenly he began to laugh. "It was a detective movie and the same way it is in most of them: the very fellow who had an alibi about being in the movies was the real killer. Maybe you went to the movies, too?"

"I was here," I said. "I can even prove it."

He looked at Mark Chapman. "Where were you, kid?"

"I was walking," Mark said. "I was by myself, and I can't prove it."

There was something very strained about the way he said it, and looking at him, watching him carefully, I realized that he was frightened. He was clenching and unclenching his fingers. He stood up and walked to the window and back again and sat down: slow, awkward, powerful—and very sensitive about himself and the things he loved. "A sensitive turtle," Webb Remington had called him once. I began to wonder what would have happened if he had seen Webb kissing the girl and mistaken her protests for sincere objections.

"We'll know you killed him," Dick Bond said, "if you start spending money like water."

"What money?"

The little tick at the corner of his mouth beat twice. "I was just talking with Tom Payne on the campus. Tom was at the Tampa racetrack yesterday and he saw Webb cashing a ticket right after the daily double. The daily double paid off twelve hundred dollars, and how much else he won heaven only knows!"

"Do the cops know that?"

"Sure. At least Tom said he was going to tell them. He'd just heard about Webb being killed."

Mark was holding to the edge of the bed. His fingers were sunk into it like hooks. "Who was with Webb at the

track?" he whispered. "Did Tom see who was with him?"

"There wasn't anybody with him. At least there wasn't when Tom saw him, standing in line at the window."

Mark's fingers relaxed slowly. He lay back down on the cot and closed his eyes.

Dick Bond looked at him with a kind of sardonic tenderness. "The kid's got it bad," he said, and turned and went out, closing the door behind him.

I said, "Mark, did she tell you about the horse races and the money?" He didn't move. I said, "My guess is she didn't."

He sat up. "Maybe she wasn't with him at the track. Maybe she didn't know. You can't tell the cops, Ed. Not until we talk to her anyway."

I thought it was going to hurt but it would be best for him to see her, to learn the truth the hard way. "Come on," I said.

ELLEN had classes the rest of that morning and it was after lunch before we found her. The three of us walked out on the campus, under the orange tree. The sun was hot, the shadows cool. Jaybirds were noisy in the trees. I said, "Tell us about going to the race track yesterday and how much money Webb won."

She tok it well: just the lines showed a little deeper in her face and she looked older. "I should have told you," she said. "I should have known that someone must have seen us."

"No one saw you," Mark said quickly. "It was just Webb was seen. Maybe—"

Ellen said, "I was with him. He won the daily double and then bet parts of it back. He won just over twenty-one hundred dollars altogether." Her eyes came around to me then. "I never had twenty-one hundred dollars in my life and there's not much I wouldn't do to get it. But I wouldn't kill for it."

I didn't say anything.

She said, "I told you the truth about the rest of it. We left the track after the fifth race. We stopped at a few places for drinks. About sundown, we stopped at that place on the county line and Webb got a bottle. Then we went on to Lake Ibis."

"I think you better go to the police."

She surprised me. "All right," she said. "I should have right at first. But I was too

afraid, too shocked to think clearly."

Mark said, "But suppose they—they think you did it?"

She shook her head. "I'll have to take that chance."

"Let's go."

I turned, and coming across the campus toward us were the detectives from the hospital. The one with the thin, colorless hair was in the lead. He said, "Hello," like we were people he met every day, and to Ellen, "You Miss Lanier?"

"Yes."

He groped in a coat pocket and got out a package of cigarettes, two books of matches, and then a handkerchief. A woman's handkerchief. "This yours?"

She swayed a little, then was standing quite straight and still. "Yes."

"We found it in Mr. Webb Remington's car," he said. "Took a while to trace the laundry mark." Nobody else said anything, and the detective scratched at his dandruff. "The cap'n would like for you to come down to the police station for awhile," he said.

I couldn't stay around Mark Chapman that afternoon. Just looking at him gave me the jitters, so I left and went to the movies.

It was one of those where a former glamor boy has been hired to play the villain, and plays it to the hilt: a sort of stupendous super-colossal Robin Hood who laughs at the law and makes the role envious if not sympathetic: a guy who steals a wealthy man's automobile, and with teeth gleaming merrily through his mustaches all the while, uses the car to take out the wealthy man's daughter. That kind of role.

Because it was a detective picture, I'd made sure to go in at the beginning. It was almost sundown when I came out. I walked down Florida Avenue until I came to a bar and went in and had a beer. After that movie I would have liked something else, but this a dry county and beer is all they sell. While I was drinking the beer a whole string of little incidents began to tie together in my mind, and I thought that maybe I knew who had killed Webb Remington.

But there wasn't any proof. There wasn't anything I could take to the police, and I didn't want to go to them with a half-baked theory and be laughed at. So I

decided to drop the whole idea. It was nothing but the result of an imagination inflamed by a gigantic B-grade movie.

I had a bowl of spaghetti, and kept thinking. I went back to the dormitory, found Mark and Dick together. They were talking about the murder. Dick said, "Have you heard the latest scuttlebutt? Ellen Lanier has confessed."

"It's just gossip," Mark said. "It's crazy."

"Our young friend here is toying with the idea of going to the police and telling them he did the killing."

"That was your crazy idea," Mark said. But his lips were dry.

"Are you sure about Ellen confessing?"

"I'm sure she didn't," Mark said. "She couldn't have. That's just one of a dozen fool rumors." He sounded like a man trying to convince himself.

All at once, I didn't want to know who had killed Webb Remington. I knew I was going to try and find out, and I didn't want to know. I had a strange, sudden memory of how it had been sitting off Kwajalein, watching the shelling of that island. There had been a feeling of sympathy, of tenderness almost, for the Japs. I had known they had to be killed. If they weren't killed, they might kill me. Yet, watching the pounding they had taken for hour after hour, without any way to strike back, I'd felt sorry for them.

I said, "I've got an idea who killed Webb. I'll explain it to you."

"Sherlock Holmes," Dick Bond said.

"I got it from that movie this afternoon. Everybody tends to associate himself with the hero of a movie. Some people do more than others, but it's a natural tendency."

"Sure," Dick said.

"Did you see this one, Mark?"

"Two days ago."

"Well, you'll know what I'm talking about then. You know how the hero was always guzzling liquor. When I came out of the show tonight I wanted a drink. Dick said when he left the show yesterday he went and had a drink. Where'd you go, Dick? Out to the county line?"

His face tightened a little. "Why?"

"It was the natural thing to do. I wanted more than a beer, but I don't have a car. Besides," I said, "that would have put you there just about the time Webb got there

coming from the Tampa racetrack."

"What are you getting at?"

"I'm trying to show how and why you might have killed Webb. Now, say you met him in the bar. Or better, maybe you met him in the men's room. Nobody there but just the two of you; nobody ever to know you'd seen him—and he told you about the money he'd won. He told you about the girl with him and what else he planned to win."

HE WAS staring at me. The tic in his cheek got faster than usual. Then all at once he began to laugh. "So I murdered him and dragged his body outside and gave Ellen five hundred bucks to drive it to the lake."

"No," I said. "You followed Webb and Ellen. Maybe already planning on murder—just a confusion of your character with that of the movie hero, a role that you were making up as you went along."

"I'm making up a hell of a role," Dick Bond said.

Mark was sitting on the edge of the bed. His face was dotted with sweat. "Is this a joke, Ed? It isn't funny. It isn't funny at all."

"That depends on the way you look at it," I said. "Murder isn't funny. Suppose he saw Ellen wave the hammer, get out of Webb's car and run off into the woods. Maybe he was pretty sure the girl would come back and he wanted to play the hero's role before her. Whatever it was, it led to a fight—and the hammer. That would be funny, wouldn't it?"

They both sat and looked at me. Dick Bond wasn't laughing any more. Finally he said, "Are you serious, Ed? Are you claiming I killed Webb?"

"It was an idea I worked out."

"It's quite an idea," he said. His voice was shaking a little. "A hell of an idea." He got up and walked out, carrying himself stiffly as though he had been physically hurt.

Mark and I sat there. After awhile, Mark said, "Do you believe what you were saying, Ed?"

"Part of it."

"What part, Ed?"

"I'm not sure," I said. "It might have been that way. It might not have been a planned murder, but one growing out of

something else: an old hatred, and sudden, new anger. And maybe the opportunity was enough—maybe a fight starting over the girl. How do you think it was?"

He sat there and looked at me. He looked older than he had two days before. "I don't know," he said.

"Suppose he saw Webb and Ellen putting on their wrestling act. And suppose he thought Ellen more insulted than she really was. I remember you telling me that Webb should have been killed."

"Yes. . . ." He wiped a hand across his lips. "I felt that way, I still—"

The door opened and Dick Bond came into the room. The door closed behind him. He reached inside his shirt and took out a Luger, holding it almost casually. "I killed the German I took this from," he said. "I never thought I'd have to use it again."

The tic in his left cheek was going fast. "I suppose I'll have to use it," he said. "Because you must have been there, in the men's room at the County Line Bar."

My mouth opened to say I hadn't been there, hadn't overheard his talk with Webb Remington. But my mouth was too dry for sound. I just stared.

"I don't believe you could have guessed it. But it doesn't matter." He made a movie-like gesture with the gun. "Come on," he said. "We'll go down the stairs, all three of us, very quietly. Then we'll get in my car and go for a little ride."

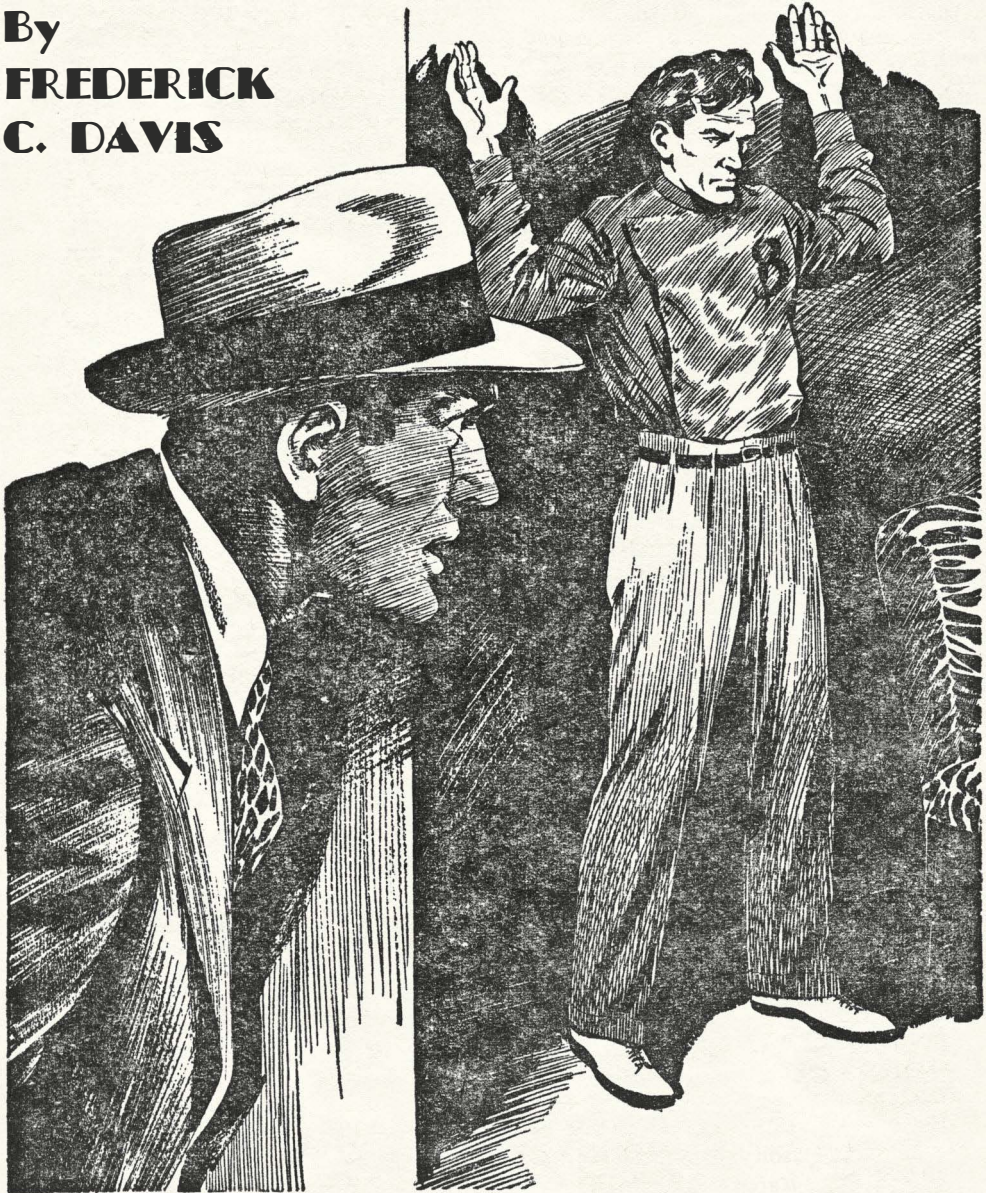
I couldn't move. I hadn't expected this. I hadn't planned on anything beyond watching Dick Bond's face while I talked about how the murder could have been committed—hadn't thought of anything beyond trying to judge whether or not he was guilty. Now I was looking into a gun and my stomach felt very cold.

"Get up," he said, and stepped toward me. Maybe he was still playing his role and had forgotten about Mark, for he went close past him. Mark reached up and caught hold of his wrist. Mark squeezed, hard. He shook Bond's hand. The gun went off, once, and flew out of Dick Bond's fingers onto the floor. But Mark still held his wrist, twisting it, bringing it up slowly behind his back until Dick was helpless and half bent over and not looking like a movie hero at all.

(Please continue on page 96)

KILL-AND-RUN

By
**FREDERICK
C. DAVIS**



• *While the boys in blue were hunting for this luscious slay-belle, she ran from the arms of her latest victim — into the ready embrace of a wolf in rescuer's clothing.* •

BLONDE



Holding the gun on Benetto, she tried to put on a pair of his pants.

**Novelette of
Supercharged
Suspense**

CHAPTER ONE

Under His Very Nose

MRS. AMY LOOMIS, the proprietor of a small hamburger stand on Route 511, two miles outside the city, was the earliest witness to

the incriminating actions of Miss Beryl "Dixie" Dixon on the afternoon of the homicide.

Miss Dixie Dixon was observed by Mrs. Loomis approaching the scene of the crime-to-be. The killing occurred only a few minutes later. As soon as it was discovered Miss Dixon, caught on the spot, burst into flight in a frantic attempt to escape justice, and vanished. This left Mrs. Loomis as one of the very few eyewitnesses to get a good look at the fast-moving fugitive.

Mrs. Amy Loomis described the meeting as follows:

I'm just dozin' off on the couch in the kitchen when that damn bell wakes me up.

The bell dinglin' like that without no warnin' means somebody was comin' in on the hoof. I mean I didn't hear any car rolling' up first and stoppin'. Traffic is mighty thin anyway, it bein' one of those sticky afternoons when the cement highway's hotter'n my griddle, with the tar hubblin' up outta the cracks. So when I hear the bell dingle I figure it's some hitchhiker lookin' for a glassa cold water and a place to cool off his blistered dogs and whatever else he can rustle up for free.

When I go front, though, I see it ain't like that at all. In fact, what I see is one of the cutest little angels ever found loose inside a hamburger heaven.

She really did look like an angel with her wind-blown blonde hair shinin' like a halo in the sun. Yeah, The Angel of Death. Only, of course, I didn't have no way a-knowin' that at the time.

For a minute she stands there just inside the screen door, her blue eyes big and round—and scared. She's wearin' a cute little lettuce-colored dress what makes her look as tasty as a chef's special salad. Her little red-tipped toes are peekin' outta her little white sandals. Altogether she's as yummy a little cupcake as any wolf would be delighted to take in one gulp. Said wolf would then get a bad stunnick-ache and curl up his toes on accounta said cupcake is loaded with poison.

Of course I don't figger her for the killer type at the time. Except, as I say, she looks plenty scared. I got no way of knowin' it's herself she's scared of. She knows that good little girls don't do what

she's goin' to do next. But I admit I shoulda suspicioned that big handbag she's carryin'.

As she stands there huggin' that big purse, with her blue eyes big and innocent, I say, "What'll it be, honey? Cheeseburger? Porkburger? Chickenburger? Or maybe nothin' quite so fancy—just a plain hamburger, huh?"

"N-no, thank you," she says in a little shaky voice. For a gal with murder in her heart she could act plenty innocent, all right. "J-just a cup of coffee, please," she says.

Next thing I notice about this chick, she musta come in a car after all. At least there's a classy little sea-green convertible parked about a hunnerd yards down the road, on the other side, which wasn't there a few minute ago. She'd left it standin' in front of Missouri—one of the cabins. All those cabins in the Fieger Motel is named after states, see? Even the office—and that's called District of Columbia.

I rustled the cuppa java up for her while keepin' a sort of motherly eye on her. She sat here at the counter huggin' that heavy purse under one bare arm and starin' across the road at that fine Fieger establishment like she was casin' it. I says to myself she's a pretty thing, but at the same time she's got a glint in her eye that sure enough bodes somebody no good.

"What's a matter with the coffee, honey?" I says after a while. "Too hot for you?"

She comes back to herself with a little jerk and stammers out, "No, I—I guess I'm just not thirsty any more!"

She quick fishes up a dime, holdin' her purse very careful so I can't see what's in it. Then she hustles out, headin' back for Missouri lookin' scarer but bolder, and hugging that heavy handbag even tighter.

That was the last I saw of her, on accounta I went right back to continue my nap. I figgered if she had any business with those low-down Fiegers it couldn't have nothin' to do with an honest business like mine. So I just let her go on her pretty way—never dreamin' she was hustlin' over there for the special purpose of beatin' someone's brains out.

SERGEANT REX GARVEY, plain-clothes man in the detective division of the local police force, was the next to witness the highly dubious actions of Dixie Dixon. His encounter with her was a violent one and left him in a state of profane chagrin.

Sergeant Garvey speaking:

I came in sight of Fieger's Motel only a few minutes after Dixie Dixon had crossed the road from the greasy little shack which Mrs. Amy Loomis calls *Forever Hamburgers*. By comparison, the Fieger Motel, across the road, is a pleasure to behold, with its neat, clean-painted cabins arranged picturesquely in a shady grove where not a twig is out of place.

Driving out along Route 511, I was delivering a large supply of groceries, to Mrs. Gertrude Fieger, the trim, intelligent woman who efficiently managed the Fieger Motel.

Trudy Fieger had phoned me several hours ago to ask if I would be so good as to pick up a few things needed for the Motel's commissary. We were old friends; the Fieger car was in the shop for repairs, and this was my regular afternoon off duty.

"Frank would do it for me, Rex, only he's not feeling so good again today," Trudy had explained over the phone, naming her husband, a frail little man with weak lungs who would have died years ago without the tender, faithful care she had lavished on him. "Anyway the whole place is deserted right now—there's no car I could borrow except Mrs. Loomis', and I wouldn't ask the old hag. I'll really appreciate it, Rex, and I do hope you'll stay for supper with us."

"You've sold me, Trudy," I said. I meant it, because she was a bright-eyed, plump, laughter-loving girl of thirty-two who was very nice to have around.

So now I was pulling toward Fieger's Motel with a load of assorted groceries, candy bars and cases of soda pop in the back seat. Anticipating a delicious supper and a pleasant evening, I was completely unprepared to come upon a bloody murder in the making.

The sight struck me without warning just as I swung off the highway and into the grounds of the motel. The murderous attack was occurring right out in the open, in broad sunlight, there in front of the cabin called Missouri—two women grappling in mortal struggle.

The blood smeared and streaked over Trudy's face made her almost unrecognizable. She had been unmercifully beaten. Repeated blows had crashed across her forehead and face. Blinded but fighting to the last to defend herself against the savage attack, she had thrown both her arms around her assailant.


The other girl I had never seen before. I was to learn later through her car registration that she was Beryl Dixon. She was desperately trying to throw Trudy to the ground and tear herself away.

I jammed on the brakes and was jumping out even before my car had stopped. My tires grinding in the gravel warned the murderess. She gave a brutal wrench that broke her loose. Then she struck at Trudy with her big, heavy handbag. For poor Trudy that was the final blow. She dropped like an empty dress.

For half a second Trudy's merciless attacker stood there staring white-faced,

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AFTERNOON

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DISCOMFORT OF COLDS

with Trudy's life-blood staining the front of her dress. Then, panic-stricken, she sprang for the nearest cover—dove to the door of Missouri, which was standing open, ducked inside and slammed the door shut.

In her desperate attempt to escape she had made the mistake of trapping herself inside the cabin.

I ran to Trudy. I shook her a little, called her name. It was no use. Trudy was dead. I had seen this lovely girl die before my very eyes—heartlessly murdered.

I grimly watched the closed door of that cabin named Missouri. Trudy's murderer was still inside it. My first move must be to make sure she would have no way of escaping this spot.

I went quickly to her green convertible, which was sitting only a few yards away. Its ignition was locked. No doubt she had the keys in her purse. I immediately saw to it that those keys and that car would be completely useless to her. I opened the hood, grabbed a handful of ignition wires, tore them loose and stuffed them into my pants pocket. That left the murderess's car as useful a means of escape as a rowboat on dry land.

WHEN that girl left here, I told myself, she would not be leaving in this classy little convertible of hers, but in my car, and she would go as my prisoner.

I went directly to the door of Missouri, knocked loudly and commanded. "Come out of there, miss. You're cornered. Come like a little lady so I won't have to get rough."

There was no answer except a soft sliding sound followed by a faint crunch of gravel underfoot at the back of the cabin.

Instantly I grabbed the knob, pushed the door wide open. Nobody was inside the cabin now. A rear window had been raised and the screen was hanging loose.

I broke into a run around Missouri. By the time I reached the rear of it, the girl was already scurrying deep into the motel's grove. I glimpsed her bare legs flashing behind a clump of young spruce trees. Next she was skimming behind another cabin, gripping that big purse in one hand, but fleet as a doe. After that she was gone from sight and in another

moment even her furtive sounds vanished.

This situation was a tough one to handle. Trudy had told me over the phone that there were no lodgers just now in any of the cabins, and Trudy's husband—her widower now, although he still didn't know it—was in bed, too ill and weak to plunge off into a woman-hunt. There was, in short, absolutely no one here to give me any help. It was up to me alone to bring this fleeing murderess to book. Considering the way she whisked herself around, as well as the many nooks and crannies of the landscape, it was really too big a job for one man.

As I have often said to the boys down at headquarters, if you gotta have a murder, get one done by a man. A female killer can be a terrific headache. She just can't believe she's to blame, that's all. She makes you feel like a heel for doubting her and she takes the attitude that the whole thing is the victim's fault for making her kill him, the louse.

I knew this little here-again-gone-again she-killer was watching me from somewhere behind the cabins and the bushes, but I couldn't catch a glimpse of her anywhere.

My move was to dodge over to the commissary. From the pay phone there I could call for a squad of men from headquarters. They would come swarming in within four minutes by the clock, to ring the motel and beat the surrounding bush. She wouldn't stand a chance in a million of squeezing through that dragnet.

I was no sooner inside the phone booth, however—I hadn't even begun dialing headquarters' number—when I heard light footfalls whipping past.

I jumped to the nearest window and saw her. She was dashing toward her car. I expected to see her hop in and try to start it, which would delay her a few precious minutes and give me an opening to grab her good. But she didn't do that. Instead she reached inside to the seat, snatched up a jacket that she had left there and flew right on.

Next thing I knew, to my everlasting disgust, she was inside my own car, starting the engine and looping it through a skidding U-turn back toward the city.

Staring after her in dismay, I recalled that in jumping out of my car to go to

Trudy's aid I hadn't, of course, wasted time removing the keys from the ignition lock. All this little killer had had to do was twist the key and highball it off.

At the same time I realized I couldn't give chase. I would replace the ignition wires of the girl's car, of course, but that wouldn't be quite enough. She still had her keys in that big purse of hers.

I had neatly jockeyed myself into the flat-footed position of seeing a murderess fleeing the scene of her crime in my own car. Not only that, but should she choose to hole in somewhere along a branch road, she would be able to hold out for weeks. Right there in the car with her, also generously provided by me, she had fourteen dollars worth of groceries, six dozen candy bars and three cases of soda pop, assorted flavors.

I ran back to the phone booth in the commissary, hoping there might still be time enough for the radio patrol to catch up with her.

Unaware of the emergency, being nowhere near a phone, Officer Henderson was standing in the middle of an intersection of streets in the outskirts of the city where no cop had ever directed traffic before. He was on special assignment, wig-wagging cars into a temporary detour so that they would not disrupt the work of a famous fashion photographer from New York, who had a battery of cameras set up halfway down the block for the purpose of taking some sort of important picture.

Henderson was simply standing there in the hot sun, wearily flagging cars right or left as they came in on Route 511, when he found himself in the path of Dixie Dixon's frantic flight without even knowing who she was.

Patrolman Henderson describes his brief encounter:

First thing I know, this car is coming up at me like a ball of fire out of nowhere.

Starting to work on it early, while it's still half a mile away, it's coming that fast, I hoist a paw to signal a full stop.

The driver of that wheeled whirlwind pays no attention—doesn't even notice me.

I begin blasting on my whistle and still it comes roaring right on. It's some fool woman, of course, in a crazy hurry maybe to keep a date with her hairdresser or

more likely her undertaker. She doesn't even see I'm there until suddenly I have to give a ballet dancer's leap to one side to avoid getting bounced into the next world.

Then and only then, partly because my whistle is shrilling like a fiend and partly because she sees the street ahead is blocked by a crowd of people, she stops.

She stops and stares back at me, with her big blue eyes frightened and pleading. I march toward her with no mercy in my heart, dragging my summons book off my hip.

Suddenly, to my surprise, she scrambles out of that car and starts running.

That's a new one on me, brother. Although you can never tell what a woman will do, this was the first time I ever had one abandon ship and light out for dear life.

This leaves me with an empty car in the middle of the crossing. I do not want it there or anywhere else. What I want is the little filly who's taking it on the lam with her skirt flying, a big purse clutched in one hand and a jacket unfurled in the other. I tear loose with my whistle again, but she just gives me one quick look over her shoulder and skims away even faster.

I say to myself that in all my experience as a cop I never saw anybody so scared about getting a little traffic ticket. The wild way she's scurrying for cover, you would almost think she'd committed a murder or something.

Next thing I know she's gone—lost in the crowd in the street what's watching the big-shot photographer Benetto doing his glamorous stuff.

CHAPTER TWO

Luscious Leg Work

A MOMENT after flurrying from Patrolman Henderson's sight Dixie Dixon entered suddenly into the life of Paul Stacey, chief assistant of the noted photographer, Benetto.

Paul Stacey was, of course, also unaware that a delectable, jet-propelled fugitive named Dixie Dixon was trying to put as much distance as possible between herself and the corpse she had left behind her.

As Stacey related it:

The weather wasn't the only thing that was hot this afternoon. So was Benetto—hot under the collar. And what was he so sore at? Me. As usual.

"More of your stupid incompetence," the great Benetto told me, sounding like a spitting cat. "I can't understand why I should endure your insufferable bungling."

He said this in the hearing of twenty or thirty curious bystanders who were crowded around to watch us. They tittered. They were impressed with Benetto. With his sky-blue shirt of silk, cut Russian style, and his beige slacks, socks to match the shirt and dark brown suede sandals, he was something to put in their scrap books.

"You don't understand how you can put up with me?" I said, feeling sour myself. "Hell, I can. It's because I work for you for beer-caps. There's only one thing in life more important to you than your art. Only one thing—a buck."

"Really, Stace, you're very crude," the great Benetto said.

"Correction," I added. "There are two things, not just one, which mean more to you than art. One is a buck and the other is any babe."

"If I'm such a horrible character, why do you go on working for me?" Benetto inquired in lofty tones.

"I must be feeble-minded," I answered. "Imagine, wanting to get into your lousy racket—grinding my life away making sockfulls of dough by taking pictures of luscious girls. It's a dog's life. The whole idea's just too silly."

"You'll try all your life and never develop a taste in girls as fine as mine," Benetto retorted, his long nose lifted. "For example, just where is the little tidbit who's holding us up—the one you swore would be here for this picture an hour ago?"

"She'll be here any second now," I said again, just as I had already said it forty times in the past forty minutes. "After all, the babes we're using here are just local amateur talent who don't fully appreciate what a terrible thing it is to keep you waiting. But they'll get to know you better soon. Much better. I mean as much better as your irresistible charm

can persuade 'em to, the poor kids."

Benetto gave to me a princely frown. "Come, come, Stacey. Such incompetence as yours isn't worth more than beer-caps. In fact, I've had almost enough of it at any price. If that incomparable model of yours doesn't show up immediately—I think I'll fire you."

He moved away, disdaining to continue the bickering. Unfortunately for me, he had a point. The delay actually was my fault. We were all set to shoot a picture except for one missing detail—the lass who should have been here almost an hour ago.

With three other sub-assistants also on the job we had two huge color cameras set up there in the street, one of them being Benetto's pet Zorka, a precision job custom-built in Germany before the war, the only one of its kind and worth as much as a house. I sometimes believe it could not have meant more to Benetto if it had worn skirts.

We had four big spotlights beaming into the sun-cast shadows. We had big flats of bright crinkled aluminum to highlight the curves of the lovely models who had already waited so long for the shutters to click that their make-up was almost dripping off.

These chicks were artistically arrayed around a new coupe parked in front of a small local version of Monticello. Wearing various sports outfits, including sunsuits, strapless and parted in the middle, they were the city's most dazzling dolls. The one slated to occupy the center spot had a French-type swim suit waiting for her, by comparison with which a handkerchief seemed as big as a sheet.

Benetto kept giving me dirty looks. I would have busted the jaw of any other guy looking at me that way. But, though Benetto was a ham, a poseur and a double-barrelled wolf, his way of draping his models was surpassingly classy. I was willing to slave for him and take his abuse for the sake of learning how he did it—and maybe topping him tomorrow.

"If your girl isn't here within exactly five more minutes, Stacey," Benetto threatened, glancing at his elegant strap-watch.

"Hold it," I said quickly. "I think I see her coming now."

SOMETHING was causing a stir at one edge of the crowd. I craned hopefully to see. Sure enough, a girl was squeezing through toward us. Naturally, I assumed it was the girl we were waiting for—otherwise why would she be pushing in like that? Jumping the gun a little in my eagerness to get Benetto out of my hair, I said, "Sure, that's her."

Benetto had called her my girl. Actually, the chick was one I'd seen only once before. I'd picked her up at the El Caballero bar last night and wasn't even sure of her name—Betsy or Betty Black, or was it Brown? Anyway, after making the woozy mistake of dating her for this afternoon's picture, I'd then made the further mistake of assuring Benetto that I had found the loveliest lass in town for the job.

You see, this was one of a series of pictures in a special assignment. It was being done for Oldam-Dorcas, the city's most chi-chi fashion store. The idea was to use local beauties, both feminine and topographical, to display Oldam-Dorcas' newest styles. To polish it off proper, Benetto had been imported from New York, for a staggering fee.

It was a nice change of scene for us and a fine idea—except for the scarcity of photogenic girls. Lookers were at a premium locally, especially those willing to pose for free—Benetto always flatters them by letting them work for free, if he can get away with it—which was why I'd plied my blandishments on the pretty Brown or Green or something at the bar last night. She shouldn't have held up the works like this, but she was finally making it.

Or so I thought.

The girl who popped out from the crowd into our working space was not Miss Brown or Green at all. Instead of the willowy brunette I'd expected, she was a cute little blonde, the cuddly type. Instead of sophisticated dark eyes, she had big innocent blue ones. She was wearing a little bolero jacket, over a flower-green dress, and holding a big white handbag. She looked deliciously breathless.

Instantly I forgot all about Miss Black or Brown. This little yellow-headed number outclassed every babe I'd seen in town.

She was the dream I'd been looking for all along. Unexpected as she was, I was dizzily delighted to welcome her.

"Well, honey child!" I heard myself saying. "Hello!"

With a shy little smile, she answered sweetly, "Hello-o, there."

Benetto was already at my elbow, having spotted her at once.

"Well," he said, briskly taking charge of her. "Hurry up and take your clothes off."

She blinked her beautiful long lashes.

I explained to her quickly, "Duck inside that trailer there. We're using it as a portable dressing room. It has blinds on all the windows and locks on the door. I will personally guard your privacy."

As she hesitated, there was another stir in the crowd in the same direction from which she had come. Someone else was pushing in—a man. I gave him only a quick glance. Then, afraid she might pop back out of my life as suddenly as she had popped in, I said, "Go ahead, honey. There's a little pink swim suit in there that'll make you the world's favorite pin-up girl overnight. If you don't hurry up and let me see you in it I'll drop dead strictly from disappointment."

She entered into the spirit of the moment with a heart-melting willingness. Looking back, I can see that my words, "drop dead" may have helped to decide her. Also, Benetto nudged her with a royally impatient, "Come, come, little one." The next thing I knew, she was ducking into the trailer.

"Stacey," Benetto said, gazing after her with his eyes practically drooling, "for once I must give you credit. This Miss Brown of yours is really a very smooth pigeon."

Just then the crude character who barged through the crowd and my rosy mist—asked:

"You guys seen a girl?" This gruff-toned, panting cop, I learned later, was Henderson.

"I have seen many girls, my good man," Benetto answered haughtily. "Both professionally and personally I have seen more girls than you could shake your nightstick at. There are a few here, as you seem to be noticing."

"It's none of them I'm looking for, worse luck," Henderson said, his eyes still roving. "The one I'm looking for has more clothes on, and the minute I catch up with her she's gonna get a ticket."

Just then a second cop pushed through. He had come from a radio patrol car that had stopped on the fringe of the crowd. Sidling up to Henderson, he said: "That car abandoned back there at the intersection, Henderson," the radio cop said. "The whole force is looking for it. It's Sergeant Garvey's—stolen by a gal wanted for homicide."

"Homicide is it now, not just reckless driving?" Henderson said. "So that's why she took to her heels when I stopped her. Well, she headed into this crowd for cover, so she must be mixed in here still—unless she's skipped on." On top of that bright observation, he asked, "What's her description?" just as if he hadn't seen her himself.

REFERRING to his notebook for details, the radio cop mumbled to Henderson. I was watching Benetto. Benetto was looking excessively uninterested in these minions of the law. I was stunned, unable to believe that my favorite blonde had had any connection with murder. Benetto, I sensed, was not only able to believe this, but also was willing to make the most of it. Already his cunning mind was scheming and licking its chops.

"How about it?" the radio cop asked, peering at us. "Did you happen to see her dodging around here—girl with bloodstains on the front of her dress?"

"All the girls you see here are my models, the daughters of the city's foremost families, spotlessly attired in Oldam-Dorcas' latest styles," Benetto said. "Now please stop annoying me and interrupting my work with these trifles." Then he added, "Ah-h, *there* you are, darling."

From the crowd all around us come an echoing sigh of appreciation.

The little blonde had just emerged from our portable dressing room clad in the silken equivalent of five or six pink rosebuds.

Benetto went to her, glowing avidly. I was struck motionless. The two cops also stared at her, in wistful admiration,

not suspicion. They went dutifully on about their official duties, pushing themselves back into the crowd in search of their quarry, as Benetto conducted the little blonde trick toward the spotlight position in our setup.

She took Benetto's cues like a lense-wise model, assuming the proper posture with one knee bent. Her blonde hair shone like a halo as she stood there, her skin looking smooth as ivory, her smile sweet.

While the cops continued to prowl the neighborhood in their vain search for the girl in the bloody dress, Benetto really did his stuff. He issued a series of crackling lordly commands to his flunkies, including me. Lights were shifted two inches closer, reflectors were tilted back half an inch, everybody tensed up in anticipation of the signal to fire.

"Cameras ready! Girls, pose! One, two—take it!"

Of course Benetto himself never stooped to touch a camera. That was my job. He simply arranged matters tastefully in front of the lens, leaving all the menial tasks to his hired help, and I had to confess that this was one more time when he'd done a beautiful job. After I had tripped the shutters, all his assistants and all the girls promptly wilted from the strain, except the little blonde, who looked fresh enough for a dozen more. Benetto tossed a kiss to his pet Zorka, giving it all the credit and me none. Then he strutted, very pleased.

Our hours of preparation had led up to that fiftieth-of-a-second exposure and now art was achieved. Benetto instructed me to "Put it through right away, like a good lad, Stace," and left to me the job of cleaning up. His masterful part done, he strolled over to turn all his overwhelming charm on my honey.

While the other girls crowded into the trailer to get back into their street clothes and exchange catty remarks, Benetto conducted the little blonde to his own club coupe. Ensnared inside it with her, he opened the little built-in refrigerator which he had so often found so useful, mixed scotch highballs and engaged her in captivating conversation.

Meanwhile, left to my sweating chores, I vowed to myself that Benetto would never win this darling away from me if

I could help it. He'd done it too often in the past, with his damned hypnotic suavety, but this time I swore it would be over my dead body.

Thinking of dead bodies reminded me of those cops. The radio car was still parked nearby. The two cops were still casing the neighborhood, peering around in baffled puzzlement. The fugitive murderess had vanished. I still couldn't believe my cuddly little blonde was the killer they were searching for. I couldn't help noticing that she seemed in no particular hurry to get back into her dress, but then it was a very hot day.

The crowd was dispersing and now all the other girls were tripping prettily away. This left the trailer for the little blonde's exclusive use. Benetto grandly conducted her over to it while I labored in the heat to pack our apparatus into my own overloaded car. She left Benetto with a lingering smile, but a moment later she was ducking out again with her blue eyes rounded with dismay.

"My—my dress!" she exclaimed. "It's gone!"

"Gone?" Benetto echoed. "Really?" He looked briefly inside the car, obviously being none too eager to find it, then backed out and said, "Why, it really is gone, isn't it, darling? Perhaps one of the other girls took it along by mistake."

"B-but what am I going to do?" this sweet little child stammered. "I c-can't go anywhere like this!"

"Why of course not, darling," Benetto said promptly—a little too promptly, I thought. "My car is at your disposal. I'll take you to my penthouse, phone Oklam-Dorcas from there and have them hustle half-a-dozen dresses right over, so you may pick out the prettiest. That does seem the nicest way to fix you up, doesn't it, darling?"

"Oh, that's very generous of you," she said, smiling at her masterful rescuer.

"Thank you, darling," Benetto purred.

It filled me with a sense of panic to think of this sweet little kid walking into Benetto's den. Shaky with misgivings, I watched her willingly climb back into Benetto's gondola. Then and there I knew I would have to get in plenty of footwork fast.

I loaded the last of our apparatus as

Benetto slid his car away, carrying my money with his to his lair. I scrambled into my own sagging sedan, vowing to never let her out of my sight with him. Just then another car stopped in the middle of the street.

"Yoo-hoo, Mr. Stacey!" a gay voice called. "Here I am-m."

This, at long last, was Miss Brown or Black, the tall brunette I'd picked up at the Toreador Bar.

"I think you're a little late, dear," I called, the trailer wobbling like crazy behind me as I whooshed past her.

I never did find out what had delayed her. In fact I never saw her again.

CHAPTER THREE

In Benetto's Den

D ETECTIVE-SERGEANT Garvey was not stranded for long at the Fieger Motel. In response to his phone calls to headquarters, several cars had come swarming in—the "meat wagon" which would carry the dead body of Gertrude Fieger to the morgue, a sedan full of homicide-squad dicks and a bigger, blacker sedan which was the official car of the commissioner of police.

Immediately upon arriving, Commissioner Moore expressed the opinion that Garvey was several kinds of a dumb-head for letting a red-handed murderess slip right through his fingers. He also made it plain that the job of recapturing the fugitive must be strictly Garvey's own responsibility. Failing it, Garvey might well expect to be stripped of his rank. Then, taking personal charge of the investigation at the scene, the commissioner went in to question Frank Fieger, who was prostrated by the news of his wife's sudden death.

Garvey headed for the city in a squad car, grimly resolved to exert himself to the utmost to nail the brutal killer of Gertrude Fieger.

First, Garvey stopped at the spot where Benetto had so grandly performed. There he reclaimed his stolen and abandoned car. Garvey also found Patrolman Henderson there, along with the two prowl-car cops who had vainly combed the neighborhood for the fugitive, and another patrolman

named Patrick, who was helping them.

After firing questions at them and listening to their puzzled answers, Sergeant Garvey had the following statement to make:

I looked at those blank-faced cops and shook my dumb head at them.

"Boys, let's understand that she didn't actually dissolve in the air," I said patiently. "If we have the wits of a half-grown cretin, we ought to be able to figure out what became of her. Henderson, you say you saw her pushing right into the thick of that crowd in the middle of this block."

"That I did, sir," Henderson asserted.

"Patrick, you were down at the next intersection watching that same crowd from the other side, and you swear she didn't show over there."

"She did not, sir," Patrick asserted.

"All right then, she must have covered herself somewhere in between. How? Did she sneak into one of the houses along this block? You say you have knocked on every door and the answer is no. You claim to have looked under every leaf in everybody's yard, and again the answer is no, she didn't duck under the shrubby. So there's only one possible answer. She must have slipped right under the noses of you sharp-eyed sleuths."

"No, sir!" they all blurted at once.

"We double-checked every girl, sir," Henderson stated.

"And not one of 'em was wearing a green dress with bloodstains on it, sir," Patrick added.

"Then she simply wasn't wearing the green dress any more," I explained to them. "She must have found a chance to change it. You said yourself this so-called Benetto had a trailer full of classy clothes, the stuff he was using in his pictures. Well, boys? What better answer could you want?"

They looked shamefaced.

"A smart detective would next ask this Benetto a few pointed questions," I said sourly. "That's exactly what I'm going to do now. I'll be seeing you soon, boys, down at headquarters, with a little blonde prisoner in tow. So long, you clunks."

I turned into the nearest home to borrow their phone. I made a couple of calls

which quickly gave me the address of this Benetto, the guy who operated with only half a handle. Benetto was occupying the penthouse home of J. Harold Oldam, one of the proprietors of Oldam-Dorcas, while the Oldam family were touring about old Mexico. Moving up into such high brackets as this meant that I was likely to find myself bucking plenty of influence. I got back into my own car, groceries and all, and started off for Benetto's borrowed penthouse.

PAUL STACEY meanwhile was following Benetto and Dixie Dixon way across the city. This was not an easy task, since Benetto was driving a super-powered land-cruiser while Stacey's coup was a tired pre-war job dragging a heavy trailer. Still, Stacey managed to pull off a tenacious job of tailing.

His account resumes:

Reeling around the last corner, I saw Benetto escorting the little blonde out of his wheeled yacht.

Besides that tricky little swim-suit, she was now wearing Benetto's jacket draped across her shoulders. Her big white handbag also helped to cover her a little. I had noticed how she hung onto this purse as if it contained something very valuable. She hugged it to her as she skipped across the sidewalk. Pedestrians halted to goggle as Benetto hustled this little canary into the building.

I swung my jaded jalopy to the curb, with the trailer directly behind.

Puzzled and suspicious, and gambling a minute or two, I stopped long enough to duck inside the trailer. It was messed up in a typically feminine way, with bobby pins, face powder and rouge-stained towels scattered about. I looked into two closets and under the folding bed, then stepped to a built-in seat and dug my fingers into the crack between the cushion and the wall. Sure enough, I found something crammed in there.

The little blonde's missing dress.

Back on location Benetto had found a moment to slip inside the trailer and hide it. Benetto had pulled off a typical Benetto play.

Pulling the dress farther out of its hiding place, I felt a chill. On the front of it were stains—ugly stains turning

brown. Seeing them now, for the first time, I realized that at my meeting with the little blonde I'd been too busy looking into those innocent blue eyes of hers to see anything else. Besides, she had kept the bloodstains covered under her bolero jacket.

Still I couldn't believe it.

I stuffed that blood-spotted dress back under the cushion, deep out of sight.

Leaving all our valuable equipment in my car, except Benetto's priceless Zorka, which I was under orders to guard with my worthless life, I hurried into the building, past a doorman and an elevator operator who acted dazed from having seen a dream walking. At the penthouse door I used my key.

The layout here could serve as a perfect modernistic set for a series of Benetto's glamor shots, but at this moment I had no time to stand around admiring the interior decorations.

To my relief, Benetto was in the living room with the telephone, giving out in his suavest tones. The junior-size blonde was in the master bedroom, wearing one of Benetto's slinky lounging robes.

I slipped in quickly, closing the door behind me. First I switched on Benetto's bedside radio and tuned in on a local station. Benetto's little blonde guest watched me with her big blue eyes. She smiled her shy, angelic smile when I turned on her.

"Who'd you kill, honey?" I said.

Startled, she gasped, "W-why, n-no-body!"

Music tinkled out of the radio. A news broadcast was due within a few minutes. Letting it play, I reached to the big white handbag laying on the bed where its luscious owner had tossed it. She gave out a little cry, grabbed my arm and tried to tug the purse away. The touch of her put my senses on a merry-go-round but I managed to zipper the bag open and drag out—a gun.

It was a hefty thirty-eight, loaded. The little blonde looked tearfully naughty as I frowned over her.

"Y-you don't have to think I k-killed somebody just because of that old g-gun!" she said.

Considering the human blood on her dress and the big gat she'd been packing

and all the cops prowling for her, I couldn't understand how she could possibly look so sweetly childlike about it all.

"Listen, sugarplum," I said urgently. "If you knew what's good for you, you'd begin yelling for the cops right now. You may not realize it, but you'd be a lot safer locked up in jail than you are here in Benetto's den."

"But he's such an awfully nice man," she said. "He wants to help me. He's doing all he can."

"He's doing all he can, all right, but not quite in the way you think," I agreed grimly. "Look, honey, I want to keep you out of jail if I can possibly manage it, but even more than that I want to get you off Benetto's hook."

She didn't seem to realize what I was worried about. As I stood there shaking my head at her, the radio began its period of local news. The first bulletin showered me with a chill rain of information. Within the space of a few seconds I learned, among other bloodier things, that this chick's name was Beryl Dixon and that her home address was a little furnished apartment downtown which the police were keeping an eye on. The bloody details of the murder followed. I heard them disbelievingly.

"But I c-couldn't have killed her!" she protested. "Why, I didn't even know her name until I heard it on this radio this very minute."

"So how-come they're tying you into the murder of a woman you'd never even met?" I said. "Had you ever been out to that motel before?"

She turned pale suddenly and blurted out, "Why, only once, and then it was a sort of accident. When I went back today it was only to try to find some way of helping Mr. Rountree because it was just terribly mean the way they—" She broke off, afraid she'd said too much.

"Rountree?" I said. "Who's he? What's he to you?"

She swallowed, too scarred to answer.

"Come on, sugar, let's have it fast, before Benetto begins working on you. What actually happened out there at the Fieger Motel?"

She blinked her long lashes, looking adorable. "I just went out there to talk to them, that's all, honest. I was just

standing there beside my car, getting up my courage to go in and face them, when suddenly the d-door of that cabin opened and that woman came staggering out, all covered with blood."

"Please, honey, don't kid me," I said. "Is it really true she was all beat up even before you got there?" While asking it I took a closer look at the big gun, even to the extent of mentally noting its serial number.

"Honest, she really was," Dixie said, round-eyed. "I was so s-scared I just stood there while this woman threw her arms around me. I think she was j-just blindly looking for help. Her blood got on my dress. It was horrible. I was trying to get away from her when that m-man jumped out of his car, looking so awful, and I just had to try to g-get away. Wouldn't you?"

I nodded and said I would. Her story was far from complete, but I had no chance to get more of the details just then. Hearing a step at the door, I stuffed the gun back into the purse and pulled the zipper shut. Then the door opened and Benetto came in with a mean look for me and a charming smile of apology for Dixie.

"I'm afraid it's a little too late in the day to raise anyone at Oldam-Dorcas's, darling," he purred. "There must be some other way I can get a new dress for you, though. But come into the living room and relax while I mix up a batch of very, very dry martinis—and I'll think of something."

With the trustfulness of a kid who still believed in Santy Claus, she beamed at her benefactor and murmured, "You're being awfully nice to me," and let him take her hand and conduct her to the big soft couch in the living room.

I knew the odds were a million to one that Benetto would not invite me to join them at cocktails. In fact, it was a sure bet that in another minute or two Benetto would thumb me out.

JUST then the door buzzed. Hoping it was Mr. Dorcas himself, or company of similar position whom Benetto would not dare to brush off too fast, I hustled to answer. The guy who had buzzed, however, did not have a high social look. In fact he looked like a dick

and he proved he was by flashing a badge.

"Sergeant Garvey of Homicide," he announced tersely, and stepped in without the formality of an introduction. Gazing past me, he inquired, "Mr. Benetto? I'm here to check on those models you used this afternoon."

Dixie sat still as wax inside the over-size lounging robe. Benetto came closer to Garvey casually, with princely deliberation. "What about my models, my good man?"

I felt Garvey bristling and saw his eyebrows go level. "I want the names and addresses of every one of them, and a print of every picture you took this afternoon."

"Indeed? And for what reason?"

"Murder," Garvey said flatly.

"So?" Benetto shrugged. "Very well. My assistant here will take care of it for you." He started away, then turned back. "By the way, here's one of my loveliest models now. She's about to pose here for me. Her name is—ah—What did you say her name is, Stace?" His smile was thin and sly as he added to Garvey, "My assistant books the models. This one is a discovery of his. He brought her in just a few minutes ago."

In this slick way, in a few words, Benetto disavowed the whole situation, so far as homicide was concerned anyway, and nominated me as the patsy.

"Her name's Betsy Brown, Sergeant," I said quickly. "In case the girl you want is distinguished by a birthmark anywhere, Miss Brown is prepared to clear herself instantly."

Garvey grinned, shook his head and said, "I'll check on that privately, if you don't mind—later. The information I asked for will be enough, this trip."

Benetto strolled back to Dixie, and Dixie sat there looking speechlessly terrified while I read off names and addresses from a notebook. The way Garvey's gaze continued to stray pleasantly back to Dixie seemed to show he hadn't gotten a good look at her at the motel but didn't mind getting one now. Also, it turned my pulse erratic and sprinkled me with a cold sweat. At last, casually, he thanked me, Benetto and thanked Dixie also, opened the door and politely stepped out.

I turned to peer at Benetto. He knew

as well as I did that this little lollipop was the one the cops were searching for as a murderess. He'd also seen the bloodstains on her dress and he had probably listened to the radio news through the closed bedroom door. Now he was cunningly playing her predicament for all it was worth.

"Stace, old boy," Benetto said with a lordly wave of his hand, "you've had a rather tough day, so you may take the evening off."

I strode straight to him, glaring, then turned to Dixie.

"Honey, within five or ten minutes this fine specimen will tell you confidentially that he's a son of one of the royal families of Europe. Don't let him kid you. His real name is Bert Bennwiss, he's from the Greenpernt section of Brooklyn and his old man is a bookie who runs a third-rate delicatessen as a front."

She looked confused. Bert Bennwiss, alias Benetto, looked murderous. I was whipping up a fine case of migraine for myself, but I felt desperate.

"I'm coming back in a couple of minutes, Bertie." I went on, knowing he hated nothing worse than to be called that, "and if I find this door bolted I'll smash it down with a fire-ax." I continued, promising him grimly, "If I find you've so much as laid a finger on this child, I'll tip off the police that you're knowingly harboring a fugitive, which will make you an accessory after the fact of murder. How will you like that, Bertie boy?"

"What are you prattling about, Stace?" Benetto said frigidly. "You found this lovely creature and brought her to me as a model, didn't you? I'm sure she's everything you've represented her to be." Then he purred to Dixie, "After all, darling, you wouldn't hide anything from me, would you?"

He smiled, and went on in velvet tones, "My assistant is subject to these infantile rages, darling, so pay no attention. My ex-assistant, rather. Consider yourself fired as of right now, Stace. That means you will not be expected back this evening or later. . . . Martini, darling? And let's leave out the olive, shall we? It takes up so much room in the glass, darling."

It left me with a tough choice to make. Realizing that I could never help to clear

Dixie of a murder charge by hanging around here as a chaperone, I headed out, knowing I would have to make my next move plenty fast—and that I might not make it fast enough.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Fugitive Returns

SERGEANT GARVEY, *scenting results, was sticking tightly on the job. Having been warned by Commissioner Moore that his official future depended on this case, he was taking no unnecessary risks, but at the same time he was passing up no bets.*

A note interpolated by Sergeant Garvey:

Seeing Stacey hustling out of the building, I let him go. I wasn't nearly so interested in Stacey's movements as I was in the girl who was tarrying in the penthouse with this so-called Benetto.

I had men covering the building on all sides. Personally, I was spending a lot of time inside a phone booth, garnering information about Dixie Dixon. Above all I had to avoid pulling another boner, but once I felt reasonably certain of being able to prove on the spot that that girl in the penthouse actually *was* Dixie Dixon—then, brother, I would pounce on her and wind up this murder case plenty fast.

When Stacey buzzed off in his car I was expecting information to clinch it at any minute now.

Paul Stacey's narrative resumes:

I braked in front of the house numbered 4322 on Sycamore Street.

This was the home of a man of conservative affluence—say an executive pulling down around twenty grand a year. On one side was a study with a bay window and a private entrance. I could see the "man of the house" in there now, at his desk in shirt-sleeves, studying some financial records.

I eased through the gate in the hedge and knocked at the private door. When he opened it, I said politely, "Good evening, Mr. Rountree."

Finding him had been easy. Dixie had mentioned his name and there was only one Rountree listed in the phone book.

"From headquarters," I said glibly. "Just a routine check on your pistol permit. May I see it?"

He frowned, an honest-looking, solid citizen type. Ordinarily well poised, no doubt, but nervous now, he hesitated before saying, "Certainly. Come in, won't you?" He turned back to his paper-covered desk, opened a tidy drawer and came up at once with a small card which he handed to me.

A valid pistol permit, all right. It had been issued to permit the possession on these premises—but nowhere else—of a .38 calibre Colt revolver. The serial number written here was one I had seen before.

"Thanks," I said, peering at him. "Now let me see the gun itself."

Reaching into another drawer, he stiffened. He straightened, empty-handed, and turned back with the color drawn out of his face.

"Gone?" I said. "Didn't you know?"

He shook his head, looking cornered.

"Miss Dixon has it," I informed him. "You've probably heard that she's gotten herself a little mixed up in a murder."

"My good heavens," Rountree groaned. "Don't tell me she committed the murder with my gun!"

Continuing to peer at him, I said, "She got into that jam trying to help you, Rountree. Just what was she to you, anyway?"

"My secretary. That and nothing more. Good heavens! I had no idea—"

Shaken, he quickly closed the door connecting with the rest of the house. No doubt Mrs. Rountree was at home and might come within earshot. Possibly several Rountree offspring were romping about as well. When he turned back, his face was that of a man desperately resolved to see it through. My play was paying off even faster than I'd hoped.

"Dixie is loyal and helpful, but she shouldn't have taken this matter into her own hands," he said quickly. "Does this mean the whole mess will be printed in the papers? Good heavens! It may be enough to ruin me."

"Dixie will be slightly ruined also if the law makes her sit down on two thousand volts, Mr. Rountree," I reminded

him, trying to sound like a dick. "If there are any extenuating circumstances, we'd better hear them right now."

He ran his hands through his handsome curly hair. "This is awful. My wife Myra is an extremely jealous woman. She always mistrusted Dixie, but with no real reason. Myra's unreasonable jealousy is why I've been paying through the nose to keep all this quiet—so she wouldn't flare up and divorce me over it."

"So," I said. "I smell blackmail."

"Damn it all, there's been no real basis for it!" Rountree insisted. "It goes back to an incident several months ago. I'd gone to Chicago on business. While there I found a chance to buy a new car, a scarce model, but exactly what I'd been looking for as a gift for Myra. I decided to drive it back home myself. It would be just in time for our tenth anniversary."

"Thoughtful and generous," I said. "Certainly not grounds for blackmail."

He looked pained and went on: "It happened that Dixie was also in Chicago at the same time, on vacation, visiting her parents who live there. She was due back on the job in a day or two anyway, so I thought she might like to drive back with me. She said she'd be glad to. So next morning we started back together in the new car on an entirely innocuous trip, which ordinarily would take eight hours at the most."

"But something delayed you?"

"A cloudburst," Rountree said laconically. "The worst in a decade. You may remember that night when the main roads were washed out. Dixie and I were trapped between blooded bridges only a few miles from here. We were forced to take shelter in the Fieger Motel."

"The plot was certainly thickened," I said.

"It was crowded with stranded motorists. There was only one cabin left. Dixie slept in it. I slept on a cot in the storeroom of the commissary. Unfortunately the records show that I paid for Dixie's cabin. I assure you my wife will take the records at their face value and my home will be broken up as a result—if she ever sees them. So when the blackmail demands began I had no choice but to pay."

I eyed him. Undoubtedly he was tell-

ing the truth. "How did the blackmail system work?"

"The demands were made over the phone by a woman speaking in a disguised voice. Mrs. Fieger, of course. I was ordered to bring the cash out and leave it under the step of the cabin named Missouri. Probably I was only one of many victims. I noticed other tire marks there. Those bloodsuckers were using their motel as a trap."

"Were they also nicking Dixie?"

"Dixie too, poor child, for comparatively small amounts, although they were important to her. As the pressure on us grew worse I worried more and more that Myra might find out. I remember saying to Dixie the other day that I wouldn't stand for this much longer. I didn't really mean it, though—there was nothing much I could do but go on paying—and I certainly had no idea that Dixie would wade in there and kill Mrs. Fieger."

"It looks very bad for her, Mr. Rountree," I said. "We'll do our best to keep your situation under wraps but we can't make any promises. Meanwhile, you're to sit tight."

He answered with a jerky nod, being very willing to do just that. I left him there and, back in my car, took a quick detour to the nearest newsstand.

THE papers had put the murder into big black headlines but at press time details had been scarce. Scanning the columns, I found a brief statement by the husband of the murdered woman:

In a statement to the police Frank Fieger accounted for Gertrude Fieger's presence near the unoccupied cabin named Missouri at the time of the crime.

"Trudy was worried about something queer that seemed to be happening over in that part of the grounds," Fieger said. "I mean we would often hear a car stop somewhere over there, then turn right around and head back toward the city. She wanted to find out why cars did that so often, especially after dark. Today things were quiet, and Trudy said she was going over to sit inside Missouri and maybe she could spot what was going on. She did—and she never came back alive."

Heavy-hearted, I saw that this statement, added to Rountree's, made the case against Dixie look even blacker. The

dicks would see it only one way: that Dixie had gone out there to stage a showdown with a relentless blackmailer, that the showdown had occurred right there at the "drop" and that the result was the destruction of Mrs. Fieger by Dixie. Looking at it the cops' way, there seemed nothing else to do but fry the little chick.

Bad as that was, it worried me less than the fact that Dixie was still trapped alone with Benetto up there in that luxurious penthouse.

I headed back.

Sergeant Garvey, hot on the job, was meanwhile getting results.

Another statement interpolated by Garvey:

The information I'd been waiting for had just come in over the phone. It told me that the murderess, Dixie Dixon, had been a nurse's aide during the war. That meant her fingerprints were on file. I had ordered a copy of her prints rushed right over to me here. They were on their way to me now.

If the girl up there in the penthouse was really Dixie Dixon, I would be able to settle her hash very promptly, with a minimum of fuss and no chance of error. All I needed to do was get an impression from just one of those dainty, bloodstained fingers of hers. That would nail her fast, vindicate me completely, close the case and make me the commissioner's white-headed boy.

Seeing a man hustling into the lobby I turned hopefully, thinking it was already the messenger with the girl's prints. But it wasn't. Instead, it was that young guy named Stacey heading back for the penthouse with a look of dread on his face and a desperate glint in his eye.

A further statement from Paul Stacey:

I turned my key quietly in the penthouse lock and slowly pushed the door open.

Chilled, I found the living room deserted. The cocktail mixer was empty, the martini glasses drained. The whole place was full of a cozy hush.

I felt suddenly and completely licked. There was no good left in the world, no hope anywhere. The unspeakable Benetto with his phony polish and unscrupulous vandalism had left me without a future. If there was anything at all left for me in life it would be the satisfaction of murder-

ing that selfish hound here and now.

I grabbed the knob and pushed the door wide open—and hope suddenly revived.

Benetto was standing flat against one wall, both hands hoisted over his head, his face white as death, his eyes glittering with hot resentment. Across the room was Dixie Dixon gripping Rountree's thirty-eight. While holding the gun on Benetto in one of her little fists, she was using the other hand in an attempt to put on a pair of Benetto's pants. She had selected for the purpose his most prized pair of alpaca wool slacks.

"Here, honey, let me help you with that," I said quickly. To Benetto I added, as I began confiscating other choice items from his linen closet and wardrobe, "This I have waited a long time to see, Benny. For years now I've been sure you'll wind up some day on the business end of a thirty-eight in some babe's hot little hand."

Benetto recognized the possibility. He stood frozen there against the wall, paralyzed with fear for himself, loathing us with an icy, unforgiving hatred. I eased the gun from Dixie's hand, jockeyed her into the living room, tossed Benetto's best clothes after her, then backed out and locked the bedroom door on the outside.

"That fixes him, honey. Since dogs can't fly, there's no way he can get out of there." My relieved smile turned into a frown. "But there's still the cops to consider. Where were you planning to go?"

She blinked her long lashes and said, "I haven't any p-place now. I've j-just got to get out of here and k-keep going."

I said, "That's right, honey, but look. There's an idea buzzing around in my head. Maybe it'll pay off and maybe it won't. At least it's worth a gamble. Are you game to play along with me?"

She lifted her big eyes to me and said, "Do you mean you honestly believe I didn't kill her?"

"I know you didn't," I said. "She was beaten to death, but not with this weapon of yours. You haven't had a second's chance to clean it, but there's not a speck of blood on this gun. That's proof enough for me. Besides, you're more the cuddly kind."

She smiled her shy smile and said, "You bet I'll play along with you. I'll go anywhere with you."

Feeling dizzy, I reminded myself it was still a long, long way past the cops. It was going to be tough if not impossible to convince them. Moreover, remembering the wise glitters in Sergeant Garvey's eyes, I could be pretty sure they were closing in right now, tighter every minute.

Quickly Dixie stepped into Benetto's pants, buttoned herself into one of his shirts, then managed a bow tie. Benetto's hound's-tooth jacket, much too big for her, was fortunately a fashionably sloppy type. Paper stuffed into one of Benetto's jauntiest snap-brim felts made it a fair fit, with her yellow hair tucked up inside it. When we were finished I took a critical look at her, hopefully, but shook my head.

She did not look masculine to me. She was definitely not built right for male clothes. In my eyes, nothing on earth could disguise the fact that she was a very yummy little tidbit; but it was the best we could do.

"Let's go, honey," I said, "praying all the way."

I hooked an arm around Benetto's priceless Zorka as we went out. Still screwed on its tripod, it was an awkward burden. Helping me to lug it as we went down in the elevator, Dixie seemed to be one of Benetto's minor flunkies—I hoped. It seemed to work. Nobody seemed to notice us particularly on the way out to my car.

I piled the Zorka in the back seat, along with the other equipment, and buzzed off with Dixie in the front beside me. It had been easier than I'd thought. If any dicks were casing the joint none of them had made a move toward us. Dixie's male garb in the evening gloom seemed to have fooled them entirely.

I headed straight out Route 511 to the Fieger Motel.

As I drove, Dixie's hand came softly to mine. She smiled in her sweet, shy way. That rosy mist came back to swirl beautifully all around me in the gathering night. It was like starting off on a honeymoon, except that this one was less likely to wind up in a bridal suite than in two separate divisions of the state prison with a thick stone wall in between.

When the neon sign of the Fieger Motel appeared at the roadside ahead, I made the next move in my plan. I switched off

the headlamps, threw out the clutch and also cut the ignition. A slight downhill grade kept the car rolling. We skimmed on until we came abreast of the motel, then veered off the highway. Almost soundlessly we swung to a black, sheltered spot behind an unoccupied cabin.

There in the darkness and the silence we stopped.

CHAPTER FIVE

Up For Life

SERGEANT GARVEY was also in action, sensing himself to be very close to the end of his woman-hunt. Within the hour, tonight in fact, he was destined to wind up the Fieger murder case.

This in Garvey's own words, is how he topped off the night's work by finally capturing the killer:

That fine pair was getting away with nothing.

When I saw those two come out of the building carrying the camera between them—Stacey and the girl wearing a man's clothes—I knew I had this murder case by the tail.

The messenger with the fingerprints hadn't shown up yet but I was in no hurry for him now. All I needed to do was to keep this feverish twosome in sight and grab the girl when the time was ripe.

While crossing the city, Stacey seemed so hypnotized by the girl's nearness that he didn't notice my dimmed headlamps behind him. Once out on 511 I simply switched off my lights entirely and followed his. Giving him nothing to see in his rear-view mirror, I simply continued to roll along in his wake—a dangerous trick, illegal for civilians, but sometimes useful to a cop.

Trundling along like that, I saw the shine of Stacey's car vanish from the road ahead. Next I glimpsed it, its lights all doused, scurrying through the glow of the neon sign of Fieger's Motel. It disappeared behind one of the cabins.

I met that play by swinging off the road onto the opposite side. This move took me into the approach of that greasy shack named *Forever Hamburgers*. The motel across the road was entirely dark except

for its sign. Frank was staying with friends in the city tonight and had put a sign in the driveway: *Closed*. The night behind the empty cabins was black and lonely—just right for a fugitive murderess to use for buttering up the poor dope who was risking his neck helping her to escape.

I peered into the motel grounds for minutes without catching a glimpse of them. What I needed right now was a phone. Another call to headquarters could get them sewed in fast.

A bell dinged as I opened the door of the hamburger hut and after a minute a blousy dame waddled out of the dark kitchen, tying a greasy kimono around her.

"Mrs. Loomis?" I said. "What's the matter, did you break your glasses?"

She was red and tender-looking around the eyes. For an answer she just blinked them at me stupidly.

"You'll go blind, trying to read such fine print without your glasses, Mrs. Loomis." I pointed to the folded paper she had in one hand. "What is it, a page out of the phone book?"

"Which one, bud?" she grumbled at me. "I got six diff'rent phones. That's how many phones I gotta have to handle all the calls I get here. I do a big caterin' business here, bud. What're you lookin' for, to borrow a toothpick or something?"

"A phone," I said.

"It just happens that all six a-them phones is outta order tonight, bud." She scowled. "Try again next week."

She waddled back into the dark kitchen and I heard a cot creak.

I eased out and away from the dim light of the horse-meat stand. The only other phone nearby was locked inside Fieger's commissary. I couldn't get at it without breaking in and risking a noise that would tip my mitt to the hidden fugitives. My only play was to lay low and grab them when they showed.

I drifted across into the shadow of the commissary and watched from there. It was as black and quiet as a graveyard tonight except for the occasional brief buzz and flash of a passing car.

Long minutes passed.

Then another car came along, one humming from the direction of the city. It swung off the road, stopped for a few sec-

onds in front of the cabin called Missouri, then wheeled back and hummed away again.

According to Frank Fieger's statement to the papers, this sort of thing had happened before, rather frequently. Somebody who hadn't been looking at newspapers or listening to radios and so didn't know a murder had been committed on that very spot a few hours ago, paid his brief visit, buzzed back into nowhere and left the motel grounds as tomblike as before.

More long minutes passed.

Then furtive prowling sounds disturbed the darkness. Someone was sneaking cautiously across the grounds. The sneaky sounds moved past the commissary, then on, and finally stopped at the cabin named Missouri.

Suddenly an instantaneous glare of white brilliance struck out like silent lightning, flooding the space in front of the cabin. It lasted only a fraction of an instant. Before it vanished, I caught the merest glimpse of a figure bent over the step of the cabin.

Next came a high-pitched shriek of fury followed by swift smashing sounds. This stirred me into action. In my hip pockets I had a flashlight and a gun. With these in my hands I skirted past bushes. The gibbering voice and crashing noises continued until I neared the cabin, then someone went crashing off in flight. I checked my impulse to give chase because my flashlight showed me Stacey and the girl both standing in the open near Missouri.

I pushed closer to them and ordered, "Stand still, both of you. If you try to get away again, I'll shoot."

In the rush, my little blonde prisoner had lost her hat. Her yellow hair was spilling down. She gave just one teary-eyed look into the glare of my light as I came closer, and whirled back to Stacey.

"Got away!" she cried out. "Gone! Jimminy, the camera's all smashed up!"

STACEY was staring down at something on the ground. It was a tangle of masshappen metal that had once been a camera on a tripod. Vicious, powerful blows had damaged it beyond repair.

Stacey came closer to me looking in-

tensely in earnest, unafraid of the gun in my fist. "Garvey, this motel setup was being used for blackmail. The victims were ordered to leave their money under the step of this cabin. Take a look here."

He turned to the cabin named Missouri with the little blonde eagerly hobbling along, her borrowed, too-long trousers getting in her way. Under the steps lay half a brick. Stacey lifted it and uncovered some folding money—fifty dollars. It had been left there by the unknown driver of that car which had buzzed up and back a few minutes ago.

"We came here tonight to set up a camera and try to flash a picture of the blackmailer in the act of picking up the blood money," Stacey explained quickly. "I figured that would prove Dixie's really innocent."

"Mrs. Fieger was on watch here this afternoon, so she caught the blackmailer in the act and that's why she got killed." This was Dixie speaking breathlessly. She went on, with tears in her voice, "It was a wonderful idea you had, Stacey, darling, but look, it just didn't work. There's hardly anything left of the camera."

Peering down at it again, we saw, sure enough, that even the plateholder was cracked open. We couldn't hope to get any picture to use as evidence out of that photographic wreckage.

"It's smashed all to hell, all right," Stacey agreed, not at all upset by it. "But I put that one there just as a blind. I figured that as soon as the flash went off the blackmailer would begin looking for a camera to smash up, so I used two. The other one is over here."

He turned my light into the deeper shadow beyond the corner of the cabin and there it stood on its own tripod, smaller and black against the night. He had already closed the shutter. The way he kissed it meant he was certain it would furnish us with the evidence we needed to nail the blackmailing murderer.

"A picture like that will help a lot at the trial, all right," I said, "but it is just now dawning on me that I have seen other evidence also pointing to the killer."

I started away with Stacey and Dixie coming close after me. I pushed first through the screen door of *Forever Ham-*

burgers, causing the bell to dingle. We stopped, waiting for Mrs. Loomis to loom in, but this time she stayed out of sight in the dark kitchen.

"We're coming in after you, my greedy friend," I said. "We're going to nail you plenty good for killing Trudy Fieger."

Gun in hand, I ducked into that rancid kitchen—and she swung at me. Her weapon slashed out of the darkness beside the door. It struck my shoulder and knocked me to one knee. Stacey pressed in after me and Dixie leaped into the fray with all ten fingernails bared. The struggle was violent but short. Its finish was marked by a series of gasping epithets from Amy Loomis. Turning on the light, I found her pinned down on the cot by Stacey and Dixie.

"She's it, all right," I said, pointing out the evidence. "See those rings around her eyes? They're left by the eye-pieces of binoculars. She used these binoculars to read the license plates of the cars staying overnight at the motel across the road. Here's a numerical list of all the auto registrations in the state. You can buy it as a mailing list for legitimate purposes—but not for blackmail. This ginger ale bottle, all caked up, is the weapon of murder. Mrs. Loomis, you're going to quit frying hamburgers for a quarter a throw. Instead the state will fry you, free of charge."

Dixie and Stacey then left the ugly-tempered prisoner to me. Dixie hopped up and down in jubilation, winding this up by hopping into Stacey's arms. I grinned, envying him, then scowled down at the unappetizing murderess who was all mine.

As I have often mentioned to the boys on the force, when you get a murder case you better watch out for the woman angle. In fact, you better watch out for the woman, period.

Paul Stacey's final note on this murder case follows:

After taking Dixie to her apartment, where she put on a fresh dress, in which she looked mighty good too, we went back to the penthouse and unlocked the door of the master bedroom. Benetto looked cynically indifferent until I indicated the camera which I had brought back from the motel grounds.

"I'm afraid there're a couple of small dents in it, Bertie," I confessed.

He leaped up screaming, "My Zorka! My precious Zorka! You'll pay for this, you blundering idiot! I'll take every cent out of your salary!"

"What salary, Bertie?" I said. "I'm fired as of a little while ago, remember? Now that I've thought it over, it's still okay with me. I should be taking pictures on my own anyway, so that's just what I'm going to do, starting now. Aren't you going to wish me well, Bertie?"

He did not felicitate me. He was still heaping hot curses on us when Dixie and I left arm in arm, happily confident of a glamorous future. My favorite model was all set to pose for me for life—and for free, too.

A P.S. which was added by Dixie Dixon herself:

I still don't see why everyone raised such a fuss over me. I hadn't done anything wrong. Not even one little thing, honest.

THE END

New!

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New fast-action Antiphlogistine Rub A-535 starts relieving discomforts of chest colds and muscular aches and pains the moment it is rubbed in . . . and it rubs in fast. Almost at once you feel warm, comforting relief as the pain-relieving medications take hold.

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**FOR
FAST-ACTION
RELIEF**

from the miseries of
**CHEST COLDS • SORE THROAT
COUGHS • ACHES and PAINS**

MR. JUSTICE AVORY donned his black cap, ready to pronounce his verdict on the case before him July 15, 1924, in the Sussex summer assizes, County Hall, Lewes. The Justice intoned:

"The sentence of the court upon you is that you be taken from this place to a lawful prison, and then to a place of execution; and that you be hanged by the neck until you be dead, and that your body be buried afterward within the precincts of the prison wherein you have been last confined before your execution."

Pat Mahon, the handsome football player, blanched but with steady step walked with the bailiff from the court. His pretty young wife, tears in her eyes, slowly tore to pieces the little yellow cardboard baggage check—the check that had found a murderer and sentenced the man she loved to hang.

Patrick Herbert Mahon, a native of

hundred dollars of his employers' money, and for this venture got a 12-months jail sentence. But still his wife remained loyal. Upon his release, the family moved to another town where almost immediately there were several house robberies. In 1916, the family moved to Sunningdale.

There another distressing incident occurred. Believing the local bank to be empty, Mahon entered it one night intending to borrow some money. But a charwoman was still at her work and recognized Pat. He belted her with a hammer, but she recovered and her testimony sent him off for five years.

In 1921, when he was released, his still-devoted wife who had been working since his imprisonment got him a job with her company. By 1922, Mahon was a branch manager of the company he worked for. He appeared to have settled down at last and vindicated his wife's faith in him.

Then one April morning in 1924, Mrs.

BLOOD AND KISSES

Liverpool, England, married his lovely young wife in 1910 when she was only 20 years old. Their honeymoon was soon over.

Her first year with Mahon found the curly-headed young athlete, the star of his church football team, forging a check for \$500 and traipsing off to the romantic Isle of Man, off the Scottish coast, with a young girl he had enthralled.

However, the dupe for the check didn't press his charges, and the wife took her wayward Pat back. The couple then moved to Wiltshire, where a daughter was born to them. Pat, now employed by a dairy company, became the star of their football team.

Life seemed to be flowing on smoothly when Pat's craving for easy cash got him into hot water again. He stole several

Mahon began emptying the pockets of one of her husband's suits, preparatory to sending it to the cleaners. In one pocket she found the stub from a baggage check from Waterloo Station, London.

For several weeks she had been worried by his habit of spending his week-ends elsewhere than at home. The check would seem to prove that he did some traveling on those weekends—and if Pat Mahon traveled there was usually a woman involved.

Here, unquestionably was a strictly family affair, something to be settled between them without the police. The results were far reaching.

She gave the check stub to a friend who was connected with the railroad. Investigation by the railway people brought

(Please continue on page 93)

CREPE FOR SUZETTE

By
DON
JAMES



"You want a lot of things, you lousy copper."

Cautious Detective Lowry almost let the shapely hooper tease him into thinking that two can die as cheaply as one.

YOU ask a thousand questions. You tramp sidewalks until your feet ache. You scan hundreds of faces, smell the odors of rooming houses, cafes, perfume counters in department stores, air-conditioned offices in skyscrapers. You hear bold answers, evasive answers, truth, and lies.

The pencil you carry gets shorter and

the pages in your small, black notebook begin to fill with notations. You order coffee and it gets cold while you think. Your wife sleeps beside you in the darkness of your bedroom, but you stare into the darkness and think.

Some men work eight hours and go home and forget the job until the next morning. But you live your job twenty-four hours a day because you're a homicide cop and you're looking for a killer.

* * *

Mary didn't awaken when he got up and dressed. In the living room, he left a note for her in case he wasn't back when she awoke. For a moment he thought of calling Pete Mayo, but remembered that some of Pete's wife's folks were visiting them. Pete was getting little enough sleep as it was. Besides, this was something that could be handled by one man. It was just a hunch that had come to him in the sleepless night.

Outside he walked from the apartment house to the garage, where he kept the car he'd bought in 1939. It was an hour and ten minutes past midnight on a September night and the air was brisk.

Once he stopped under a street light and checked the black notebook to be certain that he had Suzette Lane's address and the name of the club where she worked. It was there, all right: Robinhood Club, out on the east highway.

The club was crowded when he arrived. The band was on the noisy side. The floor show was finishing a number that needed cleaning.

Suzette was the second girl from the end. She had black hair, pert features, a slim, supple body. She'd worn a dress and coat when he'd talked with her two weeks before. In the inadequate excuse she now wore for a costume, she looked younger and obviously more feminine. When she came off the floor, he was waiting for her. Suzette was a trifle breathless from the dancing, and she frowned when she saw him.

He smiled, "Hello, Suzy."

"Hello."

"You remember me? Mike Lowry, homicide division?"

"I remember you." She watched the

other showgirls crowd by and took a step to follow. He touched her arm.

"I want to talk with you a moment," he said.

Suzette looked at him defiantly. "I told you all I know about it. Anyhow I have to hurry. That was the last show and I have to dress if I want a ride home with one of the girls and her boy friend."

"I'll take you home. It'll give us a chance to talk."

"Oh, sure!" the girl said cynically. "The same old pitch."

Even a cop can blush. "This is strictly business," he said. "I can ask your boss, Colitho, to use his office while I question you about Solly Anet's murder. I thought this way it wouldn't embarrass you."

"I'm not embarrassed about Solly Anet's murder."

"Then I'll find Colitho and ask him."

She frowned again. After a few seconds she said, "All right. You can drive me home. Where are you parked?"

He told her and watched her walk away. He remembered her crack about the pitch. Somehow it surprised him a bit that she thought he might be interested in her. He was getting into the habit of picturing himself as an average-size man with ordinary blue eyes and ordinary features who was in his late thirties and approaching middle age. He'd been married ten years. He knew that his wife was in love with him and that she was careful to keep her figure trim and her prettiness alive for him.

He grinned and shook his head. He'd better go out and wait for her.

SHE took a surprisingly short time. When she came out she wore a dark coat with a bright scarf. As soon as she was in the car, she lit a cigarette and crowded away from him against the door on her side.

"Don't detectives ever sleep?" she asked, as he started the car and circled to the highway.

"Somebody has to do the job."

"Well, I don't know how I can help you."

"If you'll go over what you told me before, maybe you can."

"Okay. Where shall I start?"

"From the beginning."

"I'd been shopping and I came home to

the apartment Janice Moulton and I rent. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. When I went into the downstairs hallway, Solly Anet was standing there like he was waiting for someone. He said, 'Hello, Suzy.' I said hello to him and pushed the button for the automatic elevator. He didn't say anything while I waited. He looked worried.

"Then I went upstairs. I was unlocking my door when I heard the shot downstairs. I thought it was a car backfiring or something and went in and didn't know what happened until all the sirens sounded and the ambulance and police came. That's all I know."

"Janice wasn't home? She didn't hear any of it?"

"I told you. She went to Maine for a few weeks. Her mother's sick. She's still there. What is this, anyhow?"

"When did Janice go to Maine?"

"That day. Why? What would she know about this?"

"Maybe nothing. Did she have any boy friends?"

"Why don't you ask *her*?"

"Take it easy, Suzy. It saves trouble if you answer questions. Did she have a boy friend Alf Lindy?"

She glanced at him swiftly. "Why?"

"I want to talk with him," he said cautiously, and grimly thought that the whole department would like to have a talk with Alf Lindy. Solly Anet still had been alive when the first cops arrived. He'd been able to say, "Alf Lindy did it . . . called me to meet him here . . . came downstairs . . . shot me . . . double cross . . ." That was all, but it was enough. The only trouble was that they couldn't find Alf Lindy.

"I don't think I ever heard of him," Suzette said, but she didn't say it right. A homicide cop who asks thousands of questions has an instinct for spotting lies.

He slowed the car as they entered the outskirts of the city. His hunch was paying off, but he had to handle it right. He couldn't tell her what he was thinking. A girl like Suzette might have a great loyalty for the girl who shared an apartment with her. Or she might have a great fear of a man like Alf Lindy.

So he couldn't say, Lindy came down those stairs. He must have been some-

where in the building waiting. The janitor said the only thing suspicious he saw that afternoon was the man Janice Moulton let into the apartment. But, he said as an afterthought, maybe it wasn't so suspicious. Janice worked at a night club. The janitor supposed the only time she could see a boy friend was in the day-time. Anyhow, Janice Moulton had left shortly afterwards. He saw her get into a taxi with a traveling bag. So he guessed there wasn't anything suspicious about the man, after all. And we figured the same way—at first. The rest is mine. It came to me tonight. The janitor saw Janice leave alone. When had the man left? Or had he? Was he waiting up in the apartment for Solly Anet? And afterwards had he joined Janice in Maine, or Chicago, or wherever Janice actually had gone?

Those were the things Mike Lowry might have said to Suzette Lane, but he didn't. It wasn't the way to work it. She'd clam up like a tombstone. Instead, he said:

"You can do me a favor."

"I could do a lot of men a favor. So what?"

"Cut the wisecracks, Suzy. Let's make it easy. This is my job and sometimes it's a lot more pleasant for everyone concerned if I work at it off the cuff."

"I don't see how I can help you," she said again.

"I want to look at your apartment tonight. Just a few moments. I want to figure out an angle or two."

She looked at him suspiciously. "What kind of angles?"

"Will you cut it out?" he snapped, and there was irritation in his voice. If she didn't stop acting as if he were interested in her, he'd begin to think he was.

He shook his head again and grinned crookedly. Maybe a guy didn't think so straight after midnight. "Look, Suzy, all my angles are known strictly as operating procedures in the homicide department. Homicide investigation. I'm asking a favor that I could have without asking simply by going through other channels. I could stop by for a search warrant. It's simply business . . . official business. Is that straight?"

She still didn't like it. Her profile had a defiant look and she kept her eyes on the

street ahead of them. "I guess that doesn't leave me an out," she said.

"It'll only take a few moments."

"All right."

He nodded and turned across town toward the apartment house. A few moments would be fine to get into the apartment and then there might be a picture on a dresser, or in Janice's things, or something to indicate that Janice knew Alf Lindy. Suzette wouldn't talk, but there might be something in the apartment that would talk.

IT WAS a small two-room apartment with bath and kitchen. She didn't let him in at once, but nervously hesitated at the door.

"Look, mister," she said with a forced smile. "Do you mind if I straighten up a thing or two first?"

"I don't mind how it looks."

"Sure. No man does. But I do when it's my stuff around."

He grinned again and nodded. "Go ahead."

It took her about five minutes and when she let him in, the apartment showed evidences of a fast cleaning. Ashtrays were emptied, but not washed. Through an open door he saw the bed that had been hurriedly smoothed over, but not made. Through the kitchen doorway he saw dishes stacked, but not washed.

She had taken off her coat and she wore a full, swinging black skirt with a peasant blouse that looked abandoned at the neckline.

"Mind if I take off my topcoat?" he asked.

She shrugged. In the peasant blouse it was an exciting gesture. He looked away as he took off his coat. He tried to forget the smooth white shoulders. His eyes searched the apartment. There were no pictures.

Now she was at a disadvantage. She wanted him to leave. She'd be less cautious about answering questions if she thought answers would get him away sooner.

He put his coat on a chair and looked at her. She leaned back against a wall table, insolently, her shoulders back.

"So Alf is Janice's boy friend?" he said.

It caught her off her guard. For an in-

stant, her eyes wildly searched for the thing that might have told him. It wasn't there, but she didn't know it. Abruptly she seemed to realize that she had betrayed herself. Her eyes were a little scornful as she looked at him again.

"I don't know," she said.

He shook his head. "Too late, Suzy. You're lying. Where are they?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I'm talking about Alf Lindy and Janice, Moulton. Where did they go?"

"Janice went to Maine to see her mother. I don't know anything at all about the rest."

He shook his head. "Let's take a look in the bedroom. Maybe she left something that might tip us. Let's see if she took all her clothes."

Her lips set angrily. "I wish you'd get out of here."

"Why?"

"I don't want any cops prowling through my apartment. What do you want, anyhow? Why are you here?"

"I've told you."

"And I suppose you'll stay until you get what you want."

"Until I'm sure I haven't passed up anything."

He smiled and went to the bedroom doorway.

"Wait a second," she said quietly. He turned and looked at her. She had left the side of the table and walked toward him. The skirt swirled a little and the peasant blouse was still exciting. Suddenly her attitude had changed and she was smiling at him.

"Okay, mister. You win."

He waited as she came close to him, until she was looking up at him and he could smell the perfume she used and see the amber flecks in her eyes. Her lips were red and slightly parted.

"You win," she said again.

He waited for her to tell him. He wouldn't prompt her yet. There would be other questions later, but now she had to volunteer what she knew. Then the rest would come easier for her.

She leaned forward so that her hands were slipping over his shoulders and her lips were within inches of his.

"Now!" she said.

HER LIPS were very soft and warm. Mary had never kissed him quite like that. After a few seconds, he forgot Mary. Suddenly Suzy in his arms was all he wanted.

He held her away from him, his hands on her shoulders and his eyes looking deep into hers.

You've just lost something, Lowry—something you've kept apart for Mary. And you can't write it off as just a kiss that fell your way in the line of duty. Just one of those things that happen. Something that could have happened a dozen times before, but never did because it didn't fit into the picture of a cop—a respectable married man—on his job. It wasn't that way—because you liked it. You liked the taste of her lips. . . . You've lost something good, Lowry, and you've found something dangerous.

"For Pete's sake," he murmured and stared into her face, seeing the odd expression and slowly recognizing fright and tense emotion.

"It wasn't meant to be like that," she whispered. "I didn't know how it would be."

"Damn it . . . how could you know? How could I know? You're just a kid and I'm a man—a cop with a wife and years behind me."

He didn't recognize his own words and his own thoughts. He was thinking and talking over his head, or so close to earth there was nothing but the bare truth to be said.

She trembled and swayed toward him again, her eyes wide, and he found her lips as he had before and nothing else mattered. . . . She broke away from him as abruptly as she had come to him. She drew back, watching him with eyes that now held tears.

"You've got to go," she said. "Please!"

"I'm not going. Not until we've—decided about this. One way or the other."

She tried to smile. It wasn't very good. "You'd better go home to your wife, mister. You'd better get out of here."

He shook his head. "We've got to talk it out first. We've got to find out what happened. But you're right—not here. Somewhere else. Around other people. Where we'll be safe. Decent. Get your coat. We'll find a place for coffee."

"It's no use, mister. Can't you understand that? Whatever it was—is—it's not for us and maybe it was just a kiss or something."

"We'll talk about it over coffee. Where's your coat?"

She shook her head. "No, we can't, I tell you! We can't. Get out and we'll forget it."

He smiled impatiently and looked about the room for her coat. It wasn't there. He glanced at the closet door and stepped toward it.

"No!" Her voice was a small scream.

He opened the closet door and a thin, compact man stepped into him. The glint of blue steel was in his hand. The hardness of the gun muzzle jerked into Mike's solar plexus. A hand plucked the police gun from its shoulder holster.

The man didn't speak and Lowry stepped back, his eyes narrowed on the lean face, his mind remembering the picture in the rogue's gallery.

He said, "We want you, Alf. Put the gun down. Don't make trouble. It won't buy you anything."

"You want a lot of things, you lousy copper. You want my girl, too."

"Put the gun down."

"How did you like kissing her, copper? Rat!"

The girl spoke dully. "I had to keep him away from the closet, Alf. I had to do it. Don't. I had to."

He spoke sharply to her without taking his eyes from Mike's face. "You didn't have to like it."

"I didn't—"

"Shut up! I had the door open enough to see. I heard what you said. I saw it and heard it. You wasn't putting on an act. You rotten little cop-girl!"

Mike's hands were up. He tensed his muscles. There was a chance to use a fast shove-away, a twist, and maybe some judo. Alf Lindy sensed the tightening of muscles. He shoved the detective away with the hardness of the gun.

"Get over there against the wall."

"I'm warning you, Alf. Be smart. You can't beat the game."

"I can try." He reached for a pillow on the bed and bunched it around the gun.

The girl started toward him. "Alf! What—"

"If he takes me in, I die. If they catch me, I die. What's the difference if I die for Solly Anet, or for the cop, too?" He glanced at her. "Or *you*?"

SHE stopped beside a dresser, her eyes wide and color draining from her face. "No, Alf!" she whispered. "You don't have to do that. You can get away."

"With you and your copper alive to make sure I'm nailed ten minutes after I leave here?" He laughed harshly. "No, baby. Not that way. I'm a killer and a killer has to play it alone. A killer's got one friend. His gun. So the pillow will kill the sound and I'll get a few hours start."

Mike felt the cold sensation spread from the pit of his stomach, the involuntary contraction of muscles, the awareness that he was closer to death than he ever had been.

"Alf," he said softly. "They'll get you anyhow. Don't be a fool. If you die for Solly you'll just die and it'll be over without your knowing much about it. If you die for killing me and the girl—Alf, you know what cops do to cop killers. You've heard, haven't you?"

"You make big with the words, don't you copper! You're good at that. Around women, too." His voice became thin. "You're quite a man around women."

"Okay, Alf. If that's the way you want to die. Only leave the girl out of it. She'll give you a break. She's too young to die."

"She's too young to die,' he says! What are you doing? Trying to make a hammy pitch so she'll think you're nuts about her? Being the big, noble guy just before you die?"

"Alf, I'm coming after you. If I reach you before the gun stops me, I'm going to kill you."

"You ought to be in pictures, copper. Only they got no use for dead bodies in pictures."

From the corner of his eye, Mike saw the girl move, but maybe that would help. It might distract Alf Lindy's attention long enough for a quick lunge. He took a deep breath and his weight balanced forward on his toes.

"Alf!" the girl said.

Involuntarily they looked at her. A

drawer of the dresser was open and she held a small automatic in her hand.

"Alf!" the girl repeated. "Drop the gun."

"Like hell!"

Mike Lowry watched the gun buck in Alf's hand; heard the roar of its shots; heard the quick, staccato cracks from the smaller gun in the girl's hand.

He was across the room, but there wasn't anything for him to do. Alf's arms were down and the gun had dropped from his fingers. He circled in an off-balance stumble and abruptly he pitched forward and was quiet on the floor.

Mike snatched up the gun and hurried to the girl. She was crouched on the floor, doubled over, screaming.

She fell to her side and straightened out a little. After a few seconds she opened her eyes. Pain contorted her face for an instant and then receded. The screaming had stopped.

"It was no good," she whispered.

"Don't talk. I'm going to get an ambulance."

"Wait . . . mister. Would you sort of like to . . . kiss me good-by?"

It was a gentle, good kiss.

Then Suzette Lane smiled a little as she looked up at him. "Okay, mister," she whispered. "You better wipe the lipstick off and—go home to your wife."

He started to speak, but he heard the tired sigh and saw the relaxation come over her. . . .

The apartment was still dark when he quietly opened the door and went in. The note was propped on the kitchen table where he had left it a few hours earlier.

He went to bed, moving with care so that he wouldn't awaken Mary. She moved in her sleep and her hand touched his face. He remembered all the years together and he knew that they had been good years. He smiled, almost sadly, and his lips touched her fingers for a second. He stretched out his hard, conditioned, cop's body, and lay on his back, looking into the dark. . . .

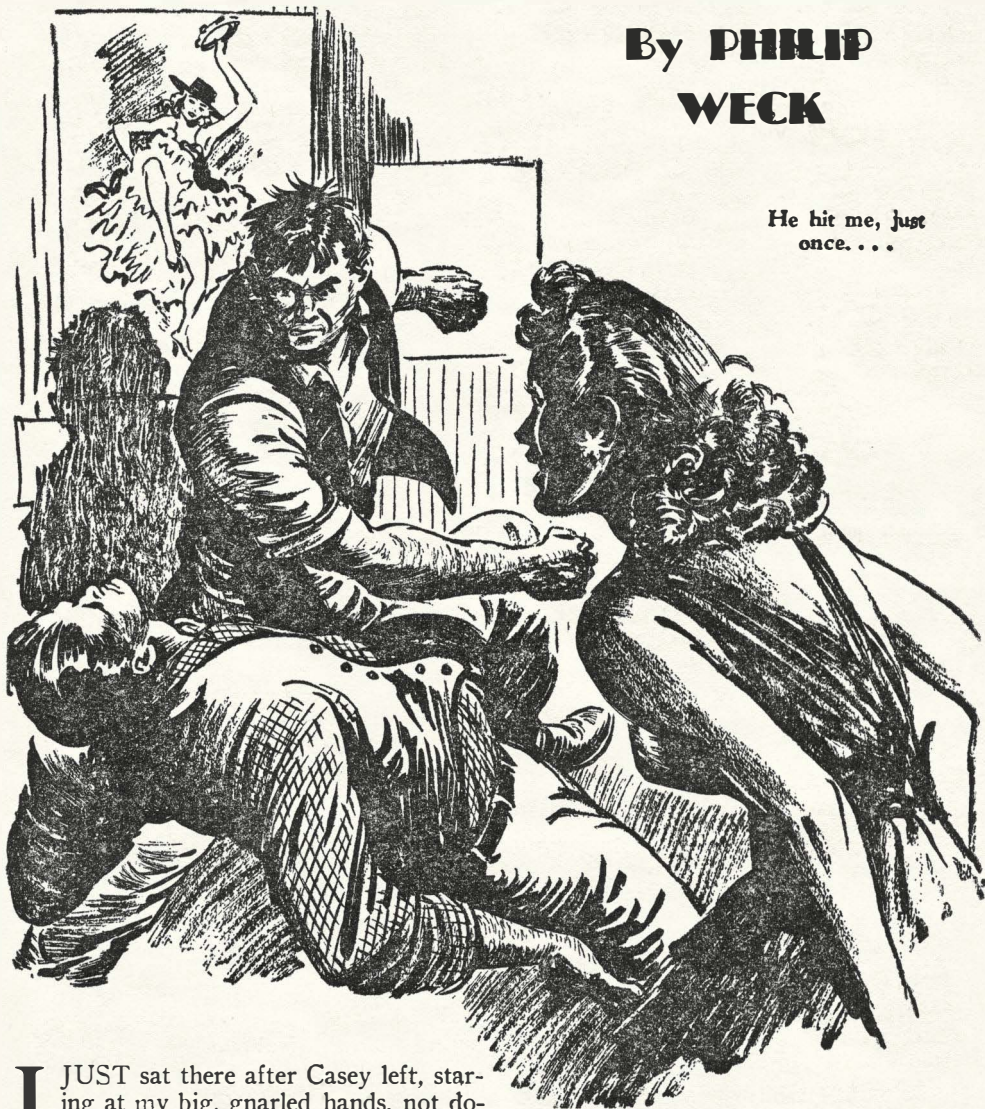
Some men work eight hours and go home and forget the job until the next morning. But you live your job twenty-four hours a day because you're a homicide cop.

The vicious hatred that Flossie brewed flamed into roaring hell—when Johnnie crashed out of the pen and headed back to . . .

Hot-Hate Alley

By PHILIP
WECK

He hit me, just
once. . . .



I JUST sat there after Casey left, staring at my big, gnarled hands, not doing a damn thing. The door to the alley was open, and it's a funny thing but I can remember how the alley smelled that afternoon.

There was stale beer from the saloon. A horse must have gone by about then, and somebody had thrown some rotten oranges next to the fence. I knew there

was a cop behind that fence, and there were cops at Twelfth Street and more cops at the other end of the alley. All hell was going to pop when Johnny showed up. It was going to be another bum rap for Johnny—the last one.

I sat there, looking at my big hands and

waiting. Just waiting. It was Monday; there isn't any show on Monday and I didn't have anything to do but wait. Until Johnny showed up and died. Wait and think about Johnny and Flossie and Derek.

After a while Flossie came in. She came in like nothing had happened. She parked on my desk and she showed me a lot of leg, like she always did. She even said the same thing she'd been saying for weeks: "Where's Derek?"

She was a cheap, tough, nasty little tramp. I didn't like her. I didn't like what she'd done to the Little Gem and to Johnny and to all of us.

But I couldn't help feeling sorry for her. Because this was the end of the road for Flossie. The very end. She was in the gutter now where Derek had thrown her a month ago, and they were kicking her when she was down. Kicking her to death.

Just the same somebody had to tell her. So I said, "Johnny's out, Flossie. He's crashed out of the pen."

She was lighting a cigarette when I told her. In the flame from the match, I could see the powder and rouge and lipstick on her face. It was caked and rough, and it wasn't part of her face at all; it was something she'd put on. Like a mask. It didn't make her look younger; it made her look older.

She didn't say a word. She just stared at me and the match trembled. I wondered how old she really was.

So I told her again. "Johnny's crashed out. He'll be looking for you."

She got the cigarette going and she said, "What're you tryin' to hand me?"

"I'm not trying to hand you anything. What'll I tell him, Flossie?"

"I don't give a damn what you tell him!" she said. She was scared.

"He'll be looking for you, Flossie. You know it was a bum rap. You know he didn't lay a finger on you."

She didn't answer me.

I said, "What'll I tell him, Flossie?"

"Shut up!" she yelled. "Shut your big mouth! I don't give a damn what the hell you tell him!"

Then she got up and bounced out of the office again. Even then, as scared as she was, she showed me a lot of leg when she

got up and strutted away from my desk.

She was scared, all right. She didn't know what to do. It was the first time I'd ever seen Flossie when she didn't know what to do.

I just sat there after she'd gone. I could hear her high heels clip-clopping down the stinking alley and I could see a flash of white from her legs still in my eyes, the way an electric light stays in your eyes when you've stared at it.

From the sound of her heels, she was still swaying down that alley, with death right behind her. Flossie, the Queen of the Little Gem.

She'd bounced in just like that the very first time she came in. She'd parked on my desk and asked, "Where's the boss?"

That was a year before. I thought about it and about all that had happened in that year. About how she'd become old and even tougher. About how she'd changed everything and how her coming sort of meant the end of it all, the end of the Little Gem and Derek and Johnny and a lot of other things.

Derek was the boss, and Derek was in Florida with his wife and kids when Flossie first came in. I was sort of in charge, but my job was just to keep things running. I wasn't supposed to put any new girls on.

So I said, "The boss is out of town."

Johnny was the only other person there that afternoon. Just Johnny and me and Flossie.

Johnny came out of his room. He stood there picking his teeth and looking her over, his eyes all bloodshot and his clothes looking the way clothes do when you've slept in them: his undershirt filthy and his arms big and bulging and fat.

I said, "The boss is out of town, girlie."

She smiled at Johnny and shifted a little so he could see the legs. She said, "Hello."

He said, "What's your name?"

"Flossie," she said. "What's yours?"

He stared at her with his little pig eyes. His hand was in his pocket, where he kept the ice-pick. He didn't answer but you could tell he was thinking.

She said, "Are you the boss?"

He looked her up and down. Then he spat out the toothpick and said, "Yeah, I'm the boss. C'mon, we'll have a drink."

He went over to the bar, without a word, and she followed. . . .

EARLY afternoons it's pretty quiet in the Little Gem. It was quiet today, the afternoon Johnny crashed out of the pen. I could hear the cars going by on the boulevard in front, and I could hear the people in the saloon. I sat at my desk and the cops sat outside, waiting for Johnny to show up.

Waiting to blast his guts out. Because they knew, too, this was going to be the last time. This was going to be the end. They knew Johnny wouldn't walk back to the pen.

Johnny. Big, vicious, mean-tempered Johnny.

Brownsbody, the newspapers called him. John Brownsbody. That was the way the cops had it in their records, too. But his name really was John Brown's Body. If you asked him, and he felt like answering, he'd say it just that way, pronouncing each syllable separately: John Brown's Body. And his hand would go for that ice-pick in case you laughed. I know; I've seen them laugh.

His name came from the song, of course. "John Brown's Body." He'd been singing it when Derek picked him up on the street, a dirty-faced, foul-mouthed, filthy little brat without a home. He'd cursed in a high, shrill voice every time you asked him who he was, and Derek had thought it was funny. Derek had said, "Okay, you can sleep here, John Brown's Body."

And the name stuck, because Derek laughed at it, and when Derek laughed, everybody else laughed.

He slept there, in Derek's grubby saloon, after Derek closed up and went to his home in the suburbs. He hung around the saloon or the alleys all day, growing up fast, always cursing and always dirty.

Derek teased him and the boys teased him because it made Derek laugh, and maybe that's how he got to be so mean. He grew up just as big and tough and nasty and mean as Derek was. He even got to look something like Derek.

When Derek bought out the Little Gem, Johnny slept there, in the dressing-room. He became sort of unofficial bouncer and handy man, when he wasn't in the pokey.

He was in the pokey a lot from the time he was hardly more than a kid. He'd get drunk and jab somebody with the ice-pick, and the cops would come after him the next morning and drag him off. Then Derek would send one of the boys around to the ward committeeman, and Johnny would get out.

That's the way it worked in those days. But not any more. Now it was too late. Johnny'd been in the pen and he'd crashed out, and all I could do was wait for him to come around so he could be shot down.

So I sat and waited, staring at my big hands and smelling the stink of the alley and hearing the people walk past on the street.

Because of what had happened a year ago. Because when Johnny had said, "Yeah, I'm the boss," he'd started something he couldn't stop. Something she couldn't stop, either.

He'd come back from the bar that afternoon a year ago and up to my desk with the ice-pick in his hand.

"Put her in the show," he'd told me.

That puzzled me. There's always a lot of women around a burlesque show, and Johnny could take 'em or leave 'em. But this time he said, "Put her in the show," and he let me see the ice-pick.

"I can't," I said.

He said, "Put her in the show!"

"Okay, Johnny," I said. "You win."

So I put her in. Every day she left after the last show with Johnny. He stayed sober, and I think he tried to clean himself up a bit.

But it was bound to end, I knew. As soon as Derek came back. Flossie was a new babe and Derek—well, Derek was Derek.

Just two weeks later, Derek came backstage one night, without our even having known he was home. He'd been up front watching the performance.

"Who's the new girl?" he asked me.

I said, "Flossie's her name. She isn't bad."

"Where'd she come from?"

"Johnny gave her the job," I said. "She just walked in."

Derek stared at me with his tiny, black eyes. Then he said, "Tell her to come over to the saloon and see me when she's through."

That was all he said. I told her and she went over.

Nothing else happened except that Johnny was sitting in his room when I locked up the place, smoking a cigarette. He was gone the next afternoon when I opened up.

The morning after that the cops were around looking for him. He wasn't there, but it was only another drunk and disorderly charge; they didn't wait for him.

He didn't show for a couple of days, and I thought he probably was in the pokey. But one dark night a chorus girl said, "What's that Johnny trying to do anyway? Hiding in the alley and scaring people half to death!"

I stepped to the door and waited until a truck went by, flashing its headlights through the alley. Sure enough, there was Johnny, trying to press his big, enormous bulk into a doorway: hulking, unshaven, his hand in his pocket.

He was there the next night, too, and the night after that. He didn't come into the theater; he stayed half-hidden in the alley, not saying a word to anyone, hardly moving.

DEREK wasn't around at all that week. But Friday morning he came with the new posters and put them up, then stood back and stared at them, his tiny eyes unblinking. *Flossie, the Queen of the Little Gem.*

He didn't say a word to anyone. Just put the posters up, looked at them, got in his car and drove away. One of the punks who hang around the saloon was in the front seat with him.

That's the way Derek was. Smooth. Quiet. He didn't make a lot of noise and he didn't seem to do a thing. You might get the idea he was lazy and sloppy fat. But he wasn't. You gave him an opening and one morning you woke up and found out he'd moved in on you, just taken over.

I know. I used to own that saloon. I gave Derek a job as bartender years ago. Now I'm a watchman, and with Johnny coming back, I'm even washed up there. . . .

When the posters went up, Johnny blew it. He forced his way into Flossie's brand-new apartment that night, and wrecked the place. He tore up all the

clothes he could find and he smashed the furniture and broke the windows. The cops found him the next afternoon, back in his dressing-room, still drunk.

The cops took him to the station again, and the next morning Flossie went down and slapped the assault charge on him. I read about it in the newspapers. It was a pretty good story because Johnny blew his top when he heard about it. Three times he managed to get out of his cell, and each time the cops dragged him back.

He was still punch-drunk when they took him into court and Derek's lawyer entered a guilty plea. When he saw Flossie in the courtroom, he tried to get at her and the bailiffs had to beat him again. The judge called him a despicable hoodlum and sentenced him, and they led him away.

Johnny had crashed out after one year, killing a guard. So it was life for John Brownsbody. Life or death. Sometimes they mean the same thing.

Life or death. Inside the pen or out. It was all the same to Johnny now.

Casey'd told me about it early that afternoon.

Casey wasn't a bad sort. Cops, I think, are like a lot of other people. Some of them are good and some of them are bad. Casey was in between. In the old days he'd smashed Johnny's head in half-a-dozen times, but that was because he was afraid of Johnny.

He came in that afternoon and sat down and said, "Seen Johnny?"

I said, "Johnny's in the pen."

Casey buttoned the strap on his holster. "He's crashed out."

I could feel the room getting smaller and smaller and more quiet. Casey said, "I figure he'll be around. Either here or over to that babe's apartment."

I listened for the creak of the floor backstage, for the sound of footsteps. But the place was quiet. There wasn't a sound. I said, "Yeah, I suppose he'll be around."

"Funny thing," Casey said. "What do you make out of it?"

"What do I make out of what?" I asked him.

"Don't button up on me," Casey said. "It ain't smart. Johnny pulled a gun on a guard. Smashed his head in with it. Then he went over the wall and a car was

already parked there, waiting for him."

Still there wasn't a sound. "So what?" I said.

"It takes dough to have a car waiting," Casey said. "It takes dough to get a gun into the pen. Whose dough? Derek's?"

"Derek could have kept him out in the first place," I said. "But he didn't."

Casey said, "Yeah, I know."

There was a rustle down the hallway. A mouse maybe, or a rat. I said, "Maybe it's somebody Johnny met in the pen. One of his cellmates."

"Maybe," Casey said.

Then he was quiet for a while. Everything was quiet.

"You got a gun?" he asked me finally.

I said, "No."

"You're a hell of a watchman," he said.

"Yeah, I'm a hell of a watchman."

"Why don't you get one?" he asked.

I said, "If I had a gun I'd kill somebody with it. That's what a gun's for, isn't it? To kill people with."

The mouse was moving around again. Or was it paper rustling?

Casey said, "I don't get it." He looked at me kind of puzzled. Then he said, "I'll be around. Close." And he walked out.

After he left, I got up and went through the building. But nobody was there. It was quiet again. The Little Gem was waiting, too, for Johnny to come back and die. So I sat down and stared at my big hands and waited with it.

It seemed like I'd been waiting for a year. Ever since Johnny went away. Ever since Flossie came around that first afternoon and Johnny met her.

So it didn't really matter, waiting for just the rest of that day. It wouldn't be

much of a wait, one more day—not after a whole year.

THE darkness came while I sat there, and still I hadn't seen the cops. They're patient when they have to be—the cops. They can wait day after day, in an alley or behind a fence or parked in a car at the curb.

But *you* can't wait. Not if you've crashed out of the pen. You can't wait at all.

I sat there, smelling the alley, and then I heard those heels clattering on the pavement once more, in the darkness, and Flossie came in again.

Her face was scratched and her heavy lipstick was smeared. She didn't have her long gloves on; her coat was unbuttoned and there was a tear in it. She was breathing hard, as if she'd been running.

You can't run from death, Flossie, I thought. It's too late now. It's been too late for a long time.

She ran past me to her old dressing-room. Then she came back and she leaned against the wall, catching her breath.

Then she said, "Close the door! Lock it!"

I did.

She said, "Those two on Twelfth Street, just sitting there in the car. They're cops, aren't they?"

"Yeah," I said.

She cursed them. "They're all over the whole damned city!" she said. "The bus depot. The hotel lobby. The Union Station." She cursed them some more.

I didn't say a word.

Then she said, "He wasn't so damned smart! I saw what he was up to, him and

How to keep AWAKE when you have to!

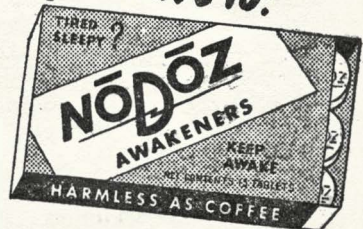
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his soft-soaping! Just stay here, he said! Just stay here and wait! The fat, sloppy, two-timing—”

There wasn't anything for me to say. "You should'a seen him," she said. "He was surprised, he was. He thought he'd fooled me. You should'a seen him, laying there with the knife in his belly, the fat, sloppy rat!" She cursed him the way she'd cursed the cops, until she had to stop to catch her breath again.

That was when we heard the footsteps in the hall, when Flossie stopped to catch her breath. Soft, gentle footsteps, coming toward us from the darkness.

"Mac!" she said. "Gimme your gun! Quick! Mac, he's here!"

But I didn't have a gun. And it was too late anyway. For Johnny stood there, just inside the yellow circle of light. Fat, sloopy, dirty Johnny. He needed a shave. His clothes were filthy and stinking, his hair uncombed, his eyes tiny and black like little buttons. And he was big. There in the doorway, he looked like a giant.

Flossie was shaking all over. "Johnny!" she said.

He walked toward her without a word.

She ran then, to the door. But it was locked and she knew she couldn't get it open in time. She turned around and faced him again.

"Johnny!" she said. "Johnny! Don't, Johnny!"

I got between them. "Don't be a fool, Johnny," I said. "They'll burn you. There're cops all around the joint; you haven't got a chance."

"Listen to him, Johnny," Flossie pleaded.

He hit me, just once, and I went against the wall like I'd been thrown there, and the next thing I knew I was on the floor. He up-ended the desk and let it drop across my legs. I was pinned down.

Then he walked toward Flossie again. He was in between us, and I couldn't see her but I could hear.

"Johnny!" she said. "Don't do it, Johnny! It's what he wanted you to do, don't you see, Johnnie? It's the way he planned it!"

Her voice got thick and hoarse. She said, "Johnny, we could—Ahhh!"

It sounded like she swallowed her words. I had the desk shoved off my legs and I was getting to my feet when he let go. She fell to the floor almost on top of me.

Flossie. The Queen of the Little Gem. Dead as hell. And even in death she was showing a lot of leg.

I got up. Johnny was looking at me, but I don't think he really saw me. He didn't see anything but Flossie, dead on the floor.

He said, "Where's Derek? I gotta see him."

"Derek's dead, Johnny," I carefully told him.

"Dead?"

"Yeah," I said. "She killed him."

"She killed him? Flossie?"

"Sure," I said. "She killed him, Johnny. He was tired of her and she wouldn't let him drop her and so he planned it. He planned to have you kill her after he helped you crash out. And you did, Johnny."

"And the cops are going to kill you, the way Derek planned it. Don't you see? Just the way he planned it—only she killed him first, after it was too late to stop the working of Derek's plan. Don't you see?"

"She killed him?" Johnny said. "Flossie killed him?" He didn't seem to understand.

Then he looked up at me and a flicker of fear showed in his eyes. "Cops?" he said.

"They're out in the alley," I said. "They're in the front and the back and all over the place. Don't you see, Johnny?"

He glanced around wildly. He took a few steps down the hall. Then he came back and unbolted the door.

Just once he looked at Flossie, lying there on the floor.

He said, "I had to kill her, didn't I, Mac?"

"Yeah, Johnny," I said. "You had to kill her."

Then he opened the door and stepped out into the alley.

A moment later the machine gun cut loose.



READY FOR THE RACKETS

A Department

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Paid in Fool

Dear Sir:

My husband and I owned a small store for about fifteen years and I've had a few fast ones tried on me. But the following one left me with my mouth wide open.

The store was located in a rather isolated rural district. A stranger and his family had moved into an abandoned house about five miles out and were in apparently rather desperate circumstances.

I had heard of the makeshift clothing worn to school by the children and many the big sack of apples that I gave them because I felt sorry for them. He worked on the WPA and had paid his account regularly.

One day when there wasn't any one else around he breezed in and said, "I want to pay my bill. Figure it up." I did, marked it paid, laid the receipted bill on the counter—and Mr. Slick picks it up and walks out, just like that. He had probably "paid" a good many bills like that.

He must have been all set to leave as the next time I heard of him he had gone.

Flossie B. Hill
Thompsonville, Michigan

Clean Sweep

Dear Sir:

I was swindled out of a vacuum sweeper when I was single and living with my folks. This fellow, an average-looking man between thirty and forty, knocked at the door one day and asked if we needed any of our electrical appliances fixed.

After further discussion with my mother, he entered our utility room and did some repair work on our vacuum cleaner.

The following week he came back and did some more work and stated that he could get us a better sweeper for about five dollars. He claimed to have an "in" with a reliable firm in town by which he exchanged sweepers, getting fairly good ones that were turned in on new sales, and turning in old worn-out ones to the factory in their place.

My mother said she would think it over. The following week the fellow was waiting on the porch when I arrived home from work. He said he had a marvelous sweeper for us in exchange

for our sweeper and five dollars. But he had to turn in the sweeper before the store closed at 5:00 p. m. Could he take our sweeper and mother could pay him the five dollars when he brought the better one? I hesitated and finally asked him to wait to see if mother wouldn't get home.

Of course, she didn't and at 4:45 p. m. he knocked at the door and said he had to leave and was sorry we missed out on such a wonderful chance. He would keep us in mind if ever there was another chance like this unusual one.

Unless, he said, I wanted to let him take the sweeper as he hated to see my mother disappointed. So did I, and knowing our sweeper wasn't very good I handed it over, watched him walk up to the corner, around it, and away. That's the last I ever saw of it or him.

My mother was wonderful about, saying she probably would have given it to him herself and that it was one way of getting a new sweeper. Nevertheless, I insisted on buying one for her.

Mrs. Delmar Ott
Elyria, Ohio

Just Picture It

Dear Sir:

Some time ago when I was out of work and pretty desperate for a job, I saw an ad in the paper for girls to solicit for a photographer.

About ten girls were there when I showed up. I was worried that I wouldn't be chosen.

Well, we were all hired. We were to take a block, one girl on each side and get a dollar deposit on a sitting. The pictures were to be taken in the homes.

We pounded pavements all day and the photographer was supposedly following up, taking pictures. We turned in our deposits and the addresses that night and he told us to be there early next day.

We waited until noon and he never showed up. Probably in the next town, hiring girls.

Peggie Hayse
Terre Haute, Indiana

Family Affair

Dear Sir:

My wife and I, at the time of our marriage, could not find a flat or even anything that resembled a room. So we had to live with my

parents. On this particular evening my wife came home from work, her face beaming with pride. She told me that she had contacted a man who said he could give us a flat—if we met the requirements!

Well I can tell you that all the rest of the evening during our supper, we just thought of this place. At eight o'clock that evening—the time my wife had made the appointment for—we pulled up at this man's home. A woman who represented herself as his mother met us at the door and said that her son was not at home but that he would be home presently. She told us about the place and just where it was located. By this time her son came home and we got down to business.

After a few minutes of answering questions, he told us that we were the ones who could have the flat. But on the condition that there must be a year's rent in advance. Well the thought of having our own place spurred us on I guess, for within a half-hour we had brought back 400 dollars. We gave him the cash and he, in return, gave us a key to the flat.

That next morning we went to the address that his mother had given us. My wife, a little too eager, bounded out of the car and went toward the building. In the next few minutes a lot seemed to happen. First the key wouldn't fit, and second, to add to our surprise, the door opened and a woman stood there asking what we wanted.

I was too surprised to say anything, but my wife finally told her what took place. She said that a few of her neighbors had the same experience with people trying to put keys that didn't fit into their locks. We told her we were sorry and turned to leave.

My first stop was the house in which we had given the money to this man. Going there my wife cried and called herself a fool for getting us into this. But it wasn't just her, for I had been the fool in going and getting the money. My wife finally quieted down and I told her that there was nothing to worry about—we'd just get back our money quietly and forget about the whole matter.

But unfortunately we couldn't forget about the matter, for when we arrived at this house we were surprised for the second time this one day to find out that the man and his mother had just rented rooms there and had checked out early this morning. This brought more crying from my wife, only now even I felt like crying.

Lawrence Kogut
Chicago, Illinois

Yours for the Tax

Dear Sir:

I would like to tell about a racket that has been worked on the people of our town. When a housewife answers the phone, she is told that it is a popular jewelry store calling. Then she is told that if she can name the largest lake in town, the store will give her a present of a valuable brooch.

When she names it, the man tells her he will have it delivered to her home immediately, and

that all she need do is pay the \$4.20 luxury tax on it.

When the man arrives, the housewife gladly gives him the tax money and receives the brooch. But when she shows it to her husband, he tells her it can probably be bought for 50 cents anywhere and he is right.

If she investigates, she finds that the store didn't know about the call.

Mrs. Margaret Clark
New Castle, Pennsylvania

Dyed in the Wool

Dear Sir:

Some years ago I lived in a small coastal town. One day a man entered my mother's shop, carrying a fine silver fox scarf. I have learned a great deal about furs, but at that time, my knowledge regarding a silver fox was that it would have a black streak down its back, a black cross at its neck, and its body should be silvery looking with white tips on the fur, or something to that effect.

This one seemed to have all the qualifications, so I bought it for a ten dollar bill. I was quite pleased with my bargain and wore it proudly, until the first rain, which curled the dyed sheep's wool used for a body on which had been attached a perfectly lovely set of fox legs, head and tail.

M. L. S.
New Orleans, Louisiana

Cash—No Delivery

Dear Sir:

Tell the suckers to move over and make room for one more. All my life I have been an easy touch for a hard luck story, especially if it comes from someone with a physical handicap.

Several months ago, I faced a glib-tongued salesman with an empty jacket sleeve, a sad story to tell, and a set of shears to sell. Yes, there was a down payment although it was only a dollar, and then the set of three lovely pairs of different sized shears would be sent to me in about three weeks, balance COD. I bit.

After four weeks passed, I wrote a short letter asking why the delay, for I had the business card that had been given me with the receipt for the down payment. After two more weeks passed, the letter finally returned with a number of forwarding addresses written in, until at the back of the letter, the last notice stated "no forwarding address."

It was then I decided I'd better do some checking. Upon close inspection I found that the receipt which I had received was of the ordinary dime store sales slip variety, there was no signature of the salesman, no address or name of the company, the purchase was merely designated as "one set," and the delivery date marked "as soon as possible"

No, my sob-story salesman was never found, nor my hard-earned dollar either. One dollar is not much money, but I've often wondered just how many others waited to pay the balance, COD!

B. J. Kiefer
Oakland, California

The Veteran Vanishes

Dear Sir:

This racket only costs the sucker two dollars, but it's pretty low.

The salesman hits all the garages and drug-stores—any place he may meet a veteran. He is selling subscriptions to a vet magazine but doesn't happen to have a sample magazine with him.

The subscriber gives him two dollars for a year's subscription and is handed a nice card and that's all, brother.

M. U. Cole
Superior, Wisconsin.

Strike Me Purple!

Dear Sir:

It is our custom, during lunch hour at the machine shop where I work, to sit on the front steps and talk in little groups.

A Latin man approached our group, that day, and asked me if I was Spanish. I replied I was and he proceeded to remove a small package from his pocket. It was a beautiful silver bracelet with shaded, purple stones. He had made a trip to Mexico, he said and as the government allowed him to return with a hundred dollars worth of merchandise duty free, he had invested this amount in Mexican jewelry and this was the last piece he had.

He had paid ten dollars for it and would sell it for fifteen. The import tax plus city and federal tax alone brought the cost past the fifteen dollars he was asking, and the purple stones were so beautiful. Genuine amethysts, he said, and very rare.

It so happened that my wife is Mexican born, and I thought she would be extremely delighted if I surprised her with the bracelet. However, when I dug in my pocket I discovered that I had but seven dollars.

The Latin vendor immediately went into a song and dance act about how the bracelet was selling in the stores for twenty-seven dollars and what a sacrifice it was to give it away for fifteen dollars. I turned the bracelet over and read Mexican silver stamped on the back. That decided me. I turned to my friend and borrowed five dollars. "I'll give you twelve," I said, "and no more."

The man snatched the twelve dollars out of my hand, complaining about the sacrifice he was making, and whisked away.

Well, I was right about my wife being delighted with it. She was, for two days. She showed off to her friends and extorted all sorts of comments from them about how beautiful it was. And then it happened—at a friendly gathering on Saturday night. You've guessed it. As she was dancing, the bracelet came loose, dropped to the floor and one of the stones was knocked out.

She picked it up and blushed as her friends crowded around her. I peeked over her shoulder and looked at the stone in her hand. It was a cone-shaped piece of glass, and inside was a little roll of pulp paper blotched with purple ink which accounted for the shaded color.

I fished through the directory for a place that dealt exclusively in Mexican jewelry and went there with the bracelet. They sold the same thing there for \$2.97.

J. J. Rodriguez
New York, New York

Phony Business

Dear Sir:

One morning, while I was cleaning, my door-bell rang. I opened the door and there stood a well dressed man with a ledger in his hand. He said that he was from the telephone company and had come to put a phone in my apartment.

After waiting for three years for a telephone I was so excited that everything slipped my mind. I forgot to ask him for an identification card. He said he'd like to have a little information—if I have any insurance, what kind of work my husband does and how much he earns.

I gave him all the information he wanted. Before he left he asked for a fifteen dollar deposit for the phone he would install the next morning. I gave him the money and never saw him again.

Mrs. K. Grossman
Cleveland, Ohio.

No Stock in It

Dear Sir:

The war was over and I had settled down to routine office work after three years in a defense plant. I'd saved a comfortable sum and wanted to keep saving it. I'd even hoped to take my savings and make more as my husband had done on the stock market.

One day my old boss (who had been on the Superintendent's staff at the defense plant) came into the office. We were both surprised to see each other again and I accepted his invitation to lunch.

During luncheon he told me he had started a factory and gave me one of his cards.

As the weeks wore on he called me frequently and while they were friendly calls, he finally asked if I would consider the position as his secretary (the position I had held with him in the plant). He told me he was incorporating his business and showed me orders for his novelties. As soon as he could get more materials his business would increase and his present secretary was not as capable as I had been.

He offered me a much larger salary than I was earning on my present job and when he held "open house" for the city to inspect his factory he and his wife drove me out to the factory as a "special" guest. I met many who had worked with us in the defense plant. They were now working for Mr. R.

When he incorporated I bought shares, using almost all of my savings.

Although nothing definite had been decided about my working for him, I was looking forward to the change. He had been pleasant to work for before and I was not exactly happy in my present surroundings.

And then, about two months after he had in-

(Please continue on page 96)

Guiding the two lovelies on a fishing trip, Tim found, was drifting him into homicide-hot waters.



**Dynamic
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DAMSELS OF THE DEEP

By **JOHN D. MacDONALD**

He felt as if he was watching a snake. . . .



CHAPTER ONE

Temptation Strikes Twice

TIMOTHY McCABE thought that unless he found out the score on his three customers before the week was out, he'd never be able to get them out of his mind. By now they'd be about through with their breakfast in the River House on the small bay near Marysville

on Wolfe Island. Timmy carried the pail of live bait out to the long dock and set it carefully down into his boat, the *Alice*.

It was a good season for small-mouth bass on the St. Lawrence. The three customers had left their rods and equipment in the *Alice*. He glanced up toward the River House to see if they were coming. Not yet. A few minutes more.

He looked at the *Alice* with his usual mixture of affection and mild consternation. It was a sturdy hull, built ten years before at the Cape of staunch wood and good brass screws. It was named for his wife. But the '39 car motor, converted to marine use, was cranky and temperamental. In the front was the usual double seat, with steering wheel and instrument panel. In the middle was the engine hatch, and behind that was an open space with two double seats facing each other some five feet apart. That was for the customers.

He looked at the scarred hull and thought morosely that she needed a paint job. Yes, she was named for Alice, and in a certain way they both had that solid capacity for hard work.

Timmy was twenty-nine, but looked older because of his heaviness. It wasn't fat. It was tough, solid muscle, because Timmy had always worked hard. His impassive face had dark good looks, and there was a bright alertness in his eyes. He wore khaki trousers, a white T shirt and a sloppy, visored marine cap. His arms and hands were heavy and powerful.

Abruptly his thoughts turned from the boat to the whole range of his ambitions. During the long winters he sold insurance on the island and over on the mainland at Kingston. No, he wasn't going to stay a river guide all his life. The bank balance was climbing steadily. One day. . . .

"Tim!" a familiar voice called. Abruptly he turned and frowned. Alice had no right to be coming down here. She came down across the yard of the River House, smiling at him. She wore faded and patched jeans and a man's flannel shirt. Her face was roughened and sun browned. She looked sturdy and capable.

"What is it?" he demanded.

She held his pipe out to him. "You forgot it, Tim. I thought I could catch you."

He took it, concealing his gratitude. If he had gotten out on the river and found it missing, it would have been a bad day indeed.

"Okay, Alice. Run along, now. Here come my customers."

They were coming down the steps from the high porch of the River House. Mrs. Merton Hase was in the lead, with Marta Owin following her, and Merton Hase coming last, laden with raincoats and the usual flask.

This was the fourth day of their week's contract. But the impact of Jean Hase was growing greater each day. She was a golden girl, her lithe, lovely body tanned to a honey brown. She wore a French bathing suit, constructed casually of bandannas. She was one of those women who, seemingly inadvertently, turn every glance, every movement, every intonation of voice, into a promise of intimate delights. Her deep blue eyes held a constant look of scornful laughter at the oddity of a world full of men who looked at her with frank admiration.

"Ah, Timmy, you told me nothing of her," Alice whispered.

"Along with you!" he said tightly. Alice gave him a look, half of hurt, half of amusement, and trudged off, her pants and shirt baggy and unrevealing. Compared with Jean Hase, Timmy thought that Alice was a shabby little wren walking disconsolately away from the glow that surrounded a bird of paradise.

"Good morning, Tim," Jean said in her husky voice.

Despite all he could do to prevent it, he felt the dull flush on his cheeks and he said, "Morning, Mrs. Hase." The long day in the cramped quarters of the boat with the earthy, fragrant warmth of Jean Hase was going to be, if possible, worse than all the three days that had gone before. The day would be a long struggle to keep from looking at her.

She put her hand on his arm and stepped down into the boat. After her touch left him, he wondered sourly if it had raised a welt on his arm. It felt that way.

He realized that if Jean Hase hadn't been along, he would have had almost as bad a time with the other woman, Miss Marta Owin. If Jean Hase was a constant

promise of a fresh, warm delight, Marta Owin was a promise of dark, almost oriental intrigue, incense and languor. She was dark, and had a constant sad look about her, a look of troubled mourning that made Timmy almost ache to make her laugh, to cheer her up. She wore halter and shorts in brilliant white, and her dusky, creamy body seemed impervious to the darkening effect of the sun, the suntan oil making her limbs glisten.

Timmy had taken a long ride from the other guides about having two such beauties in his boat.

"Are you stopping on any of the islands during the long, hot day, Timmy, my boy?" "Have you had your blood pressure tested lately, lad?" "And how can you net the bass when you don't look at them, Tim?"

THE kidding made him uneasy. But not as uneasy as his inability to fathom the relationship between the three—because Mr. Hase was incongruous. He was a dour little half-bald man, almost a full head shorter than the dazzling Jean—and his constant expression was of sulky, childish petulance. He growled at the two women, sneered when he hooked a bass, nipped constantly at the flask.

They rarely spoke to each other during the day. Jean seemed in constant high spirits, talking to the bait when it seemed a little torpid, coaxing the bass in honey tones, humming and singing in a warm, throaty voice.

Once, on the second day, Timmy had tossed out the anchor at a good spot near the breakwater, and had turned to see Jean above him, standing on the engine

hatch, yawning and stretching like a big, sleepy, golden cat. Timmy wondered why he hadn't fallen out of the boat. As it was, he gouged his thumb with the hook as he baited it for her.

And she had noticed and laughed at him.

They clambered into the boat, noisily adjusted themselves, and Timmy shoved off, backed slowly out, turned and headed across toward Goose Island.

Other customers were intensely curious about the spots he selected and why he selected them. These three didn't seem to care. Marta was consistently pensive and far away. Merton Hase sulked. Jean glowed happily.

Try as he might, he could not decipher the relationship. Obviously the Hase marriage was not what you'd call a good one. There was an odd undercurrent of tension between all of them. He'd checked with the manager of the River House and found that they occupied three separate rooms.

Timmy found the spot he wanted, anchored and waited until the boat drifted around into position. Jean swung her rod around toward him. He grabbed the leader, scooped a fat, lively minnow out of the bait bucket, hooked it through the lips and tossed it over the side. Next he did the same for Marta, then for Merton Hase.

Then he lit his pipe, stood up with his arm hooked over the windshield of the boat and watched Jean out of the corner of his eye. She turned quickly enough to catch him at it, and smiled as he could not hold back the blush that colored his face.

"Timmy," she said, "Something greedy

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wants that minnow. What shall I do?"

"Give him time to swallow it," Tim said.

He watched her strip off the line, but she was slow about it. The line tightened and, as she had drag on the reel, it began to buzz. Looked like a nice bass.

"Hit him now!" Tim said.

She hit him hard, began to reel in, and fifty feet from the boat a fine bass jumped clear, trying to shake out the hook.

He jumped a second time, and Jean, her underlip caught behind even white teeth, reeled busily whenever she could. The big bass took out line, but she slowly made it back. Tim got the net ready. Marta and Merton Hase seemed hardly to notice, except to get their own lines out of the way.

Near the boat she gave him too much slack. The bass jumped again, slapping himself against the hull with a wet thud, and he was gone. Timmy grinned and put the net back. "He looked better than four pounds."

Jean grinned. "I taught him that life is earnest." She turned to Merton, said, with a snap in her voice, "A cigarette out of my case, Mert."

Hase took the ponderous silver case out of his pants pocket, flipped it open and held it out to her. She took one without thanks, bent over to Timmy for a light. He somehow kept his hands from trembling and kept his eyes firmly on the match flame cupped in his brown hands.

He wondered how Merton Hase felt about being a pack horse for the two women. Cigarette cases, compacts, lipsticks, bottles of lotion. But he noticed that Hase kept one oversized-hip pocket empty to hold the big flask.

Not once had Hase offered him a drink. No matter. They were paying a hundred and fifteen dollars for his boat and his guiding for the seven days. He guessed that Hase would give a hundred and twenty. Deduct twenty for the gas, put thirty in the special account and the rest in the checking account. He grinned to himself and thought that he ought to ask another twenty for mental torture.

He glanced toward the lake, said, "Glad you folks brought your raincoats."

They should have griped at the idea of rain. They didn't even answer him. Tim-

my coughed and relit his pipe. Hell, it would be the first rain they had had. This should be a small storm. Maybe they liked the rain.

They had been out two and a half hours, when the reaching gray of the cloud obscured the sun and there was a wet chill in the breeze. Jean hugged herself as the goose pimples peppered her naked shoulders. She slipped into a cardigan while Timmy held her rod.

He glanced toward the lake. "Here it comes," he said. The rain was a gray curtain sweeping toward them, dappling the water.

They quickly put on the raincoats. Jean's was of transparent plastic with a hood, and seemed only to emphasize the parts of her not covered by the cardigan. Marta wore a red plastic raincoat, and Merton Hase struggled into a thick, heavy rubber coat with a cape. He buttoned it high around his chin, and all the way down the front.

Timmy glanced at his watch. Time to go back for lunch. They had five nice bass in the pail with the ice. After the rain, they should be able to pick up the other thirteen to make up the limit. He told them to pull in their lines. Then he hauled in the anchor, started the motor and headed back toward Wolfe Island.

As he crossed the main ship channel, he was electrified by a splash as of something heavy going overboard, and a thin, high, horrible scream.

His quick backward glance showed him that Jean and Marta were there—but Merton Hase was gone. He circled quickly and picked up shore details in four directions so that he could mark the spot. The rain whipped against his face. He cut the boat down to idling speed, just enough to hold it in the right spot. Intently he peered around at the water. Surely the man would come up once!

But the man didn't come up at all. He stayed down. He stayed under the angry gray surface of the river and Timmy felt sick at his stomach.

Jean stripped off her raincoat and cardigan, her lips a tight even line, and said, "Hold it right here, Tim." She climbed up onto the engine hatch, went over the side in a clean dive. Marta stood with white face, her hands clenched so

tightly that the knuckles were white.

Jean's golden head broke the surface. She shook her head, gulped air and surface dived. After eight attempts she clung, exhausted, to the edge of the boat.

"No . . . no sign . . . of him," she panted.

"Better get in," he said. "The current's bad here. It'll be taking him along."

"You'll . . . have to . . . help me, Tim."

He clasped her wet wrists, and she came up over the side like a golden goddess of the waters. She slipped the cardigan on again, and then the raincoat. She shuddered with cold, her teeth chattering.

"How did it happen?" Tim asked, his voice hoarse.

"He stood up," Marta said, "to change seats because the spray was hitting him. He tripped and went right over the side without a sound."

Timmy glanced around at the evil face of the river. "We better go in," he said slowly. "We can't help the poor man by staying here. He's done for."

Jean buried her head in her arms and he heard her sobs over the drone of the motor. Marta was white and frozen. He turned around and headed toward the River House.

CHAPTER TWO

Dead Man's Booty

BY TWO-THIRTY the sun was out again, and the whole area of the river downchannel from where Hase had gone over the side was dotted with boats commandeered by the authorities to search for the body. Timmy had been questioned closely by grave men from the police.

"McCabe, did you caution your passengers about standing up while the boat is in motion?"

Timmy took them down and showed them the notice tacked on the rear partition of the motor hatch: "Please do not stand up while the boat is in motion."

"McCabe, were you being fancy with the boat? Sharp turns? Anything like that?"

"No, sir. I was heading directly back for the River House at about eighteen

knots. The rain had flattened the river and the boat was riding steady as a concrete dock."

"Had Mr. Hase been drinking?"

"You'd better ask his wife that, sir."

"She said he had been drinking all morning."

"Then she's right, sir. But I wouldn't say he was drunk. He never showed his liquor. On the first three days of the contract, he took on a pint every morning and a pint every afternoon. But he stayed sour and . . . well, quiet, sir."

"Better get out there and help the others. Can you rig up a grapple?"

"Yes, sir."

At six-thirty Timmy headed wearily back to the dock in front of the River House. Other of the searchers were leaving the area. As he tied up, Jean came down the steps and across the lawn. She wore a blouse and skirt. Her eyes were puffed and red. She walked as though she were very tired.

"No luck?" she asked. Then she compressed her lips. "That's an odd way to say it, I guess."

"We didn't find him, Mrs. Hase. But we will. Tomorrow or the next day. The men know the currents. And he went over just beyond the main channel. I—I'm sorry, Mrs. Hase."

She looked at him, and he saw the promises come back into her blue eyes. "You're sweet, Timmy," she said, her voice husky. As he walked away he felt her eyes on him, and it made him feel awkward and clumsy.

It was almost a relief to get back into his small house, kiss the sun-warmed cheek of Alice. She had heard about it and she was worried.

"Tim, will it mean you lose your license?"

"No. It wasn't my fault. The women, they backed me up."

"They're . . . very beautiful, aren't they, Tim?" she said wistfully.

He sensed the envy in her voice and it made him mad. He grinned at her, rumpled her sandy hair with rough affection and said, "Ah, lass, it's all they got to do with themselves. Powder and perfume and diet. To hell with those sweet-smelling women, Alice."

She smiled, but it was a smile without

confidence. The two-year-old Bobby, husky and laughing, came running out into the kitchen and clasped Tim's stout leg in his chubby arms.

"Up!" he demanded. "Daddy, up!"

Tim picked him up under the arms, groaning and grunting as though it was a great effort. He lifted Bobby high, thumped his head gently against the kitchen ceiling and Bobby crowed with delight. Tim winked at Alice and said, "A couple of kids and those glamor-puss women would look a shade different."

She laughed, reached up and smacked Bobby lightly, said, "Come over to the table and get it, men. . . ."

At night Timmy lay awake, his hands clasped behind his head, frowning in the darkness. No contract for tomorrow. That meant a loss of cash. Couldn't start making money again until the bloody man was found. And better find him quick, or the eels would make a hell of a mess of him.

In his mind he pictured where the man had gone over the side, and it was like a map of the river was stretched out under his fingertips, every current marked. Suddenly he sat up. They were making a mistake. The surface current wasn't the right way to figure it. He remembered the days when he had anchored off the channel near that spot. Sometimes there was big ones there.

But you had to use a lot of line and heavy sinkers. And when you got your line down below twenty feet, instead of continuing to go down the channel, it drifted back at right angles to the channel. If Hase sank down to the bottom, he wouldn't go down channel, but he would be swept in toward the bay and toward the reeds. Nobody had looked over there. Yes, the reeds would catch him and hold him.

He smacked a fist into his hard palm. That's where he'd look at first light of dawn. The sound awakened Alice. Sleepily she mumbled, "What is it, darlin'?"

He pulled her into his arms. Her breath was moist and sweet. Moments later he realized that he was playing a silly game of pretending that it was Jean Hase that he held so tightly.

His disloyalty made him ashamed of himself.

THE sky was just graying in the east when Timmy left his house, went down to the boat and cast off. By the time he was over to the edge of the weeds, night was gone from the river and the water was the color of burnished steel.

He examined the grapple, a crossbar with a series of stout hooks and the line rigged to hold it at right angles to the direction of the boat. He threw it out, made it fast, and then cruised slowly down the edge of the weeds, every sense alert to feel the tiny drag which would mean he had hooked something.

The first circuit of the concave line brought nothing, and so on the way back he moved out a little. That too brought up nothing, though twice he got badly snagged on the bottom and had to back up to pull free.

The third time, when he felt a small drag, he released the clutch, put a sensitive hand on the line. It felt promising. Eagerly yet cautiously he pulled the line in, hand over hand, peering down into the water. A pale misty oval appeared. He looked at it hard, pulling in on the line, and his stomach turned over as the features of Merton Hase slowly became distinct.

He came up, face first, and Timmy leaned down, stuck his arm into the water and took a firm hold on the front of the stout raincoat. He let go of the line, got a firm grip with the other hand and then, with all the power of his back and arms and shoulders, he brought Merton Hase, limp and dripping, in over the side. For a small man, Hase was miraculously heavy, he thought.

The eels had only been at him in one place, along the edge of his left hand. For that, Timmy was grateful. Hase's eyes were open and staring, his mouth slack, no expression on his usually grouchy face.

Timmy sat down, looking at him, suddenly weak, almost sick. He was almost sorry that he had guessed right. A drink might settle his stomach. He thought longingly of the pint flask, decided that Hase wouldn't care if Timmy didn't.

He lifted the soggy raincoat, groped for the hip pocket flask. The raincoat was very, very heavy. He found the flask, shook it, and to his disappointment, it was empty, though tightly corked. Funny

that a man should sink so fast. Even the little air trapped in the pint flask should have helped him.

Curiously he reached into the pocket of the raincoat. The bottom of the deep pocket was almost solid with sinkers. Wonderingly, he emptied the pocket out. The sinkers more than filled his hand, dropping with dull thuds to the bottom boards of the boat. Better than five pounds of lead! The other pocket was the same. An incredible quantity of sinkers. More than a man would use in two whole seasons on the river!

In addition to the sinkers, he found in the other pockets a heavy pen knife, two massive silver cigarette cases, three lighters, two bottles of sun lotion, two compacts, two lipsticks, a quantity of loose change, a wallet full of sodden bills.

He gasped. Why, with the twelve or so pounds of sinkers, plus all the other stuff, plus the enormous heavy shoes, the poor man wouldn't have gone down any faster with a small anvil tied around his neck!

There was no reason for the sinkers. No reason at all. Neither of the three were amateur fishermen. Hase had been quite adept, in fact. Slowly the light broke on Timmy. It had to be murder or suicide. And it seemed a hell of an awkward method for suicide but an extremely clever murder method.

He sat numbly and thought. Certainly! One of the women would wait until the other wasn't looking. Timmy had been busy with the boat. Both women were healthy and strong. A quick grab at Hase's ankles, and over he goes! Or Hase stands up and she nudges him. But which one? Which woman? Which woman had noted how burdened down Merton Hase became each day, had secretly bought sinkers, packed the deep pockets, of the raincoat with them? No, it couldn't be an accident.

He threw a tarp over the body, climbed over into the front seat and started up, swinging in a slow curve toward the River House, frowning.

It was the sun that betrayed Timmy. It peered up over the horizon in the east and cast slanting rays on the huge convertible in which the three customers had arrived. The expensive glint of the con-

vertible made him think of the bills packed in soggy splendor in Hase's wallet. The bills made him think of his own bank balance. And of expensive women like Jean and Marta. Fat bundles of money.

Half understanding why he did so, he cut the motor, clambered back, emptied the sinkers out into a tin can. On top of the sinkers he put the compact he had seen Marta use, the fat, heavy bottle of suntan oil he had seen Jean ask Hase to produce for her. He put the tin can, feeling its heft, into the stowage locker up front. With a tight look around his lips, and with his eyes narrowed, he headed once again for the River House.

In his mind he set a value on the sinkers. To such women, to the one who had killed Hase, those sinkers should be worth a thousand dollars a pound. At least. Premeditation would be easy to prove. And Timmy McCabe would begin to have all of those things that he had wished for. And soon.

Maybe the guilty one would come back each year to fish and buy more sinkers. At the same rates. He dimly remembered having heard of a Statute of Limitations. But did it apply to murder?

He tasted the word, said it aloud. "Murder! And one of you two lovelies is a murdering lass! Which one?"

Well, he had a good idea of how to find out. . . .

Timmy, his hat in hand, stood in the upper hallway of the River House and tapped gently on Mrs. Hase's door. She opened the door, looked faintly puzzled at seeing him. He said quickly, "Mrs. Hase, I heard that you're leaving tomorrow. At least, the man told me this morning that all the police work would be cleaned up by late afternoon and by then you'd have permission to take the . . . the body back."

"That's right, Timmy," she said. "Why?"

"Well, seeing as how I feel bad about it, and as how you very kindly paid me the full rate for the whole week, I thought it might take your mind off your troubles if you and Miss Owin would let me take the two of you for a scenic trip around the islands this afternoon."

She gave him an odd look. "Don't you think, Timmy, that it would look a bit—

well, odd? I mean with Mert drowning just yesterday and . . ." Her voice dwindled away.

This was the moment that he had planned. He nearly lost his nerve, nearly turned and fled. But beyond her, in the room, he saw the pigskin luggage, luggage that was more expensive than any he had seen. It heartened him.

Not looking into her face, he reached into his pocket, pulled out the bottle of lotion, said, "This must have fallen out of his pocket when I pulled him into the boat. He . . . he certainly had a lot of things in his pockets, didn't he?"

As she took the lotion, he reached back into his pocket, pulled out a lead sinker, tossed it up and caught it. Tossed it up again. He lifted his head and stared directly into her blue eyes, realizing that she was within a fraction of an inch of being as tall as he.

If she was the innocent one, his words would be meaningless.

After a pause that made his pulse thud, she said softly, "On second thought, Timmy, a boat ride might do me good. It might do both of us good—Miss Owin and I."

Then it was Jean! The knowledge gave him confidence. He smiled broadly and said, "Maybe just the two of us, Mrs. Hase." He put a subtle accent on the "Mrs."

She gave him a cool look. "I'm certain that Marta would enjoy it very much." She glanced at her watch. "We'll both be down on the dock at two fifteen, McCabe."

He turned away, not hurt at all by her coldness. This was more like it! Let her call him McCabe. Let her be the snob. She'd find out.

On the porch he paused for a moment and looked at the long black sleek convertible. "Timmy," he whispered, "can you get used to riding around in one of them?"

Whistling softly, he strutted off toward his boat. With some lady guests, it would be nice to hose it down a bit. Very important guests. A profitable little trip. On the trip he would let Jean Hase know in a gentle way that he would be glad to inform on her to both Marta and the police unless she made it well worth his

while to keep silent about the murder.

Yet, for all his joviality and feeling of good fortune, his conscience was bothering him. Blackmail is an ugly word. He seemed to keep hearing it, though no one was near him. To get his mind off his fears, he mentally planned the new boat he would have built. Oh, a fine new boat, indeed. He borrowed some cushions from the River House, arranged them neatly on the back seat.

CHAPTER THREE

One-Way Swim

ON SCHEDULE, the two young women came down the steep steps from the porch, and looking up at them, Timmy was forced to admire Jean's nerve. She wore a timid smile, a perfect smile for a woman newly bereaved. And she moved like a golden cat.

To his astonishment, a great deal of Marta's gloominess seemed to have faded away. She acted almost cheerful. He helped them into the boat. Jean's hand was firm and warm—Marta's like ice.

"I'll take you all the way down to the bell buoy at the mouth of the lake," he said.

"That will be nice," Marta said.

He gave an apprehensive glance toward the east. A black storm was gathering over near the horizon, and with his experience of years on the river, he knew that it would be a bad one. No matter. There was ample time to run down to the mouth of the lake and back before it started to come down, though they might have to run for it.

What he had in mind was too important to be delayed by a storm.

The bell buoy would be a fine place to bring up what he had in mind. A fine quiet place, with the river too calm to ring the buoy, the shores a long distance away. He fought back the acid writhings of his conscience.

Timmy made a fast six-mile run down to the bell buoy. It was a massive float buoy, a tern brooding on top of it, crusted and white with the million birds that had paused there. Every once in a while a ripple would tilt the buoy just enough for the bell to bong softly.

Without warning he cut the motor and the boat drifted toward the buoy, casting ripples on the still water. He turned around in his seat, clucked sadly and looked at the two women. There was a chill look in Jean's blue eyes and her mouth looked pinched.

"That poor man sank like a stone, didn't he?" Tim said.

Neither of them answered. With his eyes on Jean, he said, "Like a stone or like a chunk of lead. The poor man was so burdened down with the things you had given him to carry in his pockets."

Only Jean would know what he meant. She gave him a level stare and said, "Yes it was a shame, wasn't it?"

Tim sighed. "You know, when a man is struck down like that, right in the prime of life, it makes a fellow feel as though there ought to be some way fate itself could be punished."

"That's an interesting point of view," Jean said.

"Of course, fate was aided a bit."

Jean's eyes narrowed. "I don't understand."

He shrugged. "You know. The rain, the full pockets, whatever it was he slipped on or tripped on."

Marta was looking out across the lake and seemed not to be listening. Emboldened, Tim said softly, "It's almost like he was murdered, you know."

"Get to the point!" Jean snapped. Her face looked feral and deadly.

He was shocked. Marta still kept her face averted. This was the major step. He said, "Fishing's an odd sport, Mrs. Hase. Sometimes a tiny little bit of equipment makes all the difference. A leader, maybe. Or the right silk line, or sometimes even a little thing like a sinker. I sell equipment you know."

She nodded her golden head as though she had expected it. "And you'd like to have me buy some sinkers?"

"They might improve your luck, Mrs. Hase. They're very special sinkers. They came from a very special place. Expensive, you might say."

"How much?" she asked, her lips pale.

"These are so valuable I'd have to have—oh, a thousand dollars a pound. If you want to buy my whole lot, I've got a shade over twelve pound."

"And if I don't want them?"

"Then I'll have to give them away, Mrs. Hase. To the men who came over from Kingston. They'll want to know where on earth I found them."

Tim was bothered by the way Marta acted. Surely the girl understood! She couldn't be so dense. Could it be that Marta knew, that she was in on it?

"And if I should buy all the sinkers?"

"I would be very grateful, Mrs. Hase. And maybe you could come up here next year and buy a few pounds more. Not as many as this time. I'm not a greedy man, you know."

MARTA slowly slipped her pocket-book strap off her shoulder, opened it, poked around inside, and brought her hand out. The sun glinted off blued steel and the tiny muzzle pointed at Tim's eyes. It was as steady as though held in a vise.

"I told you, Jeanie," she said lazily, not taking her eyes off Tim. "These country cousins latch onto a good thing with both greedy paws. You'd never be rid of him."

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"But I thought—" Tim said, feeling the cold sweat run down from under the leather band of his cap.

"Sure, honey," Marta said. "You thought. That's what got you into trouble. You thought that Jeanie did it. Honey, we both did it. We were a traveling team of sharpies, honey, and we suckered 'em from coast to coast, but little Mert held out on us the last time and wouldn't cough up the way he was supposed to. From now, on honey, we're a team of two. One less way to split the take and hence a shade more profitable."

"Look, we can talk this over!" Tim said, annoyed to find his voice climbing up into the contralto register.

Jean laughed, and it was an ugly sound. Her face wasn't pretty any more. There wasn't promise in her eyes.

"Talk what over?" she said. "Oh, you thought you were being so devilish and working up such a fine, fat deal. Brother, you're an amateur who happened to step into the pro league without knowing about it. What do we come to, if we go thataway?"

She pointed diagonally out into the lake, her finger pointing southwest.

Tim swallowed hard. "You'll come out on the lake shore north of Rochester."

"Will the boat make it with the gas in the tank?"

"I—I guess so."

"Drives like a car, doesn't it?"

"Just about."

Jean whispered in Marta's ear. The pupils of Marta's eyes grew smaller and her upper lip lifted away from even teeth. "He's sort of cute, Jeanie," Marta said, "In a mildly revolting way. I sort of hate to do it."

Tim, in one horrible second, realized what the questions had meant, realized the incredible thing they meant to do. He felt as if he was watching a snake as he watched the automatic. It lifted a little and Marta's face became pale. She bit her underlip. Jean hunched her shoulders, the instinctive reaction of someone who expects a loud noise.

"Start the motor on this thing," Marta said, "before I put one into you to help you along."

Moving as though in a dream, Tim turned back to the starter switch. He felt

as though the pointing gun chilled a perfectly round spot on the back of his neck. He filled his lungs with air and, as fast as he could move, he went over the side. The gun made a feeble snapping sound, and something burned across the back of his shoulder. He fought his way down as deep as he could go, and even as he went underwater, he sensed the slugs burning into the water around him.

He kept his eyes open and the water darkened around him. He had to guess at the direction of the bell buoy, and hope that he could get to it before his lungs burst. He swam with an underwater breast stroke and after an interminable time, he saw the globular shadow of the bell buoy above him. He let himself float up until his fingers touched the cold metallic underside of it. He was close to blacking out, and it was as though a vast thumbscrew had tightened around his chest.

Timmy let himself come up on the far side of the bell buoy. The tern that had been perched on the top was gone, frightened by the shots. Thus it was not there to squawk with surprise as his head came out of the water. He clung with his fingertips to a ridge of metal, breathing hard. The buoy was between him and the boat.

The sky was getting much darker in the east and the water had that pre-storm oily look. His shoulder began to stiffen up and when he turned cautiously to look, he saw that his blood had pinkened the water.

Jean's voice had a clarity that startled him. "No dice, Marta. I think you must have got him as he went under."

"If I did, wouldn't he float? Wouldn't there be bubbles or something?"

"If you got him through the head, maybe all the air went out of him just as he hit the water. Then he'd sink."

"People sinking around me are beginning to make me nervous, kid," Marta said.

"I wonder," Jean said slowly, "if he could be on the other side of that buoy."

"There's one way to find out," Marta said. "Get this tub started and we'll circle the buoy before we take off. Hell, I hate to lose the car."

"Honey, that car is as hot as we are.

We can't take a chance on McCabe having kept his mouth shut. Let's see now. This must be the starter. And this is the switch."

For the first time in what seemed like a few thousand years, Tim smiled. The switch! Unless they had watched him closely, they had no way of knowing that you could turn the switch on, but it had no effect unless you pushed it in hard as you turned it. For once he blessed the eccentricities of the *Alice*.

He waited breathlessly. The starter ground monotonously, but the motor didn't catch, couldn't catch with the switch off. His grin grew wider.

The bell on the buoy bonged with surprising loudness.

The grinding noise stopped and one of them said, "Damn!"

Again they tried. The wind was freshening. The bongs from the huge buoy grew more frequent. He realized that the sound of the whining starter seemed to be dwindling and knew that the wind would be drifting them further and further out into the lake. He hoped that they would forget the anchor until they were too

far out for the rope to be able to reach.

No longer could he heard their voices, just the fading sound of their voices.

With enormous caution, he moved until he could see around the edge of the buoy. He was amazed at how fast they had drifted. When he looked up at the sky just as the sun was covered over, he realized why. The buoy began to roll and ring the huge bell with every motion, the vibration jarring him.

Looking back down the river he saw the whitecaps the wind was whipping up. This storm was going to be a beaut. Suddenly his hands slipped off the narrow metal edge, and he felt panic as he fought his way back to the buoy.

In the water being thrown off as the rolling motion grew more violent he would drown. The shore was too far away for him to think of swimming to it, even without a weakening wound in his shoulder.

His boat was a tiny dot moving out into the lake, and it began to disappear now and again in the trough of the waves. With no need to hide, he set about climbing up onto the framework of the buoy before it was too late, before the motion

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was so violent that he couldn't climb up.

THREE times he reached up for one of the tripod braces that held the big bell when he was thrown back. Once he slipped and took the skin off the side of his face as he hit the metal edge to which he had originally clung. The fifth time he got his hard hand around one of the tripod braces and it took all his strength to pull himself up to where he could squat and cling to the framework, some six feet above the water level. The motion of the buoy was dizzying, stupefying, and the bell hammered him with its brazen tones until he wondered if he would go mad.

Finally he ripped his shirt off, wound it into a crude rope and managed to get it around the clapper of the bell.

The boat was out of sight. The waves, whipped by the wind, were mounting high in the lake, and he knew that the boat could not live. As it drifted, helpless, sideways to the leaping line of water, it would fill—and, with the weight of the engine, sink like a stone. Nor could the golden body of Jean, the creamy loveliness of Marta, live for many minutes after the boat was gone.

It was a storm that would mean trouble for even the big, rust-red freighters. The rain came in blinding sheets, whipping the surface of the river, but doing nothing to flatten the leap of the waves. A storm-battered tern swept down through the gray rain, circled away, its yawp lost in the tumult.

The sweeping motion of the buoy was sickening and he suddenly realized that he would not have the strength to cling to the metal bars throughout the storm. With one arm hooked around a bar, he loosened his belt. Twisting, he got the small of his back against the bar, and with infinite labor, managed to get the belt around it, pull it tight and buckle it around him, the edges of the belt cutting into the hard muscles of his belly.

There was nothing else that could be done.

For uncounted hours, as the storm passed its peak, he clung weakly to ease the pressure around his middle, and at last the weakness welled over him like a

Damsels of the Deep

dark tide and he hung limply in the circle of the belt, his head rolling with the constant motion.

He felt that there was a hard justice in his torture, a providence that punished him bitterly for his greed and his deceit.

When he fought his way up out of the darkness, he lifted his head and saw the glimmer of stars in the placid night sky. The red and green running lights of the launch were below him, and hands were fumbling at the tight belt. His legs were without feeling. The white glow of a flashlight hit his eyes and he grinned feebly.

"He's all right," a voice said. A short length of rope was tied around his chest under his arms and the two men who had clambered up onto the buoy lowered him into the launch.

He stretched out on the friendly boards and said, "Nice of you people to come along."

"Hell, McCabe, we were checking the buoys after the storm and we couldn't hear the bell on this one so we came out to take a look. Boat founder?"

"In a manner of speaking, Joe."

"Where's the two women? They're out looking for the three of you."

"Gone, Joe. I—I want to talk to the authorities."

The heavy motor purred and the launch turned away as the great bell began to clang once more. Feeling began to come back into Tim's legs.

The slug had hit his shoulder at an angle, glanced off the shoulder-blade and torn its way free just back of his armpit.

Tim sat up and worked his way awkwardly into the borrowed shirt after his shoulder was bandaged, and reached for the shot glass placed on the table by the couch by the manager of the River House.

He looked up into the face of the tall man from Kingston. "And that's how it was, sir. I—I guess I was thinking about the easy money. You want to take me in now?"

"Concealing evidence is a serious thing, McCabe."

"I know it, sir."

"You've a wife and kid, McCabe."

"Yes, sir."

The man frowned. "Could it be, Mc-



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Cabe, that because it happened in your
bat, you were trying to help out the
police and find out which one did it so
you could turn her over to us?"

Tim looked at him for long moments.
"It could be that way, sir," he said, his
heart giving a great leap.

"That, to me, is a better story, McCabe.
I seriously reprimand you for your fool-
ishness. And that license of yours—I will
see to it that you have it on probation for
a year. I only do this for three reasons,
McCabe. One, to jail you would be a
hardship to a pair of innocents. Two, just
twenty minutes ago I got an answer to
my wires. That precious trio was wanted
in Boston, by other names. Three, you
told the truth when you could have lied
to me."

"Sir, I want you to know—"

"Shut up, McCabe. Go home to your
wife. She's waiting for you. . . ."

The next morning Timmy woke from
deep, long sleep to find that the sun was
high and that Alice was not in the house.
His shoulder was terribly stiff, and he
dressed awkwardly. The events of the
day before seemed like a horrible dream.
He went to the kitchen door, looked out.

Another one of those women! Those
sweet-smelling city women, and standing
in his yard!

Not bad, either. Put together in a very
interesting way. He shoved the screen
door open, looked at the brief shorts, the
halter knot between the shoulder blades.

"You!" he said gruffly. The slim wom-
an turned and he gasped. She wore the
face of his Alice.

"Lass!" he gasped. "The neighbors!
Get back in the house!"

Smiling, she walked toward him, and
she was radiant. He wondered how he
had ever come to think of her as a drab
little sparrow. As she came into the
kitchen, he folded her into his strong arms,
her sandy hair tickling his cheek.

In the circle of his arms, she giggled.
"Do you like it, Tim? I bought it in
Marysville yesterday."

He took her shoulders and held her
at arms' length. He grinned. "Never has
a man learned so much in such a short
time."

THE END

Blood and Kisses

(Continued from page 62)

forth a gladstone bag which contained a rather curious assortment of articles for a man's bag: Two long, wide pieces of new, white silk, covered with blood; a pair of torn underwear; a stained towel; a stained silk scarf. Also in the bag were a brown canvas tennis racket cover, and a butcher's meat cleaver. The entire contents of the bag had been liberally dosed with disinfectant.

Scotland Yard was called immediately, and Chief Inspector Percy Savage took charge of the investigation.

Savage had a station official telephone Mrs. Mahon and assure her that nothing was amiss. Then the railway man visited the distraught wife, and told her: "Return the stub to where you found it. Pat is in no trouble."

Mrs. Mahon returned the stub to her husband's pocket. At the station, the police took up a twenty-four hour vigil.

On May 2, early in the evening, Detective Constable Mark Thompson saw a man present a stub at the window and get in return the brown gladstone.

As the man headed for an exit, the police officer accosted him. "Do you own that bag?" he asked, flashing his badge.

"Of course," the man said.

"I'd like to see its contents," the police officer continued.

"I'm very sorry, but I've lost the key," the man replied.

"In that case I shall have to ask you to accompany me to the police station."

"This seems quite absurd," the suspect said irritably.

However, he gave the officer no trouble, and went quietly with him to the Kensington Road station, where Inspector Savage opened the bag and began questioning him.

Patrick Herbert Mahon had his answers ready. "I'm a dog trainer. I was carrying meat for several of my hounds in this case."

The Inspector took a flyer. "That is human blood, Mahon."

"You appear to know all about it," Mahon replied in a cool voice.

The Yard men didn't reply. For several minutes, police and prisoner sat without a word.

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Bill Clayton

Mahon finally spoke. "I'm thinking about my position."

For another 15 minutes silence reigned.

Mahon broke the silence again. "Since you seem to know something about this, I might as well tell you the truth."

His confession told how he had made the acquaintance of one Emily Kaye, an office worker in a firm on Copthall Avenue, London. They had met in the course of a business transaction.

"We fell madly in love, and became sweethearts," he said.

In 1924, Mahon continued, their relationship reached the point that so many affairs reach. She wanted him to leave his wife and marry her. Mahon had other ideas..

They met at Eastbourne, on April 12, and rented a cottage on Pevensvey Downs, four miles from the town. It was one of a row of little thatched white-washed cottages formerly occupied by officers of the coast guard.

In the three days they spent there, they agreed that Mahon would desert his wife and child, and with Emily go to South Africa and begin life anew. However, the day they were to return to London, Mahon had a change of heart. He wasn't going to change wives or continents.

"This made Emily quite furious," Mahon said. "She lifted a coal hammer, and came for me with it. I had to struggle for my life. Suddenly we both fell. I arose stunned, but Emily had hit her head violently against the coal scuttle. I tried to revive the girl, but could not."

Realizing that he might be accused of murder, Mahon took her body into the adjoining room and covered it with Emily's overcoat.

Mahon said he'd decided the next morning to dispose of the body, and traveled to London to purchase a saw and a knife. But he was so upset at the sight of her body that he could not immediately carry out his intention and waited until the following day.

The prisoner explained that in the days following he had journeyed several times to Eastbourne, wondering what to do with the now dismembered body. He claimed he remained at the bungalow that weekend, returning to town on Monday.

Blood and Kisses

On May 3, Inspector Savage and several other Yard men went down to take a look at the cottage. They found a trunk with its gory contents. Savage also noted that the coal scuttle against which Emily supposedly had bashed her head was of very flimsy material, empty, and not dented.

The Yard man set to work to break down Mahon's story. First of all he found that the suspect had not bought the butchering tools on the 17th, but on the 12th—the day he was to meet Emily in Eastbourne.

Mahon now had some additions to make to his macabre tale. He said that while driving through Richmond on the night of the 12th in a heavy rain, he noticed an attractive girl standing on a corner. He had given her a lift.

Don Juan Mahon made a tentative date with this new girl, Ethel Duncan, for the 16th. He had his date with her and persuaded the girl to visit with him at his cottage in Eastbourne. He entertained Miss Duncan in one room, with Emily lying dead in the other.

The Inspector mulled over this. Mahon had said he wired Miss Duncan on the 15th—before the tragedy—inviting her to meet him at Victoria station on the 16th, which would be after Mahon had done in Emily. It seemed apparent that Mahon knew, when he wired Miss Duncan, that he would be free to meet her for dinner the next evening.

Meanwhile other Yard men uncovered new pieces of evidence. Before leaving for Eastbourne, Emily Kaye had withdrawn her \$3,000 savings account. In the ensuing days Mahon had changed three large bills for small ones. They were part of the savings the deluded woman had brought with her in preparation for the elopement.

Mahon remained cool throughout his trial. He maintained his innocence almost to the end. But shortly before he was hanged on September 3, 1924, he confessed he had killed Emily Kaye.

The murdering Romeo went to his death just four months after his wife decided to do something about the "private matter" of a little baggage check.

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Wyatt Blessingame

(Continued from page 41)

The door burst open. A half-dozen fellows from other rooms came rushing in, wanting to know what had happened. And all at once Dick Bond began to cry like a whipped child.

* * *

The next day I passed Ellen Lanier going from one class to another. She stopped, looking very cool and blonde and pretty. "I owe you a debt of gratitude," she said. "I expect I'd still be in that jail, if it wasn't for you."

"You owe Mark," I said. "If it wasn't for him, neither of us would be here."

Her face took on a soft seriousness I'd never seen there before. "I don't understand Mark. I—I don't think I've ever known anyone like him. I don't know what to do about him."

"I can't advise you," I said. "He worships you. He's a good kid, but he's got a lot to learn. A lot that maybe you can teach him, and no one else. But don't hurt him," I said. "And you could, in a lot of ways."

"I know. That's why I'm not sure what to do."

So I never knew just what she decided. But eventually Mark stopped talking about her, and he seemed fairly happy.

(Continued from page 77)

corporated and sold stock, he left town suddenly in the middle of the night taking all the money from the stockholders.

He was man enough to write me that he expected to give my money back—and blamed the secretary-treasurer of the firm for my not knowing he was planning to leave town. When I offered to accept my money in small monthly payments in order to make it easy for him to do right and help me too (I was ill and unable to work then as a result of worrying over my loss) he failed to answer my letter which I'm sure he received because it was not returned to me.

I am now the possessor of some beautiful shares in the factory, but am minus the confidence I had in my fellow man before this experience.

Ruth Sanders
Tulsa, Oklahoma

Navy Blues

Dear Sir:

Back in 1943 my husband was in the Navy. One day while he was off watch a sailor ap-

Ready for the Rackets

proached him. My husband only knew the man by sight.

His hand was bandaged and he asked my husband to write a letter for him, asking his wife to send eight hundred dollars about which he would explain later. He even said his address was being changed.

Well, I received this letter a few days later. It was all a very clever scheme. I sent the eight hundred dollars to the address, supposing my husband to be in some kind of trouble. I wrote another letter later, after I got one from him with the same old address, and we realized what had happened.

We never got our money back—we didn't even know the man's name.

Mrs. A. W. Anderson
Marshall, Texas

A Thousand Pardons

Dear Sir:

It was on the sixth floor in the rug and carpet section of the largest department store in the city where it happened. A matronly, well dressed woman of about fifty seated herself on the leather customer's seat and asked to see some rather expensive throw rugs.

The poor clerk struggled through the maze of ruggery until he finally found one which pleased her. The price was a little over two hundred dollars.

His order book in hand, the clerk named the price and accepted the bill tendered by his customer. His jaw dropped when he looked at the denomination. It was a thousand dollar bill.

After waiting for about twenty minutes the woman haughtily demanded her money back even though the store employees tried to explain that the bill had to be checked first before being cashed. Mrs. Swindler insisted that she had been insulted, and even when the bill was okayed she refused to do any business, demanding her money back.

Reluctantly she was handed her thousand dollar bill which she hastily thrust into her purse, and then turned toward the elevator. The clerk and floor walker accompanied her, still trying to explain the situation.

Just as the elevator arrived she relented and poutingly consented to the sale. The small rug was wrapped and the cashier rang up the sale, accepting Mrs. Swindler's bill in payment and returning change from it.

Yes, you've probably guessed it. The first okayed bill was good, but the bill that went into the cash register was strictly a phony. There were many red faces among the executives that day.

Ray A. McCann
Los Angeles, Calif.

Gone to the Dogs

Dear Sir:

Last winter a couple of friends of mine spent the winter at St. Petersburg, Florida. Naturally, having saved years for this big splurge, they wanted to take in all the sights.

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Ready for the Rackets

At the dog track one night, they made the acquaintance of a very presentable chap who claimed to have a knowledge of the dogs. Feeling reckless, and knowing little about where and when to place their money, they gave the man a wager to place on the dog he thought would win.

The race was over before he came back. But the dog they had bet on came in to pay huge odds. Their exuberance was short-lived as the man handed them back their money, claiming there was such a crowd around the window that he was unable to get the bet placed before closing time.

In the next race, the dog of their choice lost. The man brought them back the ticket, after the race to show that he had really placed the bet for them.

This went on for some time. When the dog they were betting on won, the man had been unable to get a ticket. But when their dog lost, he always brought back the stub to show he had placed the bet. Finally, growing suspicious, my friends followed the man.

Here's the way he operated. He bet their money on every race. When the dog he played won, he cashed in the ticket, pocketing the profit, and claiming he was unable to place the bet.

As far as my friends know, this fellow is still operating. There was no way they could have him arrested. He gave them their money back when their pup came in, and he had a ticket on the pup if he lost. I think the lesson to be derived from this is: Beware the guy who is eager to handle your money. You can't win!

G. M. O.
Denver, Colo

Paper-Doll Plot

Dear Sir:

One night I noticed two fellows standing in a store entrance selling dolls made out of crepe paper. One fellow stood in a corner while the other demonstrated the dolls.

The other guy would take the doll, stand her carefully on the legs and pat her lightly. The doll would start to dance and shake by herself while he talked fast about how easy one can do the same and have some fun at home.

I bought two dolls at \$1.25 each. At our house I tried to make the doll dance and after an hour I gave up. I went back the next morning and now these fellows had moved to another spot.

I finally caught on to their act. They had a tiny black thread tied across the store doorway and to the other fellow's hand. While the fellow holding the doll appeared to be balancing the doll he was actually hooking her on the string. The other one would shake the string to make the doll dance. When they saw I was on to their act they packed up and left before I could do anything.

Joe Sliwinski
Cleveland, Ohio.



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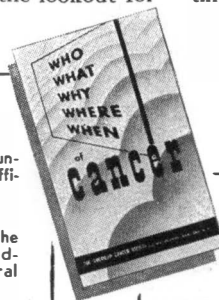
Always be on the lookout for

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