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JANUARY

DETECTIVE

MAGAZINE

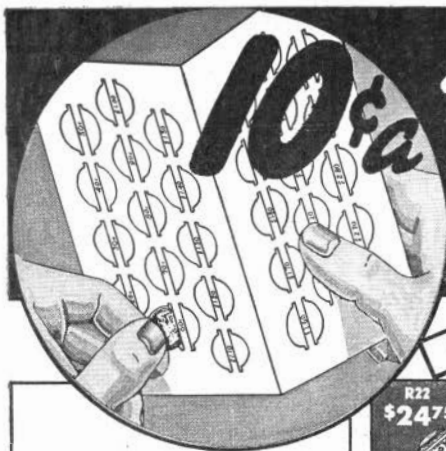
F

TOP RANKING
STORIES BY
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▲
WM. R. COX
▲
AND MANY
OTHERS

TWO GREAT CRIME NOVELS
**THE CASE OF THE
GAMBLING CORPSE**
by **FREDERICK C. DAVIS**

**MURDER IS
MY BUSINESS**
by **ROBERT S. BOWEN**





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Every man likely to go into military service, every soldier, sailor, marine, should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duty at pay up to 6 times a private's base pay. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. IT'S SMART TO TRAIN FOR RADIO NOW!

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National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.**



BROADCASTING STATIONS (top illustration) employ Radio Technicians as operators, installation, maintenance men and in other fascinating, steady, well-paying technical jobs. **FIXING RADIO SETS** (Lower illustration) pays many Radio Technicians \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week extra in spare time.

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ALL STORIES NEW—
NO REPRINTS

15¢

MAGAZINE

Vol. 1

Contents for January, 1942

No. 4

SMASHING DETECTIVE NOVEL

THE CASE OF THE GAMBLING CORPSE... Frederick C. Davis 54

He paid his debts promptly, the Broadway gambler who left a corpse as a marker—and who sold his best friends a pair of tickets to the Hot Seat.

THRILLING CRIME NOVELETTES

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A house of lost men... a girl with death in her eyes—as Murder hits the jackpot behind the bars of the Big House!

BOUQUET FOR THE DEAD... Richard L. Hobart 29

Deep within her stalked terror, yet calmly she contracted for murder—the red-headed beauty who was wedded to Death!

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MR. DETECTIVE IS CHAGRINED... William R. Cox 45

"If the chair does get me, I'll meet you two in hell. Because that's where I'm sending you, suckers. Come and get it!"

MURDER SETS THE CLOCK... Don Joseph 77

Heavy over his head hung the guilt for his brother's murder—and so Calvin Brown set a trap for a maddened killer—and baited it with his own life!

KILLER UNKNOWN... John Hawkins 92

"You may have been a good cop once—but you're just a has-been now. Keep outa my way, pal—or you won't be around for breakfast!"

A SLIGHT CASE OF HOMICIDE... Donald G. Cormack 102

Hunted, at bay, he made a last blazing gamble for life—this strange little man who wrote stories of death in the night—and saw them happen the next morning!

SPECIAL FEATURE

THE WITNESS CHAIR... A Department 6

Where readers of crime fiction meet the boys who write it.

130 PAGES—THE BEST IN CRIME FICTION!

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"I WAS BOUND AND GAGGED AND LEFT TO DIE!"



A true experience of JOSEPH J. KARES, Charlestown, Boston, Mass.



"THUGS HELD ME UP one bitterly cold night as I left our docked lumber ship," writes Radio Operator Kares. "After taking what cash I had, they left me bound and gagged in an inky dark alley between great piles of stacked lumber.

"FURIOUS STRUGGLING only lightened my bonds. My arms and legs grew numb with cold. My plight was desperate! Then, remembering my flashlight, I managed to reach it . . . started flashing SOS against the top of the lumber.



"FOR MORE THAN AN HOUR I kept signaling. Half dead with cold . . . about to give up hope . . . I was at last rescued by two officers from my ship. If it hadn't been for those dependable 'Eveready' fresh DATED batteries I would have been a goner.

(Signed) *Joseph J. Kares*

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THE WITNESS CHAIR

IT HAS occurred to us that the people who read detective fiction might care to meet some of the people who write detective fiction. That's why we asked William Cox to send us a few words about himself. Mr. Cox has long been one of the top men in this business, and can always be counted on for a Grade-A piece of fiction.

Here's what Bill Cox has to say:

Dear Editor:

Skipping the past as unimportant (having to do only with shipyards, truck-driving, factory labor, stoke-hold play with a number eight scoop, newspapers, amateur sports participation and promotion, education by the old NEW YORK WORLD and the SUNDAY HERALD TRIBUNE after being ushered ungently from a Newark high school) let us dwell upon the beautiful existence of us West Coast Florida fiction writers.

We bask in the sun and play tennis every day, except when it rains, which is too seldom, for rain here is not harsh, Northern rain. We play tennis and bathe in the Gulf and commune with our wretched little complacent souls. I do not play good tennis.

In fact, I would venture to say that I play the worst tennis. In a year I have developed no backhand. None. It's pitiful to see me hit an overhead, even when I manage to connect with it.

But each day I take my bat and go out there and sock away, blithely, heedlessly. My daily stint is done; I live on the West Coast; I am a fortunate writing fellow.

Last year I did 628,000 words, nearly all of which were published. Just a carefree loafer!

I am thirty-nine, married, white. I have my waistline and my hair and nearly all my teeth. I like prizefighters better than prizefights. I like football better than football players. I like baseball and baseball players. I see a lot of all of these creatures at one time and another. I would like to write like Lardner and Hemingway. Who wouldn't?

I don't like liquid toothpaste, swing music, pipes, gin, stupid people, contract bridge, bad downfield blocking, pretentious literature.

Does anybody care about all this? Doesn't everyone know by now that writers are the dullest egotists of all? That people who live exciting lives are so busy that they cannot possibly spend hours writing about it?

What I have done or will do is excruciatingly unimportant. What I will write I hope may be a different matter. . . .

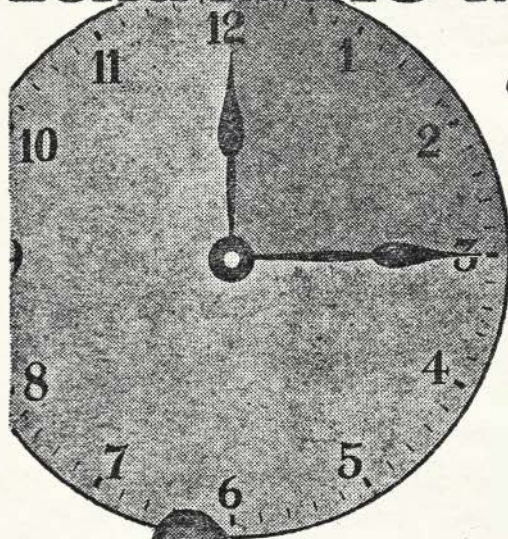
A fan letter from our mail bag raises an interesting point:

Dear Editor:

I've never written in to any magazine before, but one of the stories in your

(Continued on Page 8)

Lend Me 15 Minutes A Day



..and I'll prove I can make you a NEW MAN

I'M "trading-in" old bodies for new! I'm taking men who know that the condition of their arms, shoulders, chests and legs—their strength, "wind," and endurance—is not 100%. And I'm making NEW MEN of them.

I don't care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add **SOLID MUSCLE** to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system **INSIDE** and **OUTSIDE!** I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

bodies of other men in only 15 minutes a day? The answer is "Dynamic Tension," the amazing method I discovered and which changed me from a 97-pound weakling into the champion you see here!

Here's What Only 15 Minutes a Day Can Do For You

Are you **ALL MAN**—tough-muscled, on your toes every minute, with all the up-and-at-'em that can lick your weight in wild-cats? Or do you need the help I can give you—the help that has already worked such wonders for other fellows, everywhere?

In just 15 minutes a day, right in the privacy of your own home, I'm ready to prove that "Dynamic Tension" can lay a new outfit of solid muscle over every inch of your body. Let me put new, smashing power into your arms and shoulders—give you an armor-shield of stomach muscle that laughs at punches—strengthen your legs into real columns of surging stamina. If lack of exercise or wrong living has weakened you inside, I'll get after that condition, too, and show you how it feels to LIVE!

I Was a 97-lb. Weakling

All the world knows I was **ONCE** a skinny, scrawny 97-pound weakling. And **NOW** it knows that I won the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." Against all comers! How did I do it? How do I work miracles in the

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In every part of the country Charles Atlas is recognized as America's "Greatest Builder of Men." Almost two million men have written to him. Thousands upon thousands have put their physical development into his capable hands!

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"Feel like a million dollars and have a 2 1/2" normal chest—A 2" GAIN IN 4 DAYS!"

—L.A.S., Illinois
"My doctor thinks your course is fine. In 15 days have put two inches on my chest, and 1/2 inch on my neck."

—E.L., Oregon
"My muscles are bulging out and I feel like a new man. My chest measures 38 in., an increase of 5 in., and my neck increased 3 in."

—G.M., Ohio
"Your book opened my eyes. . . 1 1/4" gain on my biceps and 1" more on my chest in two weeks!"

—J.F., Penna.



Actual photo of the man who holds the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

FREE This Famous Book That Tells You How to Get a Body That Men Respect and Women Admire

Almost two million men have sent for and read my book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It tells you exactly what "Dynamic Tension" can do. And it's packed with pictures that SHOW you what it does. Results it has produced for other men. **RESULTS** I want to prove it can get for YOU! If you are satisfied to take a back seat and be pushed around by other fellows week-in, week-out, you don't want this book. But if you want to learn how you can actually become a **NEW MAN**, right in the privacy of your own home and in only 15 minutes a day, then man!—get this coupon into the mail to me as fast as your legs can get to the letterbox! **CHARLES ATLAS**, Dept. 83M, 115 East 23rd St., New York City.

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Name (Please Print or Write Plainly)

Address

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



(Continued from Page 6)

November issue hit me right between the eyes. It was so very much like something that really happened to me, I thought I'd tell you about it.

The story was O. B. Myers' "Blood Money." Well, the beginning of that yarn was almost exactly like what happened to me. You see, I work in the lost and found department of a department store. And let me tell you—that's an interesting job for getting clues to strange stories. If any of your authors ever need an idea for a plot, or need some strange characters for a story, let them work down here for a couple of days and they'll be supplied for a year.

Well, anyway, this suitcase turned up at my department one night. One of the porters found it in the men's room. It was just an ordinary black bag, and I shelved it with the other stuff. About three days later, a fellow came around for it. He was just a kid—about seventeen or so. He said he had lost it, but didn't know where. Just as in the story, I of course asked him to identify the contents. He started getting panicky then and asked if it was necessary. Well, actually, we don't always demand that, but his nervousness made me suspicious. I told him I'd have to check on the contents.

With that, he makes a sudden grab for the bag. Luckily, my hand was resting on the handle, and I managed to keep a grip on it. When the kid saw he couldn't get away with a quick snatch, he let go and beat it out the door.

Well, I figured that he was just a chiseler, and didn't do anything about it, waiting for the real owner to show up. But after thirty days the bag was still unclaimed so, like we do in all such cases, the store detective and I broke the bag open.

Well, what do you think we found? That's right—money. Over \$5,000. There was something else in that bag too—a gun.

We called the cops, of course. That was three months ago, and so far as I've been able to find out, nothing ever came of it. Usually, if money isn't claimed after a year, the police give it to the parties who found it, which means the porter and I would split the

\$5,000. But in this case I'm not looking forward to anything because, you see, the money was all counterfeited.

The way the cops figure it, somebody left the money, and the kid was supposed to pick it up and act as the passer. What the gun was for, they don't know. They don't have any clues, so I guess it will never be solved, but I think you'll admit that this is a good start for a story—and a heck of a lot like "Blood Money."

I thought you might be interested, in this instance of one of your stories approximating a real-life occurrence.

Very truly yours,

H. M. Smattertuck,
Minneapolis, Minn.

We're interested, of course, Mr. Smattertuck, but not in the least surprised. Most crime fiction authors rely to a great extent on fact for story ideas and characterizations. Often these are based on their own experiences, occasionally on stories told them by others.

Robert Sidney Bowen, for example, quite frankly admits that for much of his writing he draws on his own very colorful background—a background that includes many months as a fighter pilot on the Western Front in the last big tussle, and several years of chasing adventure all over the globe.

There's a passage in "Murder Is My Business" that tells of a dead man shooting his own killer. Fantastic? No. That happened to Sid Bowen once—in Egypt, in a scrap with a dope-crazed native. We've seen the scar, where the bullet creased his brow.

He promised to tell us the details some day. When he does, we'll pass them on to you.

THE EDITORS.



TRAIN FOR ELECTRICITY

*Ill Finance Your
Training*

H. C. Lewis



**NOT BOOKS-Actual Shop Work
In My Big Chicago Shops**

"LEARN BY DOING" IN 90 DAYS



**PREPARE FOR
JOBS LIKE THESE**

- Armature Winder
- Sub-Station Operator
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- Maintenance Electrician
- Service Station Owner
- Air Conditioning
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- and many others
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Have you ever dreamed of holding down a steady, good pay job? Have you ever dreamed of doing the work you really like in a job that holds promise of a real future in the years ahead?

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You will be trained on actual equipment and machinery and because of our method of training; you don't need previous experience or a lot of education. Many of my successful graduates never even completed Grammar School.

Here in my school you work on generators, motors, dynamos, you do house wiring, wind armatures and do actual work in many other branches of Electricity and right now I'm including valuable instruction in Diesel, Electric Refrigeration and Air Conditioning at no extra cost. Our practical shop methods make it easier to learn—First the instructors tell you how a thing should be done—then they show you how it should be done—then you do the actual work yourself.



H. C. Lewis

I think the "pay after graduation" plan... offers the fellow who wants to get ahead in life a wonderful opportunity... I am now employed by the Power Co. I have been employed by this Company ever since graduating from COYNE... I make almost double what I did at my previous work... COYNE School helped me in landing the job I now have.—James Dible.

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equip themselves with the right kind of training. Most of these men were only average fellows a short time ago, but the proper training helped to lift them out of the low pay ranks of unskilled workers. The same opportunity is now offered to you.

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our students after graduation. Fill in, clip coupon, mail today for your start toward a brighter future.

EARN WHILE LEARNING

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Send the coupon today for all details. When I get it I'll send you my big free book containing dozens of pictures of students at work in my shops. I'll also tell you about my "Pay After Graduation" Plan, extra 4 weeks Radio Course and how many earn while learning and how we help

**MAIL COUPON TODAY
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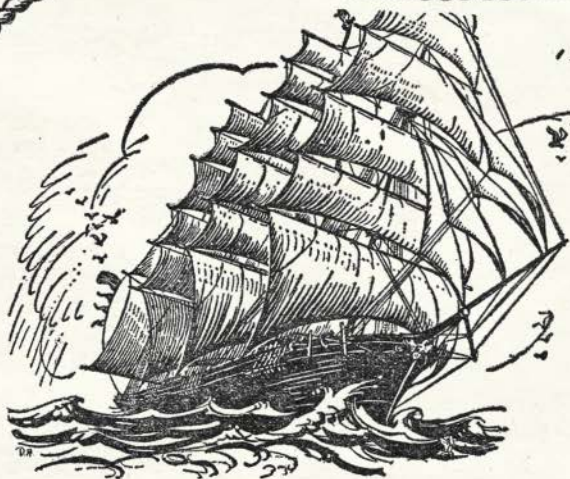
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Dear Sir: Please send me free your big catalog and full particulars of your present offer, also your "Pay-Tuition-After-Graduation" Plan and also your extra 4 weeks Radio Course, you are included at no extra cost.

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THE "GREAT REPUBLIC"...
4,555 tons...the largest ship
in the world in 1853! Cap-
tains of ships like this often
carried kegs of whiskey on
every voyage. They knew the
billowing ocean "rocked"
whiskey to smoother flavor.

Old Mr. Boston says:
**"From Sea-Rocked whiskeys of Old came
my inspiration for Rocking Chair!"**



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ing men still "rocked the keg" under
porch rockers. Down Cape Cod way,
Mr. Boston heard tales of these grand
old "rocked" whiskeys... got the idea
for mellow, richer Rocking Chair!



TODAY—YOU'LL DISCOVER in Rocking
Chair a smoothness worthy of the
finest wave-rocked whiskeys of old!
Because Old Mr. Boston recaptures that
flavor by *controlled agitation* in his
special blending process.



MR. BOSTON
ROCKING CHAIR
BLENDED WHISKEY

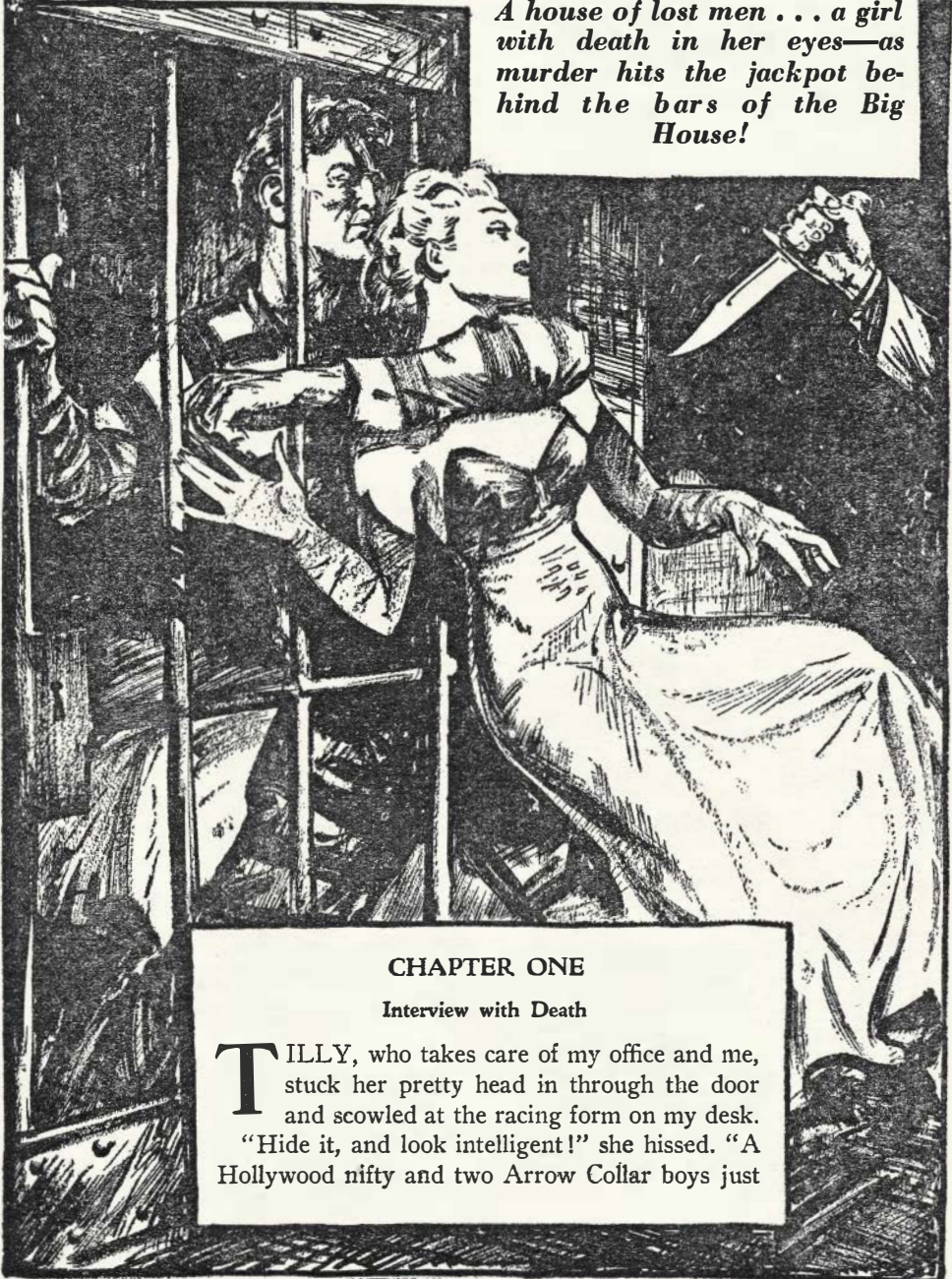
85 Proof • 75% Grain Neutral Spirits • Ben-Burk, Inc., Boston, Mass.



Murder Is My Business

By Robert Sidney Bowen

A house of lost men . . . a girl with death in her eyes—as murder hits the jackpot behind the bars of the Big House!



CHAPTER ONE

Interview with Death

TILLY, who takes care of my office and me, stuck her pretty head in through the door and scowled at the racing form on my desk. "Hide it, and look intelligent!" she hissed. "A Hollywood nifty and two Arrow Collar boys just

came in. The nifty wants to see you."

"She's out of luck," I said, and returned to the second race at Empire. "I don't handle those kind of cases."

The racing form suddenly whizzed away from under my eyes, and the sweetest face in all the world was no more than five inches away.

"You'll handle this one, because I want to eat!" Tilly said, and stuck a card at me. "You'll see her, and get a retainer, or I'll never marry you, you big lug!"

"Wait'll I ask," I growled, and glanced at the card.

It said, *Miss Emily Davis Rathborn*, and that made everything different.

"Why didn't you say so?" I gasped, and waved the card at her. "Hollywood, my hat! This is Park Avenue, stupid. Send her in."

"Park Avenue?" Tilly echoed suspiciously. "Then I'd better sit in, I guess."

"You guess wrong," I told her, thumbing at the door. "Send her in, and you sit out! Speed, sugar!"

She didn't like it, but she still wanted to eat. So she made a face and went through the door into the other clothes closet space I call my outer office.

A couple of seconds later Miss Emily Davis Rathborn came in. I don't need to describe her to you because you've probably seen her picture in the roto sections just about as often as those things are printed. However, I saw her in a trick new red dress, and what it left to the imagination just isn't worth putting down on paper. If Tilly didn't have a first, second, and third mortgage on my heart, the Rathborn dame's entrance would have taken my breath away. And maybe it did a little at that!

Anyway, she waited for Tilly to close the door, but didn't wait for me to offer her a chair, or even say, "Hi, Sister!" No, she just parked the lovely body, ripped open a cute little handbag no big-

ger than a steamer trunk, and tossed a five-hundred-dollar bill on the desk. Of course, I'm used to people slinging five-hundred-dollar bills at me, so I let it lay and just looked at her.

"That's just for listening to me," she said, and there was no sugar and spice in her voice. It was strictly business. "If you'll do what I ask, I'll pay you another five hundred dollars. And if you can successfully handle the thing after that, I'll pay you ten thousand more."

Chicken feed, of course. But I'll listen to any woman for five hundred bucks.

"That sounds reasonable, Miss Rathborn," I said. "What do you want to talk to me about?"

"About my late brother, Charles Rathborn," she said. "You read about his death three months ago?"

That was like asking me if I'd read about Hitler starting a war in Europe. Early one morning, about three months ago, a Coast Guard cutter came across a wallowing speed boat about three miles off shore. The engine was dead and there was nobody in the boat. But there were plenty of signs of recent occupancy. And how! There were all the signs of what looked like a beautiful one-man binge. Scotch, rye, the whole works. But just one glass, and it was in pieces on the cockpit floor. In addition, there were fishing lines and tackle all over the place. The boat looked like a guy had gone fishing seven sheets in the wind, and had got madder than hell at himself because the big one got away.

The Coast Guard boys spotted it at once as Charlie Rathborn's boat because they had seen it often. They started to take it in tow. Just started to, because, as the boat got underway, they saw something trailing along in the wake of the speed boat. They killed their engines and took a look. The something was Charlie Rathborn, or what was left of him. He was all snarled up in fishing lines and

stuff. It didn't take the Coast Guard boys two guesses to know that the speedboat's propeller had done a horrible job on him from head to toe. They pulled him out of the water and headed for shore.

You probably read the story, so I'll be brief. Nobody saw Rathborn take the boat out from the dock of his summer place. Nobody saw him out fishing. Everybody knew that he and stuff in bottles were blood brothers. And nobody was surprised that he should suddenly come up dead. In fact, everybody was surprised that he had taken so long. The coroner's inquest put it down in the book as death by accident. And the Rathborn lawyers turned over the family dough to Emily, as she had just topped twenty-one, and was next in line in accordance with her old man's will.

So, a beautiful girl, with enough cash on hand to run the war for a couple of weeks, and in *my* office. It was a temptation!

"Yes, I read about it, of course," I told her.

"Well, everybody thought it was an accident," she said, and started fishing in that gold-plated trunk of hers, "but last night I received a note that makes me wonder. It came special delivery and was delivered at my apartment address. It—it seems very silly, and . . . Perhaps you'd better read it."

SHE handed me an envelope stamped *Special Delivery*, and dated at a downtown post office yesterday noon. Inside was a ten-cent store sheet of paper, and the message was scrawled in pencil. And I mean scrawled. It read:

Your brother was murdered. I know it, but I can't prove it. Go see Chuck Battle, a lifer at Trenton Prison, and ask him to tell you about Slim. I don't know the last name. I never even seen him. But I know he killed your brother.

The note was unsigned, and it read like

a lot of hash to me. The look I gave Emily said as much.

"I know," she nodded. "It's very silly. Like a crank letter, or something. But I know Chuck Battle. I've known him all my life. He used to be our gardener—until he was sent to prison."

"By your late brother?" The question popped out of my mouth. "And why?"

"No," she came right back. "Charles tried to save him from prison, but it seems Chuck had a pretty bad record. He—I don't know how to explain it. I guess you'd call him a kleptomaniac. He was a born thief. Charles paid him well, but Chuck would rob our friends when they came to visit. He'd rob the people who lived near us down at the shore. One night he was caught red-handed. Charles did everything he could, but it was of no use. The victim pressed charges, and when they discovered that Chuck had a past record, he was sent to prison for life. That was three years ago."

"The name of the victims?" I asked.

"Brady, I think it was," she told me. "They moved away shortly afterward. I don't know where they went, or care."

"So you want me to talk with Chuck Battle?" I asked.

"No, I want you to arrange for me to talk with him, without any publicity," she said. "I mean, I don't want to see him on a regular visiting day, or anything like that. Possible reporters, you know. I want you to hear what he has to say. And if it has any basis of truth, I want you to make a private investigation."

It so happens that the warden of Trenton is a personal friend of mine, so fixing up a meeting with Battle on the quiet was practically in the bag.

"All right, I'll arrange the meeting for tomorrow morning," I said getting down to business. "I'll pick you up around ten. One question, though. The usual one. Why come to me instead of going to the police?"

"I've already told you!" she snapped. "Publicity. I'm sick of it!"

Recalling a few spicy chit-chat pieces I'd read about her in the papers, I knew darn well she wasn't lying.

"That answer's good enough for me," I said, and we both got up. "Ten in the morning, then."

I escorted her out into the other office, and met Tilly's Arrow Collar boys. One was tall, dark, and just ducky. His name was Gerald Howe. The other was pretty much of a carbon copy, but a couple of inches shorter, and I suspected he was wearing a polo belt under his shirt. His name was Bradford Rollins. I didn't like either of the guys, and they both handed it right back to me in spades. They didn't have to tell me they had been definitely against Emily so much as putting her dainty tootsies inside my crime parlor.

They all left eventually, and I went back into my office to find Tilly there, and the five hundred bucks gone.

"It will just cover that bedroom set I was showing you, darling," she said sweetly. "What did the note say? I didn't get that part, of course."

I shot a look at my intra-office phone and swore. The switch was up. Tilly had heard the works through the headphone she keeps in her desk for occasions when I want things said in my office put down on paper.

But this hadn't been one of those occasions.

"Park Avenue, my sweet," she said, and put lipstick on my nose. "Not that I don't trust you, of course. Be sure and collect that other five hundred."

"Don't worry!" I shouted as she went hipping out the door. I will!"

AT TEN the next morning I picked up Emily as per schedule and drove her up-state to Trenton Prison. During the hour drive I slipped in a few questions now and then just to

straighten out a few things in my mind. However, the answers I got—and I'm sure they were all the truth—didn't help any. So when we finally arrived, I didn't know any more than I had when we started.

Warden Hale was waiting for us in his office. As soon as the introductions were over, he summoned a turnkey to take us to Chuck Battle's cell block which, by the way, he occupied alone. I hadn't told Hale all the details, and he didn't ask. We were good enough friends for that. But as we left with the turnkey, he gave me a look that said I was going to tell him later, or else!

The turnkey led us up and down half a dozen flights of steps, and through just as many corridors, and finally through the last door. He showed us through and then left us. The place was the usual thing. About twenty cells, ten along each wall, with plenty solid doors with the iron bars at the top half. Battle's cell was the second on our right. He had heard the sounds and was at the door. What a pug-ugly he was! I sure couldn't see him watering petunias and pruning an arbutus, but I suppose a guy's looks don't tell you everything.

Anyway, he was a rough-tough and as big as your aunt's old red barn. He shot me a look that should have put me back on my heels, but didn't. And then he looked at Emily. Talk about facial change! I thought the guy was going to break down and cry.

"Miss Emily!" he got out in a voice that shook the joint. "What are you doing here?"

"Hello, Battle," she said smiling at him. "I came up to see you about something very important to me. I received a letter suggesting that I get you to tell me about someone named Slim. The writer thinks that my brother Charles was murdered."

The pug-ugly gulped, and I thought his eyes were going to pop out of his head.

"Master Charles murdered?" he choked out. "You mean, he's dead, Miss Emily?"

"About three months ago," she said. "But this person says that you can tell me about this Slim. What about Slim, Battle?"

Hate, if I ever saw hate, flared up in his eyes. He opened his mouth, then seemed to remember I was there.

"Who's this guy?" he demanded.

"A friend of mine, Battle," she said. "I asked him to come up with me. He's all right."

"He's either a cop, or a private dick!" Battle snarled. "I got something to tell you, Miss Emily, but I won't say nothing with him around!"

The "him" was indicated by the jab of a thumb no bigger than the small end of a baseball bat. Emily started to protest, but I know Battle's breed, so I cut her off short.

"He's right," I said, and gave Battle a nice smile. "He's got something for your ears alone, so that's fair enough. I'll wait outside in the car."

She started to object, but I didn't listen. I walked over to the door, walked through it, and shut it behind me. Naturally I didn't go out to the car. I pulled up short and stuck an ear against the door. It was like putting an ear to the ground and listening to what folks were saying in China. So I straightened up and lighted a cigarette and held up one side of the corridor wall for comfort. Time ticked away.

I GUESS it was about five minutes or so later when suddenly the roof fell in. I heard a lion roar, and I heard a woman's scream that went through me like a white-hot knife. And both came through the steel door of Battle's cell block. So I went through that door in nothing flat, sailed right across the cell block corridor before I could stop myself, and then wheeled toward Battle's cell. He had a hairy arm shoved between the bars

and hooked about Emily, holding her so that she faced me and had her back to him. Her mouth was still open, but no sound was coming out. I made a dive for the gun I always carry, and jumped forward at the same time. But at that same instant I saw a blurred movement off to my left. Something silvery sliced through the air; went right between the cell door bars, and straight into Battle's throat. As though by magic, his arm, which had been clamped around the Rathborn girl, went limp, and he fell over backwards. His arm was caught between the bars, though, and he hung there like a wet, blood-dripping sack of meal. Emily pushed away from the door, stumbled, and fainted.

All that, mind you, happened in no more than a split-second. Meantime I had jerked my head around just in time to see a blur—that's all it was—go streaking through a door at the far end. I swung my gun and pulled the trigger, but the bullet simply flattened itself against the door that had slammed shut. By then my feet were back on the floor again, so I turned and ran for that door, tore it open. It led into a maze of empty cell blocks with half a dozen corridors running criss-cross.

I pulled up for a brief second, listening for some sound, but there was none. The blur must have been wearing feathers for shoes. So I got into motion again, and chased up and down the corridors, but all in vain. I finally ended up against a wall with a window at chest level. The window was open, and it looked out on a section of countryside large enough to hide the Seventh Regiment in. I thought I heard the roar of a car's engine, but I wasn't sure. I retraced my steps back to Battle's cell block.

Warden Hale and a couple of wild-eyed turnkeys were there when I returned. Emily was on her feet and conscious, but her face was plenty white, and her pretty

legs were very rubbery. Hale was holding her up while the two turnkeys were both trying to open the cell door at the same time. As they swung it open, I took a quick glance at Battle being dragged out. One glance was enough. I've never seen a deader guy in my life. I stepped over to Emily.

"Are you all right?" I asked. Then right on top of it. "What happened?"

She looked at me like I was a stranger, then seemed to remember.

"I don't know," she said in little more than a whisper. "Battle suddenly yelled, and thrust his arm between the bars, and twisted me around. It frightened me, and I think I screamed."

"You did," I assured her. "Did you get a look at who threw the knife?"

"Knife?" she gasped, and looked dumb. "Did somebody—?"

She stopped because the turnkey had pulled Battle out into the open. She took a look, saw the plastic-handled hunting knife that was sunk hilt-deep in his throat, and then formed a great big *O* with her lips, but made no sound for a few seconds.

"Battle!" she finally got out. "Is—he dead?"

"Very," was all I could say.

THEN Warden Hale took charge. He fired questions at me, at Emily, and his turnkeys. Nothing that was said got him as far as first base. He told me to take Emily to his office, and went charging away to give the alarm. I took Emily to the office out front and gave her a shot of Hale's brandy. Then I put the question to her bluntly.

"What did Battle tell you?"

She shook her head.

"He didn't tell me anything," she said.

I could have punched her right on her pretty nose! Why do dames always lie to somebody they've hired to help them?

"Let's start over," I said. "What did Battle *tell* you?"

Her eyes shot sparks, and her cheeks got red, but I didn't care much. Tilly had already banked that five hundred. That is, I didn't care much except in a professional sort of way. I hate liars; I hate to be dropped from a case before it's hardly started, and I still had to collect the second five hundred for arranging the interview. So I sat marble-faced, and gave her eye for eye. She lowered hers first.

"It was silly rot!" she finally said. "I don't believe a word he said. I'm not going to talk about it, anyway."

"Not to me, maybe," I said with an airy shrug. "But there's been murder done in this prison, and Warden Hale isn't the kind to laugh off that sort of thing. I'm afraid you'll have to tell it all, and under oath, when the time comes."

"A trial?" she gasped. "An inquest? Oh, no! There mustn't be anything like that. I tell you, I'll go crazy if there's any more publicity. You assured me there wouldn't be any. You—"

"Murder wasn't in the contract!" I snapped at her. "Look, Miss Rathborn! No part of this even makes sense to me. You paid me to listen, and you owe me five hundred for coming up here. Okay, if you want to leave it like that. But murder is my business, and you've got a murder on your hands, whether you like it or not. Play straight with me, and I'll do everything I can to untangle the mess and keep the publicity as hush-hush as possible. However, if you won't play straight, then I'm going to leave right now."

I got up onto my feet just to prove I meant it, which I didn't—not until I had that second five hundred, anyway. It was a matter of principle with me. The bluff worked, though. She cracked.

"No, please!" she begged me. "Battle did tell me something, but I don't quite understand. He—it happened before he made himself clear. No, please handle the

case. Here. Here's the second five hundred, and my ten thousand promise still goes. Yet, I don't see how—"

She stopped short as we both heard footsteps in the hall outside. I knew they were caused by Hale's number elevens. Emily guessed the same.

"But, not here!" she whispered fiercely. "Come to my apartment at eight tonight. I'll tell you everything I know. But not here. Please don't let him force me to say anything. Please get me away from here!"

I gave her a nod to say I'd do my best, and then Hale came inside. He was still my friend, but he was Warden Hale now.

"All right, I want to know everything!" he announced.

"There isn't much," I began.

"Not you, Tracey." He shut me off with a wave of his hand. "You tell me, Miss Rathborn."

She looked at me, and I nodded.

"Tell the warden everything you told me," I directed.

She did, and she finished up by telling Hale that Battle hadn't said a thing—just like she told me the first time. Well, Hale popped lots of questions, but in time he ran out of breath and didn't try to stop me from getting in a few words. I said that it could have been most anybody. Even someone in the joint who had a hate on for Battle. And I pointed out that from where I stood, it looked to me like Battle had grabbed her to shield himself, not protect her. I pointed out, also, that the more soft pedal we gave the thing just now, the less the newspapers would feature it, which was good for all concerned. In short, I sold Hale the idea of making his own investigation inside the prison, and giving me a couple of days to make an investigation outside the prison. That told him I had something on my mind, but he could hang me before I'd peep until I was darn good and ready. He didn't like it even a little bit, but he let us go.

CHAPTER TWO

Hush Money

I DROVE Emily back to her place, and went on to my office. I had hardly one foot in the door before Tilly had me reporting on all the details. And right after I'd finished, she had the second five hundred bucks in her hands. Yeah! I'm kinda weak around Tilly.

"Now go get that ten thousand quick, darling," she cooed, and gave me more lipstick. "And I'll promise to say 'yes,' honest. Oh, by the way, a messenger brought a letter for you about half an hour ago. Now, where did I put it?"

"Just tell me what it said," I growled. "You opened it, of course."

"But I didn't," she pouted, and pulled it out from under a mess of papers on her desk. "I forgot to. Here it is."

I opened it and we both read what was inside. It didn't make good reading. It made me mad, and it made Tilly scared. It read:

Drop the Battle business, or you get what Battle got. The enclosed may help you to be smart!

X

The enclosed was wrapped in another sheet of paper. Inside were ten smaller sheets of paper—the kind they print in that big building down in Washington. Each one was worth a hundred dollars.

"A thousand bucks!" Tilly screamed, and made a grab for it. "It's more than we need. Now you won't be killed, honey!"

She didn't get the thousand. I held her off and shoved it in my pocket.

"Nix!" I snapped. "I keep this. I keep this until I find the guy who sent it. Then I shove it down his throat. Let's go have lunch."

Tilly argued all through lunch, all afternoon, and all through dinner. But it was no soap. I've got ethics. I earn my dough,

but not by being scared of some anonymous lug named X.

After dinner I put Tilly in a cab, kissed her, and said I had business but would call her later. I sent the cab off before she had time to jump out. I grabbed another cab and went across town to Emily's address, a weatherbeaten tenement no bigger than two city blocks, with a rear admiral for a doorman, and nothing but Rolls-Royces parked out front. The Rath-born dame's diggings were the top floor and penthouse.

I got off at the top floor, and a guy in black and gold lace let me in. Music, laughter, and everything else that goes with an upper crust party hit me straight in the eye the instant I stepped inside. Then Emily came gliding out of a room. In tow she had the two Arrow Collar boys, and a third guy, who looked like he played right half for Notre Dame but had at some time bumped his face against a locomotive. Emily came forward all smiles and hand outstretched.

"Hello," she said. "Sorry you couldn't find us alone, but a few friends dropped in. I don't think you've met Mr. Lunsford."

I shook hands with the halfback and turned to her again.

"Us, you said?" I echoed.

"But, of course," she said and led the parade down the hallway. "These three are my dearest friends. Fact is, we held a council of war before you came, but we couldn't arrive at anything that made sense. But I hope you can. I'm still shaking from that terrible thing that happened this morning."

And the dame didn't want publicity! I was so mad that she had blabbed to these three dopes trailing her that I pulled up short and took a step back toward the elevators. Then the picture of ten thousand in cash loomed up before me, and I changed my mind. We went into a cute little den about thirty feet by forty-five,

and found seats. There were drinks there, and Lunsford acted as barkeep.

"I think it's all very silly, Em," he said when we'd all been served. "I always said Battle was a little cracked. And, after all, why can't we let poor Charlie rest in peace?"

"That's what I say!" said Bradford Rollins, of the Arrow Collar twins. "Frankly, I think some crazy idiot's playing a joke on you. Damn poor taste, if you ask me."

"Killing a man with a knife is no joke, Brad," Gerald Howe, the other ducky lad, said gently. Then flashing pretty teeth at Emily, he said, "I think you're quite right, darling, at least to do something about it."

Well, darned if they didn't start wrangling among themselves and leave me right out in the cold. I didn't mind for a couple of seconds, because I got the sudden hunch I'd seen the Arrow Collar boys before. Just a faint memory—just a needle in the haystack as far as pinning it down was concerned. Then, eventually, Emily remembered I was there.

"**Q**UIET, boys, please!" she begged, and looked my way again. "I promised to tell you what Battle said, and this is it. He said that Slim was the name of a sort of master mind of a bunch of thieves. He had met Slim several times, as Slim used to buy things Battle had stolen. But Battle never saw him. I mean, Battle always went to a certain house that had a room in it with a curtain across one corner. A small light was always in Battle's eyes. He couldn't see who was behind the curtain, and the voice was always different. At least, it sounded different to him. But one night, just before his arrest, he—"

She stopped, lowered her eyes, and flushed to the roots of her hair. Lunsford banged his half empty glass down on the arm of his chair.

"Damn it, Em!" he finally got out. "It's not fair to Charlie! I tell you, it's not fair. Battle was insane. What do they call it? Yes! He was stir-crazy, that's it!"

Emily brought her chin up and gave him a stare nobody could take. Lunsford shut up and subsided.

"I've got to know the truth, if there is any truth!" she said desperately, and looked at me. "Battle said that just before his arrest he went to this house one night, to sell some jewels he'd stolen. The light that was always in his eyes slipped out of its bracket, or something. Anyway, the light shone on Slim's hand reaching through a slit in the curtain for Battle's loot. He saw a plain gold ring on the little finger. My—my brother used to wear a ring like that on his little finger. It was my mother's."

"Did Battle recognize it?" I asked.

"No, I don't think so," she replied. "He just spoke of it as a ring he had seen. Then I asked him about the address of this house, but it was at that moment when it all happened."

"But you got some of the address?" I asked hopefully.

"Just the number," she said with a grimace. "The number was Six-Nine-Four-Two. He started to spell out the name, but I just got its first letter—*E*. Or maybe it was *T*. I'm not sure because he spoke the name of the street and let out that terrible roar in the same breath."

"I still say it's rot!" Lunsford cried, turning to me. "I mean, it's obvious. Battle, the dirty thief, expected poor Charlie to get him out of his latest jam. When Charlie couldn't do anything, Battle trumped up this crazy story about secret addresses, black curtains, and a gold ring that was like the one Charlie always wore."

"And you're talking rot, Lun," Gerald Howe said with a smile. "Just remember, Battle didn't send for Emily. And Battle

didn't even know that Charlie was dead. No, I think you're off on the wrong foot, old boy. Perhaps Battle was a little crazy, but not that crazy."

"It's just a bad joke!" Bradford Collins insisted. "A very bad joke, in very bad taste. I'd drop the whole thing, if I were you, Em."

"What do you think?" she asked, looking at me.

I was thinking plenty, and I mean plenty. A couple of odds and ends had begun to click in the old brain. However, I kept my face a blank, save for a faint frown.

"Not very much," I said. "There's certainly not much to go on. But, let's get back to your brother's accident for a moment. Do you know if he had any enemies?"

"I don't know any by name," she said. "But I suppose he had loads of them. All rich men do."

"Did he often go out in his speed boat at night?" I asked. Then added, because I couldn't stop myself, "On a party by himself?"

She went beet red, but she kept the old chin up.

"Often, I imagine," she told me. "He was always doing the craziest sort of things. I often spoke to him, but of course it didn't do any good. But enemies? I don't know of any, and he certainly never said anything."

WELL, not to make my departure too sudden, I lingered on a bit longer and asked a few more questions just to kill time. The answers didn't help any. But there was one question I certainly longed to ask her.

I wanted to ask, "Now that the Rath-born dough is all in your name, sister, which one of these half-bakes are you going to marry?" Of course I didn't ask, but the way the three of them acted, I could see plain as day that it was in the bag for one of them. And I could also see

that Emily was getting more worried by the minute over something. I couldn't guess what, but it struck me that something had suddenly popped into her mind and made the picture a darn sight clearer to her than it was to me.

I made a mental note to see her again tomorrow and really put on the clamps. A client can punch my nose, if he's big enough. And he can fire me and throw me down the stairs. But he can't hold out on me! I draw the line there. So I decided that Emily and I were going to have a nice cozy little session sometime tomorrow, and without her three dearest friends.

But meantime I had work to do, so I looked blank, played dumb, and eventually shuffled out of the place.

Once in the open air, I filled my lungs for a few minutes and then made for a corner drug store and a copy of the city directory. Nope, there wasn't a single street in the city beginning with E or T that had a number as high as six thousand. That made me feel very sad until my brain suddenly woke up and I realized that there are some six other letters in the alphabet that have an "ee" sound to them. Same being B, C, D, G, V, and Z. So I went to work on the directory again. Two hours later I caught one that clicked. There was a 6942 Veronica Avenue. That was way the hell and gone out, so I took a cab to where I keep my car, and transferred.

Number 6942 was a two-story frame house that didn't look like it had been lived in since before World War Number One. It was jammed between a lumber yard and a pottery factory, and there wasn't a street light within two hundred yards. I only found it because I parked and used my flashlight. And even then I almost passed it up because the first and last numbers were missing. But I saw their nail holes and the imprint they'd made in the chipped paint.

NOT being a dope, I had parked my car down the avenue. I tried the door, and to my delight found it unlocked. Inside it smelled like any old house, and the hallway I stepped into looked the part. Dust, dirt and cobwebs everywhere. And not a stick of hall furniture. But there was something in that hallway that started the old heart beating a little bit. There was a beaten path in the dust on the floor. It led to the second door on the right.

Just because I'm a cautious sort of guy, I shifted my flashlight to my left hand, and filled my right with my gun. Then I walked along to the second door. It was unlocked, so I pushed it open with my gun, stepped quickly to the side, and played the light inside. It was a bare room save for one corner, and heavy ancient drapes hanging over the two windows. In the corner was an old rickety desk that looked ready to fall flat any minute, and a chair that went with it. A small light bulb, with shade sticking straight out, was fastened to the wall to the right of the desk.

I took one look at all that and knew at once I had found the loot receiving station of the mysterious master mind, as Chuck Battle had called him. A window being to the left of the desk, the guy had only to swing out one of the heavy drape arms and the drape covered the corner very nicely, but didn't cover the light. I even tried it to make sure. And I found there were two bracket arms and double drapes. That way the window was still left covered over so the glow from the single light would not show through.

Very neat. But that was only the beginning. I searched the desk, but found nothing but a few torn scraps of paper. There was writing on them, so I stuck them in my pocket for later study. And it was then I saw that a section of the wall in back of the desk was really a door. I bent over to push my way through the

secret door, which wasn't very big, and—

And then it happened!

A wild tiger, or maybe it was two wild tigers, came sailing through the air to land on my neck. My gun and flash flew from my hands, and the darn flash hit the far wall and winked out. I went down like ten ton of brick and cracked my head an awful one on the chair. I saw a million stars and lost every drop of air in my lungs. Why I didn't pass out cold, and why I didn't die in the next few seconds, I'll never know. But I didn't. And the next thing I knew I was going it hammer and tongs with the flying fury that had lighted on my neck. By then I knew it was a man, and as pain shot along my right arm I knew he had a knife. A damn sharp one.

To tell you, blow for blow, what took place would be crazy, because I haven't the slightest idea. I didn't keep track. I only know that I fought as I never fought before. And I've had some mean scraps in my time. But the odds were all against me. I was wedged down in the corner behind the desk, all tangled up in the chair that had come apart. But I did manage to do one thing. I did manage to get a hold on the wrist of the hand that held the knife, and I hung on for dear life and fought with what I had left.

It wasn't enough though. I felt my strength slipping, and cannons were going off in my head. Fireworks were right on my lower eyelids, and just plain fire was in my lungs. And then, when I felt my aching fingers gradually slipping off that wrist, there came the call of my name—from a distance.

"Tracey, darling?"

Tilly's voice!

Tilly's voice calling to me through the sea of sparks and comets before my eyes, and through the roar of cannon in my head. Tilly near this guy who was just about set to cut out my heart. I knew terror and love in the same second, brother!

I tried to cry out, but the sound just wouldn't come. I summoned all my strength, lunged to the side, and tried to twist that wrist over until I heard the bones crack. No soap. My fingers slipped off it, and the flesh at the tips was torn open as they caught on something sharp and jagged.

I knew that was my last moment on earth.

Only it wasn't.

A knife didn't arc down to go deep in my throat. Instead, the owner of the knife bounced up on his feet, light as a feather, whirled in the darkness, and was gone. I heard a door slam, and then there was silence—for a couple of seconds.

"Tracey, sweet! It's me!"

"Tilly! Look out! Beat it, fast!"

My voice was no more than a hoarse whisper. I forced myself up on my feet, and clung to the desk edge while the darkness spun around. Then suddenly there was light, and it smacked me square in the face.

"Tracey! Tracey, darling! Oh, you're hurt!"

AT THE end of the next split-second Tilly was by my side and fussing all over the place. I didn't protest until I'd got some air back into my squashed lungs. Then I grabbed her flashlight with one hand, and her arm with the other.

"You little dope!" I hissed. "You're getting out of here! Of all the—"

"I am not!" she said, and jerked her arm free. "You're hurt. Your arm's bleeding. What happened?"

Tilly had been with me on a couple of other cases, so I knew it was no use. I didn't answer until I'd found my gun and my own flash. It hadn't been broken, and still worked. Then I faced Tilly.

"Plenty!" I said. "And what are you doing here . . . though thank God you turned up. You followed me!"

"As I would to the ends of the earth, my love," she said. "But let me see that arm."

"A scratch; skip it!" I snapped. "How come you turned up?"

"Like you said," Tilly replied, and tried to smooth my hair into place. "I don't trust the Park Avenue type—especially in a red dress. That color means things on a woman, you know. Then when you got so interested in that drugstore, I got interested too. I didn't want to butt in, knowing that you'd give me the slip in time. You never let me in on the interesting part of your cases, you know. So I followed you in my car. I waited by your car for awhile, and—well, curiosity got the best of me. Now, tell me what happened to you. Who was he?"

Honest! That's what she said, word for word. Crazy, dopey, and just downright insane. But can you figure out the woman you love? I mean, day after day and all the time? If you can, then you understand how Tilly could walk into that pitch dark house with a couple of guys fighting inside, and call out my name. But God bless her for doing just that. It saved my life. Only I didn't mention it to her at that moment.

"The guy was the bird who killed Charles Rathborn and Chuck Battle," I said. "And he tried to kill me."

"But who is he?" Tilly insisted.

"I don't know," I told her. "But I've got a pretty good hunch. What I want to know is, why? Now, look! I'm going to take you out to your car, and you're going straight—"

"You go there instead, sweet," she cut me off. "Nobody else is going to have the chance to kill you tonight. It took me too long to make you love me to lose you over night. Nope! We both go, or we both stay. Until death us do part. Amen!"

And that was that! But I've already told you I'm kind of weak where Tilly is concerned. Besides, it wasn't a bad idea

to have another pair of eyes around working for me. Anyway, I gave in. And, with Tilly stepping on my heels, I pushed through the secret door and down a short flight of stairs to a room down in the cellar. Did I find barrels of diamonds, and quart bottles of radium, and boxes of gold coins and thousand-dollar bills and stuff? I did not!

I found a basement storeroom furnished like a combination office and bedroom. There was a desk, chair, corner safe, bed, radio, floor lamps, and all the rest of it. And all of the furnishings were expensive. Tilly let out a squeal of delight and started forward. But I grabbed her and made her sit in a chair, and stay there.

"Park and shut up, or we both *will* leave!" I said. "And I mean that, Tilly!"

She looked at me; she tried her very best smile, and gave it up.

"I guess you do, William," she said, calling me by my first name for maybe the second time in a year. "All right. But you can't stop me from watching."

I let it go at that, and started to work. I took the desk first. It was full of nothing. That's right. Not a darn thing! So was the safe, the door of which had been left open an inch. So was a small closet. So was everything else I searched. Even the damn radio didn't work. I spent half an hour taking that room apart, and during that time Tilly didn't let out so much as a single peep. Which was some kind of a record. And finally I gave up. The knife scratch on my arm was beginning to hurt like hell, anyway.

"Strike three, and out!" I growled to myself. "He closed up shop quite some time ago, and probably didn't leave so much as a fingerprint. Nuts!"

"May I make a suggestion, darling?" Tilly broke her silence.

"I know!" I snarled. "That I let you take me to your place while you fix my arm. But it's—"

"Not what I had in mind," she finished the sentence. "But a sensible idea, at that. No. But I'd suggest you look at that torn letter that fell down onto the floor under the desk when you slammed the top drawer."

I wheeled to the desk, and saw it underneath.

"Why didn't you tell me?" I yelled, and dropped to my knees.

"Your orders, my master," she cooed and came over to drop down beside me. "I wanted to prove I can obey."

I let that ride, too, and smoothed out the letter. It was torn, but as luck would have it, none of the typing was missing. It had fallen in back of the drawer and become torn by the drawer being shoved in and out. When I slammed the drawer, the letter had jarred loose and dropped to the floor. Anyway, it was from a T. H. K. Saunders, a justice of the peace in Yuma, Arizona. It was addressed to a

G. S. Drake, at a local post office box number. And it was dated close to four months ago. It read:

Dear Sir!

Regarding your inquiry of recent date—the two parties mentioned were legally married by me on February 5th of last year. As you requested, I am, at your expense, forwarding under separate cover photostatic copies of the records.


Very truly yours,

"Gee, somebody eloped to Yuma!" Tilly breathed on my ear. "Who do you suppose, Tracey, huh?"

"Don't say huh!" I grunted and got to my feet. "And I'm not supposing anything just now. Come on. We're getting out of here. I've got things to do. Lots of them."

"But, Tracey, sweet!" she protested, and clung to my arm. "Darn it! You haven't told me a thing. Why did you come here? Who owns this dump? Who attacked you? Who eloped? Who—?"

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"My arm, Tilly!" I groaned, though the wound was on the one she wasn't holding. "If I don't get it fixed, I'm going to pass out in a dead faint."

That stopped her. And if Mr. Guy-With-The-Knife had been hanging around waiting to jump me again, it would have just been his tough luck. Tilly would have taken him apart in stride. But the guy wasn't hanging around, I guess. Anyway, we left the place without harm and got to my car. Tilly insisted on driving mine and leaving hers to be picked up in the morning. That was okay with me. The arm was hurting plenty. And besides, it gave me a chance to relax and do some heavy thinking. By the time we reached Tilly's apartment, a few of the crazy quilt puzzle pieces had dropped into place. Not many—just a few.

CHAPTER THREE

The Corpse Aims True

WHEN Tilly had fixed the arm—among other things, she's a sweetheart of a nurse—I kissed her good night and started to leave.

"Oh, no!" she cried, and blocked the door. "Enough is enough for one night. You're staying here, my love. Right here. And I want your promise, cross your heart, not to leave until breakfast time."

"But what will people say?" I pulled the old bromide.

"It's a game, silly," she said, giving my mug a light slap, "called 'compromising each other.' You are staying here, and I'm staying at your place. Your keys, please."

That was okay by me. I mean I hadn't planned to go anywhere, anyway. All I wanted was a phone, and there was a phone at Tilly's apartment.

"Okay," I said, faking a yawn. "I'm kind of all in from that kicking around. Here's the keys. And the only one that

fits anything at my place is the door key. So don't get nosy. Phone me in time for breakfast before we go to the office, huh?"

"Don't say huh!" she mocked me. "And I'll call you, never fear. Sometime during the night, too. Just to make sure you're keeping your promise."

With that, and a kiss, she was gone. I gave her half an hour, then made sure she wasn't in the hallway just outside. She wasn't, so I locked the door and made straight for the phone. First I got Warden Hale on the wire, and talked with him for ten minutes or so. Then I put through a call to Yuma, and when I got the connection, I played Mr. G. S. Drake and stayed on the line for another ten minutes. Then I made calls to four or five people I know in the city. And then I put out the light and went to bed in Tilly's bed. And did I have sweet dreams!

Tilly didn't call until seven in the morning. We met at a local hotel for breakfast. While I ate, she insisted that I tell all. I told nothing, and she came the closest she ever did to walking out on me. But she didn't, and by the time the second cup of coffee was served, she was resigned to her fate.

"Very well," she sighed. "But there'll come a time. I'm warning you. What's on the calendar today?"

I pulled from my pocket a letter I had written to Emily Davis Rathborn, and gave it to her.

"You play messenger, and deliver that," I said. "Then you go to the office and wait for me."

Tilly hit the roof.

"Play messenger to her?" she fumed. "Why, I've half a mind to tear it up, and—"

"Don't!" I said in a tone she recognized. "It may mean everything, or nothing, Tilly. If I'm right, I'll be a rich guy by nightfall."

"Even for twenty thousand dollars I shouldn't do this!" she hissed.

However, she slipped the letter into her purse, and I breathed easier. Not that Tilly had a reason to fear anything about me and Emily. But women are funny. Or didn't you know? Anyway, she was all okay by the time I paid the check.

"And what are you going to do today?" she asked as I hailed a cab for her.

"I'm going to pick up your car," I told her. "And then I'm going to drive out in the country to see a guy. And that's God's truth, Sugar. I'll call you as soon as I get back."

"And you'd better get back soon!" she said, and blew me a kiss as she got into the cab.

The place in the country I drove to was about twenty-five miles out. I didn't head straight for it, though. I took my time. In fact, I toured about the countryside for two or three hours before I parked my car off the road and walked the last mile through the woods on foot. The place was down by the shore—an old fishing and duck-shooting house that hadn't been used in years. The fellow who once owned it had been a friend of mine. He had been dead for five years, and the place had never been used since.

Well, I walked up onto the porch, took out a skeleton key I always carry for such little jobs—and stopped dead in my tracks. The well laid plans of mice and men, and me, had gone haywire. I heard voices inside, and they weren't two sweethearts cooing to each other. They were two guys, and they were screaming at each other. Screaming like maniacs, so that nobody could understand a word. And that included me.

Then came the shot, and a scream I'll remember the rest of my life. It froze me stiff for an instant. Then I was through that door with my gun in my hand.

The business was in the front room. The two Arrow Collar boys—Gerald Howe, and Bradford Rollins. Rollins was in a heap on the floor, and he was bleeding

like a stuck pig at the lower front of his neck. Gerald Howe was standing over him, and the pearl-handled pistol he held in his hand was smoking. He spun and saw me.

"And you, too!" he screamed and fired.

Did the bullet get me? No, brother. I was dropping before he pulled the trigger. But it did take off my hat.

Then I fired my own gun. And when I shoot, I don't miss. You can't afford to in my business. It caught him right between the eyes. He turned halfway around, then sagged by the shoulders and dropped. Then a funny thing happened. I mean, it's funny to tell about it now. It was far from funny then!

As Gerald Howe, stone dead, I'm sure, started to crumple to the floor, his body twitched around slightly, and the damn pistol fired another shot. I ducked instinctively, but a railroad train roared up and banged against the side of my head. I went flying—and I mean flying! I took off and went tumbling down into a great big inky void of utter silence.

I EVENTUALLY woke up to find somebody shaking the living jeepers out of me. It was Emily. She was on the floor beside me, crying and laughing and screaming questions all at the same time. I pushed her to one side and slowly sat up. The whole right side of my head felt like it was missing, but when I explored with my fingers, I discovered it was just a shallow bullet crease. But a half inch to the left, and *bingo* for yours truly!

"Mr. Tracey! Please! What happened? Please!"

I swiveled around and slapped her across the face. That cut the mounting hysteria off short, and sobered her up. She stared at me reproachfully out of tear-filled eyes.

"Sorry, but that's what you needed," I growled. "I—"

I cut myself off short as I heard the

groan. It came from Bradford Rollins' lips. I scrambled across the floor to him. He was breathing faintly, and his eyes were open, though a bit glassy.

"You're going out, Rollins," I told him bluntly. "But you can help by clearing up a few points. You handled Charles Rathborn's brokerage account, didn't you?"

"Yes," came the faint answer. "And we . . . should have made . . . millions. Only . . ."

"Something went wrong," I finished for him. "Just what, doesn't matter now. But it put Rathborn in a bad spot. Why?"

"Emily's . . . inheritance," he said. "He plunged it all, and . . . lost it. She was . . . to get it when . . . she reached . . . twenty-one. . ."

His voice failed, and I didn't dare ask another question for a few seconds.

"How did Gerald Howe get into the picture?" I finally asked.

Rollins didn't answer, and for a second I thought he was gone. But he wasn't.

"Through me," he said in a rasping whisper that told me the end was near. "I had . . . known Howe for . . . years. Knew him . . . in Hollywood . . . when he was trying to get into . . . pictures. Knew him for . . . for the dirty double-crossing thief he . . . was. Met him by . . . accident on the . . . street one day. I got an idea . . . Got an idea how Charlie . . . could make good . . . his losses, and . . . and I could continue to make money off the account."

"Stop me if I'm wrong," I said, and placed a finger on his burning lips. "Rathborn had the position and connections in rich circles. Howe was a master thief. He stole, and Rathborn got rid of the stuff for cash. He had ways."

"All kinds of ways." Rollins whispered against my finger. "He . . . was crazy. It became like . . . a game . . . to him. Got into his blood. He was mad. He even . . . got me to stealing. I don't know . . . how many he had . . .

working for him. Before I could pull out . . . I was in too deep. I grew to hate him, and . . . and . . ."

"But you didn't kill him," I said. "Howe did."

"Yes. But I couldn't prove it. I . . . just knew. The night Charles . . . was murdered I . . . went around to Howe's place. Late. He was . . . under the shower. Didn't hear me come in. His clothes . . . were on the floor . . . soaking wet. There was a fish hook caught in the coat. He came out, kicked the stuff under the bed, and showed . . . and showed . . ."

A rasping cough shut off the rest.

"Showed you what?" I pressed.

"Evidence that . . . could send me to prison . . . for life," came the weak answer. "He didn't threaten me. Just let me see it. Told me that . . . in six months he'd give me . . . all the money I'd ever need. I didn't know then . . ."

"The elopement to Yuma, Rollins?"

It was years before he opened his eyes and spoke.

"Yes. Three nights ago. He got very drunk. Didn't know what he was saying. I wish . . . I wish I'd . . . killed him then. Her husband! Oh God, I loved her so. I had hoped and prayed that one day . . . when I was . . . clear of . . ."

He went under again, but there was still one answer I had to know.

"Lunsford, Rollins! What about him?"

"Nothing," came the reply after agonizing seconds. "Just a slob friend of Charlie's. Nice chap . . . but dumb. Don't believe . . . Lunsford even suspected . . . anything. Now, please . . ."

The voice trailed off, and this time it remained silent forever.

I CROUCHED beside him and watched him die. I didn't feel anything but a rotten sickness in my stomach. I think I vowed to all the gods to hang out my shingle and

start chasing ambulances like I used to, years ago. Anyway, I eventually turned around to Emily. She was slumped down in a chair, crying her heart out, yet not making a sound. I got up and went over to her and shook her gently. She slowly got control of herself and looked up at me like a little kid who's had all her air castles knocked forty ways from Sunday.

"I'll take you out to your car, kid," I said as soothingly as I could. "The sooner we get away from here, the better. Mine's down the road a piece. You can drop me off."

Neither of us spoke a word until I had her stop close to where Tilly's heap was parked. I started to get out, but she placed a hand on my arm.

"I'm all mixed up," she said. "It still doesn't make sense. But I've got to know it all . . . now. What was it all about? And how did you find out?"

"Look, I'll explain tomorrow maybe," I said. "You go on back to town and get some rest."

"No!" she said, and there was some of the old flash in her eyes. "I've got to hear it, now. I've a right to know!"

"Okay," I said with a shrug. "I'll be as brief as I can. Your brother plunged in the market, or otherwise, with money that was due you when you reached twenty-one. He got cleaned out. Rollins brought Howe to him with a jewel robbery idea. Your brother fell for it. Went nuts about it, in a big way. And it worked in a big way. Then, somehow, he found out about you and Howe eloping to Yuma. I'm just guessing now. We'll probably never know the exact truth. Anyway, he found out, and he had enough good in him not to want his sister married to a crook. He closed up shop, and probably called the turn on Howe. Probably threatened to expose Howe if he didn't pack up and leave. Howe didn't like that. Maybe he thought

your brother was holding out on him. Anyway, Howe got your brother plastered and took him off shore in the speed boat. He tangled up your brother in fishing lines, dumped him over the stern . . . after maybe slugging him . . . and let the boat's propeller do the rest. Then Howe swam ashore. Rollins learned the truth, but he had no proof. He wrote that note, hoping that Chuck Battle could give you a tip that would lead to Howe, and murder. And that's the way it was."

"Not quite," she said, and hung onto my arm. "How did you find out? And what about that note you had delivered to me this morning?"

"I was plenty lucky about most things," I said. "And the rest sort of exploded in my face. A warning note I received with a thousand dollars started me thinking. A lad with money had sent it, obviously. Who knew you were going to Trenton prison? Howe and Rollins. And possibly Lunsford. All three had money. All three were in on that dizzy war council you held before I arrived. There were three perfect suspects dumped right into my lap. But that street address was the first real thing to get my teeth in. I found out where it was. So did somebody else, and I damn near got taken off the case right then and there. Who? Howe, Lunsford or Rollins? Or maybe all three. You had told all three what Battle had said. Well, at the address I found a letter from a Yuma justice of the peace. I went . . . I went home and started clearing up loose ends by phone."

"And the loose ends?" she asked.

"The business at Trenton Prison," I said. "That worried me. I mean, that killer knew his way around. Well, I got a bright thought and called Warden Hale. He told me what I wanted to know. That up to the time your brother died, he visited Battle once a week. Afterward, somebody else visited Battle every week. A phony name was in the visitors' book,

but the turnkey was good at remembering faces. The description was Howe's. I called Yuma and checked that the two names were yours and Howe's. I called some real estate friends and learned that the whole block of property at the address Battle tried to give you belonged to the Rathborn estate. I called some broker friends and learned that three years ago your brother had taken a bad beating, but had bounced back. I had all the facts I needed. The only thing to do was set a trap for Howe, and pray hard."

"So I sent you that letter saying that Warden Hale had called me to say that Battle hadn't died, and that he had told plenty. And for you to meet me out at this place at noon. I enclosed that map how to get here, not for you, but for Howe. Because I was banking on his seeing the letter too. You see, I had a hunch he had visited Battle each week hoping to pump him for information. I mean, that possibly your brother had cached plenty, and maybe Battle would let something drop that would give him a clue. Anyway, I hoped he'd come out here to take me out of the picture, figuring I was getting too close. He fooled me; so did Rollins. They got here before I did, instead of after, as I had planned. They bumped into each other, and . . . Well, you can figure the rest."

"Yes, I can guess," she said softly, and bit hard into her trembling lower lip. "And now . . . it will all come out."

"No," I said. "Not your name, anyway. They'll be found some day, but nobody will know who shot who, and why. And you don't have to tell anyone of your secret marriage. And why did you keep it a secret? Wait! I'm a dope. Because it was before you were twenty-one. Something in your father's will?"

"Yes," she said. "I was to get nothing if I married before I was twenty-one. And—well, I was as crazy as Charlie

about doing insane things. I found out that I really didn't love Gerald. But—well, there was something about him that frightened me. I didn't dare do anything."

"Last night, at your place!" I shot at her. "Something popped into your mind that worried you plenty."

"Yes. The knife that killed Battle. I suddenly remembered it looked like one Gerald bought driving back from Yuma. And I remembered his showing me how he could throw it and hit a tree. And—"

She suddenly stopped and looked me in the eye.

"But I've got a lot of things to forget," she said. "And I'm starting now. I'll see you at your office tomorrow morning."

AT TEN the next morning I walked into the office. Tilly opened her pretty mouth, but didn't say a thing. Emily came walking in at my heels. I guess she'd been waiting downstairs for me to show up. She was pale, but the old chin was up. She opened that gold-plated trunk and pulled out a check for ten thousand. She started to give it to me, and then gave it to Tilly instead.

"You don't have to be a detective to guess some things," she said. "The very best of everything to both of you."

And with that she walked right out of our lives.

"Endorse this, darling," Tilly said. "We'll take it to the bank, and then go to the license bureau. You know—marriage license? But your first act as my sweet husband will be to tell me everything about what's been going on. Mind you!"

"So I have to marry the girl to get my own dough!" I sighed, but I was the happiest guy in the world. "But, nix, Sugar. Murder is my business, and it looks like marriage is yours."

So I endorsed the check, and we went.



He pointed the revolver and said, "You'll need them lilies in a minute, Mr. Kaye."

BOUQUET for the DEAD

By Richard L. Hobart

He was the toughest dick on the world's hardest artery, and he'd tell you he'd seen every danger spot along the man-hunter trail, until the day he met a redhead whose husband's name was Death, and received a bouquet of lilies—to be used at his own funeral!

THE girl was plenty easy on the eyes. What I mean, she had plenty of everything cuties are supposed to have. Golden-red hair, eyes the color of

which I've heard folks say the Lakes of Killarney are, a sifting of the cutest darned freckles on an I-usually-get-what-I-want chin.

She was sitting in a chrome chair that faced the door and looked me over pretty carefully as I entered my reception room. Incidentally, I've the swankiest reception room on Broadway—that is, for a private investigator. You see, I'm a nut on the modern stuff. Plate glass and chromium are two of the things I went nuts over. It was everywhere in the reception room, my own private office and the little bar I'd had built in a small adjoining room. Motif, the decorator with the soprano voice called it. It impresses clients, swank does, and private investigators never get enough of them!

"You are—Beau Kaye." The girl's words were a statement, not a question.

"How'd you ever guess?" I grinned down at her.

She pointed. "The boutonniere."

"Check."

I looked down at the single Talisman rosebud in my lapel buttonhole. I almost forgot to tell you something else. I'm a nut about flowers, too.

The boys on Broadway may kid me behind my back—I'm a pretty swell dresser and always have a flower of some kind in my buttonhole—but they forget about it when they talk to me. A year ago several of the easy money boys on the Street thought they could kid me about wearing flowers because I'm only five-feet seven. But a man by the name of Samuel Colt designed a gadget that has been making little men the equal of big men since long before the Civil War. And I don't shoot up a dozen boxes of shells a week in my private pistol range on the Wesley Hotel roof, just to help Mr. Winchester's factory pay dividends!

Folks on the Street call me "Beau" Kaye. Get it? Beau Kaye—*bouquet!* Not bad, eh? It's a little off on the correct pronunciation, but things like that never worry Broadwayites.

I looked around. Joan Durant, my blonde secretary and a fugitive from the

guys who paint magazine covers, wasn't in the reception room. The honey gazing up at me must have seen the look on my face, because she explained.

"The phone rang about a minute ago. The girl seemed kind of excited, told the party on the line to wait and took the call in the other office."

I cradled the receiver.

"Well, what is it you want?" I asked.

"I—I want you to—to kill a man for me," she said quietly. "My—my husband."

"Oh, sure, I'll—saaaay, what is this?"

I squinted down at the redhead. Maybe my mouth was open with surprise, for I saw her red lips curve a bit. Then her face went taut. You don't think a pretty girl can get hard? Mister, you've got things to learn!

"Whoa!" I held up my hand. "Suppose you introduce yourself."

"I'm sorry," she said quickly. "I—I'm Margaret Wolverton."

"Glad to know you, Mrs. Wolverton. Now—"

"Oh," she said quickly, "it's *Miss* Wolverton! I'm not really married, you know!"

"Not really married!" I was puzzled. "A moment ago you wanted me to kill your husband, and now you say you're not really married!" I got to my feet. "Suppose the two of us go slumming in some nice psychopathic ward, young lady."

"It—it does sound silly, doesn't it?" Her laugh was a bit on the high side. "Would you like to hear about it, Mr. Kaye?"

I nodded. I knew Joan Durant, my secretary, was taking the phone call in my private office, so I led the way into the chromium bar and motioned to a tall stool. I grinned.

"Don't mind talking in here do you, Miss Wolverton? It really has its compensations. Scotch, I presume?" I slipped

behind the tiny bar and reached for a bottle.

"You apparently combine clairvoyance with your detecting, Mr. Kaye," the redhead said, perching her body on the stool and not forgetting the proper display of nyloned gams. "Not too, too much soda, please." She reached for a cigarette.

Somehow I got the idea the redhead was acting braver than she really felt. Outside she was showing courage, but inside she was about to break into little pieces.

I raised my glass.

"To deader husbands," I kidded her.

MARGARET WOLVERTON'S shapely shoulders trembled ever so slightly, but she raised the glass and clinked it against mine. We sipped, gazing deep into each other's eyes. Those blue eyes of hers, as blue as cornflowers, did something to me. They made me forget everything but the desire to help her. Pretty, and how! Almost equal to Joan Durant, and that's the highest compliment I know how to pay a woman.

The redhead's name was vaguely familiar, but for the moment I couldn't place it. That would come later.

"Now?" I suggested, and leaned over the chrome bar.

She nodded, hesitated a moment, and then said, "It—it happened last night off Long Island, Mr. Kaye. You've heard of the *Golden Ark*? Well, it opened last night."

The *Golden Ark*? Who hasn't heard of it? It was an old four-masted schooner rebuilt into a gambling palace. And I do mean palace! It was owned by a friend of mine, "Ace" Kennicott, as square a gambler as ever riffled a new deck between his long fingers. The *Ark* catered to society and the movie crowd when it was out on the Pacific Coast. I knew Ace Kennicott had planned on sailing the ship through the Canal and anchoring it off

Long Island for a try at the Eastern business.

Ace Kennicott was young, darkly handsome—and hard. But always a gentleman.

His games were always square. Any guy playing them had practically a 50-50 chance, and that's phenomenal if you know gamblers like I do. Ace Kennicott lived like a king on that schooner of his. He had everything. That is, everything but women. Which is another story. But I looked at the redhead with real interest now. Anything that happened on Ace Kennicott's ship or to Ace was almost like it had happened to me. I liked the guy that much.

Once out on the Coast I'd helped Ace out of a jam when a movie fluff went and got herself bumped off on the ship. I had always believed that Steve Napier, now anchored off Long Island with his own gambling ship, *Pieces o' Eight*, was behind it. Napier was part owner of a gambling ship anchored near the *Golden Ark*, when they were out on the Coast, and hated Kennicott because Ace was square and popular with the movie dolls. Then Napier bought a ship and moved it to New York, even though Ace had talked about it first. I knew there would be bad blood between them now that both the gambling ships were off Long Island.

"Uh-huh," I told the redhead. "Keep right on; I'm interested."

"All right. Well, it was the first time I'd ever been on a gambling ship. I went with a crowd of a dozen or more. We were all feeling—well, pretty high, I guess. I wanted to stay around, and didn't leave with the others. They were just high enough to let me stay. I had an idea I'd like to look over the ship. I did." Suddenly her shoulders trembled, and I saw her face was white, her lower lip held by her white teeth.

"All right, you looked around."

She nodded, her cornflower-blue eyes a bit wide. "Y-yes, I—I looked around. I

went through a door and down some dark stairs. I saw a pair of the meanest looking g-gangsters looking at me, their faces blank with surprise and—and holding those machine guns like the G-men use! Suddenly I was frightened. I—I turned to run, but the men grabbed me. Then I heard queer shouted words coming from behind where the two gangsters had stood. I—I saw maybe a dozen men in a little room with heavy wire on the front side. I—I didn't understand it. But a tall man behind the wire was looking at me, and his face was white as paper. He screamed something at me. I—I guess then I fainted."

I was puzzled, didn't get it at all. That Ace Kennicott had a crew of thugs around was news to me. He wasn't that kind. Of course he kept a couple of bouncers on duty, and he and all his bunch were armed because sometimes hi-jackers get ideas. But grabbing a woman; it didn't make sense. Ace was the kind of guy you could trust with your Aunt Agatha or your kid sister. Don't get me wrong; he was hard as a tenpenny nail, but he never forgot he was a gentleman.

"All right," I said, rather impatiently.

"W—When I came to, I saw three men looking down at me. I was in a cabin now, lying on a sort of couch. Two of the men were in tuxedos; the other wore a captain's uniform. They were furious and, I believe, worried. One of the men in a tuxedo was Ace Kennicott!"

It sounded screwy as all hell to me. Ace Kennicott never had anything to hide, never in his entire life. That he was furious at any woman, openly I mean, was queer.

"They—they debated what to do with me. Mr. Kaye, I was pretty weak from fear. They actually talked about—about k-killing me!"

She leaned forward and put her hand on my arm across the bar. Her fingers were trembling.

"Yeah," I told her, and I know there was a sneer in my voice, "that's just like Ace! Frightening women. Well, then what?"

"They made me tell my name. When they learned my father is—is Judge Wolverton . . ."

"Good Lord, you're not Henry Wolverton's daughter!" I shrieked, and this time I was startled.

Judge Henry Wolverton! No wonder her name was familiar. Judge Wolverton was blue blood and high society with a capital "S." He was running for the Senate and had a hands-down chance of winning. He was pompous, a torch carrier, an honest man.

MARGARET WOLVERTON nodded and tucked a lock of golden-red hair behind an ear. "Finally this Ace Kennicott—he has light blue eyes and is so tanned it's almost like he hasn't any eyes at all—laughed. It—it was a terrible laugh, Mr. Kaye! It was worse than when he was so—so mean to me and twisted my arm." She pulled back the sleeve of her dress, and I saw black and blue splotches on her soft flesh. "It was kind of like a wolf snarling, that laugh. Then Kennicott whispered to the other man and the officer, and they agreed with him after a time. Then they turned to me."

There was no doubt about it now. The redhead needed a drink. I slopped some of the Scotch into her glass and just one quick splash of seltzer. She took a good swallow and looked better.

"One of the men," the redhead faltered, "took out a small automatic. Then Ace Kennicott stepped over, took my arm and—*and the man in uniform married us!*"

I couldn't say anything, not a word. I wouldn't have been more surprised if she'd said her father blew open safes at night as an avocation. I tried to picture Ace Kennicott, doing that—and suddenly

I felt a lot easier. But I just nodded and told the girl to go on.

"It—it was over in three minutes, Mr. Kaye. Then the captain wrote out and signed a paper, and they made me sign it. I—I guess it's legal and all that. Then Ace Kennicott, my—my husband—" There were angry tears in her eyes now—"talked to me. He said that he knew Dad was running for the Senate. I must keep my mouth shut about what I saw below decks on the *Golden Ark*. The funny part of it is, I don't know or understand what I *did* see! But Ace Kennicott thought I'd seen too much. He explained how a scandal would ruin Dad's big chance and—and I know that would just about kill him."

The redhead's face flushed, and her blue eyes couldn't meet mine. "Then came the—the nasty part. Ace Kennicott k-kissed me and dragged me to a—a cabin. He locked me in, said he still had business in the gambling rooms but would be back after a while. He told me that if I—I spent the night on the boat I really *was* married, and—" Her face was crimson.

"How'd you escape?"

"There was a big transom above the cabin ceiling. I—I managed to climb out. Then I hid until the next boatload left the ship for the shore. I ran out and mixed with the crowd and got in a boat. Ace Kennicott never saw me. He must have missed me later, though. The launches have short wave radio sets. As we got ashore, two of Ace's men, members of the crew, followed me. But I ran, hopped into a cab and escaped. Then I went home. This morning I received a telephone call from Ace. He said I'd have to return to the ship or—or he'd give the story to the newspapers tomorrow." She was crying softly now.

"How'd you happen to come to me?"

"I see your name in the newspaper columns so often, Mr. Kaye. You have the reputation of being a pretty swell

person. You always help people who need it. Particularly if it's a—a woman. Please, Mr. Kaye, help me! That paper I signed. You—you've *got* to get it away from Ace Kennicott or—or *kill him!*"

"I don't know about killing, Miss—"

I froze. A man was standing in the door, a long green box under his arm. My hand swept under my coat toward my armpit gun. I knew of cases where hoods carried Tommy-guns in long green boxes! The redhead shrilled out a little startled scream. Then I relaxed. The man in the doorway held out the green box in front of him.

"Flowers for Mr. Kaye, sir," he said, grinning at the way we had jumped.

I flipped the man a quarter. I nodded to the redhead and explained, opening the box as I talked.

"I like flowers, see? Lots of 'em. Joan, she's my secretary, probably saw I was busy and stepped out for some fresh ones after finishing using the telephone. I can put these—"

I stared. I had the cover off the box now and saw what was in it. It was filled with flowers, all right. Lilies! On top of the fragile white blossoms I saw a type-written envelope. It was addressed to me. I opened it and took out a single sheet of paper. The typewriting on it read:

Lilies are for death, Mr. Kaye! I know how you love flowers, so I send you these. Just wanted my little joke, Mr. Kaye! They are the last flowers you will ever see, for you are mixing in on a deal that doesn't concern you. Just look up, Mr. Kaye, and see death standing in the doorway!

As I finished reading the last sentence, I heard the redhead gasp. I saw her fingers on the stainless steel bar top become tense and stiffly taloned. Reflected in the mirrorlike bar top was a blur that I knew was caused by someone standing in the doorway.

I slowly looked up.

The note had hit it on the head, all

right. For death *was* standing in the doorway! Death in the shape of a burly, flat-nosed man who stood wide-legged in the opening. His hand was at his hip. And in **his** hand was an automatic! I saw his finger whiten as he pressed on the trigger.

He said, almost softly, "You'll need them lilies in a minute, Mr. Kaye!"

IT WAS pretty swell shooting after all. Really it was. I don't mean the shot from Mr. Death's gun. I mean **the** shot from my gun!

When you've been around crooks as long as I have, you'll learn to protect yourself. For instance, I have half a dozen guns hidden in strange places in my office, the reception room and the bar! I also have an extra gun that isn't kept under my left arm.

With Mr. Death there in the doorway and his finger tightening on the trigger, I didn't have a great deal of time to think. My hand dropped down, and in a split-second the fingers were wrapped around the butt of a .45 Colt. My thumb snapped back the hammer.

Now if you want to shoot a gun fast—and I mean *fast*—don't snap back the hammer until it catches and waste time pulling the trigger. Oh, no! As you jerk back the hammer with your thumb, simply pull the trigger, hold it back, and then let your thumb slip off the back end of the hammer. But be sure you're pointing that gun in the right direction!

I was!

My shot beat Mr. Death's by about a hundredth part of a second. His bullet cut a little pathway through my hair and then ruined two full bottles of Triple-X cognac and fifty dollars worth of chromium. My bullet cut a big pathway through his heart! You could have driven a truck in his back where that .45 slug came out.

It was a lucky shot. It was shooting blind through the front of the bar and I had to miss the girl and hit Mr. Death.

But maybe it was bad shooting after all. Because dead men don't talk, and I certainly had a very dead man on the floor in front of me.

Also an unconscious girl.

I wet a bar towel in ice water, grabbed up a pony of brandy and started working on the redhead. She had plenty of the old stuff, at that, for in three minutes she was trying to grin at me.

"Th—That man!" she husked. She tried to turn and look toward Mr. Death on the floor, but I stopped her.

"Quiet for a while," I cautioned. "The coppers are on the way up here now. When they get here let me do the talking. You just happened to be here, see? We're due another drink and I'm not wasting seltzer water in mine!"

Neither was the redhead. And while we waited, I was doing a lot of heavy thinking. Who Mr. Death was or who had sent him was a mystery. He had nothing in his clothing to identify him, and I had never seen him before. But, after reading the note again, I was pretty certain he had been sent by the ones who wanted the girl. It tied up somewhere, but I wasn't certain where.

Thirty minutes later the police had moved the dead man, and the office management had had the place cleaned up. My offices are on the top floor of the building and the affair was hushed up so that few knew what had occurred.

Within the hour the redhead was feeling chipper again. I looked at my watch. It was 4 P.M.

"Listen, Miss Wolverton, you'd better be going now. Here's what you do. Go over to the Continental Hotel and register under the name of—of Beatrice Turner. Before you go to your room, buy up some fruit, sandwiches and magazines, because you're not leaving until I call for you in the morning! Under no conditions are you to leave your room or allow anyone to come in—"

"Not even you, Mr. Kaye?" she asked, cornflower-blue eyes wide.

"Well—er—well, I can't come calling tonight," I stammered. "Just remember; believe nothing you hear on the telephone unless it comes from me and don't allow anyone to come in, including bellboys and chambermaids. Get it?"

"Yes, Mr. Kaye. I understand."

I stood up and so did the redhead. For some reason or other she didn't seem to want to go. But I pushed her toward the door.

"Don't worry about anything. I promise that by morning everything will be all right. I'll give you a call and we'll have a late breakfast together. Is it a date?"

"Is it!" she breathed, and was gone.

The redhead hadn't been out the door forty-five seconds before it opened again and Joan Durant came in. If you'll look at the cover of the *Ladies' Home Gazette* for this month you'll see the painting of a gal in a red bathing suit. Notice her face—if you can get up that far—and then look at Joan Durant who is secretary for one Anthony Kaye, private investigator.

Sure, one and the same!

Honest, I'm so crazy about this Durant kid that it hurts me. But I've never told her about it because a ginzo in my busi-

ness is a fool to marry. I'd hate to think of Lovely—that's what I call her—sitting home at night not knowing if her lord and master was lying dead in some dark alley or interviewing a girl with red hair like Margaret Wolverton.

My greatest worry is that a talent scout for Zanuck or Capra will start looking up the model for those gorgeous paintings being featured by the *Ladies' Home Gazette* and take Lovely Hollywoodward. Then Carole Lombard, Myrna Loy and Jean Arthur will do some worrying!

The redhead was easy on the eyes, all right, but Joan Durant is velvet, mister—soft velvet!

"The redhead must have had a long story to tell, Beau," Lovely said, a sort of queer look on her face. That look kind of tickled me—maybe she was a wee bit jealous.

"Uh?" I looked at her. "Yeah, Lovely, a long story. Excuse it a minute while I telephone."

I DIALED, and after a moment Len Enright, who does odd jobs of sleuthing for me, answered. I put him to checking on the redhead at the Continental and staying on the job all night. Enright, by the way, is a wizard at shad-

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owing and protecting. I gave him the info without tipping it off to Lovely, who was powdering her cute little nose. I hung up and turned to the apple of my eye.

"You still work here, I presume?" I kidded her, grinning.

"I've really been earning my salary the past hour and a half, Beau," Lovely said excitedly. "If you'll recall, I was talking on the phone when you came in and found that redhead. Well, the man on the phone was talking about her! That's why I took the call in the other office, so she couldn't hear what I said!"

"Why didn't you put me on the phone?" I asked sharply.

This was a new development.

"Because the man didn't ask for you, Beau. Just said give you the message. Anyway, I knew where he was calling from, so—"

"How'd you know that?" I blinked.

"Well, it must have been hot in the phone booth and he must have opened the door for a breath of air. Anyway, suddenly I heard the pound of those air things they're using to dig up the street car tracks down on the corner. That told me he was calling from the drug store across the street. So I decided to do a bit of investigating while you talked to that redhead."

"What did he say about the girl?"

I was worried. I didn't want Lovely wandering around on her own checking on mugs who phoned in threats to me. It was too dangerous.

"Oh, that it'd be dangerous to work on her case and all that. He thought he was scaring me, I guess. I asked him how he knew the redhead was in the office, and he said he'd been shadowing her. Knew then I was right about the place he was calling from; he couldn't be far away, as the phone call came in within a minute or two of the time the girl arrived. Of course, that was before you got here."

"You never thought it might be risky?"

I shrilled at her, and I guess my face was white.

"Beau, don't be foolish! In broad daylight? Of course I had no idea what the man might look like. I told him to wait until I got you on the phone. Then I put the receiver down on the desk, grabbed my hat and coat, and ran for the elevator. I wanted him to keep the line open and maybe he'd still be in the phone booth when I got there. Sure enough, a man was just coming from a booth—looked like he might be a crook. A sort of heavy man with a very flat nose and—what's the matter, Beau?"

"Oh—er—nothing, Lovely," I quavered. "I was—er—just thinking that Mayor Wallace has a sort of flat nose and is fat. Maybe you were shadowing him."

I wiped perspiration from my face. Lord! Lovely had just missed it! I didn't doubt for a minute that Mr. Death would have blasted Lovely in a twinkling if he'd known she was tailing him. It left me limp as a rag. I was going to have to do something about Lovely working on her own.

"It wasn't Mayor Wallace," Lovely said sharply, a bit sore at me. "Anyway, I stayed with the flat-nosed man. He never had an idea I was shadowing him. Then he walked back into the drug store and to a phone booth. I was in a spot where I could see the number he was dialing—"

"Good girl!" I grinned. "What was it?" I tried not to make my voice sound too excited.

"I—I didn't get all of it, Beau. But what I got was WO, and the second and last numbers; two and one. It won't be so hard to trace that call. The Woodley exchange has only four numerals in it, you know. But, Beau—" Her face was a bit puzzled—"I think all the time I spent shadowing the flat-nosed man was wasted. He must have been a pretty nice sort after

all. He came back and stood on the corner as if waiting for someone. In about twenty minutes a messenger boy came up, asked the flat-nosed man a question and then handed him a square envelope. Then—”

“And you never thought of looking for the messenger’s number on his cap,” I said.

I was really getting excited now but not showing a bit of it. Of course the envelope was the one I’d found in the box of death lilies! If Lovely had had a bit more experience, she would have called me back, later pointing out the flat-nosed Mr. Death and I could have had him arrested. Then, with a grilling, it would have been easy to trace him back to the ones behind the whole mess. Of course Lovely thought she was helping me—

“The number?” Lovely asked the question as if I thought she had overlooked something elementary. “Certainly I got it! It’s number 1356, Western Union. I—”

“Darling!” I reached forward and grabbed her by the shoulders. Then I jerked her toward me and kissed her. She blushed, and I guess I did too. But she wasn’t in too, too big a hurry to get away from me!

“As I said, Beau,” Lovely said after a while, “the man must have been a very nice sort of fellow. He apparently had a girl friend in our building. Anyway, he went to the florist shop downstairs and bought a big box of flowers. He was in the back so I couldn’t see what he selected. He’s bashful, Beau. Because he came out and stopped a man on the sidewalk and asked him to deliver the box of flowers. I saw him give the man a dollar. The man went in the building, and in about a minute the flat-nosed man followed. Guess he was checking on the messenger. I waited five minutes, but the flat-nosed man didn’t show up again. I knew I’d wasted all my time so decided

I’d waste a bit more. I went in and had my nails fixed, and now here I am.” She grinned brightly at me.

“Darling!” was all I could say.

Lovely was chagrined. There was a little catch in her voice. “I—I thought I was helping you, and all the time I was following a lovesick man who was trying to make up with his girl friend! Nothing exciting ever happens to me.”

I said softly, “No, not a thing exciting has happened. The redhead is just another client wanting me to check up on her boy friend; the flat-nosed man was just a lovesick guy and—and that’s all.” Believe me, I meant to see to it that Lovely never found out the real facts about Mr. Death!

An idea came to me. “Listen, Lovely,” I said, “what say we try for some different kind of thrills? I see in the papers that Ace Kennicott’s gambling ship, the *Golden Ark*, is anchored off Long Island. Ace is an old friend of mine, you know. Let’s us dress up all pretty and pay him a call. It’d be fun, and the high society we’re likely to see there may be interesting.”

“Swellegant!” Lovely agreed, an excited flush on her cheeks. “If we can’t find excitement as detectives maybe we can as gamblers. I wasn’t wasting my time after all, was I, Beau?”

“I’ll say not!” I breathed, wanting to kiss her again.

“Having my manicure, I mean,” Lovely said, looking proudly at her gleaming nails.

All I could do was just look at her helplessly, shake my head and sigh.

THE *Golden Ark* was a floating palace, no kidding about that, and as I armed Lovely up the Jacob’s ladder, I saw plenty of society people were among those present. Lovely, wearing orchids, no less, was enjoying things already, for her face was flushed and her eyes shining.

"It's too, too romantic, Beau!" she exclaimed. Her slim fingers went to my coat lapel to pat my dwarf white carnation into place, but I straightened it carefully myself. I like for the flowers I wear to be just right.

I looked around and spotted tables afoot. There were soft lights hung under a big striped awning, a string orchestra playing soft music to soft men and women, and as hard a bunch of waiters as I ever saw watching over things. I didn't much like what I saw. This didn't look like the usual bunch that Ace Kennicott had around him. But I could be wrong . . .

I sat Lovely down at a table and ordered two Scotches. The bar card listed them at a buck a throw, which would make the lads and lassies of bonnie Loch Lomond gnaw their nails if they knew of it. But it was good Scotch.

There had been a number of things to investigate before leaving for Long Island. But I hadn't turned up a thing. The florist on the street level had never before seen the man who bought the lilies. Messenger 1356, who had carried the note to my Mr. Death, said he was stopped by a man and given instructions and a dollar to deliver it. No, he didn't pay any attention to what the man looked like.

The telephone, Woodley 3291, turned out to be the *Hotel Paige*, the only real chance. But I didn't know who to look for and got only a blank stare from the clerk when I described the flat-nosed man.

When I checked Len Enright, watching over the redhead at the Continental Hotel, I was told that everything was in order. The girl was in her room; Len was out at the floor clerk's desk and the redhead's door couldn't be opened unless he saw it, and to please send him up some comic books to read. So that was that.

After going to my penthouse apartment and making up a very special dwarf white carnation boutonniere for my tuxedo, I took a shower and dressed. Then I

called for Lovely and gave her the orchids. We were doing it up in style tonight.

I still wasn't exactly certain about what I wanted to do. I knew I was certain of one thing, but it wasn't time to spring that yet. We downed our drinks and I took Lovely below. It didn't hurt my pride a bit to see those society stuffed shirts gasp when Lovely breezed into the main gambling room. She really wowed 'em!

There was a big crowd present and plenty of the green stuff was showing. I saw some of the stakes were high, really high. But these boys had the jack to risk. I didn't like the looks of the men standing around. A hard crew. Not one was a familiar face, which was strange, as Ace held on to his men. I turned to Lovely.

"You know how to play roulette, so breeze over and put something on the little squares." I handed her four fives. "Don't forget, I get half the take."

I gave her a little push. "I want to look up Ace Kennicott. I'll be back in thirty minutes. If anybody starts to get fresh, give 'em the frigidaire stare." I winked at her and turned away.

I waited until Lovely got a chair at the roulette table and then sauntered out of the gambling room. I'd seen a companionway forward as we came in, and it looked as if it might lead to headquarters. I lighted a cigarette. Then I very carefully straightened my white carnation again. I set out along the companionway as if I knew exactly where I was going.

I got exactly three paces.

There was a very firm hand on my shoulder, and I swung half around to see a cobra in a tuxedo grinning at me. He had a hunk of flesh missing at the point of his chin, close-set brown eyes and a trick mustache. There was dope showing in his muddy eyes. I had seen the lug before somewhere. He looked at me reflectively for a few moments.

"It's private down here, mister," he said icily. "The gent's room is on the other side. Just turn left."

His fingers tightened on my shoulder as he tried to swing me about. I didn't turn so easy. Suddenly a snarl came to his lips and I recognized him. "Snow" Palito, a Pacific Coast dooper who had mixed in everything rotten from loft jobs to white slavery! Palito was a member of the Coast gang I helped nab when Steve Napier first got the idea he wanted Ace Kennicott's gambling ship set-up.

I couldn't help but grin when I looked at Snow's nicked chin. It was done with a .38 slug—from *my* gun!

Then, like a flash, Snow Palito recognized me. Honestly, he turned white. Then the rage flooded his dark face. I felt something round and hard all at once jab deep into my backbone. Sure, a gat.

"Straight ahead, Beau, or by God I'll gun you right here! All I want is the chance, punk. I owe you plenty!"

HE HAD enough hop in him to do it, too! I walked straight on along the companionway, and he was mighty close every inch of the way. We turned left. The companionway came to a dead end. There was a door in front of me with a big palooka standing guard. He looked up when he saw the gun in my back. Palito just motioned with his head and the guard stepped wordlessly aside and opened the door. We walked in.

A man sat facing me across a desk. He was very tanned, had patent leather black hair, a vulture beak of a nose, a small black mustache and . . . *light blue eyes!*

It was the killer with the light blue eyes the redhead had told me about.

"Well, Snow?" the man snarled, glaring at me.

"It—it's Beau Kaye, Sleek—"

The voice of the man behind the desk crackled when he spoke. "Ace Kennicott,

damn you! The name's *Ace Kennicott!*"

Snow Palito's face worked a little. He gulped and tried to say something, but the words wouldn't come out.

"So you're Ace Kennicott, eh?" I asked the man with the light blue eyes. I sneered. "Better get things right, Sleek. I've seen that mug of yours in too many police line-ups out on the Coast. You're Sleek Costello!" I leaned forward, suddenly wrenching away from Snow Palito. The snowbird tried to bring up his gun, but I slugged him one on the jaw—hard. Then Sleek Costello was looking into my gun.

"What the—!"

"Yeah, Sleek," I sneered, "what the hell! You've got a heap of things to explain, punk. First, how about that paper you made the redhead sign? Second, where's the real Ace Kennicott? You fool, the minute the Wolverton girl spoke of Ace Kennicott's *light blue eyes* I knew it was a phony set-up! Ace's eyes are as black as a derby hat! I've known Ace for years; he's one of my friends. Those voices the girl heard below!— You've got Ace and his boys held prisoner in the hold! You hi-jacked the *Golden Ark*, impersonated Ace because you knew he wasn't known in the East. But, Costello, you forgot about those damn light blue killer eyes of yours!

"You stayed at the Hotel Paige yesterday and that's where the flat-nosed man called you after he'd tailed the redhead to my office. Then you heard about me from someone, probably Steve Napier, so you wrote the note and sent it by the messenger. The flat-nosed punk bought the lilies like you told him. Now *he* needs 'em!"

Sleek Costello didn't say anything for long seconds, I saw his face get taut and the vulture nose stand out sharp and menacing. If I was one to scare easy, his eyes would have really done the trick. If ever there were two killer eyes, they

were in the head of Sleek Costello. Unblinking, with lids half lowered, they bored right into me and made my spine feel queer.

Then Sleek Costello spoke. "So you are this Beau Kaye I've heard of. The dick who wears flowers!" He sneered. "You'll need flowers now, Kaye, and—"

"You know what happened to that flat-nosed hood of yours, Sleek, when he tried to deliver 'em! Don't let the same thing happen to you."

"Yes, I know what happened to Barney," Costello said slowly. "It was too bad. He was a good boy. It was my idea to see that you got some flowers before Barney gunned you. It miscarried, that's all."

"You're lying when you say it was your idea. It was Napier's idea; he knew me. Steve Napier always wanted Ace's layout. I get the whole play now. You and your boys, backed by Steve Napier, hi-jacked the *Ark* and tied up Ace and his men in the hold. You know Ace has the rep of running straight games, that society would flock here last night for the opening. You put the games on the fritz and probably cleaned up a hundred grand—"

"Two hundred grand, Beau."

"Well, two hundred then! You can take in a half million before the week's out. Then you mean to blow after settling with Napier. The Wolverton girl happened to stumble down below where you had Ace and his boys tied up. You ruined the whole play, Sleek! If you'd left the redhead alone, it would've been all right. She'd been drinking a bit and didn't understand what it all was. But your rough stuff got her frightened and she came to me. That fake marriage was a dumb play. Her old man will run you down like the rat you are. Stand up, you louse, and lead the way below. We're releasing Ace Kenicott—"

"No, mister, not yet!"

I swerved. A panel in the cabin wall had noiselessly slid to one side and a man was in the opening. He wasn't eight inches behind me. He had a Tommy-gun in his arms, a slim white finger on the trigger.

Sleek Costello laughed. It was a laugh like the redhead had described; more like a wolf snarling than something human. This time the chills did chase up and down my spine!

TEN seconds later Sleek Costello had snatched the gun from my hand and was searching me. Snow Palito climbed wobble-legged to his feet, staggered over and swung for my face. He connected, all right. I fell. Everybody laughed. Big fun! I got to my feet and smoothed out the carnation in my buttonhole.

The man with the Tommy-gun stepped into the cabin. He was a kid, no more than sixteen, with a cigarette hanging to his lip. He had rather nice gray eyes, hands like a woman, and he breathed excitedly through his mouth. He wasn't a dooper, but he was hopped up with excitement and importance now that he'd stopped me.

"Just like what's in the detecatif shows, Sleek!" he shrilled, eyes wide with excitement. "Boy! Little Johnny-on-the-spot, that's me. I heard this punk threatening you, Sleek, and come up the secret stairs." His face suddenly sobered like that of a spoiled kid who'd had his candy snatched. "Ain't there no blonde dame to rescue, Sleek? By God, I wanta save some blonde moll's life—"

"Shut up, kid," Sleek snapped, and the boy's face whitened like he'd been slapped.

"Sure there's a dame!" Snow Palito suddenly shrilled. "This punk brought one with him. A blonde. Has she got gams!"

"Damn you!"

I was white with fury. I slugged out

at the snowbird, but the blow was short. Sleek Costello slammed me with his fist. I fell back against the cabin wall.

"One side, fellows!" I heard the kid screech. "Lemme Tommy-gun him! I'll save you—*ohhhh!*"

Sleek Costello slapped the frenzied kid across the mouth and jerked the Thompson from his hands. The kid started to blubber, his lips trembling. Snow Palito laughed and back-handed him on the cheek. The kid staggered across the cabin and sat down in a chair, his hands over his face, his shoulders quivering.

"So you brought a dame along, Beau?" Costello's vicious blue eyes were aflame, his wet lips curled. "That's nice—for me! I like dames—good-looking dames. Take that redhead last night." His lips were shining with saliva. "When I get to her—" Then he flared. "Damn her, she's my wife, ain't she? We were married—"

"Yeah, a phony," I snapped at him.

"She signed the certificate, didn't she?" He patted his pocket. "Damn you! You've got to go. The play was to turn Ace loose when the take was all in. He couldn't say anything then. But now you stepped in and all of you will have to—*go!*" He whispered the last word, his light blue eyes hard as twin agates. He nodded to Snow Palito.

"Take him below, Snow. Put him with Ace and the rest. I'll go with you. This is as good a time as any." Without turning his head, he spoke to the kid. "Kid, it's all right. You're a good kid. Ain't I depending on you? You can gun the whole damn' bunch of 'em! Want to shoot that Tommy-gun, kid?"

"Gosh, Sleek, thanks!" The kid was on his feet, eyes bright.

There was cunning in the light blue eyes of Sleek Costello now, and I saw him wink at Snow Palito. The whole kill was being made by the youngster! He was simple, the kid, and to him it was Goliath stuff.

"How about the dame?" Palito asked, black eyes narrowed. "She's up at the roulette wheel trying to buck the game."

Sleek Costello laughed. "Luck to her. Let her stay. After we get rid of Beau, Ace and the rest, we can say she's wanted below. Then we'll turn her over to the kid."

"Is she a blonde, Sleek? Tell me, is she a blonde?"

Costello and Palito paid no attention to the kid. Costello smirked at me, pointing to the opening in the cabin wall.

"Down below, Beau," he ordered. "No need of making a run for it. I've got a guard at that companionway the redhead blundered into last night. And there's a guy with a chatter-gun down below. You haven't a chance now, so you might as well be nice."

I shrugged, slipped through the opening and saw narrow circular stairs going downward. I went down, the rest following me. I realized there was hardly a chance now. I'd done plenty of blundering too. Well, how was I to know there was a trick panel in the wall? I had meant to throw down on the phony Ace Kennicott and force him to release the real Ace. The rest would have been simple.

But now *I* was the one taken over! I thought of Lovely, and a hard lump in my throat wouldn't let me swallow. Why had I ever brought her into this! It was a damn fool play on my part, running her into trouble. But I'd expected, because of the crowd I'd find aboard the *Ark*, that there wouldn't be a chance for danger. But now things were different.

A BRIGHT light was shining in a small open space in the hold of the gambling ship. I saw a thick-set man seated in a chair facing a small room that had heavy wire mesh covering the front. Across his knees was a Tommy-gun. I knew the room with the wire front

was a storage space for food supplies. But there were no supplies in that room now! It was just like the redhead had said.

For, looking at me as I came down the stairs, I saw Ace Kennicott and nearly a dozen of his men!

"Hiya, Ace," I called out soberly, waving at him.

Ace Kennicott, tall and dark with *black eyes*, stared a moment, and then his white teeth flashed in an easy grin. He waved at me, an easy gesture that showed no sign of agitation.

"Beau Kaye! It's good seeing you, Beau. Sorry I can't come out and welcome you."

"He's coming in to join you, Ace," Sleek Costello smirked.

"Yeah, he's letting the kid here Tommy-gun the crowd of us," I said, matching Ace for easiness, even though I was plenty worried.

"*Pouf!*" Ace Kennicott snapped his fingers as if it was the last worry he had in the world. He looked me over, a real grin on his lips. "Same old Beau Kaye, boutonniere and all! Still crazy about flowers, eh, Beau? That's something we've always had in common. Don't worry, these monkeys can't pull this. Steve Napier's behind it, I learned." He shrugged. "Oh, well, Steve always was a heel . . ."

"Aw, cut it!" Sleek Costello snarled out the words, his dark face glowering. He walked up to me, a sneer giving his face a wolfish look. "The great Beau Kaye!" he smirked. "The punk who always wears a flower in his lapel!" He looked at the others, and his laugh was thin. "Look him over, boys. A damn sissy with a posie!"

I straightened my carnation again.

"I *like* flowers, Sleek," the kid said slowly, a curious expression on his thin white face. "They're so pretty . . ."

The kid became silent as Snow Palito cursed him.

Sleek Costello's dark face was close to mine. He bowed, a sardonic curl to his moist lips. "Just a damn sissy! Hell, Steve Napier said you were a whirlwind. Just luck, I guess. How could you be a tough guy and like flowers too? Sorry, Beau, but I can't send you flowers when you're—gone. You won't know the difference." He was almost whispering now, and I saw his right hand with the gun in it was slowly coming up so that the muzzle was nearly level with my waist.

"No, Beau," Costello whispered, "you won't need flowers where you're going. Like that one in your buttonhole. Pretty flower, too. Just like the kid said. A pretty flower for a dead punk!"

Dark, wolfish face wearing a half-crazed menacing leer, Sleek Costello's head went down a bit as if he were trying to smell the white carnation in my buttonhole. And as his head went lower his gunhand came up higher! Wordlessly I fingered my little boutonniere. Costello was working himself into a frenzy of crazed fury, doing it deliberately, the lust to kill plainly showing in his stony light blue eyes. In another five seconds, maybe in three seconds . . .

"Sure," Costello mouthed, moist lips writhing, "a flower, a pretty flower, for a damn dead—"

Sleek Costello screamed. His gun roared. He fell back, helped by my quick right uppercut. Costello screamed again and clawed at his face. I leaped forward and tore the automatic from his hand. With the same movement I raked it across his head, and he fell, jerking all over and moaning. But the automatic slipped from my fingers as I hit him, and skittered across the floor!

The heavy-set man with the Tommy-gun was on his feet, fumbling with the safety. I jerked up the left leg of my trousers and palmed the little 13-ounce .25 caliber Colt automatic clipped to my garter!

A .25 caliber gun can fit into your vest pocket or the palm of your hand. It isn't very big. But if you plant slugs in the right places, a chunk of .25 caliber lead will stop a guy—quick!

Snow Palito jumped for me, gun arcing for my head. I side-stepped the blow and tripped him. He screeched. I saw him try to regain his balance. He put his hands in front of him to break his fall. He slammed up against the wire mesh and about eight different hands clutched him at the same time! I saw fingers tightening around his neck . . .

The thick-set man had the Tommy-gun under his arm now, the muzzle toward me. I heard Ace Kennicott scream a warning. I threw my body across the floor a moment before the thick-set man's finger jerked on the trigger. I fired my little Colt twice.

The thick-set man teetered back and forth on his heels. His beefy face had suddenly jelled. There was a look of utter surprise frozen there. He never blinked; his jaw didn't fall slack; his hands didn't quiver. He just fell with a crash, stiff like a window dummy, still clutching the Tommy-gun.

Two .25 caliber slugs in your temple will do that to you!

I heard a moan from across the floor where Sleek Costello lay. I snapped a glance at him. He was on his back, his hands clawing and rubbing crazily at his face.

He screamed, "Kid—kid! Tommy-gun him! Shoot, damn you, shoot!"

The white-faced kid couldn't move. He looked at me and then at Sleek Costello over on the floor. He faltered.

"I—I can't, Sleek. God, I can't! I ain't never killed anybody in my life! I—can't . . ."

Then the kid started to cry. Honest!

I walked over and gently took the Thompson from his lax, trembling hands. It was still on safety! The kid couldn't have shot the gun if he'd tried.

"You'll find the keys in the heavy-set man's pocket, Beau," Ace Kennicott said evenly.

A moment later I had them free.

ACE KENNICOTT shook hands briefly, simply said, "Thanks, Beau." Knowing Ace, that was plenty.



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"The break, Beau—what was the break?" Ace asked eagerly.

I turned to Ace Kennicott. Then I pulled something from the waistband of my trousers and held it up.

"Preparedness, Ace," I said softly. "Just a kid's trick, but it worked! I paid two-bits for it at a novelty store. It's a long rubber tube ending in a bulb. The bulb hangs down my trouser leg to the knee. I made it up special before I came tonight, Ace. I thought maybe somebody might start kidding me about my flowers. If the guy got close enough all I had to do was bring my knees together. That squeezed the little bulb and forced ammonia out a little nozzle hidden in the center of the carnation! That's why Costello screamed and clawed at his eyes. It saved our lives tonight, Ace. A kid's trick, but it did a man's job! Ammonia, you know, will discourage even a mad dog!"

The rest was simple. I took Ace and his men up the circular stairs and we gathered in Costello's men, one by one. Not one put up a scrap; they knew they didn't have a chance. It was done quietly, with Ace's men taking charge and closing the games as Costello's men were led below, guns in their backs.

I made Ace go back with Lovely and me in the last boat. He needed a rest. Once ashore I was calling the harbor police to pick up Costello and the rest of the hi-jackers, now guarded by Ace's men. All the hi-jackers would do plenty of time. In my pocket was the "marriage" certificate the redhead had signed. The man who had married her and Costello wasn't a ship's captain, so everything turned out fine. We had the goods on Steve Napier with Sleek Costello's confession. A complete clean-up campaign.

I looked at Lovely, the moonbeams gleaming in her blonde hair as the launch sped for the pier.

I sat up a little closer, asked, "Big evening, honey?"

"Well, Beau," she said slowly, "interesting but not exactly exciting. Oh, I enjoyed it thoroughly, understand! But you and Ace talked together so long I got lonely. I liked looking at the big society people, though. The nice man at the roulette wheel talked to me, and that helped."

"He must have won some money," I said casually, knowing the poor lunkhead must have lost plenty because of the fixed wheel.

"Oh, no," Lovely said quickly, "he ran the game. I was really enjoying myself until you and Ace came and took him away and another man closed the game. He was such a nice man." She sighed.

"Hey!" I shrilled, "what you mean nice?"

"He taught me the fine points of roulette, Beau," Lovely said. She fumbled for a moment.

"Lookit, Beau," Lovely said in a matter-of-fact voice. "Money. It's ours. I might have won more if you and Ace hadn't taken the man away. I ran that twenty dollars, Beau, up to almost three thousand! The nice man said I was just too, too lucky!" She sighed again. "But nothing really exciting happened."

I looked at Ace. It was all I could do to keep from laughing right out loud. Ace was choking. I motioned for him to hold it.

"By the way, Ace," I said after a while, "I'm having breakfast with a gorgeous redhead in the morning. I've got to hand over this phony marriage certificate she was forced to sign. As she was married to the fake Ace Kennicott," I laughed, "I think the real Ace should go along to get acquainted. Time you settled down, anyway. She'd go for you in a big way. I—er—kind of think she's easy on the eyes myself, although personally I prefer blondes."

Lovely suddenly squeezed hard on my hands and sat closer. I slipped my arm around her shoulders.

MR. DETECTIVE IS CHAGRINED

By William R. Cox

THE phone jangled harshly in the dark of the room. Donny Jordine tossed protestingly in the bed, rolled over and smothered the instrument. He got the ear piece to his round head

without turning on the light. He had once known a man who got shot turning on a light in answer to a faked call.

Bullets rained about them wildly. An ambush!



"No chair'll ever get this baby. But if it does, I'll talk it over with you two in hell. Because that's where I'm sending you, suckers. Come and get it!"

He said bitterly, "You talk, it's your nickel."

Mary Portland's voice came vibrant, almost terror-stricken, "Donny! Oh, Donny! Come, quick!"

At the distressed sound of her usually calm and collected voice, he became wide awake. He glanced at his watch, and the illuminated dial pointed to two A.M.

He said, "Where? What's happened?"

"Oh, Donny," she said. "My apartment. Hurry. It's Helen. She's—she's been killed."

Donny said incisively, "Hold everything, baby. Calm down. Don't call the cops until I get there. Sit tight and wait for my ring, two shorts and a long. Don't let anyone in—anyone, you hear?"

He was already out of his pajamas, reaching for garments to clothe his muscular, thick body. He dressed in the dark, adept through long practice. He eased out of the door of the apartment and went scurrying as fast as his two hundred pounds would allow down the stairs.

By special arrangement with the police, his coupé was parked at the curb. He measured the distance across the sidewalk and hurled himself through the air, snatching open the door and jamming a ready .38 into the interior. It was empty. He got in and started the motor, slammed into second and squealed away on skidding tires.

His mind was racing over the possibilities. He himself had insisted upon Mary Portland taking the secretary of Mayor Wheeler into her apartment to live. He had thought it well that his assistant should not live alone. The mayor himself had asked that Helen Worth be allowed to share the apartment. Mary had at first resisted, but finally capitulated to the charm of the quiet, blonde beauty who was the mayor's secretary.

And now someone had killed the girl in Mary's apartment while Mary was

absent. Donny cursed and raced the car around corners on two wheels. He parked the car down the street and made for the apartment house in which Mary Portland lived. He skirted the front entrance and went down an alley. He found a fire ordinance stairway and climbed to the third floor, taking three steps at a time.

He rang the bell of number 305—two short rings and a long one.

Mary's voice was under control as she said, "Who is it?"

"It's okay, baby," panted Donny.

A lock clicked and a chain rattled. He went into the small apartment. He stared at Mary Portland. Her face was white as chalk and her lips trembled. Only her eyes were clear and steady.

Donny said, "Steady, kid. It's gonna be all right."

She said in a monotone, "I was playing bridge. I came in at one-forty-five. The lights were all blazing. She—she's in there."

He went into the bedroom. On the threshold he stopped, his eyes bulging.

He said, "No wonder you're all shot."

The room was a shambles. Blood was on the walls, the twin beds, the window shades drawn tight to the bottom. There was a pattern of gore on the throw rugs. The furniture was disarranged. The entire contents of the room were topsy turvy; even the bedclothes were strewn about in disarray.

The girl lay, limbs contorted, upon the floor at the foot of one of the beds. Her clothing was in tatters. Her head hung at an awkward angle. There was a gag made of silk stockings in her mouth.

Donny tiptoed into the room, peering, touching nothing. The girl's throat was cut from ear to ear. Her staring eyes mirrored still the pain and horror of her terrible death. There were a thousand cuts on her body.

Donny said, almost in a whisper, "The bottoms of her feet, even. Someone tortured hell out of her. Get Wheeler on the wire before you call the police. There must be some reason for torturin' her. Maybe he'll know somethin'."

Mary went to the telephone in the living room. Donny got out his magnifying glass and went carefully over the room.

When Mary came back, she said, "The mayor's out of town. He can't be reached. His wife says she doesn't know where he went."

Donny said, "Dammit. He's on another one of those vacations. He does that all the time. Don't tell anybody, even his wife, where he goes. Look, baby. There oughta be a million prints in here, but I can't spot one. This must be a gang job."

"But why? That poor child. She couldn't tell them anything."

"You never can tell," said Donny. "If the mayor had something on someone. . . . Call Tom Hooper now. The cops may find somethin' in here that I can't see."

HE GOT down on his knees and examined the blood-stained rugs without touching them. He could distinguish no footprints. He went to the window and saw that there was no fire escape, no way of entrance. There were no marks on the sill, no prints on the glass.

Mary said, "Tom will be right up."

"She knew the murderer. Or at least she let him in," Donny decided. "I made this place tough to enter when you moved here. Nobody crashed it. Now, who could she have known that well? She didn't have many friends."

Mary Portland said tightly, "How about a drink?"

He peered up at her wan face and got off his knees.

He said, "Sure, baby. It might help you. Fix us one."

She got out a bottle of Scotch and some glasses.

She poured stiff drinks, and said, "I've seen a lot of things since I've been running with you, Donny. But this is the first time it's been close to home since—since Harry. It got me."

"You're all right, baby," said Donny. "You're doin' good. Murder is lousy on women. You shouldn't be messed into it. I'm gonna send you outa town until this is over."

She drank the whiskey, and said, "No you're not, Donny. I'll never rest until the murderer of that poor girl is caught."

"You know me," said Donny. "I'll take care of that."

"I know you always do," she said, "but this is a personal matter. This is my home. A depraved animal came in here and slashed my roommate to death. I'll never quit on this case, Donny."

The doorbell rang.

Donny admitted Lieutenant Tom Hooper and four men from the homicide squad.

The tall, grey officer said gravely, "This is a terrible thing for you, Miss Portland."

"It's not nice," said Mary steadily. "It's too much like Harry—my brother. I saw him when the mob was through with him, you know."

"Yes," said Hooper. "I remember. Donny—you get anything?"

Donny said, "I couldn't find a thing. I didn't mess any. I know you guys'll cover it close and give me what you get. It sure looks like a gang job or a revenge job, don't it?"

Hooper said fretfully, "Wheeler's been after the gangsters and the peddlers. He shouldn't go out of town like he does. He could help us now. I got the boys pickin' up every known addict in town soon as I got your call."

"They mighta tortured her to get information," said Jordine. "You better round up all the hoods. I don't know a thing about Helen Worth, except that she was an orphan with no relatives and that Wheeler said she was a damn good secretary. He thought a lot of her, I know."

"You talk to Wheeler's wife? Don't she have any idea where he is?"

"She was abrupt to the point of rudeness on that point," said Mary. "I think she resents his not telling her."

Hooper nodded, "She would. Any wife would. Let's see what the boys are finding."

They were photographing the scene, dusting the walls and furniture with powder, making careful diagrams.

Donny looked at Mary's pinched countenance, and said, "They'll be hours. How about you goin' over to my place for the night, baby?"

Mary said listlessly, "All right. Whatever you say, Donny."

She leaned heavily on him going to the elevator.

He supported her clumsily, and said, "Gee, kid, I'm sorry. It's tough as hell on you."

They alighted from the grilled cage and crossed the lighted lobby through the milling, frightened employees and several aroused tenants. Out in the street Donny steered the sagging girl toward the place where his car was parked, half a block away.

He had never known her to show weakness, and it perturbed his tough soul. He put one arm around her and half carried her. He was so preoccupied that his natural caution slept within him. He did not notice the black sedan across the street. They passed under an arc light. The burst of gunfire caught him entirely unaware.

Something struck him in the left shoulder, spun him, knocked him sideways.

He shouted, "Mary! Down! Hit the dirt, baby!"

He clawed at his gun with his right hand. Blood was already on the shoulder holster, and the butt slipped in his fingers. Another slug ripped across his body. He cursed and rolled.

He saw Mary Portland then. She was standing erect, upright in the glare of the light. Her face had come alive, and in her hand was the small .32 which was ever in her handbag. She was aiming carefully, coolly, at the car across the street. She was pumping lead slowly, regularly, with the aplomb of a wooden cigar store Indian. Lying there in pain, Donny admired her so that it squeezed his heart.

Bullets rained about them briefly but wildly. Then the motor of the car roared and it careened away, turning the corner on two wheels, screaming off into the night.

Mary said, "Donny! How bad, Donny? Is it bad?"

"Hell, no," said Jordine. "Get Hooper, baby. How did they ever miss you? Don't you know enough to lie on the ground when you're shot at?"

"I wanted to see," she said. "There was only one man. He wore a hat pulled over his eyes. I couldn't make much out of the car because we were in the light. You can't move, Donny. You're hurt bad."

"Nuts," he said. "Get Hooper. Get the radio police after that car. Hurry, baby."

She gave him one last look and ran back to the apartment. Donny closed his eyes. After a moment he passed out on the stones.

HE AWOKE with the glare of afternoon sun in his eyes. He was in a white room, and his nose told him that it was a hospital room. He tried to move his heavy frame, and

pain gave him instant pause. He twisted his size seventeen neck and saw Mary Portland sitting beside the bed. Her grey eyes were rimmed with red, but her voice was firm.

She said, "Take it easy, Donny. You got one nasty one and a scratch across your ribs."

He said, "Hi, baby? What's new?"

"Hooper's been here. They couldn't find the car. The gunman got clean away." She frowned and went on. "Hooper's got funny ideas."

"About Helen Worth?" asked Donny.

Mary nodded. "He says she was smoking marijuana last night. The medical examiner detected it. And they found one under a rug, half-smoked, with her lipstick on it. That's screwy, Donny. That kid was no reefer addict."

Donny closed his eyes and experimented with his left shoulder. It hurt.

He opened his eyes again, and said, "She wouldn't have to be an addict. Maybe Hooper's got something. This begins to make sense."

"It doesn't make sense that Helen smoked marijuana," said Mary Portland firmly.

"Look," said Donny patiently, "you go see Tom Hooper. Give him this: Corny Griffin runs the reefer racket in town. You know little Corny? The shrimpy guy with the big gun? Mayor Wheeler was clampin' down on the hopheads, all kinds. Get it?"

"Helen Worth had nothing to do with gangsters or with dope," said Mary stubbornly.

"There are a lot of slick articles around town you wouldn't even know were in the racket," said Donny. "Suppose one of 'em dates Helen, a lonely kid. Some sheik. He goes up to the apartment and slips her a reefer. Maybe she don't even know what it is. Maybe she thinks a thrill won't hurt her, see?"

"No," said Mary stonily. "I don't see. She wasn't that kind."

"He gets her started along the joy route an' tries to get information about Wheeler. She won't talk, or can't talk. He outs with a shiv an' gives her the works. She's still unable to give him what he wants so he goes cuckoo and carves her all up. It fits, baby. I'll bet on it. If we could only locate Wheeler I bet I could put it together in a couple hours."

"They expect Wheeler this afternoon," said Mary. "But, Donny, I think you're wrong this time. I know you're usually right. Your hunches and angles on this town have accounted for plenty of dead criminals. But this set-up is wrong."

Donny said, "Get me my pants and I'll show you. Baby, you go down to the shore and take a rest and let me do this. You ain't gonna like it."

"I may not like it," said Mary, "but I'm sticking through it. The doctor's orders are for you to stay right in bed today and tomorrow. He knows how tough you are and all that, but he says you positively cannot move. I'll see Hooper for you. But I still think you're wrong."

Donny said, "But, baby, you haven't even been to bed. You got the same clothes on. You gotta get away and rest. And—gee, baby, you were swell last night, standin' up there, drawin' that guy's fire, standin' him off. It was crazy, but it was swell."

She said coolly, "Don't get sentimental, Donny. It doesn't become the tough private operator."

He flushed to the roots of his hair.

He said gruffly, "Nuts. Get outa here. I want my pants and I want Corny Griffin. I'll show you who's soft."

"Don't get the wrong man," she warned. "The chief of police would love to catch you without those pants you're squawking for."

She went out. He moved, swung his legs over the side of the bed. After a moment his head cleared and strength flowed back into his amazingly durable body.

He got his feet on the floor and stood, steadying himself. He found his clothes hanging in a closet. Only his guns and his wallet were missing. He dressed painfully, debating whether to apply for the return of his money and his guns. He decided that it would be enough to get loose from the hospital. He was afraid he would have enough trouble getting away at all.

He went out into the corridor.

A nurse rushed up, and said, "Doctor Horman said—"

He showed his white teeth to her, and said airily, "Must be some mistake. I wasn't even touched. Shows you how dumb a doctor can be at times."

She stood dumbfounded. He walked past her and down a winding, broad stairway. It was St. Anselm's Hospital, he saw, an old frame building with a small entry. He walked out with a group of departing visitors. He was astounded at the ease of his egress.

THERE were several cabs in front.

He found a driver of his acquaintance, and said, "I'm busted right now, Sam, but I need a ride. I need a long ride. How about it?"

The cabby, a rough individual with a busted nose and a low forehead said instantly, "All day and all night, Mr. Jordine. I'm your pal."

Donny said, "It's four o'clock. I dunno—take me out to Mayor Wheeler's house. And wait for me."

The mayor lived in a big place which was located in the exclusive North Side district of town. Donny's shoulder was not improved by the jolting of the cab. He climbed the steps of the house with difficulty and rang the bell. A maid

answered the door and stared at his white face.

He said, "If the mayor's not home, I'll wait. Gotta see him."

She admitted him reluctantly. He went into a den off the spacious hall and sank into a deep leather chair facing the mayor's desk.

He said, "If Mrs. Wheeler's in, I'll talk to her."

"She's out," said the maid shortly.

"Okay, toots. Then scram and let a guy rest," said Donny.

The leather cushions felt good. He closed his eyes. He slept.

When he awoke the light was artificial, and his eyes opened upon the figure of the mayor of Bingham. The tall, thin man was seated behind the desk, smiling at him.

John A. Wheeler was an intellectual, a zealot. He had a wide brow and bright, piercing eyes. He had been a clever attorney, a prosecutor of brilliance, then an astute politician. He was a hard worker, often wearing himself into illness by his efforts. His face was lined with the marks of care and tremendous effort.

He said kindly, "You looked all in, Jordine, so I let you sleep."

Donny sat up, wincing in pain.

He said, "You look lousy yourself, Mayor. Your vacation didn't do you any good."

Wheeler removed twitching hands from sight, dropping them in his lap, and bit his lip.

He said, "Hell, Donny, this business would drive anyone insane."

"Sure," said Donny. "She was a good kid. Look, Mayor, how about it? What did they want from the girl?"

The writhing hands came into view above the edge of the desk.

Wheeler's face contorted as he said, "Donny, I don't know anything. This has just about killed me. I . . ."

"Sure, Mayor. But you can't let it get you down altogether. I'll get the guy that did that job and let you have him first. I know how you feel. Look—I want Corny Griffin."

The long curtains at the window behind the mayor's desk moved suddenly. A tow-headed, almost albino little man slid into view. In his hand was a .45 Colt positive. It looked too big for him to handle.

He said in a sing-song reedy voice, "What you want o' me, shamus?"

Donny said disgustedly, "Now how did that rat get in here?"

The thin voice became mocking. "Yeah, I wonder? How did Corny Griffin get into the Honorable John Wheeler's jernt? Shamus, you asked for me. Whadda you want?"

Donny said slowly, "You're caught in a blizzard, Corny. Better get the dope outa you before you talk to me."

"Never mind about the snow," snarled Griffin.

Donny managed a grin. It was a tough one because he had just remembered that he had no weapons. He had been about to go for the belly gun when he remembered. He fought to keep his head clear. There was death in the muzzle of the big gun in the hands of the doped Corny Griffin.

HE LET his eyes stray to the mayor. Wheeler's hands were frozen to the desk top, the knuckles white. The mayor's face was a mask of white agony.

He said through dry lips, "You'd better get out of here, Griffin."

"Oh yeah?" whined the diminutive dope peddler. "That's what you think. When I get outa here there's gonna be a couple stiffs left behind. I don't like this set-up. I don't like nothin' about it. That girl business. That was too much. It ain't safe around here no more."

"This will lead you to the chair," warned Wheeler.

His voice lacked conviction. Donny thought that there was a quality almost of resignation in it.

"Chair? No chair'll ever get Corny Griffin," the shrill voice neighed. "And if it does, I'll talk it over with you two in hell. 'Cause that's where I'm sendin' you."

Donny said, "Better men than you have tried that, Corny. Better watch out. You ain't catchin' me so easy. What do you know about Helen Worth? Where were you last night at midnight? And where were you at two-forty-five? Someone took a couple shots at me about that time. I don't let crooks take shots at me and get away with it."

He talked along easily, desperately, trying to retain the attention of the little man with the big gun. He could see Wheeler's right hand slipping by infinitesimal stages to the edge of the desk. He knew the mayor was going to make a play, and he wanted to give him every chance to make it clean.

Griffin said, "Those are things you'll never know in this world, shamus. You're on your way out. You got Rosarios and Benedetto and the others. But you ain't never gonna get Corny Griffin. I'm smarter'n any o' those mugs, see? I'm gonna take you right now, and then I'm gonna take the Honorable Wheeler. I'll take my chances on the hot squat on accounta if you guys live, I'll be framed into it anyway. I'll—"

The mayor's hand dipped, came up holding an automatic. He whirled, ducking sideways and firing with the same motion. Donny threw himself off the chair to the floor and crawled rapidly toward the desk. The .45 went off with a bang, but the automatic rattled a message of death.

Donny came to his feet, holding his injured shoulder. Corny Griffin was back

against the curtain. He had sprouted a third eye. A little cloud of plaster descended at Donny's feet from the spot where the bullet from the .45 had entered the ceiling. Corny Griffin died and dragged the curtain to the floor with a clatter of fixtures.

Donny crawled back to the leather chair and sank into it with a sigh of relief.

He said appreciatively, "Nice goin' Mayor. He was hopped to the eyes. He'd taken both of us."

He grinned. Wheeler sat quite still, the automatic clutched in his trembling hand.

The mayor said, "I'm such a lousy shot. I might have missed him."

"Don't let it get you," said Donny cheerfully. "You hit dead center. Now look, Mayor. Think back. Is there anything to tie Corny in with the girl?"

Wheeler said distractedly, "We've got the police, Jordine. Why not let them handle it? I can't tell you anything. I can't sit here and talk with that thing lying over there. I'm no man of iron."

"Corny'll keep for a few moments," said Donny impatiently. "Moments mean something in a murder case. I want the guy who came into Mary Portland's apartment and killed Helen Worth. If Corny's the man, I want to know it. It don't seem right. He totes a .45. It wasn't a gun that large that got me. And Helen was cut.

"Criminals generally don't shift weapons. They're conservative that way. Use the same poison for everyone, while an amateur, killing outa fear or revenge or jealousy, or because of dope, will use anything at hand. You knew Helen was full of marijuana when she was killed?"

Wheeler's face was tight.

He said, "Marijuana?"

"You know. Reefers," said Donny. "Plenty of it around. The Feds take care of that racket when they can un-

earth the source. Corny was in it up to his neck. Hell, you oughta know about it. You were after the dopesters, I hear from the cops."

"Yes, I was after them," said Wheeler dully.

Donny said, "Say, why don't you put up that gat? I don't trust those automatics. They go off too easy. I never carry 'em."

He leaned forward, searching the face of the man behind the desk. Mayor Wheeler stared back at him, his eyes dilated, blood running from the lips he had bitten to the raw flesh.

From the doorway behind Donny, Mary Portland's voice said unexpectedly, "Yes, Mayor Wheeler. Why don't you put it down—before I let you have a slug in the eye?"

DONNY jumped as if he had been stabbed. He turned and saw beyond Mary another feminine figure. The mayor's automatic clattered on the desk. Donny picked it up instinctively, watching Wheeler. The mayor was looking past Mary at the woman behind her. His face was a tragic mask; his eyes burned out, vacant of feeling or expression.

Donny said, "Take it easy, Mary. What's the idea?"

"I wasn't satisfied with your hunch, Donny," said the girl. "Come in Mrs. Wheeler. He can't hurt you now."

A thin, brown-haired, pale woman of uncertain years came into the room.

Mary said, "Tell Donny what you know, Mrs. Wheeler. It's the only thing to do."

The woman hesitated, gazing about the room. Her glance fell upon the prone body of Corny Griffin.

She drew herself erect, and said, "I'm afraid it's all a mistake. Miss Portland has been very kind. I was hysterical, John. I said things I shouldn't. She

asked me so many questions. I shouldn't have talked so much. I'm sorry. . . ."

Mary Portland's voice became hard.

She said, "Watch her, Donny. Keep that gun handy. She talked plenty when I picked her up in the street awhile ago, scared to death. She'll talk again. She's trying to protect him now."

Donny said, "Protect who? You sure about this, Mary?"

"You were shot with an automatic, weren't you?" demanded Mary. "What have you got in your hand? Ballistics will tell you if it's the right gun."

"You're accusin' the mayor of takin' a shot at me? For what, baby?"

"Because the mayor knows you. Because he knows you've solved a heap of crimes. Because he knew the police would turn up some clue or other and that you would be hot on the trail of the murderer of Helen Worth," said Mary Portland.

"But why should he protect a murderer?" demanded Donny. "The girl was his secretary. You can't tell me the mayor's a crook. I know too much about him."

"He's not crooked politically," said Mary. "But he's lousy morally. He was in love with Helen Worth. He took to marijuana a year ago to keep going on the job, and under the influence of the weed he fell in love with her. Those vacations he's been taking so secretly were to indulge in his passion for reefers. Mrs. Wheeler knows."

Mary went on. "Last night she followed his car. She tracked him to my apartment and waited for him outside. She saw him come out and wait in the car. She witnessed his attack upon us. He came home and burned his blood-stained clothes. There are stains in the black sedan and holes made by the lead I threw at him. I checked it all."

Donny said, "Gosh, baby, it's hard to believe."

"What do you think Corny Griffin was doing here? He found out about the mayor's weakness. He also was following him last night. Mrs. Wheeler saw him. She knew that the jig was up because Corny would squeal, so she talked to me. Corny came here to make the mayor lay off the racket. And I'll bet Wheeler promised to do it. And I'll bet he wanted Corny to kill you and then welched on the deal. He's out from under the influence of the weed now and things look different to him. Killing is not in his line when he's normal."

Mrs. Wheeler moaned, "John's a good man. He's always worked so hard. He's done so much for people."

The dry lips opened, and the white-faced mayor spoke.

He said, "Never mind, dear. Don't let it crack you up. It's all true. That drug—that weed, Donny."

Donny paused, telephone receiver in hand.

The pain-wracked man went on. "Donny, before you call the police, I want you to promise me something. I want you to promise that you'll wipe out this reefer business, that you won't rest until the school children are safe from the fiends who are even now preparing to give it to them, hoping to make addicts of them. Will you take over Donny?"

Donny said gravely, "I'll take over, Mayor."

The thin man nodded and smiled.

He said, "Thanks, Miss Portland. Thanks for being kind to—Helen. Good-bye, dear. I'm terribly, terribly sorry."

Donny said, "Hey!"

"It's all right, Donny," said Mary Portland. "He deserves a break. I saw him take it before, when no one else was looking. Let him go his way."

The self-administered poison took effect. The mayor pitched out of his chair and fell to the floor, close beside the small body of Corny Griffin.

THE CASE OF THE GAMBLING CORPSE

By **Frederick C. Davis**

CHAPTER ONE

Slated for Murder

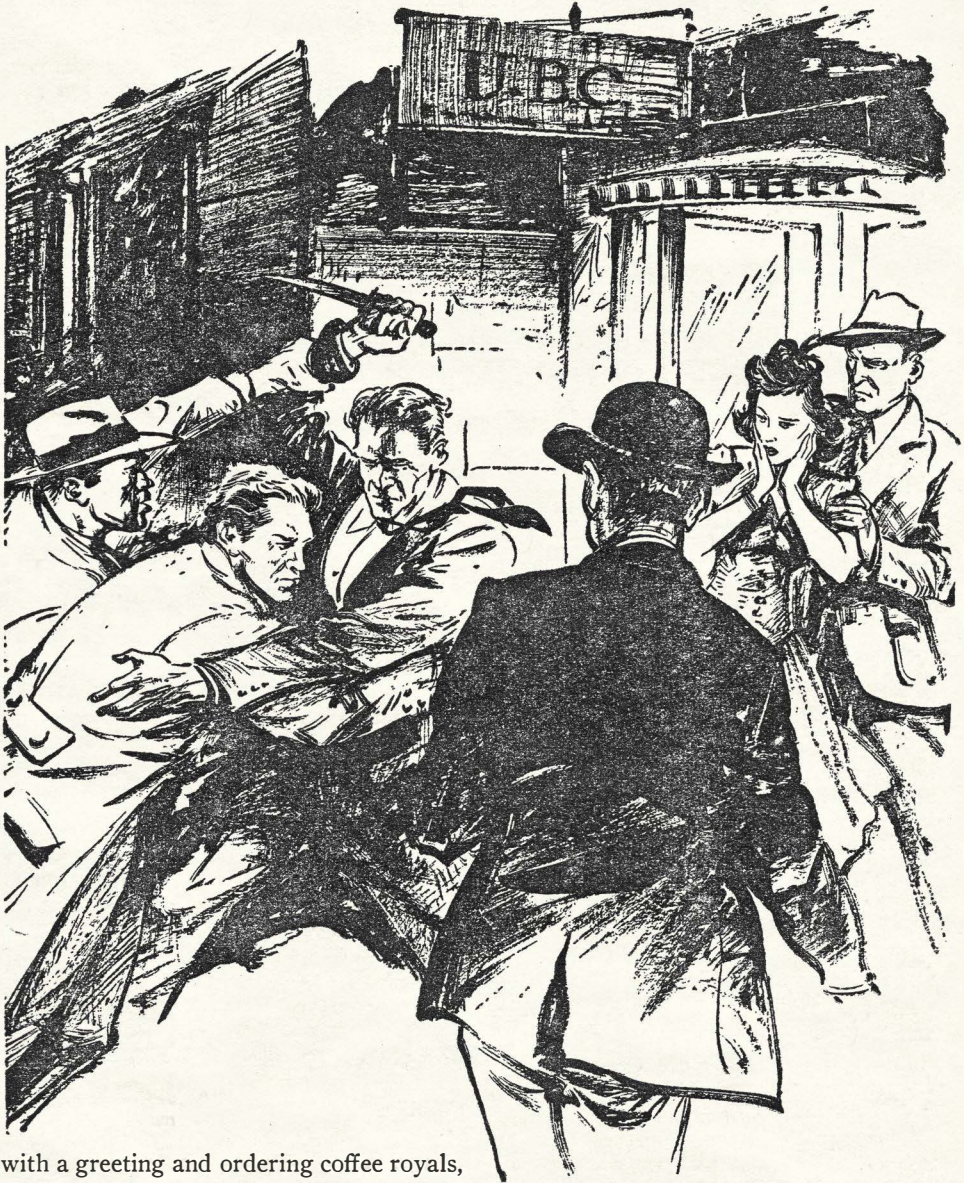
DIXON and McCord entered the restaurant cautiously, shoulder to shoulder. They saw a hand signaling from a booth—an enormous but

beautifully manicured hand belonging to a double-jowled, prosperous-looking gentleman. His first act, after buttering them



They sprang for him as the knife flashed up.

Under the shadow of the hot seat, two grim men made their last fight to break the deadly riddle of the Broadway gambler who paid off his debts within twenty-four hours—but left a dead man as security.



with a greeting and ordering coffee royals, was to produce a check book from one pocket and a fountain pen from another. The pen was as thick as his Corona Corona, and as he wrote, he bore hard on the stiff gold point.

"How's this for a retainer?" he asked in a distressed voice.

The check was written to the order of the Dixon-McCord Investigation Bureau—and the amount was \$1,000! The hard-nibbed pen had engraved the figures deeply into the paper. The signature of Andrew Eustace graced it with a Spence-

rian flourish. It was beautiful to behold, and there was only one thing wrong with it. It was post-dated the day after tomorrow, whereas Dixon and McCord were hungry today.

They looked at each other, looked at the mighty man who had produced it, then looked again at the check as casually as they could—just as if this retainer were a commonplace thing instead of the first they had seen since hanging out their shingle four long months back.

“What—” Dixon asked, his tone not quite steady, “what do we have to do to earn this money?”

“Your job is to prevent a man’s getting murdered,” Andrew Eustace answered.

Dixon and McCord gazed hard at him.

“You mean,” Dixon said, “you have definite advance information to the effect that some particular person is due to be bumped off?”

Andrew Eustace nodded.

“When?”

“Any time now.”

“You mean tonight?”

“Perhaps in a few minutes.”

Dixon and McCord strove to adjust themselves to this unexpected emergency.

It was shortly after ten o’clock of a Sunday. The restaurant was like any other in mid-Manhattan at night. Customers were standing in a row at the bar—musicians, actors and technicians who had wandered in from the Universal Broadcasting Company building across the street. A radio was reproducing a U.B.C. program—a smoky-voiced girl singing of her new-found love. The air was rich with appetizing aromas which Dixon and McCord found especially tantalizing due to the fact that they had recently been obliged to dine exclusively on doughnuts.

Thirteen weeks had passed since that optimistic day when they had severed themselves from their steady salaries as detective sergeants. They had spent those

thirteen weeks learning the bitter lesson that the act of opening a private detective agency does not automatically precipitate a parade of wealthy clients prepared to pay handsome fees. Their old pals on the force had taken to greeting them with pitying smiles — particularly Captain Mallory, their old skipper. Their financial condition was now so critical that under no legitimate circumstances—under no circumstances at all—could they permit the mountainous sum of one thousand dollars to slip away from them, startling as Andrew Eustace’s assignment sounded to them.

Dixon asked quietly, “Who is the man you expect will get killed?”

“His name’s Fletcher. Tony Fletcher, the theatrical agent.”

McCord blinked, and inquired, “Why don’t you tell him?”

“He already knows it.”

“Then why doesn’t he get himself some police protection?”

“He doesn’t realize what a dangerous spot he’s in. He thinks he can handle the situation himself—but I’m not quite so sure.”

Dixon watched while Eustace filled in the stub in the check book, subtracting the thousand from a balance of \$10,568.93.

“Mr. Eustace,” he said carefully, “judging from what you’ve said, you’re more concerned for Tony Fletcher’s life than he is himself.”

The gentleman fished into the folds of his coat and produced a wallet. From the wallet he extracted a slip of paper. He displayed the writing on the slip to Dixon and McCord.

“Last night Tony Fletcher gave me this I.O.U.,” he explained. “Just a quiet little game between friends, you understand.”

The amount which Fletcher had lost to his friend Eustace in last night’s quiet little game was noted down with the unlucky man’s signature. A round \$52,000.

“I NEVER give markers,” Eustace added calmly. “I never before took one and I never will again, but I made an exception in Tony Fletcher’s case because he was new at the table. He didn’t know we always settle in cash—always, if we don’t want to lose the other’s—ah—friendship.”

“Naturally,” said Dixon.

“Naturally,” said McCord.

“Fletcher has promised to pay me as soon as he can liquidate some stocks and bonds, which will take until the day after tomorrow. I’m sure he’ll keep his word—provided he’s still living.”

“But otherwise—” Dixon prompted.

“If Tony Fletcher should happen to die between now and nine o’clock next Tuesday morning, this I.O.U. will become a worthless scrap of paper. A gambling debt of this kind is not honored in the settlement of an estate. Let Fletcher be killed, and it’ll cost me fifty-two grand. Gentlemen, I do not wish to lose fifty-two grand.”

“I don’t wonder,” said Dixon.

“Your job,” Eustace made clear, “is to keep Tony Fletcher alive until he settles with me. Within reasonable limits I don’t care how you do it. Put him in a suit of mail. Lock him up in a vault if you have to. Drive him around in an armored truck. Handcuff the man who wants to kill him—anything. The one vital point is that I must not be mixed up in it personally in case it happens.”

With \$1.42 in his pocket at the moment, including a lead quarter, Dixon studied Andrew Eustace. As a police detective, he had familiarized himself with all the variegated fauna of the Times Square area. Eustace was an outstanding specimen of a new species that had evolved since the days of the long money, quick-triggered boys of a decade ago. Like all his new-day *confrères* of the green-baized table, he was a lone wolf in a velvet collar, a picafoon with diamond studs, a

virtuous courter of the Goddess of Chance, who winced at the mere thought of violence.

Today he and his plush-vested circle prospered by being smarter than the smart boys of yesterday. They knew the others had been undone by their crude tactics, such as the practice of collecting from welshers with blazing automatics. Andrew Eustace had no intention of repeating their errors of technique. Above all else, he was concerned with maintaining his integrity as a gentleman gambler who quietly paid his losses and politely collected his winnings on the spot—cash on the line.

“If you save Fletcher for me,” Eustace went on, “I’ll reward you with four thousand more. If you don’t, I’ll stop payment on this check. Is it a deal, gentlemen?”

To McCord it sounded like a deal, but he asked, “After Fletcher has settled, you don’t care whether he gets killed or not?”

“Your job will be done the moment he pays up,” Eustace answered. “After that, it’ll be none of my business, and none of yours, and he’ll be taking his own chances.”

Itching to pocket the check, but restraining himself, Dixon said, “One important detail you haven’t yet mentioned. Who is the person who desires to murder Mr. Fletcher?”

“He’s standing right there at the end of the bar.”

Dixon and McCord gazed at the incipient killer.

At first glance he scarcely seemed the type. His hair was thinning; his front was beginning to bulge. He gave the impression of being a very tired business man. But his shoulders were not stooped. He had them drawn up, and his head was lowered as if he were about to butt it into something. His eyes were fixed with grim intentness upon nothing.

"Notice the way he's drinking," Eustace said. "Fast and steady. He's been downing them one right after another for an hour, but he's not getting drunk. His glands, or something, won't let him. He's too full of hate. He's working himself up to it. A few more and he'll be all fired up to kill Tony Fletcher."

Dixon and McCord could believe it.

"Notice the way he keeps the glass in his left hand and holds his right over his inside coat pocket," Eustace continued quietly. "In that pocket he's got a knife. A long, sharp-pointed knife. The kind you use for carving meat."

Dixon and McCord resorted to their coffee royals and kept watching the man at the bar.

"About an hour ago he was with me and the boys in a room at the Hotel Continental. Just a quiet, friendly little game, you understand. The radio was playing, and a Broadway gossip program came on. He heard the fellow say, 'Don't be surprised if Doris Wade, the radio thrush, and Tony Fletcher, the theatrical agent, elope within the week. At present Miss Wade is under the management of her brother, Lloyd Wade, also a theatrical agent. It will be news to Mr. Wade that upon her marriage his sister will abandon her singing career.' When he heard that, Lloyd Wade stood up and said very quietly, 'I'm going to kill that rat.'"

Dixon and McCord watched Lloyd Wade.

"He wasn't loud about it," Eustace explained. "You'd have thought, almost, he was talking to himself. He just said, 'I'm going to kill that rat. So help me, I'm going to kill him,' and from the way he said it we knew he meant it. We'd all had dinner there in the room before starting the play—a whole roast turkey. Wade turned around to the serving table, picked up the carving knife and put it in his coat. I tried to reason with him, but it was like talking to a deaf man. He went

out and came here, and now he's watching for his chance, with that knife in his pocket."

Lloyd Wade was also making short work of a new whisky-soda.

"You see the way he's standing there, so still?" Eustace said. "He's listening. The girl singing on the radio right now is his sister, Doris Wade. She's in one of the studios in the U.B.C. building across the street. I made a phone call and found out Tony Fletcher's there with her. In a few minutes the program will be finished and they'll be coming out together. That's what Wade's waiting for."

Eustace lifted an admonishing finger. "Use discretion," he warned. "As little rough stuff as possible. No ugly publicity. Keep me strictly out of it, whatever happens. You understand this situation clearly?"

"We do," Dixon said.

WITH an air of finality Eustace heaved himself from the booth and dropped two dollar bills for the waiter. "I'm living at the Trafalgar, and I expect you to keep me posted. I leave the matter entirely in your hands. A small fortune, and the life of at least one man, maybe two, depends on the way you handle it. Good night, gentlemen, and good luck."

He ponderously departed. Carefully Dixon folded the check; which would remain worthless for at least thirty-five hours, and stored it in his wallet. McCord meantime eyed the man whose homicidal propensities they had to keep in check.

"Dix, we've got to think of something quick. Listen!" he said, his eyes sharpening. "The program's ending."

The announcer was, indeed, reciting a close tribute to a brand of headache tablets.

Lloyd Wade put down his empty glass, but his right hand remained pressed over his inside pocket. Intently and deliberately

he went out. Dixon and McCord slid from the booth and found him moving with that same determined grimness along the curb.

"He's so damned calm and set on it," McCord observed as they kept close at Wade's heels. "Just like he's going to keep an ordinary business appointment."

Dixon nodded uneasily. "I've seen plenty of killers after they've done the deed," he said, "but this is the first time I've ever seen one preparing for a homicide. If we were still on the force, we'd never get a crack at a job like this. Think of us collecting five grand for it. That'll show Mallory we're doing a hell of a lot better than being a couple of plodding flatfeet all our lives."

"The trouble with you is you're too ambitious, and you've read too many books on how to make speeches and succeed in life," McCord retorted. "They got us into this mess in the first place. Look—Wade's stopping."

Their man was now stationed near the neon-garnished entrance of the U.B.C. studios. A crowd was pouring from the foyer—audiences who had just witnessed gala programs. Somewhere in that white stone spire, or somewhere in the descending crush, was the man whom Lloyd Wade intended to convert into a corpse.

Wade was standing still, gazing at the faces emerging in the pink glow. His right hand was now hidden inside his coat—and it was a hard bulge, clenched. And as he stood there, unmoving, a sudden fire blazed in his eyes.

"Look out!" Dixon whispered. "He's scented the kill."

Wade's stare burned at a couple who had just appeared under the marquee. The young woman was darkly beautiful. The man at her side was laughing. He was a dashing and debonair sort, and all his attention was centered upon the lovely girl as he escorted her across the sidewalk—straight toward the cab near which

Wade was waiting. Wade let them come—and his fist lifted.

Dixon and McCord sprang as the steel glittered up. Suddenly everything was confusion. Fletcher recoiled from the blade flashing toward his chest. Dixon struck Wade's arm down and the girl cried out. Feet scuffled. McCord saw a big, blue-uniformed man advancing. He dove for the door of the cab. Dixon pulling and McCord pushing, they scrambled into it with their man.

"Take off!" Dixon ordered the driver.

Almost sitting on Wade, they saw the girl clinging to Fletcher. Fletcher didn't seem to realize what had almost happened. He was trying to reassure the girl when the patrolman hove to.

"What's goin' on here?" the cop demanded.

In the babble of voices Dixon caught Fletcher's answer.

"Nothing, officer. Nothing to bother you with. Just an overly eager autograph hound, that's all."

As the taxi whirred off, Lloyd Wade sat pinioned between McCord and Dixon, still clutching the knife.

DIXON and McCord applied themselves to the problem of separating Wade from the weapon. It was not an easy task, but the struggle ended with it in Dixon's hands. He tossed the knife out the window and it landed in a parked car. Breathing more easily, he gave the driver the address of his office.

"Go ahead and arrest me," Wade said with dogged breathlessness. "Lock me up. I'll get out. No matter how you try to stop me, I'll come back and kill that rat."

"We're not cops," Dixon explained, without adding that they often wished they still were. "We're private detectives, and it's our job to keep you from staging a massacre."

"Try and stop me!" Wade said in a challenging tone, after which he was silent until the taxi stopped just west of Broadway.

The glare of the hot-dog-and-orange-drink district scarcely reached the building that housed the Dixon-McCord office. Having paid the fare, which depleted their capital considerably, they escorted Wade up the stairs.

The small room contained two desks and several empty file cabinets conspicuously labeled *Cases Completed*. One corner was occupied by a built-in safe, equally empty. The windows were lettered with legends promising that skilled operatives were available day and night, strictly confidential service, rates moderate, no case too big and none too small.

Wade sat, his manner remaining uncompromisingly defiant.

"Now look here," Dixon said in a comradely tone, drawing another chair to face him. "Just why do you want to kill Fletcher, anyway? He must be a right guy if your sister thinks enough of him to want to marry him."

Wade sneered. "My wife," he said with sudden vehemence, "made the same mistake."

They waited for him to go on, but he sat in silence, and his eyes flamed with hatred.

"Maybe it'll help if you get the whole thing off your chest," Dixon suggested.

Wade gazed at them steadily. "I don't mind telling you about it. I'd like the whole world to know what a skunk Fletcher is. Marie is only one of the reasons why I'm going to murder him. Three years ago Marie was my wife. We were happy together—until Tony Fletcher got in his dirty work. Marie left me. Divorced me. Married him. I should have killed him then."

"What for?" McCord said. "If she was that kind of dame, you were well rid of her."

Wade tensed. "Be careful how you speak of her. I adored her. She was everything I wanted in a woman—until Tony Fletcher hypnotized her. I still love—the memory of her."

Dixon asked quietly, "You mean, she's dead?"

Wade nodded. "She was a fine actress. Marie Valentine—you know her name. But she listened to Tony Fletcher. I hadn't handled her properly, he said. He'd do it right—make her the greatest artiste on any stage. He changed her type of role, gave her different plays—all unsuitable. Every one flopped. They wrecked her career. Then Fletcher cast her aside. Last year she died—of a broken heart—because that dog—"

"That's the stuff," Dixon encouraged him. "Talk it out of your system."

Wade seemed not to hear. "Fletcher is a human devil who delights in making life a living hell for me. He wasn't content with stealing my wife. Next he went about wrecking my business. He lured my biggest clients away. He reached new ones and argued them out of signing with me. One by one he robbed me of my whole list—until now I have only one decent account left. Doris."

"Keep it coming," Dixon urged.

"He's inducing Doris to give up her career. It'll put me on the rocks. Once I'm out of the game and done for, he'll let her sing again, and he'll cash in. But he'll mismanage her the same way he bungled Marie's future. He'll ruin her. Then he'll tire of her and turn his back. The rat!"

"There now," Dixon said as Wade paused. "Don't you feel better for having gotten rid of all that bile? You don't hate him so much now, do you? You can see it's not really so bad—"

"I'm going to kill him," Wade said with undiminished determination. "So help me, I'm going to kill him."

Dixon sat back and thought quickly of

a new angle of attack. He bore in upon Wade with all the persuasion at his command.

"Listen to me. I sympathize with you. I can't blame you for the way you feel. But you're forgetting something. Suppose you kill Fletcher. What then? You'll go to the chair. Do you know what it's like—frying in the hot seat?"

"I won't care," Wade said calmly. "Killing that louse will be worth it—worth anything. No matter what they might do to me afterward, I'm going to kill Tony Fletcher."

McCord threw up his hands. "It's no use talking, Dix. Never have I seen a guy with such a one-track mind!"

DIXON grimly thumbed through the telephone directory, found a number and dialed it. A voice with an Oriental accent told him Mr. Fletcher was not at home. His insistence elicited the added information that Mr. Fletcher was at the Wade apartment. Dixon wondered what manner of man it was that would go immediately to the home of the assailant who had just tried to destroy him. Preferring not to hint of his next move, he gleaned Wade's address from the book.

"Stay here, Jimmy, and keep our pal from running amok," he instructed McCord. "If he makes so much as a move, use your gun to quiet him. In the meantime I'll be removing Fletcher from the danger zone."

Leaving McCord strategically stationed between Wade and the door, Dixon left.

He went to the Wade apartment. He thumbed the button, and Doris Wade looked out at him, with Tony Fletcher gazing over her shoulder.

"My name's Dixon," he said earnestly, "and I advise you both to be a little more careful about answering doorbells."

Fletcher was unimpressed. He seemed inordinately cheerful, considering that he

had lost \$52,000 and, very nearly, his life as well. Doris Wade, however, was not meeting the situation with such cosmopolitan poise.

"Well?" said Dixon. "Aren't you grateful, Mr. Fletcher, to be still among the living?"

Fletcher smiled. "Thanks for whatever it was you did," he said. "Andrew Eustace just phoned to tell me about hiring you. I find his solicitude very touching, but I doubt very much that Lloyd meant to kill me, and I think the whole thing's pretty silly."

"That knife in your gizzard wouldn't have felt so silly," Dixon remarked with a frown. "If you could see Lloyd right now, you wouldn't be so damned nonchalant about it. You've got to realize that getting murdered is not a matter to be taken lightly."

Doris Wade's anxious eyes turned to Fletcher, and Fletcher continued to smile.

"Oh, Lloyd may be a little upset now," he answered, "but he'll feel better in the morning. After all, why should he want to—"

"That man," Dixon said, "has reasons."

Doris Wade leaned forward imploringly.

"Mr. Dixon," she said in her throaty tone, "I think the world of my brother, but what he believes about Marie isn't true. She left Lloyd and married Tony simply because she felt Lloyd was holding back her career. She forced Tony to let her manage herself, and that's what caused her failure. She left Tony of her own free will, and she didn't die of a broken heart, but of pneumonia. In my own case, Tony isn't persuading me to give up my singing. I'm insisting on it because I want to devote all my time to the job of being a good wife. Lloyd won't let himself see the truth—and he's so wrong."

"You try to convince him of that," Dixon said sourly. "I couldn't."

FLETCHER shrugged. "As for Lloyd's business—he's slipped—become so out of date the game's 'way ahead of him now. His clients have all come to me voluntarily. I've even tried, against my own best interests, to influence them to stick with Lloyd's office, but they wouldn't. I can't believe he's completely blind to the facts. He's really bitter at himself, not at me. Damn it all, Dixon, he has no real reason for hating me."

Dixon took a breath. "Listen!" he said. "When Wade went at you with that knife he wasn't fooling. Whether you believe it or not, he's possessed by the idea of murdering you, and whether or not you like it, it's my job to keep you out of the morgue—at least until nine o'clock Tuesday morning. Good lord, I've got to have a little co-operation!"

Tony Fletcher stood there smiling, his urbane poise unruffled.

Dixon appealed to the girl. "You want to marry this man, don't you? You want it to be a wedding instead of a funeral, I hope. Well then, get him out of town. Convince him he's got to lie low—"

"Out of the question," Fletcher said flatly. "I can't abandon my clients, certainly not for such a ridiculous reason. I've several important contracts to sign tomorrow."

Dixon went back on his heels. "Can't you grasp the fact that your life's in danger? I'm trying to keep Wade under control, but he's like a wild man inside. Something might slip. And something will only have to slip once. Don't you understand?"

"I'm damned if I'll hide like a rabbit in a hole," Fletcher said obdurately. "I'm going about my business as usual, and I'm not—"

Doris Wade rose. "Please, Tony. I really am worried. At times Lloyd can be—extremely difficult." And as Fletcher shrugged again, she turned to Dixon. "I feel that Mr. Eustace shouldn't have in-

terfered, but I appreciate your concern, and I want to help. Lloyd loves me, and he'll listen to me. If I could only talk to him, I'm sure he'd understand."

Dixon took heart.

"Good!" he said. "It's worth trying, anyhow. Phone my office." He gave her the number. "Your brother's there. Do your best. If he responds to your treatment, it'll certainly be a great load off my mind."

He stood by while the girl spun the dial. The distant bell rang again and again. Doris Wade disconnected and whirled the dial a second time. Her eyes turned to Dixon, wide and full of uneasy wonder.

"There's no answer."

Chilled with alarm, Dixon pulled the phone from the girl's hands and tried it himself. She was right. His office wasn't responding. He dropped the instrument and strode to the entrance.

"Bolt this door," he ordered them. "Don't let anybody in unless you're sure it's safe. Keep under cover, Fletcher, until I find out what's gone wrong."

At the nearest corner he dove into a cab. At Broadway it seemed to reach an impasse. He dropped coins into the driver's palm without counting them, and dodged out. He scrambled up the one flight to his office. On the sill he halted.

McCord was sprawled flat on his back on the floor, and the chair Wade had occupied was now vacant.

Dixon grasped McCord's lapels and pulled him up. He shook McCord. He dashed a glass of cold water into McCord's face. His feverish efforts were rewarded by a flutter of eyelids. Abruptly McCord was looking terrified, trying to get up and fumbling at his hip pocket.

"Where's Wade?" Dixon demanded. "What happened? Where's Wade?"

"He—he socked me when I wasn't looking. He scrambled. Holy cats, Dix, he—he's got my gun!"

CHAPTER TWO

Killer on the Loose

DIXON tackled the telephone. He aged years during the moment's wait until Doris Wade answered.

"Your brother's on the loose," he warned her. "He's hunting for Fletcher—and he's got a gun."

A sound of dismay came from the girl.

"It's high time Fletcher put himself in a safer place," Dixon hurried on. "After all, your brother lives with you in that apartment and sooner or later he'll show up, all set to burn your boy friend down with an automatic."

He heard Doris Wade apprehensively speaking to Fletcher. "Tony, you *are* taking it too lightly. You *must* be careful, darling."

Fletcher's chuckle came over the wire. "I tell you, I simply don't believe—"

"Please, Tony!"

Dixon could almost see Fletcher's shrug. "Very well," he heard Fletcher say. "For the sake of your peace of mind, Doris, I'll do as you wish."

Dixon resumed. "Thank God he's seeing the light at last. Ask him to stay there—and keep that door bolted—until we arrive. We'll see him safely home—I hope."

McCord, still groggy, stumbled down the stairs after Dixon. They resorted to another cab. Dixon probed into McCord's pockets and found some silver. Ducking from the taxi in front of the Wade apartment, they warily scanned the street. It seemed tranquil. No murderer was visibly on the prowl.

Dixon pushed the bell, strode in as Doris Wade released the bolt, and came upon Fletcher standing carelessly at the fireplace, partaking of a highball and still smiling.

"Steady, men," he said. "I've still got my health."

"Nobody's happier about it than we are," Dixon answered. "Come on—you're going home."

Humoring them, Fletcher got into his hat and coat. Dixon and McCord waited impatiently in the vestibule while he said a proper good night to his fiancée. With complete nonchalance he led them to his car.

The darkness of the streets filled Dixon and McCord with mounting anxiety. Sitting beside Fletcher as he drove, they searched the gloomy sidewalks, expecting at every moment to see Lloyd Wade spring out of the shadows with the loaded automatic in his fist. The ride, however, was uneventful, and this fact broadened Fletcher's grin. He swung to the curb near the entrance of a massive apartment building and calmly got out.

"Good night, chums," he said.

"Not yet," Dixon protested. "It wouldn't be polite if we didn't see you to your door."

They did. With considerable gratification they watched Fletcher disappear unharmed into his penthouse. The elevator returned them to the lobby, and they paused under the marquee, searching the night.

"Dix," McCord said, "that guy Wade might pop up at any minute."

Dixon nodded. "I'll watch the place. You keep an eye on the Wade apartment. After Fletcher gets safely to his office in the morning, I'll connect with you."

"You can depend on me, pal," McCord said earnestly.

He trudged off. Dixon returned to Fletcher's car. Settled in the front seat, he could keep the entrance of the building under surveillance. The post was a comfortable one, but Dixon's nervous tension did not relent.

The hours crawled.

At last the night yielded to the brightening blue light of dawn. Milk wagons appeared. Trucks began rumbling up the

avenue a block away. The sun put in an appearance and the city came to life. Men and women began hastening out of the apartment house, on their way to work. Beneath drooping eyelids Dixon watched for Fletcher.

It was past nine when Fletcher appeared, incredibly brisk and dapper. He smiled at Dixon and folded under the wheel, and as he drove he kept up a cheerful, one-sided conversation. Instead of talking, Dixon devoted himself to staying awake and watching the throngs on the sidewalks. When Fletcher swung his car into a parking lot in Radio City, Dixon insisted on getting out first and subjecting the vicinity to a suspicious scrutiny.

He escorted Fletcher into an office building on Fifth Avenue. His vigilance did not relent even when Fletcher was safely ensconced behind a desk. Promptly he took up the telephone.

The whirring of the dial was answered by the voice of Doris Wade.

"This is your sleepless watchdog," he said. "Have you been able to persuade your brother—"

She broke in. "Lloyd hasn't come home!"

Dixon stiffened. "You mean you haven't seen him since—"

"I waited for him all night. I haven't been able to reach him anywhere."

Grimly considering this, Dixon said, "He still has that gun, and he's waiting for a chance to make use of it. Are you convinced now he means business?"

"I am! I'll do anything to keep him from it—anything."

Dixon said, "My partner is guarding your place. You'll probably be able to find him without any trouble. Will you please tell him I want him to find your brother, and when he has news, I'll be waiting for it in Mr. Fletcher's office?"

Sounding deeply worried, she said she would.

LEAVING Fletcher briskly at work and still unperturbed, Dixon retired to a chair in the reception room. He was gratified to find that two secretaries were on hand to help him guard his man. Compared with the drowsiness of Dixon's own office, the ceaseless activity in Fletcher's was amazing. Telephones shrilled and typewriters clattered incessantly. An endless series of clients paraded in and out. They included an incredible number of the most pulchritudinous young ladies Dixon had ever beheld this side of the footlights, but in spite of the diversion they afforded him, he experienced the longest and most trying day of his life.

Fletcher had lunch brought to his desk and was thoughtful enough to supply Dixon with a tray, which helped. But Lloyd Wade was still unaccounted for, still on the prowl. It was past five, and the hubbub in the office was continuing unabated, when one of the secretaries touched Dixon's weary shoulder.

"Telephone."

Dixon snatched it up.

"Dix," McCord sighed, over the line, "I've found him."

"Thank the lord!" Dixon said fervently. "Where is he?"

"I couldn't locate him anywhere, so a while ago I decided my best chance was to make a tour of all the bars on Broadway. Sure enough, I spotted him near Times Square. I kept an eye on him while he made a phone call, then—"

"Where is he? Where is he?" Dixon insisted.

"At the Hotel Continental. He went up to Room 514 and he's still there. But he was acting funny, Dix—like he was getting set to pull a fast one."

"Keep both your eyes peeled," Dixon said nervously, "and I'll be right over."

He left Fletcher amid the din of the telephones, and hurried.

In the lobby of the Hotel Continental

he found McCord slumped exhaustedly in a chair.

"Where is he now?"

"Still in Room 514," McCord answered, "I hope."

"Whose room is it? What's he doing up there?"

"I don't know," McCord said. "I thought I'd better leave good enough alone, but I'm willing to find out."

They stepped into an elevator. Dixon found the door numbered 514, and knocked. He blinked when it opened, for the man who looked out was Andrew Eustace.

"Good evening," Eustace said pleasantly. "On the job, I see, gentlemen."

Dixon steadied himself. "Is Wade in there?"

Eustace shut the door behind him. "Lloyd phoned me a short time ago and I invited him to join us here. Just a friendly little game, you understand. I thought I'd feel better if I could keep him in sight myself. We've settled down for a long session, and there'll be nothing to worry about for a while."

"But," Dixon said, "he's got a gun."

Eustace started.

"It's *my* gun," McCord added. "If he uses it for murdering somebody, it's going to be a devil of a mess all around. You've got to get it away from him."

In his concern, Eustace began to perspire. "I'll do my best, gentlemen, but when Wade leaves, don't let him out of your sight for an instant."

"We wouldn't," McCord vowed. "Not for five thousand dollars."

Eustace re-entered the room where the quiet little game was in progress. Before the door closed Dixon heard Wade speaking.

"Don't worry about me," he was saying. "I won't overplay. If I lose, I'll quit when I'm broke, and I'll pay on the spot. If I win I expect the same from you."

"You'll get it," Eustace assured him.

"Cash on the barrel-head. We never settle in any other way, do we, gentlemen?"

Dixon and McCord descended to the lobby and selected chairs within view of the elevators. They watched in weary silence.

THE evening trailed off into eternity. The large hours of the night disappeared and the small hours of the morning approached. And still they waited.

As an elevator opened, they perked up. Concealed behind newspapers, they spied Andrew Eustace emerging. He lumbered toward the street and they converged upon him.

"Is Wade still up there?"

"Yes," Eustace said soberly, his buttery tone thicker than usual. "And he's lost his shirt. He argued me into breaking my rule again and I took another marker, just to keep him quiet. That makes your job doubly important, gentlemen. If Wade kills Fletcher and goes up for murder, I'll lose both I.O.U.'s." He gestured. "Wade's coming out of the elevator."

Eustace ballooned through the door with Dixon and McCord at his heels. He heaved himself into a taxi and they followed. He ordered the driver to wait. They watched Wade crossing the lobby in an intent, determined manner.

"What about the gun?" Dixon asked. "Did you get it away from him?"

"He denies having one," Eustace said. "Naturally, I couldn't insist that the gentleman's a liar. I didn't try to frisk him because in his present temper he has the strength of five men. His glands, or something. You may have to take drastic steps to keep him away from Tony Fletcher—but be careful."

They left the cab in haste, because Wade was walking swiftly. His stride stretched. Block after block Dixon and McCord hustled, striving to overcome

his effort to put distance between them.

"He knows we're tailing him," Dixon panted. "Look at the way he's keeping himself in the brightest part of the sidewalk. He's doing it so we can't jump him—so we can't take the gun away from him."

"But there's no doubt about it, Dix," McCord said breathlessly. "He's bound for Fletcher's apartment right now."

JUST around the corner from Wade's destination, Dixon and McCord halted in surprise. Unexpectedly Wade was entering a small store. It was a delicatessen.

"What's this?" McCord wondered. "Has he gotten to the point where he has to have a ham on rye and a glass of buttermilk before he can murder a guy?"

"I doubt it," Dixon answered. "In my opinion he's still capable of killing Fletcher on an empty stomach."

They peered in. Wade was speaking to the white-coated proprietor across a counter heaped with potato salad. His stop, whatever its real purpose was, granted them a moment's advantage. They strode past the corner, and McCord waited outside while Dixon entered the lobby of the building where Fletcher lived. He used the house phone.

"Dixon again," he said. "Same trouble. Wade's right across the street and he's still packing a cannon. I don't know just how he'll try to get at you with it, but don't take any chances."

He returned to McCord, who had stationed himself at a spot from which he could watch both the entrance of the building and the delicatessen.

"Still in there," McCord reported.

To make sure of it they strolled past the store. Then they paused and gazed at each other in alarm.

"No," Dixon said, "he isn't."

"He's got to be," McCord insisted. "I'm damned sure he hasn't come out."

Puzzled, they returned to their previous position.

"There's somebody coming out now," Dixon observed.

"It's the guy that runs the store," McCord said.

The man who emerged was wearing a white cap, coat and apron. He passed under the canopy of the apartment house and veered to the service entrance.

"Wade couldn't be sending Fletcher a poisoned salami sandwich," McCord reflected, "because that guy isn't delivering anything."

The white-clad man disappeared into the building. Again Dixon and McCord strolled to the delicatessen. Dixon stopped short, gazing in at a man who was slicing liverwurst.

"That's the proprietor!" he said quickly. "A few minutes ago he was wearing a white coat, but now he isn't." Realization struck. "It was Wade we saw coming out! He got past us. He's on his way up to Fletcher's apartment right now!"

They sprinted. An elevator flew them to the lofty level of the Fletcher penthouse. McCord leaned on the button, and Dixon pounded the door. It was opened by a smiling Filipino boy.

"Has somebody from the delicatessen come up?"

The boy shook his brown head.

Dixon saw Doris Wade, who was pale and shaken, then Tony Fletcher, whose poise was still intact. Not reassured, Dixon followed a hallway that led to the kitchen. It was deserted, but he discovered that the door which gave onto the service stairs was not locked. Immediately he sank the bolt into its socket. He looked into two bedrooms and a bath on his way back to Fletcher and Doris Wade.

"All quiet, apparently," he said with a sigh. "But if you should hear a sudden boom, you'll know I've overlooked something."

Fletcher said cheerfully, "Relax. We're perfectly safe here. Could you use a drink?"

They could and, at Fletcher's invitation, named it. Saki returned to the kitchen in the blithest of spirits. Dixon and McCord sank into chairs.

"A few minutes ago," Dixon said, "Wade sneaked into this building by way of the service entrance. He bribed the delicatessen man across the street, and got past us by disguising himself in a jacket and apron. We've managed to head him off, so far as I know."

Doris Wade, visibly distressed, turned with a gesture of entreaty. "Tony, won't you please leave town, even if it's only for a little while?"

"Really now, Doris," Fletcher said, his smile undimmed, "you wouldn't admire a man who runs away from danger, would you?"

"On the other hand," McCord said sourly, "who admires a corpse?"

Saki came with the drinks.

"Your health," Dixon said in a grim tone.

"I understand your job will be finished as soon as I pay Eustace," Fletcher said. "Well, I hope to settle with him early tomorrow morning. Here," he added lifting his highball, "is to crime."

DIXON wasn't listening. He had caught a furtive noise in the rear of the apartment. He put down his Scotch, signaled to his partner and went down the hall with McCord dogging his steps. In the kitchen Dixon stopped, facing a closed door. He opened it.

The struggle was sharp but short.

They grasped Wade's white-sleeved arms and forced him along the hall. His sister sobbed and Fletcher gestured deplorably as they planted him in a chair and pinned his arms. He stared hatefully at Fletcher.

"I'll kill you yet!" he promised.

"Not until after nine o'clock tomorrow morning, you won't!" McCord retorted.

He tugged his automatic from Wade's pocket and, with a sigh of relief, packed it on his hip.

Fletcher said quietly, "Lloyd, let's be sensible about this thing. I'm sure we can patch up our differences, old man. I'm willing to come more than half way. What will satisfy you? How about becoming my partner in the agency, fifty-fifty?"

Wade sneered. "You can't buy me off. I don't care about money any more. It's the least of my worries now. The hell with any offer you might make. Nothing will satisfy me but killing you." And he strove to escape from Dixon and McCord.

"Lloyd." Doris Wade's pale hands pressed over her brother's. "If—if I don't marry Tony—then will you let him alone?"

Wade strained to break from Dixon's and McCord's grasp.

"Will you, Lloyd?" his sister begged. "Will you then?"

He gazed at her. For the first time Dixon felt the heat in him diminishing. A fierce gleam appeared in his eyes.

"You mean that?"

"I mean it, Lloyd."

"You won't marry him? You won't ever see him again? You swear you won't?"

Tears were brimming into the girl's lashes. "I swear it, Lloyd."

"Doris!" Fletcher protested. "You don't know what you're saying. You can't make such a promise!"

"It's the only way, Tony," the girl said, her voice breaking. "I must!"

"Damned if I'll let—"

"Don't, Tony. I've decided."

Fletcher was white-faced. The muscles of his clamped jaws stood out in little white lumps as he stared at Wade. And Wade laughed.

"I want the world to know this, Doris—"

the whole world. As soon as possible! There's the telephone. Call the papers. Tell them the news about you and Fletcher is all wrong. Tell them you haven't any intention of marrying the dog and giving up your career. Now, Doris! Go ahead! Now!"

The girl rose, fighting to restrain her tears. Fletcher stepped toward her, but she jerked back, and at that Wade laughed again. The room was tightly quiet while the dial whirled.

Fletcher started for Wade. Dixon reached out and stopped him at a safe distance.

"You damned maniac," Fletcher said, standing taut. "Don't you realize how you're hurting her?"

Wade's sharp laugh broke out again, ringing with triumph. "She'll get over it. And afterward she'll thank me. But you, Fletcher—it's you I'm really hurting. I'm doing to you what you did to me—taking away the woman you love."

Fletcher's fists were clenched and bloodless. His eyes were full of dangerous fire. His voice was vehement.

"He can't do that to me. *I'll kill him first.*"

CHAPTER THREE

The Corpse in the Closet

A TAXI was pulling away when Dixon and McCord reached the street. They checked their resources and found they could afford another cab only under the most pressing circumstances. They walked the many blocks to the Wade apartment. McCord's ring brought Doris Wade to the door. She had been crying, but her chin was firm. She gazed at them in puzzlement.

"Good soldier," Dixon complimented her. "We think we'd better watch this place again tonight, just in case your brother changes his mind."

"Lloyd's quite all right now," she answered. "He promised me he wouldn't touch Tony, and he'll keep his word. Besides, he isn't here."

"Not here?" Dixon blurted. "Where'd he go?"

"Why, to your office."

"To our—"

"He got a phone call a moment ago, and left. I thought—"

"Who phoned?"

"He didn't say, but I assumed—"

Dixon was bewildered and apprehensive. "Would you mind if Jimmy waited here?" He wagged a hand at McCord. "I'll find Wade and bring him back. In case Tony Fletcher shows up, don't let him in. If those two meet again too soon, anything might happen."

Dixon trudged toward his office. Aching with fatigue, he faced the unpleasant prospect of spending another night on the job. But tomorrow—

He realized happily that the Dixon-McCord combine was auspiciously near to collecting from Andrew Eustace. After only a few more hours the check in Dixon's wallet would be negotiable and another even bigger one would be due. Wealth beyond the dreams of Croesus—or so it seemed—would reward two hungry private detectives who, God knew, had worked for it. Only a few more hours!

Entering his building, Dixon turned to the stairs and paused. The corridor was black, but on the stairs he glimpsed a vague figure.

He asked quietly, "Is that you, Wade?"

The figure leaped. Violently Dixon was jounced into the corner. He saw a man sidling out the street door. Steadying himself, stunned and surprised, he watched his assailant run toward Broadway until, at the intersection, he disappeared.

"Fletcher!" Dixon exclaimed aloud.

Still dazed, he climbed the stairs. His

office door was standing slightly open. Possibly, he reflected, he had forgotten to set the lock when hurrying out with McCord last night. He pushed the door carefully. The back of his neck began to prickle.

Lloyd Wade was lying huddled in front of the old safe.

He crossed slowly into the corner and stood over Wade. The lamp from Dixon's desk was on the floor. Its cord had been pulled out by the roots and its green shade was shattered. A sharp angle of its metal base had made that cavity behind Wade's left ear. Wade had been hit so hard he had dived headlong into the front of the safe. There was blood on the combination dial, and the shape of the knob was impressed into Wade's almost bald skull.

The telephone was ringing. Its clangor dimly reached Dixon. Automatically he took it up.

"Dix," McCord's voice came, "Miss Wade's sort of worried. If her brother's there, put him on the wire."

"He doesn't feel like talking," Dixon said wryly. "He's dead."

McCORD'S horrified response was lost on Dixon. He disconnected and sat down and stared at Lloyd Wade's corpse.

The office seemed very cold.

Dixon's mind began to function again.

He dialed the Trafalgar and asked for Andrew Eustace.

"Mr. Eustace," he said clearly, "Lloyd Wade has been murdered."

A sputtering sound came over the wire. "What!" Eustace barked. "Wade?"

"That is correct," Dixon assured him.

"Great Heavens!" Eustace roared. "I warned you not to use violence!"

Dixon sat up with a jerk. "Hold on!" he protested. "I didn't kill him."

"Then who did?" Eustace demanded swiftly. "McCord?"

"Neither of us!" Dixon snapped. "We've been doing our level best to forestall a murder, not to commit one."

The verbal storm at the other end of the line subsided. "Glad to hear it. That's better. But do you know who's guilty?"

"Wade was killed a few minutes ago by Tony Fletcher."

"What! Fletcher? Did you see him do it?"

"I saw enough to make me reasonably sure."

"They can't pin it on him!" Eustace asserted emphatically. "Wade was trying to kill Fletcher, wasn't he? Fletcher had a legal right to defend himself."

"Definitely this is not a case of self-defense. Tonight Wade was persuaded to lay off Fletcher. He made his sister agree not to marry the man. Fletcher was burned up over losing the girl he loves. I heard him swear he'd kill Wade first—and he did. I'm going to call in the cops."

"Don't do it!" Eustace seemed to be strangling. "Keep them out of this!"

"The murder was committed in this office. The Homicide Squad will have to come here."

"Listen, man, listen!" Eustace implored. "Once you tell the cops about it, they won't waste any time arresting Fletcher. Then what'll happen to my fifty-two grand? I can't collect from somebody who's bound for the death-house."

"Concealing a murder is a matter which the authorities frown upon, Mr. Eustace," Dixon answered levelly.

"Nobody on the outside knows you've found the body, do they? All you have to do is leave it there, then come back later and discover it—after Fletcher's paid me. What's wrong with that plan? You have five grand to gain and nothing to lose."

"Except my freedom," Dixon pointed out.

"I'll make it ten grand. Double if you keep the law off Fletcher long enough to

let him settle. Otherwise you get not a penny. Think that over!"

Dixon did.

Suddenly he said, "I'll call you back."

Footfalls were running up the stairs. Dixon sprang to the door.

"Dix!" came a parched whisper. "It's me!"

McCord came in, stared at the corpse and moaned.

When Dixon said simply, "Fletcher," he moaned again.

"We're clearing out of here," Dixon explained, "and we're not coming back until Eustace limbers up that fountain pen of his to the tune of another nine grand."

McCord didn't quite grasp this, but he suggested promptly, "Let's go."

They turned to the door. They reached for the knob. They froze.

Footfalls were again beating up the stairs. The plodding heaviness of them was familiar. Too dismayed to move, Dixon and McCord saw a movement through the pebbled glass. The knob turned and knuckles tapped.

Dixon made gestures in the direction of the corpse—directions which McCord was blankly unable to interpret.

McCord managed to ask, "Who—who is it?"

A man's voice answered jovially, "Your old skipper, boys. None other than your old pal, Detective Captain Mallory."

WITH an effort, Dixon succeeded in sounding casual. "Just a minute, Skipper," he said.

He hurried to the dead man and grasped Wade's shoulders. McCord took a firm grip on himself and on the corpse's feet. They swung him over a sill and closed a door. McCord snatched up the broken desk lamp and put it beside Wade. Dixon tossed fragments of green glass into the wastebasket. The floor was rea-

sonably clean, but the combination dial of the safe was messy. McCord moved his chair in front of it.

"Well, boys," came Captain Mallory's voice from the hall, "what's going on in there?"

Dixon squared his shoulders and opened the bolt. Their visitor was stocky and square-jawed. His eyes held a habitually suspicious light, and his mouth was twisted into a sourly amused smirk. Dixon and McCord tried to prevent his advancing more than a step, but he hedged them back and glanced curiously around the room.

"Working pretty late, aren't you, boys?" Mallory commented.

"Just leaving, Skipper," McCord said quickly.

"Winding up a big case," Dixon said at the same time. "Drop around tomorrow—"

"Any other time, Skipper," McCord added fervently. "Any other time."

Mallory eyed them dourly and asked, "Who do you think you're kidding?"

Dixon swallowed. McCord's grin became a strained grimace.

"Not me," Mallory said. "I'm too old a hand to fall for an act. I know you're dead broke. You haven't had a case since you went crazy and opened this office."

He sidled in and stepped to the center of it. His move prompted Dixon to return to the desk nearest the closet door while McCord hustled into the chair that concealed the stained front of the safe. They were tensely silent while Mallory's gaze turned slyly about.

"You poor dopes," he said in a scornful tone. "You didn't know when you were well off. By this time you'd both be lieutenants. You were headed for a staff berth right under the commissioner. And you tossed it all away—for what? For this. Dust. An empty office."

McCord and Dixon wished it were even emptier than it was.

Mallory opened one of the file cabinets labeled *Cases Completed*, peered into the hollow of it, and slammed it shut.

"Know what happens to shamuses like you?" he said with a growl. "You start out with the best intentions in the world. Everything honest, nothing shady. Then your money runs out and you're up against it. You're ready to take any kind of case, just so you can eat again. Your ethics go overboard. First thing you know you're on the wrong side of the law and you can't get back. Frankly, boys, I'm worried about—"

He stopped and picked off the floor a fragment of green glass. Thoughtfully he turned it over in his fingers. Dixon and McCord watched him without breathing, damning themselves for having overlooked it. He dropped it into the wastebasket.

"I was talking to Deputy Chief Inspector Halloran about you two today. You could come back on the cops and work yourself up again. Of course, it'll take you a while to advance to where you were when you quit, but the sooner you begin the better. Once you try pulling a fast one, it'll be too late. You've got to come back as clean as you went. If there's anything questionable about you, it'll be no go. Understand, boys? Just a word of fatherly advice. Think it over."

McCord said, "Thanks, Skipper. We'll think about it, all right."

Mallory's shrewd eyes again searched the room.

"I'll be around again soon," he promised. "Well, good night. Don't do anything I wouldn't do."

THEY sat still, listening to his footfalls pounding down the stairs. They gazed with sick expressions at the door behind which the corpse of Lloyd Wade lay.

McCord went to the washbowl and soaked a towel. He hurried to the safe

and began to scrub the stains off the combination dial.

"That's no good, Jimmy," Dixon sighed. "The Homicide Squad uses tests that can detect traces of blood even on a sterilized surgical instrument. Besides, the hole in the top of Wade's head fits that dial like a plaster cast."

McCord mumbled, "Then—what can we do?"

"We've got to take that corpse so far away from here it'll never be connected with this office."

McCord blinked. "You know what it means, Dix—transporting a dead body?"

"I also know," Dixon said, "that ten thousand dollars is a very large sum of money."

They opened the closet and bent over Wade's corpse. First they emptied its pockets of everything that might result in an immediate identification. They lifted it, and each of them draped one of the dead arms across his shoulders. McCord perched Wade's hat upon Wade's broken skull. Supporting him between them, they moved to the door.

A taxi was waiting at a station near the corner of Broadway. McCord yanked the door open, and the driver frowned at him.

"Our friend's had a little too much happy-juice," Dixon said. "We're taking him home."

"Tsk-tsk," the driver said.

They maneuvered Wade into the seat. Dixon nudged McCord and backed out. His eyes were thoughtful.

"Wait a minute," he instructed the man at the wheel. "I've got to call his wife first."

McCord followed him hastily around the corner. They entered a drugstore and Dixon sidled into a booth and dialed a number.

"Mr. Eustace," he said, "I've considered your proposition. We're doing our best to keep Fletcher out of this. We'll

stick on the job until he settles with you in the morning, and until you write us a check for nine thousand."

"You'll get it," Eustace promised, "on the barrel-head. I always make good on my obligations."

McCord and Dixon left the drugstore, skirted past the corner—and came to a flat-footed stop.

The taxi was gone!

"There he is," Dixon said hoarsely. "Wade—propped up against the fire-plug."

"There—" McCord mouthed—"there's a cop coming."

Rapidly Dixon and McCord went away from there. They went as quickly as they could swing their legs, and they kept going.

THEY reached the door of Tony Fletcher's penthouse. Dixon leaned on the doorbell.

Fletcher appeared in a silk lounging robe.

Dixon strode past him and pointed to a soft chair.

"That one looks the most comfortable, Jimmy," he said. "Plant yourself in it. You're going to keep Mr. Fletcher company the rest of the night."

Fletcher asked, "What's this? Why are you fellows—"

"There's only one reason why we're keeping our mouths shut for the time being," Dixon answered. "That's to protect our client's interests. Once he's satisfied, you start on the road to the death-house for killing Lloyd Wade."

Fletcher said quickly, "Lloyd's dead?"

"You should know," Dixon said.

"Great lord! When did it happen—and how?"

"It's no good, Fletcher," Dixon retorted, "putting on an act now. We're big boys now."

Nervously Fletcher stroked his mustache. "You're right," he said abruptly.

"I'm an agent, not an actor. Of course I know what's happened. But I didn't do it. I thought you did—trying to keep Wade under control."

McCord began an excited protest, but Dixon's gesture cut him short.

"You decided to have it out with Wade right away, Fletcher, about Doris. As soon as they reached their apartment you phoned. Maybe you pretended to be one of us. In any event, you got him to meet you at our office. That dark hallway would have been good enough for your purpose, but you found our door unlocked, and that was even better. You knew what you meant to do if Wade insisted on holding Doris to her promise, and you were covering yourself. It's too bad for you that I happened in when I did. Once you've paid Eustace, I'm going to tell my old pals on the force the whole story."

"See here!" Fletcher snapped. "You've got it all mixed up. I did decide to try to make Lloyd be reasonable, but I didn't phone him. I walked over to his apartment. Just as I arrived I saw him leaving. I followed him, and he went into your office building. Since it was a private issue between us, I waited at the corner for him to come down."

"You'd better try a little harder," Dixon said. "I'm still skeptical."

"Damn it all, this is the truth. After a while I saw somebody sneak out of that door. I don't know who it was. That street's dark. Somebody from one of the other offices, I thought. After waiting a while longer I went into the drugstore and phoned up. There wasn't any answer. Not knowing what to make of it, I went upstairs. Lloyd was lying huddled in the corner, dead. Well, I realized I was in a bad spot. When I saw you coming in the door, Dixon, I knew how it would look. You can't blame me for wanting to get out of there unseen." He scrutinized Dixon's set face. "Do you mean to say you still doubt me?"

"The cops can have Wade's murder," Dixon said. "Our job is to see that you pay our client before you begin going through the wringer. That's why Jimmy is going to watch you the rest of the night. I'll see you both soon after nine o'clock, I hope, at the bank."

Dixon left Fletcher with that. The same intent, direct stride carried him to the Hotel Trafalgar. He found that Andrew Eustace was still up. Eustace's suite consisted of two rooms extravagantly decorated, and the man himself was draped in a colorful robe. His concern was causing him to perspire profusely.

"Yes?" he greeted Dixon anxiously. "Yes? What is it now?"

"I'm not exactly eager to be available to the police tonight," Dixon explained. "Do you mind having me as a guest?"

Eustace swung a fat arm toward the davenport. "Make yourself comfortable." He shook his jowls. "Wade dead!" Going to the table, he took up his bulging wallet and from it he plucked a slip of paper. "No good now," he grumbled, displayed it to Dixon.

It was an I. O. U. for \$3,540, and it bore the scrawled name of Lloyd Wade. Eustace slowly tore it to bits and sprinkled them sadly into an ash-tray.

"I can't stand upsets like this," he said, mopping his red face and breathing hard. "I am going to bed."

He lumbered into the adjoining room and closed the door.

A gentle snore was issuing from Eustace when Dixon rose. Curiously he looked into the gambler's wallet. The banknotes stuffing it added up to more than nine hundred dollars. Resolutely Dixon left the total intact. He glanced into Eustace's checkbook and saw that another stub had been filled in following the one that noted a tentative payment to Dixon-McCord. Heavily Eustace's fountain pen had inscribed the date, today, the word *Cash* and the figure 65. Dixon looked hard at the

uppermost blank slip and tried to imagine it completed to the amount of nine thousand more. He turned it this way and that in the light, and after a few minutes he resumed his chair and his effort to think.

Eustace softly snored.

DIXON switched on the radio and turned the volume control down to a whisper.

The city began to waken, but Andrew Eustace snored on.

Dixon sat forward as the first news bulletins of the morning began. Cables from London. Dispatches from Berlin. Communiques from Paris. Bulletins from Helsinki. Something about a stockyards fire in Chicago.

"New York. An unidentified dead man was found early this morning by Patrolman Kelly in a cross-street a stone's throw from Times Square. The victim was killed by violent blows on the head. Captain Mallory, the well-known officer of the Broadway sector, is leading the investigation. An important clue is a small fragment of green glass found in one of the murdered man's trouser cuffs."

Dixon tightly closed his eyes, but his ears remained wide open.

"Acting quickly upon confidential information, Captain Mallory obtained a warrant to search the office of the Dixon-McCord Investigation Bureau, in front of which the body was discovered. Finding additional evidence there, the officer immediately ordered the arrest of Howard Dixon and James McCord, both of whom resigned as detective sergeants four months ago. It is known that their private detective agency has for weeks been on the verge of collapse. The motive for the crime is reported to be robbery. The two men, however, have not been found. They are being hunted. When they are taken into custody it is believed they will be formally charged with the crime of first degree murder."

DIXON muttered, "Our old skipper. Our old pal."

He felt the bottom dropping out of his stomach. He thought hard while Andrew Eustace snored.

The telephone aroused Eustace. Dixon heard him speaking over the instrument in the bedroom. Then he appeared in his maroon pajamas.

"Fletcher," he informed Dixon elatedly. "His broker just called him. The cash is in the bank. I'm meeting him at the Sutton Place branch of the Metal Exchange National in half an hour."

And Eustace padded back, making haste to clothe his voluminous bulk.

Dixon's chin set with determination. He took up the telephone and called a familiar number—that of his precinct station during his old, secure days. He asked for and got Captain Mallory.

"Dixon."

"What? You—you—"

"Hold it, Skipper. I haven't scrambled. I didn't know you wanted me until a few minutes ago. Jimmy and I are ready to surrender. But give us a break, will you? Let us do it in our own way."

"You poor saps—"

"It's a small favor I'm asking. Just this—come after us alone."

"We'll be at the Sutton Place branch of the Metals Exchange National in less than half an hour."

"And after that," Mallory warned him, "you'll be in the Tombs indefinitely."

Dixon had taken pains to keep his voice low, for he was certain Eustace would not have approved of this arrangement. Eustace reappeared, elegantly dressed for the occasion. Disdaining all thought of breakfast, he gestured Dixon out, down and into a taxi. He glowed. He was in an expansive mood, but Dixon could not rise to it. Andrew Eustace was on his way to collect thousands, and Dixon, according to Captain Mallory's promise, was bound for a cell in the death-house.

The cab stopped. Eustace bounced from it and broke forth with an effusive good morning. Tony Fletcher was just approaching the door of the bank with McCord. The heartsick look in McCord's eyes told Dixon that his partner had also been listening to the radio. Eustace linked his arm into Fletcher's and together they started into the bank. The doors, however, were opening before them.

Captain Mallory came out.

"Hello," he greeted Dixon and McCord, "you dopes."

McCord, meeting the skipper unprepared, suffered a sudden loss of color, but Dixon retained his outward aplomb.

"Mr. Fletcher, Mr. Eustace," he introduced, "this is an old friend of mine. His name is Mallory, and he's interested in the private detecting business."

Mallory eyed him.

"Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Eustace are about to conclude a little financial transaction," Dixon explained to him. "Jimmy and I are professionally interested. You don't mind standing by a few minutes, do you? Afterward we can have a cheery little chat."

Mallory merely nodded.

THEY entered the bank. His eyes alert, the captain watched while Fletcher spoke to a man whose desk was plated with the designation of vice-president.

"I took a good look through your office," Mallory said, poking an elbow into Dixon's ribs. "Used a Quinlan to get in. Blood tests completed on the base of the broken lamp and the combination dial of the safe. Both positive. You dumb clucks!"

The vice-president escorted them into a secluded office. Eustace and Fletcher at once drew chairs to a table. Dixon and McCord stood behind them. Captain Mallory guarded the exit.

"Whatever the hell's going on here,"

he said gruffly, "hurry up and get it over with."

The parties of the transaction directed a puzzled glance at him but otherwise ignored him. Fletcher took a check from a cubbyhole and used the desk pen. Its quick strokes made the slip worth exactly \$52,000.00. He placed it in Eustace's hands, and in return Eustace surrendered his I. O. U.

"Thank you very much," they said in unison.

Fletcher briskly rubbed his hands together. "That's that. Good day, everyone," he said, and moved toward the door.

Dixon and McCord planted themselves in his path.

"Not quite," Dixon differed.

Fletcher hesitated. He did not smile. He had abruptly lost his capacity for taking things in his cosmopolitan stride.

Captain Mallory objected, "Listen, Dix. And you, Jimmy. I don't feel like fooling around."

"Nor I," Dixon answered. "Mr. Eus-

tace, my partner and I have fulfilled our duty to you. We've done our part to enable Mr. Fletcher to pay you in full. The balance of our fee is now due."

"It is, indeed, gentlemen," Eustace said affably. "And you shall have the full amount right here and now."

Reaching into the folds of his voluminous coat, he produced his thick black fountain pen and his check book. He was about to write, without further ado, when Dixon reached over his shoulder.

"Pardon," Dixon said. "I'd like to have this as a souvenir."

He ripped out the topmost check.

Eustace frowned, but wrote, this time without interruption. Dixon gratefully received the balance of the firm's fee. Folding the check, he stored it in his wallet and grinned.

"We're very much obliged," he said.

Again he reached, and again he ripped the topmost check from Eustace's book.

"Our friend, Mallory, I think, would like to keep this little memento," he said.

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did — Actually and Literally)

and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do — well — there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering — and now? — well, I own control of the largest daily newspaper in our County, I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine. I own my own home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest,

unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well — this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be — all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about — it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well — just write a letter or a post-card to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 1069, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now — while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable — but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was. — Advt. Copyright, 1940, Frank B. Robinson.

He placed the second blank check in the captain's hands. Mallory frowned at it.

"Why should I want—"

"Hold it this way," Dixon suggested. "So the light from the window slants across it. That's right. Now what do you see?"

Still frowning, Mallory said, "Scratches. Lines pressed into the paper. 'Dixon-McCord Investigation Bureau,'" he read. "'Nine thousand dollars.'" His eyebrows humped. "Nine grand! How could you honestly earn—"

"You see," Dixon explained, "Mr. Eustace bears so heavily on that stiff-pointed pen of his that the strokes are impressed through several thicknesses of paper. Now you'll be interested in this other slip—the first one I removed from his checkbook. It also bears marks. It will tell you what he wrote on the check which was directly on top of it."

Mallory held it so that the light cast shadows into the scratches and made them clearly legible.

"The date's today," he said. "The check was made out to Lloyd Wade. The amount is a round sixty-five thousand."

Eustace's big hands gripped the edge of the table as Dixon's gaze fixed him.

"That's how the friendly little game at the Continental last night turned out. Wade didn't really lose his shirt to you. On the contrary, you lost yours to him—and more. A run of luck brought his winnings up to a total of sixty-five grand. That's what he meant when he said afterward that he didn't care about money any more; that it was the least of his worries. You, Mr. Eustace, made the fatal mistake all your kind make sooner or later—you overplayed. The I. O. U. you showed me, with Wade's name on it, was a fake. You wrote it yourself to cover up the truth."

Eustace was crushing the edge of the table in his big, fat hands.

"It's a simple problem in arithmetic," Dixon explained to Captain Mallory.

"The stubs in Mr. Eustace's checkbook show that the balance in his account is roughly nine thousand. Fletcher's contribution raises it to sixty-one thousand. That's not enough to cover the check Eustace gave Wade last night, even leaving our fee out of it. If Wade had tried to collect on it this morning, it would have bounced. For a gentleman of Mr. Eustace's calling, to pass a rubber check—to welch—is an unforgivable breach of the code. It would exile him from the only world he knows. In order to save himself from professional dishonor and poverty, it was necessary for him to get that check back from Wade by fair means or foul. That's why he murdered Lloyd Wade."

EUSTACE heaved himself up and charged at the door. McCord and Dixon and Fletcher met him headlong. Always precariously balanced, he lost his feet. The mass of him met the floor with a mighty crash. He lay moving his arms and legs helplessly, like a great turtle.

"A bargain's a bargain, Skipper," Dixon said with a grin. "But we'll never have to treat our future clients this way. There'll be plenty of them, I think, after this gets into the papers. There's your murder case, Skipper, but I feel a little sad about you. Let this be a lesson. Don't be a plodding flatfoot all your life. Have ambitions. Aspire to—"

"Damnation!" Mallory said. "I've half a mind to quit the force and open an agency of my own." His eyes bugged at the prone Eustace. "Look at him. He's turning purple. He's dripping. What's the matter? Is he dying?"

"It's the nature of the beast," Dixon said, still grinning. "He breaks out in a panicky lather whenever he meets an emergency."

"His glands," McCord added hoarsely, dazed by his sudden affluence and the clearing of the skies. "Or something!"

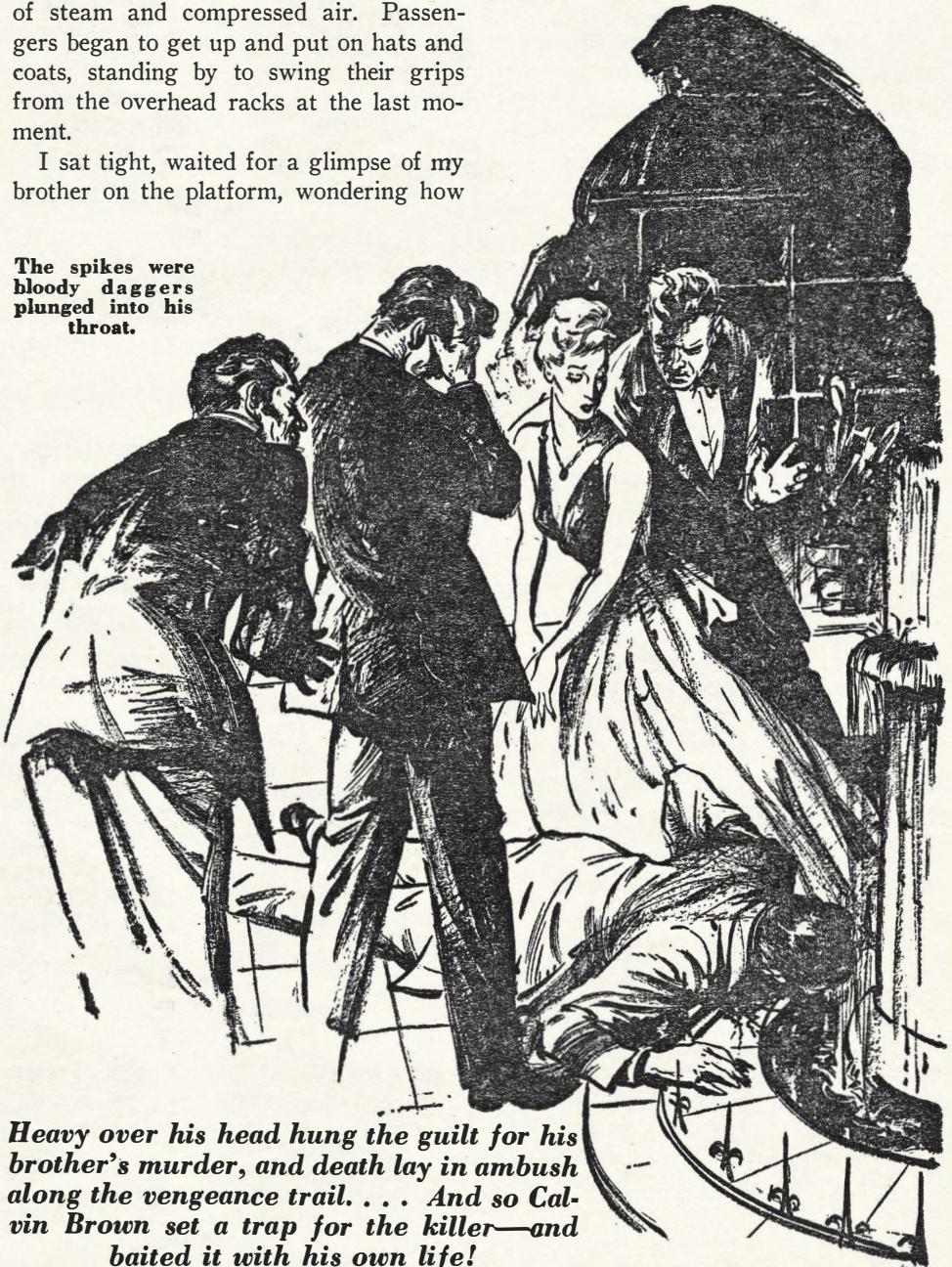
Murder Sets the Clock

By
Don Joseph

THE train rocketed around the bend, took the straight-away at full speed and then began to slow up with a grinding of brakes, a hissing of steam and compressed air. Passengers began to get up and put on hats and coats, standing by to swing their grips from the overhead racks at the last moment.

I sat tight, waited for a glimpse of my brother on the platform, wondering how

The spikes were bloody daggers plunged into his throat.



Heavy over his head hung the guilt for his brother's murder, and death lay in ambush along the vengeance trail. . . . And so Calvin Brown set a trap for the killer—and baited it with his own life!

I was going to greet him, how he was going to greet me—waited as though all the world depended on that one moment.

My brother must have needed me pretty badly to send for me, because five years ago he had shouted that he'd never speak to me again, and had walked out into the night. He had meant it too, and it had nearly broken my heart then. It was all so damn unnecessary, our scarping over a little gold-digger who had turned from him to me because she thought I was making more money. I had thrown her out fast, but he wouldn't believe me. Love's like that, I guess.

If he had just forgiven and forgotten, even now, I'd have felt better about it. Even as it was, nothing in the world could have made me feel better than this evident reconciliation, if it hadn't been for the implied menace behind it. That had me worried.

I fingered the telegram in my pocket as the train began to slide smoothly along the platform. I didn't need to read it to refresh my memory. I had read it a dozen times, trying to get some clue to what was behind it. I had it before going into headquarters to see the colonel to ask for a few days leave. I had it before taking the train. It had said simply:

MY LIFE IN DANGER SATURDAY MUST
SEE YOU AT ONCE.

SYLVAN

The train lurched to a stop, and the passengers lurched in the aisle, but I went on smiling to myself. Despite the grim tone of the telegram, it was so damn typical of Sylvan. For one thing, he had kept the count to exactly ten words. He was that conscientious and methodical! Of the same stripe was his indication that danger would arrive on Saturday. He was the kind of a guy who would reach the pearly gates as the bell tolled the hour he was due, not a minute

before, and not a single minute after.

Then I caught a glimpse of his face as he stood back on the platform waiting for me to come down the steps, and I saw how white and drawn it was. I don't know whether it was that or just seeing him again that made something swell up in my throat and choke me. After all, we had been so damn close for years, so much closer than most other brothers!

We had actually worked each other through medical school. One year I had stayed out of school and worked to pay his tuition and put something aside for myself. The next year he had done the same thing while I went to classes. We had been orphans for a long time. We had helped each other up the ladder of life for a long time. That's why, I guess, the break between us had seemed so much more tragic to me than it would be to—well, just ordinary brothers. That's why I had been a little daffy with happiness and anxiety ever since I'd received his telegram.

Then he was walking across the platform and shaking my hand firmly, almost casually. But I guess both our eyes were a little damp. He had put on a little weight in five years; had the look of a moderately prosperous doctor. Otherwise, he hadn't changed very much. He still had that boyish lock of brown hair that hung down over his forehead when he hadn't a hat on. He was still a handsome guy with deep-set brown eyes and a square jaw.

"You look well enough, Dr. Brown," he said to me once we were in his car. "How come the Army uniform?"

"You look pretty well yourself, Dr. Brown," I answered. "I've held a commission in the medical reserve for the past few years. They called me up a few months ago. How's tricks with you?"

"Fine," he said. "Better than I ever expected. I'm what you might call a suc-

cessful doctor, Cal. I've been medical examiner for the Sterling Life Insurance Company. That gave me a good start, got me lots of rich patients."

After that it was a little tough going. It's not easy to re-establish contacts after five years, after breaking them off so definitively—not when both of you are a little embarrassed by the situation to boot. As the auto rolled through the residential town of Warwick, we both sat silent, clearing our throats from time to time.

To hell with it, I said to myself. Curiosity about that telegram had me twisting in my seat.

To him I said, "What's this about your life being in danger on Saturday? Saturday at ten-thirty-one and a half, I suppose." I had to get in my little dig.

"Well," he answered, smiling a little self-consciously, "I had thought of making it somewhere around that time, but I've changed my mind. I've decided to put it off until Sunday."

He paused to watch my eyes go wide. Some brother, Sylvan!

Then he went on quickly, "Look Cal, let's forget it until tonight. I'm afraid that telegram was a little melodramatic. But I've been under more of a strain than you'd imagine. Tonight we're going to celebrate our—our reunion. We're invited out to a house party at the home of one of my patients, a wealthy old codger named Virgil Bay Thorner. We'll spend the night there, and we'll talk this thing over before we go to bed."

I knew what he was driving at. I knew what he meant was that we had to get over this artificial strain between us before he could talk easily. So I nodded my head.

"Okay, Sylvan," I said. "Whatever suits you suits me." But I was still worried. Sylvan wasn't the kind to get melodramatic. And that white, drawn appearance of his face told me he'd spent plenty

of nervous sleepless nights recently.

The Thorner home was a whopper. It was super-colossal. Even before we got inside, while we were driving through the forested grounds, I knew we were coming to something lush. I calculated that with a bit of luck a good doctor could get enough in fees from old man Thorner to keep his office going for a full year. I said I hoped he was a "good" patient.

He was. He was a cripple with a host of minor ailments.

"Calls me every day, almost," Sylvan said. "Crippled in an auto accident a number of years ago. I've about decided . . . well, he's retired and can afford to be sick. Anyway, it's his daughter, Peggy, who's got me on the run. Honest, Cal, I'm nuts about that girl. I'd give my left leg to marry her. Wait'll you see her."

And that was the point where I felt like getting out and walking back to the station. Sylvan's girls had caused enough trouble between us. A spoiled daughter of the idle rich, I thought, and wished I'd never come.

Besides, I got a look at my face as I slid out behind the wheel. In the car mirror it began to look as tense and drawn as Sylvan's. By putting off the discussion, he had left me all up in the air. Was he driving to his death tonight? Or was he really able to put off his murderer like he said! I decided that the only thing to do was to stick close until he got ready to tell me what it was all about.

WHEN we got inside the house I spotted Peggy immediately. She was standing behind a man in a wheel chair, and she was really beautiful. This time there was no doubt about the boy's taste. It was good! She was tall, almost as tall as I was, with rich, red, mahogany-colored hair that

hung down to her shoulders and seemed to be sculptured in gorgeous waves and rounded ends. The minute she saw us her blue eyes lighted up and her sensitive red mouth parted in a glad smile of welcome. It wasn't hard to see that she wasn't too indifferent to my brother's charms.

But the old man was something different. In the first place he wasn't so old. And in the second place he wasn't what you'd call handsome. His face was craggy, his lips thin, and his eyes, I thought, were small and mean. But he tried to be a good host in welcoming me.

Then he turned to Sylvan. "I'm not feeling so well tonight, Doctor. Suppose we talk over those matters of ours early tomorrow so I can withdraw after the guests arrive and go to bed early?"

But it wasn't Thorner's absence that made the party start slowly. Whatever life was in it was due to his absence. Anyone who'd want to retire as soon as his guests arrived couldn't be anything but a wet blanket. We stood at the bar drinking, and I could see Sylvan's eyes searching the crowd for Peggy. And I could also see that the guy was nervous as hell.

The place was mobbed with well-dressed men and women. They drifted past us at the bar, glanced with good-mannered curiosity at my uniform. I was feeling a bit self-conscious by then, but managed to seem absorbed in my drinking. We were on our third round when a hawk-nosed, dark-haired man walked up to us. Sylvan greeted him with forced joviality.

"Ah, Welsh," he said, "I want you to meet my brother, Dr. Brown." Sylvan turned to me. "Dr. Welsh is my chief rival here—in medicine and in love."

Welsh looked sour, but he had grace enough to joke.

"Can I help it," he asked me, "if your brother always gets there first?" He

managed a grin and then walked away.

I looked at Sylvan and held my nose significantly. Sylvan nodded vaguely.

Then I got a look at his eyes. I grabbed the glass before him, downed the Scotch, and made a face.

"Son," I said, "the contractile aperture in the iris of your eye is dilated, showing you're tight as a lord. What's happened to your tolerance for alcohol? Better go out and get some fresh air. Here. I'll take you."

He pushed me off. "No. You stay here. I'll go out to the solarium. If Peggy comes, keep her for me till my head clears. Keep her away from that damn Welsh." He shuffled on out the door.

The assignment wasn't hard because Welsh seemed to be occupied elsewhere and wasn't in sight when Peggy breezed up to me, fresh as a rose.

"Dad sent me out for a dance," she exuberated. Then she looked disappointed. "Where's Sylvan?"

"Won't I do?" I kidded, looking hurt. "The doctor's gone out for a breath of air."

The dance was hardly over, and I'd hardly had time to discover what a sweet, unspoiled girl she really was before she had to leave. "I must get back to Dad," she apologized. "I'll be back later. You said Sylvan's in the solarium? He always goes there when he wants to get away from things."

"I didn't say that," I told her, "but you know his habits all right."

I turned back to my drinking in time to see the barkeep coming around the end of the bar. "Wait, sir," he said, "I'll set up fresh ones for you and Dr. Welsh."

And sure enough, there was Welsh at my elbow, looking pale as a ghost.

"You look like you need it, fella," I said; then I thought I heard a woman scream off in the distance somewhere.

And I began to feel nervous and wonder where in the hell Sylvan had gotten to.

I fingered my glass and felt it slip in my sweat-soaked fingers as I stared vacantly at the pinch-bottle that had served Sylvan and was standing in a corner by itself. I raised my glass, thought how sultry the air was in there, like before a thunder storm.

"Here's how," I said.

Then I dropped it smashing to the floor. That time I was sure I heard a woman scream. It was frenzied, that scream, and full of horror. It stopped the dancers dead.

For a moment it stopped me. For a moment I just froze there, saying to myself, "It's Sylvan! My God, something's happened to Sylvan." And then I snapped out of it and started moving, impelled by all the fear and anxiety that had been steaming up in me all evening. Welsh was in my way when I straight-armed him and raced for the solarium.

Someone, some man, was trying to use the telephone as I came plunging into the room, shouting into the mouthpiece hysterically, getting no response from the dead wire. Dancers and drinkers, attracted by the screams, were gathering in a grim circle in the center of the glass-enclosed room, around a stone fountain from which water still dripped.

I elbowed my way through breathlessly, looked—and dropped to my knees.

For an instant I couldn't believe what I saw. My eyes weren't working right, I thought. My eyes were seeing things that weren't there. There was the back of the head of Sylvan, his brown hair sleek and unmussed, running untrimmed down the sides of his neck into the stiff white collar. Only the collar wasn't stiff or white any more. It was red. And through it projected three ugly steel spikes.

"Oh, God!" I moaned and covered my

face with my hands to keep out the sight. But I knew then I'd never be able to keep out that sight again. It was burned on my brain!

I DON'T know whether my eyes were open or closed then, but I saw the circle of spikes surrounding the tiny garden at the foot of the fountain. They had been put there as a miniature iron picket fence. They had become daggers, bloody daggers through Sylvan's throat. The water in the illuminated pool at the base of the fountain was already carmine—with my brother's blood.

Then I know I opened my eyes, and a deep, searing flame of hatred began to burn within me. A lot of things passed through my head then. Pictures. Pictures of Sylvan and me as kids, beating up the school bully. Me pulling the kid out of a swimming pool when he got the cramps one day. Sylvan sweating over his medical books in our boarding-house room off the campus. I thought of all the pain and effort that had gone into making Sylvan the man he was but a few moments before. And now, in an instant, all that knowledge and experience that had been in that head of his was gone, was flowing out there with his blood to disappear in the eddies of the fountain.

A movement in the crowd around me brought my head up, and I saw Peggy sitting on the stone bench across the room. She was sitting unheeding and white-faced while a cop tugged gently at her arm.

When I reached her side, I said, "Let's go, Peggy. The police want to talk to us about this."

She looked up, and I saw her eyes were dry now, her face tear-streaked. "Oh, Cal," she groaned. "Isn't this awful? Awful!"

I took her arm. "Come on, Peggy, get hold of yourself. I feel pretty bad too, you know."

She came along then, shuffling along as Sylvan had shuffled when I last saw him alive. And I kept repeating to myself that it was my fault all this had happened. If I had stuck along with him, as I knew I should have done, as I had decided to do, he'd be alive now.

Peggy introduced me when we got in the library. "Dr. Bowles, our coroner, Dr. Brown, the brother of the . . ."

Dr. Bowles nodded to me, indicated a heavy-set man standing beside him.

"This is Detective Paul Bannerman," he said to me. "He'll be asking all the questions now. It won't take long."

I was talking to myself all the time Bannerman was asking his questions, so I don't know how I got the story. I was telling myself over and over again that it was all my fault that my brother was dead. But somehow I did get the story—maybe because it was so simple. It was Peggy's story.

She had taken her father into the library adjoining the solarium. He had sent her out to dance with Sylvan. She had danced with me. Then she returned to her father in time to see him seized with a fainting spell. He fell out of his chair, and she screamed. I'd heard that scream. I remembered it wasn't very loud. Then she thought of Sylvan resting in the solarium. There was only one seat in the solarium, a stone bench diagonally opposite the door, so she knew just where to go for him when he didn't answer her call.

But she never got as far as the stone bench. She had nearly tripped across his body. It was still writhing in agony when she found it. She didn't recall that second scream, the shrill one. She had fainted herself then. When she came to, her father was just recovering his senses.

That was all there was to it. That was how a good man got murdered. Just like that. God!

Old man Thorner was listening to

Peggy with sharp eyes, nodding his head as she told her story. When she broke down at the end, he reached a long arm out from his wheel chair and patted her hand.

"It looks like a nasty accident," Bannerman said. "But I still don't understand how it could have happened."

Something made me stand up then, something that seemed outside of me, as though my hatred were pushing me around.

"I understand," I said, and everyone turned to look at me as though I were a mad man. But I went on anyway. I didn't care for their looks any more. "I understand, because it wasn't an accident at all. Someone killed my brother. Someone pushed his throat down on those spikes some way. I don't know how, but I know. I—I have evidence." I reached in my pocket for the telegram. "It—it's upstairs in my valise—a telegram. I'll get it for you."

"Never mind," Bannerman motioned brusquely with his hand, "I'll take your word for the moment. What'd it say?"

"'My Life In Danger. Must See You At Once.' You see," I said, "I . . ."

The gray-haired, square-faced detective cut in. "Have you any additional evidence, Dr. Brown? Have you any idea why anyone would want to kill your brother? Did he have any enemies?"

Welsh interrupted then. "I think the only known enemy of the deceased was Dr. Brown himself. The two brothers hadn't spoken to each other in five years. Maybe the reconciliation wasn't very successful."

An overwhelming desire whipped up in me to get my hands on his throat—not to hit him or kick him, but to choke the life out of him.

I felt cold inside then. I knew then that the best revenge I could get for the murder of my brother was to find the murderer.

I said, "I'm no detective, but I still know this is murder. And I'm going to find out who the murderer is."

"That sounds fair enough," Thorner said. "And why don't you stay here for the night, Detective Bannerman, as my guest, just in case he does find something?"

Bannerman seemed to be trying to size me up.

"Well, I'll just have to come out here again tomorrow morning, so I think I'll stay," he said. "I think I'll do just that."

I WAS still shaking when I got out to the bar and saw that part of the house was deserted, all the guests having been herded into the back of the house for questioning.

Even the barkeep had disappeared. I looked around. No one had come out of the library yet excepting me. The pinch bottle of Scotch was still off there by itself. I slipped behind the bar and grabbed it, even though I didn't like Scotch.

If I'd been a detective, I'd probably have handled things a lot differently that night. As it was, I knew that Bannerman wasn't half-convinced I was right. Most

of the rest obviously thought I was crazy with grief, which was nearly true. But I had to deliver on my boast now, not because they doubted my sanity, not to prove I was right, but because if I never found out the truth about my brother's death, I'd end up hating the whole world.

Upstairs I slid the bottle inside the door of the room Sylvan and I were to have occupied. Then I went along opening doors and flashing on lights until I found Peggy's room, a woman's room that looked as though it had been lived in. Off in the distance, as I slipped inside the door, I heard men coming up the stairs. An elevator ground to a stop. That must be how Thorner gets up here, I thought.

When Peggy came in the room and turned on the lights, her eyes got big, but she didn't act scared. Maybe she had expected me to try to see her. Maybe she didn't scare easy.

"If it wasn't just a horrible accident, Cal," she said, "who could possibly have done it? Who in the whole world could want to hurt Sylvan?"

"That's what I came in here for, to have you tell me."



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She shook her head, her forehead all lined in thought.

"I couldn't guess," she whispered.

Her eyes looked as though she meant it.

And no amount of questioning could change that. She seemed to be trying hard, but she couldn't even guess. At the door I swung around to face her.

"My brother was nuts about you," I said. "When did he—how long ago did he propose to you?"

"He never proposed to me. Never!" she blurted out, and looked as though she was going to cry. "It's bothered me a lot, too, Cal. A lot! Especially since I was all ready to say 'yes' myself. I thought maybe it was his pride. . . . My father's money, you know. He called me on the phone this evening before you came out. I was sitting with my father in the solarium. Sylvan told me he'd reached a decision, a big decision he'd tell me about later. I had hoped—I had hoped . . ."

She choked up, and her eyes welled up with big tears.

I wondered too, after the way Sylvan had spoken to me.

"I know, Peggy," I said. "But are you sure that's all you have to tell me? You're not holding anything back?"

It was a blind man's shot on a dark night, but it seemed to have hit somewhere. Her eyes suddenly looked frightened, and she half opened her mouth. Then she closed it again.

"No," she said. "No, I haven't anything else to tell you."

"Not even that my brother might have been jealous of Dr. Welsh," I said bitterly, knowing all the time I was saying it because I didn't like Welsh or the way he'd been hanging around her. "Maybe he thought it was Welsh you loved."

Her blue eyes shifted from the chill of fright to a blaze of anger.

"He could never have had any reason

to think that," she said. "And only someone as full of hate as you could suggest it."

I looked at her slender fingers balled up into little fists, looked at the lightning in her eyes, and decided it was time to leave. I hadn't hit any bull's-eye with that dig.

But as I closed the door outside her room, I felt the blood beating in my head. A bloodhound getting his first whiff of the trail must feel like that. She had given me a whiff of the trail without knowing it. And I had been too stupid to know it when she had given it to me. The telephone! It had worked earlier in the evening. It had been out of order right after Sylvan's death.

It should have occurred to me then that if I really were on a trail, it was a blood-stained one—that if someone really had shoved Sylvan's throat down on those fang-like spikes, he'd know I was prowling around the house after him. But I walked down the hall as though I were going to a parade.

In the solarium I avoided putting on the lights because there were just some things I didn't want to see again. The phone, I found with the help of a lighted match, had a cord about twenty feet long. It was one of those phones that can be plugged in anywhere there's an outlet.

The match burned down and I dropped it, traced the cord with my fingers until I reached the plug. It was only part way in the socket. That's why the phone had been out of order. I pulled it clear and felt along the smooth brass projection—and whistled. Something had bent the plug around so it couldn't go in all the way!

I sat down on the floor with the plug in my hand to think it over. The answer didn't hit me so easily. But something else did. A footstep grated out of the darkness on the marble floor behind me and I started to whirl to my feet. Then

something heavy landed on my head, and the room suddenly filled with lights that danced and went out.

When I came to, my head was pulsing like the lights that had just gone out. Only the lights hadn't gone out. I could see through my closed eyelids that they were burning full blast in the room. Someone was wiping my forehead. I opened my eyes and looked square into the anxious blue ones of Peggy. Her handkerchief was covered with blood—my blood.

"Are you all right, Cal?" she asked, and her voice was throaty. "You must have tripped and hit your head."

"Tripped!" I echoed. "How did you get down here?"

"I watched you after you left my room. You went on down the stairs. I knew the mood you were in, Cal, and followed you. I was afraid you'd do something—something foolish, perhaps. When I got down here I heard you fall and ran in. I was afraid, Cal—the same room and all. I was afraid you might be hurt badly."

"Like Sylvan, huh?" I asked. "Look here, Peggy. If you hadn't come in here when you did, I might have been where Sylvan is now. I didn't fall, at least not until someone hit me on the head."

HER eyes got big then with surprise. She watched mine as though she saw an idea being born there.

"Tripped," she had said when she first found me—tripped while I was hunting for the telephone. And then the whole thing came to me while I stared at her speechless. Then I was on my feet, and my voice was shaking like an electric wire in a high wind.

"What a fool I was not to get it before! What a fool! Peggy, I know now how Sylvan was murdered. I know how it was done!"

I pointed to the fountain.

"Someone doped Sylvan's liquor with chloral hydrate. I tasted it before. That made him drag his feet. That's why he got drunk so fast," I rushed on.

"That's how they made sure he'd trip over the telephone wire that was stretched here to trip him. Don't you see, Peggy?"

Her eyes were bright now, her mouth lax with the effort to understand the words that were tumbling off my lips. "His liquor doped . . .?"

"Yes, doped. I know it because I found the bottle of doped liquor behind the bar and took it up to my bedroom. I caught the salt-bitter taste of the chloral when I switched from rye to Scotch, when I picked up Sylvan's glass by mistake. And the bent telephone plug proved I was right.

"He tripped over the wire, the trap that was laid for him. Allowing for his momentum and other things, it could have been stretched at just about the right distance. A little more or less wouldn't matter. What difference if the spikes went through his head or through his neck? Look here!" I reached behind me for the telephone.

"There's no phone there, Cal." Peggy said quietly. "I guess the butler took it up to my father earlier this evening. He usually does."

"I tell you I saw it here," I said desperately. "I saw the bent plug before I got hit on the head."

She looked at me dubiously. "Why don't you tell this to Detective Bannerman?"

I shrugged my shoulders, knotted my fists behind me.

"Because," I answered slowly. "Because he'll look at me the same way you are."

All the way up to my room I kept tossing the thing around in my aching head. Whoever had killed Sylvan was out to get me now if I found out too much. What I'd found out already, I

couldn't prove. And even if I could have proved it, there were too many holes in the story. Only I knew Sylvan looked drunk when he had walked out of the bar, and I happened to know his particular symptoms of intoxication.

Anyway, I still couldn't prove it wasn't an accident. How could the killer have known it would be Sylvan who'd walk into his trap? Maybe it was set for someone else. Maybe the hunter got the wrong quarry. Those were the questions that would be thrown at me.

I opened the door to my bedroom and walked in. The place was a mess. I started exulting, smacking my fist into the palm of my hand. The murderer had made his first slip! Sylvan's suitcase was lying open on the floor, his clothes strewn around it. Someone, I figured, had hit me on the head and used the opportunity to search Sylvan's baggage and mine. The top of my suitcase was also open, but my clothes were still in place.

"I'm going to him now, Sylvan," I muttered to myself as I pawed through the stuff on the floor to see what might be missing. "We're going to get him this time, my lad. Some devil's going to burn for this, and I can make a damn good guess who'd want to go through your effects." I stopped mumbling then, horrified. "Effects!" That's the word they use for what a dead man leaves behind him. I opened the door and strode down the hallway to Dr. Welsh's room.

He was standing by the bureau looking at a book as I came ploughing in. I hadn't knocked. The guilty look on his face when he saw me brought me over to him fast. When I grabbed his tuxedo lapels in one hand and pulled his white face up close to mine, I saw gilt letters on the book he'd been holding. The letter read: *Dr. Sylvan Brown*.

I let him have it then, and I didn't care much where it landed. It landed in the middle of his pasty face, and a trickle

of blood crept down his lip and across his chin.

"That's for robbing a corpse," I said, and picked up the book and key ring lying next to it. I had seen those keys before. They fitted, among other things, my brother's office.

"Where's the telegram you stole from my bag?" I demanded.

He was shrinking away from me as I let one start back from the bleachers. What I wanted to do was beat him to death, but it only hit his jaw a glancing blow. He went down all right, but it didn't knock him out.

"And that," I said "is for Sylvan—until I can get you the full penalty."

He shook his head like a dog trying to get a fly off its ears.

"I don't know what you mean," he said. "I didn't take any telegram. I didn't touch your bag."

There was some blood on his lips. It ran down from the corner of his trembling mouth.

I had to hold onto the edge of the dresser until my knuckles ached to keep from kicking him in the face.

"What I mean," I growled, "is that you killed my brother. You killed him because he was a better doctor than you, had all the rich patients in town. And with his call book and entrance to his files it would have been a cinch to get them to come to you, knowing the diagnosis beforehand. A discreet telephone call with the suggestion that Dr. Brown had intended turning them over to you in the first place, you rat!"

His face went white again as I stepped toward him, and he cowered from me on the floor. Then the smile came back to his swelling lips, the mean, mocking smile.

"I still don't know what you're talking about," he said. "Or why you brought that book and those keys to my room with you."

I SAW what he was driving at then. For the second time that night he was taking the evidence out of my hands. Only this time I was conscious and there was still nothing I could do about it. His word was as good as mine.

But anyway, I said, "Oh yeah, we'll see about that." I pushed his face back with the flat of my hand. There was no telegram in his pockets.

At the door I turned for the only parting thrust I could think of, and it was pretty weak too, because I had no proof of that either.

I said, "And Peggy's a pretty good motive too, isn't she? If you could only marry her now, with her father's fortune, instead of my brother . . ."

About then I realized that someone was pushing against the outside of the half-opened door. I pulled it wide and saw Thorner sitting in his wheel chair.

"What are you two fools fighting about at three o'clock in the morning?" he snapped petulantly. "Look here, Dr. Brown, you better get it into your head that your brother got too drunk and stumbled into that fountain—and leave us alone. You've been keeping me awake for hours quarreling in here with Dr. Welsh."

He wheeled his chair into the room. I looked back over my shoulder as I kept going on out the door.

"Let Welsh tell you about it," I growled. "He's enjoying it more than I am right now."

I slammed the door behind me, heard Welsh's chuckle coming through the paneling. Welsh had made a fool of me, and he knew it. Well, anyway, I knew what I had to do next.

But it was lucky I glanced over my shoulder before I headed on down the hall. A shadow seemed to flit down the stairwell. I didn't need the ache in my head to sound the alarm. That shadowy figure was enough. Deliberately, I turned

toward my room, walking as unconcernedly as I could. But instead of stopping and going on in, I broke into a gallop. When I slid to a stop right outside Bannerman's door, I had cornered the barkeep from downstairs.

In the half-light, his broken nose threw ugly shadows across his scarred face.

"What are you doing up here?" I demanded.

He spread his hands.

"Nothin'," he said innocently. "Nothin' a-tall. I was just takin' a turn to see things was in order. Part of my job for the night."

"What do you mean, for the night?" There was something shifty about the guy.

"Just for the night." He spread his hands wider and grinned, but his pig-eyes got mean. "Protect the guests," he said. "Like this . . ."

He was standing in front of me talking, his hands still spread apart, and he swung from that position. It was the quick, effortless motion of a professional pug. Why he didn't knock me cold I don't know. Maybe it was because I was already punch drunk and was getting immune. Maybe I just happened to move in time to keep it from landing flush.

Anyway, I did go down—with a thump. And I wondered, trying to shake my head clear, what the hell had happened to Bannerman. There wasn't a stir from his room, and that noise should have brought him out if the low-toned conversation hadn't. But I didn't have any time to think about that because the pug was moving in on me, and the ugly look on his face said he'd decided to make an end of it all this time.

There was something dark and heavy in his upraised hand then, and I swallowed hard, rolled flat on my back to get as far away from it as I could. As his leg came forward to straddle me, I kicked out with my heel, driving with every

muscle in my leg. His face screwed up in pain as my heel dug in, and he bent over to grab his shin. The toe of my shoe caught him then. His head snapped back, and his eyes seemed to blink at me twice, like signal lamps, before he dropped like a sack at my feet.

When I got up I had to lean against the wall. That crack on the jaw had knocked everything out of my head. Then I looked at the low-browed monstrosity at my feet, remembered it might have been him and not Welsh who had beaten me over the head in the solarium and that he was mixed up some way in Sylvan's death. It took some of the ache out of my head, somehow, seeing him lying there.

Then it came back to me where I was going before I had seen him trailing me. By the time I made my way to Thorner's bedroom door, all I could do was pray that Welsh was still telling him about my barging into his chamber. A little time was the one break I had to have. With my brains still churned up in my head, I didn't understand how I was doing it, but some things were beginning to make sense; some loose ends that had been dangling were beginning to tie up.

And when I slipped inside the door, I found what I had hoped to find. This wasn't only Thorner's bedroom. It was a suite of several rooms, including a study. Remembering him sitting in the wheel chair during Bannerman's inquisition, I thought there was still a good chance of my finding something else I was looking for, particularly since yesterday had been the first of the month. It wouldn't be anything he'd want to hide especially.

And I did find it right off, in the top drawer of his desk. It was a long envelope with a transparent window in it, addressed to Mr. Virgil Bay Thorner. The return address printed on it was the Sterling Life Insurance Company.

My hand was shaking, and I was still holding it up to the light when a door opened and shut behind me. I froze that way. I don't know whether I expected to hear a gun roar first or old Thorner's snarling voice. Instead I heard another voice, and although it sounded plenty angry it also sounded plenty good. It was Peggy!

She reached me in quick long strides. "Cal, how dare you go through my father's desk? How dare you?"

"How did you happen to come in here just now?" I asked.

Her eyes blazed. "What do you mean asking me questions? I'm the one to do the asking. Why are you breaking into my father's desk?" She brushed at a hair on her pale forehead with slender, red-tipped fingers.

"Peggy," I whispered, "you've been keeping something back from me, something that would explain a lot I ought to understand. Won't you talk now, before it's too late?"

Her face grew paler, but she shook her head stubbornly. "I have nothing to tell you, Cal."

I let go her shoulders, dropped my hands helplessly.

Then I tried another tack. "You still don't suspect why Sylvan didn't propose marriage to you?"

She shook her head, frowning.

"Well," I said waving the envelope toward the four corners of the room, "Now I do. And it ties up with how he was killed and who wanted him dead."

Her face went pale with anger and indignation. She pulled away.

"First you break into my father's office," she said scornfully, "and now you're trying to hurt me with your unpleasant implications!"

"I can prove everything, Peggy," I said. My voice wasn't smooth any more. I had to undo that slip. I had to get her to agree before Thorner came back in the

room accompanied probably by Welsh. I glanced at the door warily. "But I need your help, Peggy. I need it fast. If you meant it when you said you loved Sylvan, you'll want his slayer caught, however you may feel about me. I can't do it without you. If I'm wrong—and I know I'm not—I'll withdraw all charges and leave this place forever. Will you help me, Peggy?"

"What do you want?" she asked coldly.

But even so, I knew she would.

"I want you to get Dr. Welsh, Mr. Thorner, that ex-pug butler and any other guests who spent the night here. I want you to get them downstairs in the solarium right away. Tell them Bannerman wants to see them there. Tell them anything, but get them down there. I'll do the rest."

Her face was still unsmiling and unforgiving. "All right, I'll do it. But, Cal, if you're only adding humiliation to sorrow, I'll . . ."

I DIDN'T wait for her to finish. My luck had held out long enough. I slipped out the door, down the hall, trying to see behind me in the gloom. The bartender had apparently regained consciousness. He was no longer lying there on the floor.

Bannerman was still sound asleep as I turned on the light. I had to shake him hard to get him to open his eyes. When he did, he acted at first as though he didn't recognize me.

"Come on, Bannerman," I yelled in his ear, "get up. I want to borrow your gun."

He shook his head groggily and crawled to the edge of the bed.

"The hell you do!" he grunted.

"The hell I don't," I answered and walked over to the chair where his shoulder holster hung. "The death of my brother was all carefully planned." I explained what had to be done as I slipped Bannerman's revolver into my pocket.

When I walked into the solarium everyone looked up. They were sitting on chairs that had been brought in from the library.

Welsh sneered with fake bravado, and everyone knew it was faked because his voice was shaking. "Now what's the avenging angel got up his sleeve, Doctor?"

But I kept telling myself I couldn't let them get my goat; I couldn't let the hatred boiling up within me come to the surface either. The murder of Sylvan was ingenious. Showing up the murderer was going to be no easy job.

Then I pulled Bannerman's gun out of my pocket and spun it on the table, watched them grow tense.

"Bannerman didn't send for you at all," I said. "He won't even be down here. I sent for you because I've just found out who the killer is. I'm turning him over to Bannerman in a few minutes."

"First," I said, "I'll tell you how the crime was engineered. The barkeep here was given a bottle of doped whiskey to feed Sylvan. I have that bottle in my room now. The murderer knew that when Sylvan began to think he was getting drunk, he'd go into the solarium to get away from the crowd, because he had used the solarium before to get away from people.

"The rest was simple, and diabolically clever. When Thorner fainted in the library there, Peggy screamed. She screamed because he tumbled out of his chair, suddenly. Sylvan, sitting on the only seat in here, heard the scream and tried to run to her aid. It's instinctive for a man to run toward the light under such conditions. That's a psychological fact.

"But between the light and Sylvan were those deadly spikes on the fountain and that telephone cord stretched to catch his shuffling feet, feet that would trip over anything in their way. That was simple to figure out when I found the telephone plug had been bent by quite a force."

Peggy was staring at me, and it hurt to think of what I had to do to her.

She said, "But, Cal, even if you're right about the liquor, and even the telephone, it still might have been an accident. I didn't scream on purpose to lead Sylvan to his death."

I tried to reassure her. "I know you didn't, Peggy. But Thorner did faint on purpose. That is, he never fainted at all. He sent you out to dance with Sylvan. When you returned to say Sylvan was on his way to the solarium, he knew the time was ripe, because he had placed the telephone in your absence. Then he replaced it here on the table after you fainted and returned to his fake faint in the library. You see, Peggy, he's used you all along. He's—"

But the old man cut in before I could finish.

"You know what you're doing, young fellow?" he snarled. "You're accusing me, *me*, of murdering that man! I'll not have you in this house another minute!"

"But why would Mr. Thorner want to kill his physician?" Welsh asked smoothly. I could see what was in his ugly soul. He was sticking with Thorner in the hope of getting a rich patient when my accusations blew up.

"The trouble with murderers, Welsh," I explained, "is that they usually make a slip. Now take you, for example. At first I thought you had killed Sylvan to get his practice. But somehow, it didn't fit. For one thing, you're too yellow to take such a chance for such a reward. You simply turned scavenger and used his death to make what profit out of it you could. Thorner stole the telegram from my grip. I was wrong to accuse you of that. He stole it after you left my room with your loot, after his servant here had knocked me cold and taken the telephone from me.

"Then Thorner remarked up in your room about Sylvan being drunk. That was the slip. That was the give-away.

No one but me knew anything was wrong with Sylvan, and I only knew it because his eyes weren't focussing well. So Thorner must have planned to have Sylvan drunk. I realized that as soon as I got outside your room. All I had to do then was discover what his motive could be for killing my brother."

Thorner started to open his mouth to speak then.

"Shut up, you," I growled.

His face flushed. The room grew suddenly restless and tense.

"I had guessed part of it as soon as I started thinking of Thorner as the killer," I went on. "But I found the confirmation in his desk, when I went to his room. The reason Thorner killed Sylvan was because Thorner is supposed to be paralyzed from an auto accident he was in ten years ago. It ruined his earning power, the accident, but thanks to a disability clause in his insurance policy he's been getting four thousand dollars a month ever since. He thought he'd get it for the rest of his life.

"But Sylvan, who was also examiner for the same company, saw that Thorner was getting well—as I saw it by the unconscious twitching of his legs during the detective's questioning. A man will kill to get money. He'll also kill to keep from losing four thousand a month.

"My brother telegraphed me because he knew Thorner, knew he might kill when Sylvan told him he was going to report his recovery to the insurance company. My brother never got the chance to explain it to me because he thought he could put it off until tomorrow. But Thorner had guessed what was happening and moved fast."

I looked at Peggy, which was a mistake right then.

"That," I said to her, "is why Sylvan never proposed to you, knowing that he'd have to turn in your father sooner or later. But there was one thing Sylvan didn't know . . ."

I NEVER got to finish that sentence. Thorner, whose face had been working madly while I talked, suddenly jumped up from the wheel chair and grabbed Bannerman's gun before I could get to it.

"Okay, Brown," he whispered, and his breathing was loud in the tense room. "You've pinned it on me all right. You and your damn brother have taken my income from me. But you're not taking my life." He grinned, with a mask of madness on his face. "I'm taking yours."

I felt the sweat running down my face, and somehow I couldn't swallow as that yawning barrel pointed slowly up toward my head.

Then Peggy screamed, shoved the wheel chair hard ahead of her. The seat caught Thorner in the knee, and a dark figure hurtled out from behind the curtains. Bannerman caught him in a flying tackle as the gun thundered into the ceiling. And I was around the table in a leap, dropping down beside Bannerman on my my knees.

The lid was off then.

"Please let me slug him," I begged. I was half crying and choking as I pleaded. "Please let me hit him. Just once, Bannerman. He—he killed my kid brother, Bannerman!"

A pair of hands caught my face, and I heard Peggy whispering into my ear, "That won't help, Cal. That won't bring Sylvan back."

I guess I broke down completely then. I guess she was still holding my head while I sobbed, when Bannerman came over and tapped me on the shoulder. I looked up, saw a badly battered Thorner. I felt better then.

"Good stuff, fella," Bannerman said. "It was a good plan you had, me hiding and the gun there in front of him, only you damn near outsmarted yourself." Bannerman had a tough face, but a lot of the lines had smoothed out. I knew that he knew how I was feeling about things.

"Anything else you've got to say?" he asked.

"That depends on Peggy," I answered, and looked at her, "now that she knows why Sylvan never proposed to her. I've had a hunch all along he was wrong."

She talked then, and she stared hard at Thorner with the unforgiving face of one whose love has been betrayed.

"Mr. Thorner isn't my father," she said in a low voice. "He's my uncle. He brought me here a few years ago when—when I was having trouble making a living. He never told me why, just said I was to be a daughter to him and I was to act like his daughter. I see now he was using me, so that when Syl—Sylvan found out that he was regaining the use of his legs Sylvan wouldn't tell. He kept urging me to get Sylvan to propose. But Sylvan wouldn't. If I had only known why! If I had only known!"

Bannerman wasn't very interested in that. He leaned close to my ear.

"Say," he whispered, "that liquor in your room sure was doped. I had a slug of it before I went to sleep." He grinned slyly. "It sure was doped!"

He took Welsh and the barkeep along as material witnesses.

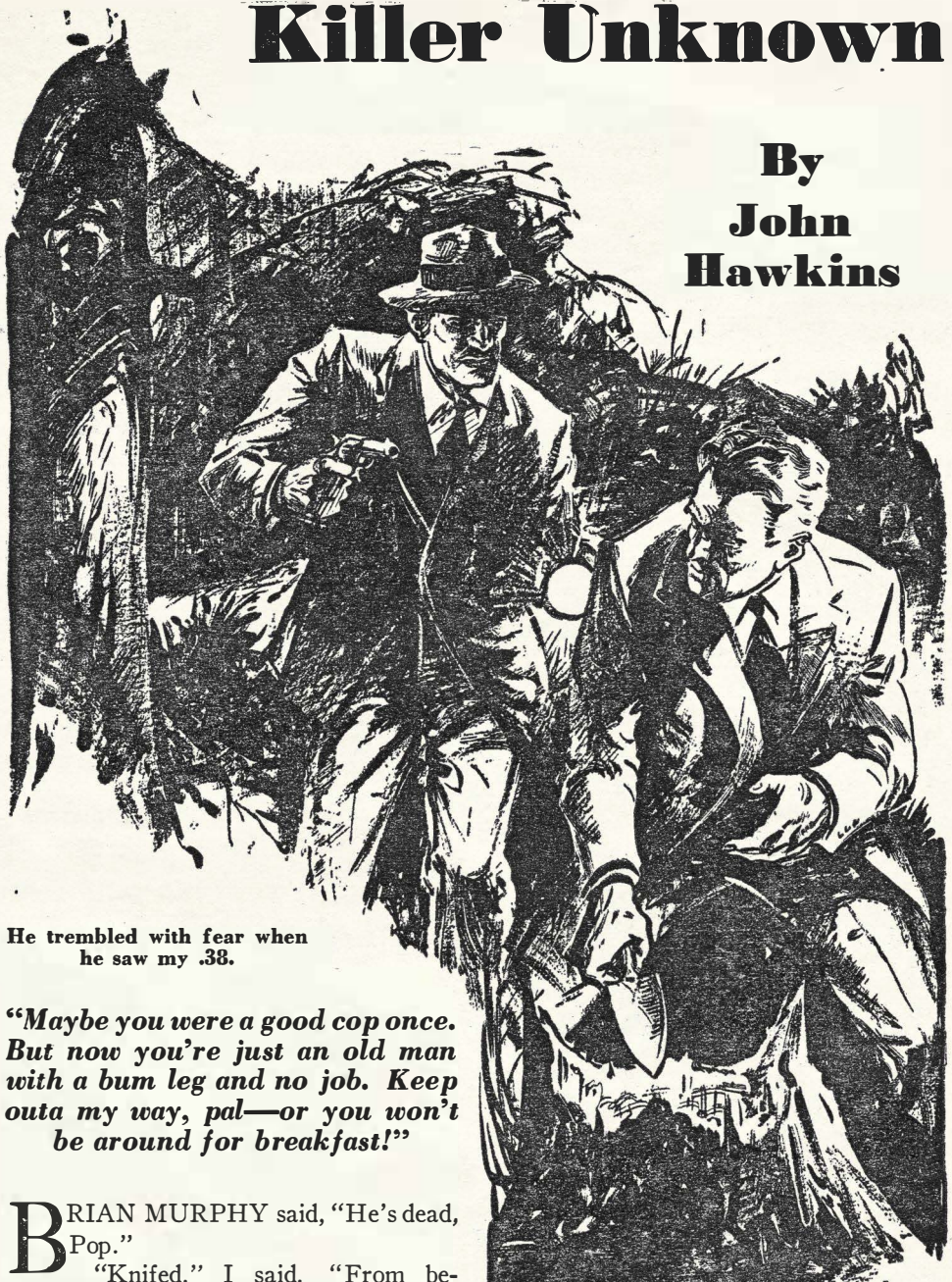
When they had left the house, Peggy said, "How did you guess I wasn't Thorner's daughter?"

"No one as beautiful as you could possibly have been the daughter of anything as ugly as him," I said knowingly. "What gets me is how it ever fooled Sylvan." I got serious then, took her hand. "Look, Peggy, my brother and I once parted over a woman. I'm wondering now whether he and I, wherever he is, couldn't get together on one?"

"It might be possible," she said, and there was a trace of a smile around her red lips, the kind of a smile I thought that she had given Sylvan the night before. "It might just be possible, Calvin." And she squeezed my hand.

Killer Unknown

By
John
Hawkins



He trembled with fear when
he saw my .38.

*“Maybe you were a good cop once.
But now you’re just an old man
with a bum leg and no job. Keep
outa my way, pal—or you won’t
be around for breakfast!”*

BRIAN MURPHY said, “He’s dead,
Pop.”
“Knifed,” I said. “From behind.”

The Point Black fog horn howled off on our left. I could hear Murphy let his breath go in a ragged sigh. Grey mist pressed down around us, wet and cold.

“When’d you find him?” I asked.

“Just before I came for you, Pop. I

wanted some air. I left town about seven and walked all evening.”

“A hell of a night for a walk,” I said.

That wasn’t decent, but Brian Murphy’s “Pop” was getting under my hide. I’m fifty-eight. Because I’ve got white

hair and a game leg, every man and boy in Bay City calls me Pop. I get tired of it.

And there was something cock-eyed about Murphy's story. He'd been walking—around midnight—in fog thick enough to cut into chunks. He'd stumbled over Frank Van Horn's body and come running for me. Only that last made sense. I'm Jock Starr, Bay City's marshal.

Murphy said, "What do we do now?"

"Look around," I said. "Look around."

I got my bad leg folded under me and squatted beside the body. Things weren't very clear just then. I was thinking of Lola Van Horn and the two kids. Pretty soon I'd have to go up a shell path to a white cottage. I'd have to knock on the door. I'd have to tell Lola that Van wouldn't be home—not tonight, not any night.

"Find anything?" Murphy asked.

I looked at the body again. Van lay face down on the trail. His coat was split below the left shoulder, and there was a dark stain where the knife had gone in. One of Van's arms was doubled under his body. The other was wide-flung, and the fingers of that hand were hooked deep in the sandy soil. Van's head was tipped, and his lips were pulled back in a frozen grin. I got a little sick.

I said, "Fair winds, Van."

Maybe that was silly. Van was dead and nothing I said would change that. But Van had been a friend of mine. His kids were friends of mine. I'd whittled a boat for Joe, the youngest, just yesterday. The same kind of boat I'd whittled for Lola, long ago, when she was just knee-high to a sand snipe. Anyway, Van had been a Coast Guardsman and a sailor. It was only right to wish him a good voyage and pleasant winds.

Murphy said, "How long will you be here?"

"I'm about through," I told him.

That was true. There were footprints around the body, but the soil of the trail was sandy and soft and the prints were blurred. A half-smoked cigarette lay a few inches from Van's lips. Van's probably—the killer wouldn't have advertised his presence. It was foolish, but I tucked that cigarette carefully in an envelope.

"Got a clue, Pop?" asked Murphy.

"Maybe," I said. "Maybe not."

WE HEADED back for town then. We took the short cut across the Point, instead of following the road. The path was crooked, narrow and steep. The summer people had used it once, but now it was pretty well grown over, and no place for a man with a bad leg.

I fell once, and another time I got too close to Murphy's heels. A low branch bent with his stride, and then snapped back savagely. I found myself sitting on the trail nursing a bruised shin.

"Sorry," Murphy said. "That was my fault."

He helped me up, and for an instant his face was caught in the glare of my flashlight. He was brown and healthy and looked like someone you'd seen in a movie—even to the little moustache. But too much white showed around his eyes now. Brian Murphy was afraid.

I wondered about that.

And I did more—I prodded him with blunt questions as we walked the shore road toward his house and a phone. He was willing to talk about anything but himself. I could feel him tightening up.

"Pop," he said, as we reached his gate. "I wasn't going to tell you this, but I guess you'd find out anyway. Knives are a hobby of mine. I've got a houseful of them."

"I know," I said. "Your cleaning woman talks."

He seemed surprised. "You knew that and—"

"—and I didn't say anything," I finished for him. "You collect knives, but that doesn't mean you killed Van. This's a fishing town. There are a hundred men here who could give you lessons in handling a knife."

"I hadn't thought of that," he said.

He pushed the front door wide and showed me where to find the phone. I called the coroner, gave him the details, and told him how to find Brian Murphy's place. He was still growling when I hung up.

"He'll come here," I told Murphy. "You hold him until I get back. I'm going to talk to Lola Van Horn."

"I don't envy you," he said.

This was the worst part. Lola took it like the thoroughbred she was. Oh, she flinched and her blue eyes went wide, and a hurt unbelief clouded them.

Finally, when the full impact got to her, she crumpled in a chair and whispered, "Why, Pop? Why would anyone want to kill Frank? Why . . .?"

I said, "I don't know—yet."

And then the kids—Frank Junior and Joe—burst into the room. They'd heard my voice and came whooping down the stairs to see if I'd brought them another boat. Lola gathered them into her arms and I felt worse than useless around there.

"I'll drop in tomorrow," I said.

Outside, the fog was thicker than ever. I saw the coroner's black hearse crawl by, taking the cliff road to Brian Murphy's. I could have hailed him, but I decided there was something more important. I went down the street to Madra O'Hearn's shop and rang the bell.

My leg had begun to give me hell—that branch had left a bruise the size of an apple. I leaned against the door, wondering why I hadn't thought of Madra before.

She was small, hardly bigger than a minute, all laughing eyes and a warm

smile. She'd been in Bay City only a year, and already she had more friends than the Government's got dollars. Her shop was mostly for the summer trade, but it must have done all right in the winter, too. At least she kept it open.

She came to the door in pajamas and a robe.

"Pop," she said, and then stopped. "Pop—is something wrong?"

"Frank Van Horn's been killed," I said.

The breath went out of Madra. Her hands went to her face.

"Poor Lola," she whispered. "Is there any—Pop, do you want me to go over there?"

"Would you mind, Madra?"

"Of course not. I'll go right away."

So that was done. I stopped at the house for my gun and then limped up the hill to Brian Murphy's.

The coroner was there, scowling and impatient. Dave Throck, Harbor County's fat sheriff, had come with two sad-faced deputies. Throck had an election coming up; he was hunting headlines. The State Police had sent a pleasant little sergeant, who was wandering around looking at the knives on Murphy's walls.

The coroner said, "It's time you got here."

The sheriff said, "Hello, Starr." He got his two hundred pounds out of a chair and gave me his best smile. "About this killing," he said. "It happened inside the city limits here—it's your case, really. But you're not equipped to handle anything this size. I—"

"I'll take care of it," I said.

Throck's face got purple; his smile didn't fit.

The State sergeant grinned at me from across the room.

"You've got no lab," said Throck. "You—"

The sergeant said, "He can use ours." Dave Throck swore.

FIVE of us went out to the Point—the coroner, one of his men, Murphy, the sergeant and myself. The coroner and his man rolled Van's body on a stretcher and took it down the trail to the hearse. Brian Murphy watched the sergeant and me go over the ground again in a fruitless search.

"Funny," the sergeant said. "This's an out of the way place. I wonder what Van Horn was doing here?"

I said, "I wouldn't know."

"You've got Dave Throck boiling."

I said, "Let him boil."

"The reporters have to go along with him, Pop." The sergeant was serious now. "Throck needs votes—but bad. He'll kick up a howl about this—unless you clean it up in a hurry. Throck can be a heel if he tries."

"This is my town," I said. "Van was a friend of mine. I'm going to hang the guy who killed him."

"I'm with you," he said. "Good luck!"

He went down the trail to his car, and then Brian Murphy and I were alone again. We went back by the road this time. It was a ten-minute walk to Murphy's gate.

I said, "The inquest's at ten."

"I know," he said. "Good night, Pop."

I went on down the road toward town. The bruise hadn't helped my bad leg; it ached clear to the hip. The fog was wet and cold. My shoulders were stiff. A fire and a warm drink were what I needed; but there was still a job to do.

Light shone from Murphy's windows when I doubled back. I left the road for the grass, moving as quietly as I could. I passed the place where the short-cut left the road and found a thick clump of alder, just beyond. There I settled down to wait.

It was an hour before he came. The windows had long been dark when I heard the whisper of softly moving feet. A shadow appeared out of the fog, moving

away from the road and into the path. I waited a moment, waited until a gleam of light appeared on the trail above. And then I followed Brian Murphy.

The fog helped. The Point Black fog horn howled dismally at one minute intervals. I timed my movement to that sound, panting up the trail when the horn spoke, freezing when it was silent. Murphy's light bobbed on ahead of me. Twice he paused to listen.

He stopped near the backbone of the ridge. He left the trail, going a little way to the right. I found him there. He had propped his flashlight against a dead limb; he was digging at the soft wood of a rotten log with both hands. He didn't hear me approach.

"Looking for something?" I said.

He started as though the words had flicked raw nerve ends. Fear was alive and ugly in his face. One hand came up, the fingers splayed, claw-like. I touched my flashlight switch; let him see the snout of my .38.

"Who is it?" he whispered. "Who—"

"Pop Starr," I said. "Get on your feet."

He said, "You, Pop . . ." and the words held something close to relief. He got stiffly erect, holding his hands wide-spread. "This isn't what you think it is," he said hoarsely. "I've got a good reason for being here."

"Where's the knife?" I said.

He wet his lips. "It isn't— Pop, let me tell you what happened. I didn't kill Van, Pop. So help me God, I didn't!"

"Where's the knife?" I said again.

"I don't know, Pop. It's gone."

"You'd better start at the beginning."

His words came in a rush, blurred and almost incoherent. "Van was dead when I found him, Pop. Everything was just the way I said it was, except that the knife was still in his back. It was one of mine; it had my initials in the handle. I didn't want to get mixed up in a killing. I—I

yanked the knife out, and then I was afraid I'd be searched. I hid it here, in this log. This is the first chance I've had to get back here alone. And now the damned thing's gone!"

"What's the rest of it?"

"That's all—absolutely all!"

And it was—at least questioning brought nothing more to light. Murphy's relief was real. He seemed honestly glad I'd found him.

He said, "I've told you all I know, Pop. And I'm glad it's over. I'm no good at this kind of thing."

"I think I believe you," I said. "Throck would call me a fool; but you're just scatterbrained enough to pull a trick like this. Let's go back to town."

"Are you going to lock me up?"

I said, "No. But don't try to leave Bay City."

So that was a washout. I'd spent most of the night in the cold and wet and learned nothing. Still, there was the growing conviction that Van's killer was a man who knew Bay City well. On the way back to the road I got a second savage crack on the shin from that same low branch. I had to soak my leg in hot water for an hour before I could sleep.

THE inquest was about what I expected. ". . . death at the hands of person or persons unknown. . ." The post mortem showed the knife had been driven into Van's back at a downward angle. This meant the knife could not have been thrown. The killer had stood close to Van.

"He knew the man who killed him," I told Lola, after the inquest was over. "Did he say anything about meeting a man last night—anything at all?"

"No," she answered. "No, he didn't."

I said, "Thanks, Lola."

I left her at the door of the white cottage and went back along the shell walk to the street. Madra was there, slender

and small in the first slacks I'd ever seen her wear. The night had marked her. The sparkling laughter had gone out of her voice; her eyes were grave.

"To hell with business," she said. "I've closed the shop for the day. I want to help, Pop. May I?"

"You can," I said. "I don't want the reporters bothering Lola. Keep them away. Call the office if you have any trouble. They'll know where to find me."

She set her jaw. "I'll keep them away."

Before the day was over I wished I had someone to keep the reporters away from me. Dave Throck had started Fifth Column talk. There's a coast artillery fort a little way from Bay City. The reporters tied the Coast Guard, the Army, and Van's death together—and then there was the devil to pay.

The city council was in emergency session by noon. Throck was there, helping the mayor lead me up to the ax, telling the world that in times like these, big jobs were not for incompetent old men. My leg was giving me hell again. I refused Throck's offer of assistance. The council voted to over-rule me. I got mad then; I made a fool of myself. I out-shouted Throck and I out-shouted the mayor. And when it was over, I had twenty-four hours to clean up the case or turn in my badge.

I clumped out of the City Hall and went back to my office. After the anger had burned out of me, I realized how readily I'd gone for Throck's bait. I'd let him prod me into saying too much. And now—I had twenty-four hours left.

I had a lot of questions and no answers. I rubbed some liniment on my leg and then went over to the Coast Guard station. Gramp Houston, the officer in charge, lent me the day book. An hour later I thought I had a lead. I went looking for a man named Adam Koski.

This Koski was a fisherman, one of the mosquito fleet trollers. Van Horn had re-

fused to license Koski's boat, refused because Koski did not carry the emergency gear required by law. Koski was a big, tough Finn. He'd lost a week's fishing time. Van had reported the whole incident in the day book. One sentence read: "Koski started for me with a knife. . . ."

Adam Koski was a Finn I wanted to see.

HIS house was one of a clutter of weather-beaten shacks at the south end of the harbor. A staircase of sullen, grimy kids watched me cross the porch. A thin woman nodded listlessly when I asked if Koski was home.

"Ya," she said. "You come in."

Adam Koski was propped up in bed. He was a heavy man, big-shouldered, big-armed. His face was black with a four-day beard. He scowled at me. I'd reached the bed before I saw the thing that stopped my questions in my throat. Koski's right leg was cased in thick plaster-of-Paris.

"What's wrong with you?" I said.

He tapped the cast. "Broke him—four days ago."

I went away from there.

There wasn't much left of the afternoon when I got back to the office.

Six of my twenty-four hours had gone when the State Police sergeant came in.

"How goes it, Pop?" he said.

"Bad," I told him.

"Throck moved fast, didn't he?"

"That fool council. That bunch of—"

He said, "How old are you, Pop?"

"Fifty-nine—come June."

"You like your job," he finished.

"I've been here a long time, son."

And I had, since the long ago day when Bay City had been a big, bustling place. Plenty of work for a husky cop then—shipyards, factories, and Main Street with its pay-day crowds and fourteen saloons. But something had turned the flow of progress away. I'd stayed on, still holding my marshal's badge, and the town and I had slowed down together. There'd been only the summer crowd and the kids to watch. And now—

"Have you found anything?" the sergeant asked.

I told him about Adam Koski's broken leg. He looked at me, frowning, and then said, "Pop, it's a slim chance, but that cast would be a hell of a good alibi. Who'd

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think a guy with his leg in a cast could hike to Black Point? He might be faking."

"I hadn't thought of that," I said.

"I'll check with his doctor for you, Pop."

He left, and early dusk turned the windows grey, filled the room with shadows.

The phone rang. I said, "Starr speaking," and then Madra O'Hearn's voice was in my ear, hurried, taut with breathless excitement.

"Pop—I've got something for you. I—I've been at Lola's all day. I've just put the children to bed. They were talking about their father, and little Joe remembered something his father told him just before— Pop, Frank Van Horn was having trouble with a man named George Happ. They had a fight and little Joe says—"

"I'll look into it," I said. "Now."

I knew George Happ. He was a Coast Guardsman, a petty officer; he lived by himself in a little house on the cliff road. Happ had worked with Van; he could have arranged the Black Point meeting. He might have had reason—

GEORGE HAPP answered my knock. He was a huge man with a tawny mop of red hair, a surly mouth, and square brown hands. He gave me a twisted grin.

"I been expectin' you," he said. "Come in."

I said, "Then you know why I'm here."

"Sure. Sure I know why you're here."

He hitched at his dungarees. "That fool Van Horn got a knife stuck in him, an' you heard about the fight him and I had. You come snoopin' around."

"Where were you last night?"

"Gettin' my nose wet."

"Can you prove—" I began.

"Sure." His eyes were wary now. "I was in the Anchor Bar from six till closin' time. Ask Snooker or Holy Joe.

They'll tell you that quick enough."

"Have you got a phone?"

"On the wall," he said. "Help yourself."

I called the Anchor Bar and talked to Holy Joe Morehaven, the bartender on shift. I could hear him yelling for Snooker King, the Anchor Bar's one waiter. Then— "He was here all evening, Pop. Anyway he was here solid, from seven to midnight."

"Satisfied?" A sneer replaced Happ's grin.

I said, "They check your alibi."

"Maybe I was lucky I picked last night to get drunk," he said. "Van rubbed my nose in the mud plenty. He ranked me an' he never let me forget it. There's a lot of guys know I ain't cryin' over what happened. If I hadn't been in the Anchor last night—" He spread his hands. "Well, I was, an' I'm in the clear. An' I ain't sorry Van's gone."

"He was a good man—one of the best."

Happ opened the door. "So long, Gran'pa."

Fog had come with the dark. The street lights wore golden halos of mist. I didn't go back to the office, but trudged down Main Street. On my way home, I stopped at the Anchor Bar. I waited until Holy Joe, the tall and solemn barman, was free, and then called him.

He said, "Evening, Pop. Want something?"

"Are you sure Happ was here last night?"

"I seen him, Pop. I couldn't miss on that."

"From seven till midnight?"

"You know how it is, Pop. Guys come and go." He frowned and rubbed his chin. "I seen him around, but why don't you talk to Snooker? He seen Happ, too."

Snooker King was small and very dark.

He wore a white mess jacket and used his hands when he talked.

"Happ was here," he said. "He never went out of the place. He got to playin' one of the ball machines, an' couldn't quit. He dropped eight or ten bucks."

"I had to be sure," I said. "Thanks."

I was through. I knew it then, but I went on hoping morning would change things. I couldn't sleep, so I spent the small hours of the night soaking my bad leg and trying to make a complete picture with the few fragments I had. That didn't help.

THE mayor was waiting for me at noon. I slid my badge across the desk. "I left the office key in the door," I said. "There's nothing in there I wanted."

He said, "I'm sorry, Jock."

I think he meant it, too. We'd had other fights and patched them up. We'd both been mad the day before; we'd both said too much. He couldn't back down now. Not with Dave Throck in the room, grinning and waiting.

"You're out of this," said Throck. "You're not a cop now—you're an old guy with a bum leg. Remember that. I want you to keep to hell out of the way. I'll clean this mess up in a hurry."

"I hope you do," I said.

He grinned. "I'll make an arrest today."

The afternoon papers carried the story: *Brian Murphy Suspect In Fifth Column Case. Admits Ownership of Murder Weapon . . .* I rated a couple of paragraphs on page two. *Marshal Admits Failure*, the heading read. *Age Gives Way to Youth. . . .*

There were phone calls from Lola Van Horn and Madra O'Hearn. "Sorry, Pop." That sort of thing. Two old-timers dropped in to tell me I was well out of it. We had a drink and swapped half-hearted lies about the good old days.

Dusk brought fog for the third successive day. I told myself this was one night I could get some sleep, that I wouldn't have to tramp around in the wet. I told myself I was better off, but I didn't believe it.

Snooker King came at seven. He didn't knock, but slipped through the front door, as silently as a shadow. His face was a shaken white; his voice choked, low.

"Douse the light, Pop. Douse it quick!"

I said, "Sure, Snooker. Right away."

I touched the switch, and dark flowed into the room. Snooker moved to my side.

"That's better," he said, "and safer. I didn't want Happ to see me in here. I ain't takin' chances with that guy. He—Pop, I give you a phony on Happ's alibi. He was gone from the Anchor for damn near an hour."

"Yes, Snooker?"

"From ten to eleven, Pop. He told me he had some married gal on the string, an' wanted me to cover for him. I thought it was the McCoy. Honest."

"Why did you change your mind?"

"He said he'd kill me if I talked. I—"

"We'll go get him, Snooker. Now."

"No, Pop. Not me. I ain't goin' up against Happ till he's wearin' handcuffs and a leg iron. You c'n give me a gun an' I'll stick here till he's put away. An', Pop, you better have help. That guy's bad."

I said, "Sure, Snooker."

My spare gun was in the drawer of the bedside table. I checked the clip by match light and then went back to the living room. Snooker's fingers trembled as he took the gun from my hand.

"Take care of yourself," I said.

THE windows of George Happ's house were dark. I hammered on the door. My fist raised echoes inside the house, but there was no sound

of movement. The door was locked. I settled down to wait.

Ten minutes . . . twenty . . . thirty, and then muffled footsteps came along the walk. Happ's figure bulked large at the gate. I held my silence, waiting until he was only five feet away. Then I switched on my light.

I said, "I've been waiting for you."

His mouth was tight. "For what?"

"Your alibi fell apart. I'm taking you in."

"The hell you are! You ain't a cop now. You—"

I cocked the .38. "I'm taking you in."

"You got the gun," he said. "I guess you're boss."

The trip down the hill was made in silence. I'd pulled Happ's hands behind him, cuffed them there. I stayed a little behind him, ready for any sudden move. I stopped Happ when we reached my front gate.

"We pick up Snooker herè," I said.

"I should've twisted his neck," Happ growled.

I said, "Start walking up the path."

The porch floor creaked under our feet. I called, "Snooker. Come on out . . ." There was no answer. There was no sound at all, save the ragged sigh that was Happ's breathing, the slow drip of water from the trees.

"Don't move," I told Happ.

The door gave at the touch of my hand. I switched on the lights. Snooker King looked at me from the big chair across the room. He looked at me, but he didn't see me. There was a knife in Snooker King's chest. He was dead.

THE inquest was held at the City Hall the next day. The big room was jammed with newspaper men, photographers, and all the able-bodied in Bay City. Dave Throck acted for the coroner. I was still on the stand at eleven.

"You admit," Throck was saying, "that you were without authority to act in this case. And yet you took it upon yourself to play detective. You are as much responsible for the death of—"

"This is an inquest," I said, "not a trial. You've been shouting at me for two hours. I'm tired of watching you wave your arms. If you've any questions, ask them; if not, stop playing district attorney."

Someone laughed and then a wave of rustling sound swept over the room. Throck's eyes turned ugly; his lips drew thin and tight.

He said, "That will be all—for now."

I left the witness chair and went back to my seat between Lola Van Horn and Madra O'Hearn. Lola smiled at me. Madra's hand lay on my arm for just a moment. The pressure of her fingers was friendly, warm.

The business of the inquest went on. Throck was trying to prove George Happ was tied to both killings. I heard Throck's voice, but not his words. I was thinking of the morning papers. Throck had made sure the reporters knew who was at fault. Screaming headlines had announced: *Starr's Blunder Causes Second Murder. Missing Knife Used In New Killing. . . .*

I thought back over all that had happened. I'd had no luck since the beginning. I had a sore leg and no job and . . . Something clicked in my mind. I sat up straighter. Then, one by one, the pieces of the picture fell into place. I had an answer.

I looked around the room for the little State Police sergeant. He caught my frantic nod and moved toward the door. I tried to follow too fast. My bad leg buckled under my weight; I stumbled heavily against Madra O'Hearn. A small cry of pain escaped her lips. Throck stopped talking and turned to glare at me.

"Sorry," I said. "It was an accident."

"Did you find Koski's doctor?" I asked the sergeant.

"No, I didn't," he said. "I—"

I said, "Come on. I need your help."

DAVE THROCK was yelling my name when we got back.

"Well," he said heavily. "And where have you been, my lame friend? I suppose this inquest bored you and—"

"I've been doing some second-story work," I said. "I know who murdered Van Horn, and King. I can prove it."

A surprised whisper ran through the room, and then silence came, tight and breathless. Dave Throck scowled.

"Van Horn was killed in the line of duty," I went on. "He was trailing something big. He went to Black Point to make an arrest. He made it, and then he made a mistake. Snooker King made that same mistake later—and died for it."

Throck said, "Who's the killer?"

"Miss O'Hearn," I said. "Madra O'Hearn."

Madra was on her feet, instantly. "You lie!"

"Madra," I said, "it had to be you. It fits. You were out on Black Point. Van Horn was there, too. He arrested you, after you'd met a fishing boat and taken a package from one of the fishermen. Van was bringing you to town when you tricked him into turning his back."

"You're a fool!" she snapped. "A fool!"

"You heard Murphy coming, and had to hide. You saw him take the knife from Van's back—the knife you'd stolen from Murphy's house. You followed Murphy; and you got the knife back."

"No," she said. "No!"

"Snooker King was in love with you, Madra. You persuaded him to lie and smash Happ's alibi. But you were afraid Snooker would talk—so you killed him, too. Snooker was armed and afraid,

Madra. Only a woman could have gotten close enough to stab him."

There was hate in Madra's eyes. "You can't prove any of this! You can't—"

I got the fist-sized package from my pocket and loosed the thick wrapping. Diamonds spilled into my palm and lay there, taking fire from the sunlight, glittering and shining.

"These were dropped overboard from a liner, far at sea," I said. "A fisherman picked them up and brought them to you. These explain the killings, Madra. They were in the false bottom of your desk drawer. They'll hang you, Madra."

The blood went out of her face. Her shoulders slumped.

"You win," she whispered. "You—" And then she was screaming, clawing past the rail, charging at me with a knife. But we'd expected that, too. The little State Police sergeant had long ago moved into position. He tripped her as she passed. An instant later he had the knife and it was all over.

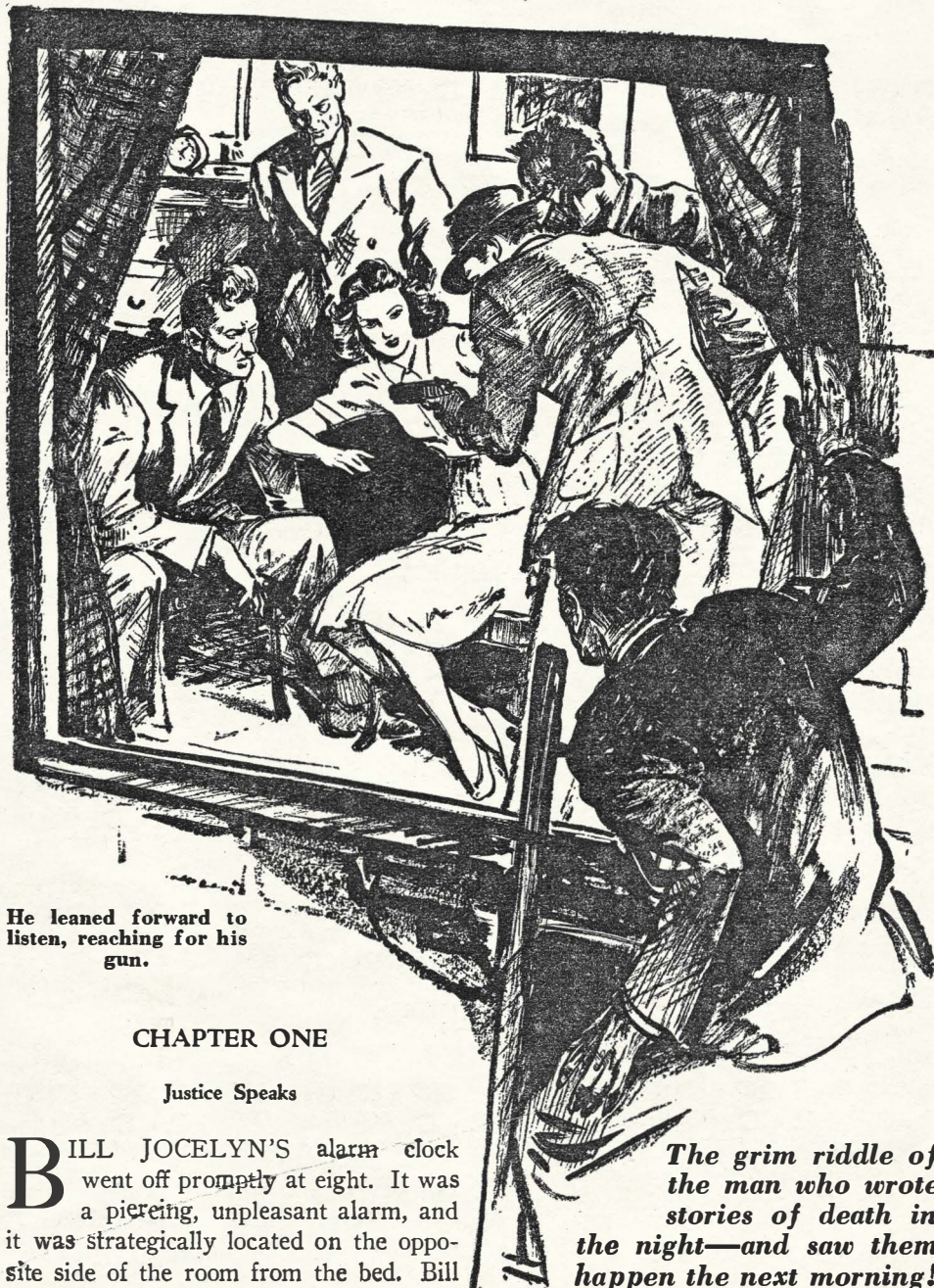
The reporters swarmed around, demanding details. I told them how we'd jimmed the window of Madra's store. How we'd looked at her books and learned that her business was losing money. Then we'd checked her bank account and found that it had grown constantly. Smuggling was the natural motive for the death of a Coast Guardsman. We'd hunted for evidence to support that theory, and finally found the diamonds.

"I talked to the mayor," one reporter said. "You get your job back, Pop. I'm using that as my lead. But I want to know—what made you suspect Madra. What started you on her trail?"

"There's a low branch on Black Point trail," I said. "It smacked my bad leg, and I've been nursing a bruise there for days. I was sitting next to Madra at the inquest. I noticed she had a bruise in the same place. I wondered why. Now I know."

A SLIGHT CASE OF • HOMICIDE •

By Donald G. Cormack



He leaned forward to listen, reaching for his gun.

CHAPTER ONE

Justice Speaks

BILL JOCELYN'S alarm clock went off promptly at eight. It was a piercing, unpleasant alarm, and it was strategically located on the opposite side of the room from the bed. Bill

The grim riddle of the man who wrote stories of death in the night—and saw them happen the next morning!

Jocelyn, a reasonable guy, capitulated in the face of those combined factors. He got up, wobbled across the room and silenced the clangor. For a few moments afterward he leaned sleepily against the bureau and blinked at the clock with indignant reproach.

Bill's new day had just begun—just like any one of his old used-up days had started. There was nothing to set it apart. There was no sign that this was to be the most important day in his life, that this day would mark the beginning of the collapse of Bill's whole orderly, law-abiding, comfortable world.

Standing before the open windows of his basement apartment, which looked out on an untidy yard, Bill began his customary setting-up exercises. First came the toe-touching bends, alternating with deep knee dips, and afterward followed an intricate series of gyrations beneficial to the arms and chest. His face was seriously set as he concentrated on the maneuvers, counting aloud for the rhythm.

On his way to the shower, breathing heavily, Bill paused to examine his torso in front of the full-length mirror. After careful study, his frown increased slightly. It was over four weeks now, and there was no sign of the change the exercise book promised. How long did a guy have to keep windmilling his arms and legs like crazy before he got results?

Bill realized that his five-feet-seven in height, his narrow shoulders, over-large ears and wholesomely homely face could never be changed. But his unimpressive muscular development was another matter.

By nine o'clock Bill had dressed and had finished a self-prepared breakfast. He didn't have to look at his calendar to know rehearsal at the radio studio was scheduled for ten o'clock that day. He returned to the bathroom, pulled a soiled shirt from the hamper and used

its tail to rub a shine on his shoes. Again he combed his rust-red, steel-wool hair with little effect.

His last act was to fill two bowls with milk and put them on the basement window sill, closing the windows afterward so his brood of adopted alley cats wouldn't decide to camp out in the apartment. Then he left.

At the corner, as usual, Bill Jocelyn stopped in at the little cigar store and took a chance on the nickel punchboard. He lost, also as usual, and spent a few minutes idly examining the wristwatch that would be awarded to the lucky number. When his bus finally arrived, Bill ran from the store and clambered aboard.

So far, the day had matched up with all the old ones. . .

DUE to a traffic jam and the seemingly spiteful co-operation of the driver, Bill was barely on time at the studio. That meant he wouldn't have a chance to speak to Barbara Dale, the heroine lead, which wasn't so good. And it probably meant she'd been in the company of big Paul Storey, the control-board engineer, which was definitely bad.

Bill had barely slipped into his chair, script in hand, when the red lights flashed on, indicating they were on the air. They really weren't, of course; this was only rehearsal. But at eight o'clock tomorrow evening, when thousands of listeners would be tuning in on the Green Network of station DLBD, those lights would mean what they said.

A lengthy commercial spiel was followed by a thunderous outburst of music—majestic and stirring—mostly played on kettle drums, big bass horns and loud brass cymbals. This masterpiece, especially composed, put Wagner's *Entrance of the Gods into Valhalla* to quiet shame. Then, as the music faded out, an announcer's voice came on—a voice

that was hushed, awe-struck, thrilling in its reverence.

"Ladies and gentlemen, he's with us again. The Champion of Justice. The Hope of the Future. Crime Master—is on the air!" He raised one hand in "ready" warning to the studio cast; he whispered into the sensitive mike: "He is only—Crime Master, King of Men!" And simultaneously the raised arm fell, a forefinger stabbing at three men grouped about another microphone. Their voices took it away now—the vicious, snarling voices of the underworld.

Crime Master was, indeed, under way.

Before a microphone on a small table sat Bill Jocelyn, the Crime Master himself. He was nervously adjusting his reading glasses and fiddling clumsily with his script.

Bill was always fidgety before each program got well started—like a proud but nervous mother duck with a brood of unpredictable ducklings. Because the Crime Master was his own creation. The character had come out of his own brain; he wrote the succeeding scripts with the meticulous care of a man who sees flimsy dream-stuff becoming splendid reality. Bill Jocelyn was also the radio voice of his own hero, Crime Master. He was Crime Master.

Then came the moment for the Crime Master to enter the play. Bill hunched his narrow shoulders over the microphone and began to speak. The effect was amazing! His voice was solid, strong, confident. It suggested perfectly the Crime Master's qualities—handsome, strong, all-knowing, eternally superior.

The thousands of fans could visualize him easily through that voice. That is, they could picture the physical and mental paragon that *should* go with such a voice. But if they had ever seen Bill Jocelyn. . . . Which is why no audience had ever witnessed the Crime Master show—and why no trade magazine or

newspaper had ever printed the actor-author's picture.

It had never occurred to Bill, even in his wildest imaginings, that one day some malicious whim of Fate might thrust him into a position where he'd have to be the Crime Master in real life. Such a suggestion probably would have horrified him, he undoubtedly would have inquired for the departure time of the next outgoing China Clipper.

But when the time came, he reacted quite differently. He surprised even himself.

WHEN Bill got back to his apartment that afternoon, he was thoroughly upset. Now this special day was beginning to show its singularity. For one thing, he was angry; for another, he was scared.

He was angry about Barbara Dale, the show's blonde pretty, who had delicately snooted him again when he asked to take her to lunch. But Bill could have gotten over that; he was used to it by now. It was the other thing that troubled him most. He was scared about his job.

Bill was far behind on his radio scripts. He had less than a week's future-schedule scripts turned out, and he should have been at least a month ahead of the current story. Before he had gotten out of the studio, three separate people had collared him and pointed that out.

Bill took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, sat down at his desk and put a piece of blank paper in his antique typewriter. But that was as far as overt action could take him. There was no physical way to wring plot ideas out of a temporarily blank imagination. For three hours Bill sat there groaning and struggling painfully—but the page remained blank.

By nightfall, Bill had given up. He was slumped in an easy chair, tossing playing cards at his upturned hat across

the room. Just when the idea of having a few drinks occurred to him, he didn't know. He'd probably been considering it subconsciously for some time, because his conscious decision was abrupt. Bill bounced out of the chair, snatched up his hat, and left. Without hesitation, he headed for the nearest bar.

Along about Bill's fifth Scotch and soda the dignified middle-aged guy next to him started to talk. In no time at all, Bill was talking too—about his own troubles. The guy's name was McCloud, it turned out, and he was a newspaperman. McCloud seemed to have a vast store of sympathy for any fellow writer.

"Plots?" he said in surprise. "Son, for the past thirty years I've been covering police headquarters downtown. If you know how politics and crime rule this city, you can guess how much I've learned. A lot of it couldn't be printed while it was still news. Too dangerous then. It's in my head, though. Plots? Man, I can give you a million of 'em for that program of yours! Listen. . . ."

For two hours Bill listened to McCloud. He heard of criminal involvements and extra-legal complications he'd never dreamed of before; he questioned, memorized and made notes. When he finally broke away and headed home for bed, Bill had material enough for a month and more of his Crime Master series.

Bill wasn't mistaken, either. During the days that followed he turned out a round dozen scripts, and still had plenty of stuff left. And whenever he got stuck, he simply went around to the newspaperman's apartment and had the blank spots filled in. Everything was perfect. Bill Jocelyn was up in the clouds, walking on air.

But he came down to earth with an abrupt and painful thump. It happened about a week after meeting McCloud, when Bill suddenly discovered he was being followed wherever he went.

AN UNEASY feeling had been in the back of Bill's mind from the moment he set out for rehearsal that noon. He didn't know what caused it; just some irritating circumstance he couldn't put his finger on. Then, as he left the bus at his own corner on the way home, he thought he had it. That big bulky guy getting out of the cab just down the block—he'd seen him when he left his apartment that day, and again when he left the broadcasting building! He was being followed!

At first Bill couldn't believe it. The whole thing was too fantastic. What reason could anyone have to follow him? On the way to his rooms, Bill stopped to buy an afternoon paper, looking back cautiously as he did so. The somberly-dressed man, apparently absorbed in a notebook he'd taken from his pocket, was walking past him—but slowly now, so Bill would overtake him again.

This was impossible, ridiculous! The very vehemence of Bill's refusal to believe was a confession that he knew he wasn't mistaken. There was a hollow ache of fear in Bill's stomach as he hurried down the block to his house; once inside, he practically ran through the hall to his basement room.

Alone and reasonably safe, Bill quieted some. He tried to force himself to act normally. Sitting in the easy chair, he paged through the paper, but his eyes only half saw the print before him. Then, abruptly, every cell of Bill's brain was concentrated on one thing—a column of black type in the center of the page. Slowly, unconsciously, he came to his feet, his two fists tightly gripping the edges of the paper. He read the gossip column again:

Have you noticed—and wondered? Anyone knows that history records events of the past. But when pure fiction begins to foretell events of the future, and accurately—that's more than news. It's practically magic!

Now, dear taxpayers, what radio pro-

gram told a fanciful story of a metropolitan night club that was peddling dope to its customers—and that meant anyone who asked for it? Why, Crime Master, of course. And, in this wild yarn, why did the night club get away with it? Because it was being protected by a fictional big-shot who was so close to the top there wasn't *that* much room between him and the governor!

But what actual local night club was raided one day after the Crime Master program—and found to be a general clearing house for the narcotic trade? Why, the *Miracle Club*, of course. The laws of libel prevent your correspondent from using names, but what high-up politician is now under investigation for protecting this club? It's all very hush-hush, but we can give you his name when the indictment is handed down.

In this particular city, over-run as it is with graft, political corruption and bought protection, such a fearless crusader as Crime Master is long over-due—if he can only repeat in reality his make-believe omnipotence!

Have you noticed—and wondered? Is this a coincidence—or will it happen again? The police call it simple coincidence. But your newsboy suggests you keep tuned to station DLBD, Monday, Wednesday, Friday at eight, and lend your ears to Crime Master. It *could* happen again! In fact, we promise that it *will*!

"Gosh," Bill said in a frightened whisper. "Then the stuff McCloud told me was true! It was real, actual dynamite about the underworld today—not ten years ago! And I'm the guy who exposed . . ." Bill Jocelyn's knees gave out suddenly. He collapsed backward into the chair, gazing miserably into space as an inkling of the future passed before him. He felt awful.

BILL'S first coherent thought was to call the police and ask for their protection. He even had his telephone in hand when he suddenly vetoed the action. The newspapers surely wouldn't miss a thing like that; it would be too perfect a story—his authorship and acting of Crime Master, along with his picture. Bill shuddered as he fancied the headlines: CRIME MASTER BEGS POLICE PROTECTION! RADIO WONDER-MAN TERRIFIED BY POSSIBLE DANGER!

Furthermore, if the police had really been tipped off somehow through his broadcast, wouldn't they have come to him, offering aid? Sure! Or would they? Bill's mind went back to his first chain of thought. It seemed so logical.

McCloud, being a newspaperman, must have had knowledge of criminal angles that the cops suspected but couldn't prove or were prevented from investigating through high-pressure crooked politics. But McCloud had given him crime setups, which he'd used. A gossip columnist suggested they were true. Such an exposé would force the cops' hands, protection or not. And the underworld, angered and scared, would be after the man responsible for the public exposure of their secrets.

Bill winced at another realization. With him out of the way, both the source of the information, as well as the voice that spread it, would be silenced. So that guy tailing him could only be a thug executioner awaiting a safe opportunity to remove him!

Why should McCloud do a thing like this to him? It was that plaintive wonder that pointed out Bill's next move. He had to go to McCloud's room and talk to him. He had to convince him somehow to make a public confession, to take some action to clear Bill. If McCloud had precipitated this mess, he could take the consequences! But how could he be forced to do that? Bill wished he had a gun, even though he hadn't the vaguest idea how to use one.

Bill peeked cautiously out the front door and saw the bulky figure of his executioner waiting patiently at one end of the block. He slipped out quickly, hurrying in the opposite direction, toward a cab stand on the corner. He wasn't taking any chances of being caught on foot in some deserted side street.

It was prudent caution, not reckless

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AGE..... OCCUPATION.....

NAME OF BENEFICIARY

(Continued from page 106)

daring, that drove Bill forward now. Wasn't McCloud a nice guy? Wasn't he soft-spoken and dignified? Wouldn't he clear things up? Sure!

As Bill paid off his taxi, another one rolled slowly past. His faithful shadow was still waiting his chance, thinking himself unobserved. Bill dove into the rooming house and ran up the three flights of stairs to McCloud's room. The door was standing slightly ajar, and Bill pushed his way in without knocking.

One look was enough for Bill. A miserable sense of defeat swept over him immediately. McCloud had fled; the empty drawers of the bureau, standing open, and the gaping wardrobe told him that. He sat down dispiritedly on the edge of the bed, realizing that McCloud read the newspapers too. He'd been scared away.

Bill wondered why the second possible way to locate McCloud hadn't occurred to him immediately. There was a pay phone in the hall, just outside the room, and he bounded out to it. He dropped in a nickel and put through a call to *The Sentinel*, the newspaper for which McCloud covered headquarters.

"McCloud?" a cheerful voice repeated. "McCloud—McCloud. Nope. Sorry, no one here by that name!" Then, less cheerfully and in response to Bill's yelped question, "Of course, I'm sure! There isn't and never has been a guy by that name on this sheet!"

Bill replaced the receiver in a sort of numb daze. Things were getting worse all the time. McCloud was a fake! He wasn't a newspaperman at all! And now a dreadful suspicion was beginning to form in Bill's mind. McCloud could have been a rival big-shot gangster, using Bill as an instrument to wipe out the organization of some competing gang empire—leaving him to take the rap! And the inexorable vengeance of that gang was al-

ready in process of being carried out.

"I've got to get out of here!" Bill whispered. "Even if it means the end of my program, the smashing of everything. I've got to go to the police now!"

He started toward the stairs, then froze in his stride, looking over the bannister. The bulky form of the gangster shadowing him was coming slowly up the stairs. He wasn't going to wait any longer; he was through tailing—now he was stalking. Bill's end was at hand.

BILL JOCELYN tumbled back into the room and closed the door.

There was a lock on it, but no key, so he jammed a chair under the knob. He looked quickly around the room for a weapon. A bronze table lamp was the only possible object he could see to defend himself, so he tore off the shade and ripped out the cord. He felt foolish. Here he was, a shrimp half the size and weight of his antagonist, opposing a makeshift club against a gun and depending on a flimsy barricade to hold off the attack.

Bill leaned weakly against the bedstead as he listened to the ponderous steps coming closer. They stopped in front of the room, and the doorknob turned, but the door refused to give. Three sharp, impatient knocks followed. It was best not to wait for the thug to smash down the door; it was best to pretend he didn't know who was outside, so he could take the man by surprise.

Bill pulled the chair loose. "Come right in," he invited in a voice that was so taut it broke in the middle.

The door swung open and the guy came through, talking as he did so. "I might just as well tell you now, bud, before—" That was as far as he got with whatever he was going to tell. Bill's club smashed down on the back of his head, knocking his hat off and pitching him

(Continued on page 110)

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(Continued from page 108)

half onto the bed. His body slid back slowly and quietly to the floor. He was out cold.

Bill danced from one foot to the other a couple of times. Then something odd registered in his excited brain. The executioner hadn't been carrying any gun in his hand, ready for the kill.

He stopped down and searched the unconscious body for a gun, found it still holstered under the big guy's arm. And then he found something else—something that left him squatting there with eyes popping and mouth open. He found a whistle, a pair of handcuffs, and a badge marked *Detective—Official—Headquarters*. The gun was a regulation issue Police Positive.

"Good Heavens!" Bill broke out in jittering music. "He's—a cop! I've gone and slugged a cop! Holy cow!"

After that, things became a bit confused. Then he was out in the street again. He didn't take a cab back to his apartment; he walked. It didn't occur to him to ride—and he was safe momentarily, anyway. He went back to his basement room because there was no better place to go. He thought maybe he'd pack a few things and move into a hotel, but first he needed time to think.

He figured he had the answers now, much as he hated to accept them. The underworld was after him for exposing their secrets, and the cops had been tailing him to discover the sources of his information. Before picking him up for questioning, they probably hoped he'd reveal his contacts. On top of being suspected by the police, he'd gone and slugged one of their men bowlegged.

Bill groaned aloud. He had nowhere to turn now. He was just like his own character, Crime Master, hounded by the law and the underworld alike, fighting

(Continued on page 112)

MECHANICS

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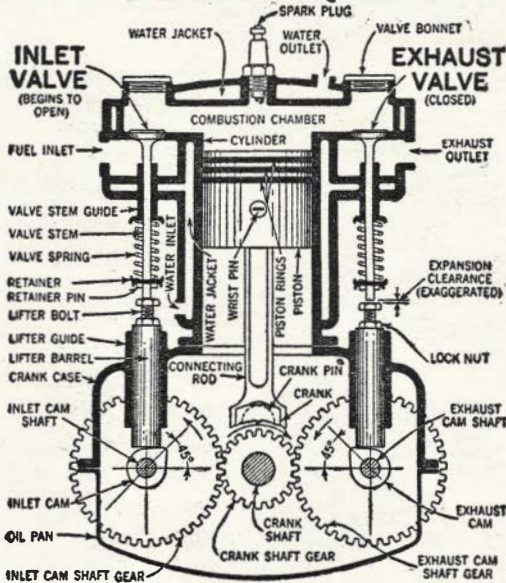
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SPECIMEN ILLUSTRATION—INSIDE VIEW OF MOTOR

(Continued from page 110)

alone. And the realization didn't give him any thrill. He didn't want to be the Crime Master now. He wanted most just to be peaceful Bill Jocelyn again.

Bill wasn't so preoccupied with his own misery that he lost his sense of caution. If he'd been looking for the guy lolling near the stoop of his building, he couldn't have seen him sooner. And there wasn't any doubt about the man's occupation, either. He had gangster written all over him. Strangely, Bill didn't leap with fright this time. He was getting sort of numbed to succeeding climaxes of disaster. He kept on walking forward.

The way the gunman kept watching him, surreptitiously and doubtfully, was odd. It was almost as though he were waiting for Bill to admit his identity. And then Bill realized that was exactly it! The gangsters had found out where he lived, but they didn't know what he looked like yet!

With a tremendous effort of will, Bill walked past the house without glancing at the thug or breaking his stride. Sweat was cold on his hands and face as he continued down the block, actually feeling a pair of doubtful eyes boring into his back.

He realized now that the safest place in the city was probably his own room. Knowing he had left the apartment, or having searched and found it empty, the gangsters would stand guard outside while the rest of the city was searched.

On the side street next below his own, Bill cut into an alley. At the end of the alley there were fences and back yards and then more fences. These Bill scaled with the lithe agility of a monkey. That was one thing he was good at—getting in and out of places, or over barriers, fast. Five minutes later he was in his own rear courtyard. A back door let him into

(Continued on page 114)

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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 112)

the hall, and he tiptoed down to his door. Here was momentary sanctuary, at least.

Bill unlocked the door, slipped in quickly and slammed it shut after him. There were no extra locks, but it was a good stout door.

"What a jam!" he whispered. "What a spot to be in!"

"Ain't it, though?" someone behind him agreed, without humor. The grim, ugly tone of the voice paralyzed Bill. "And it's getting worse for you, Half-pint. In fact, right now it's just about as worse as it'll ever get!"

Bill's breath came out in a long shudder, but he didn't turn immediately. He had no desire to look at the face of his executioner. This time, he knew, it was the real thing.

"KEEP looking at that door," the voice warned next, "and get those hands up where I can see them. Okay." Approaching footsteps stopped directly behind Bill. "You packing a heater, shrimp?"

"No," Bill said. "Of course not!"

An experienced hand ran over his clothes, and suddenly a savage curse sounded in his ear. Without warning, Bill was swung in a half-circle and a heavy, calloused palm struck him across the mouth. "Wise guy, huh?" the gangster grunted.

The short, heavy-set thug backed away from Bill and over to the desk again. Wondering, Bill saw him toss a second revolver on top of the litter of papers. Then the truth struck him. In his panic at discovering he'd slugged a detective, back in McCloud's room, he must have shoved the Police Positive and other stuff in his pocket without thinking! It was that revolver the thug had taken from him now.

(Continued on page 116)

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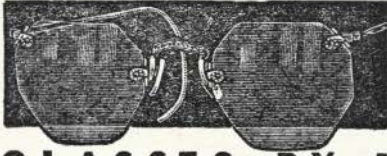
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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 114)

"Would you mind telling me—" Bill began, with a brave attempt at bewildered indignation, but the thug cut him off with a growl.

"Squat!" He motioned to a straight-backed chair. "And keep your mouth shut. All you got to know is this: First, I'm cleaning out this radio stuff you've written and burning it in the fireplace; then I'm calling Sammy, upstairs, and we're taking you to see the boss. That's when you're going to do a lot of talking, so I hope you still feel like it then."

After the thug had set a match to the pile of paper, he turned toward Bill. "This all of that stool pigeon stuff you've got?" he asked. "And I mean here in this room. We'll take care of the stuff down at the studio without trouble."

"That's all there is, every bit of it," Bill told him—and truthfully. Then he added, on the spur of the moment and not so truthfully, "I suppose you got that stack out of the closet by the front door."

The thug spent a few seconds swearing at Bill, for no apparent reason, but finally he did go to the hall closet. That's what Bill wanted, because as long as he was there, Bill was out of his sight, and a long chance for escape was possible. Behind Bill were the windows opening out on the yard. They were barred, though, like all ground-floor windows on private houses—and that's where the long chance came in. With ten seconds to himself, Bill was betting he could squeeze his half-pint body through those bars.

He got his break. In two bounds Bill was at the window. He threw up the sash, leaped on the sill and literally hurled his slight frame sideways against the bars. For a trembling second that seemed an eternity, he stuck half way out. Then, like a cork popping from a bottle, he burst through and sprawled on the free earth of the back yard.

A Slight Case of Homicide

Bill heard the muffled voice of the gangster rising angrily as he poked around in the closet, still unaware of his captive's escape.

Then Bill was back in the outside hall again and racing up the stairs toward the upper floors.

What happened after that was purely spur-of-the-moment action. It was clumsy, but effective. He simply opened his mouth and let nature take its course. He yelled at the top of his lungs.

Doors above and below Bill popped open, and faces that expressed mingled emotions sought the source of the pandemonium. The reactions of the tenants varied—there was blank wonder, surprise, anger, curiosity, and alarm. Active interest was all he needed, however, and he got that—especially from the landlady.

"Burglars," Bill explained finally, feeling foolish and ashamed in front of the group. "Thieves in my room."

The janitor, the landlady and a half-dozen roomers followed Bill back to his apartment and searched the place. It was empty now, of course. The two thugs would have been willing to shoot it out with anyone in a dark alley—but they were helpless to deal with a houseful of screaming women.

After they had gone, he collapsed in a chair and mopped his wet forehead, trying to get his bearings before he figured his next move. The detective's gun was still on the desk, Bill noted, and that made him feel a little better—though he'd never shot a revolver in his life.

Before he got around to any logical thought about his own safety, the telephone began to ring.

"BEN?" a voice asked, and Bill grunted an acknowledgement to that. "Has that guy Jocelyn shown up yet?" and this time Bill replied with an "Uh-uh."

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New Detective Magazine

"Well, look, if he hasn't come yet, he never will. He's wise to it. So you get over to that girl's house and wait for him there. The guy's bound to contact someone, and she's a good bet. Hank's over there now, so you join him after you get rid of that radio stuff. Leave Sammy outside, though, just in case the punk does come back. And look, Ben, call me back later. We may have to work on the girl and any of the others we can pick up if we don't locate the guy soon."

The phone clicked savagely in Bill's ear. Afterward, he sat, momentarily dazed, a new and deeper fear blazing up inside him. The girl! Could that mean Barbara Dale? Such a possibility was crazy, but so was everything else that had happened today! In a panic, Bill dialed Barbara's number, the receiver jammed painfully tight against his ear. It was her roommate's voice that answered. Somehow she made sense out of Bill's incoherent and desperate demand.

"But she isn't here, Bill. I'm sorry, if it's so very important. And I don't know where she went. All I heard her say was that she had to meet someone. A man named McCloud, I think."

That information exploded Bill Jocelyn's whole sane and reasonable world. McCloud had taken Barbara away! And in addition to McCloud, the other gangsters were after her too! But why? And then Bill realized it wasn't the why that made any difference—the big fact was that they had. And he was responsible! If it hadn't been for him, and his listening to McCloud, Barbara would be home right now. Bill knew that if it was the last thing he ever did, he had to save Barbara from the jam he'd thrust her into.

Pacing up and down his room didn't help a bit. Bill Jocelyn found that out after a restless fifteen minutes. Now he wished desperately that he had the astounding insight and the reckless cour-

A Slight Case of Homicide

age of his fictional Crime Master. And it wasn't a question of simply being brave enough, either. Bill was perfectly willing to try. The big trouble was, he didn't have the vaguest idea how to begin being that fabulous superman.

On the radio, the Crime Master was always getting information. Everybody gave him information when he needed it. Whenever there was a lull, a friend would pop up; a stranger would talk too loudly; some loquacious gangster would get drunk; a stool pigeon would be dragged in. But not now; not in reality. In reality you paced up and down an empty room, with no one to turn to, and wondered where they had taken the girl you loved.

Suddenly Bill decided to be analytical.

He reviewed the situation mentally: A guy begins to broadcast true crime situations as fiction. This causes investigations and raids, even where there's protection, because the police can't afford to let it go on any longer. They might get caught themselves in a rising tide of public indignation that would sweep the whole political machine out of office. So a few politicians and criminals are sacrificed to save a lot of others.

Then what? The criminals, alarmed, try to remove the source of the information. Why? So that no more information will be broadcast, obviously. *So that no more information will be broadcast.* And Bill had his lead!

BILL'S scripts for the radio ran two weeks and more ahead of the scheduled broadcast—which meant he still remembered the follow-up installments, as yet unbroadcast, in that night-club sequence. And since McCloud had given him the truth in the past, his follow-ups would also stick to the truth, with only names and identities thinly veiled.

He remembered that night-club se-

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quence well. It ended with a borough alderman being indicted for protecting the drug-peddling ring. The alderman, in desperation and fear, had gotten in touch with the criminal master mind behind him—the Big Boss. All he could remember about the guy was that his veiled personality controlled the longshoremen of the city and operated a number of phony unions. Thus, he could arbitrarily call a strike whenever it pleased him, completely tying up the waterfront.

His racket, in the radio story, was to operate a fleet of ships from South America, loading them with perishable fruit, and call a waterfront strike whenever a couple of them showed up in port. The fruit, of course, was ruined. And the Big Boss collected the insurance. When you figured that he loaded his ships with worthless, half-rotten cargoes to begin with, the take was anything but alfalfa. And in all of these illegal transactions, the identity of the master criminal remained hidden.

For Bill, too, his identity remained equally well hidden. He had all the facts—but no Big Boss. Then Bill got another angle, and the surprise brought him to his feet. To hell with the big boss! All he had to do was get the identity of the indicted alderman! Bill, pinch-hitting for the Crime Master, would find a way to make him give!

The facts in that original gossip column about the Crime Master show were about a day old—and it had promised an imminent indictment of the alderman! Bill ran into the hallway of the building in search of a late edition of the evening paper. On the second floor he found one in front of a tenant's door. A moment later he was back in his apartment with the prize.

The information he wanted was right on the front page, in big black type. For a moment he felt like a guy who's been

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A Slight Case of Homicide

looking all over for his hat, only to find it on his head. The headlines read: *Hamlin Weyth, Duchess Borough Alderman, Wins Stay in Grand Jury Indictment; Political Pressure Hinted.* The address of Hamlin Weyth was bound to be in the phone book. Bill looked it up immediately.

For a moment Bill Jocelyn stood in the middle of the room, a strange look of determination on his usually placid and friendly face. Then he went to his desk and picked up the detective's revolver, handling it with all the deftness and understanding of a monkey handling a mariner's sextant, and finally shoved it in his pocket. What happened now was entirely up to him.

Bill left his apartment quietly and went outside to the dark street. He headed for the cab stand at the corner.

EVEN as he climbed out of the taxi on the lonely outskirts of the city's suburban section, Bill had to fight against the impulse to turn around and climb right back in again.

He paid off the cab, then started up the winding driveway to the large house set back far from the road.

The house was dark, except for some rear rooms on the lower floor, and two front windows on the second story.

Bill knew he had only two things to do now, and both in order. First, in some way he hadn't figured out yet, he had to force Weyth to reveal McCloud's whereabouts, or at least give information that would lead to McCloud—and Barbara. After that, he would grab a phone and call the cops.

Tackling problem number one, Bill knew his best chance lay in finding Weyth alone and in taking him by surprise. Which meant he'd have to sneak into the house without any servants or bodyguards knowing about it. There was only one way that Bill knew to get inside a home

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without ringing the front doorbell. He circled the house, searching for an unlocked door or an unlatched window.

The Crime Master hardly ever failed to locate such a means of entrance, but Bill Jocelyn couldn't. Everything was locked tighter than the Washington mint.

Next Bill went to the garage, hunting for a convenient ladder. He slid the door open a foot, noiselessly, then slipped into the dark interior—and kicked over a big can of something that gurgled liquid all over his shoes. Next he whacked his head against a car. That was the last straw.

Over on a workbench he saw a lantern; it was a red lantern, but it was better than nothing. He lighted it and began to search the place. Finally Bill discovered his ladder partly concealed behind some packing cases. He parked the lantern, picked up the ladder and shifted it silently outside, closing the doors behind him.

The ladder fitted against the sill of one of the upper lighted windows, too. A small balustrade indicated there was a balcony in front of the window, and Bill figured he'd have a soft time of it. But when he got to the top of his wobbly perch, he saw the balcony was a fake, just an ornament for the window. Then Bill lifted his eyes and forgot all about his uncertain footing. He could see through the sheer drapes, but those inside the lighted room couldn't see out.

The Crime Master himself couldn't have asked for more.

NEAR disaster came to Bill in that first moment. The sight of Barbara Dale right in front of him was almost too much for his delicate balance. She was seated at one side of the room, her face white and scared. The heavy-shouldered thug who had been in Bill's apartment earlier that day was seated beside her.

A Slight Case of Homicide

McCloud was there too! He was sitting in the center of the room, under a bright light, just the way they did it in police stations. Three men stood around him. One, the toughest-looking yegg Bill had ever laid eyes on, was dressed in a chauffeur's uniform. The second was undoubtedly Alderman Hamlin Weyth himself. But it was the sight of the third man that made Bill doubt his eyes.


There could be no doubt of it, though; his face was often in the newspapers. He was Harold "Holier-than-Thou" Hanley! He was president of the Maritime Underwriters Company, but he had gained most fame as organizer and public-spirited leader of the indignant Citizens' Movement to Outlaw Strikes.

If he were the big boss—and he must be—he was fomenting strikes through his secret control of the fake longshoremen's unions, while at the same time covering himself by the useless movement against them. Furthermore, while his self-called strikes were causing cargoes of worthless stuff to rot in the holds of the ships he owned through a dummy company, he was collecting insurance from the Maritime Underwriters and playing the stockholders for suckers! It fitted too perfectly. Holier-than-Thou Hanley was the big-shot behind the city's corruption and machine politics!

The three inquisitors were firing questions at McCloud over and over again. McCloud's expression was weary, hopeless, but still defiant. One side of his face was already swollen from blows. Bill took the gun out of his pocket unconsciously, anger mingling with his surprise, and leaned forward to listen.

"You haven't got much time left, McCloud." It was Weyth talking. "You better talk straight if you want any kind of a break. Now—just how much did you tell that radio screwball?"

"I told him everything!" McCloud



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snapped. "You ought to be able to guess that, Weyth. What did it sound like?"

There was almost a plaintive note in Hanley's voice when he broke in. "I knew you were a fool, McCloud, but can you tell me what in the name of heaven you gained by that?"

"The hands of every one of us in the district attorney's office, from the D.A. himself on down, were tied by machine politics, by political corruption, by bought police protection, and by unwilling witnesses and outright fear. I figured there was only one way to break such a stranglehold on the law. That one way was to arouse public indignation to such a pitch there'd be a general reform movement throughout the city. Placing the facts before them was another tough question. None of the timid or corrupt newspapers would touch the thing.

"The only way I could figure was the radio. But I knew no sponsor would take a chance of ruin on such a scheme—and, consequently, no conscientious author would either. So I picked out the most likely program, posed as a newspaperman, and managed to strike up an acquaintance with the guy who wrote the scripts. I figured it would take some time to work my suggestions into his writing, but luck was with me there. He was ripe for such a plan.

"Once the stuff was broadcast—and the police had cracked down on the exposed crooked set-up, thinking it only an isolated hit in the dark—I arranged with a newspaper columnist to point out the truth to the public, and to promise more revelations. That was the only way to start a general crusade to save the city."

"You did that deliberately!" It was Barbara speaking, and the indignation and concern in her voice sent a warm feeling through Bill. "You let Bill Jocelyn stick his neck out for the ax that way, without even knowing about it!"

A Slight Case of Homicide

An expression of deep hurt crossed McCloud's face. "But I took every precaution! Ever since that program first became dangerous, two days ago, I've had a department man on Jocelyn's trail to see he wasn't molested. I wasn't going to alarm him at first, but at the first sign of any attempted violence, I was going to have a whole squad around him until it was all over. As a matter of fact, I was hoping the threat of exposure would drive the criminals into their holes without trying to fight back against the inevitable.

"It was Jocelyn himself who wrecked all my plans for his safety. Just as the first trouble broke, and before anything could be explained to him, he slugged out the detective on his trail and started to run free."

"How much does this dame know, copper?" the tough chauffeur demanded. "How much do the rest of that radio bunch know?"

"Nothing," McCloud insisted sharply. "Only what they've already broadcast or rehearsed. It would be ridiculous and stupid to molest any one of them."

"If the girl is so harmless, why did you make an appointment with her tonight? Were you warning her to lay low—or is she the one who's hiding Jocelyn?" Weyth asked that question.

"I told you before! Miss Dale doesn't know anything about this. In my alarm for Jocelyn, I wanted to ask her if she knew where he was apt to hole up—or who he was likely to contact. She didn't know. Holding her now is pointless. I'm the one who engineered this whole plan, and I'm the sole one responsible!"

During the questioning, one of the inquisitors—mostly the tough chauffeur—would punctuate the procedure by batting McCloud across the face with his open palm. He was a sorry-looking sight by now, and Barbara, crying silently, didn't look up.

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THIS was one of those rare times when Bill Jocelyn felt raw fury boil in his blood. That emotion was mixed with a lot of others, though. There was a sick sort of feeling when he saw the helpless, terrified look on Barbara's face. And the knowledge that his spoiling of McCloud's plans had innocently resulted in her seizure didn't help that sick feeling. On top of that, there was panic at the thought he might fail Barbara now.

Bill's anger, and the emergency of the moment, probably would have been sufficient to make him abandon all thought of running for the cops. As it was, the matter was taken entirely out of his hands. The shock of the things he had seen and heard, plus the precarious balance of his perch, was what did it. For one horrible, agonized instant Bill realized he was losing his balance, and the next second he was hurtling through the window, crashing bodily into the room in a hail of shattered glass.

Bill's slight form described a somersaulting parabola through the air, and he landed sitting on the floor, the gun still miraculously in his hand. It didn't have all the finesse of the real Crime Master's entrance, but it was effective.

A stunned silence held the room, the criminals gaping at Bill, and Bill gaping back at them with equal surprise. It was a stalemate, except that Bill Jocelyn recovered first.

He snapped the gun up. "Hold it!" he ordered in a thin, rather shaky voice. Then, more firmly: "Don't move, any of you!"

Everything would have been fine if he'd gotten the idea across. Most of them caught on. Hanley and Weyth goggled at the unheroic but successful intruder. Only the thug chauffeur decided he wasn't having any.

(Continued on page 128)

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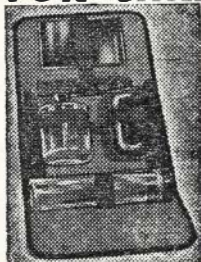
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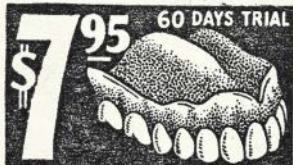
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(Continued from page 126)

Bill Jocelyn's heart popped right into his mouth when he saw the thug break into a flash of movement, his hand streaking toward his armpit. Spasmodic fear clutched at Bill and he tightened all over in the same instant, and the gun in his hand roared and jumped, ripping apart the silence of the tableau. Bill never knew if he shot through the reaction of surprise, or of his own volition. But he certainly did shoot.

The chauffeur froze with the sound, his hand still inside his purple tunic. His mouth was open, and since no wound showed on his body, that was where the slug must have taken him. A second later he pitched limply forward, sprawling.

The shot seemed to have aroused others in the household, though. Yells sounded from the floor above, and feet pounded on the stairs. Bill gulped, and wondered if he'd be able to stand them off. The smirk on Weyth's face suggested he had plenty of reinforcements, but that grin faded when Barbara had the presence of mind to leap for the door, slam it and twist the key in the lock. It was a heavy, strong door; it would last ten or fifteen minutes under an onslaught. But what then?

"YOU damned fool!" Hanley exploded. "Open up to them! Can't you see you're licked? They'll come in both ways, door and window. You haven't got a chance—and you can't summon help!"

But Bill had seen Barbara Dale's expression. It was mostly in her eyes—a new look of surprised delight and admiration. That was enough to settle the matter.

Bill shook his head emphatically. "Not even for a trade—your freedom for ours." There was nothing uncertain in his tone.

(Continued on page 130)

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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 128)

"I've had so much bad luck today, it's about time a break came along."

And it did, almost immediately. The force of it shook the house and shattered the windows. The whole night quivered and trembled with the roar. The room danced to the blast, spilling its occupants in haphazard confusion. And as Bill picked himself up and helped Barbara to her feet, he realized what it was.

The can he had kicked over had undoubtedly been gasoline—he wouldn't have noticed its odor mingling with the typical gasoline smell of the garage. And he had just as undoubtedly left the lantern behind, burning—a very volcanic combination with the gas vapor. The result was simple chemistry.

Within five minutes the police and fire engines could be heard approaching. Hanley and Weyth were against the wall, arms raised, completely defeated. Weyth's strong-arm boys had long since ceased their battering at the door and had fled.

It was only now that Barbara and McCloud recovered from their speechlessness and surprise. McCloud was somewhat incoherent in his exclamatory gratitude for Bill's amazing and unexpected rescue. Barbara Dale was more successful in her expression, and more forthright in action.

She took the revolver from Bill, handed it to McCloud, then threw her arms around the unsuspecting Bill's neck and kissed him. He ceased thinking abruptly of the kick he'd get out of handing Hanley, with his history, over to the police. He concentrated on the definitely more pleasurable sensations of the moment. He even aided and abetted that moment for all he was worth.

"You were wonderful, Bill. Splendid!" Barbara told him with a new note of regard in her tone. "The Crime Master himself couldn't have done a bit better."

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A "Penny From Heaven" dropped into the hands of J. D. Martin of Virginia, who found an old copper cent, for which Max Mehl, the Texas Money King, paid him \$200.00.



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An interesting incident is that the man who changed a dollar in his tobacco store and one of the small coins he received was later sold for \$200.00. Send coupon below to Max Mehl so that you will be able to recognize valuable old coins.



Mrs. Dowty of Texas sold a silver half dollar to Max Mehl for \$400. You, too, may run across a rare coin worth a large sum. Post yourself so that you will not pass it unrecognized.



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