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by **JOHN D. MacDONALD**

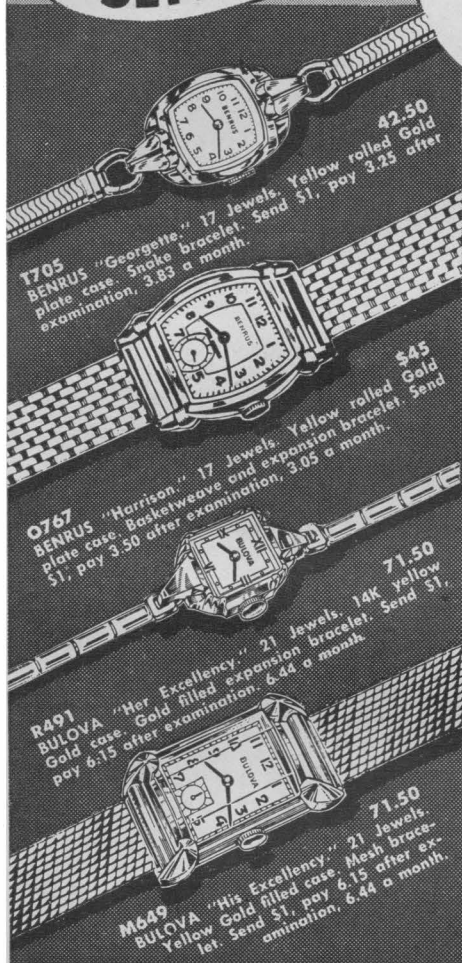


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MURDER PARLAY**

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DOWN PAYMENT AFTER EXAMINATION.**

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Enclosed find \$1 deposit. Send me No. _____
Price \$_____. After examination, I
agree to pay \$_____ and required
balance monthly thereafter until full price is paid,
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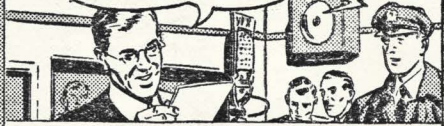
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FLOODS BRING TROUBLE TO TOWN BUT THEN...

CALLING KWX, FERNCLIFF!
EMERGENCY MESSAGE FOR CITY
HOSPITAL! PLEASE FLY IN 200
AMPULES TYPHOID VACCINE.
URGENT! DOCTOR G. EVERTS,
RIVERDALE. REPEAT...

KWX,
FERNCLIFF.
OKAY, WILL
HANDLE!



THEIR LAND COMMUNICATIONS CUT AND WATER
SUPPLY CONTAMINATED BY FLOODS, RIVERDALE'S
CITIZENS ARE UNDERGOING MASS INOCULATION,
BUT YOUNG DOCTOR EVERTS' SERUM SUPPLY IS
RUNNING LOW AND...



RIVERDALE AIRPORT TO PIPER
237: RUNWAYS FLOODED. LAND
ON HIGH GROUND BETWEEN
FLARES. OVER



HERE'S THE
SERUM, DOC.
THIS YOUNG
LADY...

GOOD! WE CAN USE HER!
HELP THE SERGEANT
LINE 'EM UP, MISS!

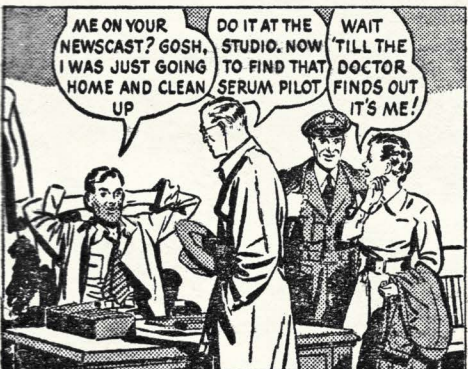
B-B-BUT...



ONLY FIFTEEN
MORE, DOCTOR

THANK HEAVENS THAT
PILOT BROUGHT FIFTY
EXTRA AMPULES

Eight Hours Later



ME ON YOUR
NEWSCAST? GOSH,
I WAS JUST GOING
HOME AND CLEAN
UP

DO IT AT THE
STUDIO. NOW
TO FIND THAT
SERUM PILOT

WAIT
TILL THE
DOCTOR
FINDS OUT
IT'S ME!



HERE'S A
RAZOR,
DOCTOR

THANKS



REMARKABLE
BLADE! I'VE NEVER
HAD A MORE
REFRESHING
SHAVE!

IT'S A THIN
GILLETTE...
PLENTY KEEN
AND EASY
SHAVING



YOU FLEW
THE SERUM!
WHY...

BUT YOU
NEEDED
HELP...

QUIET! TEN
SECONDS TO GO
M-M-M-M-
HANDSOME

WHEN IT COMES TO FAST, SLICK SHAVES
AT A SAVING, THIN GILLETTES ARE TOPS.
THEY ARE THE MOST POPULAR LOW-PRICED
BLADES ON THE MARKET BECAUSE THEY'RE
KEENER AND LAST LONGER. THIN GILLETTES
ARE MADE TO FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR
EXACTLY... PROTECT YOU FROM
NICKS AND IRRITATION. ALWAYS
ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES

10 BLADES
10-25¢
4-10¢

NEW TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED BLADES

15¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

COMBINED WITH FLYNN'S DETECTIVE FICTION
EVERY STORY NEW—NO REPRINTS



Vol. 59

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No. 3

1—RACE-PACED NOVEL OF THE BANGTAIL BOOKIE—1

The mayhem was mutual in—

- Mr. Maddox' Murder Parlay**-----**T. T. Flynn 10**
A dead jockey made Mr. Maddox the odds-on favorite—for the sizzle-seat.

2—SMASHING DETECTIVE NOVELETTES—2

Try your skill at—

- Slaughter in a Sarong**-----**Fenton W. Earnshaw 52**
Snooper Larkin tried to wrestle out of the arms of a corpse-spoiled blonde.
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- I'll Drown You in My Dreams**-----**John D. MacDonald 76**
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Some man's best friend was this filly—who was cooking *me* with gas.

AND—

We want to know if you're

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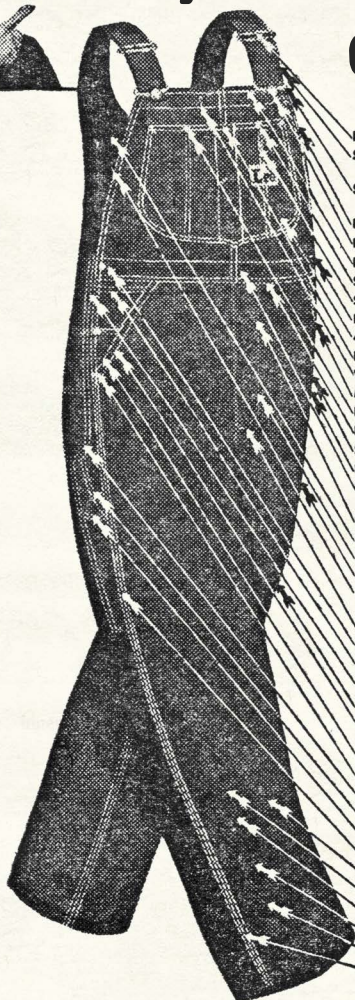
The April issue will be out March 4th

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- Box Stay At Top of Fly—Holds fly flat
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- Fly—Dress pant style—strong, neat
- Hammer Loop—Quarter turned, large, easy entrance.
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- "U" Shaped Saddle Crotch—No binding.
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- Reinforced Side Openings—For added strength.
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- Bar Tacked At All Points of Strain.
- Hip Pockets—Reinforced bottoms, shield shape.
- Self Locking Rule Pocket—Prevents ruler from falling out.
- Special Pliers Pocket.
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- Sanforized Shrink.
- Wide Bottoms.
- Union Made.
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Because of these and many other superior features, Lee overalls give you longer wear... greater comfort... better appearance... more washings per garment. Sanforized for permanent fit—sold with a money-back guarantee of satisfaction.

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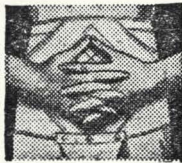
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 Special Large Sizes
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Send "COMMANDER" for 10 days' trial on approval. I'll pay postman \$2.98 plus postage. If not satisfied after wearing it 10 days, I may return it for prompt refund of purchase price.

My waist is..... My height is.....

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

Check here if you enclose \$2.98 with coupon and we'll pay postage. Same refund offer holds.

Ready for the Rackets

A Department

Racketeers and swindlers of all sorts are lying in wait for you, eager to rob or cheat you of your hard-earned cash. All you need to thwart them, guard against them, is a foreknowledge of their schemes and methods of operation. Write in, telling us your own personal experiences with chisellers and con men of various sorts. It is the intention to publicize—withholding your name if you wish—the information you have passed on, paying \$5.00 for every letter used. No letters will be returned unless accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope, nor can we enter into correspondence regarding same. Address all letters to The Rackets Editor—DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

That Ain't Fare!

Dear Sir:

New York City taxi drivers are supposed to not be dumb. Though one of them fell for a simple bit of bunco which shouldn't have happened to a blind man.

He picked up a fare who took him to four or five different places. About this time the taximans' meter read three-fifty.

He asked the fare just how much longer he was going to hold him as he had to be at the garage at four p. m.—it was then around three-fifteen.

The fare spoke up and asked, "Taxi, I'm trying to have a fifty dollar bill changed. Have you the change?" He told the fare, "No."

"Then," said the fare, "loan me about two-thirty. I have one more stop to make; then I'll go to your garage with you. Your meter now reads three-fifty. Will you settle for eight dollars when we get to the garage?"

The driver gave him the two-thirty and told him, "Yes."

The fare made his next stop and hasn't stopped yet. He evidently ducked out another door. The driver swore and swore. I know—it was me.

Joseph Dunphy
 New York, New York.

Cancel the Order

Dear Sir:

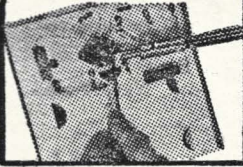
If you're a business man contending with rising operating costs, watch out for the many ingenious ways an employee may rob you. Taxes and materials may go down but not the dishonest acts of those you hire.

In a concern that used postage stamped envelopes in fairly large quantity, an employee who worked on the mail found a way to cheat his employer. He took quantities of the stamped envelopes, mutilated them so they could not be used, and then redeemed them at the post office for stamps which he sold at a discount.

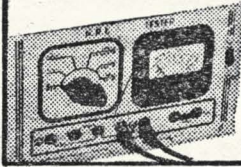
He wrote and signed the letter which the post office requires for such redemption and it was only when he carried out his scheme on too

(Please continue on page 8)

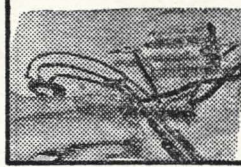
YOU PRACTICE Radio soldering with Soldering Equipment and Radio parts I send you. Get practical experience mounting and connecting parts.



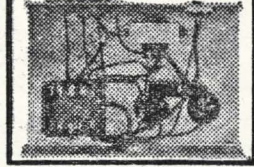
YOU PRACTICE Radio Servicing with this Tester built from parts I send. Also use it to help earn EXTRA MONEY fixing neighbors' Radios.



YOU TEST Radio Circuits like this built with parts I send. Build special circuits; learn how to locate and repair circuit defects.



YOU BUILD THIS Vacuum Tube Power Pack, make changes which give you experience, learn how to locate and correct power pack troubles.



YOU BUILD THIS A. M. Signal Generator which provides amplitude-modulated signals for many tests and experiments, gives you practical experience.

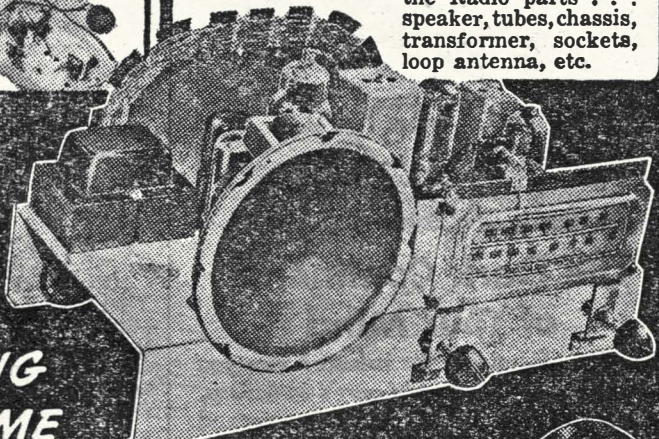


YOU PRACTICE FM experiments, get more experience with this Superheterodyne receiver circuit you build with parts I send.



You Get PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE With This Superheterodyne Receiver

YOU BUILD THIS complete, powerful Radio Receiver that brings in local and distant stations. N. R. I. gives you ALL the Radio parts . . . speaker, tubes, chassis, transformer, sockets, loop antenna, etc.



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Act now! Send coupon for DOUBLE FREE OFFER: Actual lesson and 64-page book. "HOW TO BE A SUCCESS IN RADIO AND TELEVISION-ELECTRONICS." Tells how quickly, easily you can get started. Send coupon in envelope or paste on penny postal. J. E. SMITH, Pres., Dept. 9CS9, National Radio Institute, Pioneer Home Study Radio School, Washington 9, D. C.

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TRAIN YOU
AT HOME
MY COURSE
INCLUDES
TELEVISION
ELECTRONICS



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NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE, Washington 9, D. C.
Mail me FREE Sample Lesson and 64-page book about how to win success in Radio and Television—Electronics. (No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name.....Age.....
Address.....
City.....Zone.....State.....

Check if Veteran

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The Dark Continents of Your Mind

DO YOU struggle for balance? Are you forever trying to maintain *energy, enthusiasm*, and the *will to do*? Do your personality and power of accomplishment ebb and flow—like a stream controlled by some unseen valve? Deep within you are minute organisms. From their function spring your emotions. They govern your *creative ideas* and *moods*—yes, even your enjoyment of life. Once they were thought to be the mysterious seat of the soul—and to be left unexplored. Now cast aside superstition and learn to direct intelligently these *powers of self*.

Accept this *Free Book*

Let the Rosicrucians, an age-old fraternity of thinking men and women (not a religion), point out how you may fashion life as you want it—by making the fullest use of these little-understood *natural faculties* which you possess. This is a challenge to make the most of your heritage as a human. Write for the Free Book, "The Mastery of Life." Address: Scribe H.V.L.

The ROSICRUCIANS

San Jose (AMORC) California

Ready for the Rackets

(Continued from page 6)

grand a scale that it caught up with him. The post office phoned his office to inquire about the quantity of envelopes involved and the boss received the call.

R. C. B.
Lynbrook, New York.

Skunk Afoot

Dear Editor:

While playing a split week in vaudeville at a local theatre with my husband and our partner, I heard a knock on the dressing-room door. Answering it, I saw a man standing in the hall. He was dressed in some sort of deliveryman's outfit with cap, and had with him two large wrapped packages.

"How about a wonderful bargain in some nice furs, lady?"

In almost every theatre there are a few people who have access to backstage, either with the manager's permission or at the doorman's discretion, so I asked him to step in. He hastily unwrapped one of the boxes and set it on a chair for me to examine the lovely skunk stole and muff. They certainly looked several times the value of the forty dollars he asked me to pay for them.

"Where does this come from?" I asked. "What firm do you work for?"

"Oh, I work for the express company, ma'am. Y'see, we get a lot of packages that have wrong addresses and—and—get lost and maybe COD's that are refused, and we can't locate the sender. One thing and another like that. The company lets us buy these lost packages cheap enough so that we can offer a big bargain and still make a little on them."

This was in January, and I had received around a hundred dollars in Christmas money which was burning to be spent.

My husband came into the room, saw the furs and he, too, thought they looked stunning. He also indicated to me that I had better freshen up my make up and get into my wardrobe as we were soon due for our second show.

The man with the furs said he would tie the package for me so it would be easy for me to carry. When he again handed it to me, I handed him forty of my Christmas dollars.

That night, back in our apartment, I unwrapped the box and carefully laid back the tissue paper. My first thought was: *The fur looks much coarser—or is it just the light?*

Lifting my purchase out, I saw shoddy, flowered cotton in place of the rich brown crepe-de-chine lining I had noted in the theatre. Instead of the fine skunk set, there were a skimpy collar and clumsy muff of some cheap coarse fur of dubious origin, value about twenty dollars or less, and probably stolen at that.

Of course, he had made a switch of the two boxes under the pretense of wrapping it up for me.

Mrs. Antoinette Crawford
Hollywood, California

BETTERIN' the VETERAN

—a story about



had three choices back in 1946:



He picked No. 2; came up with a brand-new job. He did well—too well, in fact, got stuck. He reached a point where he could go no further . . .

WITHOUT ADDITIONAL TRAINING. was entitled to that training under the **G. I. BILL.**

But he couldn't afford to quit work to go to school. He had to learn and earn at the same time.

SO HERE'S WHAT HE DID:

mailed a coupon. It put him in touch with the largest school in the world.

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He learned he had some **400** courses to choose from. Each course sound, authoritative, easy to follow. Each course a *gold mine* of practical information.

So enrolled with I. C. S. and studied

IN HIS SPARE TIME.

Now is making good—in his studies and

ON THE JOB.

As a trained man, there will be practically no limit to how far he can go.

is like thousands of veterans who are cashing in on their opportunities through **I. C. S.**



WHAT ABOUT YOU? Do you have enough training to carry you to the top? Here's the coupon that can help open the door to a fuller, brighter, more rewarding future for you. **MAIL IT TODAY!**

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BOX 3278-Z, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full particulars about the course BEFORE which I have marked X:

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|---|--|--|---|
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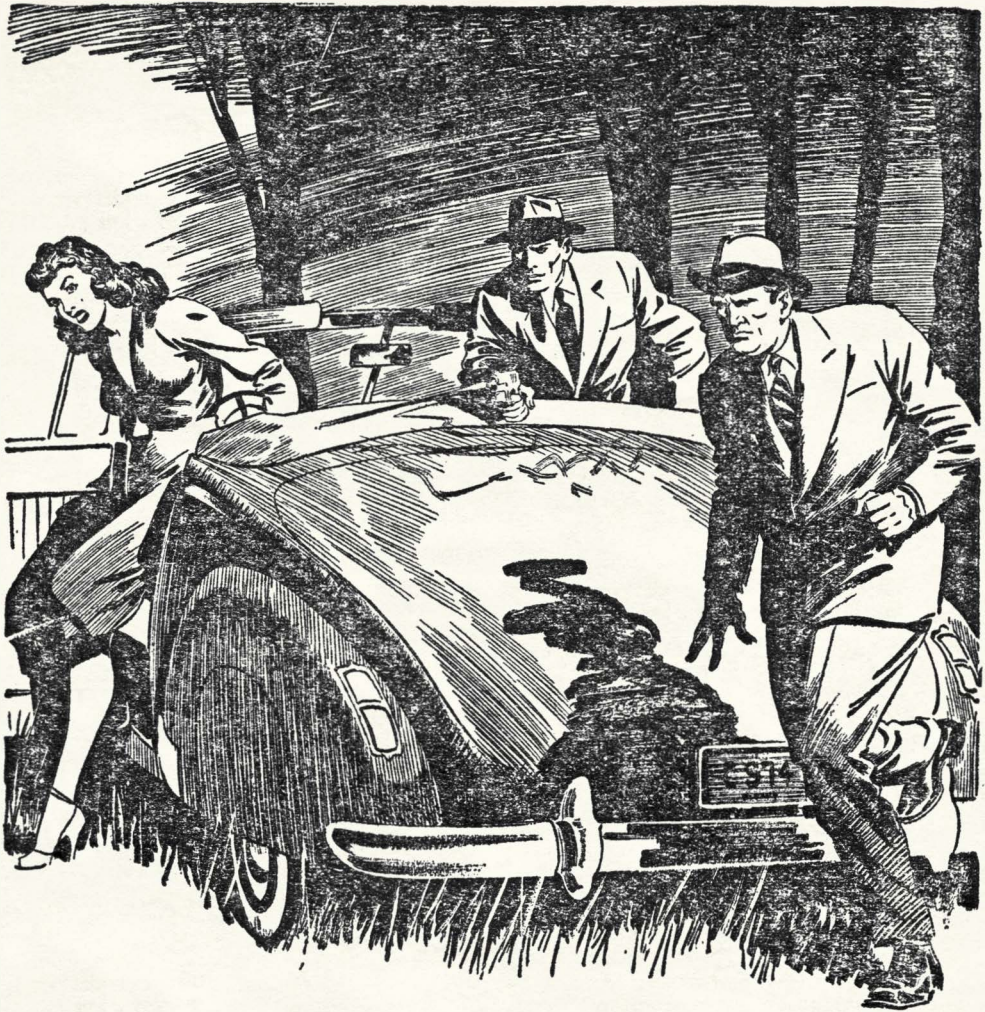
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MR. MADDOX' MURDER PARLAY

When an oil princess and her blue-blooded beau each claimed they sprinted a jinx-jockey into the graveyard, Mr. Maddox turned it into a triple dead heat for the sizzle-seat—by also confessing.



**Hardboiled Novel
of the Bangtail Bookie**



By **T. T. FLYNN**

Cassidy's gun roared, trading shots. . . .

CHAPTER ONE

Double-Crossing Saddle Boy

THERE they came, out of the backstretch into the last turn, eight flying thoroughbreds riding dangerously for the furious drive to the finish wire.

Flags on the big Suffolk Downs grandstand stirred in the brisk sea breeze. Fourteen thousand turf fans in clubhouse and grandstand watched enthralled. It was the sixth at Suffolk, at Boston, the Morely Handicap, at a mile and a sixteenth, three-year-olds, colts, geldings and fillies.

The leaders boomed out of the turn, hugging the rail, saving ground. And in the clubhouse box of Big Bill Phelps, king of Texas oilfield wildcatters, Miss Judy Phelps suddenly cried out in dismay.

"He's trying to take Zobra Mia over into the parking lot!" Judy pressed binoculars to her eyes with one hand and caught Mr. Maddox' coat sleeve with the other hand. "Oh. . . . Oh!"

Joe Maddox, the huge and genial bookmaker, known, liked and respected by turf fans from Long Island to the West Coast, also had binoculars at his eyes. He had seen the four leaders sweep around the

turn in a close pack, jostling each other.

He saw the one horse suddenly veer wide toward the outer rail. The jockey was Steve Briggs, in the green, gold and blue silks of Rancho Zobra Grande Stable, owned by Big Phelps. The rangy chestnut colt swerving out was Judy's own Zobra Mia, who until this moment had threatened about twenty-four thousand dollars of Joe Maddox' bankroll.

At noon today, in Mr. Maddox' hotel suite in downtown Boston, a young Dr. Tom Allen had bet three thousand on Zobra Mia's nose. Which was proof that tall and earnest young internes should stay with sugar pills. Better horses were in this race.

Mr. Maddox had watched the skimming backstretch run of Judy Phelps' colt with rueful surprise. Binoculars had shown speed, power, drive, rated neatly back of the leaders by Steve Briggs' iron hands. Now Riggs' hands failed to hold the swerving colt.

Judy's anger had a gasping tearful note. "I could murder that jockey! He double-crossed me!"

A tall, chic girl in the next box overheard and looked over at Judy with a faint smile. Later Mr. Maddox was to remember her look. He sympathized to Judy, "Tough luck. But Eddy Canna had the rail with Sir Knight." Glasses weren't needed now as Mr. Maddox glanced up the track. "Canna is coming in on schedule. Look at him!"

The rail horse had burst out ahead. Canna, riding far forward, was slashing his leather bat in fast flicks, which looked harmless enough and could cut horse hide if you knew Canna's skill.

The excited crowd was off seats roaring the horses in. Second and third horses were fighting it out head and head. Steve Briggs had straightened Zobra Mia up near the outer rail and was bringing him along fast. But Zobra Mia had lost ground.

"We'd have won!" Judy exclaimed with passionate conviction.

"Not on past performances."

Judy angrily insisted, "I should know! He's my horse!"

When a highly intelligent daughter of Big Bill Phelps spoke like that, she carried conviction. They watched as Canna

brought Sir Knight under the wire by four lengths, going away. Judy had no interest in her colt's flashing finish along the outer rail, fourth and lucky to have that. Her unsteady hand thrust the glasses into a tan leather case, and caught her purse from a chair.

"Don't let it get you," Mr. Maddox advised. "Owners are always too high on their horses."

Judy, small and fiery, with tawny hair and pure gold of Texas sunlight in her smooth tan, was still agitated. Surprisingly so. Mr. Maddox had known her since braces were on her teeth and Wild Bill Phelps had been taking his first expensive plunges into the racing game. Judy wasn't the sort to take a lost race so seriously.

"Zobra was pointed for this race all year!" Judy said passionately. "Everything was under wraps! The clockers never saw a true workout! He'd have won by lengths with an honest ride!"

"You're beefing like a short sport," Mr. Maddox reproved bluntly. "Briggs is your father's contract jockey."

"That," said Judy tightly, "makes it worse!"

"Why should Briggs toss away his ten percent of the purse?"

"Ask him! He hasn't heard the last of this!" Judy was close to angry tears. "I'm going home," she said abruptly. Blinking, she turned to leave the box.

The lissome girl in the next box spoke regretfully. "Too bad, darling. You're not lucky this summer, are you?"

Judy paused. Her reply was deceptively casual. "Racing luck; and how's your luck lately?"

"Increasing."

"Nice," said Judy, "if true. I hear different."

Mr. Maddox noted their bright parting smiles. He had paused at the Phelps' box, where Judy had been sitting alone, to watch her horse run. Now he moved on also, puzzled by Judy Phelps' agitation.

JUDY was young and pretty as a girl should want to be. She was backed by Texas oil money. Really famous horses were in her father's racing string. She lacked any logical reason to be agitated over losing an average race.

And why point her horse secretly all

year toward this one Boston race? Purse money was not a factor. The Morely Handicap lacked turf prestige to justify the trouble. Yet early in the year when Zobra Mia had been running at Tropical Park and Hialeah, Judy had been planning for today. Her flaring anger at Steve Briggs proved how important the sixth had been.

Mr. Maddox shook his head. Horses could be figured to a fifth of a second. Handicapping a young lady was something else.

When the horses were running, Joe Maddox was a busy man. He put the matter aside. . . .

Horses were on the track for the eighth race when Mr. Maddox walked into the stable area north of the stretch turn. He was thinking of Judy Phelps again as he rounded the end of a big, parked horse van. He almost walked over the small muttering figure of Ginky Shaffer, the jockey agent, holding a purple-bordered handkerchief to his left eye.

"Look where you're going!" Ginky snapped irritably.

Mr. Maddox looked and chuckled. "Ginky, are you trying to hide that gorgeous mouse?"

"Beat it!" Ginky snarled softly.

Twenty years back Ginky Shaffer had been a sharp, rough-riding top jockey. Now he was a bandy-legged, graying little man with a wide thin mouth, pointed nose, and a fondness for razor-pressed suits and purple silk shirts. Ginky also handled the jockey book of Steve Briggs.

"Briggs blew the sixth. You got punched in the eye," Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Ginky, would there be a connection?"

Ginky's undamaged right eye glared balefully past the purple-bordered handkerchief. "Keep your fat snoot in your own trough!" Ginky snapped. He brushed past and kept going.

Mr. Maddox thought that over as he walked on into the shed rows. The rushing drum-thunder of the eighth race took the stretch turn. Stable hands were walking blanketed "hots," still sweating and nervous after racing. Smell of clean straw and feed, liniment and acrid manure piles was a zestful tang. On an impulse Mr. Maddox turned out of his way to the

distant Rancho Zobra Grande stalls.

Judy's chestnut colt stood in the open, being washed down by two brown-faced Spanish-American grooms. The trainer, Hank Bradley, pulled on a cigarette and watched in dour silence.

"How'd it go, Hank?"

Bradley, short and solidly built, shrugged. "Okay, I guess."

"Tough luck on that turn."

"Yeah," Bradley agreed briefly.

"Got a cigarette?"

Bradley's right hand came out of the coat pocket with a pack. Mr. Maddox looked at Bradley's hand when he returned the pack. "Got a crack on the knuckles, I see."

The nearest groom, wringing a rag into the water pail, stood squeezing the rag unnecessarily, listening.

Hank Bradley shoved the hand back into the coat pocket. His bronzed face stayed dourly blank.

"Accidents everywhere today, Hank. Ginky Shaffer had one too."

Bradley pulled on the cigarette. "Too bad."

"Ginky," said Mr. Maddox, "walked into a door or something."

"Boozing, probably," said Bradley briefly. "Next time he'll walk straight."

"Has Ginky Shaffer been walking crooked?" Mr. Maddox asked idly.

"I didn't say so," denied Bradley flatly. "Ask him; I've got nothing to tell you."

"Ginky's not talking, but it's a thought, Hank." As Mr. Maddox walked away, Bradley was irritably ordering the two swipes to get on with their work. Mr. Maddox would have laid odds those two stable hands were not certain what had happened and were curious.

Kopper King, lazy pet of the small Maddox stable, nickered hopefully over the webbing strap across his stall door as Mr. Maddox came up. When Pop Harvey, the trainer, stepped from the tack room, two stalls to the right, Kopper King was greedily nuzzling sugar from Mr. Maddox' palm.

Pop was lean, wrinkled and indignant at the sight. "Joe, stop stuffin' that hoss with sugar!"

"Now, Pop—"

"Pop, hell! How can I win races with hog-fat hosses?"

Eating tobacco bulged Pop's cheek. Steel-rimmed spectacles sat askew on his sun-burned nose. And as Pop came close, the heady aroma of purest Kentucky double-distilled corn liquor tainted the air. Mr. Maddox sniffed.

"No use snortin' an' sniffin'," said Pop. His cough was dismal and deep as he put a steady hand against the stable wall. "Took a toothful fer my cold," said Pop with dignity.

"It was an elephant's hollow tooth," Mr. Maddox judged critically. "Pop, that hillbilly dew your cronies sneak up from the Bluegrass would eat out a tin throat. If you'll switch to scotch, I'll send you a case."

"Scotch!" said Pop with a shudder. "Sissy-water!"

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Don't say that to a Scotsman." Pop started to speak. Mr. Maddox waved him silent. "Steve Briggs blew the sixth on Zobra Mia. Seems to be trouble about it. Judy Phelps owns Zobra Mia. She wanted to win."

"Everybody wants to win," said Pop. "That little gal don't need to. Got too much money now."

"Not a question of money."

"Then what's the fuss?"

"Bill Phelps," said Mr. Maddox, "staked me to a bankroll that time I went broke bucking the oilfield plungers at the old Arlington Downs track between Dallas and Fort Worth. I owe Phelps a favor for that. His girl is here in Boston alone. She's convinced that Steve Briggs double-crossed her in the race."

"Know anything about it, Joe?"

"Not as much as I intend to. Briggs' agent, Ginky Shaffer, has a fresh black eye. Hank Bradley's knuckles are skinned. Neither one will admit anything. I'll lay ten-to-one they tangled in a stall or tack-room right after the race. Something's baking there. Look into it, Pop."

Pop Harvey rubbed the graying stubble on his chin. He'd been around the tracks a long time. Pop was a real horesman from his canny old head to his big heart. Crooked angles in racing made Pop bristle.

"I'll slip some corn-squeezin' on my hip an' git tongues waggin'," Pop promised.

Pop Harvey would do just that. He knew everyone around the stables. Knew

how to start talk and then how to listen. Mr. Maddox, driving his long blue convertible in the race traffic streaming back into Boston proper, was satisfied and not too disturbed about the sixth race or Judy Phelps. Which was proof Joe Maddox hardly knew the daughter of Wad Bill Phelps. He still thought of her as much too young for trouble.

CHAPTER TWO

Out of This World

MR. MADDOX was thinking of a tall scotch and soda, a thick steak later, as his convertible headed toward the hotel, near Boston Common.

He stepped into the sixth-floor suite with brisk anticipation, and halted abruptly as a stocky grizzled figure put down the scotch bottle and spoke complacently. "No more ice, Joe; too bad."

It was Cassidy, of the Masterton Internationally Agency, which policed the big tracks.

Oscar, the wizened, shrewd little man who handled the betting sheets and telephones for Mr. Maddox, warned from the front of the parlor, "He's snooping, Joe. And guzzling like he paid the tab here."

Mr. Maddox closed the door. "Order some ice and another fifth," he told Oscar.

"For him?"

"My old friend Cassidy," said Mr. Maddox warmly. He took the bottle from Cassidy and started a drink without ice.

Cassidy stood off a step watching, a big man, built blocky, with a solid, squarish face. Masterton men warred endlessly on bookmaking at the tracks. For years Cassidy had made Joe Maddox his target. They were friends in a wary way, each knowing Cassidy would handcuff Joe Maddox at the first chance.

Now Cassidy tasted his frosty golden drink and asked idly, "Did that big bet in the sixth worry you, Joe?"

"Nope," Mr. Maddox said absently as the soda boiled up golden and frothy in his own tall glass.

He sensed instantly what he'd done. Oscar wouldn't have talked. Cassidy had no business knowing anyone had bet big with Joe Maddox on the sixth race.

Mr. Maddox turned with his drink.

"Bets never worry me. They win—they lose. It all adds up."

Cassidy's heavy face was smug. "Stop stalling, Joe. How fat did you take it in the sixth?"

Oscar said sourly, "Flat feet and a flat head, and always on the grab. Why don't you drop out the window and make us happy?"

Cassidy said, "That shriveled wart is wasting breath needling me. Put it on the line about the sixth, Joe. You ain't the only one who's being checked."

"Why?"

"Reasons."

"Was something wrong with the sixth?"

"I didn't say so."

"He never says; he only yammers," said Oscar.

A red flush crawled on Cassidy's face. He disliked Oscar heartily.

"Steve Canna took the sixth on Sir Knight." Mr. Maddox said helpfully.

"Hell, I knok that!" Cassidy was getting exasperated. "I'm talking about heavy dough bet on the race!"

"He don't make sense, but he ain't got sense, so what?" Oscar commented.

Cassidy said, "*Shut up!*" He caught his temper and gulped at his drink. "How about it, Joe?"

"About what?"

Cassidy set his glass hard on the table. He was breathing faster. "I stop by to talk. Just friendly. Nothing much on my mind about you two." Cassidy poked a thick forefinger against Mr. Maddox' broad chest. "Now guess what's on my mind?"

"What mind?" Oscar questioned wearily.

"That," said Mr. Maddox to Oscar, "is a thought." He pushed Cassidy's hand aside. "The drinks are free, cigars ditto. But don't walk in and start sweating me. When you do—out!"

Cassidy kept his temper, which was a bad sign. He plucked a fat black cigar from Mr. Maddox' front coat pocket and bit off the end so roughly Mr. Maddox almost winced.

"Sucker! I gave you a chance," Cassidy declared coldly.

That was all Cassidy said. He walked out, temper still controlled.

Mr. Maddox put his tall glass beside Cassidy's glass and lighted one of the thick cigars.

Oscar fished a crumpled pack of cigarettes from his side pocket. He had a jumpy look now that they were alone.

"Joe, how did Cassidy know about that young doc's bet? What's wrong?"

Mr. Maddox told what he knew while taking off coat and shirt.

"So maybe Briggs did kink the race," Oscar argued. "What's it got to do with us?"

Shirt and coat over his arm, cigar in the other hand, Mr. Maddox said soberly, "Last night while you were out, Steve Briggs came in and left four thousand on deposit with the book."

Oscar groaned. "Joe, did he make a patsy of you? Did he bet on another horse in that race today?"

"Briggs wouldn't try that with me!" Mr. Maddox said with flat assurance. "He brought the money down so when he telephoned a bet, everything would be ready. Claimed he didn't trust any of the local books. They'd break the odds getting their own money down when they knew Briggs was loading it on a horse he was riding. His idea was for me to lay his money off when he saddled a sure thing. I'd be the only one who's know he was betting."

"That guy had a nerve coming here! People get ideas when a jockey visits a bookmaker!" Oscar snapped fingers. "Cassidy! That big flatfoot musta been wise that Briggs was here last night!"

"That," said Mr. Maddox gloomily, "is not the worst. Briggs had had a drink or two. He was out for the evening and never mind how he rode today. He handed me eight five hundred dollar bills. It seemed legitimate." Mr. Maddox shrugged disgustedly.

"I took his money and his story, and he took me. Whoever heard of a jockey starting out on the town with four thousand loose in his pocket? He didn't have it when he started, or he'd have looked me up first and gotten rid of the money. Someone gave Briggs that money while he was up on the roof. And when jockies are slipped four grand on a drinking evening, and get quick ideas about betting, maybe Cassidy has got something."

Oscar said viciously, "If I ever catch a jock at our door again, I'll lay him out before he yaps!"

Mr. Maddox added one more frowning thought. "The sixth today was sure-fire for Briggs to win, if Judy Phelps can be believed. Briggs lost it. And he didn't bet it—with four grand on deposit, waiting for just such a race."

"That ain't our business," insisted Oscar.

Mr. Maddox headed for his bath and change. "Telephone Pop Harvey," he said over his shoulder. "Ask Pop to find out where Steve Briggs is staying. Someone around the stables will know. . . ."

LATER, in the hotel dining room, half-way through a huge juicy steak laced with sautéed mushrooms, Mr. Maddox suddenly put down knife and fork and signaled for the check.

"You sick?" Oscar questioned in alarm.

"Steve Briggs is on my mind," Mr. Maddox growled. "Let's get it over with."

The long blue convertible carried them north over one of the Charles River bridges. Mr. Maddox drove with somber purpose. Oscar was uncertain.

"You can't prove anything, Joe."

"I can return his money and talk to him."

"He'll laugh at you," warned Oscar cynically.

A growling note was deep as Mr. Maddox bulked behind the steering wheel. "Briggs won't laugh if he's guilty!"

Steve Briggs, Pop Harvey had said, was using a luxurious house trailer for a home as he moved from track to track. The trailer was parked in the side yard of a Mrs. Keller, an elderly widow who lived on the south side of the road which ran west from the Newburyport Turnpike to Reading. White house. Big trees. Climbing roses along the road. Easy to find.

The night had a balmy coolness. Mr. Maddox swung the spotlight beam on houses along the south side of the road.

"The guy may be tossing another wing-ding in town tonight," suggested Oscar.

"He's probably already asleep—"

Mr. Maddox broke off as headlights burst around a curve at them. Coming fast. Too fast. The lights swung wide in a sickening lurch.

"The fool!" Oscar cried in alarm.

Mr. Maddox braked hard, half-skidding out on the road shoulder. The rushing headlights lurched back and hurtled by with scant inches to spare. The exhaust snored away in rising pitch as the motor wound up faster.

Oscar looked after the receding taillights, seething. "The fool oughta be wrecked!"

"Somewhere else," said Mr. Maddox softly, and he let out a long breath.

Oscar faced front as they took the turn. "Looked like a Texas license! Bet it was Briggs, boozing again!"

Less than a mile farther, the spotlight beam picked up trellised red and white roses on the south side of the road. The finger of light raked back under big trees to an old white house. There was a gate in a white-washed picket fence, a driveway beyond the gate. Two large tawny cats streaked across the lawn as Mr. Maddox turned in.

A huge trailer with sides and top of shiny aluminum was parked at the back of the driveway near a small white-washed barn. A low green sedan stood beside the trailer, rear license plate and trailer hitch facing them as Mr. Maddox drove close.

"Arizona license," Mr. Maddox remarked. He cut the ignition and left the lights on as he stepped over.

The curtained trailer windows were dark. So was the house. But a radio was playing low music inside the trailer as Mr. Maddox rapped on the door. Then again, harder.

The music stopped, and was replaced by a smoothly modulated commercial. "Briggs! Steve Briggs!" Mr. Maddox said, rapping harder. "Come on out for a moment."

Oscar guessed cynically behind Mr. Maddox, "The guy hears us. Hammer him out." Oscar lighted a cigarette restlessly, then said, "Joe!" on a thin, horrified note.

Mr. Maddox turned quickly, squinting against the convertible's bright headlights.

Oscar had faced the green sedan and his backstep stumbled against Mr. Maddox. "He ain't in the t-trailer!" Oscar stammered.

Steve Briggs watched them from the front seat of his new car. His right cheek

rested lazily against the seat back and half-lidded eyes seemed interested. But Briggs' mouth was a dark blotchy sneer of mangled flesh driven back through broken teeth. . . .

Mr. Maddox elbowed Oscar aside and opened the sedan door. Steve Briggs followed the door out. His small, compact jockey's figure, arms dangling loosely, came bowing stiffly off the seat edge, down, down in a head-first topple toward the smooth green grass.

MR. MADDOX grabbed at a limp shoulder and halted the fall. His other hand gripped the slack weight and he lifted Steve Briggs back on the seat with a grunting heave. He slammed the door before Briggs' weight settled against it.

"Cut off those headlights!" Mr. Maddox panted under his breath. "Get the flashlight in the dash pocket!"

The house windows were still dark. Blackness shrouded the spot as the convertible lights died. The green sedan creaked, as if Steve Briggs had stirred restlessly.

But Steve was quiet, finished. Steve would never wear bright silks in a rush from the starting gate. Never again take the rail in a furious stretch drive toward finish wire and roaring thousands in the stands.

Mr. Maddox touched the back of a hand to the hood over the radiator. Barely warm. Steve had been home some time. But Steve had died inside the hour, perhaps a few minutes ago.

Laughter came from the trailer radio as Oscar brought the flashlight.

"Let's shut that damn thing off, Joe!"

"Don't touch anything!"

Oscar sucked unsteady breath as Mr. Maddox put light close to the red-smeared mouth, and leaned through the open window, looking closely. He put the light over seat and floor.

"Gives me the creeps, Joe!"

"Might give you worse than that," said Mr. Maddox shortly. He was taking a black billfold from Briggs' inner coat pocket. Tens, twenties, smaller bills were inside.

Mr. Maddox whipped out handkerchief and wiped the billfold carefully and slipped

it back inside the dead jockey's coat.

"Not robbery," he said.

An automobile came toward Reading. Mr. Maddox switched off the flashlight. When the car sped by, Oscar let out a long breath. "Suppose it'd turned in here!"

Mr. Maddox was using the flashlight briefly as he rubbed the door handle with the handkerchief. He used the handkerchief to open the trailer door. Inside he stood in a luxurious little living room with blond wood paneling, comfortable chair, inviting divan. The radio was on a small table against the opposite wall. A half-finished drink stood in front of it. Everything else was neat, orderly.

"Steve mixed a drink and was listening to the radio," Mr. Maddox guessed to Oscar, looking through the open doorway. "Someone came. Steve stepped out and sat in the car, talking."

"And got a gun shoved at his mouth and was shot?"

"Seems so." Mr. Maddox moved back in the trailer, past a tiny bathroom with door ajar. He was scanning a small kitchen and dining nook, when Oscar warned, "Light's on upstairs in the house!"

For all his bulk, Mr. Maddox came out of the trailer fast, quietly. He stood big and intent in the night, watching the lighted window.

In a few moments the light went off. Oscar smothered a nervous cough. "What do we do, Joe?"

"We're leaving!"

Another automobile was coming on the road as Mr. Maddox stepped into the convertible. He waited until the car passed on toward Reading. Motor at an idling whisper, he backed slowly without lights. He drove toward Reading for some moments before switching on lights.

Oscar kept looking back. "Car coming, Joe!"

Mr. Maddox drove faster. In the rear-view mirror he watched the lights swing into the driveway they had just left.

"Joe!"

"I see it."

"You going to the cops at Reading?"

"I'm going to Boston fast," said Mr. Maddox shortly.

"Briggs," Oscar reminded, "brought four grand to our rooms last night! Now

he's a stiff. You've got his four grand and we're making a quick sneak from his body! How does that look?"

"Bad." Mr. Maddox was lighting one of the thick Havana cigars. He tossed the match out. "I gambled on Briggs not being found until tomorrow morning."

"You picked a fine time to gamble!" said Oscar bitterly. "That's murder back there!"

"Neat and complete murder," Mr. Maddox agreed. "But you didn't see it. You haven't been out this way tonight."

"If I ain't here now, where am I?"

"We went driving out west of town. You slept most of the way."

"So now I'm asleep! I'm dreaming all this!"

"No dreams. You merely slept. Haven't any idea where I drove. I'll do any talking that may be necessary."

"Cops digging into a murder rap will be the only ones asking me questions," Oscar reminded him. "I'll be talking to rubber hoses, bright lights and tough homicide dicks. So I say go talk to Joe Maddox. Then what do they say?"

"You tell me if it happens," said Mr. Maddox blandly.

Traffic was heavier on the highway back to Boston. They rode in silence. Oscar broke it with a sudden thought. "That car which almost wrecked us! I'll bet—"

"You didn't see any car!" Mr. Maddox reminded.

Oscar sighed. "I'm asleep," he agreed. "But I keep dreaming about Briggs's face." Oscar leaned forward and turned on the radio. "If I got to have nightmares while I sleep, I'll have 'em with music!"

Boston lights and city traffic engulfed them. A news broadcast began. . . . Then unexpectedly:

"The body of the well-known jockey, Steve Briggs, has just been found beside his house trailer, parked near Reading. Murder is suspected, less than an hour ago. Police have been ordered to stop suspicious automobiles driving into the city from the north. Further details will be . . ."

Mr. Maddox switched off the radio. "We're in town at least. I'll put you out near the hotel. You know what to do if you're picked up."

Under his breath Oscar sounded more

bitter. "Murder! And all I got to do is convince 'em I was asleep!"

When Mr. Maddox pulled to the curb and said, "Good luck," Oscar demanded, "What luck?" He walked off, a small, apprehensive figure.

CHAPTER THREE

Brilliant Brainwork

THE Gadsen was not Boston's largest or most expensive hotel. It did have long New England tradition. The vast assured dignity of Mr. Maddox got without question the room number he requested at the desk.

On the fourth floor, Judy Phelps opened the door at which he knocked. A bit breath-taking, almost child-like, Judy's tawny hair tumbled to her shoulders. Her cream-colored silk robe was belted around her waist, and her fresh-scrubbed cheeks were glowing with golden Texas tan.

"Surprise," said Mr. Maddox genially. "Can I come in?"

Judy's eyes had rounded. "You did surprise me," Judy confessed.

She had a sitting room and bedroom. The furniture was carved rosewood, heavy and old-fashioned beside Judy's tawny youth and color. She had been writing letters at a small secretary; the pen was still in her hand. A leather-covered portable radio played softly beside a tall yellow vase of long-stemmed red roses.

Mr. Maddox' smiling glance rested on the roses. "Still upset about losing your race today?"

"Oh, that?" Judy shrugged. "All forgotten."

Hat in hand, Mr. Maddox bulked above her. "I'm a night prowler. It seems to be dangerous tonight. I was almost hit by another car."

A muscle jerked in Judy's slim neck. She seemed to freeze.

"Out near Reading," said Mr. Maddox. "Car with a Texas license." He glanced at the portable radio. "Been getting the news tonight?"

Judy closed her eyes. "I heard about Steve Briggs." Now she did look young as she swallowed hard. "I did it," said Judy in a small, stifled voice. "All I could think of was getting away. I didn't

know it was your car that I almost hit."

She had always had the gift of laughter. This was not what Mr. Maddox had expected. Anything but this. He passed a handkerchief over his broad and abruptly serious face. The same sheer linen had cleaned prints off the door handles of Steve Briggs' car and trailer. Mr. Maddox wondered what prints he had missed. Judy's fingerprints.

"Why did you do it?" he asked quietly.

Judy's chin was beginning to tremble. "I killed him. Isn't that enough?" Her eyes were still closed. Tears crept through. "Call the police. I'll tell them."

Mr. Maddox regarded her somberly. "Lie down on your bed while I get your father. Where is he?"

Judy's stifled voice said, "Day before yesterday he was in Houston. There's always someone in the office, day or night. They'll know."

Full twenty minutes later Big Bill Phelps was on the humming end of a wire from a new oilfield, far down in south Texas.

"Maddox?" the booming voice came clearly. "Joe Maddox? . . . I'll be damned! Judy said she'd seen you. Might be up next week myself."

"Start now. Quick as you can get here."

"What? . . . Tonight? Anything wrong with Judy?"

"Yes!"

"Sick? Hurt?"

"Worse! Steve Briggs was murdered tonight. Judy says she did it."

"Not my girl! Not that! Is she arrested?"

"Told no one but me! I'm in her rooms! Mean to keep it quiet if I can until you get here!"

"Do that, Joe! Man, do it for me!" Wild Bill Phelps was roaring. "Spend any money you need to! Get the best lawyers!"

"They won't help. It's a gamble now."

"Gamble, man! Damn it, gamble! Hold it down until I get there! My plane and pilot are here! Well start now . . . Get Judy to the phone!"

Judy had come into the room. Dry-eyed, she took the receiver Mr. Maddox held out, listened, said, "Yes, Daddy, yes, it is so." She said wanly, "It won't do any good, but I will . . . Good-by."

Judy missed the cradle with the receiver. She dropped it blindly on the stand and fled back to her bedroom. She was not crying audibly.

When Mr. Maddox' prowling walk brought him past the open door, Judy was face down across her bed, small hands clenched tightly. He stopped and spoke to her. "Where's the gun you used, Judy?"

Judy's refusal was muffled against the bedspread. "I won't talk!"

Mr. Maddox prowled restlessly, unlighted cigar clenched in the corner of his mouth. A baffled helpless feeling was growing. The thing was out of hand. Dead jockey, Judy admitting her guilt, and in the clubhouse box when her horse lost had been motive. All that wasn't a gamble. It was a stacked deck. Not even Joe Maddox could do much with it.

Bill Phelps flying in the night toward Boston. What could Wild Bill Phelps do, even with his money and influence? Murder was murder, however you came at it.

Mr. Maddox halted in the bedroom doorway. "Judy, if I go out—"

He saw a silver-framed photograph on the table beside Judy's bed, and he stepped into the room. "That's young Dr. Allen's photograph, isn't it?"

Judy sat up quickly. "What of it?"

"He laid a big bet on your horse today!"

"I know!" Judy gripped the cover unconsciously. She was pale but calm. Queerly, desperately calm. "Please forget it," Judy begged. "Tom Allen mustn't be mentioned in this! Tom is ready to start practicing." Judy drew an unsteady breath. "Tom Allen worked his way through medical school! Years of drudgery! He hasn't any money! His name in this mess could ruin him!"

"So? He's broke?"

"Yes!"

"Whose three thousand did he bet on Zobra Mia?"

"His money!"

"All he had?"

"Just about."

Mr. Maddox came to the bed and sat on the edge beside her. He took Judy's small hand in his big hand. Her fingers were icy. Big and quietly calm, Mr. Maddox suggested, "You told him your horse would win?"

"Yes," Judy admitted, the stifled note thinning her voice again.

"Like him, don't you?"

"A little."

MR. MADDOX mused, "Last winter in Florida you started pointing your hose toward Suffolk Downs. Covering up. Getting ready for a sure-fire win. One that couldn't lose."

Judy sat stiffly, not admitting anything.

"Young Dr. Allen bet the race on your say-so," said Mr. Maddox. "Put his last three grand on a risky win bet. He must have trusted you, Judy."

"He did," said Judy dully. "I promised him he'd win enough money to open a fine office and start his practise right. Tom believed me."

"How did he take it when he lost?"

Judy's eyes lifted, dark with misery. But steady, deep maturity lay in Judy's look.

"Tom is a good sport," Judy said evenly. "I wasn't. To be cheated that way by a jockey I trusted—"

"You quarreled with Steve Briggs about it, and lost your head and killed him?"

"I'm sorry I did it," said Judy with an effort. "But—but it's done now, isn't it? I can't bring him back to life." Judy withdrew her hand and studied the glistening manicured nails. "I can take whatever happens."

Mr. Maddox stood up. He tugged absently at an ear, studying her. "Don't want to leave you alone until your farther gets here," he decided. "Meet me in the lobby; we'll have coffee and some fresh air."

Judy's slight smile understood. "I won't jump out the window, if that's worrying you," Judy paused. "At least, not until father gets here."

She said it smiling, but Mr. Maddox wondered.

The lobby downstairs had the old-fashioned stiffness of colored marble, gold leaf, plaster frescoes. Mr. Maddox passed middle-aged and elderly guests as he went back to a telephone booth. From an address book he dialed the number Dr. Tom Allen had given him.

A lady answered. Her cool precise voice could have belonged to any

of the middle-aged ladies in the lobby. Dr. Allen, she said, was not at home.

"Where can I locate him?"

"Dr. Allen did not say. I am Mrs. Allen, his mother. Will you leave a message or your telephone number?"

"I'll try again," decided Mr. Maddox.

He stepped from the booth wondering what Mrs. Allen thought of Wild Bill Phelps' daughter from deep Texas . . . Then Judy walked from the elevator in a sober little summer suit of pastel blue, looking so quietly young and fresh that graying heads turned to watch.

Murder did not fit her. Not Judy. Then you remembered her flaring anger in the clubhouse box against Steve Briggs. For a moment you were glad you were not Wild Bill Phelps in the high and lonely sky tonight. Wild Bill—wild Judy, with their tempers and gusto for living, each determined to be always successful.

"Where shall we go?" Mr. Maddox queried as they walked outside.

"It doesn't matter," said Judy indifferently. "Could we walk?"

"The young men will hate me," Mr. Maddox chuckled. "The old ones will envy me."

Judy's attempt at a smile went away. "I can't pretend," she admitted honestly. "But don't worry about me."

You started walking, not pretending—and murder walked along. Steve Briggs was there in jockey silks and booted legs, his crushed red mouth sneering. Steve Briggs behind each comment, each thought . . .

But Steve was not in the taxi which stopped at the marquee behind them, and then came on and halted ahead of them. Mr. Maddox put a warning hand to Judy's arm as a tall, blocky-built, grizzled man with a squarish face stepped out quickly and doffed his hat. Cassidy's smile was thin and satisfied.

"Luck, Joe, I was thinking about you."

"I," said Mr. Maddox coldly, "can't think of anything worse."

Cassidy seized Maddox' hand and pumped it. Cassidy smiled at Judy. "You know me, Miss Phelps?"

The frozen look had touched Judy again. She held Mr. Maddox' arm tightly. "You work for the Masterton Agency," Judy said.

They had seen each other around the tracks. Mr. Maddox started to move on. "Some other time, Cassidy."

"Now!" said Cassidy. His smile faded as he spoke to Judy. "I was going up to your room. Know why?"

Mr. Maddox warned her. "Judy, let me handle this!"

"Keep out, Joe!" Cassidy snapped.

Judy's taut fingers dug into Mr. Maddox' coat sleeve. Her voice was steady. "I think I know what you want."

"Judy!" Mr. Maddox begged.

Cassidy said, "Shut up, Joe! Miss Phelps, did you do it?"

"Yes," admitted Judy's small steady voice. "Yes, I killed him!"

CASSIDY said, "Now ain't that fine!" Then Cassidy blurted, "It ain't!" He was puzzled as he regarded Judy. "A sweet-looking young girl like you!" Cassidy muttered. He turned to Mr. Maddox. "I went out for a talk with Steve Briggs and found the body. Shot in the mouth."

"Omit the details!" Mr. Maddox said shortly. "This girl is kidding you!"

"Now is she, Joe? I didn't say anything about Steve Briggs. But she knew."

This was one for Wild Bill Phelps. How could you gamble for time when Judy promptly admitted murder to Cassidy? When Cassidy could say with vast satisfaction, "We'll get it down in a signed

confession, an' then let the newspapers watch us hand it to Homicide. Bull's-eye for the Agency!"

Behind them, a voice called sharply on the sidewalk, "Judy!"

Judy whirled toward the speaker and Cassidy exclaimed, "Stop her, Joe!" Cassidy stepped fast after her and caught Judy's arm as she met all six feet of tall, earnest, angular-faced young Dr. Allen.

Cassidy said, "Ouch!" loudly and released Judy's arm. The hard edge of a palm had chopped expertly against his wrist.

"Rough, huh?" said Cassidy angrily.

Tom Allen had an arm around Judy. His angular face was stony. "What is this?"

Breathlessly Judy said, "Nothing that concerns you, Tom. Nothing. Go away."

"What happens to you concerns me!"

"Okay, Bud," said Cassidy. "Take a piece of it. The little lady is just being pinched for killing a guy!"

"If you mean that jockey, Briggs," said Tom Allen coldly, "I killed him! Judy knows nothing about it!"

Cassidy said, "Hah?" Cassidy looked at Mr. Maddox. "She done it! Now *he* done it!" Cassidy's face was getting red. "Who's kidding me?"

"You would be dumb."

"Lay off the smart cracks, Joe!" Cassidy reached for one of Mr. Maddox' cigars. "*One of them done it!*"

Mr. Maddox slapped at the hand. The

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cigar dropped to the sidewalk. Cassidy stooped for it, started to straighten up and paused in that bent-over position. He thrust the cigar tip at the inside cuff of Mr. Maddox' right trouser leg.

"Blood, Joe!" Cassidy straightened with a grunt. "Or I never seen blood!"

The night had hidden it. In Judy's room, Mr. Maddox had been thinking only of Judy. He knew the answer before he looked down. Steve Briggs, falling head-first off the car seat, down almost to Joe Maddox' feet, had left his murder mark before he was lifted back onto the seat.

Judy, in the protective circle of young Dr. Tom Allen's arm, had a wide-eyed, unbelieving look. Mr. Maddox looked at them. No need to wonder about those two. Their future had hope and high promise. Joe Maddox had lived his good life. That old favor was still owing Bill Phelps. The odds had been high against this gamble for time tonight and Joe Maddox always paid off.

"You win, Cassidy," Mr. Maddox said with resignation. "These two had nothing to do with Briggs. I killed him."

Cassidy's startled amazement held him silent for a moment. Then he reacted explosively. "*She* done it! *He* done it! Now *you* done it! Listen, you three! We're talking about murder!"

"I'm talking about murder," Mr. Maddox reminded.

"Yeah? And how about these two? They knew everything!"

"The radio broadcast it."

Cassidy, flushed now, with a heavy bristling look, snapped, "Maybe the radio slipped our office the tip about Miss Phelps!" Cassidy turned to Judy. "Were you at the track this afternoon?"

Judy nodded.

"Said you'd like to kill Briggs, didn't you?"

Judy exclaimed, "Allison Stanford!"

And Tom Allen's white-lipped anger told Judy, "Allison heard the broadcast and she telephoned me! I thought her blasted gossip would only be repeated to me!"

Cassidy was satisfied. "The dame hung up without telling her name. Now she can dictate it and sign it!"

"Waste of time," said Mr. Maddox. "Come on, Cassidy; my car is around the

corner. I'll drive you to Headquarters."

"Not so fast, Joe! I don't walk off from anyone who admits murder! I got three of you—an' three of you I keep!"

Cassidy had that stubborn streak. Mr. Maddox eyed him thoughtfully. A slow smile spread over Mr. Maddox' broad face. "You'll be the only man who ever went to the police with three prisoners who killed the same jockey three times! That's one which will spread clear to the Coast. Cassidy, you'll be immortal! The cop who brought in a triple dead heat on murder!"

"I'll be nuts if I listen to you!" Cassidy said angrily. He glowered at them in turn. "One of you done it!"

"Makes two of us who didn't," Mr. Maddox reminded.

"I step out of a hack to make a pinch," said Cassidy with the look of an angry man who deserved better. "Now I got a mob standing in line trying to convince me each one is guilty! And the only one I'm sure ain't lying is me!"

"Now look!" he tried again. "I ain't wet behind the ears! A jockey who got iced off like that has cost somebody dough! Who lost money on Briggs?"

Judy failed to stop Tom Allen from admitting, "I lost three thousand on Judy's horse this afternoon."

"Now we hear sense! You bet with Joe Maddox?"

"Yes."

"Get sore about losing?"

"I lost all my savings," said Tom Allen evenly. "Briggs seems to have made a dishonest ride. How would you have felt?"

"I'd smack down a crooked jockey who cost me three grand!"

Tom Allen shrugged. "I felt the same way."

"That settles it!" said Cassidy flatly. "Joe, don't try to tell me a fat bookie lobbed off any jockey who just made three grand for him! Uh-uh! Fairy tales is for kids!"

"Briggs," said Mr. Maddox, "left four thousand on deposit with my book last night. No connection with the Phelps horse. And remember?"

"Remember what?"

"Blood on my pants."

Almost prayerfully, Cassidy said, "I'll

be a liar any place I tell this! Joe Maddox trying to grab a murder rap!" Cassidy chewed the cigar. "It ain't kosher!" Plaintively, Cassidy spoke to the three of them. "I'm only a Masterton cop. I got my job to do when I find a dead jockey. But one of you is all I need! Just *one* who done it!"

"I'm ready," said Tom Allen.

A thought struck Cassidy. "Say, who are you, anyway? I forgot to ask!"

"The name is Doctor Thomas Allen."

"One of the Governor Allens, I suppose, huh?" said Cassidy sarcastically.

"Only a nephew," admitted Tom Allen uncomfortably.

Cassidy's startled look sought Mr. Maddox. "That on the level, Joe?"

"Could be; never saw him before today. He had cash money."

Judy was groping for a handkerchief. "Tom, your family will hate me for this!"

Tom Allen used his own handkerchief on Judy's eyes. "Honey, no one could hate you."

"*That's* kosher," Cassidy decided reluctantly. "This I got to think over. You two be where I can find you. Joe, come along!"

Cassidy was muttering as they turned the corner together. "A hot potato like the Governor's nephew! And the Governor's not in favor of horse racing! This'll light a fire under the Racing Commission, the Masterton Agency an' under me if I ain't right!"

A little later, when Mr. Maddox walked into his hotel suite, Oscar said, "Joe, there was—" Oscar saw Cassidy at Mr. Maddox' heels and stopped speaking.

"Later," Mr. Maddox said, heading for the bedroom. "Cassidy wants my pants."

"Your pants?" Oscar repeated blankly.

"Blood on them," said Mr. Maddox, disappearing into the bedroom.

CHAPTER FOUR

Just Asking for Trouble

CASSIDY departed in tight-lipped silence with the trousers wrapped in newspaper. Mr. Maddox came out of the bedroom in a fresh baggy brown suit and drank three fingers of scotch neat, in silence.

Oscar had been pacing nervously. He reminded, "Joe! You said blood on your pants!"

"Got there when Briggs fell off the car seat," said Mr. Maddox absently.

"Blood—an' Cassidy's got the pants!" Oscar groaned.

"I tried to convince him I killed Briggs. He wouldn't quite take my word for it, but he's holding the proof," Mr. Maddox explained vaguely, his thoughts elsewhere.

Oscar's wizened face showed stunned disbelief. "You didn't kill Briggs!"

"Cassidy can't prove I didn't."

"This," said Oscar, "ain't happening to me!"

"It's happening to me," said Mr. Maddox.

"That means me too, Joe!"

"I suppose it does," Mr. Maddox muttered. He glanced at his wrist watch. "I'm going up on the roof."

Oscar pleaded, "Your head ain't right, Joe!"

"Feels all right," Mr. Maddox said vaguely. "Stay near the telephone." He walked out, still in hard thought.

The night club upstairs was a favorite Boston rendezvous. The lean and cordial Rudolph, in charge, was a local favorite. Mr. Maddox trailed three laughing couples out of the elevator, and Rudolph deftly passed the couples to alert assistants and gave his warmest greeting to the big man in the baggy brown suit.

"How did you pick 'em today, Mike?" Mr. Maddox asked, smiling.

Rudolph, christened Michael Geehan over beyond the Navy Yard, said sadly, "I bet three and got three stiffs. Know anything good tomorrow?"

"Something better right now, Mike. Hundred-to-one says you can't remember whether Steve Briggs, the jockey, was up here last night."

Rudolph's dollar bill quickly covered the hundred Mr. Maddox palmed. "At Mr. Doyle's table. Mr. Joe Doyle, from New York."

"Broadway Joe Doyle?" Mr. Maddox asked alertly.

"Party of eight," said Rudolph. "Mr. Doyle, two jockeys, a gentleman I didn't know, and four young ladies."

"Cuties?"

"Refined," said Rudolph and took his

honest winnings under cover of the elaborate menu he held.

"Who was the other jockey?"

"I didn't notice," Rudolph said. "But Mr. Doyle is here again with another young lady."

Broadway Joe Doyle might be seen in season at Frisco, Santa Anita, the Derby, Hot Springs or New Orleans or Miami. Tonight, the tomato was especially smooth, with gorgeous bronze-colored hair and subdued flash in her jewelry. Her discreet, provocative smile estimated the big, smiling stranger in the baggy brown suit who stopped by the table.

"Surprise, Joe. When did you blow in?" Mr. Maddox inquired.

Broadway Joe's close-trimmed black mustache was debonair. Well-padded shoulders looked athletic. He was tanned and lean in a long-faced, hawk-like way. His handshake lacked enthusiasm, and he did not bother to introduce his companion.

"Hello, Maddox."

"Too bad about Briggs."

"Whatever you mean by that?"

"The radio says Briggs was murdered tonight."

"That so?" said Broadway Joe coldly. "And I saw you beating your gums with that headwaiter. If he said Briggs stopped at my table last night for a drink, where do you come in, trying to pump me?"

Broadway Joe had a fast eye too. Mr. Maddox' bland amusement held a trace of admiration. "Briggs," he said, "is dead. I was thinking about the other jockey."

"No law against thinking."

"Started me thinking," said Mr. Maddox, "about bad luck running in threes. First Briggs, then the other jockey—and perhaps you, Joe."

The tomato gurgled, "Joey-boy, is he kidding?"

"Shut up!" Doyle told her politely. He leaned back, drawing on a king-sized cigarette, regarding Mr. Maddox with an unwinking stare. "Bad luck could run in fours," he suggested coldly.

The tomato pouted prettily. "Joey-boy, you don't mean *me*?"

"Why not?" Doyle said, and she gurgled at his wit. Doyle's narrowed look stayed on Mr. Maddox, waiting.

From force of habit, if nothing else,

Broadway Joe wasn't admitting anything. Mr. Maddox had expected it but had tried.

"Who was the other saddle boy taking your free drinks last night?" he inquired amiably.

Broadway Joe thought that over. "Eddy Canna, if you've got to poke around in my business. What's on your mind, Maddox?"

"Nothing, Joey-boy," said Mr. Maddox. "Absolutely nothing on my mind."

He walked away chuckling. The tomato's long lashes fluttered farewell. But it was Broadway Joe's unwinking stare which Mr. Maddox remembered as he walked out of the hotel. Broadway Joe Doyle was fast for an easy dollar. He could figure a quick angle. He had connections. Add all that—and what did you have?

You had two jockies who had ridden in the sixth race yesterday. One had lost. One had won. One was dead.

And now what?

WILD Bill Phelps arrived from South Texas in the sunrise. He ducked out of the plane, and came at a half run to the big, waiting figure.

"Where's Judy?" Phelps demanded.

"At her hotel," said Mr. Maddox, as they fell into step. "Here's the morning paper. Judy isn't mentioned."

Bill Phelps grabbed the paper. "Did you get a lawyer?"

"No. Want coffee—breakfast?"

"Had coffee in thermos bottles. Grub on the plane, too. I want to see Judy!"

"She's asleep, I hope. Read the paper while I drive, and then I'll tell you what I know."

Phelps exclaimed as he read, "So Briggs' elderly landlady was deaf? She hasn't any idea what happened outside her house last night! Good! She can't make much of a witness!" Something near a groan escaped Phelps. "My little girl! Hardly more than a baby!"

"Your little girl grew up while you were trying to corral all the oil in Texas," said Mr. Maddox dryly. And, driving the blue convertible, he told what he knew.

For once Wild Bill Phelps became subdued, confused. "Joe, you were a damn fool to take the blame. We'll go

into that later. Was the race crooked? And who did kill Briggs?" Phelps glanced along the street. "Say, this isn't the way to Judy's hotel!"

"The race may have been crooked and I'd like to know who killed Briggs," said Mr. Maddox calmly. "Mix love with betting on sure-fire horse races and who knows what happened? We're driving to the track."

"Damn the track! I flew here to see Judy!"

"Waste of time," Mr. Maddox said flatly. "Judy will tell you what she told me. How high will you gamble for a chance of clearing her?"

"The limit! All I've got!"

"Ten thousand might be enough. Have Hank Bradley, your trainer, do what I tell you. Don't try to explain."

Bill Phelps' jaw set hard. "Bradley will do what I say," he promised.

The stables had come awake at dawn. Clockers were still catching workouts. Horses with exercise boys up were jogging on the track. Stalls were being cleaned, horses fed, watered.

They located Bradley at the rail on the stretch turn, and the three of them then walked farther around the turn, away from any listening ears. Hank Bradley, astonished to see Phelps, was quickly protesting the orders he received.

Finally Bradley said, "Sure, I'm sending Flybyall in the eighth today. He did a nice third last week. But then he stalled off. He can't win today; fourth maybe."

"He'll run to win!" When Bill Phelps spoke like that he was obeyed. "Jockey Eddy Canna outrode Briggs in the sixth yesterday. Get Canna to ride our horse today. Give him a side bet of five hundred to win."

Hank Bradley stood there in the early sunshine, a chunky bewildered man. "Eddy Canna will take that deal quick, Mister Phelps. But you're throwing away money! I can't give you a winner when I'm not ready!"

Bill Phelps brushed protest aside. "I'm only in town for a day or so. I want a win. Now, what happened between you and Briggs' agent yesterday?"

Bradley's quick look at Mr. Maddox' broad bland face was not too friendly. "Lost my temper. Shaffer was sore and

calling names because he'd bet a thousand on the race and lost."

"What's your honest opinion of Briggs' ride yesterday?"

"Yesterday I was sore about it. Today I don't know. Briggs said the horse ran out before he could do anything. His hands were shaking when he got down. He was upset."

"I'll see my trainer while you two talk," Mr. Maddox said at that point.

Pop Harvey was starting exercise boys to the track on Kopper King and Lulu Belle. Pop said, "It was Bradley punched Ginky Shaffer—"

"Bradley just told me." Mr. Maddox cut him off, and thumbed four hundred-dollar bills from the thick sheaf bulging his pigskin billfold. On second thought he added two more hundreds. "Flash this around the shed rows, Pop, and see if you can beat the Morning Line on Flybyall in the eighth."

Pop was startled. "This real bettin' money?"

"All yours, Pop. Keep me out of it. Just try to beat the Morning Line on the Phelps' horse. If you're accused of having a hot tip, deny it."

Dubiously Pop fingered the money. "Every guinea in the shed row'll swear there's feed box dope behind this much cash."

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Try looking like a liar while you tell the truth. You can keep what you win." Pop Harvey was scratching his head over that offer when Mr. Maddox left him.

BILL PHELPS stated, as they drove out of the stable area, "Bradley is certain I'm a fool who thinks winners can be pulled out of a hat by giving orders. He'll telephone me at Judy's hotel if Canna agrees to ride the horse . . . Joe, what can all this do to help Judy?"

"Maybe nothing. Let me try it."

Bill Phelps' hope visibly dwindled. He was a worried, apprehensive father when he got out at Judy's hotel.

At ten-forty, in his hotel room, shirt sleeves rolled up, half-smoked cigar all but forgotten in the corner of his mouth, Mr. Maddox finished another of a series of long-distance calls and took the other telephone Oscar was holding out. Bill

Phelps was calling from Judy's suite. "Bradley says Canna will ride, Joe. Anything else?"

"Yes. Wire a five thousand win bet on your horse to Greg Farbin, the betting commissioner, in New York. At one-thirty, wire him three thousand more."

"Fifty thousand if it will help!" offered Phelps on a note of harsh strain. "That fellow Cassidy left here a few minutes ago. He made threats of arrest which I think he means!"

Mr. Maddox glanced at his wrist watch. "Cassidy will threaten me again first. Sit tight."

Bill Phelps blew up. "How the hell can I twiddle thumbs when my girl is trying to ruin her life?"

"My neck is in this too," Mr. Maddox reminded.

"I keep forgetting. Sorry, Joe."

Mr. Maddox hung up and put a lighted match to the dead cigar. Knuckles rapped hard on the door. "Cassidy," Mr. Maddox guessed to Oscar. "Let him in."

Cassidy entered with ominous calm and looked at the two tables holding betting sheets, pencils, telephones. "Put that junk away," ordered Cassidy. "Let's take you and your pants to the sheriff, Joe."

"You don't know any more than you did last night," Mr. Maddox guessed calmly, and indicated the telephones. "In the New York and Jersey books I've located twenty-two thousand dollars in five win bets made on Zobra Mia yesterday. Action like that means someone figured a win was in the bag."

"Sucker bets," sneered Cassidy. "So the race was tossed and smart books like yours cashed in. How much was Briggs promised for losing? He was knocked off to keep him from talking, wasn't he?"

"I say Briggs was trying to win. His horse ran out before he could stop it."

"Ah, nuts!" was Cassidy's opinion of that, as Oscar answered a ringing telephone. "The sheriff's men know your trainer wanted to locate Briggs last night. They're moving in on you, Joe. Let's go."

"For you, Joe," said Oscar.

Mr. Maddox took the receiver. "Maddox," he said, and a moment later beckoned urgently to Cassidy. "Say that again! Who's talking?" He put the receiver to Cassidy's ear.

Cassidy reached fast and signaled the switchboard downstairs. "Trace this call!" He challenged Mr. Maddox, "Did you plant this for a stall?"

"Be a dope and think I did!" Mr. Maddox said shortly.

Cassidy slammed the handset down in disgust. "Local pay station! The guy said to get wise and stop telephoning around before you got hurt! That what he said the first time?"

"Yes."

Muttering, Cassidy went over to the scotch bottle and drank a jigger straight. "If it was on the level, someone in New York or Jersey just telephoned Boston you're stirring up trouble!"

"You can help them by making your pinch."

"Ah, nuts! Look, Joe! Our New York office got a whisper yesterday to watch the Phelps horse in the sixth. After the race we started checking. Joe Maddox pops up. Then Briggs is killed. Joe Maddox again. Should I believe you now?"

"No."

"I don't," said Cassidy sourly. "But I've got to! It gets bigger! Phelps rushes from Texas. He'll have the Governor behind him. And what," asked Cassidy bitterly, "have I got? A pair of pants and screwballs who beg to be indicted!"

"Well, do we visit the sheriff?"

"Not yet," Cassidy decided. "If that warning was on the level, I want to see how hard you get hurt." The thought cheered Cassidy. "The worse you get it, the better you'll stand in this."

"Suppose Joe gets killed?" Oscar bristled.

"It'll make him innocent and I'll send flowers." Cassidy's grin relished the idea. "It'll be something if Joe Maddox gets knocked off. Joe, convince me that way—if the sheriff's men let you stay out long enough."

Cassidy was whistling softly past his teeth as he left a few moments later, going briskly, as if ideas propelled him.

"Now the fun starts," Mr. Maddox said wryly.

"Was that telephone call on the level?" Oscar inquired nervously.

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "If you find my corpse, you'll know it was."

CHAPTER FIVE

Underworld Fix

LATE that afternoon the sun still slanted brightly over Suffolk Downs as carefree thousands lined at the mutuel windows and walked behind the stands to watch the saddling for the eighth race.

In the paddock stalls, trainers and grooms were adjusting the tiny feather-weight racing saddles. Jockies were receiving riding instructions. And in the milling, watching crowd outside the paddock rail, Mr. Maddox met the tanned lean elegance of Broadway Joe Doyle, squirting the same luscious tomato.

She said, "Why, Mr. Maddox!"

"Snooping again?" Broadway Joe Doyle sneered.

Two well-dressed young men with expressionless faces moved close to Mr. Maddox, ignoring him, but able to hear everything that was said.

"Crowded here. See you later, Joey-boy," said Mr. Maddox blandly, and he moved on, using his owner's badge to enter the paddock.

In stall six, Eddy Canna's bony young-old face did not change as the big smiling figure loomed in front of him. "Going to win, Eddy?"

"Always a chance," Eddy shrugged.

"Watch the stretch turn. You don't want the trouble Briggs had."

Startled, Canna demanded, "What the hell has Briggs got to do with it?"

Mr. Maddox turned as Hank Bradley gripped his elbow, "Out, Maddox! Bookies don't talk to my jockies just

before the bugle! Wise birds out there will start asking who Canna is riding for now—your book or us!"

Mr. Maddox brushed the hand away. "Just wishing Eddy luck, Hank."

Eddy Canna sounded upset. "Maddox never wished me luck in no other race! What's goin' on around here?"

"How the hell do I know?" Bradley was saying angrily as Mr. Maddox left.

He saw Broadway Joe in the crowd outside the paddock rail, watching stall six. Doyle had the look of a man who had just run into a low blow and wasn't sure what to do about it. The tomato clung unnoticed to his arm. Flanking them were the two well-dressed young strangers . . . just standing there.

Mr. Maddox was halfway to the clubhouse when the clear high bugle notes signaled the post parade, and a hand dropped on his arm. He turned fast, face hardening.

It was Cassidy and Mr. Maddox relaxed warily. But Cassidy had never looked or sounded grimmer.

"Joe, our branch offices clear to Chicago have been digging whispers about this eighth race! It stinks! And you're in the middle! That last minute yak with Eddy Canna caps it!"

"Just wishing Eddy luck."

"What kind of luck? We hear Phelps is on the horse for eight grand in New York. There's talk around the stables that Phelps has got a live one in this race."

"Nice agency work."

"In New York, Philly, Chicago, Detroit and Baltimore, we've tabbed at least nine wise guys who have socked up to ten

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grand apiece in out-of-town books on that Phelps horse!" said Cassidy coldly. "Wise guys, Joe! The kind who only go for sure things!"

"Nine smart ones can't be wrong."

"No?" Cassidy sneered. They were entering the clubhouse. "Yesterday Briggs lost and the books cashed in," Cassidy reminded. "Today Joe Maddox is at the jockey's ear in the paddock! It's another fix, ain't it? With Eddy Canna this time! And the big books clean up again!"

They walked out in front of the clubhouse, and when Mr. Maddox said nothing, Cassidy said, "If Canna loses, you get handcuffs quick!" Cassidy shook his head. "Murder and fixed races! I wouldn't have thought it of you two days ago, Joe. Not Joe Maddox."

"I've never been convinced you think, Cassidy."

Mr. Maddox turned and looked up at the clubhouse boxes and picked out Judy Phelps. She was sitting close to young Tom Allen. They seemed to be holding hands. Clinging to each other for reassurance, Mr. Maddox guessed.

Assistant starters were guiding the horses into the padded stalls of the starting gate up the track. Tense quiet fell over the stands. The bell rang sharply and the line of horses plunged from the gate and sound rolled from the stands.

In a driving rush the field strung out past the clubhouse, leaders bearing over to the rail. Eddy Canna got the rail, using his bat, riding with furious purpose.

Cassidy said, "Too fast! Gonna lose that way, is he?"

The loudspeaker horns blared, "*Flyby-all first by two lengths . . .*"

Canna became a far small figure, leading into the backstretch by two and a half lengths. Then caution seemed to strike him. Canna took a hard wrap of the reins and let the field come up. Two horses passed him and Eddy Canna continued to rate the backstretch run like the canny veteran he was.

"*Easy Guess by a length—Maude's Pal second. Flybyall third . . .*"

The horns called it. And off ticker tape in a thousand betting spots far from Boston, other men were calling the race to

turf fans who had bet money with local books.

"*Easy Guess—Maude's Pal—Blue Line—Flybyall is fourth . . .*"

Eddy Canna still rated his mount, using all his skill to bring a strong horse into the stretch drive. Easy Guess began to fade slightly. Blue Line was dropping back.

Cassidy blurted, "He might make it! He's in the slot now!"

In the slot, saving ground, hugging the rail, they came pounding into the head of the stretch. Tumult in the crowded stands began to rise. Cassidy drew a fifty-dollar mutuel ticket from his pocket, fingered it hopefully and began to yell, "Use that bat, Canna! Bring him in!"

Mr. Maddox chuckled softly. Cassidy had decided that stable gossip, an owner's bet and big-money gamblers couldn't be wrong. All Cassidy's attention was on the race as Mr. Maddox walked away.

BILL PHELPS was nursing a glass of beer at the clubhouse bar. "Well?" he inquired.

"Cassidy is ready for trouble. Tell Judy and young Allen to leave. You know where my car is parked. Get Eddy Canna when he leaves the jockey room and bring him there."

The loudspeaker horns were audible as Mr. Maddox hurried out on the car-jammed parking lot. "*Maude's Pal is first—Easy Guess second—Cap Kingle third . . .*"

Eddy's stale mount had folded in the stretch. Phelps's eight thousand was gone, Pop Harvey's money was lost, Cassidy's ticket was worthless. And nine big-money gamblers out over the country had dropped fat bundles on this race.

It was sad. It was pitiful—and Mr. Maddox was cheerful about it as he waited in the blue convertible while the stands began to empty and automobiles leave.

Bill Phelps came to the car alone. Mr. Maddox stepped out hurriedly. "Where's Canna?"

"Losing the race hit him hard evidently," said Phelps ruefully. "Canna told me to go to hell and went off with a girl who was waiting for him. A red-head."

"Coppery hair? Yellow-and-black in her dress?"

"That's right."

"Where did they go?"

"Out in the lot here somewhere."

"Got to catch—" Mr. Maddox broke off as a red-faced, furious Cassidy hurried up.

"I had a hunch Phelps would find you!" snapped Cassidy. "It's a pinch, Joe! And maybe Mr. Phelps ain't heard you crooked his jockey!"

"Nonsense!" Phelps said curtly.

Cassidy eyed him and shrugged. "I get it! Maddox is putting the squeeze on you about your daughter!"

Mr. Maddox urged, "Cassidy, get in the car and argue! I've got to catch Eddy Canna! He's in danger!"

"Not with you locked up, Joe! Canna's worry now is gettin' ruled off for a fixed ride!" When Mr. Maddox started in behind the wheel, Cassidy caught his arm. "Back to the stewards, Joe!"

Bill Phelps said, "I'll be responsible for Maddox!" And Cassidy turned angrily on him. "You got enough trouble over your daughter! She's next when I get—"

Cassidy got the bone-jolting smash of Mr. Maddox' big fist square on the line of his jaw. He sagged. Only Bill Phelps' quick grab held him up.

"Joe, this man is an officer!" Phelps warned.

"He's a muttonhead!" Mr. Maddox said shortly. "In the back seat with him!" Apparently no one had marked the quick flurry of action. "Take his gun and keep him quiet," Mr. Maddox ordered as he slid behind the wheel.

Bill Phelps hesitated in the doorway. "This is kidnapping!"

Mr. Maddox punched the starter button. "If eight thousand is all you'll gamble for Judy, I'll buy this stack myself!"

Phelps stepped in and jerked the door shut. "You didn't have to put it that way!"

The convertible was rolling. "Sorry," Mr. Maddox said over his shoulder. "I got Canna into this! If he's killed, it's my fault! Look for that redhead."

The parking area was partially empty now, and it was Mr. Maddox who exclaimed, "There she is!" He wheeled the convertible across empty parking space

and braked beside Doyle's very luscious tomato, who was walking alone.

"Mr. Maddox!"

"Hop in the back, sister."

She got in beside Cassidy's slack upright figure. "What's the matter with *him*?"

"Nothing a redhead can't cure," Mr. Maddox assured her, reaching for his well-stuffed billfold. "Name's Cassidy. Big-shot from Texas who's lonesome." He turned on the seat and held up a five-hundred-dollar bill. "This is lonesome too, sister."

"For *me*?"

"If I find Eddy Canna quickly."

She was a tomato of price. Strictly business now, she bargained coolly, "You want him for *that*?"

"And Cassidy," offered Mr. Maddox. "He'll surprise you."

She said thoughtfully, "Texas? Cattle or oil?"

"Gas," Mr. Maddox said. "Pure natural gas. More of it than any man in the world."

She took the five hundred.

"I dated that jockey runt for Doyle the other night, and had a date with him for tonight. Something happened; I don't know what. Those two creeps have been around Doyle all afternoon. Canna went with them. I heard Doyle say they'd talk business while they drove up to Rockingham. Doyle told me to take a taxi back to town. They're in a black coupe with an Illinois license."

Mr. Maddox drove out of the parking area.

"What business were they talking?" he asked.

"Ask them," she said calmly. "Those creeps had lumps under their arms. Doyle was trying to hide the jumps. A girl has to mind her own business."

IN THE rear-view mirror Mr. Maddox saw her draw Cassidy's hatless head over on her scented shoulder. Bill Phelps, with Cassidy's gun and handcuffs in his coat pocket, watched in fascination.

Cassidy groaned, snuffled, stirred. She patted Cassidy's cheek. Cassidy snuggled into the soft scented shoulder. He sniffed. His eyes flew open and he jerked upright. "What the —"

"Hello, Big-Handsome!"

"Lady, you talkin' to *me*?"

She said brightly, "Mr. Maddox says you're in the gas business."

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Sister, when Big-Handsome cuddles back on your shoulder and starts talking, you'll know. All gas!"

Cassidy's red-faced bellow filled the car. "Joe, I'll break your fat neck! What is this, a frame-up?"

"The lady is helping us find Eddy Canna."

"Yah? It was *me* she was wrestling! Where you think you're driving?"

"Broadway Doyle, two friends and Eddy Canna are heading toward Rockingham in a black coupe. We're trying to catch them."

"So what?"

"Broadway Joe Doyle," said Mr. Maddox over his shoulder, "has evidently been working jockies and stable connections for sure-fire information on winners. He touted what he learned to gambling connections for a cut of the profits. Call it an honest racket. The four thousand Steve Briggs deposited with me must have been Steve's cut of one such deal.

"Steve evidently told Doyle that Zobra Mia would be a sure winner yesterday. Even Judy Phelps had urged young Allen to bet his savings. Briggs' agent bet too. And Doyle's gambling connections went heavy for it. Briggs lost the race and it looked like he'd double-crossed everyone. Judy Phelps thought so. She told Tom Allen so."

"This gets good—if I believed it," said Cassidy dourly.

"It made murder," said Mr. Maddox calmly. "Tom Allen and Judy have talked to Bill Phelps. It was this way. Allen had expected to win enough money to marry Judy. Furious over what Judy said was a crooked ride, Allen drove to Briggs' trailer yesterday evening. He found Briggs dead. Judy had said she meant to get the truth from Briggs. It looked like she'd tried with a gun. Tom Allen drove back to town to think that over. Then Judy drove out and found Briggs and thought the same thing about Tom Allen. Next I drove out and got the same idea about Judy."

"Here we go again!" said Cassidy sar-

castically. "Back on the merry-go-round!"

"Hang on," said Mr. Maddox. "When the Stanford girl's tip brought you flat-footing to Judy, her first thought was to shield Tom Allen. So she took the blame. When Tom Allen joined us, he tried to protect Judy. By then I was doubting either had done it, so I put in my word. And my pants," Mr. Maddox added, "which were marked when Briggs fell off the car seat and I caught him."

"And I sit here listening to you!" marveled Cassidy.

"Steve Briggs," said Mr. Maddox, "was in a night club night before last at Broadway Doyle's table. So was Eddy Canna. Your girl friend there was Canna's date."

"She ain't my—" Cassidy faced her on the seat. "That true?"

"You're copper," she guessed with resignation.

"Masterton Agency."

She shrugged. "It's true. And straight about Doyle too. He used girls and good times to get stable tips. And if he cashed in through his connections, why not? It was all legit."

"Until the gamblers figured a double-cross," said Mr. Maddox. "Steve Briggs' alibi evidently didn't convince them. Steve was killed—and try to prove who did a professional job like that."

"All this," said Cassidy, "sounds like real gas!"

"So," said Mr. Maddox, "I tried to make it happen all over again. When Canna lost, it added to a second double-cross. If anyone tries to get Canna for that, it should clear up Steve Briggs' murder."

"So now we're lookin' for Canna's body in a black coupe, riding to Rockingham! That track ain't even running now!"

"Horses are stabled there," reminded Mr. Maddox. "And there's lonesome country around to dump a body. The state of New Hampshire would be investigating a dead jockey this time. They'd look to Rockingham track first, clear off the trail."

"More gas!" snorted Cassidy.

"Friend," said Bill Phelps coldly, "you're hard to convince."

Cassidy gave him a jaundiced look. "With my gun, I'd be harder to convince!"

"You got it? And my handcuffs, also, I'll bet," he snarled.

"I have."

"I'll throw the book at you, too!" Cassidy put his head back and closed his eyes. "Wake me up when we don't find no dead body in a black coupe."

Bill Phelps looked worried.

Mr. Maddox was more worried, without showing it. Rockingham might have been mentioned to mislead the girl or Eddy Canna. The heavy traffic on the Crosstown Beach Parkway was behind. They were rolling north fast on the Reading Highway, through memories of last night.

Cassidy meant every threat. This was the last gamble and Bill Phelps was badly involved. Judy was still trapped by her confession. And Eddy Canna might be in real danger.

THE summer twilight was falling as they rolled through Reading and speed jumped again. Lazy peace lay over fields and blocks of woodland. It was easy to think Steve Briggs might still be alive, Eddy Canna merely enjoying a drive after a hard-riding afternoon, and Cassidy dozing before dining good-naturedly.

Only it wasn't that way. Horn wailing, they raced past a lumbering truck. Mr. Maddox hit the horn again to warn an

automobile ahead. He peered through the windshield.

"Black coupe! Illinois license!"

Cassidy said, "Huh?" and sat up.

Broadway Joe Doyle was at the wheel, Eddy Canna beside him, the other two men on the back seat. Mr. Maddox signaled with the horn as he drove alongside. He gestured to stop.

Broadway Joe gave a startled look and braked. A revolver muzzle jabbed Doyle's back. Mr. Maddox saw it and hit the gas hard with his foot. The convertible jumped ahead.

A gun fired loudly. Mr. Maddox thought of Broadway Joe in front of the muzzle. But a small hole punched through the convertible's windshield. Mr. Maddox wrenched hard at the steering wheel.

Fenders crashed and crumpled as the veering convertible carried the black coupe off the highway. Cassidy was bawling, "Gimme my gun! My gun!" The girl was screaming. Another hole punched in the windshield. One hand on the wheel, Mr. Maddox ducked over. And, in the other car, he saw a revolver viciously club Doyle's head.

Bouncing hard and grinding together, the two cars plunged through roadside weeds and smashed through the wires of a pasture fence.

Broadway Joe was slumped over the



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steering wheel as the sedan bucked to a stop. Mr. Maddox cut the ignition and plunged out the door on his side.

Bill Phelps was already out. The girl followed him and ran toward the road. Cassidy's gun roared in the back seat, trading shots as Mr. Maddox bolted around behind the automobiles.

Eddy Canna had jumped out and was running off across the pasture. An agile, gray-suited figure leaped from the back seat and fired a shot after Canna, then whirled toward Mr. Maddox.

Neither of them said anything.

Mr. Maddox had a quick, detached thought that this was the pay-off. He saw the quick up-jerk of the revolver and wondered if the bullet would hurt.

It was like being hit on the chest with a stick. A kind of numbness spread around the spot. But he kept moving. His left hand slapped the gun aside as it fired again. He hit a down-drawn mouth corner so hard the flesh split. His other fist slugged to the jaw joint. The weight of his rush carried the reeling figure caroming off the open car door, and it fell and stayed face down on the close-cropped grass.

"Look out, Joe!" Bill Phelps shouted as he charged in and caught the second stranger diving out of the coupe. His long arm caught the stranger's gun arm and twisted. The man yelled.

Bill Phelps slammed him against the car. And hit him and hit him again. What was left, went down in a spraddling sprawl, soundlessly, like an old and falling sack.

Phelps said scornfully, "They come better in Texas!"

Cassidy ran around the front of the cars, took one look and panted, "Either of you hurt?"

"I'm shot in the chest," Mr. Maddox said. He looked down and touched the bullet hole in his coat.

"Get your coat off, Joe! Lie down! Keep quiet!" Cassidy was shaken. "Through the chest? That's real bad, Joe!"

Eddy Canna returned as Phelps helped Mr. Maddox out of the coat. The little jockey was stammering. "They were takin' Doyle an' me for a ride because that

horse of yours didn't win, Mr. Phelps! They killed Steve Briggs, too! They said so!"

Cassidy snapped, "Joe Maddox already guessed it! He's smarter than the rest of us, if I have to admit it now!" Cassidy was earnest. "Joe, if I hadn't been so dumb, maybe you wouldn't have been shot like this! Lie down, pal! I'll get you to a hospital!"

Cassidy peered at the shirt front. "Must be bleeding inside! No blood outside! Joe, I'm sorry about this!"

Cassidy's voice changed. "There ain't no bullet hole! Gimme that coat!" Cassidy looked at the bullet hole in the coat cloth. He reached inside and brought out the pigskin billfold, bulging with folding money.

"Stopped in his bankroll!" Cassidy said in disgust. "And the big ham was hollerin' murder! A cop like me with no money would have been killed!"

Mr. Maddox took the billfold and examined it.

"Now I know what money is good for," he said wryly, and passed a handkerchief over his broad face and looked at the two men on the ground. "The smarter they are, the harder they fall," he mused. "This is going to parlay some smart gamblers to the chair." And, smiling a little, Mr. Maddox spoke to Phelps. "Well, Bill, you don't have a little girl any more. Judy and her young man will never doubt each other now."

"He's a fine one," said Bill Phelps and ruefully admitted, "It just slipped up on me."

"Cupid with a fat cigar and a lard belly!" said Cassidy sarcastically. "We've still got plenty of business here to clean up!"

"All yours now, Cassidy," Mr. Maddox said, and he was chuckling. "All the credit—and the gorgeous lady too, Big-Handsome."

"Never mind that, Joe! For dames I've got no interest, and in me they have nothing to interest them."

"You've forgotten."

"Forgotten what?" Cassidy asked suspiciously.

"Gas when you talk," said Mr. Maddox. "Pure natural gas!"

JUST A CORPSE AT TWILIGHT

Love's old sweet song made Malloy rejoice when someone stabbed his ex-flame's husband—and let him in for a shroud with a silver lining.



Malloy said jerkily: "Get out of here."

By **ROBERT
MARTIN**

MALLOY looked at his wrist watch and ordered another martini. Eileen had said the Catawba Bar at seven o'clock. It was now seven-thirty. But she had been very definite about the time and place. The Catawba Bar had been a favorite spot of their's—before Eileen had married Tod Harrington.

Malloy sipped at his drink and thought about Eileen's silvery-blonde hair, her

clear blue eyes, and the cute quirk she gave her lips when she was happy. She had been his Eileen once. Why should he feel uneasy about meeting her now? He pushed his empty glass across the bar. *To hell with Tod Harrington*, he thought.

The bartender said: "That was dry, wasn't it, sir?"

"Very dry," Malloy said. "Skip the vermouth, if you like."

"That would make it straight gin, sir," the bartender said gravely. "Without the vermouth."

"Good," Malloy said. Then he grinned. "Don't mind me. The same as before."

The bartender smiled. He was a young man with curly black hair and a thin mustache like a black crayon line. His hands began to move deftly beneath the bar.

A girl eased herself onto the stool beside Malloy. She had a nice profile, short brown hair, and a slim rangy body. A red scarf at her throat was bright against her plain black suit.

"Hi, Malloy," she said.

He turned quickly. He hadn't expected, or wanted, to meet anyone he knew. Not tonight. But he made his voice sound casual. "Hello, Judy. Why aren't you making merry at the big wing-ding tonight?"

She looked at him with smiling brown eyes. "Why aren't you, my friend?"

"The office party?" There was faint contempt in Malloy's voice.

The girl laughed. It was a pleasant sound. "You lack the correct attitude, Malloy. What are you drinking?"

"Martinis, I guess."

She looked at him thoughtfully. "So it's that way huh? Some dame stand you up?"

Malloy made an elaborate motion of looking at his watch. "Not yet—I hope."

"Do I know the lucky lady?"

Malloy took a swallow of his fresh drink. He was a tall solid man with close-clipped black hair and a square jaw. "No," he lied. "Don't worry about it."

"Malloy, the lone wolf," she jeered. Then she patted his arm. "Sorry, pal. I'm in a nasty mood tonight. Do you suppose that handsome young man could build me an old fashioned?"

"Yes, ma'am," the bartender said.

Malloy said mockingly. "Miss Blair,

I ask you again—why aren't you at the annual banquet?"

"I'm like you, I guess," she said. "I see enough of that office crowd during the day. But I want you to know that I had a chance for a date. Jake Navarre came in from the Chicago territory this afternoon and asked to take me."

Malloy raised his eyebrows. "Well?"

She laughed shortly. "I'm afraid I'm not exactly Jake's idea of fun."

"Poor Jake," Malloy said, grinning.

"Oh, he'll do all right," she said. "He took that new redhead in the billing department. I saw them. When I came past the hotel a while ago I peeked into the ballroom. Old man Graf was making a speech about how we are all just one big happy family. I left quickly."

"A very disrespectful attitude for a secretary to have toward her boss," Malloy said.

She tasted her drink. "Hmm. You have the touch," she told the bartender. "Start another."

He nodded gravely, and the girl turned to Malloy. "Listen, pal," she said, "I'm being paid to write Hiram P. Graf's letters, and maybe to listen to him tell me what a wonderful son-in-law Tod Harrington is, but I'm not being paid to listen to his speeches after working hours."

Malloy stared down at his glass. He saw that it was almost empty again. *Where was Eileen?* He said carefully: "I suppose Tod was there in all his glory?"

She gave him a quick glance. Then she said carelessly: "No, I didn't see him. He was no doubt in the men's room primping before he delivered his speech about how Hiram P. Graf is the best boss since jobs were invented." She hesitated, and slowly moved her glass over a wet spot on the bar. "Malloy, do you mind if I become personal?"

Malloy shrugged. "My life's an open book." *She isn't coming*, he thought, and he felt an odd sense of relief.

"I have a reason for asking," the girl said in a low voice. "A very personal reason. What happened between you and Eileen Graf? Six months ago she was secretary to her father, and everybody thought you were going to marry Eileen, and you were also in line for the general manager's job—after Eddie Birdwell re-

tired. The office grapevine told us that you were in solid with old man Graf. And then he hired Tod Harrington, and the first thing we know, Tod's got your job—and your girl. I was promoted to the boss' secretary after Eileen married Tod—and you go around with a sour look on your face and stop speaking to the help. What goes on?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Malloy said bitterly. "What difference does it make?"

Her lips trembled a little, and she stared down at her glass. "A lot, Malloy," she said. "You see, I—I kind of liked Tod myself. I'll admit my father doesn't own the business, but—but I have my points." She took a swallow of her drink. "Oh, to hell with it." She laughed shortly.

"Ha," Malloy said. "A couple of kindred souls. I loved Eileen, but she married Tod. You loved Tod, but he married Eileen. Let's have another drink."

"Let's," she said.

Malloy nodded at the bartender and lit a cigarette. He stared at the flame of the match, remembering.

AT SIX this evening, almost two hours before, he had entered his apartment and heard the telephone ringing.

A girl's voice, muffled and far away, said: "Mr. Lewis Malloy?"

"Yes."

"One moment, please. Deer Lake is calling."

He waited while the line buzzed, wondering who could be calling him from Deer Lake. It was a small resort town, up in the hills, forty miles away. Presently a ghost voice, on the very limit of his hearing, said: "Here is your party."

And then another voice, faint and distorted, but a familiar voice. "Lew, can you hear me?"

"Yes, Eileen." He could feel his blood beginning to pound, just knowing she was on the other end of the wire.

"Lew, I—look. I'm up here in a funny little hotel. I've got to see you—tonight. I'm coming back to town right now. Please meet me, Lew, at the Catawba Club. Remember?"

He thought she was crying, but he wasn't sure. He said, "When?", and he tried to keep the eagerness out of his voice.

"I'll be there in an hour. Around seven. Promise you'll wait? I've got to see you, Lew. Promise?"

"Sure," he said in an unsteady voice. "Sure, I'll be there."

Her excited little laugh was in his ear as she hung up. He stood silently by the telephone for a long time, staring out at the snow falling past his windows. Then he dressed carefully, taking his time, but aware of a tingling sense of excitement, of anticipation. He knew he was playing with dynamite, but he didn't care. He was in a mood to play with dynamite. To hell with Tod Harrington.

The match burned his fingers, and he dropped it.

Judy Blair was saying: "The trouble with you, Malloy, is that you aren't slurpy enough around old man Graf. That's what he likes. Now, take me. By just admiring the smell of his pipe tobacco, I got a five-dollar raise last week. His pipe smells like a burning glue factory, but what of it? You can't get ahead in this world by just working hard and doing a good job,



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Malloy. You've got to play the angles."

"Amen," Malloy said, and he thought about Tod Harrington, a bony man with a thin nose, a thin mouth and sly eyes behind gold-rimmed bifocals. A joiner, a back-slapper, a ladder-climber, a man who played the angles. But it paid off, Malloy thought grimly, even if the office force did refer to him as "Tattling Tod."

Before Harrington came to work for The Graf Printing Company, Malloy had been in line for the retiring general manager's job. And then came Harrington, with his ingratiating, boot-licking manner, and his whispered, petty tales to Hiram Graf. Suddenly the job for which Malloy had been working, was Harrington's.

But still Harrington wasn't satisfied. He had to make sure of his future. So he married Eileen, Hiram Graf's daughter. He started his campaign by forcing Malloy to break a date with Eileen in order to entertain a handsome lady purchasing agent for a greeting-card firm. The lady purchasing agent had an excessive appetite for scotch and water, and Malloy had his hands full from dinner time one evening until dawn. But he left the gay lady with a fat contract for The Graf Printing Company in his pocket:

But for Eileen's ears, Malloy learned later, Harrington had twisted the incident into a rendezvous with a female of questionable character, and nothing that Malloy could say would make her believe otherwise.

When Malloy, in desperation, had asked Harrington to explain the true situation to Eileen, Harrington had merely looked smug. "That's your problem, Malloy. Miss Graf cannot trust you if she refuses to believe your story."

It was then that Malloy had known that he was fighting a losing battle. But he hung on stubbornly. There were other nasty, tricky things after that—and suddenly Eileen was no longer his. But he still stayed on, refusing offers of better jobs, observing with a clinical detachment Harrington's progress.

Even after Tod Harrington and Eileen Graf were married he stayed on, getting a savage pleasure out of the fact that he was no longer wanted, telling himself that soon he would walk out on Hiram Graf and his fawning son-in-law. But he never

did. Maybe it was because he sometimes got a glimpse of Eileen as she waited in her cream-colored convertible for Tod Harrington to leave the office. . . .

Judy Blair fished a slice of orange out of her drink and nibbled on it. "How about taking me to that party, Malloy? If I don't show up, Tod Harrington will mark my name in his little black book as a disloyal employee. We gotta show that we appreciate what the company is doing for us. One big happy family, you know."

Suddenly Malloy made up his mind. To hell with Eileen Harrington, too. He finished his drink in one swallow. "Come on," he said. "I can stand it, if you can." "Such eagerness," the girl said. "I can hardly wait."

The bartender said: "There's a telephone call for Mr. Malloy. Would that be you, sir?"

Malloy felt a surge of excitement. "It would," he said, keeping his voice steady.

The bartender pointed. "The second booth."

Judy Blair lifted her glass. "Good luck, Malloy. I'll be seeing you."

"Stick around," Malloy told her. He went back to the telephone booths.

Eileen Harrington's voice sounded strained, as if she were trying to keep from sobbing. "Lew—please come. I'm at home. Hurry—"

"What's the matter?" Malloy said sharply.

"Lew—" The voice was almost a whisper. "Tod's . . . dead." There was a click in his ear.

For almost a minute Malloy stood still, the receiver still held to his ear. Then he hung up slowly, and moved back out to the bar.

He said to Judy Blair: "I've got to leave."

She swung slowly around on the stool until she faced him. She saw the taut expression on his face, and she stared silently.

Malloy said harshly: "You may as well know now. Tod Harrington is dead. Eileen just called me."

Still she stared, her lips parted, her eyes shocked.

Malloy took a deep breath. "I don't know what happened. Eileen called me

from Deer Lake around six o'clock, and said she wanted to see me tonight. It—it was the first time I've spoken to her since her marriage." He paused, and then added quietly: "I agreed to meet her."

The girl nodded slowly, her eyes searching his. "Of course."

He made a helpless motion with his hand. "She didn't show up, and now she calls and tells me—that. I'm going over there." He placed a bill on the bar and turned abruptly away.

Behind him, the girl cried: "Wait, Lew."

He kept on moving. She followed him out to the sidewalk, and he turned to face her. "Listen," he said sharply, "This might be bad. No use in you getting mixed up in it."

She lifted her chin, and he saw the glint of tears in her eyes. "Why not?" she said bitterly. "If you go, I go too."

Malloy shrugged angrily and walked down to his parked sedan. She got in beside him, and he started the motor. He turned on the windshield wipers, and they hissed softly as they cut neat half circles in the wet snow on the glass. He eased the car out into the traffic.

THE Harrington's lived in a neat white bungalow in a quiet section of the city. Malloy turned into a drive and stopped beside the front door. He got out and pressed the bell, waited a second and pressed it again. He was conscious of Judy Blair standing silently beside him. He twisted the knob. The door was unlocked, and he stepped slowly inside. The girl followed him.

Eileen Harrington sat in a chair facing the door. She looked up, and her lips moved. "Lew," she whispered. Her blue eyes looked almost black in her white face.

Malloy's swift glance covered the room. "Where is he?"

She shuddered, and covered her face with her hands. "In—in the kitchen," she said in a choked voice.

He moved swiftly across the neat, prettily furnished room, passed through an alcove into an adjoining room containing a drop-leaf table and a china cupboard, and came to a stop before an open door leading into the lighted kitchen beyond.

Tod Harrington was slumped in a corner between a dazzling white refrigerator and a porcelain-and-chromium table. He was in a half reclining position, his chin on his chest, and his legs spread apart. His glasses had slipped down to the end of his long nose, and they hung crazily by one gold bow hooked behind his left ear. There was a foolish grin on his thin lips, and his eyes seemed to be staring with drooping lids at the knife in his chest.

Malloy had a feeling of coldness along his spine. Something clutched at his arm, and he turned his head slowly. Judy Blair was standing beside him. She was biting the knuckles of one hand, and her eyes were wild.

Malloy said jerkily: "Get out of here." She stood frozen.

He jerked his arm from her grasp, crossed the kitchen, and leaned over the body of Harrington. The wooden handle of the knife protruded neatly, with none of the blade showing. There wasn't any blood. There wouldn't be until the knife was withdrawn. Malloy forced himself to touch the dead man's cheek. The skin was still warm, but cooling fast. He was fully dressed in a dark blue suit, one he reserved for board meetings and company functions like the office party tonight.

Malloy stood up straight and glanced around the kitchen. Everything was in gleaming order, except for one detail. The drawer of the porcelain table stood half open. Malloy looked into the drawer. It was filled with the countless instruments of the kitchen—various sizes of knives, can openers, strainers, measuring spoons, ice pick—gadgets without end. From this drawer, Malloy decided, came the knife now buried in Tod Harrington's chest.

Abruptly Malloy turned, Judy Blair stood in the doorway, staring at him silently. He took her arm and led her back into the living room. Eileen Harrington sat as they had left her. She raised her eyes to Malloy, and he remembered grimly what her beauty had once had the power to do to him.

"Have you called the police?" he asked, and he tried to keep his voice steady.

She shook her head slowly, her eyes searching his.

He turned away. He saw the telephone

on a table along the wall, and he took a restless turn around the room. Judy Blair stood still. She was watching Eileen Harrington.

Malloy stopped his pacing. "Dammit," he said. "Talk to me. What happened?"

Eileen Harrington said quietly: "Lew, I—I wanted you to come alone."

"Don't mind me, darling," Judy Blair said in a brittle voice.

Malloy frowned at her. Then he turned to Eileen Harrington. "I've got to call the police—very soon. But first, it might help if you told us about it."

She stared up at him. Her eyes were hot and dry. "I'll talk to you, Lew. Alone."

Judy Blair turned away and stared out at the wet snow falling past the windows.

Malloy said impatiently: "All right. Come on." He grasped Eileen Harrington's arm, pulled her to her feet, and led her across the room to a door. He opened the door and stepped inside. It was dark when the door closed behind them. Eileen Harrington moved beside him in the darkness, and he heard the faint click of a light switch. A shaded lamp between twin beds cast a rosy glow over the bedroom. Like the rest of the house, it was almost antiseptically neat and clean.

Eileen Harrington turned her face to the wall, and her shoulders shook with quiet sobbing.

Malloy stood woodenly, remembering all over again the smooth curve of her back, the way her pale yellow hair fell over her shoulders, the look of her long slim legs on the beach, the day they had made their marriage plans—a month before Tod Harrington came to work for The Graf Printing Company.

He felt a kind of a savage pleasure in Harrington's death, and he felt no pity for this sobbing woman who was Harrington's wife. But Harrington lay dead in the kitchen. He took the girl roughly by the shoulders and turned her until she faced him. Her cheeks were wet, and her eyes avoided his. "Oh, Lew," she whispered.

"Tell me," he said fiercely. "All of it."

Her eyes focused on his necktie, and she began to talk in a dead voice. "It—it's not pretty, Lew. I knew I'd made a terrible mistake—right after I mar-

ried Tod. But father was so insistent, and you and I seemed to be quarreling constantly. I was confused, and Tod was very kind, and—"

"You can skip that part," Malloy broke in.

"But I want you to know, Lew," she said, "that I hated him, almost right after we were married. But my pride forced me to stick it out. He was cold and calculating, like a machine. I knew almost immediately that he married me to get control of father's business. We quarreled every day, over a speck of dirt on the rug, an orange seed in the kitchen sink—he was a mad man over things like that. And he was insanely jealous. He boasted to me of how he had gotten the job you wanted, of how he had influenced me against you, and he swore that he would force you out of the firm. He was a loathsome person, Lew, utterly selfish. When I remember . . ." She closed her eyes and her body shivered a little.

"Go on," Malloy said in a cold voice.

SHE opened her eyes and looked at him steadily. "I'm not sorry he's dead," she said quietly. "I feel nothing but relief. I don't know who killed him, or why, but I feel as though I should thank them, whoever and wherever they are. But—it was horrible, finding him like that. He had been quarreling with me for the last two days. He insisted that I attend the office party with him tonight. But when I finally said I'd go with him, he accused me of going because I would see you there.

"And suddenly I knew that I couldn't stand it any longer, no matter what father said. This morning, after he left for the office, I got into the car and started to drive. I drove for miles, thinking. Late this afternoon I found myself in Deer Lake, and all I wanted was you. To see you, to talk to you, to tell you how sorry I was about—about everything. I knew I had to divorce Tod, and after I called you, I drove home to tell him. But I found him, in the kitchen . . . like that."

Malloy said: "Do you have any idea who?"

She shook her head. "No, no."

"Is there anything missing in the house? Money, valuables?"

"I—I don't know. After I found him, I called you."

"All right," Malloy said gently. "Try not to think about it." He patted her arm and opened the bedroom door.

He didn't see Judy Blair, and he walked swiftly to the kitchen. Tod Harrington's body still slumped in the corner under the merciless glare of the lights. Malloy went back into the living room. As he picked up the telephone, he said to Eileen Harrington, "Looks like Judy left," and then he was talking to a clipped-voice police sergeant. . . .

An hour later Malloy sat opposite Eileen Harrington and took a long swallow from a tall glass. The police had been there with their flash cameras and fingerprint powder and countless questions. Hiram P. Graf had been called, and he had stood around, gray-faced, like a man bereaved of a son, and he had placed an arm around Malloy's shoulders, muttering: "I need you now, Lew. I want you to carry on for Tod."

Malloy had said earnestly, "I'll do my best, sir," feeling contempt for himself as he said it. Now he sat facing Harrington's widow and wondering why he wasn't happier. Tod Harrington was dead, Eileen was free again, and old man Graf had practically promised him Harrington's job—the job that should have been Malloy's in the beginning. He remembered the tears in Hiram Graf's eyes as they carried out the stiffening body of Tod Harrington, and once more he heard Eileen Harrington telling her father, gently but firmly, that she preferred to remain alone in her house that night. The old man had gone out, shaking his head, but

at the door he had turned. "See me in the morning, Lew. We have a lot of work ahead of us."

"Yes sir," Malloy had said. And then the house was quiet and empty at last.

Eileen Harrington's face was pale, and there were bluish shadows beneath her eyes. The drink Malloy had made for her stood untouched on the low table before her. She said quietly: "Lew, I had no right to drag you into this . . . I—"

"Forget it," he said.

"But those questions they asked you," she said. "So many of them, and they were so—so insistent. It worried me."

Malloy laughed shortly: "Jilted suitor kills ex-girl-friend's husband in jealous rage," he said mockingly. "Is that what you mean?"

"Please, Lew," she said. "Don't joke about it."

"I'm sorry. But the robbery motive seems to hold water. His wallet, watch and diamond ring were missing. You're sure he had them with him?"

She nodded slowly. "I told the police I wasn't sure. But I couldn't find them, and he never got dressed without them." A faint frown creased her smooth brow. "But if they thought it was robbery, why did they ask you all those questions—where you were tonight, how well you knew Tod and me, where you worked?"

He smiled at her. "They asked you questions, too."

She looked at him with searching eyes. "What do you think, Lew? Really?"

He shrugged. "They said he was killed about six o'clock this evening. I'm inclined to agree with the police—Tod surprised some sneak thief in the kitchen,



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they scuffled, and the thief grabbed a knife from the table drawer and stabbed him." He finished his drink and stood up. "Stop worrying about me. I've got an iron-clad alibi."

She frowned. "Alibi? What do you mean, Lew?"

He smiled down at her. "You telephoned me at my apartment from Deer Lake at six o'clock, the time they said Tod was killed. Remember? And I was at the Catawba Club after that—until you called me right after you came home and found Tod." He leaned down and placed a hand on her cheek. "You're upset. There's no reason for us to be talking like this. Are you sure you'll be all right here tonight?"

She shivered a little. "I—I don't know."

"Maybe Judy Blair would come and stay with you," he suggested.

She shook her head. "No, no. I can go over to father's, if I want to. But I just want to be alone, to think a little."

Malloy said abruptly: "If you hated Tod, why didn't you divorce him?"

"Not Tod," she said bitterly. "He knew how father felt about divorce."

"I see," Malloy said, and he thought: *Tod Harrington would have danced down Main Street on Saturday night in a hula skirt if Hiram Graf asked him to.* He put on his overcoat and picked up his hat.

Eileen Harrington said: "Will I see you, Lew?"

"Sure," he said, smiling down at her.

She stood up and moved close to him. "Must you go?"

"Yes," he said. He was remembering too much, and this wasn't the time to remember. Not just yet. He moved to the door, swiftly, and went out, closing the door softly behind him. Her perfume was still in his nostrils.

It was still snowing. He turned up his coat collar and walked to his car. He sat behind the wheel for several minutes before he started the motor. He did not drive uptown to his apartment. At the corner of the block he turned and headed in the opposite direction.

JUDY BLAIR lived in the upper half of a duplex four blocks from the Harrington house. Malloy parked his car at

the curb and walked up to the porch. Through a wide window he could see people playing cards in a brightly lighted room, and as he opened the door and went up the stairs he heard their gay laughter. At the landing there was a card in a metal frame beside the door. The card said: *Miss Judy Blair.* Malloy rapped softly on the door.

She opened it almost immediately, and Malloy stepped inside.

"Mr. Malloy, I believe," she said lightly. She was wearing a blue silk robe over pink pajamas, and blue sandals. Her short brown hair glinted gold in the soft light, and her eyes were bright. There was a half-filled glass in her hand. From across the room a small radio emitted muted dance music.

Malloy said: "Why did you run out?" His lips were stern.

She lifted her round shoulders beneath the silken robe, and her red mouth was sullen. "Why not? You retired to another room with the sorrowing Mrs. Harrington—and a dead man isn't very stimulating company."

"Not even when the dead man is Tod Harrington?" Malloy said.

She looked at him silently for half a second. Then she said: "All right, Malloy. So I loved the guy. Would you care for a drink?"

Malloy took off his hat and brushed snow from the brim. "You're a nice girl, Judy," he said carefully. "And pretty smart. What did you see in Tod?"

She took a swallow from the glass, and her lips trembled a little. "Listen," she said, "I know Tod was a stinker. But if he had married me instead of Eileen, I might have made a regular guy of him. Underneath he wasn't so bad—really. He wasn't very bright, and he had to get ahead the only way he knew how. By squealing on people, by marrying the boss' daughter. It was dog eat dog, Tod figured.

"But sometimes, with me, he was almost human. I got a kick out of being with him, just seeing what I could do with him. It was fun to see him really relax and forget that he had an ax to grind. I did that for Tod, and I could have done a lot more for him—if I'd had a chance." Her voice broke, and she turned away.

"You're breaking my heart," Malloy said.

She swung on him. Her cheeks were wet with tears. "Why are you snooping around here tonight? What do you want?"

"Nothing," Malloy said quietly. "I was just curious."

"Get out," she said, and she flung herself into a chair. "Go, go," she sobbed. "Quickly." She turned her face away from him.

For a long minute Malloy stared at her quivering shoulders. Then he turned and went out. As he stepped out to the porch, he heard the card players still laughing. It had stopped snowing, and the night had turned clear and cold. The wet snow on the sidewalk had begun to freeze, and it crunched under his feet as he walked to his car. The clock on the dash told him that it was five minutes after eleven o'clock. He drove slowly to his apartment. . . .

Twenty minutes later he had taken a hot shower, put on pajamas and robe, and was carrying a bourbon and soda into his living room when his doorbell buzzed. Frowning, he crossed to the door and opened it.

Eileen Harrington said: "Lew, may I come in?"

He hesitated for only an instant. Then he stood aside, his face expressionless, and she moved past him. He locked the door and turned to face her.

She said in a faltering voice: "I—I couldn't stay there alone, after all. I kept thinking about Tod—and you . . ." Her eyes were bright, and her mouth was very red against her pale face. "Do you mind, Lew, my coming here like this?"

He shook his head slowly, feeling the old flame blaze within him. He took a slow step toward her, and he heard her throaty little laugh as he took her in his arms. Her lips were cold from the winter night, but they warmed beneath his, and he didn't want to let her go.

Presently she pushed him away. "I'm a brazen hussy," she said breathlessly. She turned away from him, flung off her coat and laid it over a chair, placed a pigskin purse on top of it. Her hair glistened pale gold in the shaded light. "Have the police bothered you?" she said, turning, "since you left me?"

"Why worry about the police?" he said, smiling, and he nodded at his glass on the table. "Would you like a drink?"

"Of course," she said, and she glanced quickly around the room. "It's like old times."

"Yes," he agreed. "But you shouldn't have come here. If anyone saw you—well, it might not look so good."

"For you—or me?" she said mockingly.

"I wasn't thinking about myself," he said quietly.

She placed a hand on his arm. "I'm sorry, Lew. How about that drink?"

Suddenly he smiled. "Coming up," he said, and he went out to his tiny kitchen. When he came back with a glass in his hand she was sitting by the radio, tuning it in low to a dance band. She accepted the glass. "Thank you, sir."

He bowed in exaggerated politeness. He felt idiotically happy.

"Lew," she said.

"What?"

"Is it wrong for me to feel so free—so happy? After all, Tod was my husband."

"Don't talk about it," he said.

She stared down at the glass in her hands. "Lew, is—is everything all right with you?"

He hesitated a second, and then he said carefully: "Why?"

She raised her eyes to his. "You must have hated Tod very much."

He shrugged. "Water under the dam," he said carelessly.

She lowered her gaze to his chin. "Something's been worrying me. I—I didn't say anything to the police, but—"

He tapped a finger lightly against her cheek. "Forget it."

She turned a little away from him, and he saw her straight profile and the smooth line of her chin and throat. "Lew, I can't forget it. I've got to tell someone. After I tell you, you can do as you like about it. I—"

"Forget it," he said again, and his voice was sharp.

SHE swung toward him. "No, Lew. Tonight when I turned into the drive at our house, I saw someone leaving. It wasn't quite dark, and I saw her quite plainly."

Malloy felt suddenly cold. "Who?"

She looked at him with troubled eyes. "Judy Blair."

Malloy said: "Then you went into the house, and found Tod dead?"

She nodded silently.

Malloy turned away and crossed to the telephone. He began to leaf through the directory.

Eileen Harrington said: "What are you going to do?"

He didn't answer her, but picked up the telephone and called a number. Presently a voice said: "Yes?"

"Judy, this Lew Malloy."

"Yes." She sounded tired.

"Were you at Tod Harrington's house early this evening, before you saw me at Catawba Club?"

There was a second's silence, and then she said: "So she told you?"

"Yes, Judy. She told me."

"And the police, too, no doubt?"

There was sweat on Malloy's face. "No," he said. "Not yet."

"But soon, I'm sure," Judy Blair said bitterly. "Look, Malloy, this is my story. I saw Tod tonight, a little before six o'clock. I worked overtime this afternoon to finish some important letters for him. He asked me to bring them over to his house to sign before he went to the office banquet. He signed them, and then I took them to the post office. I know he was still alive when I left him, because he tried to kiss me. Is that a satisfactory explanation, Malloy, or do I have to tell it to the judge?"

He didn't answer her. He hung up slowly, and turned to face Eileen Harrington. She looked at him, and he nodded.

"What does it mean, Lew? I'm so mixed up."

He forced a laugh. "Anyhow," he said, "they can't pin it on me. Your call from Deer Lake puts me in the clear. They said Tod was killed around six o'clock, and that's the time you called me at my apartment. But if it will make you feel any better, I'll check the time of your call." He turned back to the telephone.

"Does it matter, Lew?"

He smiled at her. "Only take a minute." He lifted the receiver and asked for the long distance operator.

Eileen Harrington moved across the room and picked up her pigskin purse.

Malloy called out, "There're cigarettes on the table," and then he spoke into the telephone. "This is Crawford 34566. Will you please give me the exact time of the call I had from Deer Lake this evening?"

He took a sip from his glass as he waited. Then the operator said: "I'm sorry, sir. We have no record of a call today from Deer Lake for Crawford 34566."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes sir."

"Thank you," Malloy said in a dead voice. He hung up slowly and turned to look into the muzzle of a little silver-plated automatic in the hand of Eileen Harrington.

There was a moment's silence. And then Malloy said sadly: "You killed Tod."

Her eyes gleamed brightly. "I had to, Lew. I killed him, and I'm glad." She spoke swiftly, breathlessly, her words running together. "He deserved to be killed. He was a—a beast. I was in Deer Lake today, Lew. Really. But I didn't call you. He was waiting for me when I came home. I had made up my mind to divorce him, and when I told him, he was like a mad man. He started to slap me, and I grabbed a knife from the table drawer. And then he was on the floor, with the knife sticking in him. I didn't care. I was glad." She took a slow step toward Malloy, and the little muzzle of her gun tilted upward until it pointed at his chest. "You loved me once, Lew. You won't tell, will you?"

He saw death in her hot eyes, and he shook his head slowly. "No, I won't tell."

She laughed. It was a sound like breaking glass. "I fooled you, didn't I, Lew? I faked that call to you by putting a handkerchief over the phone to disguise my voice, pretending to be the telephone operator. But I was in my own house, and Tod was dead on the kitchen floor. Isn't that funny, Lew?"

"I took Tod's wallet, and his ring, and his watch, and hid them to make the police think it was robbery. It was a long wait for me in that house before I called you again. But, after all, I was supposed to be driving down from Deer Lake, wasn't I, Lew?" She moved a little closer,

and he saw her fingers tighten around the little gun.

Malloy felt sick, but he took a swallow of his drink, and he tried to smile. "You *were* driving down from Deer Lake," he said. "You called me from there at six o'clock. Just remember that. They haven't anything else that they can hold against you."

The hot light went out of her eyes, and the gun wavered a little. "I—I didn't want to—to kill him," she said in a faltering voice. "Maybe he deserved it, and I was blind with rage. Lew, help me. Let's go away, you and I. Would you like that?"

There were tears on her cheeks, but Malloy saw that her gun was steady again, and the wicked little muzzle bore directly on his chest.

"I'd love it, darling," Malloy said, and he threw his drink into her face.

She screamed, and Malloy jumped forward. The gun exploded with a sharp little report, and he heard the zing of the bullet as it passed his ear. He grasped her arms then, and he held her tightly while her screams bounced against the walls. He twisted the little gun from her fingers, and he stepped clear of her. She flew at him like a mad woman, her fingers clawing for his face, and he saw in her eyes what Tod Harrington must have seen the instant before he died. He slapped her then, and she fell whimpering to the floor.

Malloy became aware of a banging on his door. He moved slowly across the room and turned the key. A stocky man in a gray overcoat stepped nimbly inside. There was a big revolver in his hand.

"Police," he snapped, and his bright little eyes flicked at the figure of the girl on the floor. "I've been tailing that babe. Thought she might come here."

He reached out and took the little automatic from Malloy's hand. "Is this hers?"

Malloy nodded silently.

The stocky man grinned. His teeth were yellow from tobacco. "Thought so. I heard part of it—enough to clear you, anyhow. Relax, mister."

Malloy tried to smile. He couldn't speak. His throat was too tight.

"We knew that call she said she made was phony ten minutes after she told us," the stocky man said. "But it didn't prove anything. The neighbors told us they heard her and Harrington shouting at each other around six this evening. That didn't prove anything, either. We checked your story, too. It jibed. So we just sat back and watched her—and you." He chuckled. "Dames, they're wonderful."

Malloy found his voice. "Yes," he finally said.

He helped the stocky man lift Eileen Harrington to her feet, and he placed her coat around her shoulders. She kept her eyes closed, and she made no sound as they led her to the door. Malloy opened the door and stood aside. The stocky man turned and said: "Cheer up, mister. The world is full of dames."

"Yes," Malloy said. He closed the door carefully.

Malloy went to the telephone and called Judy Blair's number. When she answered, her voice sounded sleepy.

He said: "Judy, Eileen killed Tod. The police have just left."

There was silence on the wire, and then she said: "Lew, I'm sorry. Do you feel like telling me about it?"

"When?"

"Tonight. Now. I'll put some coffee on."

"Ten minutes," Malloy said. He hung up and began to get dressed.

— 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!

DAMES LIKE KILLING TOO



Her right hand swung up, and the little gun was pointed at him.

By SHANE
DARCY

THE DUCHESS hastily snuffed out her cigar. She placed it on the packing case, grabbed up her purse, and walked to the doorway. She could hear quick steps outside on the wharf, coming up from the river, heading this way. It was too soon for Paul Mitchell to show, and nobody else should be here.

It wasn't exactly a smile that lighted up the Duchess' face as she patted the tiny gun within her purse. The Duchess

Staking her freedom dash on a plugged cruiser and a gutless heel, the daring Duchess tried to escape the shackles of the dope-jived waterfront.

would be the first to tell you that she didn't like killing. But, of course, in her husband's case it was different.

She pulled the door sharply open. The hot night air hit her squarely in the face. Nobody was about. Nobody at all. Those footsteps had been just a wish, imagination.

Hurling the doorway shut behind her, the Duchess hooked up the rusty catch, and let her long spike-heeled legs take her back to the packing case.

It seemed to the Duchess that she had been here for hours. She had done everything she had to, and now it was just waiting in the stifling heat in this miserable worn-out warehouse of rotting boards; waiting for the final workings of her plan that would take her out of the world of petty swindles and back-alley muggings into the kind of world she deserved.

She jerked her head sharply. Was that another sound at the door? But it just couldn't be; it was too early for Paul to come. The Duchess circled the doorway this time, a slight frown ruffling the smooth contours of her high forehead. She walked lightly to the one window and looked out from a corner of it—looked out past more desolate warehouses to the boarded-up pier which jutted out like a dead man's crutch, beyond the range of her vision, into the dirty river; and back to the empty, littered alley. Nobody there. Of course. That's why she had told Paul Mitchell to meet her here.

Returning to the crates, her rhythmic heels hardly raised any dust. Carefully the Duchess put down her heavy purse on the packing case and took hold tightly of its splintery sides. Her enormous dark eyes staring fixedly straight ahead, she clutched the case desperately and, standing there like that, gave in to a spasm of shaking.

When it was all over, she began to whimper: "Paul, Paul, please come. Come right now. Paul, I need you." More than that night she had met him, more than ever before, she, the Duchess, now needed Paul Mitchell.

* * *

Quickly, eagerly, she started remember-

ing that wonderful night she had first met Paul Mitchell. That first night, she had been sitting at the bar, near the door, with Pat and Chess, a newcomer to the city, while her placid-livered husband played cards down the other end of the bar with some clientele of his. It was a favorite sport of Duke's, playing black-jack with some desperate dope addict before he completed a sale.

Pat and Chess were sitting on either side of the Duchess, guzzling beer and watching a televised wrestling match. She was idling over a pony of café au cocoa and musing about nothing at all . . . when the door's growling open made her turn around. Then her heart had given a little jump. A slight, but lithe blond youth, almost girlish in his whiteness of cheek and hair and long fingers, had ambled casually inward, heading for a dusky table beyond the chrome partition. She had noticed immediately those sensitive long fingers and had sensed a kinship with the boy, a common distaste for the gross.

The Duchess decisively wheeled her stool half around and slid off it. Chess and Pat turned from the mat heavens to watch her—the bared, well-rounded shoulders erect and the French heels rhythmically clicking. Chess, his fascinated eyes following her, exclaimed:

"Where's she think she's going? What'll Duke say?"

"Aw, he's busy, Chess. Why're you lookin' fer trouble?"

"But she spilled her drink—that slop she drinks," Chess amended, his hypnotized eyes never straying from her back, his fingers clenching tightly together.

"Aw, Maguy keeps a coupla bottles handy fer her, don't bother worrying so. Hey! Didja see that? The Groan almost pulled his head off breaking out of Melly's half-Nelson!"

"What did you say?" Chess asked mechanically. The spell broken when the Duchess disappeared around the chrome partition, Chess untied his white-knuckled fists and his eyes reluctantly sought the television screen again.

Meanwhile, the Duchess walked discreetly to the stranger's table and accepted his hesitant invitation to sit down.

She and the pale Paul Mitchell had

talked exuberantly, extravagantly, about their shared wild dreams of traveling aboard ocean liners, with the spray misting their rapt faces; the South Seas; the magical Caribbean—while her fat husband had conducted his business on the bar side of the chrome partition. . . .

* * *

With a shrug, the Duchess brought herself out of her memories—and back to the warehouse. The slight, stirring sound outside was a breeze rattling the rotting planks—if a breeze actually existed in this heat-foundered city. Ignoring the nerve-racking sound, she walked to the window again, studied the gaunt, ramshackle warehouses. *At least, she told herself, Paul is different. He is sensitive, not like blubbery Duke.*

Walking back to the improvised seat among the discarded crates, she took up again the smouldering cigar. There was nothing to worry about now. Soon Paul Mitchell would come—while two men drowned. She puffed vigorously on the cigar. The arrangements had been so simple. She had sent Paul a message to meet her here. Paul didn't know about her other plans. There was no need to excite and, her fine mouth curled, frighten him. He would accept the accomplished facts much more easily—especially when he saw the money she had stacked away in her purse. Money Duke would never miss—now.

No, there was no need to worry about Paul, the poet-rescuer of the flamboyant Duchess of the wharves. Pale Sir Lancelot to the spouse of the dope king. Troubadour to the wife of the beefy, heavy-jowled, insensitive ruler of the dope transactions.

A chime sounded, wafted from somewhere beyond the piers, somewhere back among the houses and homes of ordinary people, the theatres and stores and churches and playrooms of common everyday people. The Duchess inhaled and blew some smoke rings. In an hour, Paul Mitchell would be here, and she would escape from the world of gunsels—and from the river.

The river. Beyond the river was the ocean . . . and that's where Chess must

be now. She had fixed the cabin cruiser so that it wouldn't start sinking for quite awhile, until Chess and his dead passenger were out to sea. She wondered what Chess would think when he finally saw that the boat had sprung a leak. He'd find out he couldn't laugh this joke off. It was the last laugh, and the joke would be on him. Still, the Duchess hoped that Chess wouldn't realize that she had double-crossed him.

Anyhow, it would be too late then for Chess to do anything about it. He would be with the sharks and a dead man for dying company—Duke, the husband that Chess had promised to murder for her.

She gritted her teeth. *I hope the sharks are hungry!* She had hated Chess from the time—No. She admitted it now—she had both hated and feared him. Chess was worse than her fat slob of a dull-witted husband, because she was always terrified that Chess would find out about her, that he'd see through her scheming and planning and playing roles with everybody.

A board creaked somewhere, and she shuddered. She had thought of stealing Duke's money and running away with Paul Mitchell. But to get away with the money he had to kill Duke. He wouldn't care about her leaving—but his miserly soul would send him hotfooting after any dough she took. So then she had considered how to kill Duke the easiest way—and oily, smitten Chess had sprung into place in the plan.

She had tricked Chess into doing her dirty work by promising him a share of her fat husband's money. Chess had said that he had no love for the big pig anyway. So he'd undertaken the job as a business proposition. She spat. Well, Chess had proven easy to convince. Obviously he hadn't guessed, seen through her. Well, he wouldn't be able to walk back over the ocean waves to collect.

A board creaked somewhere, and she shuddered. "It's creepy here," she finally admitted to herself. For the first time, she noticed the sweat running down from her armpits, chilling her hands. She scooped a tissue out of her purse and wiped her arms, dropped the sodden paper on the floor.

Suddenly, from beyond the bolted door-

way came a loud pounding. She winced in surprise, sat there looking like a harried statue. "He's here. Paul's come," she whispered to herself.

The rap on the door sounded sharper, more urgent.

STRIGHTWAY she rose, marched quickly to the door. Releasing the chains that barred the heavily paneled doorway, she pulled the door back slowly, as if she were unscrewing it from its rusty crevice. She peered out through the narrow opening.

"Duchess," the man clinging there panted.

"Ch—Chess!"

"Duchess, let me in," the man gasped.

"Of course." She hesitated, however, the small frown creasing her fair white forehead again, while she held onto the door tightly, and looked out at Chess.

"I'm half-dead with exhaustion, Duchess," the man pleaded. He pulled at the door handle, hardly twisting it.

The Duchess watched him carefully, then solicitously said, "Here, honey, let me help you." She opened the door wide, waited until he staggered through and turned around to put the bolts back on the door.

Chess meanwhile stumbled a few steps, inching his way across the crate-filled interior, drawing long squeaky breaths. He gave up the struggle to go further and fell heavily to the floor, lying where he fell without the will to try and alter his position.

Finished bolting the door, the Duchess turned her back to it. Her hands still clinging to the handle behind her, she

studied the tall Chess as he lay, face downward on the floor. Her own face growing white around the lips, she saw that his large curly head was soaked.

Chess had no hat and his jacket was missing, his blue cotton shirt torn on one shoulder and dripping and his shiny black pants had a wet green overcast. He lay there on the floor, slack narrow shoulders heaving, tremendous gasps for breath causing his back to rise and fall in unsteady, tremulous movements.

What happened? she almost screamed, standing there waiting for the prone man with the damp curls to catch his breath. She started pacing around him. Obviously he hadn't done the job. He couldn't have—and come back. But why did he look like an almost-drowned rat? *What happened?*

The Duchess felt her lips peel apart, her throat begin another scream, and she tore at her face with her hands, grimacing weirdly to choke back the cry.

Something had gone wrong, but she must not break until she found out just what had happened. She grasped the edge of a packing case, pried her fingers into it, waiting until Chess' breathing subsided to normal.

After awhile he raised himself on his elbows, favoring his hurt right shoulder and turned about, looking at the murky darkness surrounding them, his eyes finally focusing on the Duchess. He asked hoarsely: "A flask. Have you got a flask?"

"I'm off of all that, I told you," she said impatiently.

He murmured: "It'd make me feel sad, drinking the rye would. But it'd be better



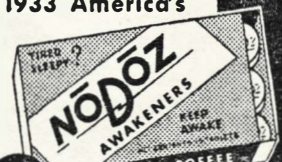
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than feeling low as I am—and you're not being any help, Duchess."

She could not tell whether he was speaking in real sorrow or mocking her, and she snapped: "Mrs. Duke."

"Ah, yes," he said, waving his hand dramatically. "The Duchess has abdicated. Long live Mrs. Duke."

She bit her tongue. Taking a deep breath, she urged gently: "Tell me what happened, Chess, darling. Please."

"Of course, of course," he drawled. "I'll tell you—the whole story." He crawled onto his knees gingerly and, gaining confidence, rose onto rubbery legs. He stood there, trembling a moment, and then staggered to a packing case. Dropping again to the floor, this time in a sitting position, he rested his back comfortably against the wooden box, shifting the holster to his unhurt left shoulder, stretched out his straggly thin legs and sighed deeply. A dark stain remained near the door to outline where he had fallen.

He gazed blandly at the Duchess, a cosy grin growing along the corners of his round mouth.

Her lips were cracked. She licked them with her tongue before she spoke. "Well," she said softly, "did you do it?"

"Ah, yes," Chess said. "Business, Duchess, always the girl for tending to business first."

SHE looked at him with distaste, greater distaste each time she saw him. Queerly she noted that he reminded her of her husband. No wonder she was repelled by both of them.

"Chess," she said, leaning forward intimately, "we had plans—for us. Is everything okay? Can we carry them out?"

"Sure." He grinned slyly. "Let's start right now."

She drew back quickly, saying ruefully, "You've recuperated fast—from whatever it was."

"I have good stamina."

She pleaded, "Darling, Chess, what I meant is—well, for Pete's sake, you haven't told me anything yet? Haven't you heard of a woman's curiosity? How long do I have to wait to learn what happened?"

His voice was a sneer: "You care

more about what happened than how I feel. I didn't hear you moaning over me when I fell through the doorway."

Tautly she drew another cigar from her purse, snapped the seal, stuck it in her mouth. She stepped away from Chess, lighting the stoogie; then leaned against a convenient packing case, inhaling rapidly, heavily.

"You see, honey," Chess continued. "I had a danged hard time getting back here." He rubbed his wrenched shoulder. "In fact, I almost didn't make it." His eyes seemed to be boring a hole through her face, as he said, deliberately, "Put out that blasted cigar."

As if it had suddenly turned into a live coal and burnt her, she threw the cigar down.

Anxiously she said, "Chess, if something went wrong, if you fumbled the job and *he* knows—we'll have to get out of town fast. Why—" she stumbled for words—"he'll kill us both—as easy as snapping his fingers at a fly."

His voice was like a dash of ice water. "We got all the time in the world."

The Duchess plunged her hands impatiently into her sides, realized belatedly that she had no pockets, let her hands droop restlessly. "You're impossible," she said. "I don't know what happened to you, but you're stranger than ever before. Just because you killed a man—if you *did* kill him," she insinuated pointedly, letting her words hang there.

He looked at her steadily, said slowly: "Yes, I killed a man—for you."

"My husband," she breathed in a long, relieved sigh. "No more the greasy sweat of him. I won't have to pretend anymore." Both her hands stretched downward into hard, little fists. Then she screamed at Chess: "Why'd you make me wait till I'd almost popped out of my skin? Why didn't you tell me right away that it was done, finished with?"

"Calm down, Duchess. You're disturbing the rats. And I'm wanting some pretty good explanations."

The color drained from her face. She clasped her hands tightly together. "No, no," she whispered. "Tell me about it, how you followed out the plan."

"Why not, Duchess? I'll fill in all the little questions that are bothering your

murdering brain. . . . I spotted him entering a saloon, waited nearby in my car. Luckily, he left alone and was already sailing three sheets to the wind. I picked him up when the coast was clear, talked him into a boat ride. By the time we got to the pier, he was beginning to change his mind, so I fed him more rye and conked him over the head."

"Yes, what happened then?" She was wrapped up in what he was saying, impervious to any danger signals flashing through her head.

"Luck was with me. Isn't it always, Duchess? So I lugged him to the pier and dumped him into the boat we prepared. That's when I twisted my shoulder—luckily I had the rod wrapped in oil-skin."

SUDDENLY she didn't want Chess to say any more. A draft of cold air swung her around. She started trembling. It was only the wind rising, heralding the storm that would drench the city and wash it clean of the oppressive heat. But now it fogged her.

Chess said, "It's barking, all right. Time this damn heat lifted." He seemed to have forgotten about the matter of the leaking boat. His manner had lightened as the weather darkened, almost as if he were playing a game of cat and mouse with her.

Now he flicked a spot of mud off his drying shirt, looked at her hard. "Why'd you want the big guy knocked off? He's not a bad-looking guy. Some women like them that way. And he gave you plenty of dough. You always looked like royalty, Duchess."

"You're new in this section," she flashed. "How'd you learn all that?"

"Oh, it gets around. People said he'd forgive you anything but the harming of his own flesh and blood."

"You killed him because you wanted to slice into some easy money, didn't you?" she snapped. "Then why pull the moral act on me?"

"Just curious, that's all. Wanted to know how Jim—how the guy bothered you."

"Bothered me," she repeated. "His filthy paws. To have to pretend—" She broke off, looking at him sharply. "Is it

money?" she said. "Do you want more money?" Her eyes widened in sudden fear. "I'll give you all you want. And Chess, darling, we—"

He grabbed her wrist. "You high-n-mighty, four-flushing phony. Don't pull that stuff on me." The pressure of his hand on hers was like a ring of metal, tightening, closing off the blood circulating in her fingers.

She didn't move, even when he relaxed his hold. He was looking down at her pale hand still clutched in his palm as if he had forgotten why it was there. When he released it, she silently chafed it.

Bluntly, he said: "I know about the double-cross you tried to pull, Duchess. All of it."

No, not about Paul Mitchell, not about the leaks in the boat, she prayed silently, watching him, following his lips as if they were magnetic.

"That splinter-sized blond pet of yours, I know all about him. I watched when you hit the high spots with him, when you thought I wasn't around. But Duchess, when we became friendlier, I began to think that you'd wise up and ditch that little gag of yours."

"Paul Mitchell a gag of mine? You poor stupid fool," she blazed. "He's the only man I ever knew who's sensitive." Rich, yolky tears welled within her, clouding her eyes. "Men, men," she ranted. "They're like puppets. You can twist them any way you want to. But, by heaven, I won't live in this hell-damned, animal-like—"

"Duchess." His mild voice stopped her cold. "Don't you want to hear the rest?"

"The rest?" she repeated wonderingly.

"Sure, Duchess. The rest of my trip into the big ocean."

Suddenly she remembered herself. "Of course, darling," she said, feeling the purse in her hand.

"When we were pretty far out," Chess resumed, "I conked him on the head again and tossed him overboard. Simple."

She nodded her head on rigid neck muscles.

"No," he contradicted softly. "Not so simple. You see, Duchess, in order to go away together as we'd planned, I had to get back. But I found it very hard getting back." He was choosing his words

very carefully now, explaining as if to a child, trying to make the situation clear and simple for her to understand. "No, Duchess, I had much too much trouble getting back. If I wasn't such a wise guy, I wouldn't have made it. Because, you see, the boat was sinking. Just like that," his voice snarled out at her, "the boat was sinking."

She jumped backwards from the sound of his voice, unable to make words come out of her parched lips.

CHESSE rested against a packing crate, his voice reaching out and lashing her. "Why'n't you ask how I made it, the question of a good double-crossing wife to her murdering pawn?"

Her right hand dipped behind her, clutching the case she leaned on for support.

"Honey, I made it all right. I plugged up the leak and kept the boat on course and plugged up the next leak—I worked like two galley slaves, hoping I wouldn't have to swim the rest of the way, praying the sharks had been satisfied with the other guy."

The Duchess had backed up so straight and rigid against the case that she seemed a waxen figure sculptured there.

"Honey, everybody knows Chess the Chiseler got curiosity—like some people got religion. Shall we go out and see the boat?"

"No, Chess, no," she screamed, her hand frantically pulling the purse open.

A smirk parted his round lips. He was walking up close to her. "What's a matter, Duchess? Scared?"

Her right hand swung up, and the little silver-plated gun was pointed at him.

He wiped the smirk off his face in nothing flat, awkwardly reaching for his holster on the wrong shoulder. "I should have known you'd pack a rod, you cheating, double-crossing—"

She triggered the little gun, emptied the clip into him.

He clutched his chest. "You fool," he panted. "You still lose." He wrenched the words from himself and slumped gracelessly to the floor, his long body sprawled out like a drunk who'd lost his last legs, his unused gun falling heavily beside him.

Her eyes retreated from the body of Chess, by which a red splotch was forming a pool. She dropped the gun back into her purse, pulled out a cigar. Tearing open the wrapper, she lighted it with concentration. Her eyes wandered back to the body.

"You're the fool," she whispered. "Paul'll be here any minute, and you might just as well have drowned out in the filthy ocean with my filthy husband for all your trouble." She turned sharply away, strode to the window, looking out beyond the littered alley, beyond the desolate, skeleton-like buildings. This was the haven of men walking constantly through the night, and always coming back here, never landing anywhere—but she was going away.

The words were wrenched from her throat: *How'd Chess know where to find me?* She rubbed her fingers nervously. It didn't matter, Paul would be here.

The wind outside halted, in mid-air, waiting. The storm would come any minute. Rain would wash down from the eaves, dripping through the rotting planks, whipping into the warehouse where the Duchess stood, waiting for blond Paul Mitchell to come and fetch her to an unsullied world.

She walked to the door, turning her back on the body there in the encroaching darkness, straining for a sound of walking feet. If Paul didn't show in five minutes, she would leave without him. She unhinged the catch, debated whether she should wait outside, decided it was smarter to wait within the shelter of the warehouse walls.

She jumped.

The sharp knock on the door curbed a spasm of shivering. A glad smile blooming on her lips, she flew to the door, opened it. All she could see was a tall dark figure. She pulled the door further back. Her smile coagulated on her lips. As from far away, she began to whimper.

Her husband pushed her inside, followed. He looked at her coldly. "You expected Paul Mitchell." It was a statement.

She was numb, uncomprehending.

"When Mitchell got your loving message, he tried to leave town—alone."

(Please continue on page 98)

THRILL

**DIME
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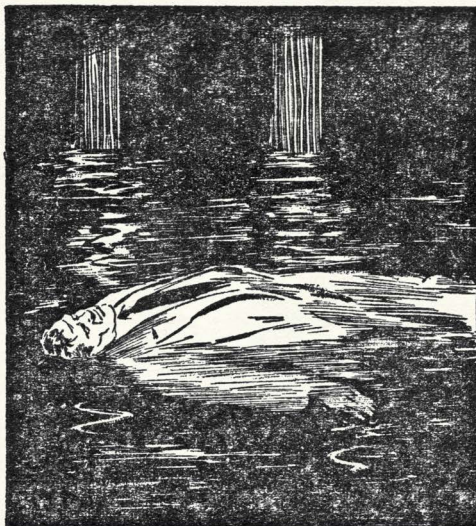
DOCKET



No figure was more famous than Ardelle's, and Thackeray Hackett and Preston of Headliner Files liked seeing her strut her stuff. But they were shocked to hear that Ardelle was frightened for her lovely life.



Sure enough, there was a plug-ugly who tailed them when they left the nightclub. Hackett suddenly about-faced, surprising him. Then he slashed Square Face's gun down with his deadly cane . . . but let the gungsel escape.



That turned out to be just dandy—for Detective Lieutenant Blackley. He gloatingly told Preston that Square Face had been found floating by the Brooklyn Bridge—and Hackett was wanted for killing the *policeman*.



Disguised, Hackett sat at Preston's ringside table—to watch the feuding strippers solve the crime. . . . The complete story will be told in Frederick C. Davis' novel—"The Merry Queen of Murder"—in the April issue . . . published March 4th.



SLAUGHTER



● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Shamus Larkin was going to get paid off in kisses by that muscle-mad . . . and blackmailed blonde—or wind up in a funeral parlor.

● ● ●

**Thrill-Packed Crime-
Adventure Novelette**

●

**By FENTON W.
EARNSHAW**

CHAPTER ONE

Sweetheart of Shanghaied-La

I WAS sitting in the Blue Bar at Balboa, California, inhaling beer and waiting for six p. m. when a red-haired character with fullback shoulders dropped onto the stool beside me. He was wearing glasses which, I knew from experience, he would whip off like a flash if the occasion demanded.

"Well, well," he said, "if it isn't Easy-Out Incorporated, Happy Larkin, prop."

"Podge!" I said, "Law at Balboa Beach. We get our man on land or sea."

Podge grinned and I was glad to see him, even though he is chief of police of this charming little beach town and occasionally I am not appreciated by police.

"Don't tell me that the lure of the sea brings Happy Larkin to Balboa. Do I have to stay near a telephone tonight?"

I shook my head and bought him a coke. Then I said soberly, "No, Chief, I

She backed away, her gun describing an arc between us. . . .

IN A SARONG

am strictly here for relaxing and—”

“I stay near a telephone,” Podge groaned. “Why don’t you go home?”

“Well, I’ll tell you, Podge. I am here by invitation. I am dining with a celebrity in your fair city—one Miss Sally Ellen Dunning. Strictly social.”

“Nuts,” Podge said. “She’s still rushing a lifeguard from Laguna Beach.”

I shrugged defeat. “Well, maybe it is business. Be kind, Podge. I don’t know the girl. What gives?”

“You’re a disarming adventurer, Happy,” he said first. “If you were only legitimate you’d make a great salesman. And if you were really crooked you’d be top book on every bunco squad in the state.”

“Flattery will get you nowhere,” I said.

He sighed. “I’ll give you what you could pick up in the gossip columns, that’s all. Sally Dunning is a screwball rich girl. Houses in Honolulu, Pasadena and Miami.”

“And Balboa,” I suggested.

He nodded. “She just owns an island here. Calls it Shanghaied-La.”

I grinned.

“The little girl likes anything with muscles and their own white teeth.” He climbed off the stool.

I chucked down my beer and hurried after him. He was climbing into a police car.

“Hey, what about the lifeguard?” I yelled.

Podge shrugged. “He must be losing his tan.” He stepped on the starter and leaned from the window. “I wouldn’t give even you more than seven days.”

And with that background, I went calling on Miss Sally Ellen Dunning.

LITTLE ISLAND sat in the north end of Balboa Bay and was reached by a foot bridge from Balboa Island. I parked my coupe and hiked across the wooden planking. A sharp salty wind swept across the bay.

I came up against a fenced gate and pushed the doorbell. Beyond the gate, thanks to the eucalyptus trees, I couldn’t see anything. I was just beginning to wonder whether the place was deserted when a woman’s voice sounded out of nowhere. I jumped two feet.

“Who is it, please?”

Then I saw a loudspeaker box atop the post. Lacking any tangible method of replying, I just stood there. The box crackled again.

“Who is it? Speak up!”

So I spoke up, addressing the wind and glad no one could see me talking to a wire fence.

“I’m Happy Larkin. I have an appointment with Sally Dunning.”

“Oh, yes. Come right up to the house,” the voice said.

There was an electric buzzing and the gate yawned open. I went through it and up a gravel walk. The gate slammed behind me. The path made two or three turns through the trees, and there was the house.

It was a pretty impressive proposition. Two stories in a perfect circle with palm leaf siding which gave it a South Seas look. I approached a lighted entrance way and punched another bell.

I was in the mood for something slinky in a sarong and felt certain there’d be the smell of strong rum and the sound of steel guitars.

Instead, I smelled expensive perfume and someone was playing the piano. The girl was far from slinky. She was a neat mouse in a plain gray suit wearing glasses.

“Mr. Larkin?” she said. Her voice wasn’t bad but timid. “Come right in.”

I followed her through a hallway into a second room. It was a small room that could easily have held two hundred people. But the furniture was arranged in clever groupings so that you didn’t notice it was a barn.

At the far end was an arc of low windows which overlooked the bay. In the very center of the room was a fire burning in an oval hearth. There was no chimney, but over the fire a copper apron was suspended from the ceiling by a copper pipe. The smoke was going up this.

“If you’ll just have a chair, I’ll tell Miss Dunning you’re here,” the mouse in gray said.

I thanked her and ambled in the direction of the open fire. Beyond, was a grand piano. A man sat at it. From the appraising glance he gave me, I gathered I was as welcome as a seagull in a guppy sanctuary.

“Hello,” I said, making a small test smile.

His reply was a cross between sniff and sneer, and he started playing again. I moved on slowly toward him. He wasn't a lifeguard, but he was dark and handsome in a Latin sort of way. I lit a cigarette and smoked half of it before I heard footsteps and a voice sort of exploded behind me.

"Oh, Mr. Larkin!"

I swung around and there she was. I dropped the ashes from my cigarette and then I dropped my cigarette. I couldn't help it.

Sally Ellen Dunning could have my whistle any time. This luscious hunk of woman was decked in the whitest, filmiest bit of robe I've ever seen. She paused at the bottom of a spiral staircase across the room, and some trick light put sparks in an upsweep of golden hair. I saw a flash of red full lips in a beautiful face. Then, as she rushed toward me, my eyes bought a commuter's ticket and started traveling.

She came right up to me in a cloud of musky perfume and held out a graceful hand which I took all right. Her eyes were deep and dark and plain old wicked.

"It was so good of you to come!" she said, and she grabbed my arm and wheeled me toward a sofa. I could feel her fingers playing around my biceps. "Mmmm!" she added.

The lad behind the piano had risen and Miss Dunning noticed him.

"That's Jose Romero," she said. "He's a piano player. Play something, Jose. Something loud. Mr. Larkin and I are going to talk."

We sat down and she cuddled up in a ball close to me. I kept telling myself to be steady.

"I don't suppose you want to talk business right away," she said easily. "Or do you?"

I lit another cigarette. "Your letter didn't tell me anything. Perhaps I can't help you."

SHE looked at me thoughtfully and then wrinkled her nose. "I *know* you're going to be a big help!" She took the cigarette out of my lips and dragged on it. Then she blew a tiny thread of smoke in my direction. Suddenly her face clouded. She glanced once at Jose who was making small thunder on the grand and then said:

"Mr. Larkin, the reason I called you is that my life is in danger! I may not look it, but I'm terrified inside. All this—" she gestured—"is just a front. I'm frightened, terribly frightened. And you've got to help me!"

Like a flash I was good old Happy Larkin of Easy-Out Incorporated. This kind of trouble is my meat. And when the client is a girl like Sally Dunning, the mother in me comes out.

"That," I said with a touch of Gibraltar, "is something I can handle."

Whereupon there was the muffled blast of a gun which started me grabbing for my armpit holster and put Sally Dunning around my neck. I came off the sofa with her still hanging on. Jose had stopped playing and was staring along with us in the direction of the spiral staircase.

"Martha! It's Martha!" Sally screamed, and she broke from me and ran toward the stairway.

I started after her but she whirled half way up the steps.

"Wait!" she cried. "I'll go alone."

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She started running up again. I couldn't see any point in sticking out my chin until I got either an invitation or a contract. Instead I turned back to Jose.

"What the hell gives?" I said. "What about Martha?"

Jose looked like he was understudying for a zombie part. "Martha is Miss Dunning's secretary. A moody girl. She often talks of suicide. I think."

"You think?" I exploded. Things were beginning to take on the general appearance of a one-night stand in a squirrel cage. "Look, Jose, do you mean to tell me that—"

I stopped short because I heard Sally Dunning behind me. She came down the stairway slowly, catching her breath and trying to smile.

"It's all right," she called weakly. "Martha was just—just cleaning a gun. Jose, play something! Mr. Larkin and I were talking."

Then she was back, totally disturbing, as though she'd just stepped out to powder her nose. She hooked my arm again and steered me across to an opposite wall. She touched a piece of moulding and the wall went *phht* like a stage curtain. Colored lights glinted behind a hidden bar. Miss Dunning swung out two lush stools that were recessed in front.

"You make some fantastic drink, Mr. Larkin," she said exuberantly. "And get a beer for Jose. If I give him cocktails he starts playing Chopin. And—how I hate Chopin!"

I slid under the bar gate willingly. I needed a drink. A big stiff drink. . . .

It wasn't an easy job to separate the chaff from the grain of Sally Dunning's story. The Stingers I mixed from 20 year-old brandy helped the flow of information but the deluge came too fast. Boiled down, it ran something like this:

She was twenty-eight years of age, alone in this great big world except for a seven-figure fortune left by her father who had done things in South American oil and greater things at the better clubs with a deck of cards and hundred-dollar chips. Sally had been loosely educated in the best finishing schools, night clubs and convertible coupes. She'd been engaged eleven times, which was twice more than she'd been psychoanalyzed. Every day was a

bright, mad challenge to Sally Dunning; every night a New Year's Eve.

How she'd stood it, I don't know. But she had. She was beautiful and the make-up didn't make her so. She had a lightning swift mind and the facility of an actress to use it.

We were in a half-moon couch on the perimeter of the fascinating fireplace. She was relaxed, and I had gotten used to her dangerous proximity. Jose was playing mood music.

"And that brings us to the present, Miss Dunning," I said.

"You may call me Sally," she answered, walking her fingers along my arm.

"Now, the matter of our business," I said. "You think your life is in danger. Why?"

"I don't know where to start."

"Threats?"

Her eyes narrowed. "Yes," she said softly. "Yes, threats. But it isn't as simple as that."

"How many and in what form and when?"

"Oh, ever so many. Since last summer, he's written and phoned and—"

"You mean you know who it is?"

"Of course. He knows I can't do anything about it legitimately."

I caught on. "So it's blackmail. All right, Sally, what's he got on you?"

She looked away, not speaking.

"I'm not a child, Sally," I pursued quietly. "So it's unpleasant and you don't like to talk about it."

She looked up at me then and there were clouds in her pretty eyes.

"Tell big brother Happy," I said gently. It was like throwing dry ice in the clouds. She started crying.

"Oh, Happy!" she sobbed. "I've been such a fool! I've never had anyone to—to talk to!"

I let her cry it out and then gave her my handkerchief.

"We'll fix it, Sally," I said finally. "Now, who is the guy and exactly what is the evidence he's using?"

"I met him two years ago. His wife was in the East then. I fell hard for him. Oh, I knew it was a bad deal from the start, Happy! But he was charming, persuasive! At first it was harmless, just a summer romance. But then—" She

stopped talking, looking at me anxiously.

"Okay," I said helpfully. "Where?"

"On his yacht six months ago. We were drinking."

"Witnesses? Pictures?"

She nodded. "I didn't know about that until later."

"How much money have you given him?"

"Fifty or sixty. I'm not sure."

"You mean less than a hundred dollars?"

She gave a tiny, almost hysterical laugh. "Fifty or sixty *thousand* dollars! In the last six months."

I grabbed a deep breath. "All right. Now one tiny detail—the guys' name and address."

CHAPTER TWO

Out Like a Light

SALLY DUNNING was staring past me and I looked around to find that Jose had walked up on us. From this angle he didn't look so feeble, but he still wasn't a lifeguard. He looked intently from me to Sally. She met his gaze solidly for a moment and then dropped her eyes. I felt uneasy, but it was her party and she could move the help around as she wished.

"The man is Chapman Crane, Jr.," she said evenly. I wondered if I'd heard her right.

"You mean Playboy Crane?" I said incredulously. "Airplanes, horses and speedboats?"

Jose spoke his first words. "Sally," he said grimly, "for the last time—I tell you this is the wrong way to handle Crane."

Sally bristled. "I gave you your chance, Jose!" she cried. "I'm going to handle this *my* way now. Go play the piano!"

Jose hesitated. "I'll write you," he said finally, turning away. "Care of the Missing Persons Bureau."

"Jose!"

He stopped and looked back at her deliberately. "You handle it your way and you'll be running tomorrow night. There's one way out, Sally. You've got enough money and the For Rent signs are up in Rio de Janeiro. Crane can't touch you there. That's the safe way!"

"That's your way!" she flamed. "And I'm sick and tired of your way! If I'd

listened to you, I'd be warming baby bottles with one hand and passing out pension checks to your family with the other! I've come to loathe you, Jose! Why don't you get out?"

He just stood smiling at her. "Don't worry," he said, settling himself at the piano. "I'm getting out. First thing in the morning."

Sally Dunning arose from the couch and screamed at him. "Coward!"

"That's right. I'm scared. I value my head. You're on your own!"

Sally picked up a brass poker and sent it sailing across the room. Jose ducked easily and the window shattered behind him.

"Look," I said calmly, rising and touching her arm. "I'm new around here. I'm reasonably bright and I like good clean fun. But don't you think—"

She swung around, anger melting from her face.

"Oh, Happy," she cried, "I'm sorry! I just—" She glanced meaningly at Jose.

"That's your problem. Chapman Crane is my baby and I'm still confused. I figured Crane had enough dough to keep him nicely."

"He has. But this is how he gets it!" She came up close. "Don't you see, Happy. I'm not the only one. Blackmail is his business—a million-dollar business!"

"Okay, okay," I said. "I'll go to work. Twenty-five bucks a day plus expenses. One thousand if I remove Crane from your hair permanently. A deal?"

She nodded eagerly. "What are you going to do first?"

I shrugged. "Snoop a little. Talk maybe. Talk nice to begin with and then later not so nice. Depends. Where am I apt to meet Crane?"

Sally looked at me as though I'd made a funny. "Why, you'll meet him tonight. We're having dinner with him."

While I was letting this information grind through my skull and closing my mouth, she began a smooth flight toward the stairs.

"I've got to change," she called back hurriedly. "Then I must go pick up Tommy Lane. Make more drinks, Happy. Jose, get the boat warmed up. Oh, Lord, I don't know where the time goes!"

Then she was up and away leaving me

with the feeling I'd walked in on the middle of an Egyptian mystery. I poured a straight brandy and drank it, and walked over to the piano.

"Jose, we were never introduced," I said, "and I don't feel that you particularly care for me. But since I'm working for Miss Dunning and since you're leaving in the morning, maybe we can be friends till sun-up."

He didn't say anything.

"You don't like the idea of fighting Crane, is that it?"

Jose nodded.

"You think Miss Dunning should retire? And maybe you're in love with Miss Dunning?"

His eyes flashed. "Naturally," he said. As it turned out, that was the last real conversation I ever had with that piano player.

I was mixing another Stinger when Sally came down. She was wearing an evening gown that was jade green in color, backless and cut so low in front it was a shame to have wasted the material at all.

She stopped at my side but was looking beyond with angry eyes at the piano. Jose got up and started for the door between the low windows.

"I know," he called. "The boat'll be warmed up."

Sally smiled at me. She reached up and took hold of my coat lapels gently. "You know, Happy, I feel so much better now that you're here. How lucky I was to see your cute little ad in the paper!"

I grinned agreeably. "I'm glad you're better."

"I feel so good that I'm going to give you a little bonus," she said, and she tugged and I bent.

Who said a man's arms hang naturally at his sides?

When we broke I was ready for air and I think Sally was satisfied.

"Oh, mix dozens of cocktails, Happy! You and I'll drink them." She paused with a tiny afterthought. "You and I and Tommy."

"Don't forget Jose," I added dryly. "Okay, Sally, I'll mix cocktails."

She started in a run for the door out onto the lanai which Jose had left open. "Happy," she called from the threshold. "I asked Martha to come down and talk

to you. Martha Hervey. She's my secretary, companion and all that sort of thing. Please be nice to her, Happy. She's a good girl, but terribly sad." She waved at me. "And frightened just like me."

The door slammed and I headed back for the bar.

Outside there was the throaty roar of a small boat's engines. When it faded I was conscious of the quiet of the house. That is, momentarily. Then I heard a radio somewhere upstairs. The volume swelled and the music of a dance band wafted down the spirial staircase.

I pulled some ice cubes from the bar box and dropped them in a crushing machine. There was a zany quality to this night, but that was to be expected with a client like Sally Dunning. It was the feeling of something a little more dangerous that worried me. I couldn't put my finger on it. It was a question of adding up the few figures I had and seeing that the ultimate sum just didn't make sense. I needed conversation with someone with their feet on the ground for a change.

THE appearance of Martha Hervey as I was scooping up the last of the crushed ice didn't promise a steady atmosphere. She came down the stairs and into the room, her own sober, quiet self, a top coat over her arm.

"I'm Martha Hervey," she said, walking directly over to me. "Miss Dunning says that you're going to work for her."

"That's right," I said. "And I hope you'll help me. Drink?"

She took a glass of wine. While I was fiddling with the bottles I was watching her and she was watching me. Finally I laughed.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"I was just thinking. We're like a couple of psychologists traveling incognito and trying to analyze each other."

She hesitated a moment and then she laughed also. "Yes," she said. "I guess you're right."

We walked to the couch by the fire.

"Tell me, Miss Hervey," I said. "Do you know why Miss Dunning hired me?"

"Yes. Your job is to do something about Chapman Crane. I'm glad."

"You've been with Miss Dunning a long time?"

"A very long time. Perhaps too long."

"You're not happy then?"

"I'm worried, Mr. Larkin," she said carefully. "And frightened and confused."

"That's quite a load for one person. Maybe I can help."

Martha Hervey stared at me. Finally she shook her head.

"The confusion and worry I can understand," I went on. "Being secretary to Sally must be like permanent counselor in a psycho ward. But fright—that's something else. What are you scared of?"

She made a little gesture. "Of everything. I'm afraid for Sally and for myself. I've seen this coming for a long time."

"But what specifically are you afraid of?" I asked impatiently. "Chapman Crane? Are you afraid of him?"

"Yes," she replied quickly. "He'll stop at nothing now. He knows Sally means to fight him."

"But a blackmailer doesn't go for violence," I protested. "Crane's game has got to be threats. He wouldn't physically attack Sally."

"He would if he thought she was ready to expose him."

"Perhaps," I agreed. "But she isn't. She's hired me. Besides, why should that frighten you?"

Martha Hervey stood up, a tight almost tragic smile on her unrouged lips. "Because Mr. Crane knows that I have nothing to lose and that I won't hesitate to kill him if I get the chance!"

While I was letting this soak in Martha Hervey rose and held out her hand. "I've got an appointment. Excuse me. It's been nice meeting you."

"Yeah," I said, and then as she started

away: "By the way, Miss Hervey, did you get your gun cleaned?"

She stopped. "Yes, it's cleaned, and ready to use. Would you kill a man if it was necessary, Mr. Larkin?"

"Well, I—"

"I was afraid of that!" she said simply and walked away.

The front door slammed as she went out. Immediately I made a run for the stairs. There were two or three things kicking around in my mind which I had to check.

The upstairs hallway was a complete circle from which doors led into bedrooms, closets and bathrooms. I identified two guest rooms, a third one obviously occupied by Jose, and then found myself in a master suite. It faced the bay with a high private porch running before the windows. I didn't risk lights but by using a pencil flash I saw enough to identify it as Sally's bedroom. There were a few clothes in the closet, a photograph of Sally on a multi-mirrored dressing table. Heady perfume personified the room.

The connecting room was Martha Hervey's. Less pretentious, it was nevertheless in excellent taste. There was a line of good books on a night stand beside the bed and a radio at hand. The radio had one of those clocks for automatic wake-up service. Home-body stuff. The bed was so soft it made me sleepy. Near the pillow my eye caught the faintest lump of something beneath the spread.

I reached underneath the counterpane and pulled out a puzzling collection of items. There was a small coil spring such as you might use on a kitchen door. Two pieces of cord were attached to one end;

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a single cord to the other. And a candle! My mind kicked around a half-dozen possible combinations of these articles but they didn't make sense. In a moment I stuffed the articles back beneath the bed spread.

I made a prowl around the room. Martha's dressing table was extraordinarily neat, noticeably free from cosmetics. I sprayed the walls with my flash and then made a careful survey of the floor area, particularly in the vicinity of chairs and bed. My last hunch was the payoff.

The glass in the French door letting out onto the balcony was shattered by a hole at about waist height. It could have been a coincidence, of course, but Martha Hervey had been aiming her gun at the French door when it had gone off earlier tonight. I unlocked the door and took a step out onto the balcony.

There were stars in the sky, but they were like the sparkle of cheap costume jewelry in comparison to the new galaxies which someone drummed up for Happy Larkin. There was the blurred movement of a black shape outside the door. I didn't have time to duck. Someone hit me just above the right ear and I spun in for a crash landing on the balcony.

CHAPTER THREE

Striking Pay Dirt

IT IS embarrassing enough for the moderately successful operator of a trouble-shooting detective agency to have his brains massaged by the dark of the moon at the hand of assailant unknown. Far worse to wake up in the ministering arms of your client and have to explain it.

Sally Dunning led me back into Martha Hervey's bedroom where lights burned now. She seemed genuinely worried as I shuddered my head to chase away the last cobwebs. So did a husky blond lad who stood near the hall door and finally came over and helped ease me into a chair.

"Oh, Happy, what happened?"

The young man fingered the bump on my skull carefully. "You sure got pasted," he declared. "Unless your head's thick, it's probably got some cracks in it."

"Happy, this is Tommy Lane," Sally said, moving in beside him. "He knows

all about first aid and things like that."

"Hello, Tommy," I said, trying out my legs. "I'm all right. Let's get a drink and I'll be ready for the second round."

We went downstairs. While we lowered the level of the Stinger shaker, I manufactured an explanation.

"I thought I heard a noise upstairs when Miss Hervey left. I stepped out on the balcony and someone slugged me."

Tommy Lane pulled Sally around in front of him. He was a nice, clean-cut kid, definitely lifeguard, and the worry that put manly lines between his eyes had deep roots.

"Sally," he said tensely, "that was probably meant for you."

She patted his cheek. "Or poor Martha!"

"Or me!" I put in emphatically. "Don't rob me of the questionable honor of having been hit on purpose. The point is: who and why? Which reminds me, where's that piano player?"

"I dropped him at the North Star. That's Chapman Crane's yacht," Sally said. "I wanted him to explain I was bringing another guest."

"You're sure you left him there?" I asked.

She looked startled. "Of course! You don't—you don't think Jose had anything to do with your getting hit?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, Happy, it must have been one of Crane's men! Don't you see, he's desperate!"

"He's positively homicidal," I said unhumorously.

"Sally," Tommy said suddenly, "you've got to get out of here! Come up to Berkeley with me. I'll look after you. If Crane follows you, I'll murder him!"

Sally Dunning sighed effectively. "Tommy, you're a darling! But I can't go away with you. You've got college to finish. I'd just be in the way. Besides—"

He was holding her closely, searching her eyes. "You're not kidding me, are you Sally? You *do* love me?"

"Tommy, please!" Sally glanced at me.

I shrugged my indifference but got to my feet. "Don't I have a date to meet Crane?" I asked.

Sally picked up the cue promptly. We went out the door to the bay front. A

short pier ran from the house into the water. A glistening, mahogany-hulled speedboat lay alongside a float. We got aboard with Tommy Lane at the wheel and Sally nestled between us. Tommy gunned the engine and the boat surged out into the black water of Balboa Bay.

The North Star lay at anchor off the tip of Lido Isle, a flat finger of subdivided land jutting into the Bay. I could hear music and see people milling on her wide boat deck as Tommy swung the speedboat toward the gangway. Other small boats were bringing passengers alongside. It looked like Navy Day at San Pedro. A uniformed sailor met us and took over. We mounted to the main deck and came face to face with Chapman Crane, Jr.

He wore a yachting cap and a blue double-breasted coat. His face was tanned, narrow and a little more weathered than the newspaper pictures showed him. He was what you'd call an athletic forty. His black eyes darkened a second as he looked at Sally. Then he turned on a most convincing smile. He shook my hand.

"Good of you to come, Mr. Larkin," he said. "You'll find we favor a Bohemian touch to our parties. If you find you need anything just call for it." He turned to Tommy. "Lane, isn't it? Glad to see you again. Make yourself at home. Drinks in the main cabin, music on the boat deck."

Tommy and I started ahead, but Crane dropped a restraining hand on Sally's arm.

"I'll be along," she called to us. "Go ahead."

I urged Tommy ahead of me. Obviously Crane wouldn't try anything foolish at a time and place like this. Moreover I wanted to talk to Tommy. We ducked inside to the bar. About two-dozen well-groomed couples were making party noises in a refined sort of way. We got two brandies and soda.

"Tommy," I said, steering him up a ladder to the boat deck, "my business operates on the principle of the open mind and the closed fist. But I've got to be versatile. This is one time I've got to be garrulous."

He looked puzzled. "Go ahead."

"First off, you're sitting on dynamite. You're a nice kid. I don't want you hurt."

"What are you driving at?"

"Sally Dunning is on a spot. I don't know whether I can perform miracles. But win, lose or draw, this is apt to be nasty business."

The kid's jaw was very square and he shoved it out. "What are you trying to tell me?" he demanded. "I love Sally. The worse the trouble, the more I want to help. I'm not afraid of Crane."

"But something tells me this isn't just a question of being afraid or not being afraid of Crane."

"Sally never would have gotten in trouble if I'd been around," he declared bitterly. "Instead of that mouldy character Jose Romero."

"I'll buy that. Or part of it," I answered. "But the point is you weren't around. And Crane is big trouble."

"A couple of black eyes will straighten him out," Tommy said firmly.

"Delivered at the wrong time," I said, "they'd help ruin Sally."

He seemed to get my point and his temperature dropped. "I'm sorry," he admitted quietly. "You're probably right, Larkin. What can I do to help Sally—and you?"

"Stick close to Sally. Don't let her out of your sight."

"That's easy."

"Another thing . . . was Jose Romero with Sally when she picked you up to-night?"

He looked at me carefully. "No. Sally was alone. Larkin, you know I don't like Romero. He's a bad influence on Sally."

"A bad influence?"

He studied the palms of his hands. "As her business manager or whatever he calls himself. He could help Sally, kind of keep her in check, if you know what I mean."

"I know what you mean. But is Jose a salaried employee?"

"For three years," he said abruptly. "And he's just hung around, letting her get involved. If things were different, I'd give him his walking papers."

I smiled. "That won't be necessary. He's leaving tomorrow."

Tommy looked up. "Did Sally fire him?"

"They had an argument. Jose seemed to differ about the method of handling

Crane." I hesitated. The news about Jose's status in the Dunning menage had given me new angles. "Tommy, I'm going to work. As soon as Sally shows up, stay with her."

I LEFT him and started making the rounds. My prowl carried me on a complete circuit of the yacht. There were little groups of people clustered from the fantail to the bow. All very gay and most unfitting background for the taint of blackmail. I kept my eye peeled for Jose. There were men like him, young, sophisticated and eligible, showing white teeth in tan faces and making small talk over cocktails to women who knew better but willingly forgot it. But no Jose. That didn't bother me so much. But there was no Sally Dunning or Chapman Crane, Jr.

Finally I began a tour below decks. From the main salon, stairs led below to a passageway which ran the length of the ship. Cabin doors opened into it and the illumination would have been ideal for a large family of mice. Near the end of the passageway I stopped flatfooted. A wider door was set in the very dead end of the passageway and at that moment it swung wide. Light from the cabin flooded the narrow, darkened hall. On the threshold Sally Dunning posed a second, looking back into the room.

Her voice was sharp and tinged with hysteria. "You've had your last chance, Chap! From here on in I'll fight you with every weapon I can buy!"

"Understood!" Crane's reply was equally crisp. "And I'll run you off the ends of the earth!"

Sally slammed the door and rushed toward me. She pulled up short, seeing me.

"Happy!" She coasted into my arms and I made room for her.

"Oh, Happy, I tried once more. But he won't listen! It's up to you."

"Okay."

She gripped my shoulders with her slender fingers. "Happy, he's got the evidence in there now. A blue envelope . . . with the pictures and my letters. Do you suppose—" She let it trail off, but the meaning was clear enough in her pleading eyes.

There were about ninety-nine things I didn't like about this pitch. An orange

light blinked caution and that sixth sense which keeps a private eye healthy instead of making his beneficiary wealthy was telling me things were not quite right. But Sally Dunning's appeal was to the seventh sense, a fuller explanation of which you can check with Mr. Freud.

So I lifted her by her slim waist and set her down facing the exit.

"Beat it!" I said. "Tell Tommy to get the speedboat warmed up."

Sally's face blossomed. She made a little spring upwards and I felt those lips once more. The little men threw a cupful of uranium into my blood stream and I began busting out all over. Separating from her was an effort which was downright noble. In a way, I guess I was thinking about Tommy Lane.

"Easy, Sally, easy," I breathed. I looked into her troubled eyes. "Don't forget Tommy."

She shook her head in quick irritation. "Oh, he's just a boy!"

I pushed her away a little. "Well, go fill in with a boy until I get this work done."

She ran her hand across my cheek and turning, darted away. I wheeled and made a brief survey of the situation. Then I acted fast and not a second too soon. There was a small door to my left. I opened it and ducked inside.

It was a small cabin, dark, unoccupied, which was all I wanted. I left the door to the corridor open an inch and almost immediately a flood of light came from the end of the passageway. The next minute Chapman Crane moved past and up the corridor. After a decent interval I stepped outside and crossed to the dead end. The door was locked but it was nothing the underwriters would swear by.

Using two small instruments, which are not for sale on the open market, I did what in the trade is called a "quick pick," and entered. In the dim beam of my flashlight I could see it was a luxurious master cabin. There was a door on the left which led into a bathroom. Four port-holes dotted each side of the cabin. Beneath one was a writing desk and I started there. But that was too obvious and it didn't take me long to go through it. No blue envelope.

I went swiftly over the rest: chairs,

beds, two bureaus, a cavernous closet and the bathroom. No dice. I circled the floor area with particular reference to the border of the deep wine-colored carpet. At the foot of one of the beds I got my lead. The carpet showed a slight scuff in the form of an arc. I tugged at the foot of the bed, swinging it in the path of the scuffed carpet. It moved like a well oiled gate. Hinged at the head the bed swung wide to the left and back of the head board set flush in the wall was a round black hunk of steel with a shining knob. I went in between the beds and knelt.

The combination lock looks impossible to crack. It isn't. It takes time and a deceptively vague little thing called inspiration.

TIME! If I'd had one minute and thirty seconds more, things would have been different. As it was I opened the box, found a blue envelope, closed the safe and wiped my prints off with a handkerchief. I even got the bed swung back into place and had taken a long pace toward the door when the sand ran out in the hourglass.

Lights came on in the room, Chapman Crane closed the door behind him without taking his eyes off me. From the expression on his face, and the .45 calibre service automatic clenched in his right fist I knew the argument was going to be short and unpleasant.

"You get around awfully quiet," I said easily.

"Drop the envelope on the floor," he said. I hesitated. He snapped a repeat command. "Drop it!"

I let the envelope slip from my fingers. Chapman Crane took a series of short steps around me almost gracefully and indicated the door with a motion of the gun.

"Now start walking, Larkin, and don't stop! Get your boat and collect Miss Dunning and her boy friend."

I had to stall. "What about Jose?" I asked. "Shall I take him?"

Crane's hand wavered slightly. "Take him too. If he's on board."

I took a deep honest breath. *If he's on board!* Then I knew I had to talk to Crane, because things were rearranging themselves like frightened electrons. I

wasn't sure of everything, but now smelt enough to believe that Happy Larkin was in the middle of a tight rope and people were sawing away at both ends.

"If he's here?" I repeated. "You mean you haven't seen Romero?"

"Larkin, I'm going to count three," Crane declared. "Then you're a dead man!"

"Crane, listen! Someone knocked me out tonight at Sally's house. I figured it was you."

"One!" Crane said.

"If Jose wasn't here at that time I'm guessing he slugged me. And if he did—there's got to be an angle. Does he work for you?"

The playboy made a slight grimace of distaste and said: "Two!"

Ideas were flooding my brain faster than Russian vetoes but the tightening of Crane's forefinger on the trigger of the .45 ruled out further speculation. I had to take a quick chance.

"Naturally Jose isn't working for you," I yelled. "But he's got you covered from the porthole! Don't shoot, Jose!"

Crane didn't fall for it, but the small mental effort required for him to reject the gag gave me a split second in which to act.

I leapt forward, grabbing him like a long-lost brother. I didn't grab for the gun but went inside his arms. Then, under my drive as he went backwards, I snaked a hand up along his arm and closed over the automatic which he was frantically reversing.

We smashed down. His knee came up like a piston, a cold ache and nausea sweeping me immediately. The .45 exploded in my ear! I twisted back on his gun hand as we rolled clear of a chair. Then I butted his chin with my head. What happened next was too fast and not too clear.

First, the lights went off. Second, a gun went off close in my ear. I thought Crane had somehow fired again. Then, like the grip of a wrestling opponent who has been tapped by the referee, Crane's hands relaxed and he started to fall away from me. Finally, someone dropped the funnel of the North Star on my head and I started looking for Larkin's Comet in the constellations which swam into view.

CHAPTER FOUR

Clay Pigeon

MY AWAKENING had all the characteristics of a dream sequence. Chapman Crane's cabin was filled with people. Sally Dunning was just inside the door, hanging on to Tommy Lane's arm and they both looked terrified. About two dozen other guests were circled about me, staring grimly. Two sailors in white and a tall, bronzed man wearing a yacht officer's uniform were close by my left side. The officer had a small automatic in his hand.

I had a worm's-eye view of all this for I was sitting on the floor. The back of my head felt like it had been used for the kick-off in the Rose Bowl. I put a hand out to steady myself and tried getting to my feet.

"Stay where you are!" It was the officer with the gun. "And don't touch anything!"

I glanced up at him in surprise and then swung my eyes to the right. Suddenly I understood what the pantomime was all about.

Chapman Crane lay two feet from me, face up. The right side of his head had stopped a bullet at close range. He was not nice to look at. I readdressed myself to the ship's officer.

"I see what you mean," I said. "But I didn't do it! We were fighting and someone came up behind me and shot him."

"With this gun," the officer said, and he brought into view a short-barreled .38 revolver which he had been holding with a handkerchief in his left hand.

It was like taking a big pull at a smelling salts bottle. I eased open my coat and looked down at my shoulder holster. My short barreled .38 revolver was missing!

"Now, wait a minute—" I protested and then stopped because there was a noise in the doorway and three men pushed into the cabin.

Chief Podge, followed by a police sergeant in uniform and Jose Romero, came directly across to me. His eyes made a grim circuit of the Crane-Larkin tableau.

"Better get up, Happy," he said tonelessly, and he gave me a hand. Then he swung around at the others. "Let's clear

the room, folks. Except you Mr. Romero. And you, Miss Dunning."

The sergeant began a polite herding of the spectators. Podge took my gun from the ship's officer, sniffed the muzzle, examined the cylinder. He shook his head sadly.

"Yours, Happy?" he asked. I nodded. "Why did you shoot him?"

"Hell, Podge, you know me better than that."

"The gun was in your hand, Happy," he said.

I stared at him. "That's impossible. We were fighting. I admit that. The lights went off. Someone ran in, blasted Crane and tagged me with the blunt end."

Podge's eyes flickered. "What were you fighting for?"

I took a quick glance around the floor before answering. The blue envelope was gone. I saw a tenseness on Sally's face, and I decided that a scene or two more played close was the only solution.

"I was trying to get back something which belonged to Miss Dunning."

"What?" Podge asked.

I shook my head. "Professional ethics, Chief. Just something. We quarreled and he pulled a gun."

"Happy, I'm sorry," Podge said as soberly as I'd ever heard him speak. "Mr. Romero, will you repeat what you told me?"

I fastened my eyes on the piano player. Avoiding my stare, he delivered himself of a fantastic lie without blinking.

"Miss Dunning met me on the stairs just forward," he said. "She told me that we, that is our party, were leaving, and to get Mr. Larkin. When I reached this cabin there was the sound of a struggle. I entered the room quickly. A gun went off. Then someone fell heavily. Then another shot was fired. I snapped on the lights and found Mr. Crane and Mr. Larkin on the floor."

"Where was this gun?" Podge demanded, indicating my .38.

"In Mr. Larkin's hand!"

I took control to prevent my jumping Romero. I was certain he was lying, but the story sounded good. What worried me was that I couldn't decide when I'd parted company with my gun. I hadn't checked it after arriving at Sally's house;

after all, I had had no reason to.

Sally Dunning came suddenly up beside Podge. She shook her head at me frantically and pathetically.

"Oh, Happy, it's my fault!" she cried. "But you shouldn't have—I mean, I didn't think you'd—"

Podge got into it before I could make even a startled response.

"Do you confirm what Mr. Romero has just said, Miss Dunning?" he asked.

She bit her lip. "Yes," she said faintly. "But Mr. Larkin wouldn't have done it if he hadn't been attacked."

Podge nodded. "Yeah, I know. Self defense. Crane's .45 is just under the bed." He turned to me. "But I'll have to take you in, Happy."

As Podge has subsequently said, it was a fine bit of acting, and he's watched a lot of it. But I was inspired. Moreover, I was playing the lead in a real life drama where my neck was at stake. I didn't butch the party by blowing off at either Jose Romero or Sally.

Starting adamantly through the door with Podge following, I winked confidently at Sally. She reached out and tugged me close enough so she could whisper in my ear.

"Don't worry, Happy," she said earnestly. "I'll get the best lawyer for you in the country!"

"Gee, thanks, honey!" I answered fervently. "Thanks for everything!"

A POLICE launch rocked at the gangway with a single harbor cop behind the wheel. Podge tailed me aboard and we shoved off. On the main deck of the North Star, Sally, Jose and Tommy Lane

watched our departure. A sailor was bringing their speedboat alongside almost before we were clear.

Podge thumped me on the shoulder as we stood in the open after cockpit of the police boat.

"You dope!" he growled bitterly. "Why did you have to get mixed up with murder? You, of all people!"

I looked at him squarely. "Do you really think I bumped Crane?"

"What am I supposed to think?"

"That the pitch was a frame! You don't think I'd stand back there tongue-tied if I wasn't playing for a high stake?"

"You mean it's just like you told me," he answered with restrained sarcasm. "You were wrestling and someone walked in and iced Crane."

"Right! Romero didn't find my gun in my hand. I got slugged at Sally Dunning's house earlier. Someone lifted my gun then. Don't you get it?"

Podge made a clucking sound. "It's going to look funny in print."

"Listen to me," I pleaded earnestly. "I've got to have a break. You can't lock me up. You've got to give me seven or eight hours to bring you a killer. I can nail him if you'll let me work alone."

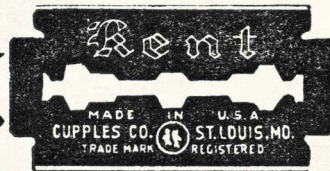
Podge inspected me a long minute. "Happy," he said finally, "maybe you didn't bump Crane. Maybe it is a frame. Give me your angles and I'll get the whole force out of bed!"

"That won't play, Podge. If I gave you what I'm guessing, you'd drive Crane's real killer into the woodpile. You'd never get him out. I've got to do it alone."

The police boat was making a turn past Bay Island and heading for the dock.

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"Happy, I love you like a black-sheep brother," Podge said quietly, "but I've got a wife and four kids. If I turned you loose for five minutes I couldn't even hope for a pension. Use your head, Happy. Don't ask me to do something that's impossible."

My fingers began to tremble a bit. I didn't really expect Podge to capitulate, yet I knew that my way was the only way. I made my decision, silently asking forgiveness.

"Okay, Podge. One thing: you don't really think I killed Crane?"

He grunted amiably. "Either way, Happy, you can count on me to help. No matter what happens I'm your friend."

I gripped his hand. "No matter what happens," I repeated slowly, "you're my friend?"

"Right!"

"Right!" I echoed, and I turned quickly, stuck my foot out and heaved on Podge's hand.

It was a good, full hip-throw and he went cleanly through the air not even touching the stern of the boat. The splash was majestic, but I didn't wait to watch him start stripping down for a fifty-yard swim to shore. Instead I jumped forward to the man at the wheel. He was just turning, alerted by the splash, when I rammed two fingers deep in his ribs.

"Laddie, can you swim?" I yelled in his ear.

He was a young man and rather impressed by the report of a murderer on his boat. Now, with a gun-like stiffness in his back, he met the situation with courage but with understanding. He just turned green.

"Ye-ah," he burbled.

"Then swim!" I ordered, and I helped him to the side.

He went up and over. His stroke would have made Tarzan look like a Cub scout with water wings. I swung the harbor boat about in its churning wake. I avoided the blob of black which was Podge swearing, and swept up the harbor retracing the course to the North Star. When I reached the widened section of the bay I cut for Sally Dunning's island. Long before I neared the pier I could see the anchored mahogany hull of Sally's speedboat. I didn't come alongside. Instead I cut the

boat's speed to a slow putt and turned up a small channel which led to the rear of the island. If my hunch was right, there would be another place to land.

And there was. Almost on the opposite side of the tiny island was a second pier. Shorter and with less the look of use about it, it was nevertheless a landing place. I brought the harbor boat against it with a landlubberly crunch and killed the engine. I made a line fast and started in a run for Shanghaied-La.

My statement to Podge that I needed seven or eight hours to bring in the killer had been rank speculation. For as good as my guesses seemed to me, I wasn't sure of all the facts. Since Jose had lied about my gun, he was framing me. Perhaps killing Crane had been his preferred way of handling the playboy. It followed that Jose must have knocked me out on the porch. But if Sally had left him on Crane's boat, how had he got back to the porch?

There was another possibility, one that had prompted a gamble which could put Happy Larkin in San Quentin for one-to-ten if it didn't pay off. The answer lay in the little blue envelope which I'd taken from Chapman Crane's safe.

The rear of Sally Dunning's house confirmed what I had suspected. In addition to a service entrance there was an exterior stairway to a rear porch. Anyone could have entered the house that way. I went around toward the front, hugging the palm-covered sides. When I reached the bay front lanai, I mounted it to where one of the large windows gave a view of the dimly lighted living room. It was empty and there was a stillness which didn't fit my preconceived picture. Sally, Jose and Tommy couldn't have been back more than five minutes.

I listened beside the shattered window near the piano briefly. I was about to move to the door, when I saw a figure coming down the spiral stairway. At first I thought it was Sally Dunning. Then I identified the plain, lifeless gray suit and Martha Hervey stepped uncertainly across the room to the fireplace.

SHE carried a small black overnight bag which she placed on the sofa. I saw her bend swiftly over the fireplace in which a fire no longer burned. If I'd

waited perhaps a match scratch or two, the matter of Chapman Crane versus Sally Dunning might have had another ending.

I walked into the living room and said: "Hello, Martha!"

She straightened, fumbling with something in her hands, and stared at me as though I were a ghost. One hand raised impulsively to touch the tortoise-shell rims of her glasses.

"Oh!" she screamed. "Oh, Mr. Larkin!"

As I approached her, she seemed to lean on the copper chimney for support. I hadn't forgotten her but I was sorry that she seemed inevitably involved in this affair.

"But I thought you—" She stopped, unable or unwilling to complete her thought.

"You thought I was holding down Cell Number One at the local bastille maybe?" I queried. "So Miss Dunning told you?"

She nodded. "Yes, Sally told me just before she left."

"She's gone? And Tommy and Jose?" I asked.

"They went with her," Martha answered hesitantly. "Something about getting a lawyer for you."

"I don't believe I've ever had so much attention."

Martha Hervey looked about her nervously. "But how did you get permission to leave the police?"

"I ran away, Miss Hervey. Not because I was mad at anyone, understand. But there were too many loose ends. I had to come back to clean them up."

Martha sat down upon the couch. "You shouldn't have killed him, Mr. Larkin."

"I?" I said. "I didn't kill Crane, Martha. Look, I'm going to tell you a story. When I finish, you'll still have time to get clear of the crash."

She clenched her purse tightly and stared at me.

"You may know more about this than I think," I went on, "in which case you can correct me as I go. First, little Happy Larkin walked blindly into a beautiful trap. He thought he was one of the guests, because that's the way his invitation read. But he wasn't a guest at all. He was the clay pigeon!"

I lit a cigarette and flipped the match into the fireplace.

"From the minute I stepped into this house," I continued, "I knew it was little rich girl in trouble. Big bad blackmailer makes threats. Action needed. I accepted this premise but they had to play fast because they didn't know when I would smell a rat. My prowling upstairs gave them a chance to lift my gun. Are you following me, Martha?"

She hadn't moved. "I'm not sure," she whispered.

"Now let's use the same characters, same motive, but switch the hero for the villain. Thus, Crane becomes the man in trouble and Sally Dunning is actually the blackmailer! Preposterous? Not at all. No harder to accept than the fact that an apparently wealthy man like Crane was the menace.

"Jose Romero is a part of the team, fed up and scared of Crane who has been bled dry and is ready to cry to the district attorney. Jose wants to let Crane off the hook and run. But little Sally thinks Crane will talk anyway. Her solution: bump off Crane, or rather have some fall guy bump him off. That's where I came in."

Martha Hervey arose and walked to the bar which had been closed. She opened it and poured a shot of whiskey from a bottle on the bar.

"And where do I come in?" she called back quietly.

"I'm not sure," I said, rising. "Maybe this will help."

I reached into the mouth of the copper chimney, pulling out the blue envelope which Martha Hervey had thrust into it when I entered the room. I opened it and glanced at the papers and the photographs—and my scalp lifted a full inch!

CHAPTER FIVE

Kill the Golden Goose

THERE was a picture of a girl and Chapman Crane in the cabin of the North Star. One of the letters contained a passionate paragraph of promises from Crane to a girl. The lady in the picture wore glasses and the letter was addressed "*My darling Martha!*"

I was trying to work my tongue loose

as Martha Hervey walked toward me. "Yes, Mr. Larkin," she said. "I was the girl."

I was so confused and shocked I couldn't organize a suitable speech. The picture I'd built of Martha Hervey had been a nice one. But—

"You don't mean that you're part of the team. You, Jose and Sally?"

She shuddered. "No, Mr. Larkin, no!" she cried. "I found out Sally and Jose had been working this game on other men. I had met Crane and I liked him. They persuaded me to—to frame him. I—" Suddenly she broke down.

"And Crane's rub-out? What about that? You told me tonight that you weren't afraid to kill him."

"Oh, I didn't mean it! I was terrified of him. You believe me, don't you, Mr. Larkin?"

I didn't know what I believed. I was trying to add it all up and make a decision.

"Jose killed Crane," she sobbed. "Sally arranged it, just like you said. Only I didn't know about it before. Oh, Happy, what am I going to do?"

I disengaged her hand which was gripping my arm. I knew what I had to do.

"My name is being screeched over every police radio in California," I told her. "I've got to report in. You're my key witness, Martha. I'll help you all I can, and I think you can beat an accessory murder rap." I took a step in the direction of the phone.

"Happy, wait!"

I went back to her. Tears were starting from behind the screen of her glasses. She looked altogether pathetic, and the way she put her arms out to me was a test of my will.

"Isn't there some other way? Can't I just—just disappear?" she begged.

I shook my head. She put her arms around my neck. This was hardly the time for it. But, I'm only human. So I kissed her.

The next sensation was one of shock. Those charged seconds that I embraced Martha Hervey were like the eternity of time one is said to experience during a fall from a tall building. That kiss did it instantly. There was no question about it.

I pulled aside the woman's arms and pushed her away easily. She stood before me, a tense, white, terrible statue, and made no move to stop me as I drew the glasses from her face. In her eyes then I saw reflected every insane thing that boiled in the soul of Sally Dunning!

For this girl—Martha Hervey—*was* Sally Dunning!

Makeup alone, or the absence of it, hadn't done it. Nor the glasses, the clothes or the hairdo. The deception included a change of spirit which only a natural actress could have achieved. And Sally Dunning had played her dual role with skill that deserved an Oscar. If she had chosen, she could have maintained the pose indefinitely. But she had planned it this way, I guess, from the minute I returned like a ghost to Shanghaied-La. She wanted me to understand how skillful she had been.

I looked with strange detachment at the gun she had taken from her bag the instant we separated. She held it without a tremor and its coldness was matched by her eyes.

"Let's have a drink, Happy," she said huskily. "One last drink."

I backed away unhurriedly. At the bar gate I started to duck beneath, but I changed my mind. One look was enough. The body of a man lay in a crumpled heap behind the bar. Fragments of a bottle which he must have been holding when Sally shot him were scattered about his outflung arms. There was a good deal of blood on the floor. Jose Romero had been bought out of the unholy corporation forever!

I poured two shots of whiskey from outside the bar, and put Sally's glass down on the hearth where she indicated with a wave of her gun. I threw mine off quickly because I needed it.

"Why, Sally," I asked softly. "Why the double role?"

She gave a short and terrifying laugh. "I could meet twice as many people. And all kinds. Martha could go where Sally couldn't."

I saw her point. "And it worked well for hypnotising me."

"Yes," she said calmly. "It gave Martha a chance to substantiate Sally's story. Martha added reality, a sense of fear."

"But the gunshot upstairs when you were down here?" I said. "How did you work that?"

She smiled. "Did it fool you? I thought perhaps you found the spring and the candle in the bed."

INSTANTLY I tied it all in. It wasn't a new gag. In fact, it was so old I should have identified it immediately. You fasten a gun to anything solid and rig a spring between the trigger and another fixed point. A separate cord takes the strain off the spring until a candle burns through it.

"And the music," I asked quietly, "after you and Jose left the house to pick up Tommy?"

"That fool!" Sally cried. "Tonight he turned yellow."

"He had courage enough to kill Crane," I chided her.

"He didn't kill Crane," Sally said proudly. "I killed him! He lied about you on the North Star because I told him to. You see, Happy, I took the blue envelope to Crane tonight. He paid me ten thousand dollars for it!" She nodded at the black overnight bag. "Ten thousand dollars, Happy! But then he told me he planned to take the whole story to the police. I had to get that blue envelope back.

"Later, when we got back here, Jose began to weaken," she continued. "So I sent Tommy away—he's getting you a lawyer—I killed Jose."



"My radio clock," she replied with amusement. "I set it to turn on just after we left. I went around the house and upstairs to change into Martha's clothes. Jose drove the speedboat to the hidden pier and came back in time to find you on the porch. The chance to knock you out was an accident, Happy. Jose was just supposed to keep an eye on you to see if you suspected anything."

I nodded. "Then you, as Martha Hervey, took the boat and picked up Tommy Lane."

"That's right. And while Tommy and I were 'finding' you, Jose walked to Balboa Island and hired another boat to take him to the North Star."

"You took a chance out there. Crane might have told me the truth."

"I've always taken chances," Sally said. "And I always win. Even now that you've upset my plans."

Without taking my eyes off her, I nodded back at the bar. "It looks like Jose already did that."

The matter-of-fact way in which this woman admitted her compounded crimes was more terrifying than if she'd been a maniac of the raving variety. My only hope lay in stalling for time. There was a chance Podge might track me down. She seemed almost to read my thoughts.

"Don't worry, Happy, no one's going to interrupt us. You see, I planned to destroy all the Crane papers. When Tommy got back, I'd tell him Jose had tried to kill me. Tommy would swear he'd been here and seen me shoot Jose in self defense."

"Yes, the kid probably would. He loves you, Sally."

She laughed and the very sound of her voice was indecent. The last vestige of charm this insane girl possessed disappeared.

"Sally, I won't guarantee you anything," I said coldly. "But you're sick. You need medical attention. Put down that gun!"

Her lips parted in a cunning smile.

"No, Happy. It's going to work out better this way. You escaped from the police, Happy. You came here to eliminate the only witness against you—Jose. After you killed him I came in. You tried to silence me. I shot you. Nobody would convict me."

I stared at her. It all made sense. Much too good sense. Sally's face twitched spasmodically, and I began wondering how lead actually felt when it hit the stomach at close range. Then the picture changed fast and Happy Larkin had little to do about it.

The door to the lanai swung in with a crash and Tommy Lane followed his foot through the entrance into the room. One look at his face and I realized that he'd heard everything.

Sally half turned her head, but she didn't forget me. She backed away, her gun describing an arc between Tommy and me. He didn't hesitate. He started walking toward her slowly, head slightly bent, sun-tanned face a grim, fearless mask.

"Stop, Tommy!" she screamed at him.

He kept walking. "You two-timer! You cheap Pasadena tramp! Murderess!"

"Tommy!" I called to him. "Hold it! Don't—"

He was getting closer to her. He answered me without breaking stride or taking his eyes off Sally.

"You told me to stay close to her, Happy, and I almost forgot to when she sent me out to get a lawyer for you."

Sally trained the gun exclusively on him now. "I'm going to kill you, Tommy," she cried.

He stopped deliberately but not because of fear, a yard from her.

"You can't hurt me, Sally," he said numbly. "You're like a drowning woman in the water. You're frantic and the only courage you've got comes from terror. You're a cinch!"

I do not recommend it as a habit. I class what Tommy Lane did along with walking on hot coals. You've got to believe in what you're doing and Tommy really believed it. Sally Dunning had only to squeeze the trigger and Laguna would have been hiring a new beach boy for the summer season.

But she didn't squeeze the trigger. I gaped as Tommy Lane flung out a hand like a whip at Sally. The gun she had been holding went flying out of her hand and through the air.

Instantly her hands went up like the claws of a tiger. With equal speed, Tommy's left hand swung easily and clipped her somewhere in the neck. She went over like a corn stalk in a cyclone.

Then, devoid of all emotion but almost tenderly, he knelt and picked her up. As he carried her to the sofa, I discovered that the shakes had left me. I moved over near them to accomplish something which always comes first with Easy-Out Incorporated. This done I started for the phone, but it wasn't necessary. The marines arrived.

Podge and what appeared to be elements from the Santa Ana, Long Beach and Los Angeles Police Departments rolled into the room like marbles from a broken sack. There were ten minutes of total confusion during which Podge was busy putting on and taking off handcuffs, until Tommy helped me set the police chief straight.

Finally, after a matron and a coroner arrived, he walked with me over to the doorway.

"I really am sorry, Podge," I said. "I mean about the rough-house on the harbor boat tonight."

He glanced down at his soggy trousers and then back at me. His cold, green eyes took on a sudden brightness and he smiled wryly. "Happy," he said almost gaily, "I forgive you. I forgive you and forget everything gladly."

I was suspicious. "Why?"

He grinned smugly. "This is one case where Happy Larkin got several good thumps on the skull, had his blood pressure raised considerably and, for all of it, came out with exactly nothing! That is payment enough for my swim!"

I grinned back at him as I stepped outside, and we shook hands.

"You're right, Podge. Absolutely right!" I agreed heartily and started down the walk, pumping my elbow against my inside pocket to feel Chapman Crane's ten grand which I'd taken from Sally Dunning's black overnight bag.

DEATH FOR DESSERT

By HARRY MANN



"The letters will not be necessary now,
Mr. G. E. Kane!" she says.

I LOOK down the street but what I see is only one of them counter luncheonettes. You know, the kind of place that slings enough hash onto the plate to fill your back tooth. And me here with the walls of my stomach making noises worse than the Walls of Jericho

*I got the money;
The headlines went to Joe—
Until that dame got ready
To latch onto the dough.*

tumbling down. But like I say, this is the only joint around. I'm hungry. I go in.

I stand near the door flipping through a copy of the "Ladies Bedside Look" which I picked off a magazine rack, making as if I'm reading it. But I'm really mapping out the setup. There's a long counter and a row of high stools running alongside.

No one looks at the guy next to him, just straight ahead. Maybe at himself in the mirror along the wall, or maybe at the young fellow who's slow at filling up a cup of coffee. It's not the rush hour and lots of the stools are empty.

I'm half eyeing the magazine's snap of some "Skillet-Barbecued Tongue" jailed in by "Parslied Potatoes" shaded by some grass. I can almost get to smell it off the page—when I get wind of the dish perched next to two empty seats.

I slide up casually to between the two empties. The dame ain't looking at me. I pile onto the one next to her. She looks straight ahead. I'm looking straight ahead. Suddenly, it hits me that she's been watching me in the mirror so I looks right back at her. She turns her eyes down. What a dish for dessert!

The soda jerker comes over and asks her, "What'll it be, miss?"

"Bacon and tomato on toast and . . . coffee," she lets drop from those gorgeous lips.

"A BT down!" the young fellow yells down the line to the guy that's setting them up.

"And you, mister?"

"Same as the lady, sonny," says I.

"Hey! Double that!" he yells as if the place is noisy.

So we're sitting there waiting for the fillings, and I can't get comfortable on that stool. I guess it's from habit that I keep reaching with my foot for the rail. But there ain't none. I wonder how *she* manages so good. I take a quick gander from out the corner of my eye. There she is, easily balancing a stack of curves piled high, with her legs crossed above the knees.

The counter boy comes along with the sandwiches which are cut into four parts, each one about an inch square. Tidbits! A ladies' social tea joint! With my appetite now I can feed on two steaks baisted

in pigeon juice. And here are these four tidbits sitting in the plate.

It's a funny thing about me. When I've got something big to do, I can't swallow a crumb. The very thought of grub makes me feel sour inside. That's when there's something needlin' on my brain. But once I do what I gotta do, and the job's finished, my stomach begins making wise-cracks. Then I can shovel in a whole load of beef and it's good to the last bite. And this is one of those times that I can really pack it in, and all I got is those four lady fingers staring me in the face.

I make two double decker hors-d'oeuvre from them and get them down me. But it ain't enough bacon for my belly. My stomach only, with its ya-ta-ta. As for the dame, she isn't much for talking. Even when I ask her for the sugar which is standing on the counter between us, she makes as if I'm not there..So suddenly I think I better leave and see how the rest of the town is doing.

When get up, I brush past her kind of clumsily and she bends forward and drops her purse.

I'm being real courteous now and bend down to scoop it all up for her. But she ain't receiving any favors. She's got her foot planted down on the stuff that's dumped out on the floor. Boy! What a gam! The instep curves very determined-like in those blood-red pumps, planted to keep the stuff down right where it is.

I don't know what a dame carries in her bag that's so personal and from my bended knees look up at her. She says, pleading-like with those eyes, "Thanks—but I'll get it up myself."

"Okay with me, babe." Then to sugar it over, "But I would like to be of assistance to you." And my eye follows her leg down, down to the toe . . . then to the open wallet her foot is partly covering. And I see it's a man's wallet, big, a little rubbed out near the edges, and it's crammed full of green stuff. But what hits me is my partner's name, *Joseph Dixie*, is printed on the identification card.

What the hell is she doing with Dixie's wallet? What's a honeyed dame like her got to do with a small-time chisler like Joe Dixie? All these questions pop into my brain. But me, I'm gonna play it smart. I'm seeing if I can pump her even though

she seems like the type who counts her words.

"I didn't know that the ladies used men's wallets these days," I says.

She looks a little nervous. And after she puts everything back into the bag, she spurts out, "What difference does it make to you?"

Now that gets me! What difference does it make to me? To see a guy I know, my own partner, to see his wallet busting its seams with lettuce, falling out of a dreamy dame's purse—

"What difference does it make to me, huh!" I snap. "I'm just wondering how the blazes you got hold of Joe Dixie's wallet. That's the difference!"

I think that told her where to get off. I see that sort of checks her from dishing out any more of the sharp talk. She looks like she doesn't know what she wants to do. But then she asks me who I am that I'm so interested.

"None of your damn business!" And that finishes it. I pay for my meal ticket and scam.

LATER I'm shuffling along Broadway, for I don't know how long. It's the dame. She's on my brain. What's a doll like that doing lifting lettuce? How's she mixed up with a broken-nose bum like Dixie? *And what does she know?*

I buy a paper. Well, look what's here. Joe finally crashes the headlines by being dead, with a bullet through his head. The police don't know who did it. At the end of the column the scribbler plants a wreath of posies on Dixie's dead head—a whole spiel about his being a smart guy, all that claptrap about how he never beat his

grandmother—much too good an obit.

No clues on his death—I'm thinking quick now. That quiet dame, she's got his wallet; how's she tied up in it?

Yeah, the whole mess is bothering me all right when I go back to the apartment. And I get bothered some more 'cause I ain't exactly expecting to see that dame, draped against my door, waiting for me.

"So you are Mr. G. E. Kane!" she says.

"What about it?"

"If you'll invite me in, Mr. Kane, perhaps we can talk about it," she drools slowly. . . .

So I'm beginning to see it all a little better with the dame in my club chair sitting like it is built for her, drawing on a cigarette. And she's got those gams crossed, above the knees again.

"You're Mr. Dixie's business partner," she says, making it sound high tone.

"Yeah," I says, seeing that she ain't read the newspapers lately. "Yeah. I was you mean." And I show her the write-up.

It sort of takes her for a ride; her eyes go dreamy. She drops the cigarette. She just sits there looking at me, expecting me to say something.

I'm picking up the weed before it should burn a hole in my rug. I'm on bended knees before her, same as at the eating joint. Before my heart goes soft for those dreamy eyes and stuff, I remember that she's the dame what's got Joe's wallet in her purse. And Joe's the slob what's been murdered.

"Don't tell me you didn't know he was dead?" I ask her.

"Did you?" she snaps back like it's her style. No extra words, but the few sure hit the mark. Only this time she's nervous.

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She's frightened like a cornered kitten which is throwing out its little paw only half way, not to hit you, but to scare you. I keep drilling her.

"How long you know Dixie?"

"I knew him about a month," she purrs.

"Concerning what?"

". . . er . . . he had some things I wanted."

"Oh!" says I, still thinking that she don't look like Joe's type of dame.

"You don't understand. Mr. Kane, you were Joseph Dixie's partner, maybe you'll help me." And then she gives me the sweet talk. "G. E.," she says, "you don't look like the kind of guy Joe was."

"To hell I'm not."

"And if you could get me some papers—letters Joe had—I'll pay you for them!"

And like lightning it hits me. Of course she's not Joe's dame. And here I was getting steamed up. Joe's been blackmailing her, leading the kid on like it was his way, and sweating every red cent out of her. And now she's appealing to me because I'm Joe's "business partner" to get her the hot letters.

"Now sister, wait a minute. I may have been Joe's partner in a couple of nice rackets the coppers weren't so curious about, but not in a dirty business like this. That's where Dixie and me traveled different roads."

She's looking kind of hopeless. All of a sudden she pours out, "The dirty crook, soaking me, promising to give me those letters if I'd bring him the seven hundred. All he was is a low-down lying racketeer."

That's me sentiment perfect. But I ain't forgetting that Joe's a hot corpse—and the police ain't gonna forget it. And she's got Joe's wallet.

"Where'd you get Joe's wallet?"

"I . . . er . . . found it."

"You're lying. You'd have to find it in his pocket. And Joe'd have to be caught *dead* before anyone could pick *his* pockets."

That sort of does something to her. She gets up.

"Will you help me, G. E.?" She is standing at the door, balancing that pulchritude as nice as when she's sitting.

"Well I ain't exactly that kind of guy." I'm explaining, trying to set her right

about me, when she says, "Good-by!" and slams the door.

I'm left sitting there, thinking about what a dope I am not to be friendly to a dreamboat like her. I remembers that Joe keeps letters like that in our tinbox at the bank—with all our hot dough! Lummo that I am! The green stuff in the tinbox! I forgot about court orders.

In a flash I'm running to the bank—quick. Maybe the police ain't tipped the bank off yet that Joe's dead, and the attorney power is still good and I can get the tainted cash out of there before the FBI gets a court order to put their mitts on it.

When I get there, the old guy behind the desk is busy waiting on a customer. I'm making as if I'm readin' the sign about the fur storage, but I'm on needles. The safe's a big igloo with bricks of steel for ice. Inside there is rows and rows of the little tin boxes. I fill out the slip which will get me to my box, but this old guy has me sittin' on pins while he clucks into the phone. And I'm making mad looks at this dumbo to get him moving.

Finally he checks my John Hancock, unlocks the gate and lets me into the igloo. So far, so good. The police ain't confiscated the box yet. But it's good only as far as it goes—and it don't go far. Because there's the dame, fishing a key into me and Joe's box. Against all them straight lines of the rows of safes hers goes in and out, pleasing to the eye.

"G. E.! The letters," she says.

"Where in Lucifer did you get a key?"

"Er . . . in the wallet," she's whispering.

The old boy's comin' snoopin' around to open up the gate for a little fat guy. So I picks up the box and carries it to the booth for privacy.

She's close behind me, looking appealing with those eyes. The booth is a little bigger than a telephone stall, but just as tight. There's one chair, a ledge jutting out of one of the walls. It's dark except for a little bulb overhead that shines on the ledge. Okay, I let her in. I lock the door.

BUT like I says, when there is something needlin' on my brain I gotta get it done. I got to pack all that lettuce in my inside coat pocket so it don't show

out. And believe me, it ain't no easy job. It's like folding over a Manhattan telephone book and trying to stick it into a pocket so no one'll see it. The light ain't good. It's tight with the two of us. It's getting hot. And the dame's all ya-ta-ta-ya-ta-ta. But I ain't noticing it's not her style. I'm too busy packing away the lettuce.

She's saying, "That's a lot of money, G. E."

"This is just the dressing."

"You can do big things with money," she says.

"You bet. First, now I'm big. I've got twice as much. Dixie and me had our names equal on everything. Now I got it all," I says, spreading the extra bills around inside my shirt. The inside pocket is stuffed solid.

She says, "You don't have to share with that Dixie anymore."

"Ha! It's not only the sharing. I don't have to take his lip no more."

"You bet you don't," she says giving me the glad eye.

"He always said he's the brain and I'm the brawn. 'Jest interested in cramming food down your neck,' he said. Said I couldn't do any job without his first mapping out the details, that I never went into blackmail 'cause I ain't got the brain for detail.

"Yeah, I got no brain, huh? Just stuff yourself with hash, huh? What'd you call this? Here I am, filling my shoes and the lining of my hat with dollars."

"Of course you know how to work details, G. E."

"Dixie didn't know it. Tough. . . . He shoulda been interested in how good I can plan."

"You can sure plan smart," she says.

"You bet I planned it smart." This dame understands me. "You bet I planned it smart. Dixie'll never know what hit him. The flatfoots neither!"

"Dixie'll never know," she's saying. And she's leaning closer to me, and her dreamy perfume is clouding the air around me.

"Yeah, Dixie ain't expecting anything, sitting there in his easy chair," I says, beginning to feel like a dothead in a pipe dream with the dame near and her per-

fume settling over my head and beginning to knock me out.

"So Dixie's sitting there, mapping out the setup on paper for distributing the pinball machines we got from Jersey. He's telling me what to do, ain't even looking up at me from his writing. I stand behind him and send a little A-bomb through his head. He don't say nothing, just keeps staring at his scribbling."

The dream-dame is touching my hand and I'm holding the empty tinbox. "Seems like the letters ain't here," I says.

"The letters will not be necessary now, Mr. G. E. Kane!" she says, and the pipe dream floats away. She's got the door open and a rod pointed at me. There's the heavy steel gate behind her and three flatfoots are standing out there waiting for me.

* * *

There's a flatfoot out there now—with a bunch of keys. And the gate I got before me now is the same kind—thick and heavy—going from the floor all the way up to the ceiling. But this big flatfoot, he's not so obliging as the little fat guy at the safe pretended to be. It'll take more than my signing my signature to get out of this igloo.

Funny, I shoulda known. When I seen the dame in the safe, I shoulda remembered that she couldn't have gotten in without Dixie's signature—or a court order.

Dixie was right.

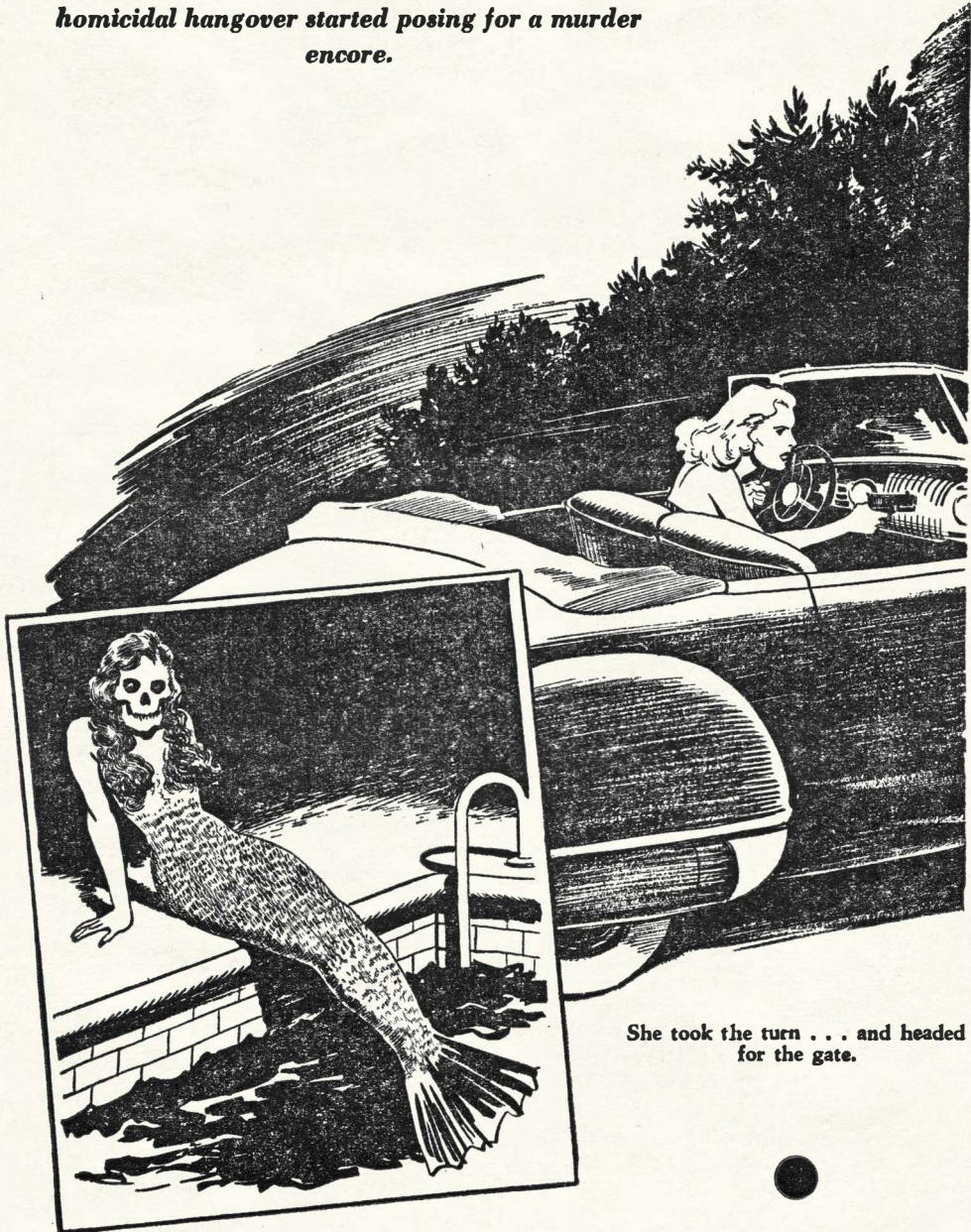
I never could keep the details in this noodle. But how was I supposed to know this dame had been employed by the FBI?

The FBI had been trying to pin something on Dixie for months. The dame got on the job when Dixie was conked off. That's when she picked up his wallet. Then she came around to make my acquaintance, being I was Dixie's "business partner." I sure got taken for a ride with those dreamy eyes and those legs crossed above the knee.

Well, now that that's all finished, I'm the kinda guy that can eat some buttered steaks, smothered in onions, side dish of French fries in bacon strips. . . . Nix on the dessert!

I'LL DROWN YOU

Brant Cully didn't give a damn about who killed the poison-pen scribe—until the starlet with the homicidal hangover started posing for a murder encore.

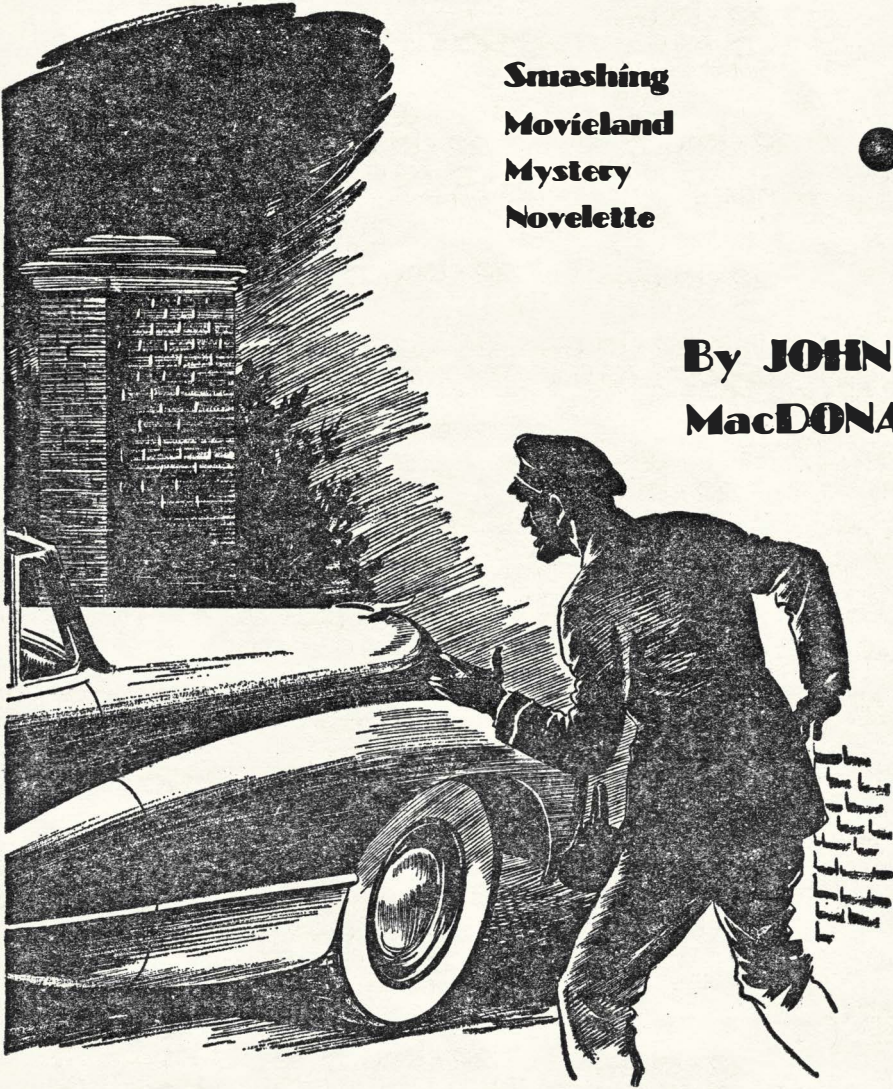


She took the turn . . . and headed for the gate.

IN MY DREAMS

**Smashing
Movieland
Mystery
Novelette**

**By JOHN D.
MacDONALD**



CHAPTER ONE

The Chilly Guest

A NIGHTMARE is something you can have while you're stretched out in the bright California sunshine beside the dancing green water of Aaron Nase's pool, the sun dots glittering behind your closed eyelids while you think of the ten-foot depth of water beside you,

of the pale rounded limbs deep in the water, of the pale hair floating, of the wide eyes, sightless, frozen in a fear that would last through eternity.

I had my private nightmare. I was on one of those canvas and rubber poolside mattresses. It was a Sunday afternoon, a hangover afternoon, an afternoon with the dull overtones of Saturday night. Sunshine and whiskey sours and lethargy.

I was alone by the side of the pool. The Filipino boy in starched white jacket stood in the shadows behind the bar cart. Up at the other end of the pool Aaron Nase held sleepy court, his round brown tummy spilling over the belt of his bathing trunks as he sat in the deck chair. Aaron Nase is a writer, a man with a list of film credits as long as one of Timmy Mitchell's slim golden legs.

Timmy was near him. She is one of those beautiful women—straight-shouldered, slim-waisted, long-legged—carved of honey and ivory. Look at a frozen waterfall through a piece of frosted glass and you get a good idea of Timmy's hair. She has a ragamuffin face. Snub nose, broad mouth. You infrequently look at her face.

She was wearing two pale blue bandannas in the fixed belief that they constituted a bathing costume. I could hear her voice once in a while, so low and hoarse that I couldn't make out the words. Aaron's was plainer. He speaks in the tone of a dubious farmer addressing the newfangled telephone.

J. Beatry Parker, agent and entrepreneur, was in a chair near Timmy. In contrast with the round, brown energy of Aaron Nase, J. Beatry is a tall fragile man with gray hair. He seems to be constructed of white skin and brittle sticks.

The group near them was silent. I knew they were either asleep, dead or listening to Aaron. In the second group there was the producer, Ludwig Zark—a beefy gent who conceals a genuinely artistic nature behind the sad face of a bloodhound. Ludwig was the only one in the group who knew my real mission in Hollywood. The rest thought I was one of the two-for-a-dime writers and seemed mildly baffled that I should be invited out in such distinguished company. Hollywood junior writers are in the social scale a shade below a starlet's dog.

With Ludwig was Maura Macey. Like the rest of them, she was on Trident Films' payroll. She is a little girl somewhere between twenty and thirty-seven, a graduate of the ballet. She danced in a few pictures several years back until they found out that she could act. I had already gathered that Timmy Mitchell hated tiny, expressive Maura.

With Ludwig Zark and Maura was J. Beatry Parker's secretary and right-handman, Janet Temple. In a wonderland of beautiful and egotistical women, Janet was refreshing. Sharp blue eyes, crisp brown hair cut short, square capable hands and a short upper lip which she had given up trying to keep down over slightly oversized teeth. She had a lean brown body, almost the body of a young boy, but with certain essential and attractive differences.

The seven of us near the pool were the dregs of Saturday night's party. Some had gone home and returned in the afternoon. Others had stayed over. Janet Temple had driven out in her battered little convertible to talk over some business with J. Beatry. Everybody yawned and dozed in the sun.

Everybody but me. I was the only one who knew that there were eight of us, rather than seven. The other member was down in the bottom corner of the pool.

You may remember her from movies a few years back. Anya Orin. She came over just before the war. Blonde placidity with an air of fires burning brightly underneath. An accent you couldn't dent with an ice pick. She did only fair and her option wasn't picked up, but by then she had learned how to exploit various other sources of income in the film capital.

I remembered how she had looked at the party the night before. Pale blonde hair piled high, thus narrowing her broad face. Level gray eyes full of greed and secret amusement. I couldn't remember who she had come with. Her strapless evening gown was the same pale green as the sunlit water in the pool.

I had been the last to arrive out at the pool on that Sunday afternoon. The others gave me a polite, distant smile. I had looked at the water and found it appealing, had dived in and done four slow lengths, eliminating the last dregs of hangover, the part that the cold shower hadn't removed.

My mistake was going in the second time. I dived from the far side of the pool, making it deep and long. Then I smacked my shoulder against something hard. After a good look, down there in the wavering pale green lights, I had emerged quickly and stretched out on the mattress to think.

Aaron was saying, "Some jokers we got

around here! A table yet! You know what those tables cost me? A hundred twenty bucks a copy. Take a look. I had four of them. I have a party and some joker takes home a table. Keepsake, maybe."

I heard Timmy's deep, hoarse chuckle. I didn't want to laugh. I knew where the table was. I had smacked my shoulder on it.

They were heavy tables with plate glass tops, wrought iron legs and frame, painted green. Down in the ten-foot depth, one of those tables stood, imprisoning the body of Anya Orin. The green paint and the glass made the table almost invisible. Anya's green dress made her hard to see. I knew that if I got on my hands and knees and looked down into the water, I'd see the pale, soaked blur of her face, the floating blonde hair.

But I didn't want to look. I wanted to spend forever in the hot sun. I wanted the hot sun to dry off me every droplet of water from the pool, the water that had drowned Anya.

The Filipino came and got my empty glass, took it back and put a fresh whiskey sour in it. The touch of it was cool and tart.

Logically I knew that of the six people sitting at the far end of the pool, there was a chance that one of them was a murderer. Murderess. If not, one of the departed guests had fixed Anya. It wasn't any of my business.

And yet, having found the body, I had a certain responsibility. To myself, maybe. The relationship to the job I was sent out to do was very indistinct.

I WORK for the City Provident Trust of New York City. The bank bailed out Trident Films nine years ago and took over. During the war, Trident was profitable. Last year things started to get shaky. City Provident sent out Walter Cazler to keep an eye on things.

Then we began to hear rumors that Cazler had "gone Hollywood," and the big boys in New York had begun to worry. Since Cazler had come into the bank during the war and since I had never met him, they sent me out to take a long look at things on the lot.

I felt like a heel spying on Cazler. Ludwig Zark was the only one who knew my

real job. Because I had sold two yarns about my navy experience during the war, they sent me out as a writer, with confidential instructions to Zark to get me on the payroll. I went on at three hundred a week. The tragedy of it was that I had to turn back to the bank everything over one and a quarter plus expenses.

So I rolled over onto my stomach and tried to figure out how the death of Anya Orin had any bearing on my job. It had happened at Aaron Nase's Beverly Hills home. Most of the guests at the party Saturday night had been Trident people. Nase, Zark, Timmy, Maura—all of them were working on an epic, supercolossal production called "Dance of Dreams."

I frowned. I had been thinking of J. Beatry Parker as being part of the Trident family, along with Janet Temple. At one time Parker had been a director, before he had gone into the talent agency business. I tried to remember what I had heard about J. Beatry. His connections were good. He hacked his ten percent off the salaries of Timmy, Maura, a half-dozen other top stars, a long string of

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lesser celebrities and any number of writers. Thus, his weekly income would be well up in the thousands.

"Dance of Dreams" was an expensive little number. Big sets. The leading man, Tod Russel—tall, dark and stupid—had been at the party. A hack plot. Maura and Timmy were roommates, trying to break into the big time. Maura as a dancer, Timmy as an actress. Tod Russel is a producer of musicals and plays on Broadway. They both fall for him. He falls for Maura. But he gives both their big chance. Maura does well, but takes time off to foul up Timmy's chance. Tod finds out, spurns Maura, embraces Timmy. Clinch and fadeout.

If the police investigation broke the shooting schedule for a few days, it would mean a substantial loss to Trident. If it turned out that Maura, Timmy or Tod had knocked off Anya, the loss would be astronomical, as the picture would have to be junked.

As a cautious human being, it seemed that Brant Cully's best bet would be to get up, get dressed and go back to his tourist court. As a curious human being, my best bet would be to use my knowledge to get the jump on the cops, hoping that I could put the finger on whodunit, thus cutting any delay in the shooting schedule. I wondered if there was any penalty for turning into an amateur cop.

The odd thing about it was, that the longer I kept the information to myself, the easier it seemed. There was another element that entered into it. If the same thing had happened in New York, I had no doubt but what I would rush to a phone and call Headquarters.

Things are different in Hollywood. Thousands of people spend all their time manufacturing bright dreams for the public. The realities themselves turn into bright dreams.

And so I gradually realized that I was going to try to handle it myself. I knew that I was doing wrong, and maybe some of my decision was due to the stinking job the bank had handed to me.

I got up to find my muscles were cramped and rigid. I walked over to the bar, got a refill. Timmy called, "Bring me a gin."

The bartender heard her and gave me

her drink. I walked over to the group with it.

I handed it to Timmy. Aaron seemed to have gone to sleep. J. Beatry and Zark had found cards somewhere and were intent on a gin variation called Oklahoma, glaring at the cards. Janet Temple was yawning. Maura was smearing suntan oil on herself. Timmy was keeping the golden body carefully in the shade.

Timmy took the glass in such a way that she imprisoned my fingers in her warm clasp. She gave me a cool look that went from my ankles to my eyes. "You're a muscular rascal, sweet," she said hoarsely. "You could play heavies."

I saw the glint of amusement in Janet Temple's eyes. Managing to get my hand away without spilling Timmy's drink, I forced a smile and said, "I couldn't be a heavy, Timmy. I look too naive and innocent."

She looked at me steadily for a moment, and then smiled broadly. "My Lord—you're right. I was wondering what that look was. I haven't seen it for so long." She chuckled.

I retreated in confusion. Timmy stretched her golden body indolently. Aaron awakened for a moment and glared at her. His chin dropped slowly back to his chest and he slept again.

I looked at Timmy's arms. Golden, sleek and strong. But unmarked. Anya was a . . . *had* been a strong woman too. It didn't seem likely that she could have drowned Anya without getting as much as a scratch.

Janet stood up and said, "Come on, muscles. I'll race you to the end of the pool and back." She walked toward the pool. I liked the way she walked.

The last thing I wanted to do was to go back into that water. I was afraid that if she stood on the edge and looked down, she'd see Anya. I glanced at the others. Maura had moved back into the shade. No one seemed the least bit interested in the pool.

Making a quick decision, I took several running strides and flashed by Janet in a flat racing dive that disturbed the surface so that she'd be unable to see Anya. I heard her yell, "No fair!"

I waited until she caught up and then turned on the steam. I made a deep turn

at the far end and came back. As soon as my outstretched hand touched the tile, I shook the water out of my eyes and turned around to look for Janet. To my surprise she was already there, waiting for me.

"Beat you by a half length," she said.

"Of you or the pool?"

"Okay. Of me. You'd do better, Brant, if you'd arch your chest more and try to climb out of the water with each stroke. You waste a lot of effort because you're too deep in the water. That is, if you don't mind my telling you."

I looked at her and said in a low tone, so the others couldn't overhear, "Climb up out of the water as though the bottom of the pool was full of dead bodies?"

She looked at me as though I had suddenly gone mad. Then she laughed politely, as though I had been making a joke. "That's pretty macabre, Brant, but it's the general idea." Her reaction had been exactly right. I figured that if she had known about the body, she would merely have laughed merrily.

"Swim down to the other end," I said.

I swam the way she had suggested, and it did seem that I went a bit faster. At the far end I stood up. The water was just above my waist. I said, "Smile as though we're joking, Janet."

She looked puzzled but smiled brilliantly. "They can't hear us here," I said. "The body of Anya Orin is up in the far right corner of the pool, held down by the table that Aaron has missed."

Her lips were suddenly bloodless, her blue eyes wide. "Smile!" I snapped.

She showed her teeth, and raised the corners of her mouth, but it wasn't a smile. "What kind of a joke is this?"

"If you can stand it without giving yourself away, take a look. But don't let the others know."

"Why not?"

"Trident is involved and so is the picture. I want to make sure Maura, Timmy and Tod are cleared. Then we can go ahead and call in the cops."

In a low tone, "And what if one of them did it, Brant?"

"Then we better find out quickly so the film can be scrapped before any further dough goes into it."

Still wearing the artificial smile, she asked, "And what makes you worry so

much about Trident finances, friend?"

"I want to make sure they can afford to keep paying me," I said lightly.

"You don't fit in this picture out here, Brant. You haven't got that terrible earnestness about you. I've wondered about you."

I sighed. "I've trusted you so far, Janet, I'm a spy from the bank. I didn't care for the job. I have to take orders. That's the way it is. Right now, I've got the bank's interests at heart."

"And you want to find out if any of that group over there are eager to keep guilty knowledge covered up?"

"That's right."

"The fact that some of them are born actors makes it rough, Brant."

"Would you know if any of them have a motive?"

Suddenly her artificial smile became real—though wry. "You've told me a lot, Brant. I don't know why. Now here's a little tidbit for you. J. Beatry, my boss, has a private deal—had a private deal with Anya. You ever read the Studio Mouse?"

I had read it. It was a syndicated column written by some one obviously on the Hollywood inside. It was nasty and almost libelous. Just almost. There was talk about it being a blackmail column. Pay off, dearie, or I'll write what I know.

"You mean—" I said.

"That's right. Our Anya was the Studio Mouse. J. Beatry got her the spot as a gag. That was back when they ran around together. He takes his agency cut of her income from it, and supplies her, I'm almost positive, with some of the juicier items. I wouldn't tell you this, except that she's dead now and it doesn't make any difference."

"I get it," I said slowly. "It means that anybody at all could have a motive. Anybody."

CHAPTER TWO

Cat and Mouse

SHE didn't answer, but swam slowly up the pool. I followed her. She climbed up, sat on the edge directly over the body. I hoisted myself out beside her. She gave me a lost look and slipped in, feet first. The water was too agitated for

me to see her. Moments later she popped up and I gave her my hand, helped her hoist herself up. She had goose pimples and was shivering.

Instead of letting go of my hand, she squeezed it with all her strength. When I got it back, the white marks of her fingers were still there.

Behind us, J. Beatry cursed and slammed his cards down. "How do you do it, Ludwig?" he demanded. "How do you get cards like that? I'm learning to hate you. I give up. What do I owe you? I make a hundred and twenty."

"Hundred and thirty," Ludwig said sadly.

J. Beatry checked the score again. "Okay. Okay. A hundred and thirty. When I change, you get the cash money."

Ludwig looked mournful. "I like the cash, but also I enjoy beating a bad loser."

Aaron stood up and said, "Go away, Parker. I'll take on this genius. Maybe I can win enough to replace my table."

The game started again. J. Beatry looked at Janet standing beside me and said, "You got your book in your purse? Good. I couldn't play because I got too many things I'm thinking about. You write them down and take them off my mind."

I sat in the chair that Aaron had vacated. Janet sat at J. Beatry's feet, her book balanced against her knee, taking his fast dictation.

". . . call up A. J. and ask about intent on Judy's option, tell him she is thinking about free lance. Wire Gus and ask him if NY office of Terrifo is really considering the Ganey book. Conference with Mouse on increase in syndicate rate. . ."

Timmy, gave a small start and said, "Say, J. Beatry! Do you handle the Studio Mouse? Who is it, really?"

J. Beatry said, "Ah, listening, I see! Sure, I got the Mouse. More trouble than it's worth."

"Who is it?" Timmy demanded petulantly.

"Do I ask you your real name?" J. Beatry said.

Timmy made a fruity sound of contempt. J. Beatry began to dictate again. Timmy reached over and put her slim hand on my wrist. "See how mean he is to me, sweet?" asked Timmy.

"Horrible," I agreed.

Her hand moved slowly up my arm. "You wouldn't be that mean, would you?" she asked softly.

Aaron glanced over and said, "Stop that, Timmy!"

She slowly took her hand away. "Oh, don't be so jealous," she said.

Slumped in her chair, she glared out at the sunshine. After a moment she picked up her empty glass and handed it to me. I trotted obediently over to the bar, asked for the drink in Tagalog. The Filipino looked up with a start and a wide smile. He spewed a fountain of the stuff at me.

I shook my head and said, "Those were about the only words I learned."

He looked sad, made the drinks and gave them to me.

By the time I got back to the group, J. Beatry was through dictating. Janet slapped her book shut, put it in her purse and stood up.

I glanced over at Zark. He was sighing heavily as he marked the score in his favor. His sagging, bloodhound face expressed deep misery at winning again.

Janet looked at me. I guessed what she wanted. "If you're going," I said, "would you mind dropping me off? I came with Ludwig and he seems to be busy."

She nodded. Nobody paid any particular attention to our leaving. Aaron mumbled something appropriate to a host, but his mind was on the cards. Maura Macey was talking to Timmy in a low tone, something about hats.

I took a quick shower, dressed, wrapped my trunks in the square of oiled silk and shoved them in my jacket pocket. I had expected to have to wait for Janet, but to my surprise she was already at the wheel of her little convertible, the motor idling.

I smiled at her and climbed in beside her. She drove quickly down the curving drive. The man at the big gate opened it for us and we turned down the grade toward town. I glanced back. "Practically a fortress, that place," I said.

"Aaron's last wife had a kidnapper complex. Barb wire and big gates and searchlights. There used to be big nasty dogs around there, but when Betty left

she took the hounds along with her."

"He's alone there now?"

"You could call it that. Timmy has her own house back up in one of the canyons, but rumor has it that she hasn't been home in five weeks."

"I read that she and Tod Russell were—"

"A publicity release, dopey. To boost the BO on the new epic."

We were silent for a time. The little car ran very smoothly. "You saw the—body down there?" I asked.

She lifted her shoulders in a quick shudder. "The way her hair was floating. Ugh!"

"Not pretty. Are you going where I think you're going?"

"He brought her to the party last night. Appearance, you know. Picked her up at the Biltmore."

"It will eliminate him, if we see him?" I asked.

"If we handle it right. Let me do the talking. Did you hear Timmy on the subject of the Mouse?"

"I couldn't help it. Of course, she could have just been interested. Or she could be bright enough to think that sort of a question would smoke screen her guilt."

Janet glanced at me quickly and then back at the road. "For my dough, she's out of the picture. Anya is still in that green job she wore last night. Remember the dress Timmy had on? After I dressed I sneaked a look at Timmy's dress. It hadn't been wet."

"Could Timmy have changed dresses, drowned Anya and then changed back?"

"Isn't it easier to count her out, with reservations?"

"Anything you say, Janet."

She turned into a long drive that lead between high rows of flowering shrubs. She stopped under the arch of a porch. We were about to go up to the door when it opened and Tod Russell came out. He was stripped to the waist, wearing ragged khaki shorts and keeping his chest arched. He smoked a gnarled briar pipe and there were wrinkles of good humor around his soft brown eyes.

"Why, hello!" he said. He smiled at Janet and looked at me with suspicion. I could see that he couldn't remember my name, only that I was small fry at Tri-

dent—without the right to come within a thousand feet of Tod Russel's home.

Janet jerked a thumb at him and said to me, "It opens and shuts its eyes and says mama."

Russel laughed uncertainly. "Come in and have a drink."

"Can't take the time, Tod," Janet said. "As a matter of fact, we're Cupid's little partners today."

"I don't get it," Tod said.

"I HAVEN'T given it to you yet," Janet said tartly. "This isn't my idea. It's a favor for a friend. Son, you have a secret admirer. She's never had a chance to be alone with you, though she has talked with you at parties. She thinks you're the most gallant and delightful hunk of meat on the screen. She's home this afternoon and she wants you to stop in . . . alone."

Tod inspected his pipe and arched his chest a little more. "Hmmm," he said.

"She's blonde and foreign and attractive."

"Myra's here," Tod said.

"For goodness sake!" Janet said. "What difference does that make? You've been treating Myra like dirt for a year."

"What did you say her name is?" Tod asked.

I knew what Janet was going to do. I watched his face very carefully as she said, "Anya Orin."

There was a faintly startled look in Tod's eyes. Then a faraway look. The pointed tip of his red tongue came out and slowly moistened his lower lip. "Hmmm," he said. He frowned. "This isn't a gag?"

"Not at all. Why?"

"Well, I tried to become acquainted with Anya about a year ago. She laughed at me."

"Joyous laughter," Janet said.

"This afternoon?" he asked.

"Well, this afternoon or this evening. Come on, Brant."

As we backed out he was still standing on the porch, arching his chest and saying, "Hmmm."

"What if he goes to her place tonight?" I asked.

"Then my story is that she made the deal with me last night to go to him. No-

body can prove that she didn't. And it sounds like something she'd do."

"But it doesn't sound like something you'd do, Janet."

She gave me a quick, grave look. "Thanks, Brant. It isn't the sort of errand I'd normally do."

"What now?" I asked. "For my dough, Russel is clean."

She slowed the car. "Maybe they've found it by now."

"I doubt it. We were the only swimmers there, I think. Look. Suppose the motive was connected with the column. Suppose it was a blackmail deal. Wouldn't she have notes or something at her place?"

"She might," Janet said slowly. "If we could—"

"Where does she live?"

"An apartment hotel on a side street of Wiltshire. It's tough to get in there. But she has no servants and once we get in, we're okay."

"Have you been there?"

"Once. A small party. Third floor rear. She has a big sun deck. That's all I can remember about the place."

"Do you know anybody else in the building?"

"Wait a minute! Banner, Batsford, Barter, Bannock. . . . That's it! Bannock, Ed and Eileen."

"We can go calling."

* * *

The quick dusk was almost over as we walked into the Bannock apartment. Ed was a cameraman, one of the best, and Eileen was one of the girls who had come out to Hollywood and had ended up as a car hop, ashamed to go back home to Chicago. Then Ed had come along. They were very much in love and very fine people and it was hard to get out of there.

They made the assumption that Janet and I were going together. It was remarkably easy to do the little things to bolster up their belief. I put my arm around Janet as we stood by the door. It started as a gag, but felt so comfortable that I forgot it was a gag.

We went down the hall toward the stairs. They called good-by and shut their door. "Unhand me, sweetie," Janet said.

At the stairs we went up instead of down.

I inspected Anya's door. It looked as solid as does the main vault back in the bank.

"Wish I had spent a little more time under water," I said. "Her purse was there, right beside her. Did you see it?"

She shook her head. We talked in whispers. The hallway was tiled, big red and brown irregular tiles. My moccasins had rubber soles. I inspected the lock, found the place where it entered the frame and walked backward away from it.

"What are you going to do?" Janet whispered.

"Trade secret," I said.

I made two running steps and lifted my right foot and smacked the door right flush on the lock with my heel. There was a sharp click of fractured metal and the door swung open so violently that it dug the inside knob into the plaster wall.

I hurried Janet in, shut the door behind us, and, to play safe, affixed the inside chain. She found the light switch. The big room was bright and airy. The doors to the sundeck were open.

The thing that struck me were the pictures. Dozens of them. Glamor shots. All of Anya Orin. Beyond the big room was a master bedroom, obviously unused. Beyond it was a small, cell-like bedroom, severe and plain. Anya's room. The walls were covered with more pictures. Janet gasped.

"Jealous?" I asked.

"Stunned," she replied.

A safe was built into the wall in the back of the small closet. I knew after one look that we'd never get it open. Janet went over and started going through bureau drawers. She straightened up with a piece of paper in her hand. She was frowning at it.

I read it over her shoulder. It was a sheet torn from a looseleaf notebook of pocket size. The sheet was neatly ruled into months. There was a column of symbols down the left-hand margin. Each symbol had a figure under it. The current month, as well as the preceding months, all had neat little pencil check marks opposite the symbol.

Nine symbols. All crudely drawn. A wedding ring with \$200 written under it.

A key with five hundred dollars under it.

"So it was a blackmail setup?" Janet breathed.

"How so?"

"THIS is her account book, Brant. Suppose she finds out that somebody is a bigamist. She puts the wedding ring symbol in her book and sets a figure. \$200 a month. Not too greedy. No payment, and the bigamist gets a mention in her column. On the other hand, that little hypo could mean a drug addict. Anyway, it's worth three hundred and fifty a month."

I looked down the row of symbols and said, "And there's an expensive one, Janet. Eight hundred bucks a month and they're three months behind."

The symbol didn't mean much of anything to me. "Why, it's a small d," she said.

"Or a toothpick propped against a marble," I said. "D for what? Destiny?"

It didn't make sense. And it was the only one way behind in payments. Twenty-four hundred bucks behind out of ten thousand a year.

We stared at each other. "It's an odds-on bet, baby, that whoever the d stands for knocked off the blonde."

Her eyes widened. She whispered, "My boss, J. Beatry, used to write stories. Under the name of John Daniel. D for Daniel."

"You mentioned that he used to run around with Anya?"

"For about six months." She slipped the paper into her purse. She tilted her head on one side and said, "You know, Brant, if he killed her, he might have dreamed up that dictation routine to throw me off the track. To throw both of us. He must have noticed the way I went down to take a look at Anya."

"If it was J. Beatry and if he had a reason to pay blackmail, why did he stop?"

"He's making more money than ever before. He wouldn't miss ten big bills a year."

"Maybe he decided purely as a matter of pride to stop paying?" I suggested.

She laughed silently. "Pride? Not my boss, Brant."

"Then why?"

"Well . . . maybe Anya raised the fee?"

It was my turn to frown. "And maybe the small d refers to someone else, Janet. Maybe we're baying on the wrong scent."

"Who could it be?"

"D for dynamite. That might be Timmy. D for damn fool. That would be me. But I didn't kill her. D for delightful. Maura. D for darling. You, my love."

She giggled. "A transfer from the diplomatic corps, no doubt."

"Yeah. D for diplomatic."

"We could stand here and guess all night," she said, "and sooner or later either the innocent Tod will arrive, or else somebody will notice the lights being on."

At that moment the phone sang. We killed the lights and tip-toed in darkness to the door. When the phone stopped, I pulled the door open, pulled it shut behind us. I didn't really relax until Janet turned left on Wiltshire.

A few blocks down, she parked beside the curb, left the lights on and the motor running, and said carefully, "We have a choice, Brant. We can either go back to Aaron's and find the body and be awfully surprised, or we can go to the police and tell what we know."

"I think the cops is the better bet," I said.

As though I were descended from Aladdin, a police sedan cut sharply in front of us and stopped. The doors flew open and two uniformed men came walking slowly back toward the car. I noted that they kept their hands close to the worn leather holsters.

"You Miss Temple?" one of them called out. "Who's that with you?"

"I am Janet Temple and this is Mr. Cully. Why?"

"Mind getting in our sedan, Mr. Cully? I'll drive your car, Miss Temple. Move over, please," he said, his hand on the car door.

"What exactly is the meaning of this?" Janet demanded.

"A little trouble at the Nase house. The orders to pick you two up went out over an hour and a half go. We're taking you back to Nase's."

"I assure you we didn't walk out with the family silver," I said.

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"Don't try to be clever, Mr. Cully. Just get in the sedan."

I did as I was told. I sat beside the driver. I glanced back and saw that Janet's little convertible was following us. My mouth was dry. The driver touched the siren lightly to clear the way and then reported by radio that they had picked the two of us up.

The gate was open at Aaron's place, the house a blaze of lights. Even the floodlights were on. To my surprise, they turned us loose with orders not to leave the place. I pulled Janet off into a quiet space by a bush and said, "Where do we go from here?"

"We don't know a thing, Brant. Not a thing. Okay?"

"Okay by me. But I'm beginning to feel like the kid that stole the jam."

We found Timmy still out by the pool. She had changed into a simple linen dress, which, on her, looked anything but simple. She had also changed her drink to straight brandy.

It seemed as if all the guests who had been at the Saturday party had been brought back. I noticed Tod Russel over by the pool.

Timmy laughed hoarsely. "What a party!"

"What happened?" Janet asked.

"You haven't been told yet? A little while after you left, sweet, Maura took a little swim for herself. She came up green and screaming and we couldn't even understand what she said before she fainted. Aaron had the pool drained and there was our Anya, pinned down by that table Aaron has been complaining about."

Janet and I gasped appropriately.

Timmy said: "Now all the odd little men from the police are scurrying around making an enormous fuss. Maybe if they find who killed the angel, they'll award a medal."

"Is it smart to say things like that?" Janet asked.

"Why not?" Timmy asked.

"Your boss told me, Janet, that he was the Studio Mouse. He's around here somewhere, moaning and tearing his hair. Over the loss of income, I assume."

"How are the rest of them taking it?" I asked.

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TIMMY laughed again. "Wonderful! Like on location. They're going around looking tragic. As if they give a damn!" She drained her glass, handed it to me and said, "Get me more like a sweet."

I solved her problem by handing back the empty glass and swiping the brandy bottle off the bar. She didn't change expression, merely filled her glass and put the bottle on the concrete near her chair.

A whole group of people were standing staring down into the empty pool. Timmy told us that the pictures had been taken long ago and the body taken into the house. The table was being dried with infra-red lamps. They were going to try to get fingerprints off it. Something about water not hurting the greasy deposits made by a fingerprint. The arrangement had a holiday, carnival look about it. Glancing around at the people I could see that Timmy was right. They were enjoying themselves.

Tod came over, frowned at Janet and said, "I don't understand. I mean about your message that Anya wanted—"

Janet smiled coolly. "She gave me the errand last night. I guess she didn't know she was at her last party."

Tod Russel gulped visibly and wandered away.

Timmy snorted. "Imagine having to be sweet to that!"

A few minutes later a lot of people came out of the house, herded by the police. A dapper little man who called himself Inspector Garth called us all together, bunched at the end of the pool. In the group so gathered were all the house servants and all of the guests of the night before, some thirty-five to forty people. Maura Macey was still under a doctor's care back in the house, he said.

"Now, then," he roared. "Your attention, please. We understand that you, Mr. Nase, brought Miss Orin to the party."

"I sent a car after her," Aaron said. "What's wrong with that? It was—"

"Just answer the questions. If I want more, I'll ask for it. Who drove the car?"

"Rogers, my chauffeur," Aaron said sullenly.

"Rogers?" the inspector said loudly.

A burly man with a red face answered.

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"You picked up Miss Orin at her apartment?"

"Yes, sir. At eight. I got her here about twenty after."

"Did she seem upset?"

"No, sir!"

"How was she supposed to get back?"

"I was going to take her back when she sent for me. But she never did. I imagined she had been taken home by some of the other guests, sir."

"You thought she had gone home, Mr. Nase?"

"Sure. She wasn't around, was she? How did I know she was in my pool?"

"You thought Rogers had taken her home?"

"That's right."

"Now then, Mr. Nase. What guests stayed overnight here?"

"Nobody. I asked some of my special friends to come back today. In the afternoon. Maura and Zark and Parker. Mr. Cully was with Zark so I asked him too. And wherever Parker goes, that Temple girl comes along with a notebook."

"But nobody stayed all night?"

"I forgot," Aaron said. "Miss Timmy Mitchell didn't feel so good so I let her stay in one of the guest rooms. It was okay with Russel. He brought her."

Then the inspector began to ask about Miss Orin's movements during the party hours. It gradually became evident that she had spent most of the time outdoors by the pool, going inside between ten and twelve to see an old movie, then going back out. She had moved from group to group during the evening, apparently gay and untroubled.

Slowly he began to narrow it down. Before the outside lights were turned off, she had been talking with J. Beatry Parker. That must have been close to three. As near as Aaron could remember, he'd given orders to have the outside lights killed at three o'clock.

Janet's boss seemed to be having trouble with a tight collar. I stood near Janet. She glanced at me and then away, quickly.

J. Beatry Parker, tall, thin and white, was having a rough time. He said plaintively, "Yes, I was talking to Anya. I was standing right over there with her. We were talking about her contract with

I'll Drown You in My Dreams

me. I'm her agent. As I told you, she writes—wrote the Studio Mouse column. We argued. Nothing important. Just business. I always talk loud about business. That's why that man over there heard me. She walked away from me toward the pavilion. I went into the house, found Aaron, said good night and went home."

"When did the lights around this pool go off?"

"While I was talking to her," J. Beatry said, wiping his forehead.

"Did anyone see Miss Orin after the outside lights went off?" Inspector Garth asked.

There was dead silence. The attitude of the people was expressed in the way they drifted away from J. Beatry, leaving him standing alone.

After a few moments, Garth said, "The following people stay. The rest of you go home. Russel, Nase, Temple, Parker, Macey, Mitchell, Cully and Zark." It was the same group that had been around the pool during the afternoon, with the exception of Russel.

CHAPTER THREE

Deadly Water Game

THE police went off toward the house to confer. There was the soft sound of water rushing into the deep pool. It was beginning to fill up. The water rushing in looked black and deadly. I glanced at my watch. Nine o'clock. I was starving. We all drifted together from common impulse—with the exception of J. Beatry. He remained at the side of the pool, looking off into the blackness beyond the lights.

I sat on the pavilion railing next to Janet. There seemed to be little to say. In a few moments Maura came down from the house, walking slowly, as though very tired.

"How's the body finder?" Timmy called.

"I would prefer not to discuss the matter," she said coldly.

She went over in a corner out of the light, her face a pale blur against the darkness.

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John D. MacDonald

Timmy stood up and wandered over to the big record player. She selected some records, stacked them in the machine, clicked it on, and after it had warmed up, turned it low. Soft music.

She came over, took my hand and pulled me off the railing. "Wait to see if you can dance," she said.

She came into my arms, warm and glowing. Though she had had a great deal to drink there was nothing uncoordinated about her. I tried to keep her out in the light part of the small pavilion, but she tugged me toward the darkness. When we were in the darkest part, she lifted her lips.

"We're supposed to be dancing," I said.

She snorted, turned and walked away from me. After a few minutes I went back to the railing and sat beside Janet.

"Have fun?" Janet asked.

"Oh, great sport," I said sullenly.

"She wants to put your stuffed head in her trophy room. The easiest thing to do is oblige her, and then she'll leave you alone."

I put my hand on Janet's arm. "I prefer women two inches shorter. I like them with crisp brown hair and blue eyes and a short upper lip. Understand?"

She moved her arm away. "Everybody seems to have trophy rooms these days." She was looking out toward J. Beatry Parker, her lips pursed.

"Do you think he did it?" I asked.

Little wrinkles appeared above the bridge of her nose. "I can't really think so, Brant. I know how intelligent he is. And he never does anything on the impulse. Everything is planned. If he killed her, I think it would have been done in a way that would point away from him instead of toward him."

Timmy was talking to Aaron, using a lush, fake Southern accent.

Janet sniffed. "Listen to our girl. Her part in the great epic is a you-all girl. She lays it on like uncooked fudge. And little Aaron loves it."

"She scares me."

Janet giggled. "Aaron is stuck with her. He wonders which day she's going to leave for greener pastures."

"She has done so before, presumably?"

"Heavens, yes! Our coy little darling

I'll Drown You in My Dreams

has been married three times. Twice since she's been out here. Her early years are, as the novelists say, shrouded in mystery."

"Lovely, lovely girl. At any distance over forty feet."

"She doesn't seem very upset over Anya. She and Anya were pals of a sort. Anyway, as much as Timmy can be friends with anybody, any woman. Timmy hates Maura, ignores me—and I think she was a bit baffled by Anya."

"Has Timmy got money?"

"She makes plenty. But she likes the wheels and the dice. She takes a run over to Nevada every chance she gets and, as far as I know, she never wins. Some of the local bistros with games of chance in the back room put the blocks to her every so often. Then she pawns something."

Timmy had stopped talking and was dancing with Tod Russel. Tod was making it difficult because he was trying to keep his profile to the light and keep Timmy in the shadow of his big chest.

I wandered over to the machine and looked at some of the albums. A lot of good numbers. I found a Daintree Able disc of "Reformatory Blues" and put it on the top of the stack. Daintree is the gal who, through the graces of a lenient warden, made her musical rep while doing a ten to twenty.

Finally Timmy hauled off and kicked Tod in the shin. He yelled and she walked off, grinning. She came over to us and said, "Got sick of the great profile. Dance with me, Brant, sweet. I'll be a good girl this time."

She kept her word. She danced well when she put her mind on it. We were in the same dark corner waiting between records when the Daintree number dropped on. She started to come into my arms for the piano introduction and then she tightened up. "What's the matter?" I asked.

"Who put that on?" she demanded.

"I did. Why?"

"Take it off. I don't like it."

"Oh, come now! It's a good number."

"I said I don't like it. How thick is your skull, mister?"

She pulled away, walked over, turned off the machine, yanked the record off and scaled it out into the night.

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John D. MacDonald

"That was cute!" I said.

"I don't go for that kind of music," she said sullenly.

"What kind? Deep blues? That Miss Able is an artist, chum."

"Well, I won't listen to her on that number."

"Baby, you must have a good reason for putting on this kind of an act. For my money you're a spoiled brat, and a shade on the stupid side."

HER palm against my cheek cracked like a rifle. She turned away. I walked back to where I had left Janet—but Janet was gone. While I was looking for her the police called us all into the huge living room of Aaron's house. A Hollywood decorator had gone quietly mad doing the place. Everything from chicken wire to drift wood. The room gave the impression that a camera boom was about to peer in over a partition. Maybe that was the way Aaron wanted it.

Inspector Garth arranged us to his satisfaction. One of his men shut the big sliding doors. Garth moistened a good third of a cigarette and lit it with a kitchen match struck on a horny thumb-nail.

"Pity the poor police," he said with heavy irony. "Already we got the big gun lawyers from Trident and the public relations, experts and the sympathetic press with us. They are in your number two living room, Mr. Nase, sucking up your liquor.

"So far I got a little. Not much, but a little. This Orin woman was a cutie. I gather that in her own gentle way she had her grubby fingers in the best pockets in Hollywood. Ten minutes ago we burned her safe open. The character who broke in there will be happy to know that there was nothing in the safe but cash. Enough cash to make my silly old head swim."

He paused, looked carefully at his cigarette, and then continued. "She operated on the basis of being very, very understanding with the womenfolk and very generous with all of mankind. She got her information that way. And as soon as she got it, she let it be known that she would sure like to have it pub-

I'll Drown You in My Dreams

lished in a column run by a friend of hers. In a way she was right. Anya was her own best friend.

"Me, I sometimes go on hunches. It seems to me that instead of looking among all the guests for the person who gave Anya the water treatment, I should look among this select little group. It would seem that the murderer's best bet would be to show here on Sunday afternoon.

"The only thing I haven't got is the information on which ones in this little group Anya was bleeding. It won't take long to find out, friends. I've got a lot of eager guys in the department who are willing to do a lot of digging. . . ."

I sat beside Zark and my mind was suddenly unable to take in the sense of his words. I was thinking of little things. Silly little things. A picture of a small d, a phony Southern accent, a smack across the face.

In a few moments Garth broke it up by saying, "Okay, friends. You're all poker players. You can go now, but not out of town. Go on about your business while my eager young men start turning up rocks and looking underneath. Happy dreams."

We all got up and wandered out of the room. Garth's man opened the doors with a flourish. The wolves jumped on all the celebrities, leaving Janet and me severely alone. We were too small to attract attention until the big names had been sucked dry. A lawyer from Trident was running back and forth between Maura, Zark, Timmy and Aaron, screaming:

"Not a word! Don't say a word! Please, ladies and gentlemen! Not a word for the press. Mr. Roberts will give out statements from you to the press after they're cleared with the studio. Please!"

One of the newspapermen tripped him and he landed on his hands and knees, still pleading for cooperation.

I got Janet over into a corner and began to talk to her in a low tone. Her eyes widened and she began to nod as she began to see what I was driving at. I told her carefully what she had to do and how dangerous it was.

It took an hour for the place to clear out. Maura Macey left with Zark and




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John D. MacDonald

J. Beatry in Zark's sedan. Aaron was standing, muttering to himself, when I saw Janet come in with Timmy, go over to Aaron, hold the back of her hand against her forehead and ask him something. He nodded impatiently.

After Janet had gone upstairs, I went to Aaron and said, "Mr. Nase, I made the mistake of loaning my place to—"

"Okay, okay. This is a hotel now, anyway. Find one of my people and they'll show you a room. . . ."

I turned out the lights in my room. The outside floodlights shone in. I was making my second drink in the semi-dark when the outside lights clicked off. Suddenly I couldn't take a deep enough breath. The neck of the bottle chattered against the glass. I set them both aside, went to my door and opened it silently.

I got downstairs without being observed and went out the side door, my footsteps noiseless on the soft grass. As on the night before, there was a half moon which touched the grass with vague silver, made the shadows huge and mysterious.

With quiet steps, staying in the dense shadows, I circled the pavilion, coming out twenty feet from the pool. In the heavy shadow of the pavilion, I crouched and watched the pool. It was at least twenty minutes later when I heard the muted, slow click of heels.

But then my eyes were sufficiently accustomed to the half light so that I could see Janet Temple, pale and straight in the moonlight, walking back and forth on the concrete apron fencing the pool, between the pool and the pavilion.

She walked back and forth in the moonlight. A strange slow dance. My muscles grew cramped with the long wait. The moon made silver patterns on the restless blackness of the water. The tables made odd shadows. Another figure walked with Janet. The wry ghost of Anya Orin.

Janet's heel clicked loudly in silence. Suddenly I barely suppressed a gasp. Something had moved over on the lawn near the house. The barest suggestion of movement. Near a bush. I strained my eyes, watching. I was ready for the next flash of movement. Something pale, crouched and feral darted to the shadow of a second clump of shrubbery.

Pll Drown You in My Dreams

I glanced back at Janet. She had grown tired of walking, was standing at the corner of the pool, her back to the house, looking up at the moon.

Evidently the pale form saw Janet with her back turned. Boldly it came out from the clump of bushes, began to advance with smooth, quick movements.

Closer and closer it came. When it was ten feet from Janet, it made a quick rush, straightening up, its arms clasping Janet, the two of them dropping into the pool with a splash that raised silver drops into the moonlight.

I had stripped off shirt and trousers, kicked off my shoes. I wore my swimming trunks under my trousers. I dropped down into the black water, reaching for them. I found wrists, locked hands, pried them apart, thrust myself up toward the surface.

My head broke through into the air and I stared into the contorted face of Timmy Mitchell. She dipped her head, sank her teeth into my wrist and I yelled with pain, releasing her. Behind me, Janet was climbing out of the pool. Timmy, evil and lovely, climbed up over the edge. I grabbed her ankle but she kicked free. Janet was running toward her.

"Get into the house!" I yelled.

I ran in the direction of Timmy's flight. Just as I got near the garage, twin beams of light flashed, a heavy motor roared and her svelte car bore down on me. I jumped wildly to one side, barely in time, the left fender brushing my bare leg. As I rolled across the grass I got a glimpse of Timmy behind the wheel. Her pale hair was matted, her face expressionless, her shoulders straight.

I stood up and watched the twin tail-lights move sideways in a sharp skid as she took the turn and straightened it out, headed for the gate.

There was a distant shout, a crash and the flat crack of a shot. The car motor roared. I ran down the drive, the gravel bruising my bare feet. The gateman lay crumpled beside the broken gate. A man in uniform stared into the distance, cursing, the gun still in his hand.

Far down the road there was a tearing, ripping crash that seemed to last for long seconds, then a burst of flame that shot

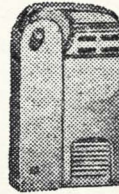
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high into the night and receded suddenly to a red glow.

AFTER my interview with Garth, I took a cab to J. Beatty's office. Janet looked up and smiled as I walked in. It was a smile that said many things.

"She was a certain type gal," J. Beatty said. "There are a lot of them. But they don't get to be big time in the movies. A little kid from some back alley. She did time twice. We can't blame her. It was the environment. Then she made the mistake of getting tight and telling Anya.

"This current picture was to have been the biggest starring role Timmy ever had. She was playing the part of a young gal, one of the First Families of Virginia. Can you imagine the stink that would have been raised if it had come out that she actually was jailed twice? And Anya would have broken the story in her column sooner or later if Timmy had continued to renege. With Timmy's gambling yen, she must have been in hock up to her ears."

Janet sighed. "That lower case 'd' stopped me cold. Brant and I made a lot of silly guesses, but he was the one who figured it meant juvenile delinquent."

"How did she kill Anya?" J. Beatty asked.

"The same way she tried to kill Janet. Timmy must have made a date with her to meet beside the pool after the lights went out. Timmy changed clothes, sneaked out, grabbed Anya and went into the pool with her. Afterwards she pulled the table over and dropped it in to keep Anya at the bottom. She knew she had to conceal the exact time of death."

J. Beatty frowned at Janet. "What did Brant here have you say to Timmy?"

Janet shuddered. "I had to ask her to meet me at the pavilion at two thirty in the morning. When she wanted to know why, I said that I was taking up where Anya left off, only that the ante was being boosted to sixteen hundred a month because there was a murder involved. Her eyes frightened me. She agreed to meet me. I arranged to stay over by telling Aaron I didn't feel well enough to drive home."

"And you were the genius?" J. Beatty said to me.

I'll Drown You in My Dreams

"Conditional. Her annoyance at the jail-bird song gave me the opening wedge. From then on it seemed to fit. Of course, when Garth checked and found her prints on file under the name of Sally Garsik, that tied it up neatly. That was after she had burned herself to a crisp by driving head-on into the tree."

Janet shook her head sadly. She looked at J. Beatty and said, "Tell Brant why you wanted to see him."

J. Beatty Parker made a little chapel of his fingers and looked through it at me. He said, "Since the newspapers reported your actual reason for being at Trident, you are of no more use here."

"Right. Cazler has learned to hate me."

"And when you return to New York, Janet will go along?"

"Right again."

"But you do not object to your future wife working for a living?"

"That's up to her."

"Your script work for Trident was surprisingly competent."

"Thank you. Thank you."

"If you resign from the bank, you are permanently queered at Trident."

"Of course."

"Then wire your resignation to the bank, sign on this cute little dotted line and I can place you at another major studio at four bills a week the day after you get back from your honeymoon."

I stared at J. Beatty. This thin, white, elderly citizen wanted me to give up the nice, safe, sound, conservative, dependable banking business at a moment's notice. Just so he wouldn't have to break in a new secretary. I wondered if he thought I was crazy.

I looked hard at Janet. She gave me a grave, sweet smile, uncapped a fountain pen and handed it to me. In a daze, I signed the agency contract.

J. Beatty sighed heavily. "A good thing you decided to sign your name, my boy. Two hours ago I wired your resignation to the bank. I . . . ah . . . took the liberty of signing your name to the wire."

Janet patted my hand. "In his own nasty little way, he's sweet, darling."

It's a wonderful little city, this Hollywood.

THE END

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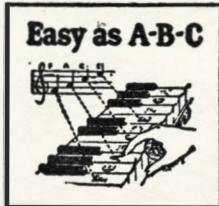
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Shane Darcy

(Continued from page 50)

When the man grinned, the Duchess clenched her fists together and stormed: "Paul Mitchell. That heel. That fool. That frightened nitwit posing for a man. Trying to run out on me—" She paused, glanced sidewise at her beaming husband, continued in a suddenly calm voice:

"I'm glad I realized my mistake before it was too late. How I could ever have even thought— But you knew, darling. You always know and understand these things. That's why I love you so much, even if sometimes I go off the beam. Oh, how awful it would have been if I had believed his promises and left you. . . ." She was talking quickly, spurting out the words in jerky attempts to change the expression on her husband's face.

But it remained serene and placid, and she shouted despite herself: "Get it over with and tell me, what did you do with Paul? You're gloating all over."

He controlled the shaking of his chin, the twitching of his lips, long enough to say: "My methodical little darling. We weren't going to ignore your plans entirely, Chessie and me. So I helped him put poor Paul on the cruiser."

Her mouth opened in a round O.

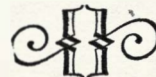
"But didn't he tell you?" her husband continued. "He should be here, back from the trip now."

She managed: "Ch-Chess-ie?"

"Sure and he's my brother. Now, did you ever think it? I brought him here from Frisco, when things went wrong for him there." Amiably, "Don't be angry, darling. I had him check up on you—without your knowing about it—to keep you on the beam, as you just said." He chuckled. "But, where is he?"

Her husband's eyes were pushing her further, and further away from him, into the warehouse depths, irresistibly nearer and nearer that silent thing, until she wanted to scream out—

"Well," he said irritably, "aren't you going to answer me?" And then his eyes fell on the object just beyond her, and it was too late for her to scream . . . ever.



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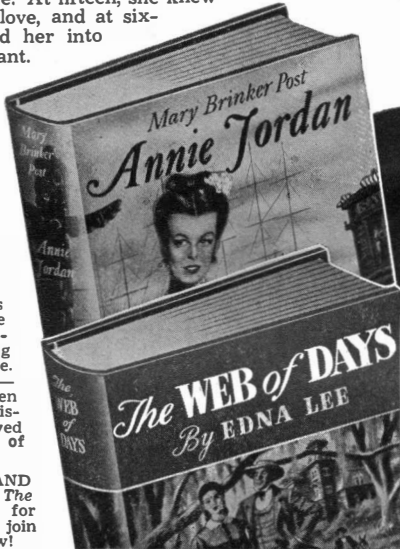
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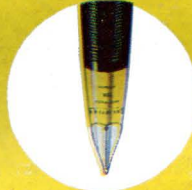
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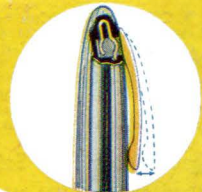
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