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FEB. 25¢

NEW DETECTIVE MAGAZINE



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BEST IN CRIME FICTION 25c

NEW DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Vol. 17

Contents for February, 1952

No. 2

THREE BIG NOVELETTES

- HALF-PAST KILLING TIME!**.....Donn Mullally 14
—And time to kill again, Kim Bracca decided, when he saw Morrissey's two Elaines—the trim little stoop, and the incendiary little blonde!
- THE GHOST OF COCK ROBIN**.....Day Keene 50
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Copyright 1941 by Popular Publications, Inc.
- MURDER MAKES THE HONEYMOON**.....Dale Clark 86
The honeymoon didn't look like anything special, but the first wedding gifts were really something—sent hot from the unseen gun!

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- THE GIBBERING NIGHT**.....Fredric Brown 36
Nothing newsworthy ever happened in Charlotteville. . . . Except the robbery, the scandal—and the corpse!
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- DEAD RINGER FOR JOE!**.....Fletcher Flora 46
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- REDHEADS KILL EASY**.....Laurence Donovan 71
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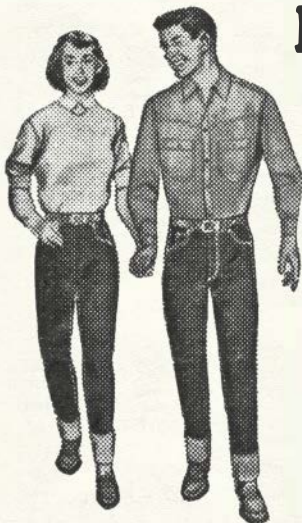
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THE WITNESS CHAIR

WHAT makes 'em do it? is one of our favorite questions. Muggings and murders—and deaths for a dime—and nobody really knows the answer. Some time ago it was all a matter of slum clearance—wipe out the slums, do away with the "underprivileged", and you did away with crime. Today, thanks to the Ke-fauver Committee and the world in your living-room through TV, the popular notion is that practically everything is caused by "corruption in high places," unattended by embarrassment of any sort.

We're willing to go along with either theory. Just so it helps. But if the current-popular trend of thought is correct, then a reader from New Jersey—Mrs. Gordon Bent—points out a ray of hope. We've

(Continued on page 8)



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SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U. S. A.

New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 6)

made progress. Things are not as bad as they used to be.

Dear Editor:

We complain, these days, of corruption in high places. Little do we know, any longer, how high corruption can get. In its greatest era, during the last century, a New Yorker named Robert Lowber really showed them. Lowber, in with the local bosses, contracted to sell the city a sixty thousand dollar piece of real estate for a little more than three times that sum. There was one indigestible part of the deal—Lowber didn't happen to have title to two-thirds of the land, and the city controller refused to pay out a cent.

Lowber, nothing daunted, sued the city in its own fixed courts, got a judgment for a quarter of a million—and forced the sheriff to sell *City Hall* to satisfy the judgment! New York, of course, later reacquired its own government seat by parting with another astronomical figure to the right party.

Mrs. Gordon Bent,
New Jersey.

From the number of times the following theme has cropped up in *Witness Chair* correspondence, we would say that it's worth bringing up once more—if for no other reason than to keep our readers on guard against medics who are not properly accredited.

Dear Editor:

During a recent shortage of doctors in Oakland, California, we had a zealous female general practitioner who not only answered any and all calls at any and all hours, but even refused any fee for her services. She claimed to be on the staff of the Children's Hospital, and called herself Jean Androvsky, M.D. She needed no money, and she owed service to society. She and her constantly attendant nurse visited many, many homes, and they wrote many, many prescriptions.

Months later, nurse and doctor both were discovered to be phonies—graduates of Tehachapi Prison, who had used the ruse for the purpose of petty robbery. Their take had been mostly in fountain pens and watches. Both were sent back to prison. And the shuddering families of Oakland, looking back on the episode, made a surprising discovery—all the phony doctor's patients had recovered health—and no one had paid more fee than a fountain pen or a watch.

William Lennox,
California.

(Continued on page 10)

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(Continued from page 8)

An ironic little note from a Southern reader points up once again the subtle separation that exists between law and justice.

Dear Editor:

Betty Burge, a middle-aged woman of rural Tennessee, swore that the law never could punish her for the murder of a neighbor, Sallie Golden. In court, Mrs. Golden's husband gave damning testimony—he and Betty together, he confessed, had done the brutal job. But he was an ex-convict. His word against Betty's was held untenable. He went to jail, Betty went free, still boasting she'd never pay. Betty's circle of friends included a wily young female blackmailer who somehow got the evidence a court had lacked, and who tried to make Betty pay hush money. Almost casually, Betty pointed out it was against her principles to pay for that particular murder, and killed the extortionist, a murder for which she now enjoys a life tenure in prison. But she still has not been charged with the killing of Sallie Golden. It must be a comfort.

George Boland,
Tennessee.

An English reader writes:

Dear Editor:

I am forwarding the enclosed newspaper clipping, giving the account of what I believe to be one of the most unusual criminal pursuits of all time—as well as one of the most heroic instances of a man overcoming almost hopeless physical handicaps.

Hero Leonard Doyle of Leeds, England was not the man you'd expect to thwart the plans of a burglar. Not that he had no guts. What he had lacked for the thirty-two years of his life, was the use of his legs. He sat in a wheelchair, one day, on guard in the warehouse where his father was the caretaker. Doyle Senior was out to lunch. Bandits entered, unconcerned, picked up two bolts of cloth, and left, ignoring Leonard's threats and presence alike. Leonard Doyle pursued them—in his wheelchair—and won. After a mile or so, the thieves were glad to drop their loot and escape. They only had legs. Leonard's wheelchair was motorized, and therefore, ruthlessly tireless.

John Gutner,
London, England

Far too long and tragic is the roster of those who have been innocently imprisoned due to mistaken identity. Even the most modern scientific methods have failed to guard completely against all error—but possibly the unhappiest case in the records is that of Adolph Beck, who was haunted by another man's misdeeds right into his grave.

Dear Editor:

In the 1890's, in England, a man named William Wyatt made a dubious living by posing as a nobleman to gullible young women, and then swindling them out of their valuables. Wyatt's unfortunate physical double, Adolph Beck, identified by eight women as their nemesis, served seven years in prison for Wyatt's crime. Upon release, he tried to pick up the threads of life anew—but within three years, he was again arrested, and positively identified by five women as their swindler. He had served four months on the second false sentence of a lifetime when the error was discovered. Though Beck was awarded five thousand pounds compensation, his nerves never recovered.

He died two years later.

Galvin Knapp,
New York.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Still, no adequate means have been devised to hold back that ultimate violator of all rules—the “born” murderer. Cain, the first such killer, was not the last to be marked by immunity.

Dear Editor:

During the last war, a British private was court-martialed for shooting at his corporal in apparent cold blood . . . a crime the private admitted. He pleaded a previous brain injury. Medical experts made an electrographic reading of the private's brain, declared him a bona fide abnormal, who would probably again behave erratically some day.

The British Army's only legal recourse: to discharge the soldier.

A few months later, the discharged soldier committed a murder at home. Again he pleaded brain injury, again medical findings substantiated his plea.

The only legal recourse of British justice: acquittal.

Condemned to death, in this strange set-up: the civilian victim.

It had been only a matter of time, of who, and where.

Clyde St. John,
Ontario, Canada.

Let's hear from all you amateur sleuths. What have you to present to “The Witness Chair” that will prove acceptable evidence to the assembled court?

And don't miss the fine line-up in the next issue—the best in crime stories by the very best authors in the field, in the April issue, on sale January 18! ■ ■ ■

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CRIMINAL CAPERS

By
Harold Helfer



IN PARIS, a convicted burglar, Etienne Lemaitre, complained to the court that while he was in jail his wife ran off with a policeman. Speaking bitterly, he said, "I am a burglar, I have stolen millions. But when a burglar's wife runs off with a policeman, that's too much."

The prisoners at Goerden, Germany, have formed two soccer football teams, calling themselves the "Nonferrous Metal Thieves" and "Economic Saboteurs."

Ignoring money and jewelry, a burglar who broke into a home in Malden, Mass., made off with two girdles and six bras.

Thomas Rennles walked into the Southend, England, police station with Mildred Browne and then proceeded to strike her in the mouth and knock her down. Then he turned to the policemen and said: "I brought her here just to do this. I want to get back in prison."

In Louisville, Ky., a man, after serving on the jury in a case, hurried into another room in the courthouse. There he went on trial for murder.

A law on the books of Barre, Vt., requires the residents to take a bath every Saturday night.

The Case Of The Pickled Hands was solved in Minneapolis when the suspected eight or nine human hands being kept by

a Chinese laundryman in a three-gallon jar turned out to be bear paws. The laundryman explained to police that some Chinese believe pickled bear paws alleviate rheumatism.

A Pittsburgh citizen returned home to discover that intruders, perhaps inspired by a television cowboy show, had shot up his TV set and all his windows.

In Norfolk, Va., FBI agents learned that a car thief, who had stolen some 75 cars around and about the country, would fly by commercial airline to the city where he planned to steal his next auto.

In Boston, Officer Edward Traverse saved a three-year-old girl on his beat, Patricia Williams, from choking to death by the simple expediency of taking her feet and holding her upside down until she spit out a hairpin that had become stuck in her throat.

A Dayton, O., woman was arrested for forging a sales slip in order to obtain a Bible.

In Tulare, Calif., a man discovered that you can sure enough lose your shirt while playing pool. He'd taken off his fancy flannel shirt during a warm game in a snooker parlor and when the contest was over the shirt was gone.

(Continued on page 104)

Reducing Specialist Says:
LOSE WEIGHT

Where
It
Shows
Most

REDUCE

MOST ANY
PART OF
THE
BODY WITH

UN UNDERWRITERS
LABORATORY
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Relaxing • Soothing
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Take pounds off—keep slim and trim with Spot Reducer! Remarkable new invention which uses one of the most effective reducing methods employed by masseurs and turkish baths—**MASSAGE!**

LIKE a magic wand, the "Spot Reducer" obeys your every wish. Most any part of your body where it is loose and flabby, wherever you have extra weight and inches, the "Spot Reducer" can aid you in acquiring a youthful, slender and graceful figure. The beauty of this scientifically designed Reducer is that the method is so simple and easy, the results—quick, sure and harmless. No exercise or strict diets. No steambaths, drugs or laxatives.

With the SPOT REDUCER you can now enjoy the benefits of RELAXING, SOOTHING massage in the privacy of your own home! Simple to use—just plug in, grasp handle and apply over most any part of the body—stomach, hips, chest, neck, thighs, arms, buttocks, etc. The relaxing, soothing massage breaks down FATTY TISSUES, tones the muscles and flesh, and the increased awakened blood circulation carries away waste fat—helps you regain and keep a firmer and more GRACEFUL FIGURE!

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When you use the Spot Reducer, it's almost like having your own private masseur at home...it's fun reducing this way! It not only helps you reduce and keep slim—but also aids in the relief of those types of aches and pains—and tired nerves that can be helped by massage! The Spot Reducer is handsomely made of light weight aluminum and rubber and truly a beautiful invention you will be thankful you own. AC 110 volts. Underwriters laboratory approved.

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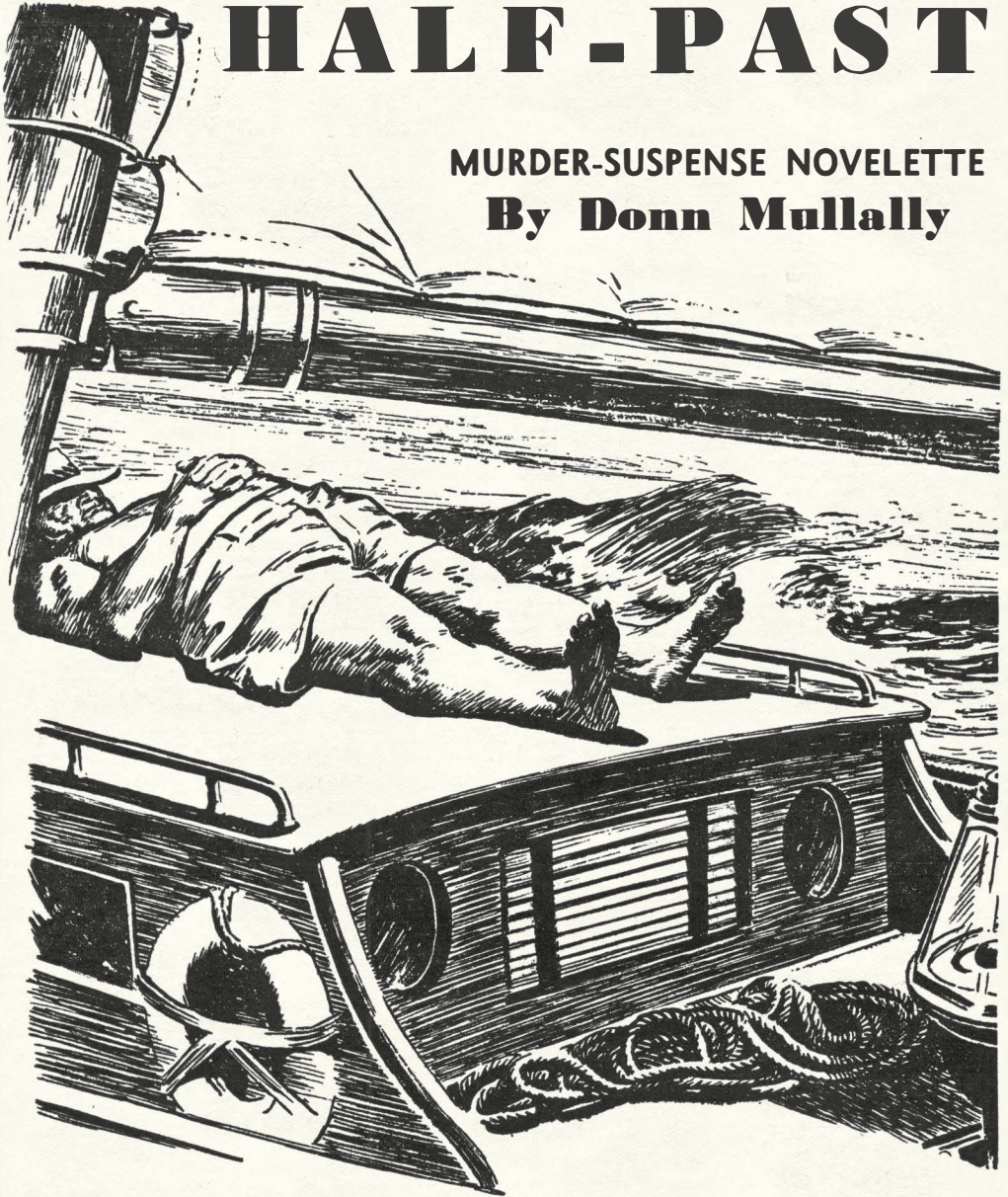
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HALF-PAST

MURDER-SUSPENSE NOVELETTE

By **Donn Mullally**



CHAPTER ONE

A Little Job of Murder

KIM BRACCA took a rough bearing on the low-riding San Francisco lightship. He had plenty of sea room, plenty of water under the *Elaine's* keel. He was running with a stiff, quarter-

ing wind in the taut canvas overhead. The wheel felt alive in his hands.

The *Elaine* had her ears back. She was a sweetheart—trim, fifty-four feet—all go. She was slicing through the choppy water off the Golden Gate and, except for a trace of spray when she'd dip her bow, keeping her deck dry.

KILLING TIME!

—And time to kill again, Kim Bracca decided, when he saw Morrisey's two Elaines—the trim little sloop, and the incendiary little blonde!



*Kim knew what he had to do. . . .
It would be clean as the blade of
a windshield wiper. . . .*

Kim glanced at the great, loose mound of leathery hide sprawled on the roof of the house. The boss. T. Morrissey. The big man, himself—letting the sun bake his fat belly.

Mrs. Morrissey was sitting next to Kim, her long, tanned legs braced against the slope of the deck. She wore white shark-skin shorts, a blue striped T-shirt, a watch cap crushed down on her crisp, blond hair. On her, a feather cut looked good. Anything looked good. She seemed as intent on the way her namesake was sailing, as Kim. But, occasionally, the movement of the boat made their knees touch.

Kim remembered the first time he saw Elaine Morrissey. He'd been stranded on the beach by a shipping strike. His own union hadn't been mad at anyone, but the owners weren't about to send empty bottoms here and there just to keep guys like Bracca in work. He'd been sick of loafing, and lining up for his unemployment insurance check every week, and being broke two days after he got his check. The unemployment office people must have been a little fed up with him, too, because the call came through them. It seemed this broker, Morrissey, wanted to interview men qualified to navigate inland and coastal waters. He'd bought himself a sailboat, needed someone to teach him how to get it away from the dock.

Kim hadn't been crazy for the job. The pay was lousy—but quarters were included. Morrissey explained, and meals. Kim decided he could stand it for the rest of the strike. When it was over, he'd drop Morrissey.

Then he saw the two Elaines, and knew right then that Morrissey was going to be a slow student.

This woman had a way of looking at Kim that said her husband could use lessons in how to handle her, too. After the first couple of weeks, Kim had given up on his boss. Morrissey might be able to pilot dough through the stock market, but he'd never

know one length of line from another. Kim had settled into his job—even did a bit of chauffeuring for the Morrisseys when he wasn't working on the boat. It wasn't an occupation for a man with chief mate's papers: but he liked the working conditions, particularly when Morrissey had to fly back to New York and attend some meeting of big-wheel financiers.

Morrissey was a peculiar sort of joker. If he knew what was going on, he didn't let it worry him. Maybe, Kim had decided, Morrissey got kind of a charge out of the idea. Like owning this boat that was too fast for him.

Kim was aware of Elaine's bare leg. It had been pressed against him for a long time, now. He glanced down at her. Her large, hazel eyes were worshipping him, his broad shoulders, the way his shirt fitted tight across the cleft of his back when he leaned over the wheel. She stood up beside him, swept the horizon with her eyes, her hand brushing his arm as she reached for something solid to keep her balance.

Kim knew what she was telling him. The *Elaine* had this end of the Pacific Ocean to herself. The lightship had dropped over the horizon. The tall headlands back of Bolinas looked distant, misty, like a bank of fog. The fishing boats working along the reef had all gone inside the Gate. They'd have to turn around, themselves, if they wanted to tie up before dark.

Her hand had closed on his forearm. There was something like a thought transference coming through her fingers.

Kim said quietly, his words whipped by the wind, "We'd better put about."

She nodded; but her hand was cold, hard, clamped on his arm, holding him on their course. She leaned forward, shouted, "Tee! Tee, wake up!"

Morrissey moved *groggily*, floundering like an ancient sea lion. He sat up, looking back at his wife through his dark glasses, said, "Huh?"

The clamp on Kim's arm tightened. He

knew what he had to do. He spun the wheel over, full; watched the boom sweep behind Morrissey, dump the old man over the side. As clean as the blade of a windshield wiper.

Morrissey let out one surprised scream as he hit the water, was out of sight before the stern passed him.

Kim brought the boat about in a big circle. There hadn't been a sound out of Elaine Morrissey, a movement, except to duck with him when the boom swept over them. She was watching the water in their wake.

They saw Morrissey bob to the surface once, waving his arms frantically; heard his hoarse shout. By the time they completed a circle, passed near the point where they had seen Morrissey, he was gone.

Kim realized the muscles of his chest and stomach were knotted; his jaw ached with tension. He forced it to unlock, said, "Shall we make another turn? We might be able to pick up the body if it surfaces."

She shook her head. "No, Kim. I couldn't. . . ."

The tight lines of her face softened suddenly. She fastened herself to his back, pressing her face against his shoulder, sobbing. Kim was frightened.

"I . . . I'm sorry. . . ." he stammered. "I . . ."

She took his face in her hands, pulled it down to hers, kissed him.

"That's better." He grinned, putting one arm around her. She was shaking. Her body felt cold through the thin T-shirt. He said, "Why don't you go below and make us a drink?"

She ducked obediently through the small hatch, smiling up at him. "I won't be long, Kim."

Kim felt very alone. He looked back over the empty expanse of water where they'd last seen Morrissey. A chill was in his guts. His fingers were stiff, untying a life-preserver from the bulkhead in front of him. He tossed it over the side, watched it bob in the choppy sea. It might wash

ashore somewhere around Stinson Beach. If it was found, it wouldn't hurt their story. . . .

INSPECTOR LAMMON looked like a high school algebra teacher. Tall, lean, a little stooped. He peered through shell-rimmed glasses, seemed about to come apart every time he moved. He didn't move any more than he had to, settled in the first easy chair he passed after he entered Elaine Morrissey's living room.

He dressed very conservatively, parted his blond hair down the middle.

Elaine had on the simple, black suit she'd worn to the inquest that afternoon; was sitting on a davenport across the coffee-table from the inspector. Bracca leaned against the mantel, watching.

"I'm glad you and Mr. Bracca could see me," Lammon said.

"I received your telephone message when I returned from the . . . the inquest." She smiled wanly. "I can't imagine what. . . ." "—what an inspector from Homicide would want to talk to you about?" Lammon interrupted gently.

"As a matter of fact, yes." Elaine drew herself up stiff, looking at the inspector.

"Some people collect autographs of movie stars," shrugged Lammon, "or maybe, a button off a celebrity's coat. Personally, I get my kicks out of meeting successful murderers."

The way Lammon said it, his eyes gazing blankly at some point beyond Elaine's shoulders, Bracca felt as though he'd been fouled.

He kept his face bland. He said, "Some time, Inspector, why don't you bring your collection over?"

Elaine was shaking her close-cropped blond curls. "You came here to tell me that you believe I'm a murderer?"

Lammon nodded solemnly. "Yeah. You and your boy friend."

"All right. Now you've said it, get out!" snapped Elaine.

"I'm not through," smiled Lammon, not moving from his chair. "You and Bracca don't have anything to be nervous about, Mrs. Morrissey. I admire anybody that can pull off a successful killing. I know what you're up against.

"You people are real artists. A nice, simple, unadorned accident. The best cop, or combinations of cops, couldn't prove it was anything else in a million years."

Elaine was on her feet. "There's no reason why I should listen to any of this," she said coldly. "I'm sure you can find your way to the door, Inspector."

"Sit down," Lammon hissed. "Sit down, Mrs. Morrissey."

She started to walk past him. His hand flicked out effortlessly, closed on her wrist and spun her around, dropped her back on the davenport.

"Oh!" she gasped. "You . . . you. . . ."

Lammon smirked at her. "That's the trouble with being a star at anything, Mrs. Morrissey. You have to expect to be man-handled by your fans."

He turned to Bracca. "I liked you at the inquest this afternoon, too," he said. "It was well told, Bracca—how you yelled at Morrissey that you were going to come about; he waved his hand as though he'd heard, then sat up just as the boom swept across the boat. It could happen, I suppose. Every year, somebody's lost over the side of one of the sailboats."

"All right," Kim growled. "Then why is it suddenly murder when it happens to me?"

"I don't know." Lammon tapped his chest with a bony forefinger. "But something here tells me it is. Maybe I'm just a patron of the art of killing. Maybe, if Morrissey hadn't been thirty years older than his wife—if she wasn't beautiful—if I hadn't seen you sneak a look at her a couple of times at the inquest—several million things. Like the dollars Mrs. Morrissey stands to inherit. I don't know, Bracca. It could be just a wild hunch."

"If you think we murdered my husband, why don't you arrest us?" asked Elaine, her voice edged.

Lammon shrugged lazily. "There's no point in arrest, unless I'm reasonably certain I can make it stick. I'm not kidding myself. I couldn't."

"Then get out! Get out," she screamed, "before I . . ."

"Before you call the cops?" laughed Lammon, rising. "Okay, Mrs. Morrissey. I'll leave."

He took a couple of long strides toward the door, stopped. "I really came over to compliment you people. Just don't let success go to your heads. You're not the first who ever got away with murder. It happens every day. You ought to see our file on suspicious homicides. You'd be afraid to be alone with yourself in a lighted room. Cases just like this one. A hatful of motives—but no clues, no evidence.

"That file would be a lot fatter," he said, fishing a cigarette out of a package, and lighting it, "but a killer never quits while he's ahead. It's a disease. A habit. The homicide habit.

"Once he's resolved something by killing, it's always a possible solution for him. Sooner or later, he has to use it again. The next time, maybe he isn't so lucky. He makes a small mistake and we ship him over to San Quentin. To the little apple-green fireless cooker.

"So watch your step, Bracca—Mrs. Morrissey."

Lammon strode out of the room.

They heard him let himself out, the grinding of a starter in the driveway. There was a sweep of headlights across the front window.

Kim went to Elaine; kissed the soft, short hair at the base of her neck. "The man's blowing smoke, honey. Forget it," he said.

She shuddered.

He sat down beside her on the davenport and she buried her face against his shoulder. He tried to laugh some courage into her,

like breathing in the face of a dead baby. A wasted effort.

He growled, "You're not going to let Lammon break you up, Elaine? He was fishing, and admitted it. Well, the fish weren't biting today. Or any day he comes around."

Kim shook her gently. He said, "What we need's a drink. Forget that dumb cop."

She stood up. "I'm sorry, Kim. You have a drink, if you wish. I think I'll go to bed."

He watched her move wearily across the big room, start up the stairs. He didn't blame her. It had been a rugged day; the inquest, newspaper reporters—and last night hadn't been exactly a picnic with the United States Coast Guard. But they'd got by. Nobody had any reason to question their story. No proof, if they did question it. Wasn't that what Lammon said?

Kim mixed himself a bourbon highball—very dark. He returned to the davenport, sat down. The cushion was still warm from Elaine's body.

He took his drink to the foot of the stairs. As he did, he heard a door being locked above him. There was only one person up there—Elaine. He stopped, swearing softly to himself. He could thank Lammon. . . .

Kim finished his drink, sitting in the cold, little room which opened on the garage. The chauffeur's room.

CHAPTER TWO

The Second Step Down

THE next morning, Elaine sent word by the housekeeper that she wanted her car brought around about ten-thirty. Which meant he was to drive her; otherwise she'd have taken the convertible out herself. Kim dressed, shaved, had breakfast alone in the kitchen. Well, not alone—there was Mrs. Adams, the housekeeper.

Mrs. Adams was psychic. She told Kim

she had a dream, not a week before, in which she'd seen Mr. Morrissey drowning.

"You should've mentioned it to the old man," Kim commented grimly. "Told him to stay away from water."

Mrs. Adams shook her head, folding her fat arms under her heavy bosom. "It wouldn't have done any good, Kim."

Mrs. Adams was also a fatalist.

Kim picked up Elaine in front of the house, on the dot of ten-thirty. She tripped out of the house, wearing a blue jersey suit and a short, white, woolly pea-coat; said a clipped, "Good morning, Kim."

He put the car in gear, cracked, "And where does Madame wish to go?"

He glanced at her—stiff, distant as she could get and still be on the same seat with him. Elaine looked as though she'd put in a hell of a night—eyes puffy from no sleep. She said, "Drive down the peninsula, Kim."

"Over Skyline?" he asked.

She nodded. Kim smiled to himself. This was more like it, more like Elaine. There were a million places to pull off the highway, look at the rugged coastal scenery—if they had to look at something.

It was a very cold ride. Elaine stayed on her side of the car. Kim parked in the first likely spot they came to. They could see Half Moon Bay, the toy-size houses, the highway with cars crawling along it like shiny, busy beetles.

Kim set the hand brake, then put one arm along the back of the seat so his fingers touched Elaine's shoulder. He tapped her "Look, baby," he said. "I don't know what this freeze is all about. It's probably connected with Inspector Lammon. But I don't like it. I'm not a guy you can keep in a box."

She turned, studied his face for a moment. Her eyes shifted anxiously. "Kim," she said, "didn't you understand what Lammon was saying?"

He snorted. "Sure. He said he thought we killed Morrissey. He also said he couldn't prove it."

"Are you positive he can't?"

Kim nodded. "Of course. What's to prove? Maybe, in a couple of days, Morrissey's body will wash ashore some place. Okay. There won't be any marks of violence—nothing. You heard Lammon say accidents like this were always happening."

He shrugged. "Well, they are." He tugged at the collar of her pea-coat. "Now, come here and stop acting silly."

She did. But something was gone. Kim felt as though he was putting out all the effort. She was responsive—in a listless way. He let her go, stared blankly between the spokes of the steering wheel at the dashboard panel. All the little gauges pointed to zero. Temperature, battery, fuel. There should have been one there for Bracca, too.

Elaine had her purse open, repairing her face. He could smell the lipstick, sticky, sweet. He felt a kind of cold fury—almost hatred. He wondered how she'd tell him it was over—what words she'd use—what she expected him to do about it.

She said, "Kim. . ." lingering on his name.

He thought, "*Here it comes,*" mumbled, "Yeah?"

"Kim, do you think you could sell the boat?"

"Sure!" he answered. "I've seen half a dozen guys drooling over her. Some of them even have dough. How quick a deal did you have in mind?"

"I want to sell immediately, Kim."

"Immediately will cost money," he said.

"How much do you think the boat's worth?"

Kim shrugged. "I'd ask twenty thousand for her, if I had the right prospect. But, since you're in a big rush, you'd better not expect half of twenty."

"Get as much as you can, Kim," she said.

He nodded. "Get as much as I can, only you want a check by tomorrow noon."

"No. Take a reasonable time—a week, if you wish."

Kim laughed. "A week! You've never tried to sell a boat, have you, baby?" He turned on the ignition, backed carefully onto the highway and drove them home.

THE next couple of days, Kim didn't see a lot of Elaine—not the flesh-and-blood Elaine. He ran some ads, got the word around the San Francisco Yacht Club that Morrissey's sloop was for sale. He made a few demonstration runs with the *Elaine*, and then tapped a wealthy young couple who lived on Belvedere Island across the Bay. He took them out once, and they were sold on the boat. The man's hand didn't shake when he wrote a check for twelve thousand five hundred.

Kim turned the papers, the boat, over to the new owner; had trouble walking to the car. He wanted to run. He couldn't wait to tell Elaine, hand her the check.

She probably wouldn't appreciate how lucky she was, even when he told her.

He barreled up Russian Hill, swung into the driveway, cramped on the brakes. The garage door was up. He could see a small, dark-skinned character working on the sedan with a chamois.

The Jap was wearing an old khaki Army shirt and knee-high rubber boots.

Kim got out of the car, said, "Hi. What're you doing?"

The Jap squinted, hostile. "What's it look like, Mac?" he asked.

"Okay, who are you? Who told you to wash the car?"

The Jap dipped his chamois in the pail of water, wrung it dry, before he replied. "My name's Shogura. I'm Mrs. Morrissey's driver—if it's all right with you."

Kim felt heat creeping over the edge of his collar.

"We'll see," he said.

He found Elaine sunning herself in the patio, lying on an outsized, upholstered wheelbarrow.

"What gives?" he asked roughly. "Am I out of work?"

She clutched the untied strings of her halter, sat up carefully. "I thought it was best, Kim," she said.

"Oh, you did? It wouldn't occur to you to get my slant on it."

"I'm sorry, Kim," she said, "but I was sure you didn't want to be my chauffeur for the rest of your life."

That stopped him. He grinned. "Maybe I did have something else in mind," he admitted. "I'm the one who should apologize—for blowing my top. Maybe this'll square me with you."

He handed her the check for the boat. "If we'd had six months to play with it, we could have held out for more," he said modestly.

She lifted her dark glasses, smiled at him. "You're a good salesman, Kim. I really didn't expect this much."

"Maybe you'll put that in your letter of recommendation—now you've canned me. I hear there's always an opening for guys to punch doorbells."

Elaine held the check in her teeth while she tied the straps of her halter. She stood up, said, "Let's go in the house, Kim. I want to settle this account with you."

"If we're keeping accounts, okay."

She went to the library, somehow maneuvered out of Kim's reach when he closed the door. He felt a little stupid.

She seated herself at a desk, took out her checkbook. Kim stared at the view from the window: the plushy, green hills across the Bay in Marin County, the big, orange span over the Golden Gate. He heard her pen scratch busily. When the sound stopped, she said, "Will this be satisfactory, Kim?"

He turned from the window, took the check from her hand, glancing at the figures on it. Seven thousand dollars.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Commission for selling the boat, plus pay and a bonus."

Kim snapped the corner of the check with his thumb. "How do you think Lammon will take it? Will he buy the commis-

sion on the boat sale, or believe you're paying me off?"

"Does he have to know about it?"

"Cops find these things out," Kim said. "However, forget Lammon. What I want to know is, how am I supposed to take it? Is this my blood money? Do you want me to steal quietly away?"

Elaine pouted. "Have I suggested that?"

"No. But I haven't heard you come up with any other ideas, either. Just what do you want Bracca to do—if I'm not leading with my chin?"

She took his hand—the one without the check in it. "Kim, dear," she said, "sit down."

"I can take it standing up," he growled. "It's all over between us. Washed up. Kaput. A short romance. I guess I was pretty dumb to believe it could be any other way."

"Kim," she pleaded. "Stop being sensitive. We must think realistically—decide what we're going to do."

He snorted. "I thought the decision was already made."

"Look, Kim," she said softly. "If Lammon suspects we murdered Tee, isn't it logical that other people will believe we did?"

"Suppose they do. They can't prove anything."

"No, Kim," she said. "They can't. But we have to live in the community."

"Why?" he asked sharply. "This is a big world, Elaine. There are a million communities. You'd be surprised how many there are where nobody's ever heard of Tee Morrissey."

"If we ran away together, Lammon and the others would be certain..."

"What difference does it make?" He grinned. "They still can't make it stick. And, even if they wanted to, they'd have a rough time finding us. I've spent enough of my life sailing around this world to know a few spots where even the great Lammon couldn't bother us."

"No," she said. "I don't want to run away."

"We've made a complete circle," snapped Kim. "What do you want me to do?"

She puckered her forehead. "The strike is over on the waterfront, Kim."

He jerked his head affirmatively. "So you want me to go back to sea."

"It might be best, Kim," she answered levelly. "The sea is your profession. Lammon might be thrown off if you did go back, just for a little while. We could see each other when you're in port—and if we still feel the same way and Lammon has lost interest in us, maybe. . . ."

"Okay, baby," he interrupted. "Don't pitch me. I'll go." He started for the door, stopped, waved the check at her.

"But first, you won't mind if I spend this foolishly?"

INSPECTOR LAMMON was sitting across the table from Kim Bracca when he lifted his head off his arms. Lammon had been shaking Kim's shoulder, yelling, "Come on, Bracca, wake up!"

Nobody else in the joint seemed curious about what was going on in their booth. The bartender, the other customers—maybe they couldn't see through the festoons of blue tobacco smoke hanging down from the ceiling.

Bracca didn't remember coming in there. He didn't remember a lot of things about the last few days. He focused his eyes on Lammon's long, angular face, his vision a little fuzzy around the edges.

"Yeah. What d'ya want?" he bleared.

"I thought I'd pay for a drink," the inspector answered pleasantly.

"I can buy my own drinks, cop."

"That's what every bartender in town tells me," smiled Lammon. "You're the biggest thing to happen in their life since V-J Day. You've been spending money for the last week, like you couldn't stand the sight of it. What's it all about, Bracca? Did your rich uncle die, leave you a pile?"

"Yeah," Kim wobbled his head. "Rich uncle."

Lammon nodded, changed the subject. "Seen Mrs. Morrissey lately?" he asked.

"No. She sold her boat and hired a new chauffeur. Why should I see her?"

"I thought you'd find some reason—just to keep in touch."

"Why keep in touch with her?" leered Kim. "I don't owe her anything."

Lammon's shell-rimmed glasses reflected the blue neon light from the bar, hid his eyes. He said, "I thought the obligation ran the other way—she was indebted to you."

"She doesn't owe me anything, either."

"Mrs. Morrissey wouldn't be the angel who's financing this bat, Kim?"

"Did I say she was?"

Lammon shook his head. "You're sure you won't let me buy a drink?"

"Okay. If you'll feel better, go ahead."

Lammon signaled a waitress, ordered a double bourbon for Kim. He said, "Bracca, do you know a man named Kuhlman? Dick Kuhlman?"

Kim finished the drink, gasped for breath. "Yeah," he answered, when he could talk again. "Kuhlman was Morrissey's lawyer."

"You earned the double shot, Bracca. Do you want to try for two?"

"Why not?"

Lammon caught their girl's eye, ordered two double bourbons. "Okay, Bracca. Now, do you know how Kuhlman got the Morrissey office business?"

"How the hell would I, cop?"

"You can have the drinks anyway." Lammon grinned. "Maybe you'll even need them. Dick Kuhlman was starving to death with his law practice, before he met Elaine Morrissey."

"You cops keep track of everything," sneered Kim.

"No," Lammon admitted. "This information, I had to dig up in the last few days—after you left the Morrissey payroll. I wanted to know what Kuhlman was all

about. He seemed the man most around the house after you were gone. Kuhlman's married, but it doesn't seem to bother him—or Elaine—too much."

Kim Bracca sobered, leaned back in the booth, studying Lammon's smirk for a moment. "Just perhaps, Inspector, this attorney might be out there on business. After all, Morrissey's estate isn't exactly peanuts."

"That occurred to me," nodded Lammon. "But I asked myself, why all the night work?" The inspector untangled his long legs from under the table; stood up, smiling at Bracca. "You know, pal," he said, "I've almost come around to the idea you're the poor, innocent chump in this situation. You did all the dirty work—you've got Morrissey on your conscience, and you're paid off with a cheap drunk. I think you'll wake up some morning and start screaming you were short-changed. And I feel sorry for you, Bracca. My heart bleeds."

Inspector Lammon walked away from Bracca's table, tobacco smoke eddying behind him, like a character who floats in and out of a dream. An alcoholic dream.

CHAPTER THREE

The Homicide Habit

DICK KUHLMAN'S wife had said her husband wasn't home, when Kim telephoned. She didn't know where he was. Working, she thought.

Kim had news for Mrs. Kuhlman. If what her old man was doing was work, there would never be an unemployment problem.

He caught them on the davenport in Elaine Morrissey's living room. The only light came from the fireplace. Elaine screamed, broke with Kuhlman, when Kim stepped out of the darkened doorway.

Kim said, "Hello, counsellor. Aren't you afraid you'll ruin your eyes, working in that no-light?"

Elaine snapped on a reading lamp, was

momentarily blinded. Her lipstick looked a little devoured. "Kim!" she said. "What are you doing here? How did you get in?"

He jingled his key-chain, grinned drunkenly. "You shouldn't've changed the locks after you tied a can on me, honey."

Kuhlman was a rugged-looking young guy. He said, "Bracca, you're drunk."

Kuhlman was on his feet. "We will have quite a party here, Bracca," he said, "unless you get out."

Kim ignored him. "You know, Elaine," he said, "Lammon is a sharp guy. He told me about you and Kuhlman. Do you want to know what he said?"

Elaine shook her head. "No, Kim. I'm not at all interested. Please leave."

Kim straightened. "Please leave. Please leave," he mimicked her. "Lammon's right. I was an awful sucker—to let you two people use me for your hatchet man. An all-American, all-time sucker."

The attorney's big hand became a big fist. He let it go. Kim was too drunk to try to dodge, or counter. He stood there, watching what was happening to him. His head snapped back; the lighted room bounced before his eyes. He was surprised. He stayed on his feet.

Kuhlman clubbed him with another blow. An idea started to bubble through Kim's alcoholic fog. This big clown couldn't hit. He was either all flab, or muscle-bound. His fist looked dangerous, but it had no power behind it.

Kuhlman hit him on the bridge of his nose, made him shake his head—laughing. Kim shuffled his feet easily, dropped his chin low beneath his shoulder, and cracked his left hand into Kuhlman's soft belly. He got a big, glazed take out of the lawyer. Kuhlman's jaw sagged. Kim pinned it together with a solid right.

Kim started punching Kuhlman across the room, shifting from body to head, from head to body. Every time he connected with the attorney's soft face, he cut. It was a picnic—a Pier Six picnic.

Kim Bracca was enjoying himself—too much. He didn't miss Elaine until she was out of the room. Then it was too late to do anything about it, except get in a few more licks at Brother Kuhlman.

When she returned, she had Shogura, her Japanese chauffeur. He had a gun. A very large gun it looked, in his small, brown hand.

Kim wasn't so drunk but he knew when he'd had the bell rung on him. He stopped working on Kuhlman, leered at Elaine.

"Okay, baby. Bracca can take a hint. I'll leave—by the front door." He walked past her, feeling suddenly a little feeble in his knees. Shogura followed him to the door to make sure he didn't change his mind.

Kim Bracca stopped when he got to the sidewalk, looked down the Hyde Street hill. He could see Alcatraz glittering like a Centennial birthday cake in the middle of the Bay. Closer, at the foot of the hill, was the neon sign of a bar. No cable car was in sight, so he started walking down the three blocks. He was running, stumbling on legs that felt as strong as bands of Jello, by the time he got there.

KIM'S eyes felt as though they were bathed in glue. Hot glue. He was lying on the bed in his hotel room, fully clothed. He had a dim memory of coming in, riding the elevator . . . thought he was going to be sick before they reached the fifth floor. He wasn't sure he hadn't been.

The room smelled of raw gasoline—his clothes. He groaned, rolled over. The room looked like he was seeing it through a piece of wavy glass. Clouded glass. His mouth tasted as though he'd used it for an ash tray, forgot to empty it.

He sat on the edge of the bed, forced his eyes to focus.

Inspector Lammon was watching him from the room's easy chair. He said, "How's the King of the Zombies this morning, Bracca?"

Kim moaned and tried to hold his head in his shaking hands. It felt like somebody else's head. He wished it were.

"How long have you been here, Inspector?" he asked.

Lammon smiled, glanced at his wrist-watch. "Not more than forty-five minutes. Your door wasn't locked, so I let myself in. You didn't seem interested in waking up. I waited. Do you feel as bad as you look?"

Kim tried to nod, nearly fell off the bed.

"Are you for real, Inspector?" Bracca asked. "You're going to book me for Morrissey's death?"

Lammon shook his long, horsey chin at Kim. "No, Bracca. I'm booking you for the murder of Mrs. Morrissey."

Kim Bracca's head seemed to balloon, explode. The room melted down like a wax candle, guttering before his eyes. "You . . . you said *Mrs.*?" he faltered.

"Right. I told you homicide was habit-forming, Kim. Nine out of ten who try it become addicts."

"But . . . But Elaine isn't dead. I . . . I . . ."

Kim lunged off the bed, grabbed the telephone, asked for Elaine's number. Mrs. Adams answered the phone. He rasped "This is Bracca, Mrs. Adams. Let me talk to Mrs. Morrissey."

"I . . . can't, Mr. Bracca." Mrs. Adams sounded frightened. "Mrs. Morrissey is dead."

He looked at the wall in front of his face, pounded it with his fist. "You're lying! You're lying!"

He heard Mrs. Adams gasp. There was a click on the line, and the phone began to hum in his ear.

He hung up, bracing himself on the dresser; turned slowly to face Lammon.

"Her car was driven into the dunes off the Great Highway, down at the beach—burned. She was in it," Lammon said.

"But I . . . I didn't, Lammon! I . . ."

"You saw her after I left you in that bar last night," Lammon said.

"Yes. I went out to the house. Her boy friend, Kuhlman, was there."

"Why?" needled Lammon. "Why did you go, Kim? Were you jealous of Kuhlman, what I'd told you about them?"

Kim Bracca swallowed hard. His lips felt cracked, feverish. "No. No, I . . . I . . ."

Lammon smiled. "You just dropped in to say hello. All right, I won't press for an answer—now. Anyway, you were so glad to see this loving couple, you beat up his ribs, Kuhlman."

"He hit me first," choked Kim. "He hit me three times, before I even made a pass at him."

"What was he hitting you for, Kim?" asked Lammon.

"He didn't like something I said."

"What did you say? What upset him?"

"How do I know?" growled Kim. "I was drunk. Besides, it wasn't much of a fight. The Jap chauffeur stopped us. He

had a gun. Elaine had him take me to the door—which was the last I saw of her. She was alive then."

"Where did you go from there?" Lammon asked quietly.

Kim thought. "A bar. A bar down at the foot of the hill, on Hyde Street."

"You didn't stay there the rest of the night, did you, Kim?"

Kim tried to recall, through the milky fog closing in on him again.

"No. No, I probably didn't," he admitted finally.

LAMMON lit a cigarette. "The clerk at the desk downstairs tells me you weaved home about five-thirty this morning. The bar closed at two. Do you want to fill me in on those three-and-a-half hours, Bracca? Can you do it? Think hard, Bracca. Hard."

Kim's thick fingers clawed the iron



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maiden around his head. "I . . . I don't know. I'm . . ."

"Look, Bracca," Lammon said. "Let me tell you what we found. Maybe it'll toll a bell for you, somewhere. Shogura, Mrs. Morrissey's Jap chauffeur, woke up with a headache this morning, too. His wasn't from a bottle. Someone had parted his hair with a wrench. Mrs. Morrissey's sedan was gone. So was she.

"I'm telling you this backward, Kim, on purpose. We found the car, and Mrs. Morrissey, before we knew about Shogura. As I told you, it was about ten miles north of Sharp's Park, in the dunes. Burnt out. We figured gasoline had been drained out of the carburetor, splashed on the upholstery. It must have been quite a pyrotechnic show, Kim. You're sure you don't recall it?"

"No . . . no . . . I . . ."

Lammon rubbed his long jaw thoughtfully. "You'd better get ready and come downtown with me," he concluded. "We can have the doctor administer a drug that'll break your mental block."

"Thanks, Inspector," Kim muttered grimly. "You're too kind."

"Have it your way, Bracca," Lammon shrugged. "We can't force you to submit to sodium pentothal against your will. It's a matter of great no-importance to me what you do—so long as you walk into the lethal gas chamber. And you will, brother. You're on the hook."

"How . . . how?" Bracca mumbled.

"How do I figure?" Lammon finished his question for him. He held up a knobby forefinger to count on. "One—motive: you were jealous of Kuhlman's relationship with Mrs. Morrissey. Example: you went there last night, beat him up when you caught him with her."

Lammon held up another finger. "Two—accessibility: you had a key to Mrs. Morrissey's house; used it earlier, before you came back to get her. You knew the layout of the house, where the chauffeur slept.

And Mrs. Adams, the housekeeper—you'd be able to avoid her room off the kitchen. Add the fact you can't account for three and a half critical hours last night. You were drunk."

The third finger went up on Lammon's hand. He held it like he was taking a Boy Scout oath. "And finally, Bracca—I find you in your room, smelling like a ruptured gasoline tank. You must have spilled some of it on you when you were draining the carburetor of Mrs. Morrissey's car. I'm betting we find beach sand in the cuffs of your trousers, maybe in your shoes. We'll build quite a cage around you, Kim!"

Kim Bracca was crouched beside the dresser, holding on. The gasoline fumes, the hangover; he was sick. The whole room was lurching. The windows were down. He had to have air. Some air. The window. He stiffened, panting, trying to breathe. He looked at Lammon slouched in the chair.

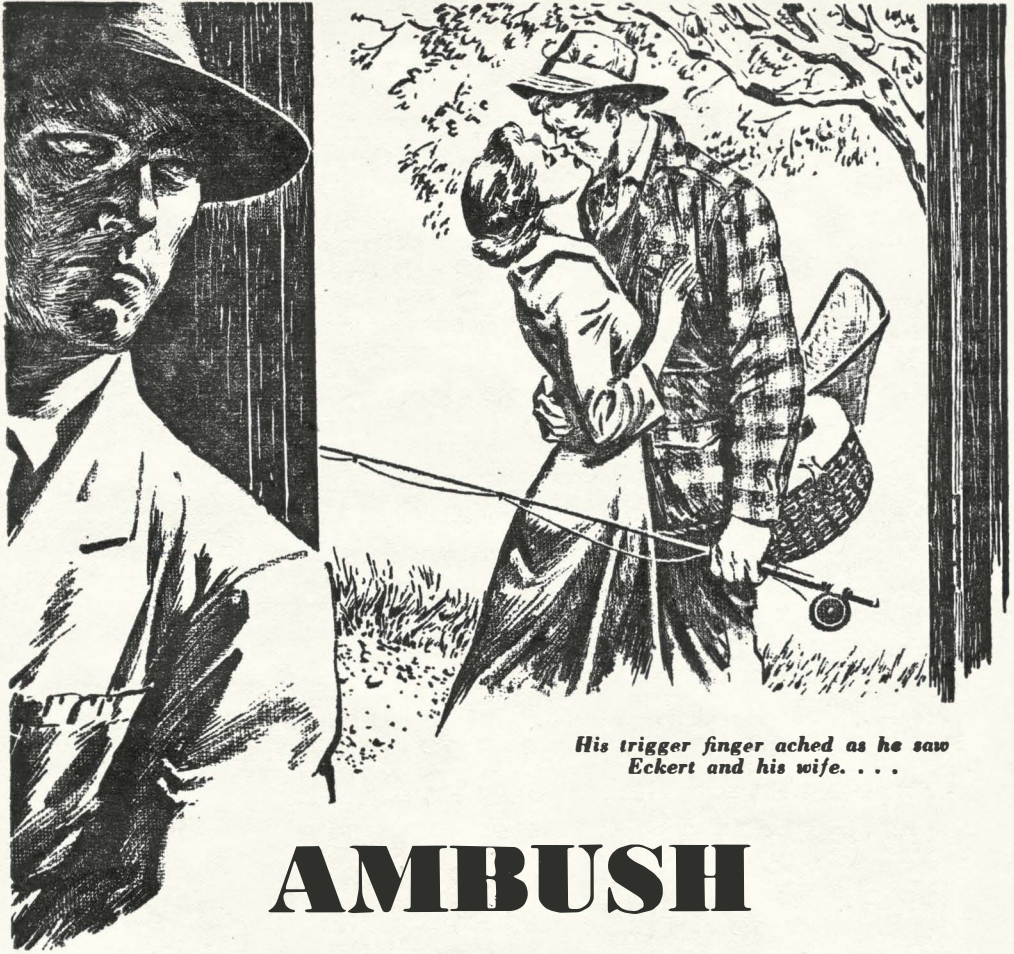
Lammon didn't move when Bracca threw himself at the closed window, took out in a shower of splintered glass. He waited for the sound of broken glass landing in the bottom of the air shaft five stories down. He sighed, pulled himself out of the deep chair and went to the phone. He gave the operator a number, waited. Said, "Lammon. Let me have Lieutenant Aaron."

He traced the end of his finger on the dresser mirror while he was waiting. Then, "Aaron—Lammon. Our boy just saved California an expensive trial. Yeah. Pitched himself out the window of his hotel room. Yeah, he did—said enough. Credit Mrs. Adams with pushing it over for us."

Lammon rested the phone against his lean chin, listened. "Okay—I'll pick up Mrs. Morrissey. Have somebody type a confession I can tell her Bracca signed before he jumped. Right."

He hung up and went to the bathroom, broke a glass vial over the sink, turned on the tap a minute.

He wrinkled his long nose. His fingers smelled of gasoline. ■ ■ ■



*His trigger finger ached as he saw
Eckert and his wife. . . .*

AMBUSH

By Charles Larson

Eckert desperately gambled that the thin, flickering flame of decency in Glidden would outlast that moment of black, cold terror.

GLIDDEN stood quietly in the dark of the garage, his hand barely touching the cool gun in his pocket, his eyes half closed as he waited. He knew that Eckart and his wife were up; he could imagine them moving sleepily about, yawning over breakfast, talking softly so that they wouldn't wake the child. Glidden, personally, was a man who liked to sleep late. Why anyone would rise at four in the morning. . . . Even to go fishing. . . .

He moved his cramped toes a little. In the pale glow of the dawn, he could see Eckart's fishing equipment sitting on the driveway against the kitchen door, and beside that the dew-bespattered outline of a green and white wagon. The child must have left it out all night. Incuriously Glidden wondered what the child looked like, whether or not he loved Eckart, how he would react to Eckart's death. Violently? Tearfully? It was hard to say. The ways

of children were, on the whole, a mystery to Glidden.

His own childhood, now. . . . There had been a time for you. He'd been seven or eight when his father was killed. He remembered the shy, drowned face of his father clearly. But he hadn't cried at the sight. By that time he'd learned all the sharp, short, bitter blasphemies, and on that occasion he'd used every one of them. He'd kicked and screamed and sworn at the sky until some of the men in the neighborhood had dragged him home, and even then he'd continued to rage so persistently that they'd had to cuff his head to keep him quiet. And where was the sense to such anger? The accident had been his father's own fault. Coming home drunk through the dark, he'd tripped on a railway tie, and fallen with his face down in a tiny brackish pool.

Drowned, by God, in a bit less than two inches of water!

Glidden shook his head. Even his brother Clay's reaction had been more sensible. Clay, at fourteen, had laughed about it. Two inches!

Odd, Glidden thought, that the memory should remain so distinct. Sixteen years ago, and as clear as yesterday. Clay laughing, mocking him because he'd wanted to go to the funeral. Clay with his yellow eyes, and his old, old face, and his contempt. Well, Glidden *hadn't* gone to the funeral, and then Clay had laughed about that. But the next day, too, Clay had made him a member of the gang. He said they needed a look-out, and he gussel Glidden could handle the job.

Glidden's gratitude had never lessened. From then on he'd been Clay's man, for good or bad, through the clumsy kid robberies, and the rolling of drunks, and the heavy pound of shoes when they ran from the cops, through all the years of it.

Until Clay had been shot, of course. By Eckart.

Uneasily Glidden shifted his feet. He

took the gun out of his pocket, twisted his wrist to look at the luminous dial of his watch. Five o'clock.

A noise from the house brought his head up sharply. Eckart had emerged from the kitchen door, and was standing over the mound of fishing tackle, talking to his wife. He wore a pair of canvas pants, a wild plaid jacket, and a dispirited hat stuck through with tufted hooks. He looked as eager and nervous as a kid on his way to summer camp. It was the first time Glidden had seen him out of uniform, and the sight made him vaguely uncomfortable. A cop, in Glidden's opinion, had no more right to frivolity than a nun.

All at once Glidden wanted desperately to get the whole business over with. His trigger-finger ached with the need to pull. Eckart's head, in the ridiculous hat, presented a target so perfect that a baby couldn't have missed it. He lifted the gun, fighting it, knowing it was neither the time nor the place, but jumpy, suddenly frenzied, drawn tight and crazy for release. No plan was worth the waiting. Squeeze the trigger, shatter the head, and when the thing was done—then think. But not now.

Eckart disappeared again inside the doorway.

Trembling, unable to catch his breath, Glidden leaned his cheek against the rough wood of the garage wall. His entire body was soaked with perspiration. He let the gun hang loosely at his side. A drop of sweat ran into his eye and he was too weak to brush it away.

"Eckart," he whispered aloud, "damn you, Eckart. Damn you. *Damn* you. . . ."

It might have been over by now, and to hell with the consequences. It might have been behind him, the pressure gone, and the release achieved.

He licked his lips, forced himself to straighten up. All right, Eckart, he thought, maybe you've saved my life, and how do you like that? Maybe I couldn't have gotten away afterward.

He'd do it properly, the way he'd outlined it to Regan and the rest. No more nonsense. Clay, especially, had been a great one for plans. "Look over your ground, figure your getaway, and follow the plot. The minute you jerks start to ad-lib, something happens. You aren't smart enough."

All right, Glidden thought again. Fine. You take your time, Eckart, and we'll see about this. You took the devil's own time yourself when the shoe was on the other foot, when you had the gun and Clay was at the wrong end of it.

That had been a funny one. Clay trapped by a two-bit patrolman. Clay running down an alley, away from a prowler car at the front of the shop, and straight into Eckart's arms. Straight into one blunt bullet, full in the chest.

Glidden hadn't been able to believe it. Regan had been the one to tell him, and he could still remember the shock he'd felt.

Eleven months ago.

He closed his eyes, seeing again the red, heavy face of Regan behind the wire mesh of the visitor's cage, hearing the low chatter of the others in the room, and somehow trying to assimilate Regan's unlikely words.

"Clay's dead? Dead?"

"Take it easy." Regan's whispered voice was sharp, but his big face was strangely compassionate. "I knew you'd hear it sooner or later, but the guys figured it'd be better if you heard it from one of us. You and Clay—well, hell, we know how it was. How close you were. . . ."

Close? Glidden thought numbly. No, not close. What had respect and need to do with closeness? This was something different. Once Glidden had seen a cripple fall, his crutch kicked from under him by a running kid. Would you say that the cripple loved the crutch?

It seemed to him that his head and his heart had ceased to function. He knew that Regan was waiting for him to inquire about the details, but he couldn't think exactly what to ask.

He said: "Regan, I—"

"Sure, kid. I know. And the devil of it is that it had to happen while you're stuck up here." Regan stared at his clasped hands. "You'll be out—when?"

"Two years."

"Two years. And if you behave yourself. . . ."

"Eleven months. Minimum."

"It could be worse," Regan said meditatively.

"Regan," Glidden said, "who did it?"

Slightly Regan glanced up. "An old friend of yours. A cop by the name of Eckart. Clay knew him."

"Eckart," Glidden repeated. At first the name meant nothing, and then, little by little, his sluggish memory began to give him the details. Eckart had been the first cop he'd run from. Eckart's maiden beat had been Bush Street, where Clay and he had grown up. He recalled the self-conscious young rookie's efforts to stick his nose into every phase of the gang's activity, and the way, even at fourteen, Clay had been able to outsmart him.

"IT WAS quite a set-up," Regan murmured. "In the newspaper, Eckart said he figured Clay would try this particular dump next. A real amateur psychologist, this Eckart. Said he could always figure the criminal mind. He really shot his mouth off. He said he knew Clay'd beat it down the alley if he thought he was spotted, so Eckart had a car go to the front, got around to the alley, and plugged Clay when he came out. He was real proud of himself."

The buzzer sounded again and Regan got to his feet. "I'll see you, kid. Like I told you, take it easy. We'll keep him on ice for you. Eleven months ain't so long." Again the compassion came into his eyes. "Nobody's going to touch the guy. Remember that. He's all yours whenever you want him."

"Mine?" Glidden looked up dully.

"What am I supposed to do about it?"

Regan stopped, startled. For a moment he gazed thoughtfully at Glidden, and then his mouth broke slowly into a grin. "Sure," he whispered. "That's the stuff. It's nothing to you. Keep 'em thinking that way. And stay in line." He raised his hand, disappeared through the visitor's door.

Glidden was still staring after him when the guard poked his arm. "Come on, come on."

Obediently, Glidden pushed himself up, went back to his cell.

The first week was the hardest. He was cold all the time, even in the heat of the laundry room, honestly cold, chilled deep inside and shivering with it. Sometimes he'd lay awake for hours, and listen to his mate, Jordan, snore in the bunk below him, and try to think his way through the panic that had come to plague him. He felt that the rage was bound to arrive soon, the crying desire for revenge, the natural, knifelike hunger and hatred, but it continued to elude him. Clay was dead, and the emotion he felt was fright. Nothing more.

Jordan helped somewhat. Jordan was an old-timer, half through a twenty-year stretch, and lonely for drama. Three days later, when Glidden told him of Clay's death, Jordan exhibited the proper attitude at once. He listened carefully until Glidden was done, and then he said quietly, "You want help, kid? I know how you feel. Your own brother. I know what I'd do. There's a torpedo named Lerner. . . . No. Hell, no. What's the matter with me? This is your show. You wouldn't want anybody else cutting in. . . ."

In time, listening to Jordan, Glidden began to sense the spark grow inside him. He nursed it, and eventually the anger turned up. Not very great, but adequate enough. He and Jordan would talk late into the night, devising crafty, vindictive schemes for the future death of Eckart, and Glidden would finally go to sleep appeased and righteous, at one with the natural world.

But the prison hours are long, and before the month was out, Jordan got bored.

It wasn't in anything he said. Rather, it was in his silences. During Glidden's low, impassioned declarations of revenge, Jordan would stare out the window, and shuffle his feet, and say: "Yeah, yeah," so that Glidden knew he wasn't even listening. Jordan acted as though it had all been decided long ago, and why carry on about it? Vaguely hurt, Glidden shut up.

However, without Jordan to act as bel-lows, the spark Glidden had taken such pains to uncover gradually began to fade despite his best efforts to sustain it. He would find himself in the courtyard laughing over a story someone had told, and it would occur to him that he hadn't brooded about Clay for days. Conscientiously he would leave the group, and walk alone, which made him feel so silly that he finally gave that up altogether.

On top of everything else, he commenced to eat better. He could discover little or no reason for this. Certainly the food hadn't improved. He smoked less, laughed more heartily, took a distinct if irrational pleasure in the work assigned him, and slept like a log at night.

They transferred him to the library. On his second day in the stacks he noticed an illustration in one of the books he was putting away. He glanced at the caption, sat down on the bottom rung of the ladder, and started to read.

That night he checked a book out himself for the first time in his life.

He tried to tell Jordan about it.

"This kid—now get the picture—he's just a little squirt, but he's got all the guts in the world. Well, he gets mixed up with these pirates, including this gimp character called Long John Silver. I forgot to tell you there's a treasure. . . . Well, before *that*—"

"What the hell you getting so excited about?" Jordan asked. "It's just a book, ain't it?"

"Well—yeah," Glidden said.

"So go to sleep," Jordan said, and turned over.

Glidden shrugged and kept his reading to himself thereafter. He came to prefer the tang and belying-pin smash of the sea stories. He cried like a baby over "Captains Courageous." He read Sabatini, and all of Joseph Conrad, and "Two Years Before the Mast," and "Moby Dick," and little by little a furtive and exciting idea crept into the back of his mind.

There was no precedent for it. None of his family, so far as he knew, ever had been seamen, and he'd never before thought about going to sea himself. He hadn't had the time to think about it. But with Clay gone, it seemed easier somehow to plan along different lines. He put a question to the warden one day, and shortly afterward received a seaman's manual, which he studied and underlined until the book had become a part of himself.

He almost forgot that Clay ever had existed.

They transferred him out of the library, and into the warden's office. And at the end of the eleventh month—on account of his record—they released him.

He walked out of the gate, with the seaman's manual stuck in his pocket, and Regan's voice said, "Here you are, Glidden. Over here."

Glidden turned. Regan's face was creased in a smile. He stood beside Clay's old coupé, one hand outstretched.

"Eleven months on the nose." Regan held the left-hand door open. "Take over, kid."

The manual was warm against Glidden's side. Regan was waiting. After a moment he climbed slowly into the car, feeling the familiar sway of the seat, the coolness of the wheel under his hands. Right back where he'd started. Clay's car. The getaway car.

"Think you can still drive it?" Regan asked, grinning.

Glidden took a deep breath, let his hands

drop from the wheel. "Regan," he said, "I got an idea while I was in there. Maybe you'll think I'm nuts. . . ." He paused.

"Yeah?" Regan said. He looked interested.

Glidden frowned at the dashboard. "Well—I figured on getting out. Shipping on some freighter. Now, before you say anything. . . ."

"Freighter," Regan repeated. "You know, that ain't such a bad idea. . . ."

Glidden lifted his head. Regan had narrowed his eyes and was looking into some thoughtful distance of his own. Glidden felt a sudden, explosive gratitude toward the other.

"It isn't a question of walking out on the gang," he said. "You understand that."

"Why, it's a question of what you want to do, kid. It's your problem."

"That's the way I saw it."

"The trouble is," Regan mused, "that they just might connect you and Eckhart if you disappear afterward. I mean, you got your own angle, and that's the way it ought to be, but at least we can help you with an alibi. Eleven months, they might not even check on you. But if they did, maybe it'd be better if you were around for questioning. Then let 'em try to pin their rap. We'll rig an alibi that'll drive 'em nuts."

Glidden put his hands back on the wheel, stared at the whiteness in his knuckles. "Regan, listen. Something happened to me when Clay died. "I—can't explain it . . . even to myself. . . ."

In an embarrassed undertone, Regan murmured, "What kind of a dummy do you take me for? I know how you felt about Clay. You don't have to explain anything to anybody." He laughed. "We'd probably take you apart if you didn't fix Eckart's wagon. So relax."

Presently Glidden flicked the ignition key, punched the starter button. "Yeah," he said. He jammed the gear-shift into low and headed back toward town.

THAT night they gave him a party. And this was a curious thing. In all his life before no one had seen fit to hold a party, especially for him.

"They're all on your side," Regan explained, "and they want you to know it. Clay had a lot of friends." He filled Glidden's glass. "There isn't a one of these guys who wouldn't have cut Eckart's throat the day after he burned Clay down. But they waited for Clay's brother."

Wherever Glidden went there were men to surround him, to shake his hand, to offer grave suggestions. And each word was a silken lasso spun delicately around his conscience. No one ordered him to murder Eckart. No one insisted on it. Why should there be a need for insistence when a man's own brother had been killed?

Confused, Glidden undertook to re-examine a number of subtle values. He was not a coward. Had anyone shown the slightest interest in forcing him into retaliation against Eckart, he could have held his ground and fought his way free. But there was no question of pressure. 'Slowly he began to see himself as the others saw him. There were things he'd forgotten in prison. A matter of duty, and of something deeper. On occasion a man could, prudently, or with wisdom, turn the other cheek, but those occasions were limited. Sometimes, it seemed to Glidden, that tenuous element called honor entered the picture, and the man who defied honor defied his own soul. . . .

In the tired, early hours of the morning, when the party had almost spent itself, they made their plan.

It was Regan who suggested the time and the place.

"Do what you want with it, but I don't think you'll find a better set-up. Next week Eckart takes his vacation. He's a great fisherman. Now the deal is this. He'll start out early Friday morning. Alone. Suppose you're in the garage. . . ."

"Where does he fish?"

"South. Coast country. Not a damned thing around but rattlers and scenery."

Glidden chewed his lip. "That might be our angle."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean, go with him. Do the job there. They wouldn't even miss him for a week or so. And there's a lot of places down there to bury a body. . . ."

Regan's eyes were glittering. "So help me, they'd never find him."

Their eyes caught over the table, and held, and Glidden grew in honor, and knew that he was truly Clay's brother.

"Friday morning," he said.

"Friday morning," Regan repeated.

IN THE chill dampness of Eckart's garage, Glidden stirred, snapped to attention.

He heard noises on the driveway, and the sound of low laughter. Through the abrupt tightness behind his eyes, Glidden could see Eckart and his wife, the two of them very close, kissing in the doorway. Now Eckart had picked up his creel, and the pole, and was walking toward the garage. For one taut moment Glidden thought that the woman intended to walk out with him, but she stopped beside the kid's wagon, pulled it into the house.

Eckart reached the garage, squeezed himself between the car and the wall, and opened the back door. He was whistling quietly to himself.

"Eckart," Glidden whispered.

The cop started to turn, and Glidden stepped forward, jammed the muzzle of the gun heavily into Eckart's side. "One sound, and I'll plaster you from one end of this dump to the other. I mean it."

He could feel the dull thud of Eckart's heart against the gun, a ponderous, muted bump, like hands clapped under water.

"Get in the car."

Without a word, Eckart climbed behind the wheel. Glidden followed him, crouched on the floor.

"This a robbery?"

"Just shut your mouth, and start driving."

For the first time Eckart's eyes swept over him. They took in the solid viciousness of the .32, the strain of his finger on the trigger, and rested at last on his face.

"Hello, Glidden," Eckart said.

"For recognizing me, copper, you win the special silver-plated slug with the lace pants. Congratulations."

"I've been waiting for you, Glidden," Eckart said. He started the car, put his head out the window, and backed slowly down the drive.

Far away Glidden could feel the tension begin to build again. "Now don't tell me you've got a conscience, Eckart."

They had gotten safely to the street. Eckart waited, his eyes straight ahead.

"South to your fishing spot," Glidden murmured.

Eckart laughed emotionlessly.

"That's funny?" Glidden said.

"Not funny. Obvious."

At the end of the block, after Eckart had turned, Glidden swung onto the seat beside him. The streets were deserted. He held the gun in his lap, pointed toward Eckart's belly. He felt cool now, detached. He said, "Eckart, it seems to me you're too happy about this."

"I'm not happy, Glidden."

"You were expecting me."

"Yes."

"I'll see a trap if there is one. You know that."

"There's no trap."

Glidden subsided.

"That coast country," Eckart said. "Ever fished it?"

Glidden frowned. "What's the matter with you?"

"Matter? We've got a long trip. Can't we talk?"

Angrily, Glidden said, "Maybe it won't be such a long trip. It might end any time now, Copper."

Slowly Eckart shook his head. "No.

Not yet. You're emotional, Glidden, but you aren't foolish."

A vein in Glidden's throat began to throb. With a great lack of dignity, his stomach growled.

"Hungry?" Eckart asked.

"No!"

Eckart glanced at him curiously, and then shrugged.

Glidden swallowed the saliva in his mouth. Somehow, somewhere, a balance wheel had slipped out of alignment. The show should have been his, and it wasn't. He had the gun. He gave the orders. And yet he was the one with the fear. And he *was* hungry.

"There's some doughnuts in a bag or the back seat," Eckart said.

"Eckart, let me tell you something." Glidden's voice trembled. "You're pushing, and I don't like to be pushed. When I'm hungry, you'll *give* me the damned doughnuts."

"Any time," Eckart said amiably.

Glidden thought clearly, If I killed him now, could I grab the wheel before we crashed? They had gotten onto the wide highway leading away from the city, and Eckart had stepped up their speed considerably. The sun was out, and the road stretched empty before them.

Glidden shifted the gun. Eckart had turned his head, and was smiling out the window. "Look," Eckart said suddenly.

Startled, Glidden obeyed. In the field on their left, a young colt hopped and shook its head fiercely at nothing at all. Behind him his mare watched complacently. Despite himself Glidden grinned.

"You like farm life, Glidden?"

"I don't know. I've never been on one.

"I don't think you would. You're like me. You get a kick out of looking at the results, but you've got sense enough to realize it isn't really your line."

"Lot of work," Glidden said.

"People forget that. Me, I *know* it's lot of work. I was born on a farm."

Glidden grunted noncommittally.

"My father was a farmer. My grandfather. All my family. I never knew anything else until I was eighteen. Happened to move into the city to stay with a friend of mine for the summer. The guy's uncle was a cop. And I decided right then and there what I wanted to be. Terrible thing to go home and tell my mother. She wanted me to take over when she died. I thought about it for a long time. Everybody's got the choice sooner or later. Follow the line you're born to, or strike out for yourself. I wasn't fit to be a farmer. But Ma had her mind made up. *She* couldn't see it. I damn near stayed."

"God, but you're corny," Glidden said.

Eckart chuckled. "Don't be so self-conscious, Glidden. I told you the choice comes to everybody. Don't mistake common conversation for a morality tale."

"I didn't, and you're still corny."

"Shall I tell you what's wrong with you, Glidden?"

"Yeah. I've always wondered."

"You ever see an apple with a bruise on it? There's a lot of them. Perfectly good, except for a little spot of rottenness. That's you, with this one difference. You're all rotten, except for a little spot of goodness. You can't beat it down. It's always there, like a benevolent cancer. I saw it when you were a little kid riding on Clay's coat-tails. You weren't like him. There's something wrong in you. Something ethical and virtuous. You're going to lead a hell of a life."

"Longer than yours, Eckart."

"Oh, I don't think so," Eckart said.

Glidden raised his eyebrows, and Eckart smiled. "When did you kill your last man, Glidden?"

Glidden moved restlessly. "Maybe I've never had a reason."

"That's the good spot in the apple. Never having a reason."

"You think I won't kill you?" Glidden asked curiously.

"I don't think you will. No."

The words were spoken quietly and simply, but along with them Glidden heard the balance wheel right itself. He looked at Eckart's confident face, and felt a brief, but vast, sadness. For the first time since he'd stepped into the car he knew that he was in command. He couldn't tell what had happened, and yet he knew it was so. He would indeed kill Eckart. Somehow the question had been totally resolved. The wheel had spun, and the ball had fallen, and there it was in the black, and Eckart had bet on the red.

Eckart said, "Glidden?"

"Yeah?"

Eckart was watching him, puzzled. Again he glanced at the gun. After a moment he turned back, stared at the road silently.

I wonder, Glidden thought idly, how it would have been to have gone to sea?

BY NOON they had passed the last small town squatting across the road, and two hours later they were deep into the loneliness and immensity of the coast country. Nothing but rattlers and scenery, Reagan had said, and Glidden could believe it. He and Eckart had not spoken for hours. They had left the highway long ago, and had taken a pitted, rutted road that Glidden himself had chosen. Eckart drove carefully, stoically. He'll make one last attempt, Glidden thought. He may wait until almost the end, but he'll try. Nobody goes quietly to death.

He touched Eckart's arm with the gun. "This'll do."

"My boy's just seven," Eckart said. "Well, seven next month."

"Get out. Walk ahead of me."

"I'm not going to beg, you know, Glidden."

"Get out."

The ground was dry under them, baked by the sun. Glidden followed the checked red jacket at a discreet five paces. No ques

tion of a sudden turn, or a surprise kick at the gun. They proceeded into a shallow, rocky gully.

"Here," Glidden said.

Eckart stopped. Beneath the dispirited hat a ring of sweat had risen on his forehead. He kept his eyes on the gun.

"Last words, copper?" Glidden said.

"One or two. You'd have made a fine sailor."

Glidden hoped his face hadn't betrayed the surprise he felt. "So you know about that?"

"Maybe I know more about you than you do yourself. I'm not a fool, Glidden. I had reports on you from the pen. The mistake I made was in thinking you were too smart to listen to Reagan and his bums. Maybe I counted too much on that spot in the apple. And maybe not. . . ."

"Way too much."

"Yeah?"

Glidden lifted the gun, centered it on Eckart's chest. "Pray, copper." A breeze sougled through the small pines around them. He wished Eckart would run, would make some kind of a break. The pale, composed face before him wasn't natural. Slowly he tightened his finger on the trigger. His hand dripped with perspiration.

"Funny about the muscles, isn't it, kid?" Eckart said at last. His eyes on the gun were half-closed; his lips barely moved. "Sometimes something deep in the brain says no. Pull hard, kid. Harder. Try to beat the muscles. . . ."

The monotonous whisper crept into Glidden's mind. His breath rasped in his throat. Tighter his finger pulled. Tighter.

"You were never meant to follow Clay,

Glidden." Eckart shut his eyes. "You did it because it was the only thing you could see around you. Like me and the farm. I met a cop, and you read a book. Your fingers won't work for you. Your muscles say no. . . ."

Eckart's voice trailed away. There was no sound in all the world. The silence crushed the world and developed a sound of its own, a mute nothingness as stinging as a shriek.

Eons later, Eckart looked up.

"Damn you, Eckart," Glidden said.

Eckart moved slightly back, and sank onto a flat rock nearby.

Almost leisurely, Glidden turned, began walking away. He dropped the gun at the edge of the clearing.

"You're only about two miles from the coast," Eckart said. "Straight ahead. Keep the sun in front of you."

Without replying, Glidden swung a bit to his left, toward the sun.

Presently Eckart rose. He picked up the gun, and stared gravely at it. He ran his finger over the safety, which had been locked into place ever since he'd first seen the gun in Glidden's hand. He wondered how much of Glidden's failure to notice the safety had been due to his own distracting words, and how much had been due to Glidden as a man. Because what kind of a killer carried his gun locked in safety? Yes, Eckart thought, something deep, deep in the brain had said no a long time ago. . . .

He got into his car, his whole body trembling with fatigue and release. Maybe not such a hell of a life, he thought. Slowly, he backed down the rutted road toward home. ■ ■ ■

Statement required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233), showing the Ownership, Management, and Circulation of New Detective Magazine published bi-monthly at Kokomo, Indiana, for October 1, 1951. 1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. Editor, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. Managing editor, None. Business manager, None. 2. The owner is: Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York, Shirley M. Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. 3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None. 4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. Signed, Henry Steeger, Publisher. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 19th day of September, 1951. Eva M. Walker, Notary Public, State of New York. Qualified in New York County, No. 31-9506600. Certificate filed with: City Register & F. County. My Commission expires March 30, 1952 (Seal) —Form 3526—Rev. 8-50.



Just once, I'd have liked to get out something besides social notes. . . . A nice big murder, for instance. . . .

**By
Fredric
Brown**

THE GIBBERING NIGHT

Nothing newsworthy ever happened in Charlotteville. . . . So, despite the robbery, the scandal—and the corpse—Pop splashed the news of the season's first snow right across the front page!

I HAD a short drink from the bottle in the bottom drawer of my desk and then walked over to the window and stood looking down Main Street. From the *Clarion* window you can see just about all of it. If you don't look out of the window, you don't miss much.

I could hear Pete Turner's footsteps crossing the composing room toward me.

He said, "Front page form's ready for lockup, Pop. Want a stone proof?"

That was Thursday night routine. I said, "Go wash up, Pete. I'll pull one while you're getting ready and then we'll go over to Shorty's for a coupla beers."

He shuffled off. That's the way we always did on press nights. A few beers and a little conversation and then we'd come back and run off the paper for Friday morning distribution.

It was eleven o'clock now, and except for Shorty's Tavern across the street, everything was dark. Charlotteville takes in its sidewalks early. It was getting colder out, and looked as though it might snow before morning.

I pulled the proof and then Pete came out of the washroom and we went to Shorty's. Over our first beers, I started to read the proof.

"Not much news this time," Pete said.

It was an understatement, and I said so. "Worse than last week," I added. "Lord, just once I'd like to get out an exciting paper. Something in it besides church socials and farm sales and christenings."

"This ain't Chicago, Pop," Shorty put in. He picked up our glasses to refill them. "And we like the *Clarion*. Them socials and sales and christening are important to us because they're people we know."

"Yeah," I told him. "But you know everything that's in the paper before it's printed. That's the trouble with a blame weekly. Damn it all, if I had just *one* item of real news—"

Shorty said, "Real news would be something happening to someone. Like if somebody murdered—uh—well, Carl Trenholm, for instance, that'd be news. Want that to happen?"

"Course not," I admitted. Carl Trenholm is my best friend. "But damn it, just the same—"

I finished off the second beer and read on.

Suddenly I made forceful use of a four-letter word.

"Something wrong?" Pete asked, stepping up and looking over my shoulder.

"That box item in the middle," I groaned. "The story on the auction sale. It's been called off, and I forgot."

"Not so bad," Pete said. "Six column inches. We'll find something else to fill it." He grinned. "We can use one of those poems Polly Wheeler gave you. I'll set it up soon as we get back."

"Over my dead body," I told him. "Over my dead body will we use a poem on the front page." I folded the proof and stuck it in my pocket. If I read on, I might find something worse.

Shorty filled them up a third time, and just as he put them in front of us the door jerked open hard and suddenly. We all turned.

It stayed open, with the kid standing there in the doorway and cold air coming in around him. Willie Colina, the buck-toothed, not-too-bright kid who worked in the feed shop. He looked too excited to talk, but gulped and got going.

"Mister-Rogers," he said, "I-was-over-at-the-Clarion-and-you - wasn't - there - so I—"

"Shut that door, Willie," I told him. "It's cold."

He didn't even hear me. "A-a-murder," he said. "They's been a murder, Mister Rogers, out on the Dane Road. Hit over the head with a—"

"Who?"

"C-Carl Trenholm. Sheriff was out there, and they took him over to the courthouse or somewhere. In Sheriff Otis' c-car. They was blood all over."

The door was still open, and it was cold now in Shorty's Tavern.

I said, "Thanks, Willie," and went past him out the door and I didn't think to close it either. Pete Turner was at my heels. He said, "Pop, that's three blocks. Go get your overcoat."

I cut across the street to the *Clarion* and I was putting on my overcoat when the phone rang. Sheriff Otis, of course, calling to tell me—

But it wasn't. When I'd groped across the dark office and said hello into the phone, it was Walter Gottfried's voice. He said, "Pop, I called to tell you right away. There's a maniac escaped."

Gottfried lives on the farm next to the state asylum, a couple of miles out east of town.

He went on, "I dunno who it is, or how. Pop. But I thought I'd tip you off. They're out hunting for him now. I can see the lanterns and flashlights and cars going out and everything. Me, I got the family here in one room, and I got my shotgun loaded. So we're all right."

I said, "Okay, Walter. Thanks for calling."

I hung up and then picked up the phone again and gave the number of the asylum. It was busy.

I got my overcoat and went back to Shorty's. Pete was buying a coke for Willie Colina. I told him about Gottfried's call.

I said, "That asylum line'll be busy for hours. Whyn't you take my car out of the garage and go out there and get the story direct?"

He said, "Sure, Pop."

Shorty asked, "Do you suppose the escaped looney killed—"

I said, "Could be," and didn't look at Shorty as I turned and went out. I'd wanted news, and didn't want Shorty to remind me of that uncanny guess he'd made. Three thousand people in Charlotteville, and he had to mention Trenholm.

Yes, it was getting colder. There were a few vagrant snowflakes gleaming white in the light of the street lamps. Blowing around in the wind, even after they'd hit, and beginning first to fill up the cracks in the sidewalk and make a white line down the middle of the gutter.

I WAS halfway to the courthouse when the big car pulled into the curb alongside me. I hadn't seen it coming until it pulled in and slowed down. A voice said, "Hey, buddy," and I stopped and looked.

There were two men in the car, both in the front seat. The one who had spoken looked familiar. I'd seen him somewhere before, but he didn't live in town. He had a flat, expressionless sort of face and a mouth like a rattrap. He said, "What town is this?"

I said, "Charlotteville", and walked on. Maybe he was going to ask for directions, but I didn't wait to see. Behind me, I heard the car start up and drive on.

But where had I seen that face before?

And then, a couple of dozen steps farther on, I stopped suddenly because I knew. I'd seen it on a reward circular. Swede Carey, alias any name you could think of, partner of Bugs Murdoch. Holdup men, wanted plenty. Had the other man been Murdoch? He'd been driving and hadn't turned. I hadn't seen his face at all.

I quickly started walking again, without turning around to look behind me, in case one of them was looking back through the rear window of the car.

Killers. Swede Carey, and maybe Murdoch, too. Hell, for the moment, at any rate, this took priority over everything else. I had to get to a phone quick and let the sheriff know those men were driving north through town. The state police could watch the road up ahead at Watertown, or, in case they took the other fork through the mountains, at Beverton, and get them.

But I was nearer now to the courthouse, and the morgue where they'd have taken Carl, than I was to the phones back at Shorty's or the *Clarion* office.

But even a minute more or less might count. If there was only a phone in some place open in this block—

There wasn't, of course. Not at midnight. All store fronts were dark and locked. There was not even a night-light

left burning in any of them. Not even in—
And I stopped again.

The bank. I was passing the bank, or I had been passing it. But thinking about night-lights, I'd glanced at the bank windows. And there wasn't any night-light burning back in the rear of the bank over the safe. There should have been a light there. Maybe the bulb had just burned out, but I stopped walking and looked through the window into jet blackness.

And, way back there, where the night-light should have been, another and dimmer light flickered briefly. It was from a match. There was a burglar in the bank!

I'm not sure why it was that I found myself tiptoeing quietly down the dark areaway that led between the bank and the paint store next to it. I don't know just what I expected to do, single-handed and unarmed. Maybe I was a bit punch-drunk, there in the gibbering dark, from murders and maniacs and wanted killers, and now burglars, all in an hour and in Charlotteville, where nothing ever happens.

But there I was, groping back through the utter blackness of the areaway like a damn fool Don Quixote or something. And at my age, too; almost fifty, and old enough to know better.

I reached the back of the buildings, and I could see a little again, because there was a street light down at the end of the alley. I could see that there was a window open at the back of the bank.

I moved toward it, and I stepped on something that felt like a piece of board, and it made me realize how empty my hands were. I bent down and picked it up. Not a bad size for a billy, although awkward to hold, a piece of half-inch-by-three pine, a couple of feet long.

I was just testing my grip on it when a head came out of the window of the bank. I swung and hit it. Thank God, not too hard.

A figure fell back inside, and when there was no sound or movement for a few sec-

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onds, I leaned in the window and struck a match. I gasped, and I think I swore a little, and then I climbed into the window. I felt for his heart, and it was beating strongly.

I let out my breath slowly, then, got the night-light turned back on, and picked up the nearest phone. There was something that came ahead even of calling the sheriff.

I gave the number of banker Henry Wade and waited impatiently until his sleepy voice answered. I said, "Pop Rogers, Henry. I'm calling from your bank. Get down here right away. Hurry."

"Huh? You're at the *bank*? How in hell—"

I said, "Somebody was inside there. I hit him over the head when he started back out the window, and he's unconscious but not hurt bad. Pick up Doc Manders on your way here, though, just to be—"

"On my way," he cut in. "You're phoning the police, or shall—"

"No," I said. "No police."

"My God," he said, "why not? A burg—"

"Just come down here quick, Henry," I said. "But don't worry; he isn't hurt badly. I can't say any more over the phone."

He was silent a moment, and then his voice was different. He said, "I'll be right down. Hold tight."

Before he could hang up, I said, "I won't be able to wait, Henry. Hell's loose around here tonight."

"Yes," he said. "I'll see you later, then."

I HELD down the hook a moment, and then gave the courthouse phone number. Milly Berger, the night operator, must have recognized my voice. She said, "You want the sheriff, Mr. Rogers? I think he's over at the hospital; he just made a call from there. But the line's busy there, and so's the courthouse line, for that matter. Gee, what's going on tonight, Mr. Rogers? And say, you're calling from the *bank*. What's going on?"

I said, "Milly, you forget I'm calling from the bank. Understand?"

"No, but I'll forget it if you say so."

I hung up, knowing she would. Milly's as close-mouthed as a clam, and that's why she's night operator.

I went back to Jerry Wade, the banker's son. He hadn't moved yet, but his pulse was good and there was color beginning to come back into his face. He'd do all right, I decided, until his father and the doctor got here. And he was lying behind a desk where he couldn't be seen from the front window, even if somebody went by and looked in.

I made him as comfortable as I could, and then went back out of the window and through the areaway to the street again.

The snow was falling faster now, and beginning to stick on the flat surfaces of the sidewalks and the streets. The air was thick with big, soft flakes of snow, falling straight down now in a lull in the wind.

I thought of Carl, lying cold and dead and never able to play chess with me again. Nor have beer and pinochle at Shorty's. He'd be underground and with white snow on his grave, and Shorty had been right—if that was news, then we didn't want news. Farm sales and christenings and church socials, and our friends alive and happy; that's what we really wanted.

I walked rapidly, trying to guess how many minutes I'd lost at the bank. Would the car with the holdup men have had time to reach the next town?

The *Clarion* office across the street was dark, and I knew Pete was on his way out to the asylum. Shorty's phone would be handier, and I opened the tavern door almost on the run. I turned quickly to the phone on the wall. The warmth of the tavern made me realize suddenly how cold I was, and as I took the receiver off the hook I called to Shorty to pour me out a shot.

He said, "Sure, Pop. What's up?"

Milly's voice came on the receiver and I

gave the hospital number, and then put my hand over the mouthpiece and said to Shorty, "Hell's popping tonight, Shorty. Swede Carey and maybe Bugs Murdoch just went through town and I got to get Sheriff Otis and—"

There was the scrape of a chair at the back of the tavern, and I turned the rest of the way around, and—yes, there were the two men who'd been in the car. Swede Carey—but the other one wasn't Murdoch. It was a man I didn't know, and didn't want to know. A dark-faced man with a big nose—and a black automatic in his hand.

There was one in Swede Carey's hand, too. He'd been standing by the juke-box in the back corner.

Slowly, I put the receiver back on the hook. Swede Carey hadn't told me to. He'd just looked at me.

He said to Shorty, "Come out here, you." Shorty, his hands up, came around the end of the bar. The big-nosed man took over the care of Shorty, and Swede came up to me and said, "Turn around. Out that door and in the car."

Sure, there was the car just outside Shorty's door. If my mind hadn't been on everything else, I'd have seen it. Even if I hadn't seen the two men in the back of the tavern, I should have noticed that car. But I'd been so sure they were driving through town.

I hadn't given a thought to the possibility of their stopping for a drink.

Out the door into the snow—

They put Shorty and me in the back seat, and Swede got in with us and the other man took the wheel.

Shorty said, "Well, Pop, you wanted news." His voice didn't sound happy, but then it didn't sound bitter or scared. And Shorty wasn't dumb; he knew as well as I knew that we were pretty likely to be going on a one-way ride. Being able to kid in that casual tone of voice made Shorty a pretty brave man. Funny, you don't think

of people you see every day as being brave until something happens.

Me, I was scared stiff. But what was worse than that was that I couldn't stop kicking myself for being so asininely careless as to miss seeing the car and then to barge in blatting my mouth before I even looked.

Shorty started to say something else, but Swede said, "Shut up," and then said, "Make it fast," out of the corner of his rat-trap mouth to the man at the wheel.

WE STARTED fast and kept going fast, with the snowflakes making a solid curtain about fifty feet or so in front of the bright headlights. We passed through the edge of town and got on the pike before it occurred to me we had nothing more to lose by trying to talk our way out of this.

I said, "You're not going to kill us, are you, Carey?"

He said "No," and I knew he was lying from the way he said it.

"Listen—"

"Shut up."

But even with a pistol in my ribs, there wasn't anything to gain by shutting up. I said, "You can drop us off some place where it'll take us hours to reach a phone. You can even tie us up so it'll take a good while to get loose. And leave us off the road so if a car passes—"

"Shut up," he said again. "That's what we're going to do." He was still lying; I hadn't made a dent.

The car stopped with a jolt and a squeal of brakes. The big-nosed man said, "Fork in the road, Swede. Which way?"

Swede Carey said to me, "Which way to Watertown?"

"Both of them," I told him. "South road goes along the river and this one goes through the mountains. It's shorter, but not used so much because it's trickier driving, and sometimes gets blocked by snow."

"Okay," Carey said, "keep on the way you're going, Harry."

The car started up again. It was snowing harder now, and looked about three inches deep already on the road ahead. But this was the first snow of the year; there wouldn't be any chance of drifts on the mountain road.

The car had power, all right. It took the steep slopes as though they were level road. The man up front drove fast, but well. I didn't talk any more; it's useless to argue with a man who pretends to agree with you and doesn't mean it. Our only chance, and a slim one it was, would be to try a break when we got out of the car. If it stopped somewhere along the mountainside—

We began to slow down just a bit before the hairpin turn, and the big-nosed man turned in the seat and looked inquiringly at Carey. Carey nodded, and the car came to a stop.

This was it, then, and I realized they couldn't have picked a much better spot. Shorty got out of the car first, and then Carey motioned me to follow. They'd let us get clear of the car, of course, before they shot us down.

But I didn't wait for that. I got as far as both feet on the running board, and I jumped from there. Shorty was just ahead of me and I put both hands on his back and pushed and he went over the edge of the road. I was after him a fraction of a second later—just in time to be too late for the pistol shots that banged out behind us and probably went just over my head as I started to fall.

It wasn't pleasant, landing and rolling, sliding, down that steep fifty-degree slope, but what with the grass and bushes, we were luckier than I'd dared to hope. Bushes, thicker ones, slowed me down before I hit a tree that was solid enough to have broken my ribs in. And almost before I stopped, Shorty had hold of my arm, helping me to climb shakily to my feet.

There were no more shots from above. They wouldn't have seen me, in my dark

clothes, but Shorty had worn only his shirt and that and his undershirt had been taken off by the bushes and his skin gleamed white in the darkness.

A second later we were in among the trees, out of sight from above. I didn't think they'd try to chase us, and they didn't. By the time we were fifty yards farther down the slope, I heard the car doors slam and the engine pick up. Even if they had flashlights, I don't think they could have found us, because we'd hunted in this country and knew it, and they didn't. Their best bet, now, was to put plenty of distance behind them before we could reach a telephone.

Shorty let out a sigh of relief at the sound of the car starting. He panted, "Nice work, Pop. Makes up for your dumbness back in town. Now, if I don't freeze to death before we get back to—"

"Get back, hell," I said. "Shorty, we can stop them. Listen, they go around the hairpin now, and then wind down that other slope, and in three miles driving they go by right below us. A couple hundred yards below us. Come on."

"But what—" Shorty started to ask, and then he broke off talking to follow me, for I was going ahead down the slope, feeling my way where I couldn't see.

The road below was nearer than I thought; I might have stumbled right out on it if I hadn't seen, far away, the headlights of the killers' car. I spotted the road, then, and crouched behind bushes about ten or twelve yards above it. I knew I wouldn't have to hunt for boulders; the slope was full of them. I groped around and found a big one, as big as I'd be able to throw easily. There'd be time for just one shot, and if it missed, there'd be no harm done; they'd probably never know they'd been a target.

Shorty slid to a stop beside me, and said, "Say, Pop, you gonna— Swell idea." And then he was scrambling off sideways into the darkness.

The car was coming, and then it was right under me, and I let go the big boulder.

I saw right away it was going to miss by yards, and it did.

BUT SHORTY'S idea had been different. He hadn't picked something to throw; he'd picked something to roll. A big round one damn near a yard in diameter. I heard it start, just as my piddling little stone was missing the car, and we figured afterward that it must have rolled about eight yards or so to gather momentum, and then it jumped. Just as though that chunk of weathered rock knew what it was doing, it took a flying jump off the steep slope just above the road. And it crashed into the side of the car just back of amidships, and the car wasn't on the road any more. The car was just a noise rolling down the rest of the slope that was past the road.

Shorty and I found one another and I gave him my overcoat, me having a suit coat and a sweater-vest under it and Shorty being dressed from the waist up in not much more than the hair on his chest. I couldn't see his chest, but a man that could start a boulder that size rolling *had* to have hair on his chest.

Shorty said, "We better go down and see if they—"

We went down, but they weren't. They were both plenty dead and not nice to look at.

But we found a flashlight in a side pocket of what had been the car.

It lighted our way up the slope to the road again, and along the road that now gleamed brightly with four inches of white snow that was already covering the tracks the car had made—just as it was already covering what was lying in the valley below.

It was twelve miles back to town, but we walked only two before a car came along and picked us up. It was while we were in

the car that Shorty said, "Lord, Pop, I forgot to tell you. Carl Trenholm isn't dead. He's at the hospital with a concussion, but he'll be all right. Willie got the story wrong."

He chuckled. "But cheer up, Pop. You've got plenty of news anyway, for once."

Cheer up? I felt positively light-hearted when I dropped off at the hospital on the way to town. They let me in to see Carl, too.

The sheriff was in there talking to him, but the sheriff left pretty quickly when I started telling him about Swede Carey and company.

"I'll get the Feds right away," he said. "They sure wanted Carey. You're sure the other guy wasn't Murdoch?"

I told him I was sure, and he left on the run. Then I had time to ask Carl if he knew who slugged him. He grinned a bit sheepishly. "A mule, Pop. A white one. I'd been over at Sam Harder's and was walking home when my foot slipped or something. The road came up and hit my head with a rock."

I shook my head at him. "At your age, Carl, you should know better. That white mule of Sam's—"

"Pop," he said, "you keep it out of the paper or I'll never play chess with you again. Sarah's visiting down at Springfield, but she gets the *Clarion* mailed to her and if she finds out anything happened to me, she'll come tearing back so quick that—"

I said, "With the news I got for tomorrow, you wouldn't rate a stick, anyway. Which reminds me; I got to get back to the office quick."

Henry Wade, the banker, was waiting for me there. He said, "Pop, I can't even thank you enough for calling me instead of the sheriff tonight, and I want to explain something to you. You see, Jerry didn't really—"

"You needn't tell me, Henry," I said

"He's just a crazy kid, Pop, and I guess I was too strict with him. He's only seventeen. But he wasn't robbing the bank; I want you to know that. He was running away from home, yes. And there was two hundred and ten dollars in his savings account, and he knew I'd never let him draw it out to— Well, he was just taking it on the way. He had exactly two hundred ten in his pocket and no more, and he'd closed and locked the safe again."

It made me feel better to hear that. It made me feel swell, because I'd liked young Jerry Wade, and I knew now—by the lifting of it—that there'd been a heavy weight on my mind ever since midnight.

I said, "That's great, Henry. And—and it's okay now? I mean about the running away?"

"He's going," said Henry, and suddenly he looked older. "But with my consent, this time. Yeah, the army. You see, being seventeen, he had to have consent. But he was going to run off up to Canada and join there— Well—"

I said, "We'll drink to it, Henry." And I took the bottle out of the bottom drawer of my desk. "And when the board accepts him, I'll give him a swell write-up."

"And—uh—about tonight. You won't—uh—mention—"

I just looked at him, and then poured the drinks.

IT WAS half an hour later that Pete Turner came back, and I had the Swede Carey story almost done. It was a dilly of a story, and setting it up would make us late to press, but so what.

Pete wasn't alone. Old Mrs. Andrews was with him. Mrs. Andrews is a sort of distant cousin of his, but even so, I stared in surprise when I remembered where she had been staying.

Pete read my mind and nodded. "You know Aunt Wilma, don't you, Pop? When I got out to the asylum I found out it was her who'd—uh—"

"And he was right where I'd go," cut in Mrs. Andrews. "And he came and got me. But it's all right now. I saw the house again, and got the letters I wanted to get, and I'm ready to go back now."

I looked at the gentle little old lady and thought of Walter Gottfried cowering with his family in one room, with a loaded shotgun, and I smiled at her. She looked so happy right now that you couldn't help smile at her, even knowing.

She said, "But you won't tell in the paper about my escaping, will you, Mr. Rogers? My daughter in the city would read it, and she'd worry. She'd think I wasn't happy there and worry about me and then I'd be unhappy too. She takes the *Clarion*, you know, and—so—"

I said, "Don't worry, Mrs. Andrews. I won't mention a word about it. The sheriff will be here pretty soon, and he'll drive you back to the asylum. And if you're good, I won't say a word about it in the paper."

Pete was phoning the asylum when Sheriff Otis came in, and there were two men with him. They were Feds.

The big one did the talking. He said, "You sure did a night's work, Mr. Rogers. The guy with Swede Carey was Bill Delaney, who shot down two men and a woman in the getaway from the Alberton bank job. And the best of it is, we can get the real big-shot of the gang too, if you will only cooperate with us."

"Bugs Murdoch?" I asked. "How? How do you mean I can cooperate with you?"

"Listen, there was a telegram in Swede's pocket signed Evans, and Evans is one of the aliases Bugs uses. And it makes an appointment for them to meet Sunday evening in Chicago. Well, we'll just keep that appointment for Swede, now that he can't. See what I mean?"

"Sure. Great. But where do I come in. You don't want *me* to go to Chicago, do you?"

"Of course not. But until we pick up Murdoch, the story's got to be kept under wraps, don't you see? If you print that Swede Carey's dead—or even captured—the Chicago papers and the press services will pick it up, and Murdoch will read it. And he won't keep that appointment he made. If that story gets out, we'll miss the best chance we've ever had to pick up—" He went on selling from there, telling me how many jobs Murdoch had engineered and how many men he'd killed and there wasn't anything I could do but nod. Even if the nod did hurt my neck like the very blazes.

And then they were all gone, and Pete Turner looked at me. He said, "About that auction sale item, Pop. There's six column inches to fill, when I pull it out."

I took out the bottle again and we each had a drink, and not too short a one, either. I said, "Go unlock the page and take out the article, Pete. I'll think of something to fill in."

I went over to the window and stood looking out again. All Main Street, even Shorty's, was dark now at four o'clock in the morning.

It had stopped snowing, with the snow

about six inches deep and the street virgin white except for the tracks made by the sheriff's car.

I thought of that lousy, newsless front page, and the six-inch hole in it that had to be filled, and filled right away so we could have something to start the old flat-bed press running.

Hadn't *anything* happened tonight that I could write about?

But of course it had. There was my answer lying six inches deep in the street. Just like the hole in our front page was six inches deep.

I went back and sat down at the typewriter and jerked a sheet of paper into the roller.

Murder, I thought. Bank robbery, kidnaping, escaped maniacs. *Bounding Boulder Bags Bandits*.

Everything had happened. But—

I took another drink. I sighed. And then I wrote:

FIRST SNOWFALL OF THE SEASON

Starting at about eleven o'clock last night, the first big flakes of snow began to swirl and gleam in the lights of Main Street, while a fitful breeze. . . . ■ ■ ■



ON THE NEWSSTANDS THE VALLEY OF EYES UNSEEN

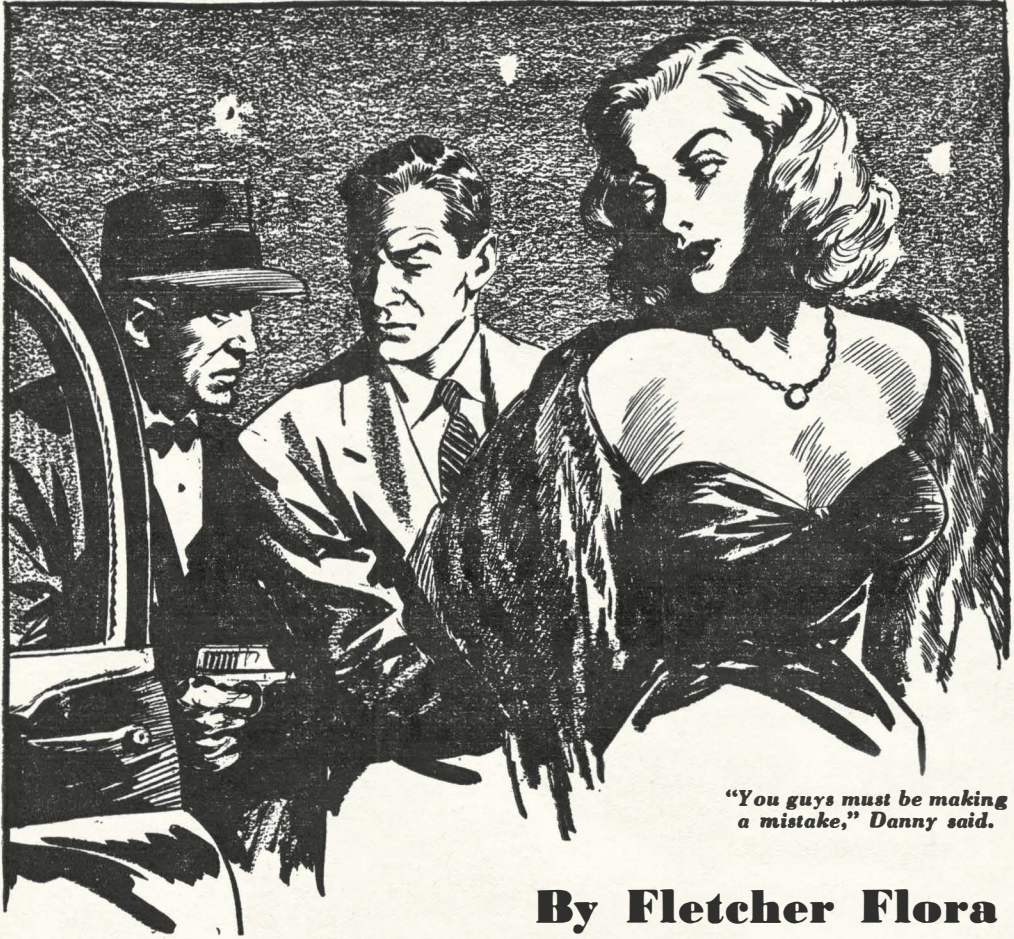
By Gilbert Collins



Only the extraordinarily courageous, or those touched with madness, dared attempt the towering, frozen barriers that guarded the secret of Lost Tibet's Phantom Valley. But three there were who ignored all warning and portent in their quest for its amazing heritage, ordained when the world was young, and jealously held by the Nine, those strange, grim mystic shadows which were more than mortal.

This great fantastic novel by the author of "The Starkenden Quest," features the February issue of this magazine. On the newsstands now!

FAMOUS ^{25c}
fantastic
MYSTERIES



"You guys must be making a mistake," Danny said.

By Fletcher Flora

He looked like Joe, he talked like Joe, he acted like Joe. . . . By golly, he was a real . . .

DEAD RINGER FOR JOE!

HIS NAME was Danny Quincy. Right now the thing he needed most in the world was a trey for twenty-one. He caught an eight. Shrugging, he pushed away from the blackjack table and stood, as the house man raked in cards and chips.

"Tough," the house man said. "Tough luck."

Shrugging again, Danny turned away and saw the small dame looking at him. Brown hair and eyes, with soft lights in them. Flat cheeks. A black dress, cut low, hanging on around the curves. Everything

present in the right amounts and places, even if it was on a small scale.

There's something about a small dame. A beautiful big woman will knock your eye out, but a beautiful little woman will break your heart with the look of her. Like this one. Her lips moved in a faint smile and Danny's answered.

"The night's sour," she said. "For me, too."

He moved a step closer and caught the perfume of her hair.

"Nights get like that. Some of them. A drink might help."

"It might."

He offered an elbow and didn't even have to wait for a token hesitation. On the way to the bar, she said, "I ought to develop a technique. I ought to be harder to pick up."

He shook his head.

"No. That way you lose time. Something tells me we've already lost too much."

She gave his arm a little squeeze and laughed. It was a nice laugh. Soft and fuzzy. He thought it was better than Scotch for warming a man's insides.

"You're nice. You say nice things."

"Sure. Nice Danny Quincy. Unlucky at cards. How does the saying go?"

"Right now I can't remember. Maybe later I'll think of it."

At the bar they ordered Scotch and nursed it.

"You said the night's sour," he reminded. "Why?"

"My man's run out. You know any good torch songs?"

"I never sing them. Why would anyone stand you up?"

"It's not exactly a stand-up. Maybe you'd call it a fall-down. He's drunk. Lousy."

"Don't criticize. I like the guy. He's done me a favor."

"Both of us, Danny. Isn't that right? Didn't you say Danny Quincy?"

"That's what I said. If you mentioned your name, I didn't get it."

"It's Mandy. Is the last one important?"

"Not particularly. Mandy's name enough. Mandy's beautiful. Like you."

She set her glass on the bar and gave it a little push across the polished surface.

"I've got Scotch in my apartment," she said. "It's better than this."

He slipped off his stool and stood beside her.

"If there's anything I like, it's good Scotch."

Following him to the floor, she fished in her purse for a check stub.

"This is for my wrap. I'll meet you at the check room in five minutes."

He went out and got the wrap. Holding it, he waited four minutes. When she came out of the powder room and across to him, he enjoyed himself watching the smooth movements of her small body under the black dress.

"You're early," he said.

"See what I mean? No technique. I couldn't wait."

Outside, he looked for a taxi. A yellow parked thirty yards down the street caught his signal and started to move up. Not quickly enough. A black Cadillac moved in ahead and stopped at the curb in front of them. The rear door on the curb side opened and a man got out. He was a short, heavy man wearing a light tan topcoat over a dinner jacket. His eyes were shaded by the snap brim of a black hat. Brushing by Danny, he turned shortly. Danny felt the steel rim of a gun barrel digging hard into his back.

"Get in the car," the man said.

Danny twisted his body away from the prodding steel.

"What the hell is this? You guys must be making a mistake."

"No mistake, Joey. Don't you make one either. Get in the car."

A vicious jab with the gun sent Danny staggering a couple of steps toward the open door. A hand came out and hooked on dragging him in. The hood in the tan coat followed, pulling the door shut behind him

with a soft thump. The Cadillac moved off purring. Twisting in the seat and looking out the rear window, Danny saw Mandy turn and go back into the club. She didn't look excited. She just turned and walked back in.

The hood who had dragged him into the car laughed and clipped him on the back of the neck with the edge of a hard hand.

"It would've been fun, wouldn't it, Joey? Too bad. Lots of guys feel like that about Mandy."

Danny came over into the ribs of the hood hard with an elbow. The hood cursed and smacked him across the mouth. The one in the tan topcoat smacked him too, and Danny felt the sharp stone of a ring cut into his lips. The salty taste of blood was in his mouth.

"Take it easy, Joey. We can play rougher than you."

"My name's not Joey. You guys are making a wrong snatch."

"Mandy said the guy she came out with. You're the guy."

"Mandy made a mistake."

The tan topcoat hit him again. This time the hand was doubled into a fist. Under knuckles, Danny felt the cut in his lip spread and break wider as his head snapped back.

"Mandy doesn't make mistakes," the hood said. "Shut up and take it easy."

In the front seat, the driver cackled. He had big ears that stuck out like fans. He wore his hat perched squarely between them. He looked like a clown. Over his shoulder, he said, "Save some for Algie."

Danny leaned back against the seat and let bitterness rise in him. A beautiful small woman. A woman to make a man's heart ache. And she was nothing but a finger. A finger for a gang of cheap hoods. But why? Why Danny Quincy? Just an ordinary guy. Just a guy who couldn't even win a hand of blackjack. He closed his eyes, tasting the blood and letting the bitterness rise.

When he opened them again, they were turning into an alley. The Cadillac eased

to a stop and the tan topcoat got out. He jerked a thumb at Danny.

"Okay, Joey. This way."

DANNY followed him out and walked ahead of him through an alley entrance into a building. Through small panes of glass in a pair of swinging doors, he could see a long, carpeted hall. Apartment building. An expensive one.

The hood had his gun out. Using it, he waved Danny into a service elevator. It was a slow lift, geared for heavy loads. Counting the clicks as they passed floors, Danny got up to ten. At the tenth floor, the hood prodded him into the hall and walked him down to a heavy blond oak door. 1003. The hood put a finger on a button and waited for the night lock to snap off inside. Danny walked in ahead of the gun.

The apartment was huge. The furniture in it was built to scale. So was the man who sat in one of the chairs looking at Danny. A great bald dome ran down into a face in which the eyes and mouth were almost lost in sagging flesh. A series of pendulous chins carried on into a swelling, flabby body that required all the space of an oversized chair to hold it. The man was holding a smoking cigarette in a long holder. He waved it at Danny in a strangely effeminate gesture.

"Come in and sit down, sir. Isadore has brought you promptly, I see. I've waited a long time for the pleasure of meeting Joey Palmetto."

The voice was an asthmatic wheeze, rising only a little above a whisper. The revulsion Danny felt for this great gasping mass was sharply physical.

"You'll die of heart failure," he said. "As far as I'm concerned, the sooner the better. And I'm not Joey Palmetto."

The tiny crease of a mouth in the fat man's face opened to permit the escape of an explosion of wet air. The flabby body shook in the big chair.

"Sharp tongue," he wheezed. "That's

what I've heard about Joey Palmetto. Sharp brain too. I'm an admirer of your work, sir. You'll find no professional jealousy in Martin Hicks."

Danny had him then. Martin Hicks. He was something of a fabulous character. Master in the practice of jewel thievery. Too fat to do the actual work, he supplied the brains, the deft touch, for a select and highly organized group of subordinates. The cops had never been able to touch him.

"Maybe you didn't understand me," Danny said. "My name's Quincy. Danny Quincy. I never heard of Joey Palmetto."

Martin Hicks drew smoke through the long cigarette holder and let it drift slowly from his nose.

"Give up, Joey. Why persist in this childish denial? I admit that few people know what you look like, but the young lady you met tonight happens to be one who does. She knows you by sight. I have confidence in Mandy. She said you would be at the club. She said she would manage to accompany you outside. I have no reason to believe that any error occurred."

Danny sighed. His lips were swollen and hurt like hell. He was too tired to argue any longer.

"Okay," he said. "So I'm Joey Palmetto. What of it?"

"Good. Very sensible. Now if you will just hand over the Barrington pearls, or tell us where we can pick them up, you will be permitted to leave in peace. Don't bother to deny that you have them. You took them from the old dowager's bedroom safe last Tuesday night. A very deft piece of work. Unfortunately, you moved in just ahead of one of my own men whom I had managed to work into the household for the same purpose. At the price of considerable personal trouble, I may say. I hope you can see the justice of my claim to priority."

"I wouldn't know a pearl from the oyster," Danny said.

"No? Too bad. Incidentally, I must apologize for my bad manners. I believe I

forgot to introduce you to Algie here."

Johnny turned to the sound of feet shuffling across the thick carpet. Algie wasn't very tall. About five-nine. If you had laid him on his side, he'd still have been about five-nine. His head was small and slanted above the ears to a rounded vertex under thin, straw-colored hair. The ears were not really ears at all. They were just twisted bits of gristle adhering to the sides of his head. Under jutting bones from which the eyebrows had vanished, his little eyes gleamed with yellow light. Psychopathic sadist. A killer who liked the smell and taste of blood. A hands killer.

The hard knot in Danny's stomach tightened. He took a step backward and felt Isadore's gun in his back.

"This is Algie," Martin Hicks said. "I think you will find him pleasant company. Algie, I suggest you take Mr. Palmetto into the next room and get better acquainted."

With the gun in his back, Danny walked to the door leading into a bedroom. With one hand on the jamb, he stopped, looking back at Martin Hicks.

"I don't suppose it would do any good to tell you again that I'm not Joey Palmetto."

"You're right. It wouldn't do any good. Algie, be careful of the carpet."

Danny walked quickly to the middle of the bedroom and turned to face Algie, who shuffled after him with a wide grin on his loose lips. The hood Isadore came last, closing the door and leaning against it. He held the gun loosely in his right hand.

Algie's little yellow eyes devoured Danny.

"You're nice," he said. "Nice and young. I like you."

Danny waited for him to come, the sickness growing in his stomach. When Algie was close enough, he threw his right fist suddenly at the heavy jaw, following through with his body, getting all his weight into it. His knuckles cracked against bone in a flash of fire that shot all the way up to

(Continued on page 106)



"Just follow Doris. And don't make no bum moves!"

THE GHOST OF COCK ROBIN

CHAPTER ONE

Homicide Homecoming

THE night was hot and quiet, even for a Florida night in mid-July. And if Bart Scarlet had driven directly home from the government hospital at Bay Pines he might never have heard that Bes-

sie and Sam Robin had been murdered until after Cocos was lynched. As it was, he decided to drive on up to the Heron Point drug store for some cigarettes and a pint of ice cream for Myra. He arrived just as the crowd was beginning to form in front of the flimsy jail.

"I told you that boy was bad," said Ben-

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**By
Day Keene**

**VIOLENCE BENEATH THE
FLORIDA PALMS**

Big Boy would do plenty to get his hands on the dead blonde's \$60,000 . . . which Scarlett didn't have, didn't know about—and would have to be caught dead without!

son, the fishing guide. His voice was ugly.

Scarlett turned off his ignition and his lights and sat eyeing the growing crowd of sun blackened men in front of the jail. "What boy?" he drawled.

"The one that works for you," Benson said. "That Cocos sure done it this time. He killed both Sam an' Miz Robin with one of them bow an' arrows from that archery place up on the beach. Sheriff Tate caught him dead to rights, wipin' his fingerprints off the bow."

Scarlett said nothing. Limping slightly, as he favored the shrapnel shattered knee cap for which he had just undergone his annual operation, he stepped into the drug store and bought two packs of Camels and a pint of ice cream. Then he limped in silence past the groups of clustered men who averted their eyes as he approached. No one spoke to him, or even nodded. He climbed the stairs leading to the sheriff's door and knocked.

Sheriff Tate opened it himself. A sal-low-faced old man with a scraggly white mustache, he carried a double-barreled shotgun in the crook of his arm. A grim-faced deputy stood on either side of him.

"Oh, hello, Bart. Come in," the sheriff said. "Your Miz told me you were over at Bay Pines."

Scarlett limped on into the office. John Mason, the Miami lawyer who had come to the point for his health and remained to hang out a shingle, was sitting in the sheriff's chair.

A hawk-eyed, darkly handsome man in his early forties, Mason's past was obscure. But he was known to be a ladies' man. He seemed surprised to see Scarlett. "Well," he greeted him. "It's a good thing you got home sooner than you were expected. That hired boy of yours has sure raised hell this time."

"Yeh," Scarlett nodded. "So I heah tell. But why should Cocos do what it's claimed he done?" he asked the sheriff.

The sheriff mopped at his perspiring

temples with a faded blue bandanna. "I'll be blamed if I know, Bart. An' Cocos won't say a word. If he'd just killed Sam the boys wouldn't feel the way they do. Sam Robin was a rat. But, well, Bessie was well liked."

"What's your proof that Cocos killed Bessie Robin, Sheriff?" Scarlett asked.

"I caught him standin' over her pullin' the arrow out of her an' wipin' his fingerprints off the bow."

Mason examined his cigar, put it between his teeth, and with narrowed eyes, smoked thoughtfully. "What I can't understand is why if Sam—or Cock Robin, as Sam practically claimed to be—was as handy with a gun as legend has it, he'd let a old gray-haired fellow kill his wife and him with just a bow and arrow."

THE sheriff admitted that was a puzzler. And it was. For years it had been openly hinted along the coast that Sam was the fabulous Robin; Cock Robin, the outlaw whose incredulous career had included the framing of Big Boy for murder when both the Coast Guard and the F. B. I. had tried for years, in vain, to get Big Boy on any charge. And if he wasn't the Robin, Sam had never denied the implication.

He had swashbuckled. He had blustered. He had used the general public's unreasoning fear of the legendary outlaw in his business. On the strength of Cock Robin's name he had robbed, cheated, and close-dealt with almost everyone on the point. And now he was dead, killed by a gray haired handy man, so the sheriff said, with a symbolic bow and arrow.

"You all think Sam was the Robin, then?" Scarlett asked.

"I know he was," Mason told him crisply. "Why?"

"Just wondered," Scarlett drawled. "I see a poster several times that Cock Robin is still wanted—wanted ten thousand dollars' worth, daid or alive."

"But there weren't no picture of him on that poster, Bart," Sheriff Tate protested. "That's why Sam was so bold like. I've heard it told that no one but Big Boy ever positively saw Cock Robin an' lived." He sighed. "Well, you want to see Cocos, I suppose." He led the way back to the lock-up.

When Cocos saw his Cap'n in the passage, he grinned through the bars. "Ol' Cocos knowed you'd be along, Boss."

Scarlett lighted a cigarette, said nothing.

The old Negro sobered. "You know I never killed no woman, Cap'n Bart. I jist foun' Miz Robin with dat arrow stickin' in her an' pulled it out t' see how could I aid her."

"Then why were you wiping your fingerprints off the bow when I walked in?" Sheriff Tate demanded.

"Was Sam Robin shot with an arrow, too?" Scarlett wanted to know.

"We ain't found Sam yet, Bart," the sheriff admitted. "But the way I got it figured, Sam must have surprised Cocos killin' Bessie, so Cocos killed Sam too—mebbe jist mashed him in those big hands of his and threw him in the pass. Shucks. We may never find Sam. He's probably out in the gulf by now. But I did find some blood on the sand, an' Lait Benson found Sam's watch an' wallet. That's howcome we know Sam's daid." He turned back toward his office. "But go ahead. Mebbe you can make Cocos talk if you're alone with him."

Scarlett smoked in silence until the door banged shut. As he started to speak there was a pad of feet in the alley in back of the jail. A moment later a vile smelling conch shell hurtled through the barred window.

"We'll get you, Cocos." Benson's hoarse voice shouted. "Just you wait till a few more of the boys git heah." He was echoed by a series of jeers and catcalls.

Scarlett ignored the interruption. He

thrust a long, slim, brown hand through the bars and pulled Cocos up to the steel. "You're lyin' to me, Cocos. I don't believe she done it."



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The colored man regarded the dripping container of ice cream in his Cap'n's hand, then looked away. "I ain't say no one done it," he said simply. "I jes say, I ain't."

Scarlett released his hold. Even at the hospital rumors had reached him of the affair that Myra, his wife, had been carrying on with Sam. And Cocos was protecting, shielding Myra. He was certain of that now. Not that Cocos liked Myra. On the contrary, he knew her for the cheap white trash that she was. Still, Myra was Mrs. Bart Scarlett. And Cocos was old-fashioned and from Georgia.

Back in the sheriff's office, Scarlett wasted little time. "How long can you stand off the boys?" he asked.

The sheriff shook his head. "It's our bounden duty to do our best. But that's hard tellin', Bart. Why?"

"'Cause Cocos didn't kill Bessie," Scarlett told him. "An' what's more, Sam ain't daid. I aim to prove it."

One of the deputies, his rifle cocked, let Scarlett out the door of the sheriff's office. Mason walked out with him. At the sight of the two men on the jail stoop, the sun-blackened men clustered under the Royal palms that lined the single street of Heron Point grew momentarily silent.

Most of them knew Scarlett and liked him. To them he was just a quiet-spoken, lean-flanked, leather-faced veteran who had bought a beach home on the point for his health, and to be near the government hospital at Bay Pines. But they didn't like his handy man or his dog. Neither took orders from anyone but Scarlett.

Mason eyed the somber faced men moodily through his cigar smoke. "No, sir," he said. "I don't think I'd want to be in that Cocos' shoes. Take a fool's advice, Scarlett, and don't try to interfere. You'll see trouble if you do."

The leather-faced veteran smiled wryly. "Mister man, you all might be amazed if you knew half the trouble I've seen."

He strode down the street to his car, his limp forgotten. The clusters of silent men opened a lane for him to drive through and then closed in again around the jail.

HIS eyes glued on the road ahead of him, Scarlett slackened his speed slightly as he neared the huge, white Gulf Vista Hotel. Deserted but for a watchman, the big hotel loomed black against the night. Beyond the hotel was the Gulf of Mexico. In front of it, forming the stem of a T, was the crushed oyster-shell lane that led to the home he had bought for Myra.

Bringing the car practically to a stop, he swung in the turn to the house. Seconds later he coasted to a standstill behind Myra's yellow convertible. There was no moon and his house stood in darkness. There was no sound but the distant pound of the surf and the immediate rustle of the palm fronds in the light wind.

At first he thought Myra wasn't at home, and he began to fumble for his keys. Then the screen door opened and Myra's arms were around his neck as he stepped up on the porch.

"Sweetheart," she breathed. "I thought you were never coming." She kissed him—then screamed.

Scarlett's groping hand had found the porch light switch and clicked it on.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Wasn't I the sweetheart you expected?"

She laughed at that, too brightly. "Why—why don't be silly, darling. I—I've been standing here waiting for you for—for hours."

"So?" he said curtly. He walked past her into the house. "Strange. You didn't expect me home until next week." It was then he saw her traveling bags. They were a matched set of three that he had given her. And they were waiting by the front door.

He turned on the living room light and stood looking at her. She was as daintily

blond and beautiful as ever. But absence from her had somehow cooled his blood and given him a new perspective. She was cheap and she looked it.

"Cocos has been right all along," he told her. "You're nothing but a cheap little tart." He slapped her, lightly. "An' where's my dog? If you've harmed Jeanie, s'help me God, I'll kill you."

Jeanie heard him as he raised his voice. She barked from the bedroom closet. He let her out and looked at her. Her fur was as sleek as ever and her eyes were bright. Cocos would have seen to that.

The girl stepped back as the dog bared her teeth in a snarl. "I was afraid of her," she faltered.

"You should have been," her husband told her. He unlocked the top drawer of his dresser and took out two bone-handled .38 caliber Colts swung on .45 frames for better balance. It was the first time the girl had seen the guns. She sat down on the bed abruptly. "What are you going to do?"

Scarlett made certain that both guns were loaded, broke them and peered through their barrels intently. "Why, I aim to find Sam Robin an' take him back to the jail for the boys to lynch instead of Cocos. 'Cause Sam ain't daid, not even if the sheriff thinks he is. Cocos thinks it was you who killed Miz Robin when she caught you cheatin' with Sam. But it was probably Sam who done it. An' you two were fixin' to light out of heah, leavin' Cocos to be lynched for what Sam done."

The girl got to her feet, indignant. Her husband barred the door with his arm.

"Oh, no. You don't leave heah until Sam calls."

Myra Scarlett stared at her husband, puzzled. This wasn't the man she had married, the man she had wound around her finger for two years. This was a deadly cold and capable stranger whom she had never known. "And what—what if Sam doesn't call?"

Scarlett said nothing, merely stood regarding her thoughtfully.

"No, Bart. Please," she pleaded. "Don't kill me. I'll talk. I'll tell you who killed Bessie Robin. I'll tell you everything I know." Her words tripped over each other in their haste to be out of her mouth. "I have been seeing Sam, yes. But I didn't kill Bessie Robin. And I wasn't going to run away with Sam tonight. Honest, I wasn't. I—"

What she was going to do, Myra Scarlett never said. Jeanie barked sharply, lunged at Scarlett's knees. The *pling* of a bullet from a silenced gun spat outside the screening and lead slapped the wall where Scarlett's head had been. Scarlett fired, off balance, at the flashes. Then all was silence but the muted chirrup of a robin and the sound of running feet. Bart Scarlett was alone with his dead. Cheap, blond, pretty Myra Scarlett had double-crossed both her husband and her lover for the last time.

CHAPTER TWO

Big Boy's Private Party

SCARLETT looked up from the figure on the bed to the bullet-shattered screen and mentally counted the flashes he had fired at. The man's gun should be empty. "Get him, Jeanie!" he ordered.

There was a blur of fur as the dog leaped through the window.

Scarlett straightened the torn body on the bed. He crossed his wife's hands on her bloody breast and covered her with a sheet. There was nothing more he could do for her. There wasn't even any use of phoning the sheriff and telling him that she was dead. The sheriff had his hands full.

Out in the night that crowded against the screens, Jeanie howled just once—in disappointment.

The sudden roar of a car split the night, then faded rapidly.

Scarlett stood for a moment as if lost in thought. Then he slipped out of his linen coat and laid it on the twin of the bed that held the bloody corpse of Myra Scarlett. From the dresser drawer he took twin shoulder clips and strapped them to his body. Then he reloaded his guns, slipped them into the clips and put his coat back on.

Without a look at the sheet-covered body he closed the door and limped into the living room. The three traveling bags that had stood by the door were gone. He limped on out to his car and meshed it into gear. Jeanie was waiting for him at the head of the T formed by the lane and the highway in front of the big hotel. Her muzzle was pointed up the road toward Heron Point.

Scarlett whistled her into the car. "No," he told her. "Sam wouldn't dare go up to the point. An' he won't dare try the roads across the causeway. There's only one way Sam can go, an' that's by sea."

As he spoke he swung his car down the road away from Heron Point toward Sam Robin's home and boat slip on the pass. The dog whined, looked up at her master, then settled back on the seat.

Scarlett drove in silence, his bitter thoughts making poor company. He had tried to be an average man with a wife, a home, one servant, and a dog. All but the wife had been average. And now she was dead.

* * *

Sam Robin's ranch-type house was built on a filled-in spit of sand between the Gulf of Mexico and the deep water channel of Blind Pass. It was in darkness but for a light in what Robin called his den. A car stood in the driveway.

Scarlett picked up the car with his headlights as he crossed Robin's private causeway across the pass. He snapped them off and cut his motor.

"We'll walk the rest of the way," he told the dog.

He got out of his car and limped through the sand to the bank of the pass in order to approach the house from the rear. The moon was beginning to rise, a wind had sprung up, and Scarlett noted with grim satisfaction that Sam's boat was still in its slip.

At the kitchen screen door he paused to listen. The night was alive with sound. There was the putt-putt of a kicker in the pass, the pound and surge of the surf on the beach, the screaming of the night birds and the rising howl of the wind.

He opened the screen door carefully, held it for the dog and stepped inside. Jeanie raised her muzzle, sniffed. There had been death in the house but it was gone.

Moving catlike through the dark despite his limp, Scarlett wove his way through the kitchen to the hall, paused outside of the door of the one lighted room. There he thumbed back the hammer of one gun, turned the knob, and kicked open the door.

"Hello, Cock Robin," he greeted.

But he was talking to air. There was no one in the room. And it looked as if a hurricane had blown through Robin's desk. Its drawers were hanging askew and the floor was littered with papers.

Scarlett stooped and picked one up. And then another and another. Most of them were duplicate sales contracts, and Scarlett recognized that the prices were too low. Their meaning was plain. Sam Robin had converted everything he owned both on the beach and the mainland into cash. And he had done so in a hurry. The cash, Scarlett thought grimly, had probably been waiting for Sam in Myra's three traveling bags.

Still Scarlett was puzzled. Sam had sold valuable tracts of land for whatever he could get. And he had sold most of them to Mason. And that wasn't like Sam Robin. He loved women, but he also loved money. A growing suspicion began to form in Scarlett's mind.

A low warning growl from Jeanie turned

him to the window. The lights of another car were coming across the causeway. He considered turning off the light, but drew his other gun instead. Sam's car was already in the drive. And it couldn't be the sheriff. He was fully occupied up at the point.

The car drove up behind Sam's car and stopped. Two men got out and both looked back suspiciously at Scarlett's car. Scarlett stepped behind a door and waited. They lumbered onto the porch, through the front door, and into the lighted room still arguing about the car.

"See! Just as we left it," the first man crowed. His voice was harsh, metallic. His clothes were expensively flashy. He looked like a city hood. "I told you them were petters in that car."

And then they saw the dog. Both men drew their guns.

"A wolf!" one said.

"A chow!" the other corrected. He slipped the safety off his automatic.

Scarlett stepped out from behind the door. "I wouldn't if I were you," he drawled. "Start reachin', an' start talkin'!"

One of them reached. The harsh-voiced hood whirled and fired. His bullet chipped plaster off the ceiling. He looked with incredulous, fast glazing eyes at the wisp of smoke curling out of Scarlett's gun barrel, then crumpled to the floor.

"He hadn't ought to have tried that," Scarlett said.

The remaining hood was wizened and shrewd. He spoke with a Cockney whine and Scarlett thought he had seen him before.

"S'y! 'Ow the 'ell do you figure in on this? Who the bloody 'ell are you?"

Scarlett shook his head. "Who are you? An' where's Sam Robin?" he demanded.

The little Cockney triggerman grinned widely as Jeanie growled deep in her throat at the sound of feet scrunching up the path from the pass. "Hi don't know 'oo you are, mister. But Hi do know that you've

walked right into a jam! In 'ere, boys!" he called.

The snout of a machine gun ripped through the screening of the window. Scarlett fired a shot at the light and stepped back through the door to the kitchen as the gun began to chatter. As he moved he tossed a parting slug at the rug where the Cockney had dropped his gun, and shot him through the hand.

The hoodlum swore. "In through the back way, fellows. There's a rube John Law in 'ere and 'e's looking for Cock Robin!"

Bart Scarlett grinned wryly in the dark. He had been called a lot of names, but this was the first time he had even been mistaken for the law.

In addition to the two gunmen who had come across the causeway by car, one of whom was now dead, Scarlett decided by the intensity of the gunfire that at least four other torpedoes had come down the pass in a boat propelled by the kicker he had heard. And at least two of them had sub-machine guns. But who they were, or why they were there, he hadn't the least idea. And he hadn't the time to reason it out. He was too busy dodging lead.

"Down, Jeanie! Down!" he ordered.

The gunman who first had fired through the window moved around to the back. From the shelter of a huge stone urn in the patio he poured a murderous streak of lead that searched out every corner of the kitchen but the one where Scarlett crouched.

Coldly, without haste, Scarlett waited until the gunner's head showed above the urn in the moonlight. Then he fired just once. The machine-gunner staggered to his feet, took two steps backward off the patio, and fell. The machine gun hurtled over his head and fell into the sand.

A fleeting shadow snatched it almost as it touched the sand. But not quite soon enough. The sand had clogged the feed pawl and it jammed. The man threw it

from him in disgust and jammed a fresh clip in his automatic. But he had stayed framed against the new moon for too long. Two .38 slugs from Scarlett's Colts smashed his Adam's apple.

There was a sound of frantically ripped screen wire from the room where the battle had begun.

"Come on, fellows," the little Cockney screamed. "Let's get out of 'ere and back to the 'otel! That rube John Law is poison. 'E just got Jake and Lew!"

Bart smiled grimly but stayed right on the floor where he was. The second machine gun was spraying through the front of the house, searching for him in short, vicious bursts.

"Howl, Jeanie!" he ordered.

The dog lifted her muzzle and howled.

"That got him," the gunner on the front porch exulted. He stepped in through the door and was silhouetted for a moment against the skyline by the moon.

Scarlett fired. The machine gunner grunted and his knees buckled under him. He slid down the door jamb to the porch, his hands clawing at his belly.

Scarlett got quietly to his feet and stared out of a window. Of the six unknown men who had attacked him, four were dead. The other two were running for their lives. But he had yet to find Sam Robin. And time was growing short. Still, the wizen-faced little hood had mentioned the hotel. And there was only one hotel he could have meant.

Then suddenly Scarlett grinned. It all was very clear. "Well, I'll be damned!" was all he said.

PARKED in the palm-lined circular drive reserved for the guests of the swank Gulf Vista Hotel, Scarlett studied the big, rambling building through the rustling fronds of the palms. It looked like a huge white octopus sprawled on the beach in the moonlight. He was back almost from where he had started—not three

hundred yards from his house and the sheet-covered corpse of his wife.

He thought that he could see a ray of light through the tightly shuttered windows of the ballroom on the second floor. If it was a light, he could imagine the ball that was going on in there—a devil's ball, with Sam Robin as chief dancer. If Sam hadn't wanted to meet Cock Robin's obligations, he shouldn't have openly boasted that he was Cock Robin.

Scarlett started to get out of his car and stopped with one foot on the running board as the bright lights of a Ford played up the highway. It came to a stop when it saw him.

"Need any help?" one of the sun-blackened passengers called out cheerfully.

Then the driver saw who it was. "Hi, Scarlett." He scowled. "This true what Lait Benson tells us about your hired man?"

Scarlett said nothing. Nor did he tell them of the murder of his wife. He knew that it was useless, or worse. In the mood they were in they were capable of blaming him. Myra, too, had been well liked. Too well, by some.

"Hell, yes. Of course it's true," one of the other men drawled. "But you don't expect Scarlett to admit it, do you?" The speaker nudged the driver. "Come on, Sash. Let's git on up to the point or we're goin' to be too late to help lynch him."

The driver kicked the ancient model A into gear and it chugged on up the highway.

Scarlett stared after it. There was still a lot he didn't understand. Why was Benson, the fishing guide, so anxious to get Cocos hung? There were still some points, important ones, that needed clearing up.

A sudden howl of wind caused him to look out at the Gulf. The riding lights of a yacht bobbed on the swell just off the bars. A bad place for a yacht, he thought, with a blow quickening from off shore. He looked back at the hotel, then slipped one of his bone-handled Colts from its clip and

snapped it into a specially constructed buckle riveted on to the collar of the dog. The big gun hung low in the fur of her chest and out of sight.

"You wait heah until I whistle for you, Jeanie."

The dog growled, her eyes bright with understanding. She sat in the car, her eyes following him in the moonlight as he walked openly up to the front door of the hotel.

The door was open a crack. Scarlett opened it more with his foot. Even in the wan light of the moon the rope mat inside the door held two distinctive sets of footprints. Both were wet, and one of them was bloody. He inched the door still farther open and stepped inside.

"Okay, sucker. Hold it!" a girl's voice ordered pleasantly.

Scarlett "held it" as the hard, round snout of a sub-machine gun bit into the small of his back. Then a soft white hand with crimson nails that looked like splashes of blood in the silver of the moonlight reached out of the shadows and tugged his remaining gun from its holster.

"Just couldn't let well enough alone, eh?" the girl's voice jeered. "You rube John Laws are all alike. But come in. You're just the man we want. Big Boy would like to see you."

Scarlett smiled wryly in the darkness. It was common knowledge that Big Boy couldn't see. The once famous, still powerful gangster who owned the Gulf Vista Hotel had gone stone blind during his twelve years in prison.

CHAPTER THREE

Sam Robin Pays Up

BIG BOY, belied his name. He was small, dark, and lean. And he was bad. During his most active days when he had ruled the underworlds of Chicago and Miami, he had killed without com-

punction. He was the sound and legal theory that dead men tell no tales and where there is no *corpus delicti* there can be no trial for murder. One man alone had bested him. That man had been Cock Robin. And now Big Boy had the Robin where he wanted him, as he had dreamed for twelve long years in Atlanta, Leavenworth, and Alcatraz. He had him strung up by the thumbs. And on either side an impassive-faced gorilla poked lighted pine slivers under the soft flesh of Robin's toe nails to make him dance in the devil's ball that was but the prelude to his death.

Scarlett heard Sam Robin's screams before the door had closed behind him; heard screams and the sounds of clapping.

The girl turned the flashlight in her hand up to her face. He saw she was both beautiful and smiling. "We're giving a little party," she explained.

Scarlett nodded soberly. "Yes, ma'am. So I heah."

"Get going." The hoodlum with the machine gun prodded him toward the stairs. "Just follow Doris. And don't make no bum moves."

The girl led the way up the stairs. The carpets were rolled back. The chairs and tables were so many shrouded ghosts. Even the wind was silent here. There were no sounds but the screams of pain from the ballroom. It was like walking through some giant, fantastic tomb peopled by living dead. Even the air had the dry and musty stench of death.

"You the law?" the girl asked.

"No, ma'am," Scarlett told her. "Just a neighbor. I live down the road a piece from heah."

Even the hoodlum with the machine gun laughed at that. "Then you're just in time, neighbor," he chuckled. "Like Doris said, we're giving a party tonight. A coming out party for Big Boy."

Behind its drawn, shuttered windows the white and gold ballroom of Gulf Vista was ablaze with light. Only the windows look-

ing out upon the Gulf were open. Big Boy sat on the raised dais at one end, his blind eyes peering avidly in the direction of the screams. A dozen assorted minor gunmen and their molls in formal summer dress stood in a semicircle, clapping drunkenly to the tortured convulsions of the screaming figure in the center of the circle.

Scarlett looked at Robin, then turned his head away. They had stripped the big man to his shorts. He hung by his thumbs from two ropes suspended from the ceiling. His toes barely touched the floor. Under each toe nail burned a sliver of resinous pine. He was smeared with honey; he literally crawled with ants which explored the cavities of his mouth, his nostrils, and his ears. When his eyes were open, they held the light of madness.

"But I'm not Cock Robin," he screamed endlessly. "Oh, God, don't do this to me! I'm not Cock Robin! I'm not! I've just been trading on his name!"

The clapping stopped when the boys and girls saw Scarlett. But the screams went on unending.

The lean-faced little gunman's nostrils tightened as his blind eyes sought the door. He had a dry and brittle way of speaking.

"Yes," he demanded.

"It's just a man named Scarlett," Scarlett told him. "I live right down the road a piece, an' I'm lookin' for Sam Robin."

Big Boy turned his blind eyes on the speaker. His tone was an accusation. "I've heard that voice before!"

"Probably," Scarlett admitted. "I've been both heah an' there."

The girl, Doris, laughed shortly. "It's that rube John Law who shot up Sam Robin's cottage."

"Describe him."

She did. Scarlett realized with a start how similar both he and Sam Robin were. The girl's description would have fitted either man. Or Benson, the fishing guide. Or Mason, the lawyer, for that matter. They were all tall men, gaunt, weather-

beaten, with aquiline features. The blind eyes stabbed again in his direction.

"What did you want of Robin?"

Scarlett told him the truth. "I wanted to take him up to Heron Point for murder. Sam killed his wife this afternoon an' blamed it on my handy man. An' the boys are fixin' to lynch him any minute."

"HE'S TALKING straight, Chief," one of the gunmen offered confirmation. "You can hear the mob shouting from out on the sun deck."

Big Boy waved him to one side. "I'm not interested in anyone but Robin." His sightless eyes turned toward the sagging figure in the ropes. The screams had ceased when the tortured man had fainted. "Pull out the splinters, wipe off the ants, and pour some whiskey down his throat. I don't want him to die until we learn where that money is."

Two of his hoodlums did as he ordered. They lowered the unconscious body to the floor, released the thumbs, wiped off the ants, and forced the neck of a whiskey bottle in between Sam Robin's teeth. He choked, spat it out, and sat up weakly.

"Where," Big Boy demanded, "is the money you got from the forced sale of your properties when you heard I had been released?"

Robin stared at him dully with lackluster eyes. It was Bart Scarlett's private opinion that the man was dying where he sat.

"I've told you," Robin said slowly, "I gave it to a woman—Myra Scarlett. We—we were going to run away tonight."

Big Boy faced Scarlett. "This Myra Scarlett is your wife?"

"She was," Scarlett admitted. "But she's daid."

"Dead?"

"Yes, sir. Sam, heah, shot her. Must have been just before you got him."

"What time was this?"

"Not quite an hour ago."

Big Boy smiled wryly. "Then it wasn't

Robin who shot her. We've had him here since five."

"No," Robin said uncertainly. "I—I didn't shoot Myra. An' I didn't kill Bessie with an arrow." It seemed difficult for him to breathe. "And I'm not Cock Robin. I—I'm just a loud-mouthed fool who—who. . . ."

He slumped against the legs of the hoodlum who stood behind him.

"More whiskey," Big Boy ordered.

Scarlett shook his head. "That won't do no good." He stooped and raised one of the slumped man's eyelids. It stayed open "Robin's daid."

Big Boy lighted a cigarette, his lean face unperturbed. "All right. Then we'll go to work on you. Where's the money that he gave your wife? Sixty thousand dollars, he said it was."

Scarlett backed a step and the snout of a submachine gun stopped him.

"Not so fast, John Law," the man behind it ordered. "The boss asked you a question."

Scarlett stalled for time to think. "But I'm not the law," he protested. "I'm just a man whose wife's been killed, an' whose handy man is bein' lynched for a murder that he never done."

As he talked he considered the spot into which he had walked of his own volition. No matter what he said or did, he was marked for death. He considered making a break for the comparative safety of the staircase, and whistling for Jeanie as he ran. Then he looked around the circle of silent, staring faces and knew he would never make it. Even with a gun in his own hand, not counting the machine gun at his back, or the possibility of the women being armed, it would be twelve against one. He'd be dead before Jeanie was halfway up the stairs. Besides, if it hadn't been Sam Robin who shot Myra—a wry smile flicked across his weather-beaten features as he thought of a fantastic possibility. Still, stranger things had happened.

"Talk," the man with the machine gun said, and prodded.

"I don't know where the money is," Scarlett admitted. Then he threw out his bait. "But I do know this much. If it wasn't Sam who shot my wife—"

"Yes?" Big Boy demanded.

"Then it could be you've been torturin' the wrong man," Scarlett told him. "Could be Sam wasn't Cock Robin. Could be Cock Robin's still alive an' laughin' at you."

The girl, Doris, balanced Scarlett's own bone-handled Colt in her hand. "That's a lie." She looked at the dead man on the ballroom floor and then back up at Scarlett. "He boasted all up and down the beach he was Cock Robin. And as soon as he heard Big Boy was out, he converted all his real estate into cash so he could scam."

"Might be he was advised to," Scarlett told her. "From what I've heard, Cock Robin is a lot smarter than Sam acted."

"That." Big Boy admitted, "has been worrying me."

"What's more," Scarlett contined in his easy drawl, "I don't think the real Cock Robin would call hisself that name. They just call him that cause someone heard him whistling just like a bird."

The blind man on the dais nodded curtly.

"You seem quite well informed. Go on. What else do you know of the Robin?"

SCARLETT mused on what he did know. It was his personal opinion, and always had been up until that night, that Cock Robin was a much maligned and wrongly accredited man. Cock Robin's methods were ruthless, true. Ever since he had seen his young, idolized brother—an ensign in the Coast Guard—mowed down by the murderous bullets of a gangsters' crew, he had lived to stamp out vermin of the type of Big Boy. He had made a fortune at it, too. Still, his methods were outside the law and it wanted him dead or alive—wanted him ten thousand dollars' worth.

"Just what I read in the paper," he drawled. "An' I don't recall I've read much 'bout him for two years."

Big Boy sucked deeply at his cigarette, then his thin nostrils tightened. "And just who are you?" he demanded.

"My family name is Scarlett," Bart told him. "An' I originally come from Georgia." He tapped his shattered knee cap. "I been in the government hospital at Bay Pines an' I just got out this evenin'."

"Cripes," said the little Cockney gunman who had been in the battle at Robin's cottage. "It's a bloody shame it warn't your arm what's sore."

Scarlett ignored the interruption. He was talking for his life.

"An' I live three hundred yards down the road in that little white Spanish house. Just me an' my wife, an' my dog, an' my hired man, Cocos. Only now my wife's daid."

The gang leader pursed his finger tips against his lips.

"Check on that," he ordered.

The girl, Doris, who had become his eyes, left the ballroom with the wizened-faced Cockney gunman.

The circle of unsmiling, staring faces closed in even tighter. They were growing impatient.

"Keep on talking," Big Boy ordered sharply.

Scarlett drew a deep breath and continued. Briefly, but well, he told everything that had happened since he had driven into Heron Point to find Cocos accused of murdering both Sam and Bessie Robin.

He omitted nothing. He invented nothing.

"And you think Robin's money was in the three pieces of luggage by the door?" Big Boy demanded when he had finished.

"I do."

"And you say the man who shot your wife through the window whistled, or chirrupted like a robin?"

"He did. What's more," Scarlett added,

"my dog Jeanie was right an' I was wrong. I found her sittin' where the road forks, with her muzzle pointed *up* the road toward Heron Point."

"We'll wait until Doris gets back," was all the gang leader would promise.

She came back shortly, puzzled.

"There is a woman there, and she is dead," the girl admitted.

"And there is plenty 'appening up at the point, too," the Cockney gunman added. "We could 'ear the sound of shouting and gunfire."

Doris touched the corpse on the floor with the toe of her open work sandal. "But my advice is for us to get on the yacht and scam on back to Miami. You've done what you came here for, Big Boy. You've killed Cock Robin."

The evil faced little gang chief waved her to one side. "I must be certain. You have something in mind," he told Scarlett. "Go on. Let me hear your proposition."

The ring of silent, staring faces surrounding Scarlett moved in even closer. His proposition had better be good, and he knew it. They were impatient for the kill.

CHAPTER FOUR

Who Killed Cock Robin?

THERE were four men in the sheriff's tiny office: Sheriff Tate, Mason the lawyer, and Sheriff Tate's two deputies. But the room was so filled with gun smoke, they could hardly see each other.

From the lock-up cell in the rear, Cocos prayed aloud.

"Oh, Lawd, doan let 'em hang ine," he prayed. "I ain't neber kill no woman, Lawd."

A burst of shots that hemstitched a pattern through the upper panel of the office door cut short his prayers. They began again in increased fervor with the thump of a battering ram against the door.

"Don't be a fool, Sheriff," Benson called from the outside. "You'd better open up. Because we're goin' t' git that Cocos if we have to burn the jail."

Mason put down the hot and smoking rifle he had been firing over the heads of the mob.

"I quit," he told the sheriff. "I'm not going to be killed."

The two deputies looked dubious.

One of them mopped the perspiration from his forehead with a sweat-soaked sleeve.

"We jis' cain't hold out no longer," he protested. "Not lessen we shoot right into the mob stead of over their haid. An' I feel like Mason does. Some of those boys out there is kin t' me, an' I ain't goin' to kill 'em and I don't want to git killed."

"All right, then. Stop firing." Sheriff Tate admitted he was licked. He made one concession to his pride. "But I'll be blamed if I'll open the door. Let 'em bust it down if they kin."

They could. Once the firing from inside had stopped, the battering ram smashed against the heavy door with rhythmic blows that sprung it on its hinges, then cracked the huge cross bar and wrenched it from the hasps of iron that held it.

There was a moment of silence as it gave. Then the mob of sun-blackened fishing guides, bait camp proprietors, and the more riotous element of the point swept on into the jail led by Lait Benson.

"Just stay out of the way, boys, an' you won't git hurt," Benson warned the men in the office. "You fellows done your duty like you seen it. Now we aim to do our'n."

Cocos didn't have a chance. They hauled him, fighting frantically but vainly, from his cell, and tore the clothes from his back.

"Oh, Lawd, doan let 'em hang me," he kept screaming. In the same breath he wailed: "Oh, Cap'n Bart, you betteh hurry or you gwine be too late."

Benson cuffed him into moaning silence and slipped a noose around his neck.

"Haul him over to Pete Sheldon's Ways, boys. We'll hang him from that big boat davit."

The crowd trailed, whooping and shouting, to the bay. The sheriff and Mason followed. Cocos had grown silent. With the rope around his neck, he shuffled gravely through the dust.

Benson threw the free end of the rope over one of the big steel davits that swung out over the water.

"Any last words, fella?" he demanded.

Cocos shook his head. His eyes rolled wildly as he looked around the circle of grim and scowling faces.

"No, suh. But you all hadn't better do dis. My Cap'n gwine have yo' hide fo' dis."

A roar of laughter swept the beach.

"'Sides," the Cocos protested, "I ain't never kill Miz Robin. I tol' de truth on that."

"Who killed her then, Cocos?" Sheriff Tate demanded. "Mebbe if you tell me, I still can stop the boys."

The old man licked his lips. "I—I ain't sayin'. I—I jist say I ain't killed her."

"String him up! String him up!" the crowd roared.

Benson drew the rope taut on the davit. Two dozen pairs of eager hands reached out to help.

"I wouldn't if I were you," a voice warned slowly.

"Bart Scarlett!" Benson roared with surprise.

THE whites of Cocos' eyes receded slowly. He even smiled when he heard the sharp bark of a dog. His Cap'n and Jeanie hadn't forgotten him, after all.

"That's right, Benson," Scarlett told him.

He made his way slowly through the crowd, limping slightly under the weight of the body that he carried on his shoulder. On either side of him walked two well-

dressed, hard-faced strangers, their right hands in their coat pockets. Behind them walked Big Boy himself, his hand clutching the arm of the girl. Behind them, in the shadows, a half dozen similar strangers stood waiting, their hands also in their pockets. Big Boy had listened to Scarlett's proposition, but he wasn't taking any chances.

The crowd on the beach grew silent as Scarlett eased the body off his shoulder and they saw that it was Sam Robin.

"I wonder," said Scarlett, facing them, "could I say me a few words before you boys go on with this heah lynching?"

"You'd best not interfere with this, Bart Scarlett." Benson scowled.

The sheriff touched the body.

"Sam Robin's dead?"

"Robin's daid," Scarlett nodded. "But he wasn't daid when I first found him." The roar of the mob had quieted to a whisper. "In fact," the lean, gaunt, leather-faced veteran lied, "Sam told me quite a few things I think that you boys ought to heah."

"We don't want to heah 'em," Benson shouted. But he shouted alone.

Scarlett stood up on an empty oil drum and looked aroun@d him.

"But before I start to talk," he said, "perhaps there's some of you who recognize the man heah with me."

A ripple of comment circled through the crowd. Most of them knew Big Boy by his pictures. Those who didn't, knew his yacht and knew it had been anchored off Gulf Vista since some time that afternoon.

The dapper little gunman, smiling sightlessly, bowed to the crowd in the moonlight.

"I'm just one of you tonight, boys," he told them. "I'm here in the interest of justice."

Mason edged his way to the front of the crowd, his eyes glaring at Bart Scarlett.

"Well, go on and make your talk; Scarlett," he said. "We tried to save your man

for you as long as we could. If there's any more can be done, you'll have to do it."

"Take the rope off the man's neck," Big Boy ordered one of his men who was guarding Scarlett.

The gunman did so, but his eyes never left the man whom he was guarding. Scarlett had been promised his life if he could prove that someone other than the dead man was Cock Robin. If he couldn't, well, he was riding with Big Boy part way to Miami.

Sheriff Tate licked at his scraggly mustache uncertainly.

"Er—Sam Robin told you who killed his wife?" he demanded.

"Yes," Scarlett lied, "he did. He named a man up at the point heah. An' he said that man was the real Cock Robin."

A roar went up from the crowd. John Mason, the lawyer, held up his hand for silence.

"That's a mighty deadly accusation you've just made. Are you certain you can back it?"

"I can," Scarlett told him.

"Which is the fishing guide called Benson?" Big Boy asked.

The girl placed her thin white hand on the bronzed arm of the fishing guide.

"Whistle like a robin," Big Boy ordered.

The fishing guide shrugged the hand off his arm. "Why should I? I ain't one of your gun-toters. You cain't tell me what t' do."

"You're stayin' right heah," Scarlett told him. He lifted his voice. "You boys want to heah what Sam Robin had to say before he died?"

They roared back that they did.

"You all know," Scarlett began, "that for as long as Sam Robin was heah at the point he practically admitted that he was Cock Robin, the outlaw, an' traded on his name."

The massed faces in the moonlight nodded affirmation.

"But tonight, before Sam died," Scarlett

drawled, "Sam told me that he wasn't Cock Robin. An' this was what else he told me." He paused and they waited breathless. "Sam said that a certain man right heah in Heron Point. the man Sam figured was the real Cock Robin, came to Sam an' told him that Big Boy was out of jail; told Sam that Big Boy would never believe Sam wasn't the real Cock Robin and the best thing that Sam could do was to sell off all his property for what he could get—and skip."

"That part must be true, boys." Mason addressed the mob. "I know, because I bought a lot of Sam's real estate myself at give-away prices. Sam seemed desperate."

"That man," Scarlett continued, "wrote to Big Boy oveh in Miami an' told him that Cock Robin was oveh heah at Heron Point. An' if any of you boys out there was Cock Robin an' knew Big Boy was after your hide, could you think of a better idea than of blaming everythin' on to Sam? He'd boasted that he was the Robin." His voice lowered slightly. "An' Big Boy, as you see, is blind—went blind in prison. He's the only man who's ever really met Cock Robin face to face an' lived."

"But who is Cock Robin?" Sheriff Tate demanded.

"Who," Scarlett countered, "is one of the boys who wanted most to see my handy man hung?"

"No, wait a minute," Benson scoffed. "You ain't going to try to say that I'm Cock Robin?"

"You could be," Scarlett told him. Point by point he drove the known facts home. "You look a lot like Sam. You wanted mighty bad to have my man hung. It could be that Sam found you out, an' that you killed both him an' Bessie when he did."

A roar went up from the crowd.

"I never!" Benson shouted.

Scarlett lighted a cigarette and his face was grim in the match flare.

"Yet you're mighty handy with a bow an' arrow, Benson. I've seen you shootin'

mullet. An' you were the one who found Sam's watch an' wallet. You were the one who drove the sheriff over to Sam's this afternoon just in time to find Cocos wipin' off the bow. Could be you were the man who shot at me through my window after I left heah t'night—an' killed my wife Myra instead."

THE growing murmur that had rippled through the crowd of sun-blackened men ceased abruptly. It was replaced with an ominous silence.

"Myra—Miz Scarlett, your wife—is dead?" the sheriff asked.

Scarlett nodded. "That's right. She was killed to keep her from talkin'. Killed to keep her from telling me the name of the man she was plannin' on' runnin' away with—the same man who framed Sam Robin, tricked him into Big Boy's hands, and was intendin' to run away with Sam's money and my wife."

The crowd closed in around Benson.

The fishing guide poised as if for flight, then changed his mind. He turned, a scowl on his face and a long barreled pistol in his hand.

"It's a lie. I'm not Cock Robin," he protested.

Big Boy tugged at his ear lobe.

"Yet you drive a thirty-six Ford convertible with a rumble seat?"

"I do," the fishing guide admitted.

Big Boy nudged the girl. She motioned to one of the hard-faced men on the outskirts of the crowd. He strode into the knotted center of the crowd with three pieces of smart, matched luggage in his hands.

"Then suppose you tell us," Big Boy asked the fishing guide, "what this luggage was doing in your car? It is Mrs Myra Scarlett's luggage and it held Sam Robin's money."

Sheriff Tate, Mason, and the two deputies crowded forward to look at the cases

"I'm waiting," Big Boy said.

Benson shook his head. His voice was surly, bitter.

"I don't know nothin' about the cases or Sam's money, but if they were found in my car I know who put 'em there." He paused, then continued grimly. "All right. If that's the way he wants to play I can play that same way, too. I know who wrote Big Boy an' told him Sam was the Robin. I was paid plenty to help him. But I wasn't paid to help him kill Myra Scarlett an' I didn't know that she was daid until jist now." His voice rose to a pitch of fury and his red eyes gleamed with hate. "An' now he's tryin' to frame me, make out like I done it all. Well, he won't. If *he's* Cock Robin, I'll kill him, that's what I'll do— an' I'll collect me that big reward."

Before Scarlett or his gunman guards could stop him, the fishing guide whirled toward the spot where Sheriff Tate, Mason and the deputies were stooped over the suitcases on the beach, his long barreled pistol spitting fire.

Then he said, "Oh, my God!" He put both hands to his chest and sat down on the sand. A bloody tooth oozed from his lips and he slumped slowly sideways.

Mason blew the smoke from the barrel of the gun in his hand and dropped it back into his pocket.

"The man was mad," he said coolly. "He was aiming right at you, Sheriff. And I know you're not Cock Robin."

The crowd clamored noisy approval, but Scarlett held up his hand.

"Before we thank Mr. Mason," he drawled softly, "might I ask him just one question?"

Mason rolled his cigar in his mouth and grinned.

"Sure. Why not? Go ahead."

"How come," Scarlett asked him, "that one of Big Boy's men saw *you* put those traveling cases into Benson's car?"

The silence was deathly. Even the wind seemed to pause.

"That," Mason said finally, "is a lie.

You can't trip me like that. Those weren't even Myra's cases. Her traveling bags are—" He stopped short when he realized what he had said.

Scarlett snapped, "How do you know? And how—" he shook his fist under the lawyer's nose—"did you know I got home from the hospital tonight sooner than I was expected! No one knew what time I was expected home except my wife! And tonight when you were afraid she would expose you, you shot her—shot her from outside the window and then whistled like a robin, still trying to put the blame off onto Sam."

"Cock Robin!" Big Boy exulted. "The *real* Cock Robin, this time!"

HIS GROPING hands felt for the lawyer's neck, but they were only two of many. The duped crowd of fishermen closed in silently this time. There was no shouting and no hurry, but there was a hanging. They hung Mason with the rope that he had expected would swing Cocos into eternity. They did allow Big Boy one privilege that Scarlett begged for him. They let him pull the rope.

Except for the sheriff and his deputies, Scarlett, Cocos, Jeanie, Big Boy, the girl Doris, and those few of Big Boy's men who had not gone back to board the yacht, Heron Point was asleep and deserted. The crowd of sun-blackened men had slipped away.

In the sheriff's battered office, Scarlett cleared up the last few remaining points on which there still was any doubt.

"Mason," he drawled, "saw a chance to clean up, and he did. Sam Robin had boasted for two years he was Cock Robin. So when Mason heard Big Boy was out of prison he schemed with Myra, my wife, to git both Sam's money an' his land. Sam thought he was runnin' off with Myra, but she'd been two-timin' both him an' me with Mason right along. She was runnin' off with Mason an' Sam's money."

"An' Benson?" one of the deputies asked.

Scarlett dismissed him contemptuously.

"Mason hired him to do his dirty work like gittin' Cocos hung, for little or no money. An' when Benson thought Mason had framed him, he ups an' tries to shoot him."

"Meanwhile," Big Boy added, "several of my boys had—er—met Sam Robin and asked him up to the hotel to answer a few questions." He sighed. "In a way, it's a shame Cock Robin's dead. At least he was smart, and he almost fooled us all."

The blind gunman nodded to the four hoodlums who were his constant bodyguard and the two who still guarded Scarlett. He got up, still holding to the arm of the girl.

"Well, we must be getting on back to Miami."

The girl reached for one of Myra Scarlett's bags that they had found in Mason's car.

"I'm sorry," Scarlett said, stopping her, "but I'm afraid that money stays right heah. It might just be Miz Robin had some kinfolks."

The blind gangster's thin lips twisted in a bitter smile.

"Don't be a fool, Scarlett," he ordered. "You have your life. You should be grateful that I kept my promise. Remember that you're still unarmed and at one nod from me, you'd be dead."

Scarlett's right hand caressed the soft fur of his dog.

"Perhaps. But I wouldn't nod if I were you, Big Boy. Because we'd die together."

As he spoke, he leveled the bone-handled Colt that had swung from Jeanie's collar directly at the blind gangster.

The girl smiled openly and in admiration.

The sheriff, forewarned by Scarlett, drew back both hammers of the double-barreled-shotgun in his lap. He nodded toward the gunmen, and their hands froze just above their pockets.

"I'd be obliged," he smiled, "if you boys would raise your hands. Bart Scarlett tells me that it might just be that you are wanted. So we'll take you into town to see."

The blind gangster smiled his contempt.

"But this is ridiculous, Sheriff. You haven't a single thing on me or any of my boys!"

"We have murder," Scarlett told him, and his voice was bitter. "Besides, rats like you should stay in jail."

The little gang leader smiled his bitter, twisted smile.

"All right, double-crosser. But I'll see that you're gotten for this. They can't hold me. And they can't make a murder charge stick. You've admitted openly in front of witnesses that Sam Robin died of fear."

"Yes," Scarlett admitted, "I did. But John Mason died of a rope. You pulled that rope. Lynchin' is against the law in this state now. You know—" He smiled. "I wouldn't be at all surprised if, what with your record, you went right back into a cell for life."

"Damn it! I've heard that voice," the blind man fumed. "Just who the hell are you?"

"Just a man named Scarlett," Scarlett told him. "I guess we'll be gettin' on," he drawled. "Come on, Cocos."

"I'll see you in the mornin', Bart?" the sheriff asked.

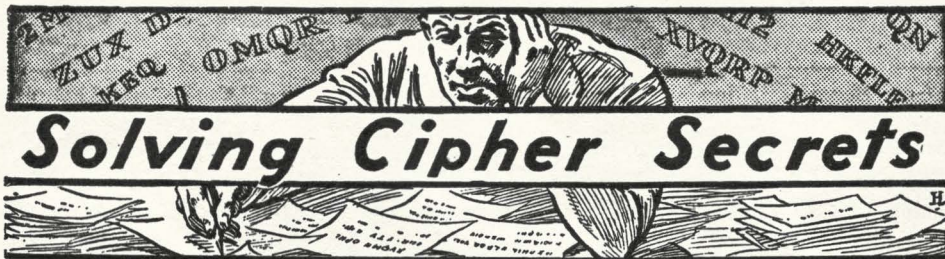
"Perhaps," was all he said. "But I don't think so."

The door closed softly behind him.

Big Boy stared with his blind eyes at the door, shook his manacled wrists in fury—then shrugged.

"Well, let's go into town and get this over with," he said. "I got one consolation. Cock Robin is dead. At least—" He stopped, his evil face fierce in its fury.

Clear on the quiet night air outside the jail came the cheerful chirrup of a robin. At least it sounded like a robin. Or it might have just been a man whistling to his dog. ■■■



Founded in 1924

Article No. 859

M. E. Ohaver

A CIPHER is a secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Helpful hints appear in this department each month. Study them carefully.

CRYPTOGRAMS

No. 5427—Turning the Tables. By †Helcrypt. Hints for new beginners: Try V and RUVR as "a" and "that." RUN (th-) and UN (h-) then become "he" and "the." Next, JERU (--th); etc.

NYNS VSEBVAT VFN TXHNFTREREGXT, TVCT MGPNTRNF.
UN DEYNT VT VS NQVBHAN, RUN FVLLER RUVR ZVFFENK
RUN ANOR UESK AND GO V BVS JERU UEB OGF AXZP.

No. 5428—How's Your Luck? By †Tot. Here are the first four lines of a limerick. Can you make up the fifth? To solve, start with O and P. Next, phrase DPFN FNY, PU and PUE'F, etc.

SR NKAUYVYYBPEM EKD PU O FZYOF; SR OHHZYUU,
*EASTYZ *KEY *YOUR *UFZYF. P UOCY DKZV YCZR
HOR DPFN FNY *YOUR *UFZYF DOR—(GPZUF BZPQY GKZ
XALVR XOUF XPEY PUE'F GPGFR FNKAUOEH TALVU!)

No. 5429—Watch Your Steps! By Tagalong. Try short words NVF and NVLE, noting IFERNV and LSSLPFENIH. Other entry, TG, GTP, and TP, taken with UTPF and ATUUTE.

NVF ATUUTE LAN TG CLIMBER JS ONLBPO LSSLPFENIH
JOFO UTPF SVHOBALI FEPFRH NVLE VLPKFON CTPM TP
OSTPN ALPPBFK TE GTP NVF-OLUF IFERNV TG NBUF.

No. 5430—The Little Fixer. By †Rebbina. Phrase TY YNNU TY, and two-letter words RN, TR, and AR provide entry. Follow up with FN and ending -AUF, RNUAFVR, etc.

ENULALATO LAYARNB RN YHTOO XNP: "TR SVTR VNDB
MN PNDB GNOQY DYDTOOP VTLK YDZZKB?" PNDUF VNJR
RN AUCDABAUF FDKYR: "HNYROP TR YAJ, XDR HT YTPY
RNUAFVR SK'OO VTLK AR TY YNNU TY PND FN VNHK."

No. 5431—They Left Prints. By Henry Tilmon. Guess the connective OHS, then complete XOS. Substitute in XDHSATS, and fill in missing letters.

OC KHT CYGT YH CXTYA ROATTA, *RDAAYTA OHS *YETB,
NAYHCTAB KU RTFTPAOCTS *OGTAYROH NYRCDATB, XOS
TFTETH XDHSATS BDPZTRCB FYBCTS YH YCB ROCOFKV.

No. 5432—Caught in the Act. By Zadig. Look to endings -UAT and -FUKA. Substitute letters thus found, and complete FSOKRTS, noting twice-used S.

NYVOF PUFULVAB ERUPXYH ANC ZNA BERUOZUAT JOKZ
BZNY Y SKYV PSUBVYVQ FSOKRTS GNY NOKRAQ MNUY
SKRBV. DKYUPV ERVBFUKA VBPNDVV. "PRYDOUF" GNB
ZVOVYH BFKAVZNBKA OVDNUOUAT DOUBKA ONZDNOF.

No. 5433—Sales Tycoon. By °Isotope. High-frequency U, used 17 times, will help with ending -OUUL, thus unlocking the first three starred words.

WINL *UAPCOUUL *MINOK-*OCNUU, JAUJ ZUTULOK KUENZ
REOUN, *EENIL *FILOPIFUNK *BENJ INAPALEOUJ FEAR
INJUN FUNSCELJAZALP, BAJU SILOUFYINENK YNESOASU.

No. 5434—Linguistic Curiosity. By Bill Thomas. Count symbols in long word, then note three-group compound. Also, EL and ending -ELRG, taken with SZLRKZRXG.

"UAPAXETAUXHXDAGXPZLHABUALARSAGGXG," PERUHO
HUEDHO-HUDXX-SXHHXD HXDP, TXLAHXG JADTG GBXSSXT
ZSEFX YKH JEHU TEVVXDXLH PXZLELRG EL NZDEAKG
SZLRKZRXG, ZG "FELT," *RXDPZL VAD "QUEST"; XHQ.

No. 5435—Going Up, Please! By Captain Kidd. Identify pattern YTTOT. Follow with YXXYKOA E. And cryptofans, the hyphenated word could have been SCYB-RYNNOK!

DEHFOXUXO RYED NYPAUVZ YXXYKOA E YCEUEGTO, COAT
YTTOT TUPAEZ. DBYCCHB-EYUC SHYED, CHAP LOYKTD,
DEUCED VGKEROK ONXRYDUMO FOKEUSYC TUNOADUHA.

No. 5436—Repeated Pairs. By °Jaybee. Here's a catalogic or list crypt, fans. Spot your own clues! Asterisks in ciphers indicate capitalization.

DSPPRET XLEZY YFBP OLFE ASTVO? YLHR CSNBTK
ZLFGURZ AELTPSU YOUUSGURY: SVSVBS, GLGLUBTM,
VSVSL, VLVLS, BVBVUR, HBHBVEO, LNLNBNBDSELY,
DSDSX, YFYFEELFY, PYRKYR, FUFUSTP, NBNBZ.

CURRENT puzzles pack plenty of thrills for eager cryptofans! For instance, °Ty Roe contributes another of his key-phrase ciphers, a type made famous by Edgar Allan Poe, and calculated to keep your midnight mazdas burning overtime! In this variety of cipher, a phrase or sentence of twenty-six letters, written letter for letter under the normal alphabet, provides the cryptic key. Thus, using "THE FLAG OF FREEDOM IS UNFURLED" as illustrative key, symbol T, first in the key, would signify plain-text "a," first letter of the alphabet. H would represent "b," the word "solve" would be enciphered UOEUL, etc.

No. X-5438. True Friends. By °Ty Roe.

"ALI YEAAYI AIU LIT ES
EIEIDIL TEAL LRSA; HRA
SARDLU TRL SATREL LI
SATRLS; TRL ALIYEAAYI
AIU SIYLEID ES DIL TEAL
DRSA, TRL LES FRSOJA
FIRYLS ER LES LTRLS."
—*IRTIRI *TEIYL.

In a key-phrase alphabet of this kind, a letter may act as its own substitute, as G for "g" in the above key, or a given symbol may stand for any of several letters, as D for either "n" or "z," in this case. And unpredictable combinations often occur in the cryptogram, such as ETEEEE and TEEE, in this instance, for "calmly" and "ally." In solving, the message and key may be developed together, each providing clues to the other. See if you can unriddle °Ty Roe's No. X-5438. And watch for complete explanation in next issue!

An exhaustive series of methods for the solution of cryptic division problems, worked out by your cipher editor, were published a number of years ago in this department. These processes included rules for finding certain digits by inspection and elimination, development of key-sequences, separating the odd and even symbols, and other procedures almost too numerous to mention. Some of our old-timers have asked for a review of these methods. So here's a starter, based on †Ian's division No. 5437.

In this puzzle, symbol for zero cannot be singled out in the usual way. But knowing the rule, you can find it in a matter of seconds. This is the rule: *In two multiplications having unit digits answering to the formulas $X \times Y = Z$ and $X \times Z = Y$, symbol X is either 4 or 9; Y and Z are both odd or both even; and the sum of Y and Z is 10.* The last part of this rule, applied to the 1st and 3rd multiplications in No. 5437, namely $R \times L = N$ and $R \times N = L$, shows that the sum of L and N must be 10; and hence in the 3rd subtraction, $M - L = N$, that symbol M must be zero. Other methods and rules, with appropriate problems by our readers, will be given from time to time.

Scorpio's "Teasing Triplets," No. X-5426 in last issue, used the keyword CONJUGATE, separated into three-letter words, CON, JUG, and ATE, answering to the definitions, and numbered from 1 up to 9 for the three additions. Two new cipher fans, Tagalong and Henry Tilmon, line up with the old-timers and present their first contributions in this issue! Give them a

whirl, fans, and keep your ciphers and solutions coming!

No. 5437—Cryptic Division. By †Ian. See text for notes on determination of zero. The 10-letter key is numbered thus: 0123 456789.

O	G	R)	C	L	N	E	M	M	(L	C	N
				C	H	U	N						
				U	O	C	M						
				U	U	O	E						
					H	N	C	M					
					H	L	G	L					
					U	L	N						

ANSWERS FOR LAST ISSUE

5415—"Old soldiers never die; they just fade away, even as you and I, upon a summer's day. That's why they never die, they just fade away."

5416—"All of a sudden it—hic!—started raining like a cloud-burst," explained tipsy driver, arrested sitting in his smashed car. He had hit a fire plug, breaking it off flush with the pavement.

5417—According to an old joke, it used to be said that the owls in Boston sedately hooted "To whom!" instead of the more familiar "To who!"

5418—Anhydrous alumina, also called corundum, is second only to the diamond in hardness. The ruby, topaz, sapphire, amethyst, emerald, and emery are varieties of this mineral.

5419—During each twenty-four-hour day, American barnyard fowl lay over sixty-five million eggs, about seven hundred and sixty per second!

5420—Facetious showman barks: "Toss hoop over doll's head! Win prize!" Showy gifts exhibited. But try to win! Hoop girth lacks just quarter-inch of being large enough to slip over doll's head.

5421—After much prancing sideways, avoiding collision with jaunty debutante during sidewalk traffic jam, jocosé chap requested: "Let's waltz, next!"

5422—Some nine-letter one-syllable words: scratched, screeched, scrounged, scrunched, splotted, squelched, stretched; single-vowel, strengths. Have you any ten-letter monosyllables?

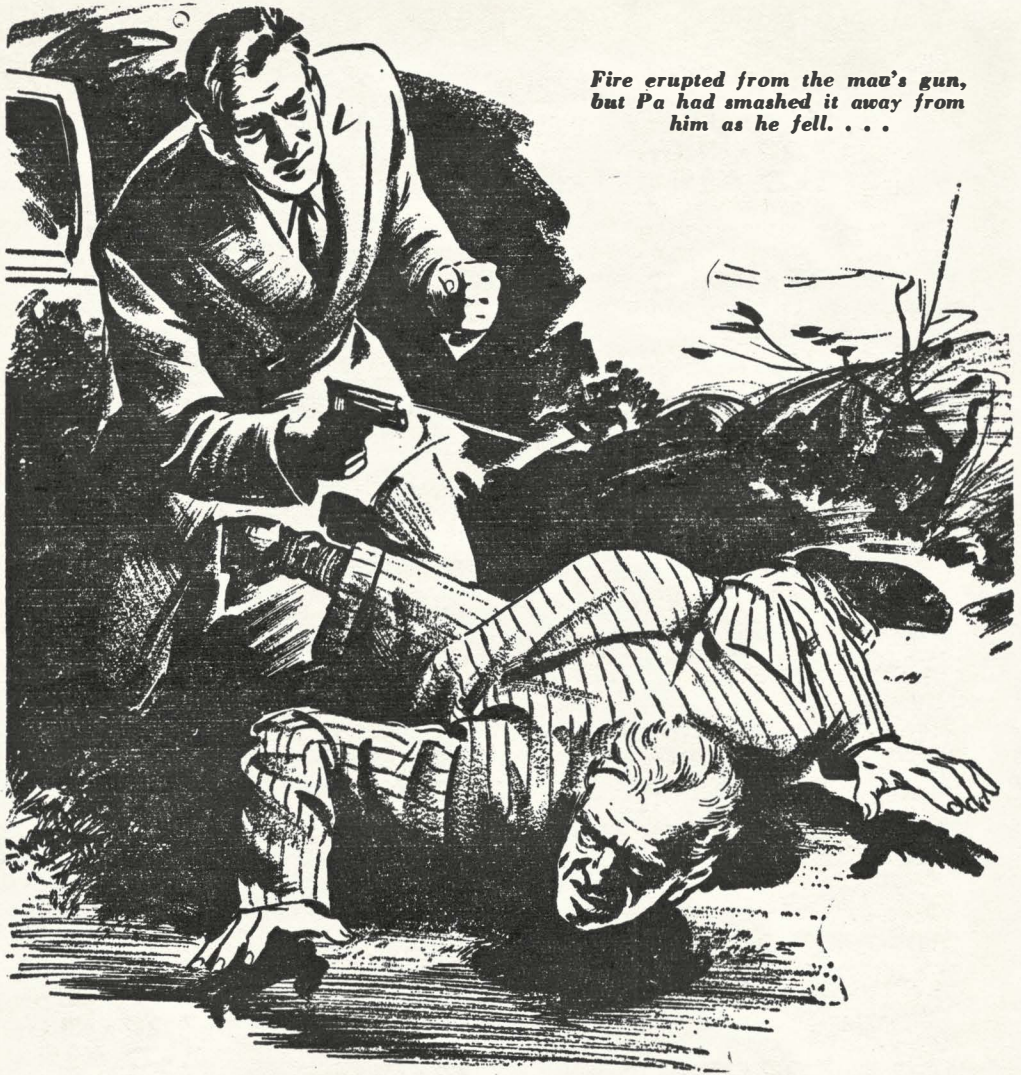
5423—Composer compliments compatriot completing complex composition. Composer complainantly compensates companion. Compatible company!

5424—Huge cinder cones arising from crater floor, fissured clinkstone walls, deeply eroded gorges, ravines, beautiful valleys, tropical scenery mark dome-like Haleakala, extinct volcano.

5425—Key:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
L	I	O	N	T	A	M	E	R	S

All answers to current ciphers will be duly credited in our *Cipher Solvers' Club*. Address: M. E. Ohaver, *New Detective Magazine*, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.



Fire erupted from the man's gun, but Pa had smashed it away from him as he fell. . . .

REDHEADS KILL EASY

By Laurence Donovan

Pa Howdy, dealing with a pair of beautiful and lethal redheads, figured it was better to play dumb than to be dead!

PA HOWDY heard murder in the Everglades, as rain slashed over Miami and hissed into Biscayne Bay. Voices had to be raised above the dashing downpour of the evening. Unexpected lapses of thunder and the water in the trees of the park suddenly brought out louder speech.

The crowd talked of tips on the horses at Hialeah and the dogs over at Miami Beach as they huddled for shelter under the trees and shrubbery of Bayfront Park, or near the cars parked by the charter boat wharves. It took the huge, hairy ears of Pa Howdy to read the sinister intent in the voices of two men in the rear seat of a sleek limousine parked close to his own nineteen-thirty model job that looked as if it never had its much battered fenders straightened or the mud of forty states washed off. And Pa's keen gray eyes, long trained as a cattle association dick on the far Montana range, also didn't miss the tall girls in bathing suits, slipping out of a speedboat and crossing to a parked convertible.

The two redheads were gorgeous even in the obscuring downpour. They drove the convertible across the park grass toward Biscayne Boulevard.

But Pa Howdy's straining reverie was interrupted by the prim, snapping voice of the plump, round-faced woman beside him in the car.

"Land o' Goshen, Pa! Do you have to twist your skinny neck every time you see some bathing beauties come sneakin' off that boat?"

"You'd best be pretendin' you ain't here, 'cause there's that nice, young patrolman lookin' at the initials you went an' whittled into that park bench. Judge Stover said he'd give you six months on the road gang the next time you was caught infringin' and infractin' the law."

Pa Howdy stretched a leg that was too long for any average car and did some low cussing as he prepared to push the starter. His mind was on murder, on the furtive voices of those two men, spilling something, no matter how his eyes strayed. Then he grinned.

"Jest passin' judgment, Ma," he stated. "Them red heads shining in the rain didn't come out of a bottle. 'Twas nacheral red hair like yourn, Ma, thirty—I'm meanin' ten years or so back."

Ma humphed. "Told you that nice copper would see how you been whittlin' that bench. But maybe I can talk the young sprout out'n it. Gimme that whittlin' knife an' I'll put it in the reticule."

Rain slapped the park copper and brightened the blue eyes in his leather-tanned face. He may have meant to make an issue out of Pa's whittlings, but he looked over at the other car where the two men had suddenly dropped their conversation to a whisper and lost interest.

"Know 'em, son?" Pa asked.

The cop nodded sourly. "John Carden," he volunteered. "Has a half-million dollar yacht, the *Narwhal*, over in Flamingo Basin. They say he's figurin' on dredgin' himself up a private island of his own back of Miami Beach. Fella with him is named Birch an' I'll bet he's doin' more bookie stuff than the private snoopin' he's registered for at the station."

Having just seen a roll of bills handed over to Birch, Pa kept his own notion to himself.

"Yup, officer, looks it," he commented.

As the copper walked off, Ma Howdy dug her elbow viciously in Pa's side. In a sudden hush of the storm, voices drifted over to them.

"A few thousan', my eye. That damn' Bob Graham knocked out two watchmen on the yacht, opened the safe with a combination one of them Barton girls—"

"Meaning Mary and Molly Barton, your late wife's nieces," Birch interrupted.

"Yeah—" was John Carden's reply.

Pa wondered how long Ma had been listening. He tuned in his own hearing for all he was worth.

"Five grand's a chunk of dough to hand out to get back a few rocks that you've got insured, anyway," stated Birch, his voice coming thinly through the rain.

"Few rocks?" John Carden's voice rose. "That damn Bob Graham got away with three-quarters of a million in diamonds, rubies and emeralds—"

"It'll be twenty grand cold if I find the hot stuff and bring it back, Carden," Birch said bluntly.

The red-faced yacht owner looked as if he might explode, but he nodded. Birch, whose thin body was as slinky as his face, was easing out of the car. Pa Howdy bent forward suddenly.

"Graham's been holin' up at the San Dimos hotel." Carden's voice seemed to boom as the rain stopped abruptly. "Might be he's hid it back there. My nieces have been stayin' at the Beach National. They'll be waitin' for a call and a switchboard girl is a friend o' mine. I'll head over there and you wait for a buzz at the San Dimos."

"Yeah, if the cops don't arrest Bob Graham," grunted Birch.

Thunder clashed down again, but Pa Howdy had a glimpse of Birch's narrow face. John Carden might be a smart rich man, but Pa made a bet with himself that Birch was figuring how much more he could cut himself in for if he had the luck to catch Bob Graham with the stolen jewels still on him.

MA HOWDY suddenly ran one hand over her reticule and smiled grimly.

"We're havin' our grub at the San Dimos," she announced mildly. "I see where there's tables lookin' right into the lobby and that Birch snooper is spottin' himself a big chair right up close to the desk. Reckon that Bob Graham ain't come in yet an' that he's layin' to bushwhack him."

Pa Howdy's long, bony face was puzzled. He twanged nasally, "But you said—"

"Now what on earth could have went on with them pretty red-headed Barton girls, if that was them?" interrupted Ma calmly. "I knowed you'd fuss if I wanted a good meal to fill in between the four-bit fish snacks we've been livin' off of."

Pa Howdy shrugged his lanky shoulders and gave in.

The four-buck steaks were still being done rare at the end of ten minutes. No one noticed the lanky Pa Howdy and the plump gray-haired woman with him in the dining room, least of all Birch.

Pa Howdy caught a glance now and then being exchanged between the chinless hotel clerk and the thin-faced Birch. Pa talked through the napkin he had tied around his neck.

"That there Birch has been askin' if there's a Bob Graham, Ma. Appears how there is and he's been in and gone out. Maybe he's smart enough to meet them red-headed girls outside, but Birch is actin' like he's expectin' him to come back. 'Scuse me, Ma."

A minute later Pa Howdy glared at the San Dimos clerk.

"Feller livin' here name of Graham—Bob Graham?" growled Pa.

The clerk's nervous eyes jumped to Birch, then he shook his head.

"Nope. Never had anyone by that name," he replied.

Pa Howdy fumbled at the worn leather of a wallet in his coat pocket. He surmised that the clerk had already been sweetened by Birch, but the bulging appearance of that old leather wallet caused the clerk to swallow hard. He leaned forward, talking low.

"Don't know that name, but a new man paid for room forty-three, on the alley fire escape, and he went out before I got him registered. Is he a tall, heavy man wearin' a tan raincoat? He'll be back soon."

A slow grin, with a go-to-hell sort of clicking of Pa's hard teeth, gave the clerk his answer. Pa pushed the wallet back into his pocket unopened and clumped solidly back to the dining room.

If the clerk believed he had been tricked into telling Pa something, he was wrong. Pa's keen eyes had picked up the thin trail of rusty spots leading from the San Dimos door to the desk and out again. Only recently dried blood could have put the marks on the tile floor.

Pa Howdy was back at his table when a tall man wearing a rain slicker walked in. He moved slowly, staggering a little. Pa heard him say he would register later, but to have two dozen raw oysters, a steak, pie and coffee sent right up to room forty-three.

The steaks for Ma and Pa had arrived by this time, but both had suddenly lost their appetites. They were watching the tall man in the slicker going toward the elevator. Also, Pa saw Birch watching the door facing the boulevard.

There was a call from the desk and Birch went to a phone booth. When he came out, he appeared unhappy and undecided as to what move to make. The tall man in the raincoat momentarily turned, sizing up the occupants of the lobby. He showed a strong-boned face, but it was too white and haggard for a man who had been taking the Miami sun.

"Has the looks of one that's been in the state pokey some'ere," offered Pa.

"Allus belittlin'," said Ma with an unusual frown on her smooth, placid forehead. "That's what comes of wastin' years suspectin' one of every three men bein' hard cases."

Pa dragged the napkin from his neck. Several minutes had passed since the tall man had gone up to room forty-three. Pa had seen the girl at the switchboard hurriedly fumble with the plugs, then slide over and talk in a low tone to the room clerk.

Birch saw the byplay and got to his feet, looking out into the rainy boulevard. Then it sounded to Pa Howdy as if a whole parade of police cars came screaming down at the hotel.

Ma Howdy's plump fingers pinched Pa's arm hard as he started to his feet. Pa had just glimpsed Birch high-tailing it up the stairway. Cap Hamer's whitish eyes rolled around as if he knew exactly where to look.

"Pa Howdy!" roared the homicide copper. "Any time there's a killin', he's always there waiting. If I were smart I'd send him

to the courthouse jug an' ask questions afterward. Four times now—"

Cap Hamer stopped bellowing as he took in the trailing spots on the marble floor in front of the desk. He let out a roar that caused the desk clerk to duck.

"A'right, spill it, Evans!" The clerk opened his mouth, but no words came out.

"Don't tell me this guy reported in forty-three was shot down here an' walked away? Or maybe that's milk spilled on the floor and turned to blood?"

Cap Hamer and his squad turned their attention to the spotty blood trail left by the tall man. The shaky clerk mumbled, "No sir, Captain. The phone call come from some frightened woman, an' she said slugs was smashing into her room which was next to forty-three. I ain't been up yet."

Gripping Ma Howdy's wrist firmly, Pa Howdy took three steps at a stride up a rear fire stairway at the back of the dining room. If Pa and Ma had been observed by diners or waiters, it wasn't mentioned to the explosive Cap Hamer.

"Dangwhangit, Ma, I wasn't showin' no more sense than a newborn calf when any fool would know that Bob Graham would have a reason for takin' a room on a fire escape," complained Pa. "Mebbeso he went out for some doctorin', but surer than sin them redheads would be told about that fire escape."

"Pa, we ain't goin' one more step," insisted Ma firmly. "I don't want to see you workin' on a road gang."

Pa didn't argue the point. In spite of his long legs, plump Ma Howdy was ahead and pulling him toward the fourth floor. By this time Cap Hamer's squad was pushing back curious spectators from the open doorway of room forty-three.

Momentarily, Pa Howdy had no reason to worry about the hostile attitude of Cap Hamer.

If the Barton sisters had been in the room, they must have worked fast. Pa kept to one side, away from the roving eyes of

Cap Hamer who was bellowing again.

The body of one man was stretched out in the middle of the room and the other draped over the windowsill which he had been trying to enter from the fire escape.

"Neither one is him, Pa," whispered Ma Howdy. "But don't tell me a dyin' man went and et up all that dinner in less than ten minutes."

Bob Graham was not one of the dead men; moreover, there were uniforms on both corpses, with the gilt insignia *Narwhal* on their left arms. Birch had started prowling around, but Cap Hamer stopped him.

"Damn funny!" protested Birch. "Those empty plates had steak and oysters on them, enough for four people, and now they're empty. But have a look at those bullet holes across the table."

Cap Hamer took a good look. The furrows were made by at least .38 slugs, but there were no blood marks to indicate that whoever had devoured the steak and oysters had been hit.

Keeping furtively in the background, the clerk asserted solemnly, "Somebody went up and ate the food then."

Birch suddenly disappeared through the fire escape window. At the same time the police M. E. announced, "Doesn't look like a free-for-all shootin'. Have a look and you'll see both sailors died of wounds under the left ear that couldn't have been made by anything heavier than a .25."

"Provin' that a woman must've done the bumpin' like that phone call informed us—" Cap Hamer chopped off his words suddenly. He had said more than he intended.

SOMEONE ELSE undoubtedly had tipped off the police to the shooting besides the woman guest who hadn't taken kindly to leaden slugs slapping into her room. And Cap Hamer's fast talking had given out that someone with a motive had wanted the police to believe a girl would be their probable suspect.

"Keep a weather eye on Cap Hamer," cautioned Pa Howdy, nudging Ma suddenly. "That polecat Birch went down the fire escape and none of these Jude city coppers seemed to notice."

Ma's whisper hissed at Pa. "If there's any brain left in that bone 'tween your ears, we will light outta here. But seein' you ain't got good hoss sense, look out for an ambush outside."

Between absorbing the M. E.'s report and trying to figure how anyone could have absorbed a double meal of steak and oysters with .38 slugs playing tag with the plates, the redoubtable Cap Hamer had for the time being overlooked Pa Howdy. However, Cap Hamer moved toward the fire escape window just as Pa was doing an agile vanishing act.

"Hey, Pa Howdy!" yelled Cap Hamer. "Get back in here before I loosen you from your back teeth!"

Hamer jumped for the window and dragged his police gun from its leather at the same time.

"Heavens to Betsy!" was Ma Howdy's terror-stricken cry, and she jumped to one side in fear of Cap Hamer's half-drawn police pistol.

However, Ma Howdy's quick movement jerked her plump right arm into a frantic motion to ward off the rushing police captain, and that time-worn, beaded reticule flew up and smashed full across Cap Hamer's face. He heeled backward and went down with a profane groan.

The bulky captain sat on the floor fully a minute before he could focus his bruised eyes and climb to his feet. By this time Pa Howdy had skinned down the fire escape and Ma Howdy was uttering a flustered apology.

"Land sakes, Captain Hamer, what in time happened?" she exclaimed. "I was doin' my darnedest to try an' stop Pa from gettin' into a ruckus that ain't none of his business. I was movin' back to give you room when your gun—I've allus beer

afear'd of guns—made me jerk my hand up! Wait'll I find a clean hanky, an' I'll stop that nosebleed. Whatever could've hit you, Captain?"

Ma Howdy being a little, plump old lady, there was nothing that Cap Hamer could say. As for Ma, she had a faint idea that the heavy .38 automatic and the hefty flashlight in her bag might have brought about Cap Hamer's accident. But even a tough murder copper had to try to smile and be a gentleman.

By the time Cap Hamer and his squad got onto the fire escape, one car was moving out of the narrow, dark street beside the San Dimos. Other cars were clocking along Biscayne Boulevard in the rain.

Cap Hamer said to his men, "Maybe the killer is in that car an' maybe she isn't. But put everything we've got after it. It's a convertible and should be easy to pick up.

In the meantime plump Ma Howdy had faded from the double murder room. She moved fast enough to reach their own battered jalopy just as Pa Howdy was pushing the starter.

"Thought you'd snuck away from me, didja, Pa?" panted Ma as she climbed in. "Since the killer's made a getaway, hadn't we better get over to that Causeway dump and have that four-bit fish supper? I'm all wore out and hungrier than ever."

Ma Howdy took one look at the unholy light in Pa's eyes, and gave the idea up.

"Land o' Goshen, Pa! Don't tell me you seen them redheads again? An' where'd Birch take himself? You might as well know Cap Hamer's cars are on the prod and they'll pick us up any minute."

Pa Howdy skidded their jalopy neatly through two red lights and took a sudden turn off the boulevard, cutting across the corner of the park and heading for the hinged bridge across the river.

"For heavens sake, Pa, look! The bridge is just startin' to split in the middle for that boat comin' in! Pa! Where you goin'?"

His old eyes were fixed upon a conver-

tible that had crossed ahead of the opening signals and the closing of the wooden gate. Pa Howdy went through the flimsy wooden barrier with a jolting crash.

Ma Howdy closed her eyes for a dizzy second or two while the jalopy made a clear flight through the opening space between the rising wings of the opening bridge. Then Pa emitted a sudden "Yi-yippee! Made it, by gum!"

The old car shot down the other side of the bridge. The convertible ahead was turning into the Tamiami Trail leading toward Coral Gables. Then it was that Ma got her breath back, opened her eyes, and saw the red-headed girl.

"Where's the other sister—and it looks like that slinky Birch has joined up with the car driver, Pa."

"Jimminy, Ma! You can't figure too fast. There's no sign of that Bob Graham, so there must be another car or somethin' danged smelly about that convertible. I'm wantin' a look-see into that back seat."

Three-fourths of a million in jewels was a big stake to play for. The similar killing of the two sailors off the yacht *Narwhal* was too much of a coincidence to be natural.

"'Pears to me that this John Carden was a damn sight closer to Bob Graham and the Barton redheads than he was spillin' to that Birch," came from Pa Howdy as they closed up on the convertible and it went over the old Key West railroad tracks. "Reckon you'd best pass over that gun in your ridiculous."

"But why would there be more killin'—"

Police cars screamed in several directions, but Cap Hamer appeared to have missed the convertible.

THE cars sped on, the convertible holding a block lead and Pa Howdy trailing. Pa could have picked up speed, but he wanted to keep a keen eye upon the red-headed girl and Birch. The rain had stopped abruptly and a moon was riding in over the bay.

"Demnition! I'd had an idea that had happened!" twanged Pa Howdy, taking a sudden left-handed shot at the rear tires of the convertible.

He missed rubber. He had been a split second too slow taking his mind from the oddity of Birch riding away with one red-headed girl, while Bob Graham and the other Barton sister, if the redhead was one of them, hadn't been sighted. Pa guessed this chase was a ruse to mislead any following police.

The cars flashed through the Coral Gable gates, heading for a thinly populated section near one of the canals. It was then that Pa Howdy really smartened up. Birch had every intention of cashing in on the big jewel robbery and what he knew of the peculiar killing of the two *Narwhal* sailors, who would, of course, be reported as having traced Bob Graham to the San Dimos Hotel.

"Yeah," grunted Pa Howdy. "That Birch is branded to cash in on this, but not the way he's hoping."

The bright moonlight presented the whole picture. Birch leaned over to the girl. Suddenly her hand flew up and red flame flashed out.

Birch had cashed in, all right. He went over to one side and Pa Howdy would have sworn that a slug had hit him under the ear, the same vital spot as the mortal wounds of the two *Narwhal* sailors.

The red-headed girl reached back and dropped the murder gun into the rear seat of the convertible. Birch, dying or dead, slumped down in the seat.

The highway along the coral canal curved at this point under the shadow of a row of pepper trees. The redhead swerved the convertible toward the trees, cutting down her speed.

Pa had snapped off his headlights some distance back and had been driving by moonlight, following the outline of the white concrete road. He chuckled grimly as the face of the girl flashed around.

"Sure as sin she's thinkin' she got away with a killin' without any witness but that Miami moon," said Pa. "But what's she's aimin' to do—wreck the whole works?"

The redhead at that moment appeared to be planning her own suicide. She sent the convertible crashing off the road shoulder, at the same time making an acrobatic leap from under the wheel.

She had slowed the car to a fairly safe speed and then cut the ignition so that there would be no explosion or fire. Then she landed, lightly, on the ground.

"What in time's on that gal's mind?" said Ma Howdy. "Now she has to walk and if she's picked up she's puttin' herself in that hot chair before the city cops get through with her."

"Dollars to doughnuts she knows who'll be pickin' her up, Ma."

His thought was instantly confirmed. A sleek sedan came from among the trees and Pa identified it as the John Carden car. He could see the bulky Carden himself alongside the driver, and the shapes of two other men in the rear seat.

The sedan was more than a hundred yards ahead and Pa's old jalopy was still sneaking along without lights.

"Out, Ma!" whispered Pa suddenly. "Don't argue! Hit the dark side of the road and if there's reason to use that gun, don't drill me or that redhead!"

"But, Pa Howdy, I won't—"

There were moments when Ma Howdy ceased to be the dominant woman. Pa's long bony arm reached over and snapped the jalopy's door open. Ma was lifted and set down outside.

But to herself Ma whispered fiercely, "I could-a told Pa all the time it would be one of them red-headed sisters, two shameless girls that don't care who sees 'em runnin' around in bathing suits."

The sedan stopped and Carden himself stepped out as Pa muttered, "He's one smart operator, an' that redhead killer ain't neither one of them Barton sisters!"

Pa Howdy jammed his big foot down on the gas and the lightless old jalopy jumped toward the pepper trees with sudden speed. Seeing the battered jalopy coming straight for him, Carden sprang back for the protection of his sedan.

The tall, red-headed girl screamed and moved in the same direction.

Pa Howdy twisted his wheel away from the sedan and his long figure left the seat in a dive on the opposite side. Before John Carden or the redhead saw his purpose, the range dick's body crashed onto them, making double contact.

The girl's light body went all the way across the road. Carden groaned and was knocked out. His driver, an automatic in his hand, jumped for Pa Howdy as Pa landed on the ground.

Fire erupted from the man's gun, but Pa had smashed it away from him. Another man in the car triggered an automatic, but there were only two shots. He and his companion fell to the floor of the car and didn't move again. Ma Howdy could shoot the head off a chicken at that range. Her .38 smoked three times, then she waddled down the hill.

"Grab the gal an' tie her up, Ma," commanded Pa. "Keep your gun on John Carden."

Five minutes later Pa Howdy backed the convertible out of the ditch. He heard a girl sobbing behind him. Peering into the back seat, he asked, "Who's there?"

"I'm Molly Barton, and this is a Jap gun Bob gave me," she replied tearfully, holding up a .25 caliber special. "I lost it while I—Mary and I were visiting Uncle John on his yacht. It's been used."

"Yup, ma'am, it's been used plenty," said Pa Howdy. "And that's your sister Mary and Bob Graham back there with you! They dead?"

Molly shook her head. "Mary was knocked out when the car ran into the ditch. Bob must get to a hospital. He has three bullets in him, but he's breathing."

"Three bullets?" said Pa. "And who et that steak and them oysters at the San Dimos?"

"Bob," said Mary, "while he was hiding the jewelry our aunt left us. John Carden's been keeping it on his yacht where a court order couldn't get it."

"Three bullets, and he et one of them San Dimos steaks!" exclaimed Pa Howdy. "He'll live, girlie, and don't you worry."

Pa told Ma about Bob Graham taking the jewels belonging to the girls.

"Next thing, Carden sees this snooper Birch, an' figures out a nice murder frame-up," said Pa Howdy, "with Molly Barton's gun. The little matter of two sailors was easy. This red-headed killer is John Carden's special girl friend, and with her having red hair Carden figured out a trap that would put the sisters away for murder and give him their jewels."

Ma Howdy puckered her round mouth. "Pa Howdy, you said this redhead was Carden's special girl friend. Just where'd you learn things like that?"

"Ma! You wouldn't have tricked me into marryin' you if you'd knowed what an all-around romeo I'd been!" He grinned.

Far up the road a police siren sounded. Pa Howdy moved fast. He made sure John Carden was still out.

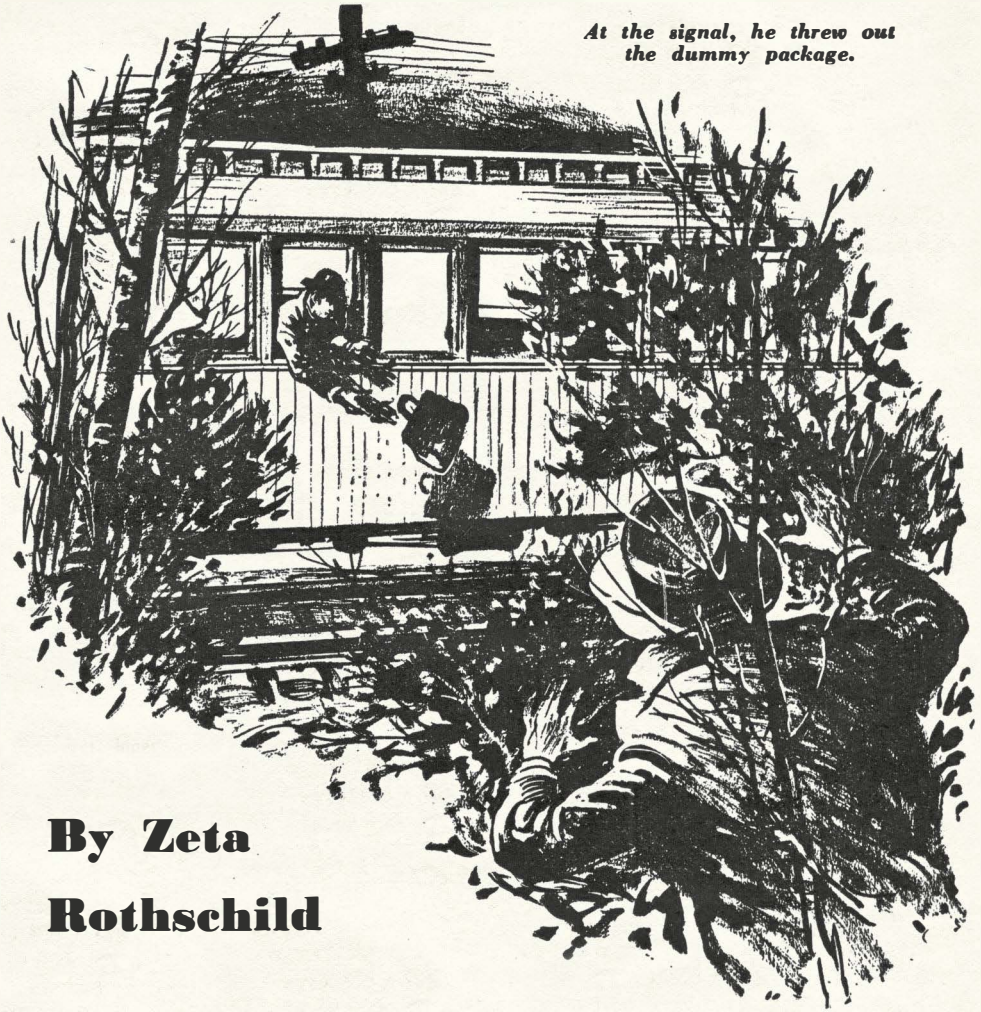
"Get that convertible down the road as if the devil was after you," he told Molly Barton. "I'll be bumping along right after you, and get Bob Graham to the hospital. Then we'll all go over and have a San Dimos dinner."

"We'll go over and have a cheap fish fry on the Causeway," put in Ma Howdy. "And what about that murder gun that was to have been found on Molly Barton?"

Pa Howdy looked at the red-headed girl and grinned. The lights of the police car were showing up. Then he went over and closed John Carden's fingers around the murder weapon after carefully wiping it clean. The police, he knew, would take on from there. ■ ■ ■

OPERATION MANHUNT

*At the signal, he threw out
the dummy package.*



**By Zeta
Rothschild**

A True Crime Story

Out of the deadly blueprint of the criminal's mind, grew the larger and even more deadly blueprint of the law's . . . a super dragnet that closed in with the grim, merciless precision of a death-house door!

THOSE who believe in the saying that history repeats itself can refer to two outstanding kidnaping cases of this century. There are several extraordinarily similar points in the kidnaping of the Lindbergh baby and that of Blakely Coughlin of Norristown, Pennsylvania.

Outstanding in both cases was the detective work that brought about the capture of the guilty party. Not only because

of the intelligence and experience the men involved put into their job but, undoubtedly because their hearts were in it, too.

The third week in May, the Coughlin family had moved out to their country house on the outskirts of Norristown, Pennsylvania. The night of June 1st, 1920, a Saturday, the father and mother left shortly after dinner to join some friends. The two older children, David, eight, and McLean, five, were asleep in their beds when the parents returned home around eleven o'clock. So was thirteen-month-old Blakely Coughlin in his crib.

An hour later Mrs. Coughlin woke up suddenly, disturbed by an unfamiliar noise. It came from the adjoining room where the baby slept. Then she heard a whimper.

Quickly she prodded her husband and whispered to him.

"I think there's a burglar in Blakely's room," she told him.

Together they hurried into the next room. There was no one there. The crib was empty. Had one of the boys taken the baby to his bed? But both boys were sound asleep and there was no baby there. They next woke the nurse asleep on the third floor. She didn't have the baby, either.

While the baby could toddle, he couldn't climb out of his crib. But the parents nevertheless made a quick search for him through the house, calling softly. But their search was in vain.

Then they went outside the house. And then they saw the ladder, propped up on two flower boxes, before the window of the baby's room. And they realized for the first time that Baby Coughlin had been kidnaped.

An alarm brought the police immediately from Norristown. With the coming of dawn the search widened. The police went over the grounds carefully, and found a line of footprints leading from the ladder into a field adjoining the Coughlin home. Here they were lost in the soft earth.

The story broke too late for the Sunday

morning papers. Not until Monday morning did news of the kidnaping spread. All Philadelphia was agog. For from this city had Charlie Ross disappeared many years earlier. And the citizens had not forgotten the excitement of the hunt for his kidnapers which, alas, had brought no results.

The Coughlins were not wealthy people. Though George Coughlin was the president of the Brouker and Kessler Lithographing Company in nearby Philadelphia, he had no fortune. Nor had he, he told police, any enemies.

The Norristown police immediately set up a barrier around the town. Every car leaving Norristown was stopped and searched. And the Pennsylvania Railroad sent fliers to all its employees in the state to watch for the baby.

A description of the baby was printed in every Philadelphia and Norristown paper with a request that other newspapers throughout the country copy it. Blakely Coughlin weighed a little over thirty pounds. He had blue eyes and blond hair with a slight curl. He had eight teeth with another coming through. He had a slight scar over his left eye.

Dozens of letters arrived at the Coughlin home that first week. One from Virginia said that a couple in a car had stopped at the Home Nursing Hospital on the 3rd of June and wanted to leave a baby there. Told the hospital did not take babies, they had driven off.

Others thought they had seen the baby. No tip was ignored. But still no clue to the whereabouts of the missing child.

One letter, postmarked Norristown, June 3rd, was addressed to "Parents of the Stolen Child, below Sandy Hill, Norristown." It was signed "The Crank," and hinted that the baby would be returned on payment of a ransom.

Immediately Mr. Coughlin put an advertisement in the Norristown paper. He would gladly pay a ransom. But please, he requested, furnish some proof that the writ-

er had the baby. Send something the baby wore when he was kidnaped, suggested the father. Or better still, a photo of the baby.

Within two days came the answer.

"I can give you the proof you want," The Crank wrote. "The room where I got the boy has three doors, one Roking chair in the middle of the floor between the window and the crib. A table or dresser is on the left near the window I went in with a woman's workbasket on top."

Also, wrote The Crank, he had wrapped the baby in a coat stolen from the same place he had got the ladder.

The Crank had described the baby's room, sobbed Mrs. Coughlin when she read this letter.

And detectives soon checked with the men on a nearby construction job. They had found a ladder missing when they came to work on Monday. Also one of the men had found a blue coat gone when he came to work that same day. He had thought he had mislaid it somewhere and thinking it would turn up, had told no one of it. Only he and The Crank knew it had been stolen, he thought.

The next day's paper carried an answer from George Coughlin. He would pay a ransom of six thousand dollars. Please, he asked, make arrangements for the return of the baby in his next letter.

The police were not altogether convinced that The Crank was the kidnaper. Anybody who had been in the Coughlin home recently would know about the furniture. The man might have read about the ladder and guessed whence it had come. He might also have learned somehow about the missing coat.

Another letter came from The Crank. The father was to put the six thousand dollars in a rubber waterproof bag, take a train from Norristown that would cross the Schuylkill River at midnight. He was to throw the bag out the window. The next day the baby would be returned.

Now six thousand dollars was not easily

acquired. Coughlin was not a wealthy man. Both his family and his wife's pooled their resources to make up this sum. He did not want it to fall into the hands of the wrong man. And mindful of the warnings of the police, he decided to drop the bag, but instead of the money there would be a letter asking for more proof that The Crank had the baby.

AFTER the bag had been thrown out the window of the moving train, the Coughlins waited anxiously for word from The Crank. When the letter finally came, The Crank demanded twelve thousand dollars because of the delay. He had none of the baby's clothing; he had burned it as soon as he got to his hiding place, he explained. The father would have only one more chance to get his baby back. If he did not follow the plan, he would never see his baby again.

The money was to be in fifty and one hundred dollar bills. They were to be put in a handbag which was to be wrapped in a blanket. The package was to be left at midnight under the southwest corner of the trolley station at Swedeland. If the police were notified, he, The Crank, would know. If Coughlin did not come alone, the deal was off.

The police were not told of this meeting. Coughlin, having raised the twelve thousand dollars, carried out the instructions the night of the 14th of June. And back at home, the family waited anxiously for the return of the baby.

Not until ten days later did the Coughlins hear from The Crank. Then in another letter he wrote he had received the money. He would write again soon and tell them where they could get the baby.

On July 1st came the next letter. But it made no plan to return the baby. Instead The Crank asked for another six thousand dollars. And so sure was he that the Coughlins would again pay that he included instructions for getting this money to him.

The father was to take the 2:10 train that left Camden for Atlantic City on the Reading Railway. He was to sit on the right hand side of the train. When he saw a white flag, he was to drop the money from the window.

"If you don't pay, you might as well say good-bye to your boy," the letter ended.

Almost all hope that The Crank could or would return their baby was fading fast. They might be able to raise another six thousand dollars, but could they trust The Crank again?

Now for the first time did the police learn of the trip to Swedeland and the bag with the twelve thousand dollars. More than ever were they convinced The Crank would never hand over the baby. To them there was still doubt as to whether he had it.

"But if you will leave the next move to us," the parents were told, "we will get The Crank."

The Coughlins agreed. And the problem of capturing The Crank was now put up to the Pennsylvania State Police under the guidance of Major Lynn G. Adams.

First a hall was hired in Philadelphia where a group of selected troopers were coached and trained for the part they were to play. Those who turned out to be swift distance runners were chosen for a special task on which their plan depended.

At last the day was set by The Crank. It was August 3rd. And Major Adams and his men were ready.

From Camden to Atlantic City is a stretch of sixty miles, sparsely settled. This area was divided into eighteen zones and each of the selected runners had been taken over the ground beforehand to study the zone he was to cover.

The local train Coughlin was to take stopped at several stations but the hamlets which they served were some distance from it. No attention was given to the stations, however, for it was not thought likely The Crank's signal would be shown anywhere near them.

On the 3rd of August, eighteen groups of five men sauntered into the Camden station. They were dressed as laborers, commuters, and travelers. To anyone watching, it would seem that they had never met before.

The Reading Railroad, eager to cooperate, had an engine and caboose waiting. One by one, these men strolled through the gates, crossed the tracks and climbed aboard. The engine pulled out of the Camden station at ten o'clock. It made none of the regulation stops. Instead it slowed down when it came to a woods or a crossing far from any habitation.

Each time it stopped five men got off, to be met by a trooper who had gone out long before to scout the section for his crew. By the time the train chugged into Atlantic City, it had made eighteen stops, one for each zone.

Each leader had hiding places picked for his men. They were spread out from the railroad tracks, with only one man near enough to keep an eye on the train.

Still another special train had been provided by the railroad company. It left the Camden station ten minutes ahead of the 2:10 which George Coughlin would take. In this special sat Major Adams, on his lap a stack of large white placards each bearing a different number, one to eighteen.

The troopers already scattered through that sixty mile route eyed the train as it chugged along. Major Adams had a pair of glasses glued to his eyes. Nervously he scanned the countryside on the right side of the train. If and when he saw the white emblem which was to be the signal for Coughlin to throw out the packet with six thousand dollars, he would put the card with that zone's number in a window.

The train would not stop. But those picked runners would drop off on the far side, some distance before The Crank's signal was reached, and a short distance after it was passed.

In the meantime the troopers through whose zones the train had passed without signaling would come in, fanwise, making a barrier getting nearer and nearer to the signal.

On chugged the train. It passed through zone after zone. Still no white cloth was to be seen. Had The Crank double-crossed them again? Then as the train neared Egg Harbor, in Zone Thirteen, Adams spotted a white square hung between two trees.

The engineer threw a smoke screen that shrouded the train and hid it from The Crank. And three of the trained runners jumped off the far side and started to encircle the place where the signal was flying.

On went the train. There was no sign of the kidnaper.

About a mile beyond the signal the other three runners, hidden by another smoke screen, jumped from the train. They were to complete the circle back of The Crank.

On went the train, now in a window the white placard with the number Thirteen. That meant to the troopers stationed beyond this zone that the signal had been seen there. They were then to close in.

Back in the Camden Station, George Coughlin had arrived alone. In his hand was a brief case in which he had a dummy package.

It was 2:58 when Coughlin saw the white cloth signal. As instructed, he threw out the brief case with the dummy package in it.

The train was barely out of sight when a short, dark-skinned man came out from behind a clump of bushes about fifty yards from the signal. He moved slowly, cautiously scanning the scene. Then, finally satisfied, he hurried to the case and picked it up.

Stowing it in his pocket, he began quickly to retrace his steps to a road that ran parallel to the tracks. But before he could reach it, he found himself facing a circle of troopers, breathless and tense.

Major Adams had left his train at Egg Harbor, commandeered a car, and now

raced up the road to where his men held their captive.

Questioning began as soon as the man was pushed into the car. But his only answers were shrugs. A man had asked him to get the package. That was all he knew, he insisted.

In a pants' pocket, a card was found. On it was printed, August Pascale, New Gretna, New Jersey.

"You live there?" demanded Adams.

The man nodded.

Hoping they might find the baby, the party started off for New Gretna.

Pascale reluctantly pointed out the house where he was living. It was an attractive two and half storied clapboard dwelling, with four acres of ground. A picket fence marked it off from the sidewalk.

Despite the man's protestations he knew nothing of the kidnaping of the Coughlin baby, hopes were high that even if they did not find the baby in the house, there would be some traces of his presence there.

Alas, their hope collapsed after a thorough search had been made. The house was sparsely furnished. Closets were empty. There were no diapers or milk bottles anywhere. Not an item that could be tied up with any baby.

But they had Pascale. And despite his protestations they took him back to Philadelphia and prison. He could stay there, the city's guest, until they had checked up on him, he was told.

Pascale, it soon came out, had a criminal record. He had not only served time in Elmira, New York, but had only been released from the County Prison in Philadelphia on March 26th of that year. When he left prison he had only \$4.26 in his pocket. Whence had come the money to buy that attractive house in New Gretna?

"Check up on his bank account, if any," an order went out. "See what he's been spending since the day Coughlin left that bag with twelve thousand dollars at the Swedeland trolley station for The Crank."

The house had been bought the end of June, just two weeks after The Crank got that bag full of bank notes. It had cost Pascale \$1,200. Also a more thorough search of the house had brought out a canceled check for \$135 made out to the former owner. It was for the furnishings, Pascale admitted.

Also when Pascale kept asking that some old clothes hanging in a closet be brought to the jail, the police became exceedingly interested in these garments. One detective noticed that the lining around the right armpit of one coat had been sewn in by an inexperienced hand. The thread ripped out, the detectives found a three thousand dollar check on a New York bank. And tucked between the lining and the outside was a note with the cipher—5 and 7
PP 641 BW 221 W 42.

It didn't take long to decode this *cipher*. Nos. 5 and 7 Park Place, New York City, was the address of a bank. Here he had bought \$1,200 worth of bonds under an alias he had used before. J.P. were the initials of still another alias, John Pons. And under this name Pascale had deposited one thousand dollars in bills at a bank at 45th and Broadway in the same city.

And at 221 West 42nd Street, a jewelry store, Pascale had bought gold studs and two diamond encrusted stickpins.

Moreover, all these moves had been made after the June 14th when that twelve thousand dollar ransom had been paid to The Crank.

Pascale had also bought a motor truck. His bank accounts amounted to over five thousand dollars. Plus the cost of the house and furnishings, the bonds and jewelry, Pascale had had in his possession over ten thousand dollars.

"Where did you get all that money?" he was asked.

"Gambling," was the only answer.

But he refused to say with whom or where.

Pascale still insisted he had picked up

the package thrown from the train to oblige a friend whom he now called Russian Joe. But in the Mt. Gretna house detectives found a towel, a twin of the one used for a signal, and a ball of twine, identical with the string with which the towel had been attached to the trees.

QUESTIONED daily, Pascale continued to deny ever having seen the Coughlin baby. He admitted, however, having been in Norristown in June. His friend, Russian Joe, had taken him there

More and more fanciful became his stories. Maybe this Russian Joe had stolen the baby. He had once talked about a woman who had lost her baby and wanted another.

But though the police in Philadelphia and New York did their best they found no trace of this Russian Joe. Nor, alas, anyone who had seen him with a baby at any time since June.

It seemed impossible to break down his denials. Never had a more unpopular prisoner been housed in the Philadelphia jail. His jail mates turned on him; they took his guilt for granted. Fraud and theft they could condone. Even murder they could understand. But kidnaping was the lowest crime of all. And they made life for Pascale miserable in their own peculiar fashion.

Only once did Pascale flinch. That was the day Mrs. Coughlin came to his cell and begged him to tell where the baby was. Even if he was dead, she wanted to know.

Pascale did not answer. He covered his face with his hands and backed to the far end of his cell. But he had been affected by the mother's tears.

And then two days later he asked to see Major Adams.

At last Pascale, The Crank, told the truth.

He, alone, had kidnaped the Coughlin baby. In Norristown, looking for work, he had been near the Coughlin home that

Saturday afternoon of June 1st. He had seen the two older boys, then Mrs. Coughlin, who brought the baby into the garden. Then had been born the plot to steal him.

He had stayed on, watching the house. He saw the Coughlins leave. But the nurse had been up. He saw the Coughlins return. Then he waited until the lights went out.

That he had brought the ladder and the blue coat from the construction job nearby, Major Adams already knew. Also that he had propped the too-short ladder on the flower boxes to make it reach the window.

Just as he picked up the baby, it began to whimper. And he had pulled the blue coat in which he had wrapped it tight around its head. He had fled across the field, as his footprints had already shown—not toward the road, but in the direction of the Schuylkill River.

Breathless, he sat down to rest. He had made no plan to take care of the baby. He had to decide what to do. The baby was quiet. And he opened up the blue coat.

To his surprise the baby did not move. Its blue eyes stared back at him. He talked to it—it did not answer. Its little head hung limp. And then he suddenly realized the baby was dead. He had smothered it in the folds of the blue coat.

He sat there less than a mile from the Coughlin home, the dead baby on his knees until almost dawn. He saw the lights go on in the Coughlin home. He could hear the racing cars of the police as they gathered at the house.

It was almost dawn when he made his

next move. The river was less than a mile away. And he started toward it.

On the water's edge he put down the baby and started looking for a heavy piece of wood or iron. He found a short piece of iron rail. Then he took off the baby's night dress and burned it. With string he tied the naked body to the rail and threw it into the river.

Then he had returned to Norristown by a roundabout way, to his room and to bed.

No one had known of his plans, said Pascale. Nor had he ever told anyone until this day.

The next morning, October 11th, Pascale was whisked out of the jail and taken to Norristown. Out at the Coughlin home, he showed the route he had taken that June night. He led the party over the field to the river's edge and pointed out the place he had thrown the body of Blakely Coughlin into the water.

A few days later a diver went down at this spot. He brought up an iron bar which he had found embedded deep in the bed of the river. At both upper and lower end were fragments of string. The baby's body had disappeared.

Within a month Pascale went on trial. Because the state could not produce the body of the baby, Pascale could not be accused of first degree murder. And the district attorney had to accept a plea of second degree murder. Pascale was quickly found guilty and sentenced to twenty years imprisonment for second degree murder and life imprisonment for kidnaping. ■■■

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NOVELETTE OF GHOST-TOWN DEATH!

*One outstretched hand
reached for the car-
bine. . . .*



The honeymoon didn't look like anything special, but the first wedding gifts were really something—sent air-express from an anonymous donor, hot from the muzzle of the unseen gun!

CHAPTER ONE

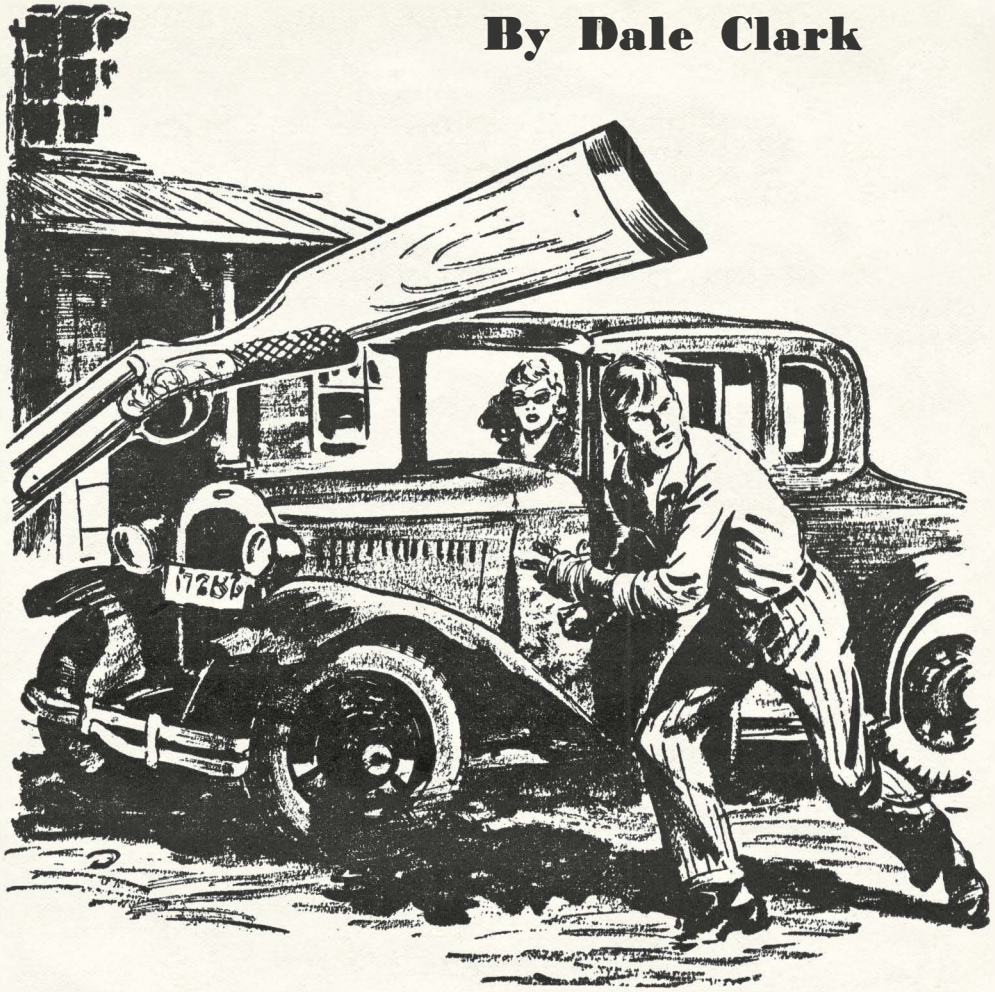
Ghost Town

FOR THE third time, she said it. "Some honeymoon!" The first time, Kid Harney had said:

"But, Irene, the honeymoon hasn't begun yet. It's still a hundred miles to Las Vegas."

The next time, he just laughed. This third time, he merely stared dourly down the long, long road. Straight as a ruler, the concrete tape stretched down a flat, griddle-

By Dale Clark



MURDER MAKES THE HONEYMOON

hot desert valley hemmed on both sides by mountains. Bare rock mountains, looking like miles-long, petrified lizards. Speckled the tan and drab gray of lizards.

Last night, Harney had urged, "Let's get married. We could hop in the car and be in Las Vegas before morning."

The trouble was the car. Kid Harney was driving what \$250 would move off a California used car lot. A rumble-seat coupé. A high, square-cornered, composition-roofed cab perched above narrow fenders and four beat-up tires. It hadn't cost him \$250 cash. The expense was largely

ten rounds fought before a small-town Fiesta Day crowd. Afterward, the promoter hadn't been able to pay off. So he said. But he owned this used car, and he offered the fighters the coupé—to be split any way they liked.

They agreed to flip a coin, winner take the coupé and pay the loser \$100 Harney won. Or did he?

Because, last night, he'd actually made only eighty miles, the last five of that behind a tow truck. And it was hard to make up the lost time today.

"It's so hot!" Irene despaired.

They'd been on the road all forenoon. Now, past two o'clock, a molten sun scalded from the cloudless sky. The breeze, coming off the desert, was no more cooling than the out-rush from an opened oven.

Kid Harney had given her the sunglasses, and his own blue eyes were growing bloodshot from squinting into the road glare. Worse was the way the dry wind chapped his bruised, puffed lips. Worst was the throbbing ache in his swollen, tape-banded left hand.

Last night, fighting a six-round semi-final in L.A., the Kid had got the bad hand, the bruised mouth, and \$200 to pay for a honeymoon.

He eased his weary foot off the gas pedal. A billboard, a big one, loomed up beside the highway.

An arrow pointed:

LEADING CITY, NEVADA
pop.902
4 M.

There was more to it, in smaller letters. The population had been 30,000—sixty or eighty years ago, 'way back during the silver lode days. There was a list of sights the motorist was invited to stop and see.

"Irene, look."

She straightened in her corner of the coupé, peered through the dark glasses, managed the flicker of a full-lipped smile.

"Some leading city!"

The Kid said, "A town of nine hundred two must have a preacher. A justice of the peace, anyway. And it's in Nevada. We could get it over with right here, I bet."

"Get it over with!" she gasped.

"I mean we could get married. And turn around, go back up into the mountains and the pines. Where it's cool."

"Gee, could we?"

"We can try."

He twisted the wheel, steered the coupé onto a side road. An oiled road. Bump-bumpety-bump.

After a while, Irene sighed, "Still, I hate to give up Las Vegas. It's romantic, like the movie stars. I can hardly send all the girls postcards from Leading City, can I?"

She'd got a glimpse of Leading City. It had one paved street—the oil surface road running down the town's middle. The side streets were so many rutted trails, leading back to cluttered 'dobe houses.

Along the main drag, the buildings were false-front, frame and tin-roof structures. Three-quarters of these, at least, were boarded up, sun-bleached and rusting ruins.

What had saved the town was tourists. The billboard had lured quite a few out-of-state cars off the main highway. Kids leaned out of these cars, licking ice-cream cones. Up and down the wooden sidewalks, women in slacks and halters window-shopped the trading posts and curio stores. Merchandise overflowed in outdoor displays of Indian weaving, baskets, silver trinkets, rock and petrified wood specimens, potted cacti. Here on the corner, half a dozen camera addicts were taking snaps of the crumbling brick, iron-shuttered, old-style jail.

Said Harney, "I don't know. Maybe it's more romantic than Las Vegas. More the real old Wild West."

Said Irene, "It's a tourist trap. That Indian stuff, I bet they ship it in from Brooklyn."

She'd learned about life the hard way; she was as suspicious as a Geiger counter. She'd graduated from dime-a-dance girl to selling cigarettes in a pretty fair nightclub, and from behind the cigarette tray to behind the hat-check counter. The soft, sweet, unsuspecting ones don't graduate, they go downhill.

In the block ahead, Kid Harney spotted Bill's Cantina holding a six-foot beer mug over the wooden sidewalk. White foam, green beer, and icicle-shaped letters spelling, *Ice Cold*.

"Okay, we don't have to get married here. But we can spare five minutes for a drink, can't we?"

He swung the car in under the beer mug. "Okay?" he repeated.

But, parked, the girl just sat slumped. Pinned between the sizzling sun heat beating on the coupé's roof, and the hot engine breath flooding up from under the dash.

IRENE was a lot more used-up than the Kid had suspected. And, as every cross-country motorist knows, the fatigue of long traveling really hits you when the car motion stops.

Harney dropped a hand on the girl's knee. "Get some food in us, we'll both feel better."

Another voice asked, "You kids all right in there?"

Harney's head jerked. Irene's eyes blinked open behind the dark glasses.

On the sidewalk, presumably to be out of the way of the auto traffic, stood a burro. Pack-saddled with rolled blankets, battered pots and frypan, a miner's pick and shovel, and a carbine slung in a worn leather boot.

The burro's owner had stepped off the sidewalk, so that he wasn't much taller than the animal. A little gnome of a man, white-whiskered, built along the lines of a Walt Disney dwarf. A little old man under a slouch hat, wearing a faded checked shirt and ancient jeans that went down into high-laced, hobnailed footwear.

"You talking to us?" said Harney.

"Yep. It worried me the young lady had a tetch of heat-stroke," said the gnome.

Kid Harney had been a club fighter too long to expect solicitude from a bystander. Or know what to do with it. Fight crowds aren't sympathetic with physical distress. The cheers go the other way.

Come on! Knock the mug's block off!

That was human nature, as he'd learned it. He peered dubiously at the gnome, and what Irene thought of him showed in her tone:

"Thank you, I'm quite well."

The old fellow got the idea. He tugged at his burro's halter rope, and the two moved on up the sidewalk.

Kid Harney said, "Gosh. A prospector."

"Maybe. But I'll bet the old duffer's a stooge, hired to parade up and down the street. A real prospector, that's what the Chamber of Commerce wants you to think—"

A tire blew out.

At least, that's what it sounded like. All the more so, because Harney was worried about the thin casings on the coupé's wheels. It took him a moment to realize the explosion had not been *that* close.

The moment was long enough for the slouch-hatted little gnome to spin around, facing his burro.

The old chap took a staggering step toward the animal. His knees buckled, and he didn't make it. Not quite. One outflung hand reached for the booted carbine, but by that time the little old man was down on the sidewalk. His hand clung to the weapon briefly, and fell away.

Harney's swollen, tape-wrapped hand pawed at the coupé's door handle. But there was a trick to it. You had to lift up, otherwise the worn mechanism slipped.

He got the door open, jumped stiffly out. It was a half dozen steps.

The gnome must have twisted around reaching for the carbine—he lay face up. His hat had tumbled away, and his eyes

were squeezed shut. Spread hugely on the faded, checked shirt front was a stain, very wet and very red.

Harney's head jerked up, and he stared along the street.

He saw no gunman, smoking shooting-iron in hand. There was just the empty sidewalk reaching toward the empty desert, and a vacant lot in which sat the nearest, and boarded-up, building.

Pivoting, the Kid peered the other way. Toward the busy business district. He met the white-faced stare of a middle-aged woman fifty feet away.

The whole episode had happened in less time than a fight referee needs to toll his ten-count. In that interval, the killer had melted clean away.

Only, he wasn't a killer—not yet, technically.

"Son," breathed a feeble whisper at Harney's feet.

The Kid looked down, and the oldster's eyes were foggily half-opened. "Bus," the gnome gasped. With the word, a plastic bubble of bright pink burst on his lips. "Tell Al." A whole mouthful of blood aerated with tiny bubbles flooded onto the white whiskers. "Is," the whisper panted. Each word an agony. "Real—black—night—"

To Barney, all of it had the impossible, dragged-out pace of a knock-out screened in slow motion. Really, the time lapse couldn't have been anything. Because, now, the watching middle-aged woman released a delayed-action scream.

Harney looked up at her. Then, when he looked down again, the gnome's eyes were peacefully quiet and gazing straight up at the sun.

The Wild West wasn't quite the tame tourist trap Irene had imagined. . . . In a dazed, half-thinking way, the Kid retrieved the slouch hat. Since it chanced to lie crown down, he caught the name lettered into its sweatband. *Mike McColl*. Moved by the impulse to shield Irene from the piti-

fully staring eyes, Harney lowered the hat over the old man's face.

Already, the woman's screams following the shot had gathered a crowd. Mostly tourists. Mostly men. Then, the local citizenry streaming from the stores and trading posts.

Lastly, there stalked into the scene a gaunt and black mustached man wearing on his suspender a town marshal's nickel star.

"Who seen it? Who's the witnesses here?"

A dozen voices and a dozen gesticulating arms pointed out the middle-aged woman.

What's she say?

"Why, Mr. Canfield, I honestly can't tell you a thing in the world. I was about to step into the car here—" The car being a station wagon, shining and showroom new under its film of road dust. A \$3500 creation of metal and wood, encircled by wrap-around gleaming bumpers, and mounted on white-wall rubber. "I was taking my keys out of my purse, and the shot made me turn around. That young man, there, jumping out of his coupé, caught my eye. I'm afraid I noticed nothing but him."

Her uplifted arm aimed at Kid Harney.

It was the look on her face. It stuck out all over her face that she didn't intend to get mixed up in the mess, and have her name written down as a witness.

The town marshal's eye measured Harney:

A squarish faced, frowning young guy with a pug nose and lips freshly battered and puffed. A middle-weight, bull-shouldered youth with rope-muscle arms hanging out of a short-sleeved tee shirt. One fist all bandaged up. A tough cookie, one who'd been in a fight very recently.

"I heard the shot," said the Kid, "but I couldn't say where it came from."

"Oh, yeah?" said the town cop. His eye moved on, estimating the coupé. The kind of jalopy fruit-pickers drive, and Okies, and shovel stiffs, and tin-can tourists.

Kid Harney, glancing at the coupé, too, saw that Irene had had the sense to slip out of it, and out of the jam. For just as good reason as the station wagon woman could possibly have. . . .

"Anybody else?" asked the marshal.

Harney stood silent; why'd he want to drag Irene into it? He wanted to be on his way fast, was all.

"I reckon," the marshal decided, "then I better hold *you* for the sheriff."

Some honeymoon!

CHAPTER TWO

The Wrong Al

THE battered brick, iron-shuttered jail was semi-dark, without managing to be in the least cool.

It seemed to Kid Harney he'd been locked away in the back cell long enough to breath the dry, stale air three times over.

Leading City wasn't the county seat, so the sheriff had to come sixty miles. The black mustached marshal had taken his wallet, keys, and watch; the Kid could only guess at the time.

He sat on a narrow wood bench and moodily massaged the bulb of his nose. His forefinger pushed down the nose's tip, nearly flat with his cheeks, then worked it around with a circular movement. From daily massage like this, he'd got the nasal cartilage as plastic as so much rubber.

He heard Irene's voice:

"I wish you'd break that habit!" she was scolding.

How many times had he explained that maybe a pug nose wasn't romantic, but it saved him from countless nosebleeds in the ring?

Irene was peering in through the iron-barred door. Harney jumped up from the bench. The marshal opened the door. He came in, then the girl, last of all a fat, businesslike man wearing a blue business suit but carrying a boat-brimmed, ten gallon hat.

Irene said, "Darling, this is Mr. Preston, the county sheriff."

Her voice sounded as if she'd managed to make friends with the businessman sheriff.

Friendly-fashion, Preston's plump hand unpocketed a pack:

"Cigarette, young fella?"

"No, thanks."

"You in training? Your girl tells me you're a professional scrapper."

"I can't do any serious fighting until this hand heals up," said Harney. "Since I've got to lay off awhile, it looked like a good time to get married and—"

Irene burst out laughing. To the sheriff, she said, "Listen to him. You'd think he was doing it on account of his hand, not his heart."

The sheriff smiled. But it didn't mean anything. Because he said, "Yes, you kids are awfully anxious to get to Las Vegas. So perhaps if you actually saw the murderer today, you wouldn't want to stick around here and identify him."

The marshal, next: "And how could you help seeing him?"

They poured it on, firing the questions.

"In broad daylight! Nothing wrong with your eyesight, is there?"

"You know what killed old Mike McCall?"

"A single ball shotgun load!"

"That means at shotgun range—"

"Inside a city block. Seventy yards, fifty yards, or closer—"

"So close it sounded like a tire on your own car!"

"Isn't it human nature to look around when you hear a shot?"

"So how come you didn't see the guy?"

Harney had one answer for all these questions:

"The old man falling down caught my eye. By the time I looked up from him, whoever pulled the job had got away."

They couldn't shake his story. He stuck to it, volunteering nothing.

He'd been raised on the wrong side of the tracks. Long before he knew a left jab from a right cross, he understood that cops made dangerous enemies and dangerous friends. Any guy suspected of being chummy with the police was suspected of being a stoolie, a thousand degrees worse than a teacher's pet.

The Kid had never had any trouble with the cops. He'd just stayed on the other side of the street from them.

He figured, the less you tell them guys, the sooner they'll have to let you go.

No matter how the marshal snarled, "We can lock you both up as material witnesses! And don't forget it!"

Irene pouted. "Don't forget something yourself. What it's like to be in love." Turning to Sheriff Preston, the pout became a smile.

She was a pretty girl. She had a slim, dancer's build, surprisingly developed in the right places. It helped. But she was too smart to risk trying to vamp her way through life.

"Let's not do or say things we'll be sorry for later. You can lock us up, yes. But what kind of witnesses would we be, if you have a murder trial in court? How much help would we be, two heart-broken kids whose honeymoon went on the rocks because you got tough and threw us in jail?"

Hostile witnesses. Soured on the law. More than anxious to help the other side.

Sheriff Preston said quickly, "I'm sure you're both on the level. You're a nice girl. And this young man of yours is a clean living sportsman. You'd both help us if you could, wouldn't you?"

The trouble was, Kid Harney knew about the fatherly type of cops.

The sheriff yielded at last. "All right, Canfield, turn them loose."

Out in the jail office, the marshal glumly returned Harney's watch and wallet and keys.

"Beat it, then. Let's see how fast you can beat it outa town."

Outside, the sun had rolled three-quarters of the way down the western sky. There was a shaded side to the street now. And a fresh lot of kids licking ice-cream cones, different women fingering the Indian rugs, new camera fiends winding film through their boxes. For, of course, the earlier tourists were a hundred or a hundred and fifty miles on their way.

Kid Harney scowled, "I'm kicking myself. We could be in Las Vegas, if I'd stayed on the highway."

"At least, you had sense enough to keep the old man's jabbering to yourself. Or they'd have used up another hour asking questions about that."

He threw a startled glance. "You heard him?"

"A word now and then. You were supposed to go into the bus station here and deliver a message to Al, weren't you?"

Following Irene's look, the Kid saw the window sign:

BUS
Albert's Lunch

There was the memory of the gnome's panting whispered. "Bus. . . . Tell Al. . . ."

The way Kid Harney saw it, babbling to the cops was one thing; delivering a man-to-man message was a different matter entirely.

HE HELD the screen door open, and Irene went in first. Into a narrow room with bare wooden benches down one side, a counter and stools along the opposite wall. At the cash register, a freckled waitress waited with a fly-swatter for a cruising fly to alight. Back by the coffee urn, a white-jacketed male swabbed the counter.

Harney walked back.

Low-voiced, "Your name Al?"

"I'm the manager. What are you selling?" White Jacket was the sharp-tongued, chinless wonder type.

"I've got a message for you. From Mike McCall."

The rāg on the counter stopped making its rounds. White Jacket's eyes bugged.

"Just before he died, with his last breath, he asked me to tell Al that—"

What halted the Kid was the warning pressure of Irene's fingers on his arm.

What she'd seen was something wrong in the chinless wonder's bug-eyed wonderment.

"I don't get it," the counterman marveled. "Nobody calls me Al. I'm Bert to everybody."

A punch to the solar plexus, it rocked the Kid. Irene was on her way, tugging at his arm.

Said White Jacket, "Besides, I'm new in this town. In the three months I've run this place, I don't think McCall ever spent ten cents—"

He saw them going.

"Hey, you didn't tell me—"

The door banged. But the voice followed them through the screen.

"Helen," it hailed the waitress, "did you get a load of that?"

Irene plunged along the wooden sidewalk at a heel pounding clip.

"It'll be all over town in an hour!"

Harney grunted, "Yeah. Wait till the marshal hears this."

"Wait? We're getting out!"

They pulled up, under the cantina's painted beer mug.

Kid Harney's coupé?

The coupe was gone.

The Kid said, "Canfield had the keys. It's what he meant by that crack, see how fast we can get out of town."

What had there been to stop the black mustached marshal from hiding the coupé, if he figured he maybe couldn't make an arrest stick?

Beep. Beep-beep.

"Look," said Irene.

Beep, said the big, broad-fronted, blue-and-white bus. *Las Vegas*, announced the

glassed-in placard above the windshield.

Irene whirled and ran toward the bus station. The Kid pounded behind her.

"Our stuff. Our suitcases in the car."

Irene's knees pumped harder inside her swirling skirt. The bus was at the curb. One passenger, a girl, stepped down to the sidewalk. She was merely an obstacle that Irene eluded with a dancer's leap, that Harney brushed past with his boxer's sidestep. Irene dived between the already folding doors. Harney shoved his shoulders in, too.

"Alice! Over here!"

The Kid swung around, stooping a little to peer through the narrow panes of the bus doors.

He saw what looked like the same spanking new, luxurious station wagon. A burly, big man with the deep mahogany tan that goes with living in the Southwest.

Harney said, "Hey, Irene; look—"

The bus was moving, swinging out into the street. Bus door-frame blotted out the mahogany-tanned giant. Bus panes framed the girl on the sidewalk.

Harney saw a sailor hat, shading a face and two shoulder-length pigtails. Blond braids, with a hair ribbon bowed to each. She was just a little girl. A school kid.

Mike McCall's voice whispered in Harney's memory. "Bus. . . . Tell Al . . . is. . . ."

The bus picked up a little speed. The driver, one hand on the wheel, used the other palm to gesture. "Ticket, lady. Ticket, sir."

"Let us out! We forgot something!"

A block away, they were back on the sidewalk. True, the Kid had practically had to lift Irene's struggling figure out of the door.

Irene said he was crazy, they could have paid cash fare instead of tickets, they could have bought in Las Vegas the few essentials.

Cried Harney excitedly, "Listen! What McCall meant wasn't, *Tell Al is. . . .* He tried to say, *Tell Alice. . . .* The Alice that

stepped off the bus, she's the one the message is for!"

CHAPTER THREE

Sweet Alice

OF COURSE, the station wagon had pulled away from the curb, and the girl was gone with it.

"We've got to ask somebody who she is, then," Harney muttered. "There can't be many Alices in a town this size—"

Irene cut in, "There'll be one less, Kid, the way you're going at this."

He stared.

And Irene said, "Remember, somebody murdered Mike McCall. Now we made that blunder in Albert's Lunch, the entire town's going to find out the old man spilled to you before he died. Just stopping strangers on the street and asking for Alice wouldn't be so good. You don't want to get her murdered, too, do you?"

The Kid's stare became a series of worried blinks. "We'll have to ask in a roundabout way. Come on, let's find a place."

He knew what kind of a place to look for; he found this kind of a place wherever he fought. Whether in the Imperial Valley towns along the border, or up Bakersfield way to the Bay cities, there was always a barbershop or maybe a poolroom with posed champions pictured on its walls, and thumbed copies of boxing magazines lying about. There was always this place where you could get into an argument who was the best man at his best, Jack Dempsey or Joe Louis.

In Leading City, the framed fight pictures hung in a little, sidestreet bar. Practically anywhere else in the town, Kid Harney's bruised mouth and his taped fist would have been met with suspicion. Here, these items were good for a drink on the house. Because the bald bartender, never missing a bout on the radio, didn't so often get to meet a fighter in the flesh.

The bartender figured it'd have been a scrap, but Dempsey would have won, all right.

Harney nursed the free drink along, and nursed the fight talk along, until he felt it safe to nudge Irene's ankle.

The girl came through with, "I see you're getting some new cars in town. Who's the big, brand new station wagon belong to?"

"Art Elson," the barman supplied.

"Who is he, the local banker?"

"He's manager of Bill Theele's Trading Post. Used to be Theele's. You been in there?"

Irene said no, and the bartender told her, "It's the biggest store in town, and it's worth seeing. Old Bill Theele was one of our real pioneers. He collected a regular museum of early day relics, and he could tell you the life history of every piece in it—it was as good as a history education to hear him."

"Mr. Theele retired and put Elston in charge, is that it?"

"Bill Theele died here a few weeks back," said the barman, "and left every damned dime to the woman that took care of him in his last sickness. So it's now Anna Loyberg's trading post, and Elston's working for her."

Irene twinkled, "Being a beautiful nurse, that's a career with a future." —

"You've never seen Anna Loyberg. I never did either, except at Theele's funeral, and then she was wearing a thick black veil. She never shows her face downtown, and from what I could tell through the veil, no wonder."

Kid Harney butted in. "Well, if the old guy had no relatives to leave his money to—"

"But he did have. There's his granddaughter, Alice Theele; he was paying her way through school. Damn' funny the old man left her out of the will."

Irene mused, "Maybe the Loyberg woman is handy with a hypo needle. She

could get him to sign a will while he was doped, couldn't she?"

"Yes," said the bartender, "but Art Elson and his wife witnessed the signing. Art's a big, tough hombre. He was in Bill Theele's former will for ten thousand cash, so he'd hardly let Anna Loyberg stick a hypo needle in *him*. From what I hear, Art's wife comes of a pretty rough outfit herself. There's gossip she's got a brother in the pen somewhere for manslaughtering a guy with a knife."

Kid Harney said, very carelessly:

"What the hell! How'd we get off the Dempsey-Louis fight, anyway? I'll pick Louis on a decision. I say if Tommy Gibbons could stay fifteen rounds with Jack—"

"Wait a minute. Tommy Gibbons—I went up to Shelby and saw that fight. Tommy wasn't a sucker for a right hand, like your Mr. Joe Louis!"

Sliding from the bar stool, Irene lifted her handbag decisively.

"Oh, Kid, come on! I can hear fight talk from you the rest of my life. When we're traveling, let's see something different for a change."

They stopped outside, in the footpath that served the sidestreet as a sidewalk.

"It's no good," Irene said. "It was Mrs. Elson that did the screaming after the murder. She saw us both, and Elson saw us get aboard the bus."

"We could try getting Alice on the phone."

They went back to the main drag, into the cantina, and tried the phone, Irene doing the talking—"they might think I'm one of local friends."

She turned from the wall phone. "Alice isn't there. She's staying at her grandfather's house."

"Okay. Try calling there."

"Yes, but suppose Anna Loyberg answers the phone and says she's Alice Theele? How do I tell the difference?"

Leave it to Irene to think of all the angles! The Kid brooded over this one.

"Tell her to meet us somewhere."

Thus, Irene into the phone, her voice a schoolgirlish falsetto:

"Hello . . . I'd like to speak to Alice, please . . . Who? Why, I'm Irene. A friend of hers from California. Yes, just passing through . . . Hello, Alice? You remember me! Well, anyway, I want you to meet me right away. At Mike McCall's shack. Right away."

Harney asked, "What made you think of McCall's shack?"

Irene shrugged. "I had the privilege of going for a ride in the sheriff's car while you were locked up, darling. The shack's way out beyond the edge of town, and nobody will notice if we meet there."

Irene thought of everything.

It was her idea that they should walk boldly up the main drag, right past the jail door—"because nobody pays any attention to tourists on this street. It's trying to sneak through the alleys we'd attract attention."

THE shack was a tiny structure, apparently built of lumber and tin salvaged from the tumbledown ruins of Leading City. The architecture seemed borrowed from a box-car—a low oblong building, with a stovepipe rising through its flat roof. In front, the burro grazed patiently at the scant desert herbage. At the doorstep, a saddlehorse snorted as the Kid and Irene approached. The door opened, revealing Alice Theele.

Kid Harney gulped.

There had been time for Alice Theele to unbraid her blond pigtailed, combing out her hair in a rippling, shoulder-length flood.

She had changed to a costume of pearl buttoned shirt, flared riding breeches, and glistening high-heeled boots. The top three, unbuttoned pearl buttons left a deep V in the shirtfront.

"Hell," said Irene softly, "I thought she was just a little kid."

Alice Theele nibbled at her lipstick coated underlip, tapped a riding crop against her

glistening riding boot, waiting for them. Waiting for them to speak first.

Harney blurted it out, "I guess you know what happened to Mike McCall?"

The blond girl nodded. "I rather suspected it was that," she said in a throaty, finishing-school trained contralto.

"I was there when it happened."

Alice Theele said, "I suspected that, too."

"The old man told me to tell you something. He said something about the bus and Alice, which must have meant you."

"I'm sure it did," the girl in the doorway said. "I had a postcard from Mike, asking me to come home at once. What else did he say?"

"It was, *Tell Alice real black night.*"

Alice Theele frowned.

Irene said, "Is that all?"

"He died before he could get out any more," Harney said.

From Irene:

"Kid, it must be you're punch-drunk before your time! That isn't a message. It's nonsense. If I'd realized all you heard was—"

"I think," said Alice Theele, "I know what it means." She whirled around, back into the low-ceilinged, one-room shanty. She was on tiptoe at a corner cupboard when Harney and Irene entered. In excitement, her voice forgot its finishing-school accent.

"My granddaddy and Mike McCall were old cronies. They used to play chess together. Mike carved a beautiful set of chessmen and gave them to granddad. It was in the will that Mike should get back those— Here, it's this box."

She brought the box to the oilcloth covered table, dumped out the contents. The pieces were elaborate. Indian scouts, replica log forts, U. S. cavalrymen on their mounts, Spanish padres, Indian princesses, and Kit Carson figures.

At any other time, the Kid would have marvelled at the workmanship. Ranging from two to five inches high, each figurine

seemed modeled in perfectly exact detail.

"Mike was an artist. He made things like this, for sale at the trading post, and with the money he grubstaked himself to prospect for gold he never found . . . Anyway, the Indian scouts are the pawns. The forts are the rooks, the padres are the bishops, and the cavalrymen must be the knights. Black knight means one of these—" Alice caught up one of the dark colored pieces "Ooh!"

"What's wrong?"

"Look!" She turned the chessmen upside down.

Originally each piece had been fitted with a glued base felt circle, so's not to scratch the board. The felt had been ripped away, exposing a hollowed cavity.

"I noticed it was lighter than the others as soon as I picked it up. The bottoms are loaded with lead so they won't tip over easily. Mike," said the blond girl, "took out the lead and put in a message for me. But it's gone. Somebody else beat us to it."

Never mind the lipstick; she was a fifteen-year-old school kid, with frank tears of disappointment in her eyes.

"Hey," muttered Kid Harney. "Don't." He made an awkward stab at patting the kid's shoulder.

A funny thing. The fifteen-year-old flung around, following the inner curve of the Kid's hard-muscled arm, so that her blond head came to a nestling rest on the Kid's shoulder. She quivered against him, sobbing.

Harney said, "There, there. Cut it out. We'll help you; sure, we will."

Then he saw Irene's face. Irene's compressed lips had lost their soft fullness. Her cheeks looked a little pale behind the round dark circles of the sun-glasses.

"Pardon me," said Irene angrily, "while I bow out of the picture."

"Huh?"

"You've delivered your message. The rest isn't your responsibility, is it?"

"Not exactly, but—"

"You're not the town marshal or the

sheriff. You're just a guy on his way to get married, remember?"

Harney said, "Yes, sure, but Mike McCall didn't go to the marshal or the sheriff. So maybe it isn't such a wise stunt, leaving it up to them."

"Mike McCall," said Irene, "was probably crazy with the heat. Why, if he had such an important message, did he hide it in a chessman? Why not write a letter, instead of a postcard, and put his message in the letter?"

She thought of everything. Even when she didn't want to, as right now.

"Damn it," said Irene, grimly rueful, "come out of the clinch, you two. I've just thought of an angle. Young lady, I'd like a look around inside your granddad's house."

Why?.

Irene wouldn't say.

"Oh, don't bother me with questions. I'm doing some heavy thinking."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Last Move

IT WAS away at the back of town. An adobe, two-story house, built inside a thick adobe wall. The front door looked as if it'd been built to withstand a siege of battering rams. Its hinges squeaked like trapped mice.

So Anna Loyberg heard them come in. A suspicion-filled voice assailed them:

"Alice, who's with you? Who are these people?"

Kid Harney had to crane his neck to see Anna Loyberg, peering down at them from the top of the hallway stairs. The nurse was a five-foot, ten-inch beanpole, draped all in mourning black. The dress collar fitted up to the angular chin, the sleeves fell to the knuckles, and the skirt brushed the stair landing's floor. The face was gimlet eyes and chalk-white, heavily talced cheeks.

Kid Harney would have hated to be sick and have her hanging around his bedside.

Alice said what Irene had instructed her to say:

"Miss Loyberg, I'd like you to meet my last year history teacher—"

"Teacher?" The gimlet eyes questioned Irene.

"Yes, and as a pedagogue, I'm too utterly fascinated by pioneer relics. I understand dear Alice's grandfather had the most marvelous collection."

Where had Irene picked up this flow of language?

The movies, Harney guessed.

The gimlet eyes questioned the Kid, too. "Is he a history teacher, too?"

"Football coach." The Kid grinned.

"Football coach? In a private girls' school?"

"It was last year I taught in Alice's school," said Irene. "He's from my school this year. Miss Loyberg, you don't mind, do you, if Alice shows me the room where her grandfather spent his last illness? I seem to see him lying there, surrounded by all the treasures he loved the very best."

The voice snapped, "The museum's in the trading post, not here in my private home."

"I know, but surely Mr. Theele owned some especially cherished antiques as personal possessions, that he kept here in the house and didn't have on public display?"

Anna Loyberg's reply came pettishly "I've cleaned all that junk out of the house. If you want to snoop around the carriage house, you'll find piles of trash there."

Anna Loyberg wanted to get rid of them that was clear to Kid Harney.

Irene said sweetly, "Thank you—it's too too kind."

The carriage house was another adobe structure, across a hundred feet of sun-baked rear patio, just inside the back of the outer wall.

It had huge, swinging doors into which a smaller door had been cut.

Inside loomed a mountain of museum pieces. In the middle of it stood the weathered wreck of a twelve passenger Overland stagecoach. Off to one side was a tarpaulin covered shape that might have been a baby Overland stagecoach. An ancient cannon pointed its snout up from a two-wheeled, broken-spoked gun-carriage. There were music boxes, spinning wheels, and miner's cradles; there were saddles, soup kettles, and buffalo rides; there were deer heads and elk antlers and a stuffed grizzly bear. There were boxes, big and small, piled over and around all of the rest.

"It'd be some job to find a needle in this haystack," said Irene.

"It'd lick Dempsey and Louis both," the Kid nodded.

Said Irene, "But we've got to do it."

"Do what? I don't even know what you're looking for."

"I've got an idea somewhere in this mess is a *real* black knight."

The Kid mumbled, "Huh?"

"It's probably in one of these boxes in front, if Anna Loyberg's been throwing things out of the house lately."

"Huh?"

"Empty out a few boxes for me," Irene ordered.

So the Kid did.

And Irene pawed through the scattered contents, old magazines and calendars and Currier & Ives prints—stovepipe hats and celluloid collars and Congress shoes—a saber in a mildewed scabbard, a military forage cap, a long-ago style of blue military uniform.

She straightened, the military tunic at arm's length.

"I thought so," she said.

Alice Theele said, "Why, that must be my great-grandfather's uniform. He was a soldier 'way back during the Indian wars."

The Kid was listening to Irene, though.

"What got me," said Irene, "was the detail in those chess pieces. The way they were carved right down to the tiniest but-

ton. As if Mike McCall worked from a model. As if he copied old pictures, or even the actual costumes of Indians scouts and padres and cavalrymen."

Harney's chapped, bruised, puffed lips worked into a grin.

"Check! McCall's message is hidden away in this old uniform—"

"Before we look," said Irene, "I'll bet you. You're wrong."

The Kid's lips gave up grinning.

Waiting for Irene, he felt like a live minnow on a fish-hook.

Irene was bland. In no hurry at all. She lectured away. "Remember what I said at the shanty. If McCall had any message, he could have put it in a letter. So it must be he didn't have one. He just knew where one was. He'd never read it, never seen it, and so far as he knew, it was where he couldn't lay hands on it."

Harney gestured. "Okay, let's look."

"Wait. I said I'd bet you this won't be Mike McCall's message. Now I'll parley the bet into a daily double. Remember how the bartender described old Bill Theele as a dying man, under the thumb of a nurse who could shoot him full of hop and make him sign anything she pleased?"

The way Kid Harney remembered, this was Irene's idea. Not the bartender's. But he didn't argue the point.

Said Irene, "It's how a dying man could get a message to anyone, with Anna Loyberg guarding his every move. How could he?"

It was getting to be an agony for Harney, as when a fighter's taking a beating on the ropes and it seems the bell will never end the round.

"The old will left the chess set to McCall," ran on Irene. "And such a tiny item, Anna Loyberg wouldn't change. She'd think, better put it in the new will, too. So's to look more on the level. One place for a message would be to dig the lead weight out of a chessman and tuck in a little folded piece of paper.

"You see the risk, though. The Loyberg woman herself might notice that chessman weighed less than the others. Therefore, the message had to be just a hint which she wouldn't understand—a hint about a 'real black knight,' she'd never figure out but maybe Mike McCall might."

Irene still wasn't through. With the hand that wasn't holding the coat, she flipped off her dark glasses.

"And," said she, "there was one other way. Supposing Bill Theele could crawl out of bed, he might hide a message in this old heirloom, this uniform. An old coat Anna Loyberg would throw on the junk heap. But which Alice might rescue, being her great-granddad's uniform. If Alice did, she'd find a paper hidden down in its pocket—" Here it was. At last.

Irene let the old cavalryman's coat fall. She'd been holding the note folded in her palm all the time.

SHE unfolded it. Kid Harney on one side, the blond girl on the other, moved in for a look.

Something in Irene's voice stopped them.

"I'm sorry," Irene said. Dully. No pep in her now.

Her fingers closed, crumpling the paper into a ball.

"It's nothing but a dry-cleaner's bill, ten years old," Irene said.

Her fingers opened and the ball of paper fell to the packed earth floor.

The trio looked at each other.

It was like in the ring, when a fighter's sure he's won the decision but the referee raises the other guy's hand.

"Well, I lose both bets," said Irene. She gave the ball of paper a vicious little kick, the way a disgusted race fan would treat a losing pari-mutuel ticket.

There was some more stunned silence.

Then the carriage house door whispered open. The mahogany-tanned man who'd been in the station wagon at the bus station looked in.

"Alice," said big Art Elson, "my wife's in the car out in front. She wants you to have dinner and stay at our house tonight. We both think you'd feel more at home with us than under Miss Loyberg's roof."

Just a big, friendly, soft-voiced, fatherly guy. He sounded regretful.

"The truth is," said Elson, "Miss Loyberg phoned for us to come and get you. She's upset because you invited these people, strangers, into her house. You'd better go with Mrs. Elson, and I'll try to soothe down that hellion nurse."

Irene sighed, "Come on, Kid, the man says we're trespassing."

Out in front, seated under the station wagon wheel, was the middle-aged woman who'd screamed when Mike McCall died.

She stared.

"Lift," offered Alice Theele, "down-town?"

"No," decided Irene, "we'll walk."

Alice climbed in. The station wagon rolled on ahead. Bumping along, because Elson's wife watched the rear view glass instead of the rutted street.

Harney grumbled, "The dame spotted me."

"What's the difference now?" Irene kicked a pebble. Caught up with it, and kicked it a second time.

"I'm sorry the way I acted, Kid. Tearing you down. Showing your blonde who was the boss."

The Kid said, "My blonde? That fifteen-year-old baby?"

"Babe. She looks sixteen to me. She looked older than that, cuddled on your shoulder."

"Ahh! You couldn't be jealous of her!" he said.

"I could be jealous of what she'll be in a year or so. And how do I know this is the last time she'll need a shoulder to cry on? I don't want her remembering my husband as the big hero who fixes things for dolls in distress. She might look you up again some time."

Irene thought of everything. Including the damnedest things.

She sighed, "Still, at the pay-off, I couldn't bring myself to break the kid's heart. Tell her what was really on that paper."

Harney stopped, round-eyed.

"It was a will. Leaving everything to her, nothing to anybody else."

Harney made just a round-mouth, no sound at all.

Said Irene, "You remember what the bartender said? Art and Mrs. Elson witnessed the other will. This one wasn't witnessed by anybody. So why tell the kid? It wasn't worth the paper it was written on—"

"Was it handwriting, though?"

"Yes, but why?"

"I'll tell you something. I saw a guy killed in the ring once. He didn't leave a will. Just a letter to his mother, in case anything happened to him. It turned out that was just as good as a will, if it was all handwriting and not typewritten. They call it a holographic will, and probably the Nevada law is the same as California. It wouldn't need any witnesses' names on it."

They whirled around, racing each other. Up the street, into the driveway past the adobe house, into the back building.

Irene peered at the dirt floor and wailed, "It's gone!"

"Maybe it blew off in a corner some place. Where'd you kick it to?"

The Kid saw something peeping under the tarpaulin in the corner. He jumped and grabbed up the tarp.

It was nothing but a crumpled, empty cigarette pack.

But he'd raised the tarpaulin high enough to get the glimpse of a rubber tire under it.

Who ever heard of rubber tires on a Wild West stagecoach?

Harney snatched with a wide arm motion, hurling the tarp aside.

What he uncovered was his own, \$300-bargain, used car lot coupé.

"We've got something on them," said Irene. "Motor vehicle theft."

"We'd better get something off them. The will, before they burn it."

HARNEY ran back across the baked, rear courtyard. He tackled a back door. It let him into a kitchen, empty. A dining room next. Then the hallway. Across the hallway a big front room with a big black-throated fireplace.

He'd made so much noise that they were both on their feet, waiting for him. Anna Loyberg, a swathed black figure with crossed, folded arms. Elson, a towering, two hundred and twenty pounder, with his fists double and ready.

"What do you want in here?" said the mahogany-tanned big man.

"Piece of paper. Hand it over." Harney reached out his right. Then he feinted with his taped left.

After that, he fired the right at Elson's heavy jaw.

It'd have been a one-punch fight, if this worked.

It didn't work.

Elson got up his guard, partly blocking the Kid's right. The Kid's fist landed high. He put knuckle prints on the big guy's cheekbone, shook him up, but didn't drop him.

What happened was that Elson went into a crouch, both hands up, and both hands open. A two hundred and twenty pound, rough-and-tumble, barroom wrestler looking to get a grip on the Kid.

He said, "It's in my pocket. Come and get it."

Harney flicked out his left. No good. Elson was watching the other hand, the unbandaged one.

The Kid threw the right. Elson guarded with one arm, and made a grab with the other hand. He missed, but his fingernails ripped shreds of skin from Harney's right forearm.

Harney skipped back. He went in and

drew back again, almost shadow-boxing.

Elson was a tough hombre, just as the barkeeper had said. But he wasn't in training. After a couple of minutes those big arms would get tired of staying up, guarding against fainted blows. His tired guard would drop a little and—

"Help me," said Elson. "Get him in a corner."

Harney's glance flicked away to Anna Loyberg's somberly draped figure. He saw a hand slip into a black sleeve and come out, followed by eight inches of knife blade.

The Kid saw what he had to do.

He fainted with the right toward Elson's belt, drawing down the guard. He threw the swolled left hand in a hook with his twisting shoulders, his hips, and his leg muscles all behind it.

It hurt Kid Harney far more than the big man. Because Elson didn't feel a thing. It was clean on the button and lights out for him.

What felt like liquid fire ran all the way up to the Kid's left shoulder. It was as if the taped fist was stuffed full of aching teeth, and each tooth had a dentist's drill boring into it.

Harney's knees buckled and his stomach turned over.

He sagged over Elson's body.

Anna Loyberg came across the room, running, holding up the black skirt with one hand, pointing the knife with the other.

And the Kid couldn't move.

He was out on his feet, out from the sheer shock, as if he'd shoved his left hand into a whirring meat grinder.

He saw the steel flash, and the blood spurt. But he didn't feel a thing. It wasn't his blood.

Irene had run into the room, and she'd whacked Anna Loyberg across the arm with the cavalry saber which went with Great-grandfather Theele's cavalry uniform.

As Anna Loyberg writhed on the floor, a wig fell off and showed a bald, shaved

pate. Some of the thick, coated-on talc wore off, and showed a blue, five o'clock shadow.

LATER on, it was seven o'clock shadow while in the jail office, Harney and Irene listened to Sheriff Preston and Marshal Canfield kick around the pieces:

"That Loyberg nurse—let's start with her—"

"Only she wasn't a *her*—"

"Or a real trained nurse—"

"She's a he. The brother of Elson's wife. The brother that did time in the pen."

Said the sheriff, "It started with Art Elson, then. Because when old Bill Theele took sick, it was Elson brought in this jail-bird dressed up as a nurse."

Said the marshal, "So the three—Elson, his wife, and the wife's brother—could split the whole estate, and not get just a measly ten thousand dollars."

"And pretty damned near got away with it—"

"Only, Mike McCall took it into his head to go prospecting again. To raise the grub-stake, he decided to sell that chess set. And noticed the black knight was missing a weight. So he found the note—"

"And showed it to Art Elson, I'll swear," said the sheriff.

"I'll bet he did," agreed the town marshal. "He figured, and we all figured, the Elsons got a dirty deal. The same as Alice Theele got. Mike had the same reason to tell Art that he had to write Alice a post-card."

"Better reason. Art grubstaked him."

The sheriff turned to the Kid.

"You see, son, Mike McCall was leading a pack-saddled burro down the street today. And a man doesn't load up a month's supplies just to meet a bus. It's obvious the old man had gold fever. He was headed for the desert, and so it's obvious he trusted Elson to meet Alice. It works out, he must have told Art Elson all he knew or suspected."



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New Detective Magazine

The marshal stared at the Kid. "Then, bang!"

"A shotgun banging! Close up—"

"So close Mike saw who shot him, and he knew he'd been double-crossed!"

Both officers stared at Harney. "Kid, where'd that shot come from?" one asked.

Harney shook his head. "All I saw was the old man falling."

"You're sure? You're not just trying to get out of town fast?"

"I'm sure."

The marshal tugged his black mustache. "All right, we'll tell you. Remember that empty, boarded-up building in that vacant lot? There's a trap-door to the roof. Mister Art Elson was up there with a single-ball loaded shotgun. And Elson's wife was down in the street to scream. Maybe give a phony description of the killer—until you butted into the picture. You're sure you didn't happen to glance up and see a shotgun poking out of that roof?"

"I didn't, no."

The sheriff said, "They must have been afraid of it, though. Stealing your car—"

"So they'd be sure of getting a shot at you before you left town, if it turned out you saw or heard too much."

Irene's handbag clasp popped open. She drew out a vanity case. "Speaking of leaving town—"

"Yeah. You can go."

Kid Harney came to his feet. Irene was taking her time, powderpuffing the suntan-base talc onto her face. He hesitated.

"One thing gripes me."

"What?" the sheriff bent forward.

"It's why that Loyberg fake chased us out of the house. To the very place the stolen car was hidden."

Irene answered, out of half of the mouth she was lipsticking.

"I know. You officers, what's the first thing you look for when you go to arrest a man?"

(Continued on page 104)

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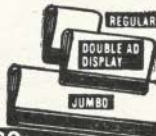
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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 102)

Said the marshal, "If he's got a gun. Shoulder or hip."

"Mmm. And you, Kid, when you climb in the ring with another fighter?"

"Fat. Little wrinkles that show he's not in shape."

Irene finished the lipstick job. She went to work on her eyebrows. "You men, you wouldn't look twice at anything Anna Loyberg's age, in that black dress. And Alice was supposed to be just a kid. So probably she or you wouldn't tumble there was the worst secret of all hidden in the house.

"Ann Loyberg herself—*herself*."

"But when I walked in—well! Women have a hellish habit of simply picking each other to pieces!" She closed the vanity into the handbag, closed the handbag on it.

"Anna Loyberg *herself* couldn't risk having a woman in the same house for five minutes, picking to pieces the permanent wave and the hair-do and the fingernails and the makeup, and the couple of hundred catty little details any woman notices about any other woman!" ■ ■ ■

CRIMINAL CAPERS

(Continued from page 12)

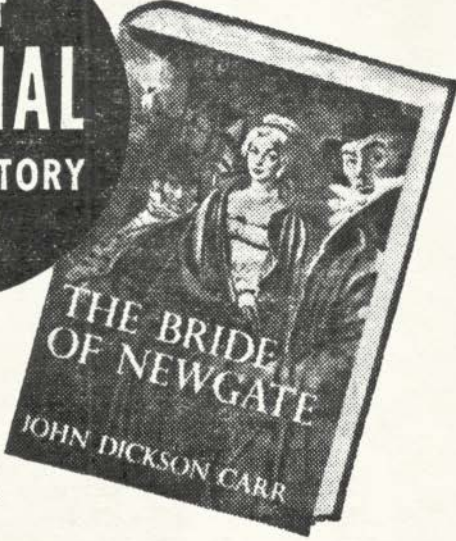
FORTUNETELLERS sometimes hit the nail right on the head. Take the case of one swami who told a customer in New York City that she would be very successful in her new profession. It turned out that the fortuneteller was correct. The customer happened to be a rookie policewoman assigned to clean up the crystal gazing racket!

A CAUTIOUS Chicago woman wrote to Connecticut police that she intended to marry a former resident of that state, but first wanted to check up on his past. Two days later she received her answer when grateful police arrived and took the man back to the county jail, from which he had escaped some time previously!

(Continued on page 112)



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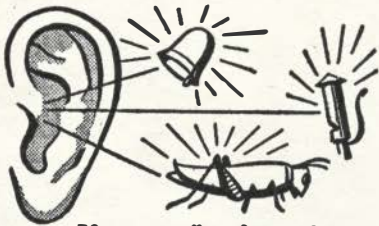
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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 49)

his shoulder. Algie blinked, shook his head, and grasped Danny almost gently by the lapels of his jacket.

"Now," Algie said. "Now."

He worked slowly. Methodically. Like a man who enjoyed his work. Holding Danny easily with his left hand, he hit him three times in the mouth with his right. There was a kind of cadence to the blows. One. Two. Three. Danny's bruised lips split over his teeth. He felt blood on his chin and a warm trickle in his throat. Gagging, he brought his right knee up with all his strength into Algie's groin. The sadist whinnied with pain and smashed his huge fist against Danny's temple. In a searing red world, Danny went limp, hanging a dead weight in Algie's grip. At the door, Isadore stirred.

"You hit him too hard, Algie. He can't talk if he's unconscious."

Algie tugged, trying to get Danny's feet under him.

"Stand up," he said. "Stand up, nice boy."

"Let him lie down," Isadore said. "He'll come around in a minute. And next time don't hit him so hard. Try this on him."

Cold water splashed sharply into Danny's face, stinging as it ran into his split lips. He felt Algie's hand at his chest again, felt himself dragged to his feet.

"You better be smart, chum," Isadore said. "Algie can work like this all night. Algie loves his work."

"Go to hell," Danny said.

Isadore shrugged. "Okay, Algie."

THE red world again. The cadenced smashing of bone upon bone. Searing pain and retching sickness ebbing slowly into silence and night. A long time later he came back to consciousness a second time and lay still upon his back, listening intently.

The door from the other room opened

Dead Ringer for Joe!

suddenly to project a wide path of light across the bedroom floor. With a wounded animal's instinct cunning, Danny closed his eyes and lay still. Mandy's perfume was strong in his nostrils. It made him sick. He felt her toe exploring his ribs. The floor creaked under the ponderous weight of Martin Hicks.

"I'm afraid Algje played a little too rough, but I think our friend will be ready to talk when he comes around again."

"Too bad," she said. "Under different circumstances he might have been a nice guy for fun."

"Never mix business and pleasure, Mandy. Which reminds me that you were a long time getting here. Why?"

"I finished my business, didn't I? I hung around for the pleasure."

Her feet moved back to the door and out of the room, followed by the heavy ones of Martin Hicks. The door closed behind them. With infinite care, Danny rolled over onto his stomach and drew his knees up beneath his body. On hands and knees, he remained for a minute quietly, fighting nausea. Then he began to crawl. He seemed to have gone a mile when his fingers moved off carpet onto tile. Bathroom. Finding the lavatory, he reached up and caught hold of cool porcelain. Painfully pulling himself to his feet, he stood holding desperately to the lavatory and retching in deep, shuddering gasps. When his head felt a little clearer, he moved over to the tub and stepped in.

There was a small window set high in the wall above the tub. Under pressure, the lower pane moved up easily. Straining, fighting persistent sickness, Danny pulled himself up slowly into the opening. He crouched there for a long minute while the world receded and came back, then he stood achingly erect on the ledge, braced by the pressure of his hands on both sides of the casement. An iron fire escape angled down in front of him. Stiffly, his body fell out and down, his hands clutching the cold



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New Detective Magazine

metal. For a precarious minute he dangled ten stories above a paved court. Then he was up on the steps and down.

At the corner he located himself by the street signs and moved off in the direction of the club where the hoods had picked him up.

It took him half an hour to get back to the club. Down the street, three cabs were lined at the curb. Two yellows and a checkered. He skipped the checkered and went up to the first yellow. The driver's eyes popped as Danny's face appeared at the window.

"I know, Walt. I look like hell. Never mind about it. Tell me. Did you start to pick up a guy and a dame earlier tonight and get cut out by a black Cad?"

"Sure, sure. Guy about your size. Little dame. A real looker. The guy got hustled into the Cad and the dame went back into the club."

"Did you happen to see the little dame again?"

"Matter of fact, I did. Her and another guy came out a little later, and I took them to the guy's place."

"Will you take me there?"

"You got the fare, Mac, I'll take you any place."

The place was an old brownstone walkup in a dark street. Not much of a place, but all right for a guy who wanted to stay inconspicuous. Danny crawled out of the cab and showed a fin.

"Wait for me, Walt, and it's all yours."

He went up front steps into a dimly lighted hall. At the end of the hall was a door with a little sign that told him to ring for the landlady. He went back and rang. After a long time a thin woman in a dirty pink wrapper opened the door and stood looking at him. Her mouth was open for invective but snapped with a startled rattle of plates when she saw his face.

"There's a guy lives here," Danny said. "I don't know what he calls himself, but

Dead Ringer for Joe!

I think he looks like me. Just superficially. Same build. Same color hair. Things like that."

"It could be Mr. Waco. You might look something like him, if you had a face."

"Where's his room?"

The woman started to protest, but Danny cut her short.

"It's me or the cops," he said.

That was enough. The woman brushed past Danny and shuffled up the hall to the worn stairway.

"Front room on the next floor," she said

Danny went up ahead of her and tried the door to Waco's room. It wasn't locked. He pushed the door open and found a switch inside on the wall. In the weak light of a small bulb, he looked at Mr. Waco and saw without much surprise that Mr. Waco was dead. Stepping closer, he saw that Waco had been shot four times. Once in each leg, between knee and hip. Once in the left shoulder. Once between the eyes. The body was slumped on the floor in front of a chair. The shots had been placed with deliberation. To Danny the first three shots looked like persuasion. The fourth one showed that Mr. Waco had finally been persuaded and was of no further value.

Danny turned to the landlady. Her new green complexion didn't go so well with her pink wrapper.

"There were four shots," he said. "You hear them?"

She shook her head and he grunted.

"It could be you didn't. The walls in this old house are probably thick. Small calibre gun with a silencer. Maybe no one else was home on this floor. Look. You call the cops. When they get here, tell them to send someone to the apartment building at the corner of Eleventh and Congress. Apartment 1003. Got it?"

She nodded and Danny went back downstairs to the yellow cab.

"Eleventh and Congress," he said.

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New Detective Magazine

THIS time he went up in the passenger elevator at the front. It was faster.

At the door numbered 1003 he knocked and waited. Not long. It opened and he stepped in.

"Hello, baby," he said. "You won't recognize this face, but we've met before."

Mandy turned and walked back into the room. Even now, with an ache, he admired the small and perfect body in its revealing gown.

"I sort of hoped you'd get away," she said.

"I'll bet you did. It would've been almost as good as having me beat to death. Sorry to disappoint you, baby."

In his chair, Martin Hicks stirred his massive body. It began to shake from his humorless whispered laughter.

"Isadore and Algie are out looking for you. Good joke on them. Thanks for returning, Joey."

Danny turned to him and twisted his swollen lips into what might have been a grin.

"You won't thank me, hippo. And for the last time, the same's Danny. Danny Quincy. Ask Mandy. I look a little like Joey Palmetto. Same build. Same hair. Enough resemblance to be a fall guy to fool a bunch of punks who've never seen the real Joey. While you were wasting time on me, Mandy was working on the McCoy. Mandy's a smart gal. Smarter than you, hippo."

The vast bulk of Martin Hicks was very still. His little eyes burned in fatty sockets.

"Go on."

"Sure. When your morons hauled me off from the club, Mandy went back in and picked up the real Joey Palmetto. For a gal like Mandy, it was easy. I'll bet he even thought it was his own idea to take her to his room. It's in a brownstone in a street where you wouldn't expect to find a fancy crook like Palmetto. He called himself Waco. He's there now, incidentally. Dead.

Dead Ringer for Joe!

Shot four times. Each leg, shoulder, between the eyes. Why should a guy be shot like that? Maybe the first three were to make him spill something. Something like where some pearls might be hidden. The shooting was done by a small calibre gun with a silencer. Like the one Mandy has."

Her smile was friendly, but the gun didn't add anything to it. He knew the smile would still be friendly when she shot him.

"You're a clever boy, honey. You lie real well. Too bad it won't pay off. I don't know anything about a guy named Waco in a brownstone. There hasn't been any double-cross. You can search me if you want to, you won't find anything."

Danny laughed.

The fat man had guts. Turning to Johnny, he lifted his arms in a brief gesture and let them fall again to the arms of the chair.

"My apologies, Mr. Quincy. I did you an injustice."

Measuring the distance to Mandy, he drew his aching muscles taut for a last desperate expenditure of energy. As he drove toward her, Martin Hicks heaved upward in his chair, a massive distraction. The gun swung to what Mandy felt was the greater danger, and the single bullet ploughed into fat. Danny's fist caught the fine bone of her jaw and slammed her back to the wall. She stood there for a second against the wall, as if she were nailed, then slumped slowly down. In his chair, head bent forward until his chins were folded against his chest, Martin Hicks stared with wide eyes at a small hole he didn't see.

"You should have got us both, honey," Danny said. "Now it's too late forever."

And his tired body relaxed as his ears picked up the muffled sound of a heavy foot in the hall outside. The sudden pounding on the door was thunderous. With a deep feeling of relief that was really a final capitulation to exhaustion, Danny thought that no one but a cop could knock like that. ■ ■ ■

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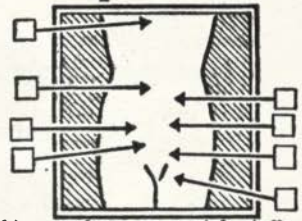
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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 104)

It is against the law in Montgomery, Ala., to refuse to leave a burning building.

A TRIAL was scheduled to begin in a South Carolina court when it was discovered that the chief witness was missing. An attendant was assigned to go about calling the name of the missing man, and finally a voice answered from the jury box. Through error the witness had been sworn in on the jury, and the judge was forced to declare a mistrial!

IN MUSKEGON, Mich., a 64-year-old woman (apparently in her second childhood) was arrested recently—for throwing snowballs at a policeman!

In St. Mary's, O., thieves, who (using hatchets, hammers, crowbars) labored for hours trying to break into an office safe, nearly blew their tops when, upon finally breaking into the safe, they discovered that all it contained was—14 cents!

In Coeur d'Alene, Ida., a man came up with quite an excuse for busting the law. "I got tired of waiting for the bus," quoth he—after police grabbed him hurrying home in a stolen auto!

In Albuquerque, N. M., police gave chase, so two auto thieves abandoned the stolen vehicle—and fled. The law, however, didn't have very much trouble tracking them down. In fleeing, one thief had left a perfect clue behind: a camera—containing his snapshot!

In Detroit, a bus driver took himself quite a busman's holiday. During his vacation, he was arrested—for stealing a bus!

In Waco, Tex., a thief, surprised stealing clothing, was in such a hurry to get away that he ran right out of his shoes!

Criminal Capers

In Albuquerque, N. M. a judge, drawing names of persons who were to serve on a jury in a murder trial, disqualified—but promptly—one of the first persons whose names he drew on the grounds that that person would've been highly prejudiced. And how! The name was that of the defendant himself.

In Rock Island, Ill., the thief who broke into a salesman's parked auto, and made off with 110 gloves, ended up with nothing but a white elephant for his trouble. All the gloves were for the left hand! And so once again crime did not pay!

In Lincoln, Nebr., a jewel thief (female) was quickly jailed—after foolishly wearing some of the pilfered "ice" to (of all places) a policemen's ball!

In Cromer, England, a meek, little man, who had killed his spouse, explained it this way to the police: "I shot my wife because she told me to shoot her—and I always did what she told me to do."

In Gary, Ind., a grocer took a shot at a prowler. Missed. The prowler, however, did not get away. The bullet came so close—that he fainted in fright and was easily captured!

IN ST. PAUL, MINN., burglars burst into a tavern one night, searched seven out of eight drawers behind the bar, and—upon not finding anything worth-while stealing in them—left in utter disgust without even bothering to open the eighth drawer. That last drawer contained \$400 in cash!

IN FORT WORTH, Tex., the hungry prowler who raided a henhouse and ran off with five eggs, must have received quite a surprise when he tried to break them open for frying. All the eggs were wooden!

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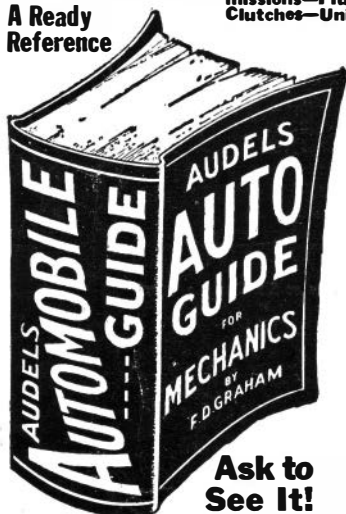
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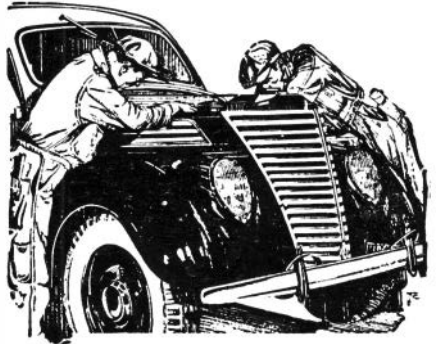
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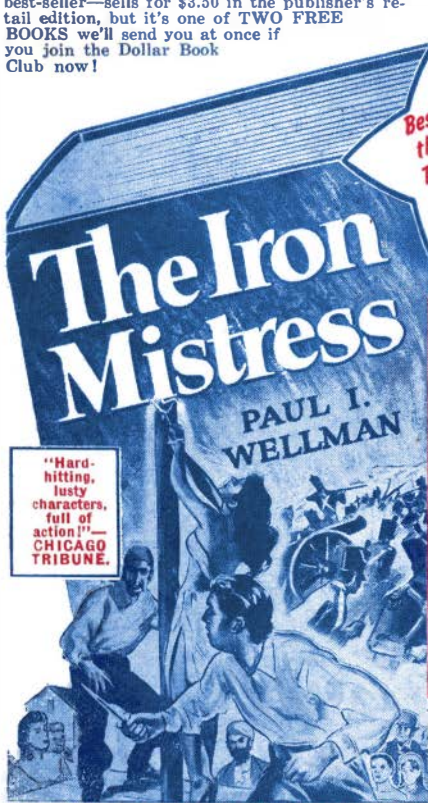
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