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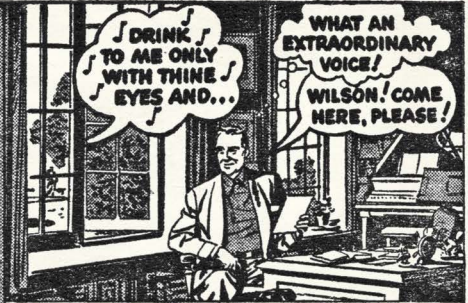
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MAGAZINE

Vol. 13

Contents for May, 1949

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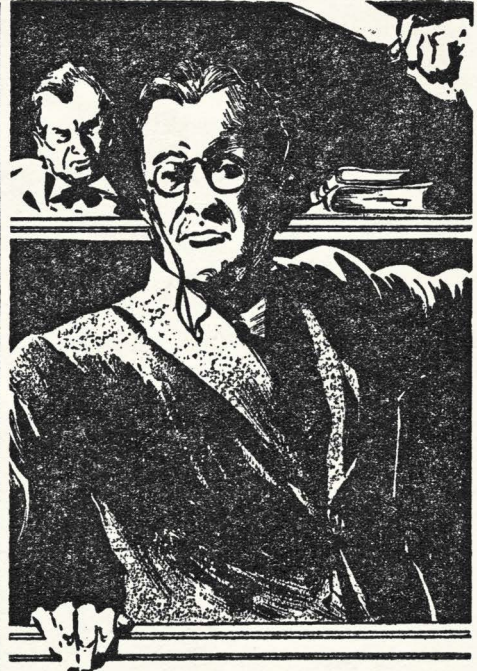
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THE WITNESS CHAIR

HELLO, all you Murder's Little Helpers. On this nickel-plated note we unveil what we hope will be a bloody interesting exchange of ideas, information, arsenic and stabs in the back. As you may have guessed, this gimmick has been long in preparation—nobody can run a magazine like *NEW* without help. Accordingly, some time ago, we invited—from some people we knew, from others we didn't—comments on what we printed, what we didn't, and what we should print. The results took on avalanche proportions, and hereby we pass them on, sparing nobody—except maybe the rod. Is it loaded, chums?

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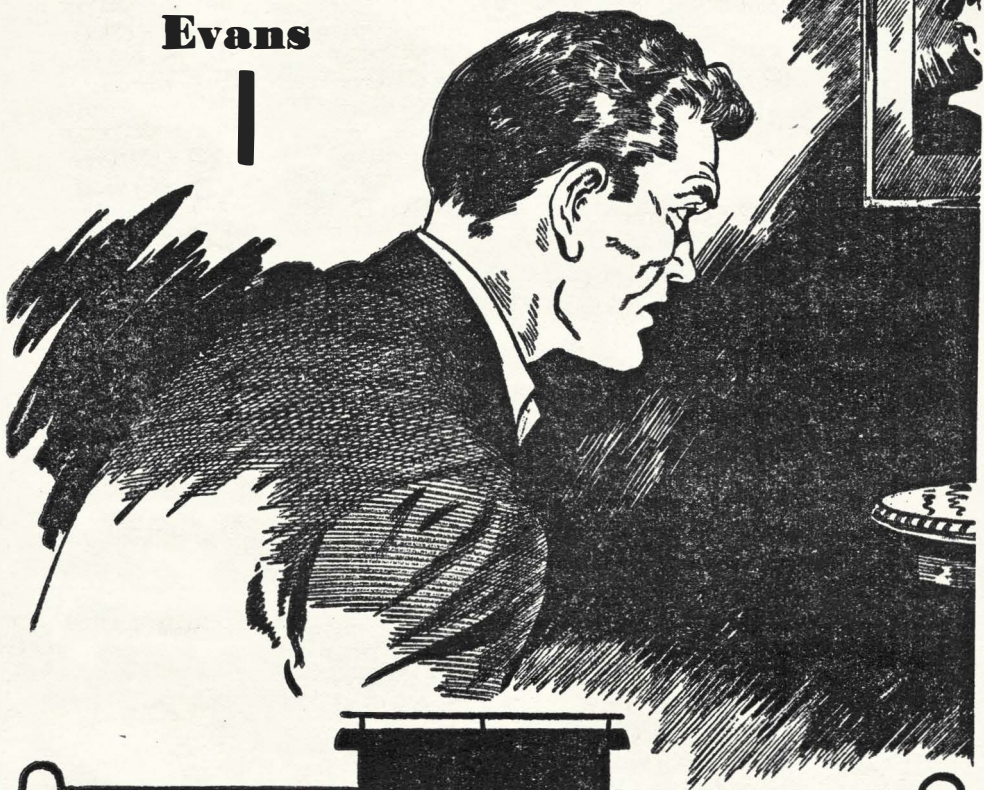
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*In his big mitt was an
automatic pointed in the
general direction of my
stomach. . . .*



A woman too little to die—a cop too big to kill—we answered a dead man's call to a last rendezvous where—three was a shroud!



CHAPTER ONE

Fateful Fortune

MAX'S CHOP HOUSE is diagonally across the street from my office building on Sierra and Third in downtown Reno and I eat there every day. That's how I got to notice the girl in the first place. She was a new waitress there and she had my booth.

I didn't make a play for her. She had skin with as much pigment as the white

paper the butcher uses to wrap your hamburger in and she was thin and she wore her clothes like a hook on the wall wears a sweater. But she was a good waitress; and if her voice was deader than a note on the original Jericho trumpet, so what? She was a good waitress and it wasn't any of my business and besides I wasn't interested and besides, again, nobody was paying me to worry about her.

And she didn't make a play for me. To her I was a customer, a guy, came in to be filled, a number on her check slip only. That is, for the first five days I was. On the sixth things changed.

On her sixth day she brought me the luncheon special as usual, and my black coffee as usual, but instead of going away again as usual she leaned her thin white palms down on the table in my booth and spoke to me.

"Max says you're one of those private eyes, Mr. Gates," she said.

I listened to her voice. There was something about it that got me. I wanted to pigeon-hole it, to nail it down—and I couldn't.

"I'm a detective, yes," I finally said. "I'm private, yes. I make lots of money at it, no."

She didn't smile and I hadn't thought she would. "How would you like all that to change?" she asked. "How would you like to nibble about half way into twenty thousand fish?"

"Huh?" It seemed the only sensible thing for me to say.

"The rajah's emeralds, ten years ago. You're a dick, you should remember it."

I said "huh" again but it came out of me automatically. I was just now—for the first time—seeing a great big light. The girl's voice. I had pinned it now. I had it classified. A voice that thin and that dead could be only one kind of a voice. A stir voice. I shut my mouth and wet my lips and then I said, "How long you been out, sister?"

She didn't bat an eye. "Three weeks, and my name is Aurora Johnson and if what they do to women up there is only a sample of what they do to men then I sort of pity Bob Archer even though I hate his insides. You remember the deal?"

I shook my head. Prison. That accounted for the white skin and the listless figure. And the voice, of course.

"Be right back," she whispered, and went away to take care of a table where somebody had just sat down.

I tried to remember back but nothing about a rajah's emeralds seemed familiar. And Bob Archer was a strange name. And Aurora Johnson? That was stranger yet. But ten years is a long time and there had a war during those ten years.

She came back, slid into the seat opposite in the booth.

"You've got a strange name," I said.

"Yeah. I was born in Aurora. Once upon a time Aurora was a famous silver mining town, Mr. Gates. My grandfather died up there after sixty years trying to strike it rich. I was named after the town. My mother lives there and nothing ever happens but the big wind storms like in the old days."

"You should go back," I said. "Get well again, put on some weight."

"No. My mother thinks I'm in New York, thanks to a friend of mine back east who mailed letters to her for me all these years."

I thought about that. So her mother hadn't known she was in prison. I said, "What's that got to do with the rajah's emeralds, whatever they are?"

"Listen, Gates." She leaned over the table, began to whisper. If her voice had been dead before it was only an echo of death now. "Listen. Ten years ago a rajah came over here from India to study oranges at the Citrus Experiment Station in California. He'd probably been growing 'em since Buddha wore diapers but he came over here to study anyway." She

stopped, watched to see if I believed this.

"California. But this is Reno, Nevada, where oranges don't grow so good. Bring me another cup of black coffee," I said.

She shook her head. "Listen, will you? I'm trying to let you in on something good, something big. The rajah's emeralds got snatched. And today, ten years later, there's still a reward out for them."

I FORGOT about the coffee. I blinked, said "Oh!" and blinked again.

"This rajah came over here, see? That's the McCoy. Then after a while he heard of a place called Reno where there's gambling and lots of real clean fun so he came up here to give it a whirl."

I began to see things. "And you were a shill in a club?"

"Hell no. I never even heard of him. I was working in a little place here that made custom built radios. The kind of radios that cost a C note just for the plug you stick in the wall. Sterling cabinet, gold knobs, gold escutcheons. Nice radios. The kind of radios you couldn't buy in the stores."

"Indeed I couldn't," I said. "In or out of the stores I couldn't."

"But the rajah could. He ordered a special job to take home to his favorite—" she paused—"his favorite wife, I guess you'd call it. But his was a special job. Even more special than the specials we built special."

"How do you mean?"

"With genuine emeralds for pilot jewels on the panel. You know what is a pilot jewel?" She got up suddenly, slid out of the booth and took care of some more tables. She was gone some time. I ate my lunch, lit a cigarette and wished I had another cup of black coffee. I knew what she meant by pilot jewels. I had seen radio test equipment with green and red lights on the panels. I knew they called those lights pilot jewels. And I began to marvel at the skinny dame.

She came back finally—with my cup of coffee.

"How did you manage it?" I asked. "And where are the emeralds now?"

She slid into the booth. "That's what everybody says," she sneered. "Everybody says Archer and Benning and me planned to lift the emeralds. Everybody says we did lift them. Everybody says Archer and me went to prison for it and now that we're out we're going to get rid of the things if we can, and settle down with Cadillacs for the rest of our lives."

"Everybody says?" I asked, sipping my black coffee.

"Yeah. But skip that, mister. In the first place I didn't know anything about the job. In the second place I wasn't even at my bench in my department when the rajah brought in the stones to be mounted on the panel that day."

"Oh?" I asked. "Just where would you be, lady, if you weren't in your department at your job during those working hours?"

She handed it to me level as a sidewalk, "In the ladies' room, mister, getting washed up ten minutes ahead of quitting time. And for each minute I got a year."

"Oh!" I said. "Oh, oh, oh."

"Now listen. I ain't got much time. After it was over they found me with one half of my lips painted and the other half bare, and innocent as all hell but they wouldn't believe me. But here's what happened. The rajah came into the final checking department where his emeralds were to be mounted in the panel. Bob Archer and Ronnie Benning were in there. And nobody else. Fifteen minutes later the plant manager went in to see how it was going. He found the rajah out cold on the floor. Beside him he found Ronnie Benning likewise. Archer was gone and so were the emeralds."

She glared at me so I wouldn't interrupt. Then:

"They followed Archer to his rooming

house but they were two doors and a back window too late. So they chased him. And up on the rim drive at Lake Tahoe they started shooting and Archer got scared and let the car go over into the drink as he jumped clear. And for the next ten years he had plenty of time to get all the splinters out where he scraped bottom before he came to a stop. How's it sound?"

I wet my lips. "I'm buying it to here," I said.

She looked around the restaurant. A couple of tables were empty and needed clearing off but she seemed to think that could wait.

She turned back to me and said, "When Ronnie Benning came to he claimed Archer had knocked the rajah out with a cold soldering iron, grabbed the bag with the emeralds in it, swung the cold soldering iron once more and laid Benning flat. And that was all he knew. But Archer himself, on the other hand, swore Benning had planned it all. He said Benning told him they'd split up and meet later in Carson City and decide what to do with the jewels. And Archer claims that was the last he saw of Benning. He thought Benning had taken a powder same as him."

"Golly," I said.

"Listen, mister, that ain't half. Here's the payoff. They never did find the emeralds. First they dragged the lake where Archer's car went over. They got the car. But no emeralds. They took Archer's rooming house apart piece by piece. No emeralds. They took the radio testing department down to the walls almost. Still no emeralds. They even went through Benning's own home for two weeks with a ditto for results. No emeralds. You begin to get it?"

I didn't. "How did they drag you in on it?" I wondered.

"That's just it. On account they couldn't find the emeralds. After they finished searching in where I'd been powdering my

nose they had to completely build over the women's room, that's how thorough they were. But for some reason they seemed sure Archer had slipped me the stones and I had somehow got rid of them. So you know what? They gave me ten years to think it over. And Archer got ten, too."

"And this Ronnie Benning?"

She shrugged her thin shoulders. "What do you think? They let him go. He had a egg on his noggin where he was hit with the cold soldering iron. His story stood up in court. But no emeralds yef. Until today no emeralds. The Western Star Indemnity people are still willing to pay out twenty thousand reward. It cost them one hundred grand insurance when they had to pay off the rajah."

"Hey, Johnson!"

Somebody was bellowing, and I looked around. Standing in the kitchen doorway was Max himself, and he was glaring down at my booth and he was probably meaning the girl should get up off her thin carcass and start clearing off some of the dirty tables.

She said "Oh-oh" and stood up. "Gotta go now. Wait in your office for me tonight, will you? I get off at six. There's more to it." She slid out of the booth and left me there feeling as though I had been in a movie and had just gotten to the good part when the film broke. I sighed, picked up my check and left.

I DIDN'T have a job that afternoon anyway so I went back to my office across the street in the Graham Building and smoked two cigarettes in a row. Then I went to the bottom draw in the filing cabinet and got out the coffee percolator, the electric hot plate and an almost clean cup. In my desk drawer I had a pound of coffee and a bottle of water left over from the last time I'd been to the wash room down the hall. I plugged the thing in, stuck some coffee and water in

it, and sat back to watch it plop up and down.

The waitress was a hophead. I got to thinking about her. Skinny, bony, eyes a little the color of Max's split pea soup, she was an animated memory of something that might or might not have happened a decade ago.

In the first place I had only one thing I was sure of as a fact: she had been in prison, for her skin and her voice testified to it. But the story? It could be something an inmate dreams up on those long winter nights behind bars when you have to do something or go nuts.

I drank some coffee black. I lit a cigarette, unplugged the hot plate and put my feet up on the desk. I pulled my hat down over my eyes and tried to go to sleep.

Ronnie Benning. Bob Archer. Aurora Johnson. Names. After a while I pushed my hat back up on my head, took the dogs off the desk and went over to the directory on top of the filing cabinet.

I looked up Robert Archer. There was none. Of course not. If he'd been in stir it wouldn't show in the directory. I looked up Ronald Benning. No. A Eugene Benning only and he was a reverend connected with the Baptist Church. Hardly the same guy. For the hell of it I looked up the Western Star Indemnity.

Yes. They had an office over on Commercial Row across the street from the S.P. station. I should have known that, I should have remembered—I had passed their office windows hundreds of times. I put the directory back, tossed the phone book on top of it and sat down at the desk again and hoisted my feet and lowered my hat.

At ten to three I hoisted my hat, lowered my feet, went out of the office, stuck a back-at-four sign on the door handle and went downstairs in the elevator.

The sun was banging down on the asphalt outside and it was hot. I went over to Commercial Row and to the Western

Star Indemnity Company. They had offices with big plate glass windows in front. The windows had gold lettering on them in the lower corners giving out little blurbs about how big Western was and making you feel how little you were. I went in.

The big gun's name was stuck in front of me on a chain-hung sign. ROBERT W. THORN, MGR., the sign said. I asked a girl for Robert W. Thorn. I waited. After a while a door opened in a glassed-off room and a big man stuck his head out and looked over my way. He was fatter than he was big and he had eyes that would always see just a little more than the next fellow's. Avaricious eyes. Western Star Indemnity eyes.

He motioned and I went over and on in and he closed the door behind me.

"Howdy," he said. "The girl says you wish to see me. Mr. Gates. Fine. Fine and dandy. How can Western be of help?" He held out a fat hand that stuck to his wrist like a pound of lard. I took the hand, squeezed it mushily and let it go again. Then I gave him a big fat fib in return.

"I'm a feature writer, Mr. Thorn," I said. "Odd stories that need writing, you know. Like the stuff you read in the Sunday supplement."

"Oh? Well, well. Sit down. Never met one of you boys before. What's on your mind?"

I tried him out a little cautiously. "Oh, nothing much. Just thought I'd do a piece on the rajah's emeralds. Remember the case?"

His eyes didn't blank out. They blinked once or twice but that was all.

"Remember? Hell, yes. We lost a goodly hunk of money on that one, Gates."

"Was there ever a reward?" I put it with a frown on my face. I wanted him to get the idea I thought there was but I couldn't exactly recall the thing clearly.

"Sure was. And is. Twenty thousand. It's a dream now, of course. Those emer-

alds would've turned up before now if they hadn't been lost for good. Hasn't been a nibble on the reward money in years and there won't be, either."

"No? How come?"

"Simple." He got out a cigarette and lit it and blew a barrel of smoke over the top of my head. "Those stones are somewhere at the bottom of Lake Tahoe, Gates. Gone."

"Oh. They tried diving, did they?"

Another puff. Another barrel. "At first. We had divers of our own and the police. But nothing."

"Good gosh," I said. "And they couldn't bring them up? How heavy are emeralds anyway?"

This time the barrel of smoke didn't quite make it over my head. I ducked to get under it. "I can see you don't know much about diving, Gates. It isn't that simple. You don't just dive and see what you're after and latch on to it and come on up with it again. Not that simple at all."

"Or . . .?" I suggested. "Maybe they never were down at the bottom of the lake in the first place, huh?"

He thought about that, his little eyes taking me in suckingly like a vacuum cleaner going over a thin rug that isn't nailed down. Slowly his fat red lips opened.

"What do you mean by that, Gates?"

I shrugged, said nothing, gave him a smile instead.

"How'd you happen to hear about this case? Samaravan?"

"Huh?" He'd caught me flatfooted.

"Samaravan." He stopped, studied me. Then: "What newspaper you say you're with?"

"No newspaper," I said quickly. "Free lance. I write 'em first and sell 'em afterward. Well, thanks, Mr. Thorn. Just wanted to know if the case was still active on your books. Thanks. I can write the article now. Fine." I backed to the door,

got it open, went out. "Thanks again," I said. "Goodbye."

Half way across the outer office I turned around and looked. He was leaning over his desk, snubbing the cigarette in a big ash tray, and his beady eyes were looking out through his open door at my retreating figure and there was bewilderment in them—and a great, great interest. I left the picture like that, not knowing what was to follow.

I WALKED to Virginia Street, down to First and Center, over to Police Headquarters. Captain Madeiras and I weren't exactly friendly but I was going to ask him to be helpful. I didn't expect he'd be waiting for me.

"Mr. Edward Gates," he said. The way he said it sounded bad to begin with.

"Same, Captain. How's it?"

"What's your interest in the Samaravan emeralds?"

For the third time in about as many hours somebody had caught me with my mental pants down.

"That's what you're here for, isn't it?" his voice was cold.

"Yeah. But how'd you know?"

He gave me a tiny chip of a smile. I wondered if he could spare it. "Simple, Gates. The Johnson woman got out three weeks ago. We got her a job in a restaurant. We watch who she talks to."

"Oh. Like that. She did ten years but that wasn't enough. Now you've got to hound her day and night." I said it hard and I didn't give a damn if it hurt him.

He sighed. "In a way we're only protecting her for her own good, Gates. In June, Nineteen Hundred and Thirty Eight a foreigner known as the Rajah of Samaravan had a little trouble here in Reno. He lost two very expensive emeralds. They were insured with the Western Star Indemnity people. Western Star paid. Two persons went to prison, one Aurora Johnson and the other a Robert Archer. But—"

and here he lifted his brown eyes to mine—"but the emeralds were never recovered. And now both the Johnson woman and this Robert Archer are out of prison. Tell me what I'm thinking Gates?"

"That's easy. You're thinking either Archer or the girl have the stones cached away somewhere. You're watching them day and night like they were in a concentration camp, hoping to catch them digging the jewels up again. Now it's your turn. Read my mind."

"I will, gladly, and I'll give you a warning at the same time. You have an interest here. The girl has tipped you off as to where the emeralds are hidden. Between the two of you you plan to split the insurance reward."

I grinned. "You're doing fine, Captain. Keep on. Now let's have the warning."

He raised a brown, guarded finger at me. "If you do happen to find them, Gates, and it can be proven the girl was responsible for your good fortune, you will go to prison yourself for aiding and abetting a known criminal."

I almost exploded across the desk and into his lap. "Get off that stuff. She paid, Madeiras, understand? She paid with ten long long years for a crime she didn't commit. She isn't, she never was, and she never will be a criminal. And if she isn't a criminal then how can I aid and abet her?"

It didn't phase him. "You deny you'll split the reward if they're found?"

"No. But I deny she stole them in the first place."

Madeira's shoulders came up in an elaborate shrug. "If so, Gates, how do you hope to be successful?" His lips ended the sentence in a sneer.

I gave it to him in two pieces. "She might just have brains enough to know who did it. And I might just have brains enough to get them away from him."

"Who?"

"Archer, of course. Who'd you think?"

His lip stopped sneering. It curled, instead, under his upper teeth and his teeth came down on it hard. It stayed like that for so long that I began to wonder. And then I got a little glimmer of something funny.

"No!" I yelled. "Don't tell me! You mean to say that an ex-con who got kicked around in State prison for ten years and who just now got out has simply disappeared under your very noses, and you don't know where he is?" It was almost too good to believe. I stared at him in amazement after I'd said it, half not believing it was true.

And he continued to bite his lip. "It could happen to better men than mine, Gates," he said slowly. "Nobody is infallible, remember that. Not even you."

But I was off on a laugh that I figured would last a week. If he said anything else I didn't hear it for I was already out his door and walking down the hall to the street. It was too good for indoors, I had to take it outside where all the world could hear it. I even felt like calling up Danny Streater on the *Globe* and letting him have a bite of it, it was so funny.

CHAPTER TWO

Grave Journey

AND then suddenly, it stopped being funny. There was something I was overlooking. If the police couldn't find this Archer how was I to? I didn't like that. I didn't like it so much that I went back to the office, took the sign off the door, took the peroclator down to the washroom and washed it out, filled it with water and went back to the office again. I had to think.

I tossed in six tablespoons of coffee and stuck her back on the hot plate and then got comfortable while I waited for her to plop up and down.

But even coffee didn't help. I was on

the third cup and was filling my old bull-nose briar for the second time when I finally admitted to myself that I had a dilly on my hands. After that I just smoked, drank black coffee and waited for the girl to show.

She looked even more beat out, whiter, more of a wraith than she had when I saw her at noon. She came in slowly, tossed her handbag on a chair and stood in front of my desk just looking, not saying anything.

"Sit down," I said. "Have a cup of coffee. Just one left." I went over to the filing cabinet, found another cup and poured her the last of my home brewed. "Max show you a bad time after I left? He seemed a little sore."

She smiled wanly. "Yeah, mister. He can be tough. But that's not what bothers me. I just found out something. The police are tailing me. Imagine that. After ten years they don't forget."

"No," I said. "Sometimes they don't. But this time there's a good reason. Your friend Archer has disappeared and they're concentrating on the only other lead they have left." I watched her to see how she'd take the news. She surprised me.

"Yeah? Gosh, you make strong coffee, mister. I like it that way, though."

"You're not disappointed? About Archer, I mean?"

"Who me? Hell no. Why should I be? He's not our boy."

"No? I thought that's what you meant."

"No. Look. After I served four years in in prison they got anxious like, see? Offered me a full pardon if I tell them where the emeralds were. I couldn't tell. I didn't know. Now don't you think they offered the same deal to Archer? Sure. And he'd have taken it if he'd known, same as me. But he served the full ten and he got out three weeks ago. No, he doesn't know. He's a cold pot."

"Who, then?"

She sighed, went over to her handbag on the chair, opened it and took out a newspaper clipping that was wrinkled and torn almost entirely across. She laid it on my desk.

"Read that."

I did. It was a little item telling about a meeting of the Southwestern Association, a group of model railroad enthusiasts. The meeting was being held in Riverside, California, and it mentioned that it was hoped by all interested that the meeting would be a great success despite "current conditions." I looked up at the girl.

"You're tired," I said. "Sit down and rest a minute. This tells about some kids and their model railroads."

"Read it down to the bottom."

I went back to the clipping. And there, sure enough, it was, down at the bottom. *Playing host at the meeting, it said, is a man who brings a love of the game with him; a man who for years has had as his one great passion model railroading.*

And the great lover's name was Ronald P. Benning.

"I tore that out of a prison newspaper in Nineteen Hundred and Forty-four, mister. I've saved it all these years. It was the one link I had with him."

"I see. He's living in California now. Is it the same guy?"

"It is. When we worked side by side in the radio plant that's all he talked about, his model railroads. No mistake."

I thought about that. I didn't know whether it meant anything or not. In 1938 this guy was living in Reno. The court had found him not guilty on account of a pretty good story backed up by a doctor's testimony about a bump on his noggin. Six years later the guy had moved to Riverside, California. And he still loved model railroads.

"You think that somehow it was Benning all the time and not Archer—despite appearances?" I asked.

"Of course, mister. Believe me, if Archer had been the one he'd have told when they gave him that offer in prison. It must have been Benning."

"Uh huh. And he's had ten years to get rid of the emeralds."

"Has he? I wonder. Don't forget the police have never forgotten. If those jewels had turned up while Archer and I were in prison guess what would happen to who? And where would he get rid of them? He wasn't a professional, he didn't have contacts. My guess is that after it was all over he just then for the first time realized what a tiger he had by the tail. He could keep the stones maybe, if he was awfully, awfully careful. But he could never get any dough out of them."

Which might have been true enough, I had to admit. "Tell me how he worked the robbery?" I asked. "And then later was found knocked silly alongside the rajah?"

"I don't know. All I know is what I've told you. And I'd like you to try it for me. If you get the emeralds back there's ten thousand dollars in it for you. What do you say, mister?"

It was getting late. The sun had long ago gone down and the neons over on the gaming palaces on Virginia Street were washing the low sky in colors. And I was getting hungry.

"It's thin," I said finally. "Hell, lady, it's like cheesecloth. There's too many if's in it for my liking. You say you didn't do it and I believe you. But I don't think it was Benning. Remember, Archer has disappeared. And where's he gone to, I'd like to know?"

She didn't answer. She just looked at me for a long time and then she shrugged her thin shoulders, sighed, picked up her clipping off the desk and walked over to the door.

"Okay, mister," she said softly. "No hard feelings. Sorry to have wasted your time."

I let her get her hand on the doorknob.

"And the police," I reminded her. "They're watching you. And already they know about me. What chance has a guy got—even if he has all the cards?"

Her hand stayed on the knob but she turned her head. Her eyes looked moist and her lower lip started to tremble. She pressed it in tight against her teeth.

"Damn it, mister!" she whispered. "There's twenty thousand dollars reward and I'm offering you half for helping me. Half. That's ten grand!"

She was glaring at me but her eyes were as shiny as a hubcap on a Frazer Manhattan. I pushed the chair away from the desk and went around it and went over to where she stood at the door. She started to turn the knob. I dropped my hand down on hers. She dropped her head and tried to stuff the black handbag into her mouth.

"It's the granddaddy of all ground-floor deals," I said gently. "But you've had a bad time and I'll be the first to admit it. A pretty bad time." I put my arm around her skinny shoulder.

She started to sob then. She snuggled into me as though she were a little kid and I her mother. "It's been so long, mister." Her face was two inches from mine and the tears were sliding down her thin cheeks. "It's been so awful, awful long since anybody's had their arms around me."

I said "Yeah" and let her enjoy it. She was a thin wisp of flesh and lots of hard, sharp-cornered bones, but still she was alive and warm and a woman—and she'd just finished a ten spot three weeks ago. I kissed her on the lips twice, the second time hard, and let her enjoy it. I could appreciate how she felt inside and besides I didn't have anything important to do anyway.

EXCEPT, that is, for the business of the emeralds and wondering about Ronnie Benning; and wondering, too, how an ex-con named Archer had

managed to drop out of sight right under the noses of the entire Reno Police Department.

After she had gone I locked the filing cabinet, closed up the office and went over to Max's Chop House for supper. I would have liked to talk to Max about the girl but he wasn't there so that left that out. After supper I decided to go home and pack a bag and take a plane to L.A. and a bus from there to Riverside, California—all on the strength of a newspaper clipping four years old.

Right outside the door of my apartment, just as I was sticking the key in, I had one of those presentiments you read about but don't believe. I didn't believe it either. I turned the key, pulled the key out again. I kicked the door open wide, not even being careful about it. This last, at least, I should have watched out for carefully.

The apartment was as black as the inside of a derby hat. I reached round on the wall about shoulder high for the switch. I felt the switch, started to snick it on and that was as far as I got.

I heard the sap coming down; and I knew when it connected for the top of my head suddenly got like a marshmallow under a flatfoot's heel and the thunder from thirty-six jets roared around me and a flare went up inside my brain. I felt myself falling. The floor must have been all pillows for I never felt it when I hit.

When I came to the lights were all on and I was sitting propped up against the wall and there was a big guy who had the edge on me by fifty pounds sitting across the room in my easy chair. He was watching me and there was a grin tacked on his face.

"Have a nice nap, Free-lance, old pal?"

I tried to get up, couldn't make it. I groaned instead.

"Take it easy, pal. Nasty bump when you tripped." He had a rich baritone

voice and I could have named him an opera to use it on.

I put my palms flat on the floor at my sides and tried to heave. I got to my feet and stood there a second trying to brace myself against what felt like a strong wind. I took a step toward him. I cocked my right into a hard ball and took another step toward him. I started to swing. His grin turned into a laugh.

I looked down. In his big mitt was a little .25 auto and it was pointed in the general direction of my stomach. My fist unbunched itself and I told my feet to forget all about the deal.

He stopped laughing. "We can be pals, pal. Looky here." He reached inside his coat with his left hand and pulled out a wallet. Flipping it open, he threw it over to me and I caught it in the ribs. Underneath a cellophane window was a photostat of a thing that I was familiar with—and in my own case proud of. It was a reproduction of a private detective license and it was made out to one Samuel Rittenhouse.

"That's me, pal," he said. "Old Sammy. A private like you. Only difference is I'm not free-lance. Haw, haw!"

"Okay," I said. "So Thorn got suspicious today. So that gave you the right to break into my apartment and knock me cold. Kindly get the hell out now that you've had your fun."

He didn't move. I threw him his wallet and he caught it and put it away. And he sat there.

"Quick like," I said.

"Listen pal. I'm sorry, honest, about that safety on the noggin. I wouldn't of did it if I didn't have to. I work for Western Star and for ten years off and on I been trying to find them jools. I seen you today when you come to the office. I found out who you were, who you been talkin' to." He stopped. He tapped the short barrel of the .25 on his fingertips. "So you ain't got the emeralds here.

Okay, I didn't think you did—but I couldn't take no chances. I hadda go through your dive."

"Get—" I said.

"But pal, you have some angle or else you wouldn't be in it, huh?"

"The hell out," I said.

He sighed. "Look, pal, I ain't afraid of you. I'll even put away my gun. Now we're even, see. Let's be pals. Let's talk turkey." He stopped, looked around the room. "You got a little snifter, maybe, in this flea nursery?"

The last was the only sensible thing he'd mentioned. I needed a drink bad. I hobbled out to the kitchen and took down a pint off the shelf and two glasses. I poured, lifted one and let him come on over and get the other. He did so, calmly and unhurriedly with a smile on his face. As he had said, he wasn't afraid of me.

"I got a angle of my own, pal. A angle you never thought of, I'll bet."

I downed the whiskey.

"I work for the company, pal. That's how I got such a nice angle. I'm willin' to cut a pal in on the reward money, if a pal would cooperate, sort of. You get me, pal?"

I put down my glass, filled it again and lifted it to my lips.

"You see, pal, workin' for the company like I do I'm sort of tied up in professional ethics. Understand? But if me and a pal like you was to have a little deal cooked up we could work side by side and then when the reward money was paid we could split it under the table like true pals. Get me, pal?"

I downed the second whiskey, let it burn down there.

"What makes it interestin', pal, is that I got a angle like I mentioned. And I believe you got your own angle too." He spread his big arms innocently from his bulky sides. "So why not team up, huh, pal?"

"What about the girl?" I said. "She

suffered, and she deserves something."

He looked incredulous. "What? You gonna let a bag like that cut in on us, pal? G'wan, you ain't nuts." He lifted his glass to his mouth, slopped the whiskey down and grinned evilly at me.

"What's the angle you're talking about?" I said.

"Sure, pal. Easy. For instance like where's Archer these days when even the cops don't know themselves."

"And you know—when the cops don't?"

We looked at each other like two little gentlemen—with our right hands extended in a gesture of friendship, and our lefts concealing the things that we stuck in hard when we patted each other on the back.

For a long, long time we looked at each other like that, and then I said, "I'm from Missouri."

"And you gotta be shown, huh, pal? Oke with me. You know what this guy Archer looks like? You know him when you see him?"

"No."

HE REACHED inside his coat and brought out a folded thing that looked like those sheets they hang in post offices. He handed it over. It was a Reno Headquarters poster, the kind that is sent out all over the country to different cities.

"You see, pal, this guy's out only one week—one week mind—and he starts practicin' some of the stuff they teach him up in the State pen. He goes into a downtown jeweler's and sticks up the joint. Only the jeweler has a button under the counter and he kicks it and the fireworks go off. Ding, ding. ADT. And so whadya know, our friend Archer's in dutch again."

Robert Aloysius Archer. Age 39. He was a wormy little man with only blank glass marbles where eyes should have

been. I handed the poster back to the big guy and went into the living room and took out of my desk a spring holster and my .38. I strapped it on. The big guy watched me, a grin hovering around his big mouth.

"Let's go," I told him.

We went in his car. He drove down Chestnut Street to Seventh, turned left at the corner. We went by Whittaker Park. At the corner of Washington and Seventh he pulled up to the curb and stopped the car. Then he reached in the glove compartment and pulled out a polishing cloth that hadn't yet been taken from its wrapper. He ripped the paper off.

"Excuse it, pal," he said. "You know how it is. From here on out you gotta go blinded a little. Hold still now, this won't hurt a bit."

Hold still, he told me. His left fist came up and smacked into my solar plexus. I gasped for breath while he wound the polishing cloth around and around my forehead. Then he tied it behind my head, pulled it down so that it covered my nose, too.

"Breathe outa your mouth, pal. Oke? Forgive the love tap. You and me're pals, remember."

I gradually got my breath back. I could feel the car start up, make a "U" turn and go back they way we came. I identified the streets for a couple of blocks and then everything got hazy. I was lost and I knew how a blind man feels.

"You doubled on your tracks," I told him.

"Sure, pal. Just to louse you up. I'm a conscientious guy. Good old Sammy Rittenhouse. And a pal, pal."

I let it ride. There was one thing bothering me. I mentioned it. "How was Western Star able to find Archer when the police couldn't?"

"Oh that? Haw haw, pal, we didn't find him, he was never lost. Haw haw. He

come trippin' over to the office five minutes after the stickup and he makes a deal with old man Thorn."

"He what?"

"Yeah. Wouldn't that give you the hives? Thorn's to hole him up till the heat's off on this stick-up and then Archer tells Thorn where the emeralds are. A deal."

"A nice honest guy." I said.

"Yeah, pal. Nothin' like me and you."

I thought about that until the car stopped again. Rittenhouse took off my blinds and got out. I got out after him. We were on a residential street, in the middle of a long block. At least I figured it was the middle of a long block for I couldn't see any intersections either way. The house we were in front of was small, bungalow-type, and dark.

"C'mon, pal," the big guy said. He went up a short walk, up three small steps to a porch. He took out a key and unlocked a door. I followed close on his heels for it was black inside the house. We went to the back through what must have been a living room, a dinette, and a kitchen. Then into a small hallway. We stopped. He knuckled a door and waited a minute.

Then he said, "Me, Archer. Just dropped in to see do you need anything."

Somebody from inside said, "Cripes. Okay."

We went into a bedroom. Lying on top of an unmade bed, his knees up and a newspaper propped against them, was the marble-eyed character of the police poster. His right hand held a glass of what looked like beer and his left held a burning cigarette.

"Hey!" he squawked when he saw me. "Who the hell's that?"

The big guy grinned. "Relax. This guy's my pal. Anything you need? Just dropped by."

The little guy got terror in his eyes. "No!" he screamed. "You ain't gonna

work me over! Thorn promised me he'd protect me! That was the deal." He cringed on the bed, his beer glass shaking in his hand.

"Relax, I said!" The big guy looked disgusted. "The only time you gotta shake is when Thorn pops the big question. Then's when you better have some fast answers, boy. You need anything or don't you?"

It took a while for the man on the bed to believe it, but finally he calmed down. He lifted the glass of beer to his lips and sucked at it nervously.

"Yeah. Okay. Leave a sawbuck here, willya? I wanna send the house lady out for some good stuff tomorrow. This damned beer stinks."

"Sure, boy." The big guy took out his wallet, tossed a ten on the bed. He marked something down on a card, put the card in his wallet, put the wallet away again. "Enough cigarettes and everything?"

"Yeah."

"Oke. See you."

We went out of the room and out of the house. Back in the car the big guy grunted. "So now you see, pal. That in there was Archer. We split the reward two ways only, huh? To hell with him and to hell with the skinny dame."

I took the polishing cloth and wound it around my head. The big guy watched me and began to laugh.

"Haw, haw, pal. Haw, haw! I hit the wrong spot before? Haw, haw!"

I let him drive for several minutes before I shafted him with something which I'd been clutching to my bosom for quite some time now. I said, "You and Thorn are wasting your time. Archer doesn't know where the emeralds are. If he had known he wouldn't have bothered with a stick-up as soon as he got out of the pen. He'd have learned in the last ten years in there just how to get rid of stones like that and how to make a nice profit on them."

The big guy fooled me. "Sure, pal. Gee, you're smart. Smart as me, almost. Now you see why I wanted a partnership. Thorn don't seem to see it the way you and I do. I figger the Johnson dame's the one. Only with the police watchin' her I can't worm in there so good. That's why it was a real break for us when she hands the tip over to you. Well, how about it? We gonna be pals? You and me'd make a good team."

I didn't say anything. He drove some more.

"Or—" he amended at last— "you gonna try it the real, real hard way all alone?"

I glanced at him.

"I'll have to think it over," I said. "Let me sleep on it tonight. I'll tell you in the morning."

He sighed. "Don't hug it too long, pal. If you don't cook them things right away they spoil on a guy."

A little farther. Noises now. We were in a part of town with a lot of traffic. He said abruptly: "You can take off the turban now, pal."

We were on Virginia Street downtown. I could see Harold's Club on the left side of the street a block down. At the next corner the big guy stopped the car.

"Gotta get a bottle, pal. Watch the heap." He got out and went into a drugstore. In a moment he was out again. "Canadian Club, pal. I hope you like that?"

"I have a bottle home," I said.

"What bottle? That dinky pint? How long'll that last a couple he-men like us?"

"Us?" It got out of me like a thin whistle.

"Yeah, pal. Us. I'm shackin' with you tonight, didn't I tell you?" He winked. "So we can both get a early start in the morning."

I said, "Oh, fine," and slumped down in the seat.

CHAPTER THREE

Dead Man's Trail

THE pint went first. I'll say one thing for Samuel Rittenhouse, he really could drink. The whiskey went down him like a whisper that has never been uttered, like the song of an angel who hasn't yet learned to sing.

I got the last dip out of it. I took off my coat and vest and shirt and shoes. The whiskey was tearing holes in my brain. I lay down on the bed, wishing I had a nice big pot of black coffee. I put the pint to my mouth, drained the last few drops and laid the empty bottle on the floor.

The big guy took off his coat, his vest, his shirt and his pants and shoes. He looked like an elephant wearing jockey shorts. He grinned at me, tucked his .25 auto under the pillow on his side, picked up the quart of Canadian Club and ripped it open.

"Hah!" he growled deep in his throat. "A wonderful label, pal. Long may she wave." He put the bottle to his mouth and let the stuff steam down inside of him. He lay down next to me on the bed. He was a heavy man and the springs caved on his side.

I got up. He jerked up along with me.

"Where you goin' pal?"

"Three guesses," I said.

"Oh. Don't be long, willya?"

I went to the bathroom, bathed my head in cold water and brushed my teeth. That was the strongest little pint I'd ever had the pleasure to kill half of. I went back to the bedroom.

He was lying in bed holding the bottle on his big hairy chest. He was holding it firmly by the neck so it wouldn't tip over.

"Ho, pal," he said, grinning at me.

I lay down again. He handed me the bottle. I thought *Damnation, how the hell do you get rid of a lug the size of him?*

I said a little profanity to myself and took a swig from the bottle. It went down nice and smooth but when it landed I thought the Queen Mary had docked in my stomach without benefit of the harbor master. I handed the bottle back to him and passed out.

The next thing I knew I couldn't breathe so good. I opened one eye. The room was spinning. I opened two eyes. The room spun both directions at once. I looked down at my nose. The reason I couldn't breathe so good was that the big guy's left arm was across it and in his left hand he still held the quart bottle. Only the bottle was now empty.

I shoved his arm off my nose and sat up and looked at him. His breath was coming from his nostrils like somebody was forcing it out with a tire pump but his eyes were open watching me, and there was a grin still tacked to his big mouth.

"Y'boiled, pal."

I took the empty quart bottle out of his lax fingers and looked at it.

"Shhdedinjun."

"Yeah."

"Yup. Shhdedinjun."

I grinned back at him, lifted up the bottle and smacked him on the head with it. It hit like a ball pein hammer and it didn't break. I gave it to him again in the same spot and his eyes closed and the grin faded and his head turned a little to the left. And that would hold him for the rest of the evening.

"Goodnight, dear pal," I said.

I got my feet down on the floor and grabbed the end of the bed for support. After a while the room stopped spinning and I made it over to the door and out into the living room. I sat down with the telephone book trying to read numbers in it until I decided it couldn't be done and then I gave up and dialed information and asked for the airport.

A plane was leaving for Los Angeles in fifty minutes—which gave me just enough

time to get sobered up a little and drive across the city to the airport.

I took a hot shower. That made it worse. I took a cold shower and that helped. I took another hot shower and then a second cold one. After that I leaned up against the stall trying to get strong again.

I got dressed, packed one small bag, and strapped on my .38. I didn't know if I'd have to use it and I didn't know what good it might do me if I did use it, but I took it anyway. The last thing I did was to go over to Rittenhouse's pants where he had thrown them on a chair, and take out his bunch of keys. Then I turned off all the lights and left. I took his car to the airport.

The plane got me to Los Angeles like they advertise it does. From there I got a Pacific Electric bus to Riverside and pulled into the bus station there at a quarter to four A.M. The city hadn't yet

caught the first glint of daylight from the east. I went down Market Street away from the P.E. Station towards a hotel I could see one block up. I got a room, signed the call sheet for 8:30. I fell asleep smelling orange blossoms, for this was citrus country.

The morning was hot. I went down to the tiny lobby of the hotel and picked up a thin phone book. Then I crossed my fingers and said a prayer and opened it and ran my finger down the "B's." Jackpot. *Ronald Benning*, I read. *46924 Ivy Street, Rockledge Park, Riverside.*

I felt better after that. Even the bump under my hat didn't hurt now. Nothing mattered now except that there was I and there was Benning and between the two of us stood two emeralds worth one hundred thousand dollars.

I had breakfast with three cups of black coffee and during it I thought. If only, in the intervening ten years since the



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theft, he hadn't been able to get rid of them! That was the only thing to worry about. I didn't know—and didn't give a damn—how he had pulled the job in the first place.

After breakfast I consulted another phone book and looked for model shops. I was lucky. There was one over on Eighth Street. I crossed my fingers again and walked the few short blocks.

It had a half-grown shade palm outside and the fronds on the thing hung down to my shoulder. I stooped to get under them and went in. It was a small place, but loaded. Anything any model fan could ask for was here from model gas-powered racing cars all the way up through the airplanes and to the top specialty which happened to be model railroads.

There was a girl clerk waiting on some kids. I skipped her. Over behind the desk sat a thin man with red hair and at that moment he was running his slender fingers through it.

"Good morning," I said.

"Hi. Can I help you?"

"You can. I'm just in town and I have a deal cooking with a man who happens to be a model railroad fan. Now the trouble is I don't know from beans about model railroads. I thought maybe if I came in here before I saw him I could soak up a little railroad talk that would take me over the hump and fool him a little."

He studied me. "Oh? Friend, if he's a real fan you'll be able to fool him like Rommel fooled Montgomery."

"Yeah. But I thought you could help."

He sighed and got himself out of the chair and walked around the desk. He went to a big show case that held a lot of locomotives and equipment. He pointed at one. "See that big job with the three large wheels? That's a Pacific. And the one next to it with the two big wheels is an Atlantic. And the one next to that is a yard goat."

"A what?"

"That dinky there." He slid back the glass door of the case and reached in and brought out a tiny thing that looked as that it had got telescoped in a wreck. He handed it to me.

"That's a cute little choo-choo," I said, taking it. I nearly dropped it. For a little thing it weighed like lead. "What did you call this?"

"A yard goat, friend. Or a camelback or switching engine. It's also known as a Mother Hubbard."

"Oh." I gave it back to him.

"Now that track there," he said, pointing, "H-O."

"H-O," I repeated.

"Yes. The international gauge. It's exactly one eighty-seventh of full size, figured in millimeters."

"Oh," I said again.

"Now that other feller there with the long stack is an eight ball, sometimes known as a mogul. And the one behind is a belle of the Eighties." He moved to another cabinet, pointed at some equipment. "Signals, track, coaches, tankcars, and the like. Getting back to track, that layout on the bottom there is a single track line with stub end termini. There are also pretzels and other forms."

It was going in one ear and out the other. "Pretzels?"

He smiled, scratched his head, looked up at me, sighed and shrugged. "It's hopeless, friend. You'd never fool a child."

"I guess not," I admitted.

"Take my word on it. Who'd you say your friend was? The one you're trying to fool?"

"A Mr. Ronald Benning. He lives here in the city."

"Ooooh!" It came out of him long and drawn out and thin as a memory. He looked at me. And then he said quietly, "In that case, friend, you can stop worrying."

"What? You mean he doesn't really

know his stuff?" I was very perplexed.

"No. I mean you're too late. He got himself buried yesterday. Auto wreck, corner of Mulberry and Eleventh."

I couldn't speak. I was petrified. I had flown over mountains in the dead of night half drunk and sick to my stomach from a sapping I'd taken. I had ridden in a bus from Los Angeles and had paid for a hotel room that I'd used only a couple of hours. But that wasn't it. In my mind I could see an undernourished girl with white skin and dead voice, a girl who had paid with ten of the most important years of her life for a crime she hadn't committed. In my mind I could see ten thousand dollars running through her clutching, bony fingers like sand skittering in a high wind. I felt sick to my stomach again.

The red-haired man spoke again. "Ain't any of my business, friend, and I don't know what kind of a deal you had on the fire, but if it's any help at all to you he left a widow. Amy Benning. You'll find her home, I imagine."

I thanked him and left.

A lot of good a widow would do me now. The one person, the last person, the *only* person in this whole wide world who could do any good was dead and had been buried yesterday.

I went over to the bus station and sat down on a bench and listened to two guys giving each other the razoo about something or other. One guy wanted the other guy to spring for cokes and the other guy said to the first guy hell no and the first guy said why not you can't take it with you anyway.

No. You can't take it with you. First guy, you're right. But some of us poor souls haven't got it to worry about in the first place.

You can't take it with you!

I got a Tanner cab right outside and fifteen minutes later he let me off in front of 46924 Ivy Street, Rockledge Park.

It was an old house, as old as the hills

almost, and it was small and set off by itself behind a big stone wall. There weren't any other homes within half an acre of it. I went up a winding walk and rang an old-fashioned doorbell.

She was about forty and small and not too thin. She must have been pretty when she was younger but too many years had dried the skin on her cheeks until they looked like parchment that isn't old enough to be antique nor yet fresh enough to be new. She was smoking a cigarette and she wore a plain house dress which wasn't black.

I said, "Good morning. I'm Edward Gates from Dallas. I was passing through and thought I'd stop to chin with a brother railroader. I was sorry indeed to hear in town that he died."

She said, "Good morning. Yes. My husband was killed last Monday in an automobile accident." Her eyes steadied on mine and held that way. "Where did you say you were from, Mr. Gates?" She had an accent wide enough to spread out on the lawn and roll around on.

"Dallas, Texas. I belong to the Model Railroaders of Dallas. I considered Mr. Benning a sort of brother although I never knew him personally."

"Oh? C'mon in."

"It must have been a shock. His passing, I mean."

"It was." She closed the door behind me. We were in a plain living room that had needed money, lots of money, for lots of years. Everything in it was old and worn and not too clean. "It was quite a shock. I haven't been able to get over it yet."

"Naturally. You have my sympathy."

She said, "Thank you" and studied me. And then: "Dallas, you said?"

"Yes. I was on my way to Los Angeles."

"Oh. I suppose you'd like to see my husband's layout, Mr. Gates? He built it all himself."

IT MUST have been that I was tired. And not too well from the night before besides. Otherwise the conversation would have struck me a little on the incongruous side. Anyway, I said, "I sure would. That is if it's not too much trouble."

"C'mon with me." She stubbed her cigarette in a dirty ash tray and led me through the house and out the back door. We crossed a bare yard down to a flat building that looked like it could have been intended for a four-car garage at one time. In the middle of the front of it was a small door.

It wasn't a garage. The place was a sea of flimsy tables stretched out all over the room and butting on one another. And built on top of the tables was track—miles and miles of track that looked like it started nowhere and ended at the same place. And tankers and freight cars and coaches and gondolas and engines. Lots of engines. This was a real railroad system in miniature, the delight of a railroader, the despair of a novice.

"Like it, Mr. Gates?"

"Who wouldn't?" I said.

"Like to see it run? Put a pen knife across those two contacts on the table yonder. The switch is broken. Ronnie was going to fix it the day he died."

I said, without thinking, "I haven't got a pen knife. Will a silver dollar do?" I took a cartwheel out of my pocket and held it in my hand and looked up. She had moved across the room. She was standing by a work bench that had a lot of tools on it and a lot of drawers. Mounted on the wall above the work bench was a huge model of a caboose.

It was the largest miniature caboose I had ever seen and it wouldn't have fit on any of the tracks in the room, and hanging from either end of it were large lanterns that had bulging green lenses.

I waited for her to answer. She didn't. She was studying me and her body was

half turned from me, half facing the work bench.

"I said, would a silver dollar do as well as a—"

I never finished it. She swooped into one of the drawers built into the bench and came up with a gun that could have stopped a buffalo. Her hand didn't shake as she pointed it at me. And neither did her voice.

"Dallas, you said, Mr. Gates? Since when are they using silver dollars in Dallas? And since when aren't Dallas men saying *Ma'am* anymore when they address a strange woman?"

I didn't say anything. I couldn't. For the second time this morning I felt petrified.

She went on, "I'm from Texas myself, Mr. Gates. Maybe you notice my drawl. Denton, Texas. When I was a little girl we used to roll marbles into Dallas from Denton, that's how close it is."

I wasn't petrified any longer. I was dead.

"That silver dollar looks like Nevada to me, Mr. Gates. They still use them there. Maybe Reno even. That's it, isn't it? Reno. And what would a Reno man be doing down here?"

I still didn't say anything.

"You've got one second to answer, Mr. Gates."

"All right," I said. "I'm not from Dallas. I told you that because it was the first place I thought of."

"Keep talking."

"Reno, yes. And none of us from Reno likes guns put in our ribs for no reason at all."

She laughed. It was a sharp laugh, without humor. "I know how to use a gun, Mr. Gates, and I'd just as soon. In fact—" she took a slow step nearer to me—"I'd like using it on a man from Reno. It would give me a real pleasure, it would."

I didn't say anything to that.

Her eyes blazed. "Who are you, the cops?"

"No."

"Insurance dick?"

"No."

"Who, then? Can't they give a woman any peace?"

I said carefully, "There was a girl up in Reno a long time ago. They didn't give her any peace either. She got ten years for nothing. People from Reno are just plain unlucky."

"Who are you?"

"Just a friend of that girl. She got out three weeks ago and she asked me to come down here and ask Mr. Benning what he'd done with the emeralds he stole from the Rajah of Samaravan."

"He didn't steal them!"

"He must have. It wasn't Robert Archer. They offered Archer a pardon years ago if he'd tell where the emeralds were hidden. I've seen this Archer. He'd tell on his own mother if he thought he could buy something with it. And it wasn't the girl because she simply wasn't the type to steal."

"It wasn't Ronnie! How could it be? He was knocked out just like the rajah himself! Even the doctor at the trial testified!"

I was on thin ice now and wearing sewer pipe for skates. I could either guess how Benning had done it or I could tell her how I myself might have done it. I said:

"That was the easy part. Archer knocked out the rajah. Benning took the emeralds, told Archer to meet him later in Carson City. After Archer went, Benning grabbed up a cold soldering iron and cracked himself on the head with it hard enough to leave a lump. Maybe it even knocked him out, I don't know. At any rate all he had to do was lie down and wait for somebody to come along."

She listened to it without a word. I couldn't tell what she was deciding about it. Even in my own ears it sounded pretty terrible—but possible.

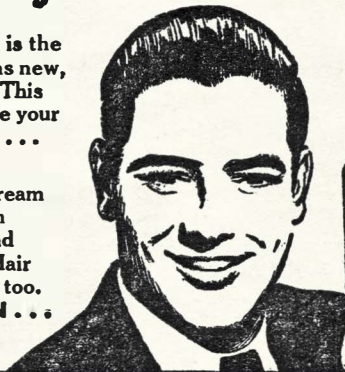
"If he did," she said, "you're overlooking something. What would he do with the emeralds? Where would he hide them? And how would he get them out again, if he had hidden them? They searched that place."

"Why," I said, not having any more idea how it could be done than she did, "that would be easy too. For instance, before he knocked himself out, all he had to do was drop the emeralds into the handle of one of those big electric soldering irons and then ram the handle down on

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the iron again. As for getting it out that would be just as easy. Months, even years later perhaps, he could decide to quit his job and when he did he could take out the same soldering iron with the rest of his tools. That's one way it could have been done. Was that the way he did it?"

SHE took a deep breath and her gun hand dropped. She raised her left hand and pawed across her eyes with it as though she had a headache. Then she looked up at me and there was a tired smile on her lips.

"Mr. Gates, you're very clever. More clever, I think, than all the police and insurance detectives put together. I'll tell you the truth. Ronnie did plan to steal those emeralds. He wasn't making much money at the plant and his one big love was his railroad. He had to have more and more money for the railroad all the time. For the rest of his life even up to the day he died, it was like that."

"Yes," I said.

The smile stayed on her lips. It looked a little pathetic now. "But thieves fall out, Mr. Gates."

"Yes," I said.

"And he didn't get them. Archer was in on it and Archer double-crossed my husband. He knocked him out and fled with the stones. What he did with them after that is a mystery."

"No," I said.

The smile flattened. "Look! You saw our house. It's shabby, isn't it? Did it strike you from what you saw that my husband has successfully stolen a hundred thousand dollars worth of precious stones?"

"It means nothing," I said. "After—only after—he stole them did he realize what he had on his hands. Where would he dispose of them? The instant they showed again, no matter in what part of the country, he knew he was a gone duck, because the other two, Archer and the girl,

were in prison. And it would all point back to him."

She shook her head. She kept on shaking it.

"No, Mr. Gates. It's good, but no."

But she was as wrong as sin and suddenly I knew it. I had it now and it was like a doughnut in my fist and I was going to squeeze it till I sweat the living hell out of it.

"That caboose up on the wall," I said, pointing to the big miniature. "Look at the lanterns on it, Mrs. Benning. Unusual lanterns with very, very unusual lenses in the lanterns. Green lenses, Mrs. Benning. In fact—emeralds."

"Mr. Gates—"

"And an innocent girl who never had anything but freedom and lost even that, suffered for ten years while your husband hoarded his green emeralds in a homemade caboose and hung it up on the wall of a broken-down made-over garage."

"Mr. Gates! I never knew—"

I just looked at her.

"Look, Mr. Gates, you could take them and get rid of them. You could do it where I couldn't. You could manage to get something for them and we could divide the money. They must be worth way more than a hundred thousand by now."

"Wrap it—" I said.

Her eyes were bright. She laid the gun down on the bench and came toward me. "Please Mr. Gates. I'm sorry about the girl, really. I used to lay awake nights thinking of her and worrying. You could get rid of them and we could divide it three ways. That would make up to her for the years—"

"—and stow it."

"Please, Mr. Gates!" There were crocodile tears in her eyes now. "Look at me! I haven't had a damned thing. All these years it's been nothing but trains, trains, trains. I haven't even got a black dress to mourn him in. Look, Mr. Gates. We could do it like that and then we could

go away together, you and I. I'm not old. You'd see when I get fixed up . . ."

"*Ain't that purty!*" It was a big baritone voice. I turned. The door of the garage was opening and coming in the doorway was a big man who had the edge on me by fifty pounds. In his hand was a small .25 auto and it was pointed at both of us at once. There was a sneer on the big man's lips.

"Ain't that purty as all hell! You got a way with the wimmin, you have, pal." He took a step toward me. The gun didn't waver but the sneer dropped off his face and was supplanted by a grin.

"You got away with an empty bottle too, pal. But I don't mind that now. I stood outside there just long enough to hear you gettin' clever as all get out about the jools. To tell you the truth I wouldn't of thought of it myself. Thanks."

He came forward. He motioned the woman back against the bench with the stub-nosed gun. He got between us, keeping me covered like a tent, and then he backed up to the wall, reached up a big ham-like hand and took the caboose down. A grin such as a pleased child might wear spread across his face.

"Ah!" he grunted.

I didn't say anything. It wasn't the time to say anything. I was figuring just how long it would be before the .25 began to kick hot holes in my middle.

"Ain't they nice?" he said. He came forward, passed me, swept in a half turn and started backing towards the door again.

The woman screamed. "No! You can't take them, you can't take them! Not after all these years!"

The big guy grinned at me. "Get a load a that, pal. Touchin', ain't it? They ain't nobody can stop me. Not you, pal, and not you, lady." He kept on backing.

The woman screamed again and swept her gun off the bench and shot him twice in the stomach.

He didn't go down. He caved a little in the middle and his eyes took on the torments of hell but he didn't go down. He laid the caboose gently down on the end of the bench and brought his left hand up to rest on the flimsy train tables for support. Then he brought his right around until the .25 covered the woman. Then he pulled the trigger.

She shot him twice more before she collapsed at his feet.

It seemed a month of Sundays before he let go of the string he was holding. He stood there, his eyes not seeing anything, his gun hand clutched in at his stomach. He stood there swaying from side to side like a man who is the slightest bit dizzy but nothing else. And then it was over. It could have been heard way up in Reno when he hit—and the whole flimsy structure of tables that held the wonderful miniature railway went over with him.

My right hand felt tight. I looked down. There was my .38 sticking uselessly in it and I was trying to pulverize the grip. My finger wasn't even inside the trigger guard. I put it away, went over to the bench and took the winking green lights down off the caboose and left the garage, and went inside the house and called the Riverside Police.

IT WAS late when the plane landed at Reno. The Riverside police had to ask questions and were reluctant to stop asking them. They'd been in touch twice with Captain Madeiras on the phone but what he told them I didn't know. And finally they had released me.

I took Sammy Rittenhouse's car back into the city again. It was late. The big neons of the gaming palaces swept over the low black sky painting the town in nice, gay colors. One thing had bothered me all day from the moment I had seen the big guy coming in the garage door.

How had he known where I was? There was one answer to that but Max's Chop House was closed at this hour of night. The only other place to go was Headquarters.

Captain Madeiras was still at his desk. He didn't seem surprised nor pleased nor displeased when he saw me. He just looked.

"If you don't mind, Captain," I told him, "I'd like the address of the girl Aurora Johnson. I've got to see her right away."

His eyebrows went up. "Oh? Anything else you'd like?"

"Yes," I took out the big guy's keys and threw them over. "One of those keys fits a house somewhere here in Reno. And in the house, holed up, is a man you want for attempted grand larceny. Archer. Mr. Robert W. Thorn of the Western Star Indemnity Company can tell you where that house is."

He didn't seem surprised. He looked at the keys a while and then fingered them.

"You're slipping, Gates," he said. "We've already got Archer. It seems he drank a fifty of whiskey before breakfast this morning and then his hideout got a little stuffy so he went out in the bright sunshine for a walk. He was weaving all over the street downtown when we spotted him. We helped him weave into a prowler car and he's downstairs now in the tank."

"Oh," I said.

"Yes. Now about that girl. I'm sorry to say this but I've got to. One of Western Star's private men got through us a little and worked the girl over. He was after information. He was the one who got killed earlier today down in Riverside. It's too bad."

There didn't seem to be any end to the shocks I'd been getting lately. I gripped the edge of his desk and looked down at him. For a minute I couldn't speak. And then I said, "Tell me she's dead. That's all I need to hear."

"No. But beat up. Her right arm's broken and she's in the Washoe General Hospital. And, Gates, a funny thing. When she came to, the first thing she said was she wanted to see you."

I took a deep breath. "Thanks."

"Goodbye, Gates. Keep the license clean."

I hardly recognized her she was so bandaged. One of her eyes was black and she had a cast on her right arm. But she still looked as though she had a dream hugged tight in her heart. She held up her left hand when she saw me.

"Hi, mister. You all right?"

"Yeah. It was a little rough. Not as rough as what you went through, but rough." I let her look at me. There was a firecracker on her tongue and she was dying to spit it out and afraid to at the same time.

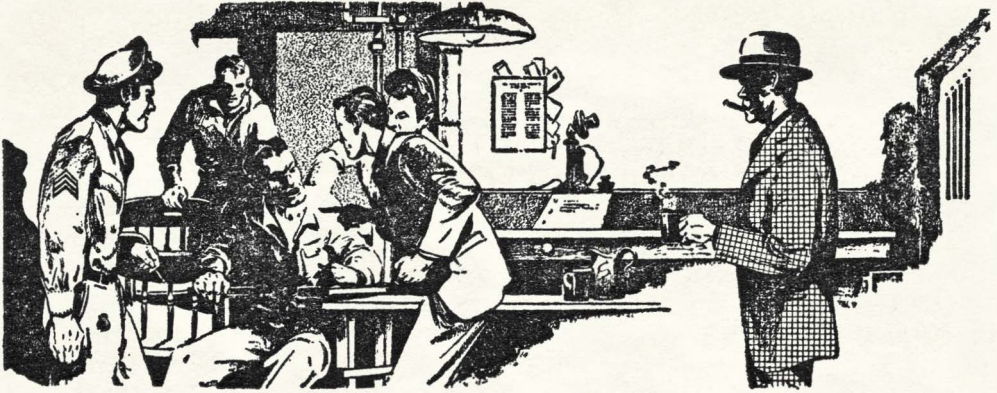
I knew exactly what it was. I kept her in suspense for a little while.

And then I said, "I did get 'em. They're big and green and wonderful, and by the time you get out of here you're going to have ten thousand hard dollars in your sock that you can take up to an old lady who lives in Aurora, Nevada, where nothing happens anymore except the big wind storms like in the old days."

She didn't say anything. It was too soon. After the long long years it was much too soon.

Anything she said now would be words only.

I leaned down over the bed and looked at her. "Go on and cry," I said. But she didn't. She just looked into my eyes and I couldn't tell if she was trying to say anything with them or not. So I kissed her on the lips twice—the second time hard—and let her enjoy it, broken arm, black eyes and all. Then I went downstairs and out into the night again and tried to think of a place that would be open where I could get a gallon of strong black coffee.



THE THIRD DEGREE

By Hallack McCord

(Answers on page 109)

SO YOU think you're the Sherlock Holmes type, eh? Then here's your chance to prove it. Here's a 20-part test of your knowledge of crime and criminal investigation. Try your hand at answering the questions. And if you can answer 18 or more of them correctly, you're definitely sleuth material. Answer 16 or 17, and you're still good. Answer fewer than 15, however, and you're right in with the average boys. Good luck!

1. If a crook acquaintance of yours told you he had just been dealt some "blood money," would you expect him to be: Happy? Disappointed?

2. In the language of the crook, a "bing room" is: A pool hall? A place where dope addicts meet?

3. If a crook acquaintance of yours told you there was a "frog" chasing him, what would you think he meant?

4. True or false? A "flop worker" is a person who runs a cheap hotel.

5. True or false? A "scratch man" is a criminal who is a dangerous killer.

6. A "set up" is a jail sentence of: One day? Three months? Six months?

7. True or false? "Steel" is crook slang for either knife or razor.

8. "Stick" is the housebreaker's word for what burglar tool?

9. If a detective friend of yours told you he was looking for a "girl scout," you would think he was seeking: A woman informant? A female spy working for thieves? A police woman?

10. When the police give a man "a floater," what do they do to him?

11. If you, as a detective investigating a homicide, discovered a certain person had been killed by being stabbed with a knife

thrust upward into the body, would you suspect suicide or murder?

12. True or false? When a person commits suicide by stabbing himself with a knife, he generally gets blood on his hands.

13. True or false? Nothing under about a pint of nitric acid is a fatal dose.

14. True or false? When a person has been given arsenic, he dies immediately.

15. Which of the following individuals probably might be the most difficult to kill by poisoning with opium: A Chinese? An American? An Esquimaux?

16. If a person with a low intelligence decided to commit murder by poisoning, what poison would he be likely to use?

17. True or false? Dope addicts never drink liquor.

18. True or false? It probably takes years of use to become addicted to cocaine.

19. A man and a woman are found in a gas-filled building. The woman is dead, presumably of asphyxiation, but the man is still living. Previously, they were both known to be in about equally good health. Why might the scientific detective be inclined to suspect the woman had been murdered?

20. If a person testified he recognized a casual acquaintance at a distance of 500 yards, would you be inclined to believe him?

TWO DEATHS HAVE I

CHAPTER ONE

Young Man's Fancy

I DON'T know just why she wrote the story. She wasn't a writer, or even much of a reader, I suppose, with her red lips and her dark eyes of night. It couldn't make any difference to Koppelman whether anybody thought he had drowned that quietly beautiful blonde woman deliberately that moonless night or not—that woman who came with them, who took care of the boy, whose name I never knew. It couldn't make much difference to her, either, it would seem.

Even if she had been a better storyteller than she was, she couldn't prove Koppelman hadn't, anyway. And using different names and a little different location, as she did, it would seem that she hadn't expected anyone to know whom it was about. She couldn't think of my reading it, if she remembered me at all, or anyone else who had known her and Koppelman.

Maybe it was just something she had to tell. Or maybe she had only written it for the five hundred bucks which True Murder Romances paid for contributions, plus a chance at the big ten-thousand-dollar prize for the best story of the year, which might offer her freedom and escape.

She had won the prize, anyway. And there her story was in the new October issue that Mr. Rutherford tossed across his desk to me, for me to dramatize to the great invisible radio audience.

"Good morning, Beaman. Did you have a pleasant time on your vacation?" Mr. Rutherford asks me kindly, not caring, as I sway into his office. "Where did you

She was coming at me with that dagger raised. . . .



A NEW-Length Novel

By Joel Townsley Rogers

*A baby's borrowed cry—a woman's stolen face
—these answered Death's hungry demand:
"Tonight is mine!"*



go? What did you do? Did you take Mrs. Young with you? And your—ah—your offspring? Did they enjoy it, too?"

He tosses the shiny magazine he has been fondly looking through across his desk at me as I slump to a seat.

"Yeah," I tell him. "Wonderful. I took Mrs. Young and the twins up to spend the month with my uncle, who's a bachelor and the sheriff of Allen County up at Big Moose Lake Landing, way to hell and gone in Maine. It was a wonderful year for blackflies and mosquitoes on the lake. A refreshing rain poured down steadily for a week. I got a concussion the first day diving off onto a submerged log, and broke my wrist the fourth day cranking my uncle's outboard motor for him. Mrs. Young went blueberrying and got the most beautiful case of poison ivy you ever saw, complete from head to toe."

"Fine. Fine." says Mr. Rutherford. "I envy you. Nothing like a wife and kiddies to make life seem worth while. Glad you came back refreshed and in the pink, all raring to get in there and pitch.

"You've already seen our latest issue, out last week, no doubt," he tells me with fat, pink fondness, "containing the T.M.R. prize story, 'Was My Husband a Murderer?' by Vilena Lamarre. A stark, powerful, gripping drama," he intones, with his pink jowls jiggling and a quiver in his voice, "written from the depths of a woman's soul-searing experiences, a—uh—"

"A slice of human life," I say, "poignant and unforgettable."

"A slice of human life," he says, "poignant and unforgettable. Right."

That's the sponsor's plug which begins each True Murder Romances Hour, dramatizing a story every Monday night from half past eight to nine over the Consolidated Network for the great invisible radio audience. I ought to know it. I've listened to it for eighty-seven broadcasts in the sound-booth, and twice that for rehearsals;

and I wrote it. Not to speak of the eighty-seven scripts, plus five that I left all ready for the air before I went away.

I'm in the radio-script department of Shea and Healy, who handle the T. M. R. account, and Mr. Rutherford is the mag's editor.

I don't know anybody besides Mr. Rutherford who reads True Murder Romances except my uncle, who runs the general store up there at Big Moose Lake Landing, rents rowboats and canoes, and poses for amateur photographers of quaint native types during the two months of the summer season.

Still, other people must read it, because it has a circulation of a million eight hundred thousand copies, which gives Mr. Rutherford his bleached mahogany desk and etchings and his soft, white rugs and chromium bar up here at the top of Rockefeller Center, looking out from the farthest reaches of East Brooklyn to the blue swamps of Hackensack, New Jersey; and gives Shea and Healy three-quarters of a million bucks a year for advertising budget, and me the hundred and twenty-five a week which pays for the twins' diapers and milk, and the other overhead of Ruth's and my little love nest in the Bronx. . . .

I HAVE a low feeling in my bones. "Who's Vilena?" I say, opening the book gingerly. "Nelson?"

"No," says Mr. Rutherford, pleased and pink. "It's strictly an amateur story, Beaman, which came in through the mails. All our stories are based on fact, of course," he adds a little hastily, "though naturally they have to be somewhat interpreted by our stable of professional writers in many instances. Miss Lamarre is definitely an amateur, however, by the simplicity of her style.

"She is a young widow, apparently, with an eight-year-old boy," he says, taking a cigar from his silver box and lighting

it. "She gave as return address a box number in Pottstown, Pennsylvania. Her entry came in at the last minute, when we had practically decided to give the prize to J. Worthington Jeffries, Jr., the high school student's story for which you wrote the script before you went away."

"Did she send her picture with it?" I say meekly.

"Why, how did you know that?" he says. "You're right in there, Beaman. That was what convinced me she was an amateur. Naturally professional writers don't send their pictures with their contributions. I don't know what we'd publish if they did. It was a naive gesture, but genuine.

"The reason I left an imperative message to see you the moment you returned," he goes on, "is that we are making a little ceremony of presenting the prize check. A little cocktail party in our offices this afternoon for the critics and book reviewers and general run of literary hangers-on, with resulting publicity, we trust. Miss Lamarre has been invited to attend at T. M. R.'s expense, and has accepted. Drop up yourself for a highball and canape, by the way, if you can. In view of the added publicity to be obtained by tying up the prize presentation with the True Murder Romances Hour tonight, we have decided—"

"To yank the script of Jeff's story that was scheduled, and put Vilena on."

"Right," says Mr. Rutherford, putting down with a relieved air the antique Sicilian dagger paper cutter which he had picked up from his desk. "Glad you enter into the spirit of it so eagerly, Beaman. You will find it a story in natural dramatic form," he adds confidently, "which can be put on the air with hardly any alteration. Just pick out the high scenes. In fact, the actors could probably read the dialogue as it stands, even without a script."

"Yeah," I say.

I look at my wristwatch, and it is ten minutes after noon. I have been driving from six A.M., with the twins howling, and there is a roaring in my ears and spots before my eyes. In the next eight hours and twenty minutes I've got to read Vilena's story and write a script of it from scratch, try it out, redraft it, try it out again for timing, give it a final rehearsal, and stand ready to put it on at half past eight at the bell for True Murder Romances thirteen million devoted listeners. I can always take three hours off for lunch, of course, and four hours for cocktails with Vilena. But what do I do with the rest of my time today? I open the mag.

"I waked up at midnight," it starts off.

I waked up at midnight to give my baby his bottle. I realized that my husband hadn't yet come to bed. I stood at the window a few minutes looking out at the moonless darkness, listening to the lapping

**Fast HELP for
HEADACHE**

**UPSET
STOMACH
JUMPY
NERVES**



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For fast help from ordinary headache always take Emerson's Bromo-Seltzer. It fights headache three ways:

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of the lake water on the pier float down by the boathouse. Somewhere on the black shore I heard an owl cry, or perhaps it was a loon out over the water. In all the world that single cry, and the water lapping, were the only sounds. I felt a sense of tension and uneasiness—I didn't know of what.

She had something. A feeling for atmosphere. I looked back at the title of the story and her name again. I read the first sentence over, and then went on.

I put on slacks and a turtleneck sweater and a pair of loafers, without bothering to turn on the light, and went to the room of our maid Hilda, back by the kitchen, to get her to feed the baby while I went looking for Charles. But she wasn't there, and her bed hadn't been slept in. Then I remembered that she had expressed a desire at various times to go canoeing, and Charles had told her—more or less jocosely, as I had thought—that some dark night he would take her for a ride.

I left the silent house, and went down onto the boathouse float a hundred feet away. The canoe which we had rented with the cabin was missing. I stood looking out at the blackness of the water, straining my ears. There was no sound of voices, but after a while I heard what sounded like the drip of a paddle approaching, over the smooth, dead black water. I was filled with terror. I felt, with a sixth sense—I felt, though I could not see—that whoever was coming was alone.

"Charles!" I said. "Did she drown?"

It had me. I'll admit it had me. I don't mean that the writing was anything particular. No deft professional touches or literary words. Just plain and simple factual statements, like Vilena was telling something that she had to tell, and that you must believe, in answer to your questions. I could almost see her, in her white turtleneck sweater, with her large eyes straining at the darkness through which that dripping blade was coming towards her, down by the edge of the dead black water on the float.

The reason I asked the spontaneous question was that Charles could swim, and Hilda could not. Charles was extremely nervous, due to his war experiences, and it occurred to me that in his condition he might have accidentally overturned the canoe, and been unable to save her. It did not occur to me that it had been anything intentional. Charles was too much of a

gentleman—in a way he was too weak—to be a murderer . . .

I had first met Charles in London in the fall of 1940, a year before. He had been driving ambulances for the French, and had been through Dunkirk, and was badly war-shocked. I myself was a Belgian refugee, all my people killed, working in a hospital. It had been love at first sight between us, and we had been married after a month.

His wealthy and snobbish family over in America had resented our marriage because I belonged to a different religion, as he had told them in his cable announcing it. They had written him that they would not receive me. Consequently, when we returned to America a year later, when our baby was three months old, we had not gone to his home, but had taken this cabin up in New Hampshire, as a place to live quietly while Charles recovered from his war-shock and decided on his future.

It was autumn, after the season had ended, and we were the only residents on the lake, except for an old native and his half-grown nephew who lived on the opposite side, where they operated the country store from which we obtained our supplies. We had brought only the one servant, Hilda, with us—a big, blonde, rather stupid woman, whom we had engaged in Boston, where we had landed. In the simple atmosphere, shut off by ourselves, we had fallen into rather informal ways of living, allowing Hilda to occupy the living-room with us in the evenings, occasionally playing three-handed bridge together, and even eating our meals together. We treated her to an extent as a member of the family—in other words, not insisting that she keep her place.

It was inevitable, of course, that she would take advantage of it. I remember having noticed at times that she even addressed or referred to Charles by his first name. But while I naturally did not approve, it seemed a slight thing, hardly worth reprimanding her for, nor for their occasionally taking walks together along the lake shore. It did not occur to me that she might have developed a secret infatuation for Charles, and even less that he might have been so weak and neurotic as to yield to her crude animal charms, even for a single occasion.

Still, their absence together in the night, and the absence of the canoe, had made me uneasy and concerned. And when I heard the drip of the blade approaching over the black water, I had a feeling that something terrible had happened.

"Charles!" I said. "Did she drown? Did she drown?"

It sounded almost real, and eight years had rolled away from me, and I was a kid of seventeen spending the autumn with my uncle, and rowing on the black water and

diving for the drowned woman, and fighting with that hysterical, sobbing guy Koppelman to save his life, and having Mrs. Koppelman's kisses warm and fervent on my mouth.

God, she was a beautiful, black-haired woman, and the first woman that I ever kissed. And a boy can grow to be a man and still remember that, and remember it all his life, even though there'll never be another woman but Ruth now that I'll ever look at any more.

I was seventeen again. I was there, and I was in it. Because, except that the scene of the story was a lake in New Hampshire and not Big Moose Lake in Maine, and except that the people in it were named Charles and Vilena Lamarre like that, and the maid named Hilda, it was the Koppelmans almost to the life.

Calvin and Catherine Koppelman, I think their names were, though he always called her kitten. Nobody knew what the maid's name was, until Mrs. Koppelman gave it for her death certificate as Mabel Clane, which was the name she had been listed under at the agency where the Koppelmans had hired her in Boston four weeks before she died. I don't think it was ever learned where she had come from originally. She had left home, probably, and changed her name, like a lot of girls in domestic service do. Nobody ever turned up to claim her body, and nobody ever missed her much, I guess.

Catherine Koppelman, if that was her name.

I had never called her anything but Mrs. Koppelman. She was only four or five years older than I was, twenty-one or twenty-two, but wiser by all the world; or so she had seemed to me, at the age I was then.

Mr. and Mrs. Koppelman of Ellinville, Pennsylvania, and their nursemaid, who had the Tawney cottage eight years ago up on Big Moose Lake, way to hell and gone in Maine. . . .

I REMEMBERED the night they first arrived. It was a pouring night towards the end of September, and I was helping my uncle close his store. The lights of their station wagon turned in, and the car slushed to a stop outside.

"City people," my uncle said, peering out over his glasses. "Wonder where they can be heading for? Better put your slicker on, Bud, and see if they want gas."

The driver was already getting out, though. He came up onto the store porch beneath the eave pour, and pushed inside. He was a tall, spindly man in his late twenties, wearing a belted raincoat, with his blond hair hatless. He had a bony face and a hawk nose, and a kind of chinless mouth, and uneasy, light blue eyes.

"Is this Big Moose Lake Landing?" he said.

Only that wasn't the way he said it. He had the most awful way of stammering. He twisted up his face, wiping the rain from it with a handkerchief, with his mouth stretching in a hideous grin and the muscles of his neck like cords, getting out the words syllable by syllable, with a kind of drenched agony in his eyes. The sounds he really made were something like: "Is this bub-bub-Big! Muh-muh-Moose! Lul-lul-Lake! Lul-Landing?"

There is nothing funny about stammering when it's as bad as his was. It makes you ache to listen to it and it is painful even to remember. Because we were strangers to him maybe he was a little worse than ordinary. But he was still pretty bad, even after we had got used to him. I'll just say that he stammered in the most awful way with everything he said, and let it go at that.

"That's what we claim to be," said my uncle, pained. "What can I do for you?"

"Koppelman," he got it out. "Friend of Bill Tawney's of Philadelphia. Called Bill up from Boston yesterday, where Mrs. Koppelman and I had landed. Looking for a quiet place to stay for a while. Bill

offered us his cottage up here. Told me to get the key from you. I'm a little nervous," he added, twisting his mouth in his death's head grin.

My uncle opened his rolltop desk and fished around in the key drawer till he found the one tagged "Tawney."

"Finest season of the year," he said. "Blackflies gone. Lake water still warm and turning over. Woods all full of color. Danged fools all leave the end of August, never could see why. We're having a mite of rain now, but it'll clear away by morning, and we'll have a fine bright spell. How long you and Mrs. Koppelman plan on staying, Mr. Koppelman?"

Koppelman opened his mouth again, with his face contorted.

"Perhaps till after Thanksgiving, unless the pater and mater ask us home for it. They've always made a big thing of it. They might want us to be with them."

"Yep. I should think that anybody would want their folks with them for Thanksgiving, Mr. Koppelman. We make a kind of big thing of it down here in Maine, too. You come from Philadelphia?"

"Ellinville, near Pottstown," Koppelman stammered. "I've been across the past two years, though. It's Mrs. Koppelman's first visit to the States. She was born in Belgium."

"Tawney's cabin is around on the other side of the lake," my uncle said. "End of the road that goes around. Were you aiming on staying there tonight?"

"We didn't find any tourists cabins that were open," Koppelman got out.

"No," said my uncle. "There sure isn't any place. I might put you up in my quarters above the store tonight, with Bud here bunking in with me, if it was just a couple of men of you. Never had any woman staying beneath my roof before."

"Kuk-kind of you to think of it," Koppelman said. "But I'm afraid there are too many of us. We have the baby, and the nurse we got him in Boston."

His ears had reddened, for no apparent reason.

"Most domestics don't care for the country," he said. "We were fortunate to get her. Mrs. Koppelman needs some help. She's not so strong."

"Yep, I reckon," my uncle said. "They aren't today what their mothers were. Paint and cigarettes.

"Guess you can make out all right when you get there. Windows are boarded up, but not much to take them off again. Guess there are plenty of sheets and blankets. Fireplace wood on the back porch, and kerosene for the kitchen stove and the heater in the drum. It's about seven miles around, counting the twists and turns of the road. Only about two miles across the the lake, though. You could leave your car here and I could take you over in my power boat maybe a whole lot quicker, only its motor isn't working and it's got a hole in it and is kind of sunk. There's a canoe Tawney's got in his boathouse, anyway, and maybe an outboard motor, I don't know. You can putt or paddle over for your supplies after you get to living there. That's what most everybody does when they're here on the lake. Guess Bud had better take my car and lead you the way tonight.

"You'll want some supplies to take along with you," he added, going behind his grocery counter. "There'll be some canned goods in the house, and flour and sugar, most likely. But, let's see, you'll want milk and eggs to start off with, and coffee."

"Yes. Whatever you think of," Koppelman got out.

"Butter. Bread. Seen plenty of the war over there, I reckon," my uncle said, making out a list on the back of a sack, and estimating in his mind what unexpected business he might be having while they were up.

"I was in it," Koppelman managed, with his face contorted. "Drove an ambu-

lance. With the French. The pater and mater didn't want me to go, but I was twenty-five. A man has got to stand up for his rights."

"He sure has," my uncle said sympathetically. "Some parents are downright bossy. There was a fellow I used to know when I was a little shaver. His parents had always been real strict with him. He wasn't anything like so bad as you, but even so it made you plumb ache to listen—I mean he was kind of nervous, too. He used to go with my Aunt Nellie. His parents never would let him get married, though. How come yours did?"

"We were married in London," he said. "They didn't like it. They thought that I should wait till I was thirty-five. You'd think I had committed some awful crime. What made it a hundred times worse to them was Mrs. Koppelman's religion. They are awfully strong in theirs. They wrote me that they disowned me and that I was dead to them, when I cabled them. They've sent back every letter I've written them. They've been just fierce."

"I've got prunes and shortening down," my uncle said. "You'll need some maple syrup if you like pancakes. We've got some nice jars of olives if you like that sort of stuff. We lay in some right fancy goods for the summer people. Have you anything in mind?"

"Perhaps I'd better ask Mrs. Koppelman."

"Yep," said my uncle with a sigh. "You can't even buy groceries without asking 'em, it seems like, if you're married. Bud," he told me, "Step out and tell Mrs. Koppelman her husband wants her to come in, if she doesn't mind."

CHAPTER TWO

Sound and Fury

THAT'S how I come to first meet her. The rain had sort of slacked away. I went out, down off the porch, and she was just getting out of the station wagon in the light from the store.

She was wearing one of these transparent red raincoats with a hood. She was little, with the blackest hair and the reddest lips. Her eyes were a dark blue, with long black lashes curly from the dampness. The color of the eyes of night, I remember the words came to me as she looked at me.

(It was the first advertising slogan I ever thought of. I used it with the Duffee account a couple of years ago, which was where I met Ruth. They put a million dollars into a campaign built around it, and jumped their gross sales ten million dollars. They are still using it.)

"Mr. Koppelman wants you," I told her awkwardly.

It seemed to me that I stammered it.

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**TOUGH
SPOT
TEST**



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Mr. Kuk-kuk-kuk. Wuh-wuh-wuh-wants. Listening to a man who does it in that awful way will make you want to do it yourself, unless you watch. Though probably I didn't, really.

"Wants me?" she said.

She had a baby's milk-bottle held against her coat.

"My uncle thought you might need some supplies to take along," I explained. "Mr. Koppelman wanted you to help him pick them out."

"I was just going in to heat the bottle," she said.

She went up onto the porch and in through the door. I saw my uncle run his hand across his bald head and feel his collar button as she went towards him and Koppelman at the counter.

"Did you want me?" she said.

"Kuk-kuk-kuk!" Koppelman said, looking around at her. "Kuk-kuk-kitten!"

My uncle rubbed his bald pate again, and said, "I've got milk and eggs and butter, and—"

Then the door closed with its automatic closer.

I didn't go back in with her. I wanted to get a little breath of the cool rainy night into my lungs. I could feel my blood pounding. It wasn't right to be only seventeen. And what did that bony stammering loon have that I didn't have, except about ten years and maybe a million dollars?

There was a kind of "*Wa-wa! Wa-wa!*" sound inside the station wagon. I hadn't had the twins then—I wasn't baby-conscious. It sort of startled me. I looked in through the car window.

There was this blonde woman sitting in the corner of the back seat. She smiled at me, as if she realized that I had been startled, and it amused her. She turned on the overhead light.

"Alfred," she said. "The baby. It is getting about his feeding time. They always know."

She had a kind of placidly smiling face, with a broad, smooth brow, and a white kerchief tied over her yellow hair. Her eyes were brown, and rather wide apart. You always notice brown eyes particularly with a blonde.

I never knew what her name was, or anything about her, except that Koppelman had mentioned having picked her up in Boston. It was one of the few times—perhaps the only time—that I ever talked to her at all. It was the nearest I ever was to her, standing at the car window that rainy night they came, until the night I was diving for her in the lake. Still I remember her quiet look, and the few words we exchanged.

The principal thing about her was that she was restful. I suppose it was that about her that had got Koppelman. Maybe he didn't even care if she was beautiful. There is one kind of woman who gets a man at first sight, just by the way she walks and throws her eyes. But there is another kind whose effect may be slower, but who holds him when she's got him. I guess she was that kind.

"Yes, ma'm," I said. "I guess that's right. Are you the nurse?"

"Yes," she smiled at me. "Did Mr. Koppelman say I was, or do I just look it? Are you the grocery clerk?"

"No," I said. "I'm just up here visiting my uncle till I get called into the army. I come from East Orange, just outside New York."

"You aren't the native then?" she smiled.

"No'm," I said. "That's my uncle. A lot of summer people call him that. Though he isn't a native, really, either. He was born in Portland."

I didn't know just what to talk about to her. I didn't know anything about Boston, except that I would have liked to have gone to Harvard if it hadn't been for the war; and she had never been in East Orange, I guessed. I didn't know anything

about babies, to be able to talk about them.

"My uncle has the key," I told her. "It's only a few miles around the lake. I'll lead you to it. Mr. Koppelman is just getting some supplies."

"I'll be glad when we get there," she said. "It has been a long drive."

The baby was in a canvas cradle hooked on the back of the front seat. (We have two now for the twins.) It was sucking its fists, with its eyes closed, sort of squirming its head from side to side. It gave that plaintive "Wa-wa!" sound again.

"Is it a boy?" I said. "It sounds sort of sick."

"He's just waking up," she said. "Wait till he really does, if his bottle isn't ready. I suppose I might as well change him now."

She leaned forward, and unloosed the buckles of his straps. She picked him up expertly and laid him face down on her lap. She reached for a stack of something white on the rear seat ledge behind her, quite unconcerned. Diapers.

"I'll show you the way," I said again, backing away.

I backed my uncle's pick-up truck out of the shed in the rear, and drove it around in front, ahead of the station-wagon. I went into the store again, and helped stow the stuff they had bought into cartons, before taking it out. There is a lot that a woman thinks of to buy that a man doesn't, paper kitchen-towels and all kinds of bathroom and laundry soaps, and things like that, as well as fancy eatables. They had put in a good order, more than thirty dollars worth, just to start off.

There was the pad of telegraph-blanks we had on the counter for the convenience of customers, if they wanted to leave a wire for my uncle to phone in to Moose Lake Junction when the operator there came on duty at six in the morning; and when Koppelman had stammered out the question of what they were for, he wrote a telegram off.

It was to William C. Tawney, Locust Hill Road, Germantown. I phoned in the next morning to Moose Lake Junction, spelling out the names for the railroad telegrapher there:

"Catherine and I arrived with baby safely Big Moose Lake Landing ten p.m. after four hundred fifty mile drive somewhat fatigued but happy and secured key from store. Stop. Looking forward to restful sojourn. Stop. Secured excellent nursemaid Boston competent with infant and willing to assist Catherine in household chores. Stop. Raining at present but fair weather promised for tomorrow. Stop. Lake still warm so shall probably have swimming as well as canoeing. Stop. For the rest will devour your library. Stop. Regards. Calvin."

He didn't even bother to go over it and cut out the unnecessary words. There wasn't anything in his telegram which required a reply; and Mr. Tawney never did get around to writing him while they were there, I think. I just remember the telegram because it was how I learned her real name was Catherine, and what his first name was.

She had warmed the baby's bottle and taken it out to the nurse in the station wagon while I had been getting the truck out, and had come back in. She had a hand linked through his left arm while he wrote, nestled again him.

"'Fatigued but happy,'" she read with a little laugh. "'Looking forward to restful sojourn. Excellent nursemaid. Swimming and canoeing.' Oh, it's going to be wonderful, isn't it, Calvin?" she said a little breathlessly.

He made only the littlest gesture to pull away from her.

"Yuh-yuh-yuh," he said. "Yes. It ought to be all right, kuk-kuk-kitten."

He loved her, all right. A man couldn't help it. He was just weak. He loved that placidly beautiful blonde woman out in the station-wagon, too, who was feeding his baby now, with its wails stopped. And

that is a misfortune for any man, to love two women.

I drove the pick-up ahead of them, slowly, along the rocky winding road around the lake, with their bumping headlights following me in the rain. We drove up to Tawney's cabin around on the other side in half an hour, and I helped Koppelman unhook the weather door and unlock the door, and found the fuse-box for him in the front hall and put the fuses in, and turned on some lights. I went down in the basement and turned on the electric-pump, listening to the tank begin to fill up, because the first thing women want when they get in a house is plumbing.

I brought the groceries from the truck into the kitchen, and after I had done that I helped Koppelman carry in the last of their bags from the station wagon. They had a load of them on the tailboard under a tarpaulin, mostly expensive leather and striped airplane stuff, except one cheap cardboard suitcase that I guessed belonged to the blonde nurse. I left the luggage in the hall for Koppelman to distribute where it belonged, because the women were already getting things settled off in the other rooms.

I went outside again, around the house, and unhooked three or four of the winter shutters from the windows. I wouldn't need to get them all off tonight, I figured, just enough to give them some air. It would be easier to get them all off tomorrow in daylight. Then, too, it would give me an excuse for coming back.

It was while I was outside that I re-passed one of the windows where I had taken the shutters off, and saw the nurse inside the room beyond. She had turned on a small bureau light, but hadn't pulled down the shade. I guess she didn't realize that the shutters had been taken off.

It was the Tawney kids' nursery room, and she had put the baby in the crib in it. She was standing beside the crib, looking at a thermometer—to tell whether to put

another blanket on or take one off, I guess. Ruth does it a half dozen times a night now with the twins.

Koppelman came in the door while I was standing there outside, and went to the crib beside her.

"Little fellow all right?" he said.

"Yes," she answered.

"He's got his mother's eyes, all right," he said. "Funny little animal."

He put a finger under the baby's chin, and bent down and kissed him. He straightened up, and suddenly without a word he put his arms around her, where she stood there beside him, and her arms went up around his neck. They stood there, kissing and rocking, in silence. I stepped back, and tiptoed carefully away.

I guess I was pretty shocked. They were a grown man and woman, and they knew what they wanted, and knew their way around, which made it seem worse.

I got in the truck, started in up noisily, and drove off. . . .

MRS. KOPPELMAN came driving around alone in the station wagon the first thing the next morning. The rain had cleared away during the night, and it was a bright, sparkling morning, with the lake as smooth as glass. She had on slacks and a white turtleneck sweater, and a dark blue bandana, matching her eyes, around her head. She wanted some shelf-paper for the kitchen, a diaper pail, and milk. I got them for her while she waited in the car, and then filled her car up with gas.

"Just charge everything," she said, painting her red lips.

I couldn't help remembering the scene I had witnessed through the nursery window. I felt my face get hot.

I wondered if she knew anything, or guessed at all. Or maybe she just didn't care for their nurse, but she had been the only help they could get to come up here in the woods.

It was fine weather all October. The woods' colors hit their prime, and held on for a long time. Over across the lake, from around the Tawney cabin, you could sometimes hear the radio in the stillness, or sometimes shouting and laughing when they were swimming off the boathouse float—that must have been just Mr. and Mrs. Koppelman, since the nurse couldn't swim.

He sometimes asked if there was any mail when he came in—the mail for all the places around the lake was left with my uncle. But there wasn't ever any. Mr. Tawney was the only one who knew he was back, I guess, and he was probably waiting to write till he had some word about Koppelman's parents, whether the news about the baby had made some difference to them, or whether they were still as set against Mrs. Koppelman's religion. And Mrs. Koppelman, of course, having come from over there, with all her family dead, never had or expected any.

I HAD plenty to do, helping my uncle take stock and figure up his accounts for the year. And we still had the gas pump open, and I had to service it for an occasional customer. I had my uncle's power-boat to work on, too, to see if I could get it to float and the motor running. Uncle was awfully proud of his power-boat, and always made the occasion to mention it. But so far as I know

it had never run, and never even floated. I think that it was just something that had been lying off the wharf when he bought the store up there in 1916; and he had it down in his mind as something valuable, which he would someday salvage, and go roaring and streaking around the lake faster than a cyclone. I worked hard on it, and I did get it calked up, after a fashion, and up out of the mud so that it would float a little, stern down. But the motor was just a bunch of rust, and there was no sense in working on it.

I had a little boat proposition of my own, too, after I had given up the power-boat. The Riddenpath kid from Chicago had had a rowing wherry, a beautiful little mahogany boat with a sliding seat and a pair of racing sculls, which his father had given him for his birthday during the summer. Not quite so fast as a single scull, but a lot worthier; and when you stretch out your arms in one of them to take the water, and bend back with a long sliding pull, and carry forward again, feathering your oars, you can skim along in them, and it's just like music.

Well, the first time the Riddenpath kid had taken that beautiful little boat out, he had driven it onto some submerged rocks forty or fifty feet offshore in front of the Fralley cabin, trying to show off to the Fralley girl, and she had laughed at him; and he had been so mad that he had taken the butt of one of his sculls and had stove

<p>THEY'RE PROMOTING JIM TO THAT JOB I WANTED-THAT'S THE SECOND TIME THEY'VE PASSED ME BY- I OUGHT TO QUIT</p>	<p>JOHN-JOHN-JOHN-CANT YOU HEAR? DINNER'S READY! MAYBE THAT'S YOUR TROUBLE AT THE OFFICE</p>	<p>THEN MARY-I FEEL LIKE A NEW MAN WITH THIS PARAVOX HEARING AID AND I CAN HARDLY TELL YOU'RE WEARING IT</p>
<p>E. LATER JOHN- WE NEED A NEW ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT AND YOU'RE IT! NICE RAISE IN PAY, TOO</p> <p>Guaranteed by Good Housekeeping</p>	<p>FREE HOME HEARING TEST!</p> <p>Maybe a very slight hearing defect is holding you back -like thousands and thousands of others-why not play safe? Act today!</p> <p>TEST YOUR HEARING IN THE PRIVACY OF YOUR OWN HOME</p> <p>Send name and address or use this coupon</p>	
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a hole in its bottom, and then had banged the scull blade against the rocks and busted it, and had waded away and left it.

The Fralley cabin was only about half a mile away on the road around the lake, and not half that far by water. And after eyeing that boat from my uncle's pier every time I was down on it, I hadn't been able to stand it any longer.

If I'd written the Riddenpath kid, asking if I could have the use of it, he would not have answered, or would have said no, just to be nasty. I had taken it on myself to repair it, anyway. I had hauled it to shore one day, and up on the grassy bank by the Fralley landing, just below their summerhouse. I had taken the sculls home with me, and spliced the broken blade with copper bands and rivets at my uncle's workbench in the shed. It was good strong wood—western spruce, I guess—and was just split. I made a pretty neat job of it, adding a little weight to the blade, but not enough to make it clumsy. I put bands to match on the other scull, to make them even.

After that, I had undertaken to repair the hole in the wherry's bottom, going around the road to it in the evenings after supper, while it was still light enough to work. It was beautiful, laminated wood; and it would have taken a cabinet maker with all the tools and materials to have done a first-class job in it. But by tacking canvas over the hole inside and out, and stretching it tight with dope, and painting and varnishing it when the dope had dried, I did a fairly neat job. You might have to look twice to see where the hole was, I mean; and it was water-tight, anyway.

It was the evening I went around to take a final look at it that I saw the Koppelmans again, for the first time in about ten days.

I had taken to being at the workbench out in the shed or back in the storeroom counting supplies when they came over in

the mornings. I just hadn't wanted to think of her red lips any more, because it wasn't doing me any good. I knew that I was just a kid, and that there was a war ahead of me, and that there were maybe more important things. So it had been a while since I had seen either of them.

It was the end of twilight. There was some light still in the sky, but it was all dark silver on the lake, and the shore around was black. I was lying sprawled on the bank beside the wherry, rubbing the patch over with my hand, and feeling that the varnish was dry and the canvas tight, inside and out. I remember thinking that I could launch it tomorrow morning. If I had brought the sculls with me, I could even launch it now, out over the smooth darkling lake, with the sweep of the curved blades like flying, like music. I lay on the grassy bank, beside the dark silver water, in the black shadow of the shore, feeling that boat and loving it.

Then I saw the canoe coming, slowly, quietly drifting down along the shore. Tawney's aluminum canoe that they paddled over in each morning, but dark silver now as the water, and more mysterious and different.

The two of them were in it, sitting side by side amidships. Koppelman lifted his long thin arm, sweeping a sluggish paddle.

"Shall we go up to the summerhouse again, Calvin?" I heard her voice over the water, lazily murmuring. "We must be somewhere near it. We haven't been there for more than a week."

"Whatever you say, kuk-kitten."

"Steer a little to the left then, darling. There's a wharf, it looks like. It must be the place. But there used to be a boat out in the water in front of it, didn't there?"

"All the places are empty, anyway."

"But I love our summerhouse. Oh, Calvin, we've stopped moving! Are we grounded?"

"Ruh-ruh-rocks."

The drifting canoe had stopped out

there off shore, on the rocks from which I had rescued the wherry. I saw him put his arms around her and kiss her.

I lay on the black shore, clutching that wherry that I loved. In a minute I began to crawl away. I reached the graveled path beside the summerhouse, where the bare vines grew about the glassed-off windows, with the tiles and dead fountain and cushioned settles all inside. I crept across the small sharp blue stones on my hands and knees, trying not to make them creak. On silent grass again, I got to my feet, and reached the road in long careful strides, and ran down it headlong. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

Death Walks Quietly

I CAME back at ten o'clock, two hours later, with the sculls over my shoulder, when my uncle had been snoring for an hour. There was a wildness in me to drive, drive, drive. To smash the world. To rush and get away.

The canoe was gone on the black water. It had left no wake in the black night. Still I could see her red lips, and her eyes like the eyes of night, and the sweep of his arm around her.

I launched the wherry and got into it, putting the sculls in the locks and fastening down the thole-pins over the leather loomguards while I drifted. I put my feet in the laced leather holds. I paddled out past the shore rocks, and then stretched my arms to it, digging in, and hauling back, with the swift bow cutting through the dead smooth black water, headed down the long ten-mile length of the lake, as near as I could judge it without a star. But there was no song in it, and no music. Only a hammering drive to exhaust my muscles and drain my brain.

I didn't know that I was anywhere near the Tawney boathouse. I must have covered the whole lake. I didn't know at all

what time it was, though it was midnight, and I had been out two hours.

There was just the imponderable sense I had of shore near me. I rested on my oars, turning my head around. It looked as if I was over on the other side of the lake—the dim whiteness of the Tawney boathouse down by the water's edge; the cabin, dark and quiet up on the shore, could barely be seen.

"Calvin! Did you drown her?"

I held my oars feathered above the water, coasting, while they dripped.

"Calvin! I can hear your paddle! Tell me what happened, Calvin! Did you drown her?"

"It's Bud Young, Mrs. Koppelman," I said.

My port oar had bumped against the float. I had realized I couldn't get away in silence, without speaking to her. She was standing on the float edge in the darkness, in slacks and a white sweater, strain-out out. She seemed to clap her wrist up across her mouth, taking a step back.

"Oh!" she said. "What are you doing?"

"I was just out rowing," I said. "Has anything happened, Mrs. Koppelman?"

She breathed quickly for a moment.

"Mr. Koppelman!" she said. "He's out in the canoe—I thought he should be back by now. It's had me worried."

"He's out with your nursemaid, ma'm?" I said.

"Yes! Yes! I don't know why he should have gone out with her! I couldn't imagine—"

"How long have they been out?"

"Why, it must have been hours! I mean we all go to bed early. I just waked up and found them missing, and the canoe gone. I don't know how long ago!"

I had been out two hours myself, and hadn't heard any voices on the water.

Somewhere off over the dead black water, in the velvet night silence, it sounded then, a cry like a loon.

"Huh-huh-huh-huh!"

A watery, thin, inchoate cry, out on the lake, like a crazy, laughing loon.

"Huh-huh-huh-help! Huh-help! Huh-help!"

I pushed off from the float. I drove my blades in, sweeping around.

I laid myself to it. If I was tired, I didn't know it. I dug the blades in and hauled back on them, leaped forward in the slide, and lay back while the looms bent. And the water foaming, riffing off the bow, and sucking away in a boil behind.

"*Huh-huh-huh-help!*"

I don't know what kind of time I made. It seemed to me that I was making ten yards a second, as fast as a man can sprint. The cry was much nearer. I was headed for it. I was almost on it when I heard it again. In front of my bow, behind me, I felt something loom.

I dug the oars hard in, backing water. The wherry's bow, with way on her, struck something with a bump. An overturned canoe. I let go the oars, letting them drift sternward against the strakes. I stood up, kicking off my low sneakers, and peeling my pants down and off me with a jerk.

Koppelman's watery head and face came up beside the canoe.

"Huh-huh-huh— She's down there!"

I dived off.

I went down, and found her. Ten feet below the surface, and rolling. My outstretched hand slipped from her cold smooth arm, and then I couldn't find her again. I came thrusting up, sucker air, and dived again. Koppelman was clinging to the canoe and panting as I came up. I felt him going down again as I went down.

I found her again. I got her by the hair this time—those coils of heavy blonde hair. I held to her, though my lungs were bursting, kicking and fighting up through that black, strangling water. I broke surface, pulling her face above it, and reached for

the gunwale of the motionlessly drifting wherry. Her eyes were open on the water's surface. But she was cold. She was cold.

I caught the gunwale, and brought her to it. I held to her hair, keeping her face above, while I rolled inward, tearing my chest on the oar-lock. I knelt in the boat, with my hands beneath her armpits, and pulled at her.

Koppelman came up.

"You've got her!" he gasped. "You've got her!"

"She's dead!" I said hysterically. "She's dead! Help me, Mr. Koppelman!"

"She wanted me to!" he gasped. "But I didn't mean to do it! Oh, God, I didn't mean! It was an accident! I was shifting seats! Oh, God, I didn't mean!"

His lips sank below the surface for a moment.

"Oh, blast her!" he gasped. "Oh, Catherine!"

His head went down.

"Help me, Mr. Koppelman!"

But he had gone down, looking for something that she had had, I thought.

I pulled her up across the gunwale, over the wherry's thwarts. I rolled her over on her face, with the oars lying out as outriggers, while the wherry rocked. With her face over the gunwale, I tried to pump her lungs out. But she was very cold.

Koppelman hadn't come up.

Maybe he had been exhausted. But I was exhausted, too. I couldn't go down for him, not right now.

He hadn't stuttered. He hadn't stuttered at all. Just gasping. Beyond fear. Beyond the last fear. He hadn't stuttered to his God. He had gasped God's name, and his wife's, and had said it had been an accident, before God. Then, very quietly, he had gone down.

"Mr. Koppelman! Mr. Koppelman!"

But he didn't come up.

There were lights in my uncle's store on the shore in front of me. There were

lights in the Tawney cottage on the shore behind me, too. I was in the middle of the black lake.

A flashlight came jagging down to the store wharf. A car drove down onto it, with headlights.

"Bud? Bud?" the faint cry came.

"Drowned!" I croaked. "Drowned!"

But I didn't know if my voice carried at all. I didn't have a flash to signal back where I was.

I sat down and took the oars. Her body lay across the stern in front of me. That placid, beautiful woman, whose name I didn't know, with her deep limbs and yellow braids and her brown eyes staring. I couldn't bend my knees nor stretch my arms far. I pulled in little dips, as fast as I could, for the store wharf, with her arms and legs dragging over the sides.

Maybe I reached the wharf in nine minutes, maybe fifteen, pulling hard. But it wouldn't have made any difference if I had been on shore with her from the first moment. She was very cold when I found her in the water the first time.

My uncle was down on the wharf with some other men, trying to get an out-board started, when I pulled into the headlights of the car that had driven down on it—Dr. Denning from Moose Lake Junction. He had been driving past, on his way home from a delivery down in town, and had seen the store lights on and my uncle's flashlight down on the wharf, and

the voices out over the water; and he had stopped, bringing his car down.

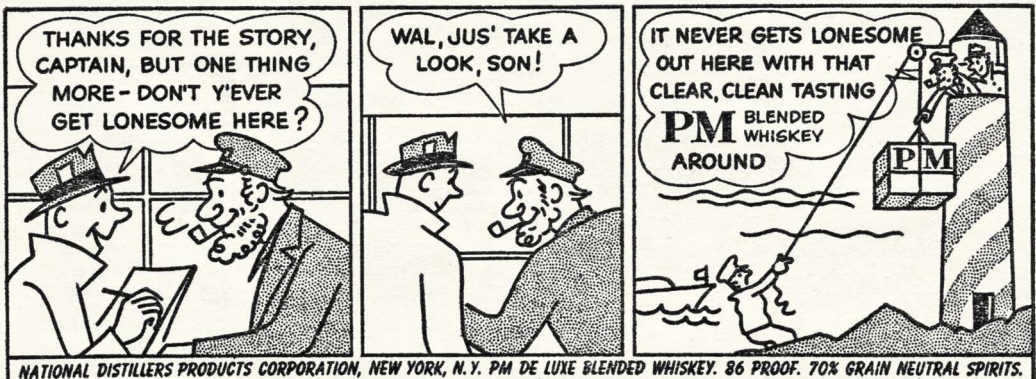
We got her out and on the dry planks of the wharf, and took turns pumping at her ribs. But her heart had stopped, Dr. Denning said. If she couldn't swim, she might have died of shock and gasping terror when she first hit the water.

There was a bruise on her forehead. She might have got it when she fell out of the canoe.

There were other men who came, that my uncle had phoned for. There were boats out there all night long. But they didn't find Koppelman's body till morning.

He had gone down deep, and his arm was wedged around a rock.

At some time I remember Mrs. Koppelman being down there on the wharf. Some boat had gone over to get her, or else she had driven around the lake in their station wagon. It was after the body of that beautiful blonde woman who had loved Koppelman, and whom Koppelman had loved, had been carried into the store, before I had finished diving, before I had put on dry clothes or dried my hair. I remember her sobbing, and clinging to me and kissing me. She had the kind of kisses that I had never known before, that make a boy into a man, and that a man can't ever quite forget. But my own lips were cold. They were wet and cold, as cold as Koppelman's were now.



It didn't mean anything. She was just unstrung. She kissed and clung to Dr. Denning, too, and would have to my uncle if he hadn't been so wary, and quicker to dodge than a spider. Dr. Denning told me afterwards, dryly explaining that a natural reaction to death is quite often a blind amorous abandonment, a desire for life as compensation. That it was not the first time a newly-made widow had flung herself upon him, even beside the death-bed, when she realized the finality of it. Nature's way of striking a balance, he said.

All night the boats with lanterns were out on the lake, searching for Koppelman's body. But that beautiful blonde woman who had been drowned with him, or before him, lay in the store beneath a sheet. Nobody knew her name until Mrs. Koppelman told it. Mable Clane.

NOBODY ever claimed her. She was buried by the county in Sanctus Cemetery, though I think that the Senior Koppelmans, who came up to take their son's body back with them, would have paid for her if the matter had been brought to their attention. They had a million dollars, and they believed in doing the right thing, according to their lights. They took Mrs. Koppelman and the baby back with them when they left, and they were sorry now.

The Koppelmans and their nursemaid, up on Big Moose Lake in Maine, eight years ago. . . .

"*They found Charles's body—*" I read on in Vilena's story. . . .

They found Charles's body the next day. His hands were torn, as if he had been clinging to the rocks at the lake's bottom. He was a good swimmer, and it might have been that his sensitive and highstrung nature could not endure the thought of having been responsible for Hilda's death, even accidentally.

Her death would certainly have been put down to accident if the local doctor, who served as coroner—a rather dry man with an unemotional nature—had not taken advantage of the windfall of an unclaimed

body to perform an uncalled-for autopsy. He determined that Hilda had been about five weeks *enciente*. And since that was a little less than the time we had been at the lake, and since there was apparently no other man but Charles with whom she might have consorted—my suggestion of the old storekeeper and his gangling adolescent boy having been dismissed as ridiculous—he was assumed to have been responsible.

I was profoundly shocked. I had been so confident of Charles's complete devotion. His and Hilda's conduct before me had been so circumspect, although the gangling boy did say that on the night of our arrival he had played the peeping Tom and had seen them embracing. Perhaps all wives are stupid that way, and are the last to know what is known to every curious boy.

This provided a possible motive for Charles's having drowned Hilda intentionally, to escape the stigma of having associated with a woman of her class, and also to avoid the hazard of losing my love. It was considered possible that she had played upon his neurotic nature, being a quietly determined woman, and had even demanded that he divorce me and marry her. A man of Charles's nature is easily swayed, and easily driven into a panic of rebellion when forced against his desires. What conflicts went on in his mind, however, were known only to him.

Charles's parents had been notified by wire, and came at once. They were quite wealthy and important, and refused to countenance any further inquiry into Charles's possible guilt. They were very pleased with the baby; and upon my expressing an interest in their church and inquiring how to become a member of it, they very graciously invited the baby and me to their home, which was necessary since Charles had had no actual money of his own, and had left me quite unprovided for. I have lived with them ever since, in their large mansion in a small town. It is a quiet life, but I go to the movies twice a week, and have the women's clubs. Next year, when Charles would have become thirty-five, a trust fund will become available to the baby and me.

Still the question lies brooding in my mind, even after the years, as I look at the broad shining brow of my boy, with a mother's constant anxiety and affection. Is he the son of a murderer? Or merely of a kind-hearted but weak man who let himself yield to a woman's crude temptation, and then regretted it; but who did not plan, and was himself the victim of, the accident which caused her death?

Well, that's the standard question which ends all True Murder Romance stories. I don't know the answer. I think that maybe Koppelman contemplated drowning her, and then got cold feet. And the

canoe did overturn accidentally, and with the shock and gasp of water that she took into her lungs she died before he could save her. Or I think that maybe he worked himself up into a neurotic pitch, with the frenzy of a repressed and thwarted boy, and in order not to lose his red-lipped Kitten, with her blue eyes of night, he did slam down the paddle on the head of that quietly beautiful woman, and tip the canoe over, and squawl for help while he let her drown. And got cold feet only when I came scooting across the black water and bumped into the canoe that he was holding on to. Got cold feet, and cold all over.

Yet he said, without stammering, that it had been an accident. He said it without fear, or past the last and utter fear. He said it to his God.

Myself, I just don't know any answers. I write scripts for radio plays that will keep the customers interested, that will sound like something that is really happening when they are put on before the mike. And that's all that I am interested in, how real they sound.

I can see her on the wharf that night while they were still diving for Koppelman's body, and at the Tawney place across the lake the next day while she was waiting for the Koppelmans, senior, to arrive, not knowing what to do. Twisting a handkerchief, with her lips bloodless, while my uncle and Dr. Denning patiently questioned her, as they had to do. And her answers, confused and harassed, not knowing all of them.

But she knew all the answers now.

It's almost a playing script, is what I mean. Only a few touches, a few changes for the great invisible radio audience. A dubbing in of sound effects.

I turn the pages back to the beginning, to see where I shall start.

I waked up at midnight to give my baby his bottle. I stood at the window listening to the lapping of the water on the pier

float. Somewhere I heard an owl cry, or perhaps it was a loon. In all the world that single cry, and the water lapping, were the only sounds. . . .

Mr. Rutherford had put down his antique Sicilian dagger paper cutter, with his pink face relaxed.

"You think you can do it without changes, Beaman?" he said fondly.

"Not more than one or two small ones, I hope," I said.

Mr. Rutherford frowned slightly.

"I'm afraid Miss Lamarre would be much dismayed if you changed a single word," he said. "She isn't just one of these bloodless professional writers, who pull the last page of their stories off the machine and rush in with them yelling for their checks, and then don't even read the book that their stuff's published in. This is her brain child. She loves it. We told her in our wire of invitation that it is to be put on this evening after the cocktail party, and she is naturally much excited at the prospect of being present while it is being dramatized to the great invisible radio audience. I know your instinct, Beaman. But just for once don't let your thwarted urge for creative work tempt you to butcher a perfect little story, and break her heart."

I swallowed that. I've been called worse than a butcher, by experts in the verbal meat trade. I stood up a little groggily, with the mag beneath my arm. Eight hours till the great invisible radio audience tuned in its ears to the T. M. R. hour. Who said that I wanted to do creative work? If I could script her story without changing a syllable, I'd ask for nothing more, except to go home to sleep.

But you just can't. If it's written to be read, it's one kind of thing. If it's written to be listened to over the air, it's something else again. You can't play an ear of corn, or eat a saxophone.

She had deep blue eyes with smoky lashes like the eyes of night. But she

didn't have an ear, not quite. She hadn't, for example, detected the difference between my double oar blade drip, feathered while I drifted, and what might have been the dripping of Koppelman's paddle returning to the boathouse float. And it hadn't been "Did she drown?" that she had whispered so tensely to me, but "Did you drown her?"

Only a slight difference, of course. Still I didn't want to change her story just to conform to what I had heard and she hadn't, or what I knew and she didn't. I just wanted to take it as she had told it and make it ready for the air. And if there was a difference in our memories about anything, I'd take hers, if possible.

I zoomed on an express elevator down to the Shea and Healy offices on the seventh floor, seventy below True Murder Romances' cloud-hugged pinnacle. I dived into my glass-cased cubicle in the radio-script department, tearing off my jacket, and plunked myself down at my typewriter, beginning to write it out in dialogue, straight. As she had written her story. Starting with Vilena's waking up to feed her baby and realizing that Charles had not come to bed, and feeling alarmed as she stood at the window listening to the quiet black lake water lapping down on the float.

(There's a splasher in a tub at the sound-effects mike which you use for anything like that—lake water lapping, lady taking a bath, or rush of giant combers over a sinking ship at sea, depending on how hard the sound effects man churns the splasher.)

And then discovering Hilda gone, too, and going down to the boathouse float, and hearing the drip of the oars approaching. And then flashing back to how they had met, and how they had picked up Hilda from an employment agency in Boston. And up to the drownings and the post mortem on Hilda, which had given Charles a possible motive for her murder.

CHAPTER FOUR

Murder by Midnight

I WROTE it by the book, just reducing the descriptive passages to sounds, not changing a word of it. And the typing babes clicked the script out like machine-gun fire in sextuplicate, one copy for each of the five actors in the cast and one copy for the files. My uncle and I appeared in it in a very minor way, he as Sheriff Smert, the native storekeeper, and I as Cy, a gangling youth. The copy was done by four P.M. which, for a twenty-seven minute script with a lot of little different scenes in it, was good tight going.

And I tried it out in Number 5 broadcast room at the Consolidated studio, down on the fourth floor, with five old reliables who were able to read any part that was handed to them, from a circus elephant to a dying mother. But with the first sound effect they began to laugh, with a kind of hysteria sweeping through them. And having once started, they kept it up at intervals all through the reading, even the scene of my diving for the drowned woman and Koppelman saying his word to God and going down, where God knows they shouldn't have.

It's one of the worst damn busts you can have, to have even the actors laughing at your script. The thirteen million T. M. R. Hour fans are pretty serious, and they take their murders straight. They'd think we had turned into one of these comic things that have the four apes in them, and wouldn't even listen to an Hour again.

I would have to throw in that hand. Not the first time that I had had to toss a first draft away, and sometimes three or four, before I got it to sounding right. But never before with such little leeway to the broadcast bell. I ran, not walked, to the staircase, and back up to Shea and Healy's four at a time.

It wouldn't do any good to try tinkering with it, changing a little bit of it here and there. That would be all right if I had my usual week, maybe. But the time was too short. I should have to do it clean from the beginning, with a new angle, a new approach.

The closing bell had rung when I dashed back into the offices. I grabbed a couple of the outflowing typists by their little waists, hauling them back to stay on deck with me.

I sat down at my machine, and I began to click.

I started with Vilena and Charles returning to the boathouse float after canoeing, not at her bedroom window listening to the black water lapping. I started with a few words of conversation between her and Charles, and I kept right on. I wrote it so it sounded right, and was right, however it might read on a printed page with glossy illustrations in True Murder Romances. I wrote it without corrections, steadily and straight out, while the minute-hand went sliding around the clock like seconds, and the girls took the copy from me page by page and typed it out on their own machines.

It was eight by the time I had finished the last page; and there wouldn't be time for even one rehearsal. I grabbed the copies, and went leaping down the stairs again. From the elevator shafts beside the staircase, as I rounded each landing, the

voices of hilarity and literary joy went shooting up and came shooting down from the T. M. R. party, which was still going strong. And maybe it would keep on going, I prayed, for the next hour or more, and Mr. Rutherford and Vilena would forget all about the time. For neither one of them was going to like the way I had had to change her story, if they heard it. They weren't going to like it at all.

I went sprinting past the reception girl in the Consolidated studio to Broadcast 5 again. Jessie and Estelle, Ed Williams and Jay and Herbert were waiting like old troupers, with Mr. Graham, the pink-faced announcer who did the commercial, and the sound-effects man, Gus Schmid, and the organist. I shuffled their copies to them. They wouldn't have much more than time to read it over to themselves, to get the new dialog, before the bell.

"Same parts," I said. "Jessie, still cute little Vilena. Estelle, still quiet Hilda. Ed, still Charles. Jay and Herb, still old native and dumb boy. Same setting and same general action. Just conversations and point of attack changed a little around. I think it's got it. It has to."

The announcer had just gotten into his introduction when I saw a page at the broadcast-room door.

"Mr. Rutherford and the authoress in the reception room for you, Mr. Young."

I wiped my face and palms with my handkerchief, and went on out.



AT LAST! A DRESSING AMERICA'S BEEN WAITING FOR

KREML KREME Dressing

MADE ESPECIALLY FOR STUBBORN HAIR

IMPORTANT: KREML KREME never leaves any white flakes or sticky residue on hair as so many creamy dressings do.

You can't beat this sensational new KREML KREME to control hair that won't stay put. Marvelous after shampooing — a real test. Also has added advantage of relieving dryness of BOTH hair and scalp — removes itchy dandruff flakes.



She was Koppelman's Kitten, all right.

She was at the front picture window of the reception room, which looked out at the plaza, with the awnings of the restaurant down below which was a skating-rink in winter, and all the flags flying on their tall staffs.

She was wearing a leopard coat, though the September day was warm, with her wistful, red-lipped face beneath a veil-fringed feather hat; with her dark blue, black-lashed eyes, and her hair like a crow's wing. She had a copy of the new issues of True Murder Romances clasped with her alligator purse against her breast.

A boy about a head shorter than she was stood in front of her, holding her hand. He wasn't Mr. Rutherford, because Mr. Rutherford was almost five feet six, and had a bald pink head.

He was a calm, intelligent-looking boy, with a broad shining brow and smooth, light-brown hair. He had steady brown eyes as he turned his face to look up at her. He seemed older than eight. He looked maybe ten. But he must be Alfred, who had been the baby. And I knew that I was right.

She turned around, and saw me.

"Mrs. Lamarre, the authoress?" I said.

"Yes," she said. "That's my pen name. I don't know if my in-laws would like it. Are you Mr. Beaman Young, the director?"

She didn't know me. I shouldn't have known myself, I guess, the gangling boy that I had been, after four years of war and four of peace. And I had been Bud Young, not Beaman.

"Right," I said. "Where's Mr. Rutherford?"

"He went dashing back up to his offices to get the fan mail that has come for me," she said. "He forgot it. He'll be down in a minute. A wonderful response from readers, he told me. Already more than fifty letters. I'm crazy to see what they say."

"I'm sure you are," I said.

"He really has a lot of money, hasn't he?" she said.

"Mr. Rutherford?" I said. "Oh, definitely. All editors roll in it."

"Is it really true that he's a bachelor?"

"Sad but true," I said. "Like all True Murder Romances."

LONG smoky lashes still, and dark blue eyes. But all eyes are blue or brown, unless they're pink. Red lips. But you buy that in a stick. The loveliness of her face was a tissue-paper. There was nothing at all behind.

Mr. Rutherford came back to join her then, in his gaudy tweeds, with his fruity breath, and his face as pink and smooth and innocent as a pink Easter rabbit. And don't get me wrong—I like old Rutherford. He's just a romantic boy of fifty-three, and he has all women up on pedestals, and he sees the world through glasses as roseate as his face. He couldn't have made such a success of True Murder Romances if he had ever changed the diapers of twins.

"Kitten! Here they are. Just the first batch, but already it's a marvelous response. Beaman has introduced himself to you, I see. He's a married man, I should warn you, Kitten."

So she had already confided her nickname to him, even if maybe not yet her real name. And I could swear that he almost stuttered it, like Koppelman.

He handed her the big manila envelope he had under his arm, as he led her towards the broadcast door. He had been to too many broadcasts, and knew the way. I couldn't head them off.

She had taken the envelope a little greedily, unwinding the red string from the tab and pulling forth the contents, as they went down the corridor towards the broadcast room. I took the quiet boy by the hand, following them. I like kids, and I could feel his hand responding to my

grip. It's hard for a boy not to have a father. And to have such a mother, perhaps.

"Look, Mr. Rutherford," she said, "a postcard. 'Just a line to say your story, *Was My Husband a Murderer?*, is the most gripping and powerful I have ever read.' And why, here's a letter from—"

She dropped it on the marble floor.

I picked it up, and handed it to her. It was a long manila envelope with a printed return address on it, "Franklin C. Young, Sheriff, Aliopstook County, Big Moose Lake Landing, Moose Lake Junction, Maine." Addressed in my old uncle's illegible scrawl to Mrs. Vilena Lamarre, care of True Murder Romances.

She held it against her breast a moment. She remembered my uncle, the address and title. He had frightened her a little with all his questions eight years ago, perhaps.

We had reached the broadcast room door. It was eight minutes still before we went on the air. Maybe Mr. Rutherford would remember something else that he wanted to go back up to his offices and get, I prayed, and maybe the elevators would stick on his way up and back. I tried to think of something for a stall.

I introduced the cast to her and him, and I showed her the mike where the actors stood, and the organ mike, and the sound-effects mike, with the door beside it to make the sound of a door, and the bureau drawers to make the sound of bureau drawers, and the tub of water for water lapping or a bath or hurricane, and the rubber squawker that was a baby's cry.

She shivered a little with distaste when I told her what it was. But she wasn't really interested so much as authors generally are, in the actors and the mikes and how it was all put on. She had that letter from my uncle in her hand, and she wanted very badly to read it. While as for Mr. Rutherford, he had seen it all before.

I led them into the sound-booth. The

T. M. R. Hour isn't an audience show, of course. No laughter or applause are wanted. The business is all too deep and grim. But there are chairs for four or five listeners in the booth. For authors and sponsors, like her and Mr. Rutherford and the boy.

She had opened my uncle's letter, and was reading it avidly beside me before she sat down. I could have helped reading it myself, but I didn't. My uncle wrote a tough hand, which was hard for the uninitiated to decipher, but I knew it of old. And standing by Mr. Kelly, the sound-mixer, I could read it over her shoulder, from the corner of my eye, in half the time it took her to make it out.

My uncle had gone all overboard for her, and down to the lake bottom.

Dear Mrs. Lamarre:

Your story, "Was My Husband a Murderer?" was sure a powerful one. It reminded me an awful lot of something that happened down here in Maine eight years ago to a man named Koppelman and the nursemaid he had for his baby, which only proves that there is nothing stranger than truth.

I sure sympathized with you, Mrs. Lamarre, on the way your nursemaid and husband treated you. I am glad that there was no one to cast question on you. In the case I cited, the lady whose husband was drowned, Mrs. Koppelman, didn't explain why she was down on the float at midnight. But maybe it was the same with her as with you, and she had waked up to feed her baby, only she couldn't think of it to tell us.

I am a great True Murders fan. Will look forward to hearing the broadcast of your powerful story over their Monday night hour on the Green network from half past eight to nine, which is my favorite broadcast. Only that is half past seven to eight, our time in Maine.

Yours respectfully,
Franklin C. Lubby
(P. S. Over)

She looked up from the letter at me with a bright smile. It was almost as if she were gloating over me. Yet I don't think she knew I had been reading it. I think she just felt suddenly relieved, and suddenly triumphant, because my uncle had questioned her so hard eight years ago as to why she had been down on the boat-

house float in the silent midnight—he had asked her about that particularly. She hadn't thought then of having waked up to feed the baby, and of having suddenly found Koppelman and the maid gone, and of going down and finding the canoe missing, to explain it. She hadn't thought of it then.

She was relieved and triumphant. Relieved of the burden of that dark question which she had now answered. She had written her story for my uncle, and for anyone in the world who might still have doubts of her. It had been something she had had to tell, and that you had to listen to, and believe in. That had been the reason of its simple force. As if she had been sitting there, answering your questions.

"When does the broadcast begin?" she said a little breathlessly.

I SWALLOWED, looking at the clock. "I had to change it a little," I said. "I wrote a version that followed your story to the dot, but it didn't seem to click. I had to write another.

"We've still got a few minutes," I interjected, as Mr. Rutherford looked at me with pink reproach and she frowned. "I asked the actors to stand ready to run through the beginning of the first version that I did, if you wanted. But you'll see yourself that it wouldn't do at all."

And I gave them the signal from the window to start the thing as she had written it, and as they had tried to read it this afternoon: *I waked up at midnight to give the baby his bottle. . . .*

Wa-wa-wa-wa! the sound man started it with his squawker.

It came through the speaker in the sound-booth.

"Good heavens!" she said, putting her hands towards her ears, with an angry face at me. "What's that hideous sound? It isn't in my story!"

"It's the baby waking up for his bottle,"

I said. "They always know their feeding time."

Wa-wa! Waw!

The cast out there were all laughing, as they had this afternoon. In the booth the brown-eyed boy, who had been a baby eight years ago, was smiling superiorly, and Mr. Rutherford was twisting in his seat uncomfortably.

"Vilena wouldn't be able to hear the water lapping down on the boathouse pier, you see," I explained a little tiredly, "or the lone loon giving his scream of maniacal laughter out over the lake. She would be rushing to change the pants on that baby and warm his bottle for him and stop his yells. But babies don't get their bottles at midnight, anyway. The hour of the midnight feeding is two A.M."

They were all laughing. I motioned them to cut the scene, before they had started a word of dialogue. The minute hand had moved around the clock.

"So I had to change it just a little," I said, sweating. "I made Hilda the wife, and Vilena the nursemaid they had hired. But it's still a good story."

The play was on. . . .

Water lapping.

"Oh, gug-gug-God. Hilda's there on the float! She knows we've been out again, Vilena. She's waiting for us!"

"Drown her, Charles! Drown her!"

"But, oh, gug-gug-God, I can't! I love her!"

"Drown her. Drown her now! You promised me you would, down in the summerhouse! Drown her, Charles! Tonight!"

Water lapping.

"Is that you, Charles, with Vilena? You might as well come in. No need of trying to dodge me like a sulky, guilty boy. Really, do you think it is quite fair? I don't wish to make a scene, but this cheap, foolish girl—"

"Lul-lul-listen! Lul-lul-listen! Kuk-kuk-kuk! Kuk-kuk-come out in the canoe

with me, Hilda, and lul-let us tut-tut-tut-talk this over. Get out of the canoe, Vilena. Get in, Hilda. We will tut-tut-talk this over."

"Perhaps we can talk it over better alone, Charles. I never see you alone at all any more. Since we came up here with this girl— She seems to have made you crazy—"

"I kuk-kuk-can't help it. Lul-let's just paddle a little, and not talk about it."

"You don't need to talk, Charles, if you don't want to. But just think it over in your own mind, without that girl with you to destroy your sense of values. Just what does she mean to you?"

Water lapping. . . .

Koppelman's Kitten sat with my uncle's letter in her hand. She had turned it over to the back. Slowly she crushed it in her fist. She looked at me with eyes of hate.

She got up, and was coming at me. So help me, she had that antique Sicilian dagger of Mr. Rutherford's in her cute little fist. I guess she had picked it up for a remembrance during the cocktail party.

But it was really sharp. It went slicing through my new ninety-dollar suit before I had caught her wrist and twisted it from her. And maybe nicked a little skin on my ribs beneath.

"Catch!" I said to Mr. Rutherford, as her face went white, and she keeled over.

I let him pick her up. He needed the exercise. I picked up my uncle's letter where she had crumpled it on the floor.

There was the postscript he had written on the back.

P. S. About those Koppelmans I mentioned, it always kind of seemed to me that Mrs. Koppelman was more the nursemaid type, and the blonde lady who was their maid more the type of wife. If it had been that way, I'd have had the irons on that little red-lipped lady quicker than you can slap a blackfly in August. It would have been a perfect set-up for murder. But I guess your story proves it wasn't. Will be listening for it, as I say.

Respectfully,

F. C. Young.

Well, my uncle was listening to it right now, up there on his broken-sprunged old sofa in his living-room above the store at Big Moose Lake Landing. Unless he had left his radio to call up Dr. Sawtelle, the coroner, and the county prosecutor to ask for a quick grand jury. . . .

It had been my fault. I had made the mistake that first night, when Koppelman had spoken about getting Mrs. Koppelman to come into the store and help select supplies, and I had assumed that she was Mrs. Koppelman. She had enjoyed the pretension of being Mrs. Koppelman in my eyes, when she realized my mistake, and had got Koppelman to live up to it, as a joke, he had no doubt thought.

I had made a mistake of just one word, too, in the only conversation I ever had with that beautiful quiet woman who was Koppelman's wife, out in front of the store that night. I had asked her if she was the nurse, and she had said yes. She had meant that she was a nurse—she had been in the hospital in London where Koppelman had met her. . . .

There's no capital punishment in Maine. And if there were, it wouldn't be for a witch like her, with her blue eyes of night. I think it was five years that they gave her, when she pled to false pretenses, or something like that. But she had had her eight years with the Koppelmans, senior, already, which had been a tomb itself. She'll never get any of their money, anyway, nor any of the brown-eyed boy's.

Brown eyes. Hers and Koppelman's were blue. And two blue-eyed parents rarely have a brown-eyed child. It had been the color of the boy's eyes which had told me my script was right.

I'm going to see that that quietly beautiful blonde woman who was born Catherine van Groot, and who died a nameless Mabel Clane, is buried sometime where she belongs, over in her own country, under her own name and religion, whatever it was. She had a right to it.

By John D. MacDonald

GET OUT OF TOWN

*A city without honor—a cop without glory—
and night guns whispering a strange verdict—
“You made your bed, copper, now fry in it!”*

HE CAME down the dark street toward the car with Sally Owin after the double feature and he was wryly amused at the way they had to keep telling each other, through shallow laughter and unfunny jokes, that everything was really going to be all right.

The curbing was high and Sally stood behind him as he bent over to fit the key into the lock. They came around both ends of the car, silent and purposeful.

“Go home, Sally,” he said flatly. “Run!”

She screamed as they hit him high and low, bearing him down, his head thudding against the black metal side panel of the car. There were three of them. He slammed his knee up into one of them and, turning to struggle to his feet, he saw the distant streetlight, saw the broad blue shoulders of the cop who stood, his head self-consciously turned from the sounds, the scrape of shoe leather on concrete, the grunts of effort, Sally’s second scream.

One of them went high on his shoulders and he twisted convulsively. The

*There were three of them,
and they hit him high and
low. . . .*



man was catapulted onto the shining roof of the car, scrabbling with his fingernails, sliding slowly over the far side.

But as he turned he saw the glint of metal banding a fist. He half turned but the heavy brass hit him solidly in the middle of the forehead. Consciousness was a grey, swirling place of weakness, and he felt himself being rushed back against the wall of the dark building. His knees like water. One of them was on each arm and the third one came up, his words echoing hollowly through the temporary anesthesia of the blow.

"Durgen, this is from Larry. He's afraid you won't leave town. He's afraid you'll get wise. This is from Larry, your pal."

Bus Durgen shut his eyes, relaxed his neck muscles, sagged into the hammerblows of the punches. He opened his eyes as he heard the sobs tearing at Sally's throat. A blow tore his underlip into sagging wetness, driving a splinter of tooth into his tongue. She came at the man who was throwing the punches, her hooked nails reaching for his eyes, her shoes hammering his shins, a blonde fury with blazing eyes.

The man cursed and backhanded her with sullen force, driving her to her knees. It wasn't her tea party. She should have gone home. This wasn't for her. Bus tore both arms free with one white blaze of anger. He ignored the man on his left, got both hands on the throat of the man on his right and slammed the narrow head soddenly against the bricks of the wall. As the man slumped, Bus Durgen, in one continuous motion, spun back and drove straight ahead with a thick right fist. The man who had cuffed Sally bounced back against the side of the car, rebounded onto his face. His face hit flat against the sidewalk with a sound that was like the slap of a wet towel.

The third man stood half crouched and there was a gun in his hand. A thin line

of teeth gleamed against the night, disclosed by the twisted upper lip. Bus realized that the man was frightened, and that he would shoot.

A black object arched toward the man with the gun. As his head turned, startled, Bus kicked in panic at the wrist which held the gun. The barrel of the gun dug into his shin, and the weapon sailed up into the darkness. As the man turned, Bus caught the wiry wrist, pulled him back, and, with one hand on wrist, the other clamping the elbow, he drove the forearm down with all his strength against the sharply lifted knee.

The man gave a thin, gasping scream and fell, rolling from side to side, his eyes wet and shining in the glow of the distant streetlamp.

Sally made small, whimpering noises. Bus picked up the purse she had thrown at the gunman, and he unlocked the car door, handing her the purse as he helped her in.

The lights glared whitely and he drove slowly to the corner. He reached across Sally, rolled down the window and called out, "Go back down the alley, officer, and pick up your friends."

"Yes sir, Mr. Durgen," the cop said, his voice neither eager nor sullen. Just flat and matter of fact.

He parked in front of the emergency room of the hospital. Sally showed him the fragments of the mirror that had been in her purse. There was a touch of hysteria in her tone as she said, "This means seven years bad luck, Bus."

He clamped his big hand on her knees, steadying her. "I told you to go home but I'm glad you stayed. And now you're part of it, Sally. From now on I can't leave you alone. They'll take it out on you. Come on in with me."

The corridor had a bitter antiseptic smell. The interne clattered his coffee cup into the saucer, took Durgen over under the light. "Two stitches in the lip, friend.

And tape the forehead. You have rough friends."

He was clever with the curved needle. He said, "Don't smile, friend, and don't kiss anybody. Eat carefully. In a few days the stitches will come out."

It was then that Sally showed her skinned knees. The interne swabbed them clean, painted them and put thin strips of gauze across the pavement burns.

Bus gave him a ten dollar bill, turned with Sally toward the door to see Wallace, the grey and sardonic police reporter, leaning against the frame.

Wallace said, "The hammer man of the ex-Commissioner of Public Safety now takes a hammering. It was a great fight, but who won, Ma?"

"I got fresh with Sally and she clipped me," Bus said.

"I don't know my own strength," Sally said.

Wallace went with them out to the car. Bus got behind the wheel, Wallace near the right window, Sally between them.

"All this amuses me," Wallace said.

"Glad we're keeping you happy," Sally said bitterly.

"Test tube democracy," Wallace said drearily. "Here we had a clean, tight little city under the powerful paw of John Gordon, Commissioner of Public Safety. You were his muscles, Bus. And John had the misfortune to have a coronary. So Larry Drass, kept neatly underground by you and Gordon, pops up into the air and pushes the rubber-stamp mayor into installing his brother-in-law, Sherman Lurat, in the vacated position. The right guy for the position would have been Louis Hinton, but Louis would have been just as hard on Larry Drass as old John was. Sherman Lurat doesn't quite dare fire you, Bus. So now Larry is encouraging you to quit. I rather imagine that if you don't discourage, he'll have you shot."

Bus felt Sally stiffen beside him.

"Why don't you put all this in your paper, Wallace?" he asked, his voice distorted by the stitches in his lip.

"The managing editor has a strange affection for advertising revenue, Bus. A write-up like that would put Larry on our tail. He couldn't do much before. Now he's out in the open. Good old Larry. Wine, women, gambling and song. Only he doesn't indulge, himself. He just makes it possible for his fellow citizens to do so. Public spirited, that boy. Off the record, Bus, what are you going to do? Why don't you get the hell out of town?"

"This is my town," Bus Durgen said. "I stay."

Wallace pushed down the door handle on his side and stepped out. "Don't be too stubborn, Bus. You'll be dead a long time."

He walked away.

Sally started to cry after he had driven two blocks. He didn't know she was crying until they passed a street light and he glanced over at her and saw the tear streaks on her cheeks. She sat with her face blank, her head against the back of the seat, the tears running down in quietness and dignity.

"Stop it!" he said hoarsely. "Stop!"

"Do you owe me anything, Bus?" she asked in a small voice. "Do you owe me your life? Do you want to stay alive for me?"

"Forget what Wallace said," he said. "They can't take a chance that big." But he knew that they could. His mind slipped uneasily over the thought of death, veered quickly away. He stopped in front of the small apartment house, turned out the lights, pulled her toward him. He held her in his arms until she stopped trembling.

"When are you going to marry me, Bus?" she asked.

"Any minute now."

He walked her to the door, waited until her elevator had gone up. He stood in

the darkness outside, carefully put a cigarette in the corner of his mouth away from the stitches, lit it, sucked the smoke deep into his lungs. He was a big man with a deceptive air of placidity. Standing there in the night he savored the town, tasted the flavor of it. In some subtle way the very streets looked different. Even the streets laughed. The greedy laughter that was a reflection of Larry Drass. The city had become a jungle. To the quiet middle classes it would appear not to have changed. They would not know the jungle in which they lived.

TOM CARD, the Deputy Chief, was a burly man in his early fifties, with a seamed, reddened face, small grey eyes. He looked steadily at Bus Durgen. "A little working-over, eh?"

"I didn't come to make a complaint, Tom."

"You're too smart for that, Bus. What could I do about it? I could smack my thick head against a stone wall and lose my retirement. But nothing more. How do you think I feel about that, Bus? The strongest laundry soap in the world wouldn't make me feel any cleaner. How does a man scrub his soul with a rough brush?"

"What are my chances, Tom?"

The deputy chief shrugged. "You'd better run for it, lad. Six years ago you put a twist on Larry's nose that plastic

surgery couldn't correct. He loves you for it. He'll have you buried under the public rest rooms."

"All I came for, Tom, is a permit. And a gun out of your collection."

Tom Card drummed thick fingers on the desk top. "What can I lose? Only my pension. What's that? Just money. A medium of exchange, they keep telling me. A nice big thirty-eight special, or something more compact?"

"The flattest thirty-two automatic you have, Tom. I haven't carried a gun in over five years."


Card put a gun on the desk. "This is one of my pets. Belgian. Nice action."

* * * *

Bus thought that going into the private office of the Commissioner of Public Safety was like one of those trick movie shots. He had gone in there so many times, into the familiar paneled office, had seen, so many times, the blunt, strong face of John Gordon, the white, coarse hair, the grin of combat.

But the vision of John Gordon faded and in its place there was a small man. His name was Sherman Lurat who, as attorney for Larry Drass, had carefully skirted the edge of the law for so long that he had made a simulation of expansive honesty a part of his personality.

The dark hair, parted on the side, was combed carefully in thin strands over the white and gleaming skull. His eyes were



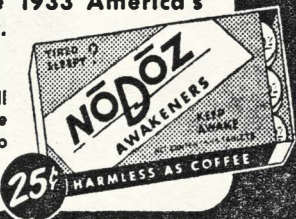
Yoo Too-o-o

can keep awake when you have to, with a NoDoz Awakener; since 1933 America's famous wakeup tablet.

HARMLESS AS COFFEE

Why take a chance at the wheel—fall asleep in a movie—yawn thru a bridge game? It is easy, safe, convenient...to

KEEP AWAKE WITH



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as dull and expressionless as tar melting in the summer sun. The thick, too-red lips were spread in a constant, good-humored smile.

He wasn't fat, but there was a look of fatness about him, a look of fat living, a hotel-room look, a manicure, bourbon and water, benzedrine, barbituate and blondes look.

He jumped up from behind his desk and came eagerly over to Bus Durgen, both hands outstretched, a look of concern on his face. "My dear boy! What on earth happened to you?"

"Cut myself shaving," Bus said.

Sherman Lurat clucked. "Well, I'm glad you're able to be up and about, anyway. We have a lot of work to do." He scurried back to his desk, picked up a small mechanism and handed it to Bus. "As Commissioner of Public Safety, Durgen, I am concerned about the placement of our traffic lights. This device is a counter. I want you to personally make a survey of traffic at each of our traffic lights. I want a noon hour count, twelve to one, and a count from five to six. All cars coming into the intersection. You take your position and push down on this little lever for each car. That automatically records each one and gives you a total figure."

Bus stared at him. "You want me to stand on a corner and count cars? With this thing?"

Sherman Lurat smiled. "Of course, if you'd prefer not to do this sort of work, it will be necessary for me to employ someone who will."

"Oh, I just adore to count things, Mr. Lurat. Nothing I like better. I'll just count like crazy."

Lurat licked his lips. "I—ah—thought you would. There are four hundred and eleven traffic lights in the city, Durgen. I want a detailed report."

Bus smiled until the stitches began to hurt his lip. He left the office.

From the outer office he called the bank where Sally worked. The girl said, "Miss Owin hasn't come in today."

Sweat made his palm slick as he hung up the phone. He called her apartment. The phone rang a dozen times. No answer.

He sat heavily behind his desk, staring at the phone, the knots of muscle ridged at the corners of his jaw. This wasn't the way it was supposed to be. They had moved the pieces on the board too fast. They had been more eager than he had thought.

He looked up the number of the Double Deuce, dialed it with a steady finger. "Double Deuce," a harsh voice said.

"Give me Drass."

"And who the hell are you, friend?"

"This is Durgen. Drass is expecting me to call."

He sat and held the phone and he could visualize the interior of the Double Deuce, a night-time place that would be jaded by daylight, an abandoned set for a B picture. He could visualize Larry Drass coming to the phone. Larry, the young-old man, blond hair flecked with grey, languid, bored, with his clipped British accent, his crisp tweeds, his new air of victory.

Durgen could taste the hate—a film on his tongue, a rasp in his throat.

"Ah, Durgen," Larry Drass said. Amiable.

"What's the deal?" Bus asked, forcing the words past the knot in his throat.

"Deal? Oh, yes. You are leaving town, aren't you?"

"That depends."

"On me? Of course. By the way, your Miss Owin is very charming. She's bored in that stuffy old bank, Durgen. I'm booking a South American entertainment tour. She thinks she might like to go along."

"So I leave town."

"You have a reputation for sticking by your word, Durgen. A rather outmoded

index of honor, don't you think? I'm having a statement prepared. It tells how you and John Gordon got fat on bribes over the past few years. Times, dates, places. They implicate a few of my boys, but not too seriously. I want your signature on that, Bus."

"The hell!"

"Oh, I won't use it right away. Just in case Louis Hinton should ever give me trouble. He was so closely tied up with old John, you know. Tarr'd with the same brush, I believe is the expression."

"Kidnaping is federal business, Drass."

"So I've heard. Miss Owin came here of her own free will. She understands that her coming here is the only reason you're alive this moment, Durgen. Come now. You people are making all this very troublesome. Come on out and sign. And then you have my word that you'll both be taken over to Mardon City and released."

Durgen waited for several seconds. He said softly, "Expect me tonight, Drass." He hung up, put his face in his hands, breathing softly, slowly. He thought of vulnerability, of the value of a hostage, of the completeness of defeat.

He went from the office to his furnished room. He sat on his bed and tried to forget the fear, tried to think clearly and objectively. And the answers came up wrong.

HE SAW Sally himself in Mardon City. Oh, it would be done nicely. With all the trimmings. Probably in a hotel room. Like the time Chamberson had crossed Drass. Chamberson had been found in a hotel room in Mardon City. His woman was with him. Her face was livid blue, swollen tongue protruding. Chamberson looked just the same. She was on the floor and he was on the bed. He still had the tiny bottle clutched in his hand. It would all fit. Durgen, faced with proof of bribe taking, takes suicide route. Pact with girl-friend. Thus

John Gordon had died just in time. Very neat.

And he was glad that he had instinctively said that he would come out at night. Night was best. The Double Deuce was a fort. Larry's stronghold. The county was in his pocket and he was safe there. A big wheel. And so Sally would be there.

He went out and ate and went back to his room. He dropped his pants down around his ankles and, with two strips of tape, he fastened the .32 automatic to the outside of his solid right thigh. Then, with a scissors, he cut the bottom out of his right-hand trouser pocket. He fastened his belt, put his right hand in his pocket. By straightening his arm, his fingertips touched the chill butt of the gun.

When it was dark enough he got into his car and drove up to Waverly Avenue. He parked a half block from Sherman Lurat's house. Lurat was having a small dinner party. Through the French doors, Durgen saw Lurat talking to a tall brunette in a dinner dress.

He went to the front door, and a servant let him in. Lurat came into the hall, his eyes wide with surprise, his mouth slack with cocktails.

Durgen made mystery out of it. "Come out on the porch for a moment, sir."

He pulled Lurat off to one side, hit him solidly under the heart, caught him as he sagged and leaned him against the clapboards. "Shut up and listen, Lurat. You can die right here or come along with me."

Lurat made a gagging sound.

"We're going back in and you're telling your guests you'll be away for an hour. I've got nothing to lose. I'll be right behind you. One wrong word and I'll crack your spine over my knee."

Lurat straightened. "I fail to understand how you think—"

Durgen hit him again under the heart. Lurat's shoulders hit the clapboards. "Do as you're told," Durgen said.

Durgen stood behind Sherman Lurat in the arched doorway from the hall to the living room. Lurat's voice shook as he said, "I'll be gone for a—little while. You folks go right ahead and—enjoy yourselves."

Durgen got him out to the car, pivoted and slammed a short right chop against Lurat's fatty jaw. He pushed Lurat so that the man fell face down on the rear floor of the sedan. With the tape he had brought he taped Lurat's wrists and ankles, wedged a cleaning rag in the man's mouth and taped it in place.

He drove, obeying the lights, the stop signs, the speed limit. He drove the five miles from the city limits to the Double Deuce. The parking lot was two-thirds empty. The evening was young. The parking lot floodlights were dim. Raw, brassy music floated out across the smooth asphalt.

The building was ranch type, long, low, white, dim lights showing through the windows. Durgen went in the doorway to the bar. Two girl shills sat on the tall blue stools, their faces a white, dead fragrance. They turned towards him with mechanical smiles. The bartender touched something under the edge of the bar. Durgen waited patiently. The doorway beyond the bar opened and two men in white mess jackets came out, wary and controlled. The dark hair of one of them had been shaved away at the back of his head, the adhesive gleaming white.

Durgen smiled placidly at him. "Headache?" he inquired politely.

"Walk slowly through that door," the man said, "and stop inside it with your hands in the air."

Bus Durgen did as he was told. The door swung shut and the three of them were in the inclosed space. A single bulb hung from a ceiling cord. He felt the hands on him. Pockets, waistband, arm-pits, groin.

"Take him in. He's clean."

The office of Larry Drass was the small and cozy living room of an early American farmhouse. Classic antiques, a break-front desk, ruby glass, a churn in front of the fireplace, a cast-iron cat on the hearth. Larry wore Shetland tweeds with casual elegance.

The one man who had come in with Durgen closed the door and leaned against it, his hands in his pockets. "How the mighty have fallen!" Larry smiled.

"You're the dealer," Durgen said softly.

"I want you to know that I hold no grudge for past difficulties you've caused me, Durgen. That's over. I've had this prepared." He motioned to the document on the table.

"No dice, Larry. First I have to know the girl is okay."

Larry reached for the bell pull. The man moved away from the door. The first man put his head in. "Miss Owin, please."

She was brought in two minutes later, just as Durgen finished reading the statement he was expected to sign. She ran into his arms. He felt her body tremble, but there was no hint of a break in her spirit. Her fingers dug into his arms and he looked at the benign smile of Larry Drass over her fair head.

"Touching," Drass murmured.

Durgen held Sally at arm's length. "Have they hurt you?" he asked.

His heart twisted at the grin she managed to give him. "Not yet, darling. And don't sign anything."

"I have to," he said heavily. He saw the relaxation on Larry's face.

The pen was on the table. He wrote quickly, the words "No dice," folded the paper twice, handed it to Larry. Larry smiled and began to unfold the paper. His eyes shifted to the paper as he unfolded it. Durgen turned a bit so that his right arm was shielded from the man at the door. The tape tore the hair on his leg as he pulled the automatic free.

He spun completely around, the gun cradled against his palm, his right arm straight. The solid metal of the slide smashed against the head of the man at the door. The pink and delicate edge of the temple bone protruded jaggedly through the pale flesh as the man fell without a sound.

Larry's hand had slipped inside the left breast of his jacket, his eyes widening with fear, his mouth open to shout. As the hand came out from under the coat, Durgen chopped viciously at the slim tanned wrist, hitting it solidly with the trigger guard and the underside of the barrel. The gun dropped with a muffled thud to the rag rug.

He reversed the chopping motion, caught Drass under the cleft chin with the top of the barrel, shutting off the shout as effectively as though he had clamped a hand over the man's mouth. Larry wavered back.

Sally had backed slowly to the wall. Durgen advanced on Larry, said over his shoulder, "Get the gun."

He kicked Larry's weapon aside, towards her. Larry lurched toward the bell pull. Durgen put a forearm, almost tenderly, across Larry's throat, bearing down so that the man dropped to his knees, clawing at Durgen's arm.

Durgen said softly, "Oh, that pretty, pretty face, Larry. What a beastly shame, old man."

Larry made a strangled sound. His hard fist smacked against Durgen's jaw without changing Durgen's cold expression.

Durgen did not like what he had to do. He told Sally to turn her back. He spun Larry onto his back on the floor, stepped heavily on the man's wrist, leaned over him and, with the gun barrel, with the front sight, with hard stroking motions he smashed the mouth, made deep splits in the flesh over each eye.

He stood back. Larry wavered up, clinging to the desk, trying to shake the blood out of his eyes, his broken mouth writhing with sudden madness. The veneer had been broken and the animal showed through. A vicious animal.

Durgen pushed the dead man out of the way of the door. He yanked it open. Sally held the gun. He took it from her, pushed her out the door. Then he tossed the gun at Larry. It hit the man on the chest and fell to the floor.

"Here's your gun back, Larry. It's loaded."

As Larry groped for the gun on the floor, half blinded by the blood streaming across his eyes, Durgen took Sally's arm, ran with her down the corridor to the door that led out into the bar. The bartender reached below the bar, his eyes wide as he saw the gun in Durgen's hand. Durgen shot him in the shoulder. Durgen pushed Sally toward the other room, said

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sharply, "Go in there. Stay with people. Wait for me."

He went to the door to the parking lot and waited. Larry Drass stumbled out the other door, rubbing at his face with the back of his left hand.

The sound of the shot had killed the music. A woman screamed.

"Over here, Larry," Durgen said.

Durgen darted out onto the parking lot in a zigzag run as two heavy shots crashed in the smoke-blue air of the bar, starring the glass of the door.

He ran to the car, turned and looked back. Larry Drass, walking like a drunken man, came out onto the asphalt sixty feet away. Durgen yanked open the back door of the car, pulled the tape free of Sherman Lurat's ankles, hauled him out. Lurat's eyes were wild above the gag.

"Run, little man! Run like hell!" Durgen hissed in his ear, digging the automatic into Lurat's plump middle.

Lurat started toward the Double Deuce, running, with his hands bound, with the ungainly motion of a fat hen.

"I'm coming to get you, Larry," Durgen called.

Many faces looked out from the club. Larry Drass swiveled toward the sound of the voice, rubbed at his eyes with the back of his left hand. He took aim and fired four measured shots.

Sherman Lurat was running when the first shot at him. The second shot drove him three crazy steps backward, fighting for balance. The third shot knocked him off his feet, falling like a rag doll. The fourth shot passed over where he had been, rang off one of the cars in the lot. . . .

Bus Durgen stood beside Wallace at the foot of the stairs as Mayor MacRoe, his eyes puffed with sleep, came ponderously down, belting his robe around him.

"What is the meaning of this?" MacRoe demanded in a rich baritone.

Wallace said, "Mister Mayor, we've come to urge you to make an emergency

appointment. The city needs a new Commissioner of Public Safety."

"But Mr. Lurat is the—"

"Mr. Lurat is dead, Mister Mayor."

MacRoe stopped on the third stair from the bottom. He wiped his heavy mouth with the back of his hand.

"That is a misfortune, gentlemen, but I can see no necessity for making an appointment until I have discussed this matter with—"

"No dice, Mister Mayor," Wallace said. "Fifty witnesses saw Larry Drass shoot and kill Sherman Lurat."

The mayor's voice had a strangled sound. "Shot! You mean—"

"A little misunderstanding. We'd like to hit the morning edition with your appointment of Louis Hinton to the post."

"I will not be dictated to. Either by the press, or by you, Mr. Durgen."

Wallace interrupted. "That place out there is alive with county cops, Mister Mayor. Some of our boys are out there too. The Double Deuce. Larry kept pretty extensive records. The *Ledger* could probably print everything we pick up."

MacRoe put one hand on the bannister. He said, "I'll get Mr. Hinton on the phone immediately and advise him of the appointment."

* * * *

Durgen set his coffee cup down and looked stolidly at Sally. Her face was drawn with strain. He said somberly. "So now I'm leaving town."

Her eyes went wide with alarm. "But I don't— Bus, darling, whatever—"

"I made Larry a promise that I'd get out of town. So I have to do it."

"Are you joking?" she asked sharply.

"No. I'm leaving town for a full month, and then I'm coming back. How long will it take you to pack?"

"Thirty-five thousand potential bridegrooms in this town and I have to get one with stitches in his lip. I'll be packed in twenty minutes," she said softly.

POPULAR FILMS

A Guide to Good Movie-Going For Fiction Fans Ted Palmer Picks:

For Intrigue: "The Bribe" with Robert Taylor, Ava Gardner, Charles Laughton, Vincent Price, John Hodiak (MGM).



Government agent Rigby (Robert Taylor), on an island off the coast of Central America, is in search of a gang which falsely condemns surplus airplane motors, reassembles and sells them at exorbitant prices in South America. In cracking the case, Rigby tangles with beautiful cabaret singer (Ava Gardner), her drunken husband (John Hodiak) and several assorted villains. *Some good villainy and ominous action.*

* * *

For Drama: "Knock On Any Door" with Humphrey Bogart and John Derek (Columbia).



Ex-Skid Row lawyer, Andrew Morton (Humphrey Bogart), unintentionally causes Nick Romano (John Derek) to become one of the more undesirable citizens on the wrong side of the tracks. Although marriage temporarily halts Nick's career of gambling and small-time thieving, he returns to his bad ways when he can't make the grade on an honest job. Picked up for cop-killing, Morton agrees to defend Nick whom he thinks is innocent. With a not guilty verdict almost won, Nick breaks down when the prosecutor insinuates that Nick's wife committed suicide because of his bad ways. Nick goes to the chair, but forces are already at work to clean up Skid Row. Nick's death has at least served one purpose. *A bit grim but often powerful picture.*

* * *

For Mystery: "Homicide" with Robert Douglas, Helen Westcott, Robert Alda (Warner Brothers).



A transient worker, looking for a job, finds murder and murderers on a citrus ranch in California. After being threatened, he testifies that the ranch owner's death was accidental. His

isn't, a few hours later, and Lieutenant Landers (Robert Douglas) has a hunch and some clues that lead him to an out-of-town hotel. Questioning the bartender (Robert Alda) the hat-check girl (Helen Westcott), he gets a lead and returns to the citrus ranch where he finds a piece of telephone cable wound up on the plow of the tractor. This is the tip-off. *The sleuthing is better than average.*

* * *

For Adventure: "Down to the Sea In Ships" with Richard Widmark, Lionel Barrymore, Dean Stockwell (20th Century-Fox).



Although they finally lower the boom on Bering Joy (Lionel Barrymore), the old whaling master, he still has time to indoctrinate his young grandson (Dean Stockwell) into the ways of the sea and whaling. Before the old man dies, however, he tussles with his first mate (Richard Widmark), an 1887 ninety-day wonder, with an ill-fated whaling attempt, storms and icebergs. *For those that like some salt—in their pictures and their eyes.*

* * *

For Sports: "Interference" with Victor Mature, Lucille Ball, Lizabeth Scott, Sonny Tufts (RKO).



A high-salaried professional football player, Pete Wilson (Victor Mature) has mingled woes with an expensive wife (Lizabeth Scott) and an unsuspected heart condition. *Training camp pictures, practice sessions and scenes from actual pro-games give the picture added interest.*

* * *

For A Western: "The Streets of Laredo" with Macdonald Carey, William Holden, William Bendix, Mona Freeman (Paramount). Technicolor.



When three badmen split up and two get into the Texas Rangers by mistake, their's trouble afoot, pard. William Holden and William Bendix are the hombres who turn good and refuse to tip off their former partner, Macdonald Carey, on big jobs. This leads to complications when Holden refuses to bring in Carey—a source of irritation to the Rangers. Bendix, however, goes after him and gets shot (dead) for his efforts. Holden, stirred to action, mixes it up and has a showdown. For a twist, the bad guy is shot by Mona Freeman as the love interest. *There's plenty of chase, shooting and blood in full color.*

*The boy was about
twenty-four and his face
was dead white as he sat
there. . . .*



DEATH IN THE

LIEUTENANT JOSEPH RYAN sat rigidly in his swivel chair and listened to the footsteps which approached in the corridor outside the Traffic Division office. A shadow moved into the pane of frosted glass in the door and Joe waited expectantly for the knob to turn. But the shadow crossed the pane and the footsteps faded away.

Ryan dropped his lusterless blue eyes to his tightly clenched hands. Sooner or later, Jane's killer would be delivered to him. If it did not happen today, there were

other days. Time was unimportant. But when it happened— He smiled grimly and tightened his interlaced fingers as if to crack a walnut between his strong hands.

The clock on the wall ticked off the minutes. Then, in time with the ticks, Ryan again heard the sharp click of hard heels on the corridor's marble floor. He looked up, saw the shadow appear and then stop. The shadow stood immobile, etched on the frosted glass.

"Come in," Joe called harshly.

The door swung open slowly and Larry

A guy and a gal and a dying flame that flared one last time in a killing—it was easy for Lieutenant Ryan to fill in the picture—a picture he was dying to fit into a frame!

By Richard E. Glendinning

Daniels stepped into the office. He closed the door and pressed his broad back against it. "Joe," he said, a tremor in his deep voice, "we've got a guy down the hall."

"Does he have a story?" Joe asked woodenly. It wouldn't do to get his hopes up prematurely. Homicide had had other suspects in the past two days.

"It falls apart." Larry crossed the room and leaned over the desk. "But we can't be sure, Joe. You know that."

"Who is he?"

Larry shook his head. "Take a look at him first."

Rising as if he lifted the weight of the world on his stooped shoulders, Joe came around the desk and dropped a hand on Larry's shoulder. "It scares me a little. I've tried to be a good cop, but—"

The door opened wide and Joe stepped into the small, windowless room which had once been a storeroom. He nodded to Barney Martin, Sid Lester and Ralph Stuart, three of Larry's men, and then he turned to look at the blond youngster who sat in a straight chair under a glaring light.

The boy was about twenty-four and his handsome face was dead white. Sweat streamed down his face and funneled through a cleft in his blunt chin, dropping to the front of his yellow sports shirt. The boy's teeth chattered but there was surprisingly little fear in his wide brown eyes. If anything, he seemed too sure of himself. It wasn't natural, Joe thought, for anyone—even one who was completely innocent—to act so unafraid.

"Know him, Joe?" Larry muttered, his mouth close to Joe's ear.

THIRD DEGREE

"I know, Joe. Don't forget I've got a stake in this, too. Don't lose your head. This may not be the man we want."

"How can I be calm when it's my own daughter?" Joe muttered, realizing immediately that that was unfair to Larry. Larry and Jane were to be married. Everything had been all set but the date.

They walked down the hall to Homicide and through two crowded offices to the room at the rear. Larry rapped on the heavy door and it opened a crack. "Here's Joe," Larry whispered.

"Vic Standish," Joe said, nodding. "He drives a delivery truck for the Fireside Bakery."

"Uh-huh. We've been over it a couple of times and each time it's different. Do you want to take a crack at him?"

Joe massaged the knuckles of his right fist. He was close to the breaking point after these two days of waiting. His knees trembled and he ached in every joint from the strain of holding himself under control. "I'd better not. You handle it." He moved back against the wall.

"All right, Standish," Larry said. "You admit you knew her."

"Sure, but there's no crime in—"

"And you dated her."

"I've known her since sixth grade. We had dates."

"You killed her."

"You're crazy."

Barney Martin stepped forward and blew cigar smoke in Standish's strained face. "What're you scared about if you didn't kill her?"

"I'm not scared."

"She was in your truck the night she was killed," Larry said.

"I've told you everything I know about it."

"You're a liar!"

"I was driving past her house," Standish said, squirming in his seat. "She was on the porch and waved me down. She asked for a lift downtown. The last I saw of her was when she got out at Broad and First."

"You're a liar! You killed her!" Larry snapped. "You've been lying from the start. First, you told us you didn't see her at all that night. Now you say you gave her a lift to Broad and First. You gave her a lift, all right. You took her out to Lake Crystal and shot her."

Listening to Larry hammer away at Standish, Joe Ryan's eyes filled with angry tears and the blood pounded fiercely in his head. He stepped into the light. "You cheap punk," he said coldly. "You rotten little punk. She wouldn't have anything to do with you and you didn't want anyone else to have her. You killed her because she was too decent."

"Don't you guys have to prove anything?" Standish said.

The room seemed to explode into a million bits in front of Joe's burning eyes. Swinging blindly, his right fist smashed into Standish's mouth and slammed the blond head against the back of the chair. Blood trickled from the corner of Stand-

ish's mouth and the sight of it enraged Joe still more. He hit Standish again.

"Hit me all you want," Standish mumbled through bruised lips. "You can't make anything stick."

Joe's fingers itched to encircle Standish's throat, thumbs pressing back Standish's every lying breath.

"Take it easy, Joe," Larry said. "You'd better stay out of this. You're marking him up."

"Don't lose your head, Joe," Barney Martin said gently.

"If some screwball knocked off your daughter," Joe cried, "what the hell would you do? Pin a medal on him?" He stalked out of the smoky room and went down the hall to Traffic Division.

He sat behind his desk and clenched his hands. There was blood on the knuckles of his right hand, Standish's blood, he thought. But when he saw the broken skin over the knuckles, he knew that some of the blood was his own. Strange that he had felt no pain. He wondered if death for Jane had been painless. He hoped so.

JOE had done his best to spare Jane pain all her life. It hadn't always been easy because pain came in so many ways, the least of which was physical. Physical pain lasted only a little while but the pains of the heart were deep-seated and festered like malignant growths.

He cursed himself for that. He, who had tried to protect her from harm, slaying the dragons which roamed her world as if he were a Don Quixote in modern dress, had been the cause of her greatest suffering. He hadn't meant to be, of course. Jane's own mother had died when the girl was only three. Four years later, hoping to give Jane the mother she needed, Joe had remarried. But Nora had never been much of a mother to Jane.

Joe supposed that Jane's earliest recol-

lection of Nora and him together would have been of a loud and violent quarrel, punctuated with name-calling, thoughtless accusations and abrupt actions which were only one taunt removed from vase-throwing. Joe's life with Nora had been one long fight. The tender moments between scraps had been so rare that they became inconsequential.

And, invariably, the fights began over Jane. Nora had always resented the girl—despite the fact that Nora had understood full well that Joe was not marrying her for love—and she took her resentment out in treating Jane shabbily. When Jane grew older, and could fight back, the atmosphere in Joe's small bungalow was one of heightening tension.

He wondered now if Jane's death had been much of a blow to Nora. He doubted it and, from that doubt, bitterness filled his mind. He pulled the phone to him and called his home. Nora answered promptly.

"I think we've got the man," he said flatly. "Vic Standish."

"Has he confessed?"

"No, but he will. Larry's working on him hard."

Nora was silent for several seconds. Then she said, "Suppose Standish doesn't confess?"

Joe didn't want to think about that. There were no witnesses to the murder. The murder gun had not yet been found, though a crew had been dragging the bottom of Lake Crystal for two days.

"We'd have to release him," Joe said.

"I wish I could tell you how I feel about all this, Joe."

"I'll bet," he said bitterly. "You had more than fifteen years to tell it to Jane. It's a little late now."

"She was as much to blame as I was."

Joe rubbed his brow wearily. "All right, Nora. I'm too damned tired to argue with you."

"Will you be home to dinner?"

Dinner, even one of Nora's cold dinners, would never seem the same again without Jane at the table. In his mind's eye, he saw an endless string of dreary evenings ahead, evenings when he and Nora would stare silently at each other, stifling their yawns of boredom.

"I don't know if I'll be home or not."

"Please, Joe. It's—it's lonely around the house."

"Save that for the neighbors." He slammed down the phone and put on his battered grey fedora. He went down the hall to Homicide and found Larry Daniels at his desk, staring disconsolately at the ceiling.

"We had to let him go, Joe. We couldn't hold him. I've been trying to get up the nerve to tell you."

"What do you think of his story?"

Larry shook his head. "I don't know. I checked it as best I could. According to your missus, Jane left the house at six sharp. A couple of highschool kids found Jane's body at eight o'clock. But you know all that."

"How does that tie in with Standish's schedule?"

"He claims, but can't prove, that he let her off at Broad and First a couple of minutes after six and that he had his truck back at the bakery garage by six-thirty. I checked that. The dispatcher at the garage showed me his tally sheet. Standish brought his truck in at twenty-five to seven."

"Do they keep a mileage chart?"

"I tried that, too. It's five miles each way to the lake, ten altogether. Standish drove his truck close to a hundred miles that day. Ten miles could be buried in there somewhere but—" Larry shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"According to the medical examiner," Joe said, "Jane had been dead about an hour. If she was found at eight and Standish had his truck back a little after six-thirty, maybe the punk didn't—"

"The medical report is only a guide, Joe. Jane could have been dead anywhere from one to three hours." Larry pressed his fingertips to his red eyelids.

"You need rest, son," Joe said. "Why not have someone else put on it?"

"No," Larry rasped. "I'm going to get Standish personally if it's the last thing I do. He's lying. We've caught him in a dozen lies. And the despatcher tells me Standish is quite a boy with the ladies. Every woman on his route is making eyes at him."

"Jane didn't, did she?" Joe asked. It was strange that he, her father, really didn't know.

"Maybe when they were kids, but they grew up and Standish wanted to play grownup games. I figure she put him in his place and he shot her. Jealousy or frustration, maybe both." Larry punched his big right fist into his left palm. "He's bound to have made a mistake. I'll find it, I swear I'll find it. I'll send him to the chair. I'd like to pull the switch myself."

"Steady," Joe said. "Steady."

"Jane and I had finally set the date. We were going to spring it on you and the missus Sunday." Larry buried his face in his hands.

Joe eased out of the office and walked down the hall to the entrance. As he walked down the long flight of steps to the sidewalk in front of the municipal building, Vic Standish came from behind a column and called to him.

"Mr. Ryan, I could make things hot for you," he said. "You didn't have any right to slug me."

"Get out of the way," Joe said gruffly. "No, wait a minute, Standish. I'm going to give you a tip. You killed Jane. I know you killed her, but you're a smart cookie. You think you've got all the answers. All right, but if you ever accuse me of this, I'll deny it. If I can't touch you any other way, I'll frame you!"

Standish's handsome face blanched. "You couldn't."

"Couldn't I? Listen, I've always tried to be an honest cop but when I see a punk squirm out of a rap, it makes me sick inside."

"What about the gun I'm supposed to have used?"

"You carried a gun with you in the truck. A thirty-eight, and it was a thirty-eight slug they found in Jane."

"So I hear. But my gun is gone. It disappeared."

"That's nice," Joe said grimly, fighting back the urge to beat Standish to a pulp. "When did that happen?"

"I bought it about two weeks ago—I make collections in a pretty tough part of town—and put it in the glove compartment. I didn't even know it was gone until I was asked about it. It wasn't there when Daniels and his gang searched for it."

JOE laughed harshly and pushed Standish out of his way. He walked over to Broad to catch a bus home. He stopped for a paper at the stand on the corner of First and Broad.

"Hi, Shorty," he said.

"Good evenin', Mr. Ryan," the blind newsboy said. He jerked a *Times* from one pile and folded it with a sharp snap. "I heard about Miss Jane. It hit me hard, Mr. Ryan. She always stopped by to say hello. Sometimes she read me the news or the late race results. It always gave her a big kick when she could read me a winner."

"That was her way, Shorty," Joe said. He wished the bus would come. He didn't want to talk about Jane.

"Funny thing is, I put two bucks on Long Life, a long shot, for her the other day. Long Life won, but not for her. She never collected on either. The thing I'm wondering—"

"I've got to go, Shorty." Joe strode

swiftly down Broad to wait for the bus at the next corner.

When he got home, Nora was rocking on the front porch. She saw him coming and she stood up to greet him. Nora was only thirty-five and pretty enough to have been Jane's older sister. That was probably one reason for her fights with Jane. It galled Nora to have people think she was old enough to have a grown daughter.

"Any news?" she asked quietly, pushing back a curl of light brown hair.

"None," he said.

"I thought you weren't coming home for dinner."

"I changed my mind but don't worry. I'll make a sandwich or something." Listlessly, he went into the house and took off his coat and hat. He stretched out on the worn sofa and closed his eyes.

"I'll have dinner ready in just a minute," Nora said. "I bought a steak just in case you came home."

"Don't bother," he snapped.

"It's no bother. I haven't eaten, either. I waited for you."

"What the hell? For fifteen years, I get a cold dinner or a late dinner or none at all. Now it's steak." He jumped to his feet and paced the floor. "Like a party or a celebration."

"Joe!" She stared at him for a moment, her big brown eyes filled with a strange light. She turned and went to the kitchen to put the steak in the broiler. In a few minutes, she came back to the living room with a long drink. "Drink this. It will make you feel better."

"Thanks." He took a long pull on the highball, conscious all the while of Nora's eyes upon him. He glared at her. "All right, let's have it."

"Maybe Jane and I did get along like cats and dogs but, Joe, I wish I could let you see how I am inside right now—twisted up and hurt and sick, wanting her back."

"So you could be at her throat again."

"Yes," Nora whispered, and tears rolled down her cheeks. "We'd always be at each other's throat as long as we were both trying to do things for you. Oh, I know you didn't love me when you married me, Joe, but I didn't mind. Later, I saw it wasn't right for a wife to watch her husband turn to another woman, even if the other woman was his daughter, for everything. I guess that's when I knew I loved you and that there would never be room for Jane and me in this house."

"It wouldn't have been for much longer," Joe said coldly. "She and Larry had set the date. They were going to tell us on Sunday."

"I thought it would be soon. I found her engagement ring in her purse after they—after they let us have her things."

Joe's face turned livid. "Nora!" he roared. "I told you to leave her things alone. Don't touch them. We could at least give her a decent burial before you start throwing every trace of Jane out of the house!"

"How dare you!"

The ringing telephone interrupted her. Joe went to the hall to answer it.

"Mr. Ryan, this is Shorty."

"I'm busy, Shorty."

"Just a sec', Mr. Ryan. I was wondering, where is Miss Jane going to be buried? I mean, I've got this dough, more than forty bucks, that I won on Long Life for her. She ought to have it. Maybe some flowers."

"Keep it, Shorty."

"That don't seem right. Maybe if I put the forty bucks into flowers—"

"She'd probably forgotten all about it."

"How could she? She didn't even know the nag won. She was dead when Long Life came home."

"Well, then, she wouldn't have—*What?*" Joe's fingers tightened around the phone. "When did you talk to her, Shorty?"

"Let's see. It must of been . . . no,

I'm certain that was the day before."

"When?" Joe asked hoarsely. "When, Shorty? Think!"

"I am." There was a short pause and then Shorty exclaimed, "I've got it. It was a little after six the night she got killed. I remember because a drunk fell off the curb and a squad car had to come."

"Okay, Shorty. Thanks for the help."

"What about the forty bucks?"

"Buy yourself a new suit. That's what Jane would have wanted." Joe hung up and walked back to the kitchen. He leaned against the door jamb and watched Nora slide the steak on a platter. "You say you saw Standish pick Jane up about six?"

She turned and looked up at him, puzzled. "She was on the porch. Standish stopped his truck and Jane went down and got in."

"And she told you she was going downtown?"

"Of course. You don't think I made it up, do you?" She carried the platter to the dining room table and came back to the kitchen. "All right, Joe. Time to eat."

He shook his head. "I'm not very hungry. You go ahead." He went into the hall and phoned Homicide. Larry was still there. "You'd better drag Standish in again, Larry," Joe said. "It was no accident that he picked Jane up. She was waiting for him. Otherwise, she would have gone to the corner for the bus."

"Can we pin it on him?" Larry said. "Will it stick?"

"You haven't found the gun, have you?"

"No, Joe. They went over the bottom of Lake Crystal with a fine-toothed comb. The crew was pulled off the job an hour ago."

"Have any new witnesses turned up?"

"No luck there, either. Lake Crystal is pretty lonely at night. Remember about

six months ago when there was a series of stickups out that way and then when a boy and a girl in a parked car got shot? Ever since, we've had a patrol cruising the place. The kids who found Jane took a chance. It's a good thing for us they did."

"It didn't help Jane much."

"Are you coming down to see Standish?"

"If you think I can help crack his shell, I'll come." Joe hung up and called to Nora. "I've got to go downtown."

"All right," she said, disappointed. "I'll finish with Jane's things."

Angrily, he shouted, "I told you to leave her things alone!"

"For fifteen years, I straightened her room, kept her things in order, made her clothes, took up hems and washed her stockings. And no matter what you say, I'm—"

"She always took care of herself."

"You think you know everything. You think I let her go to school hungry and dirty. You think we did nothing but fight. Well, you're wrong." She sank down on a kitchen chair and stared at her small hands. "Can you make Standish confess, Joe?"

"I was sure of it a little while ago. Now, I don't know. At least, it's going to be hard, thanks to a little guy who only wanted to give Jane flowers."

HE WENT to the corner and caught a bus. At headquarters, he took the elevator to the third floor and walked down the dismal corridor to the radio room. Jimmy Rasmussen, a white-haired cop who had been on the force long before there were such things as radio cars, got up from his desk and came to the counter.

"Hello, Joe. I was mighty sorry to hear about—"

"I know, Jimmy. I appreciate the thought. How about checking the manifest for me? Wednesday evening about

six. Was a car sent to Broad and First?"

Rasmussen pulled the Wednesday record sheet from the filing cabinet and ran a stubby forefinger down the column. "Six o'clock Wednesday? Car thirteen went to the freight yards about then. A barroom brawl. I don't see anything for Broad and First."

"Nothing at all?"

"Nothing all day. Wait a minute, though. One of the boys may remember something." Jimmy walked ponderously into the radio room. In a moment, he came out. "You've got the wrong day. Stengler sent a car to that corner about three-thirty Tuesday afternoon. Some guy snatched a woman's purse. That's the only one recently, Joe. Help you any?"

Joe smiled grimly, massaging his knuckles. "It sure does, Jimmy." He walked swiftly down the two flights to Homicide. It wouldn't be necessary to frame Standish, after all. His story of having left Jane at Broad and First could no longer be supported by Shorty's testimony. Shorty had talked to Jane on Tuesday, not Wednesday.

There was only a skeleton force in the Homicide office. Two detectives were playing gin rummy and a third was reading a paper-backed novel under a bright, green-shaded light.

"Where's Larry?" Joe asked.

The man with the book nodded toward the storeroom. "He's got Standish in there."

Joe passed through the outer offices and opened the door to the inner room. Larry was standing over Standish. He turned as Joe entered the room.

"No luck yet," Larry said, breathing heavily. "If anything, he's wearing me down."

"Take a rest," Joe said. "I'll have a go at him." He stepped forward. "Standish, you'd better talk. I know you had a date with Jane that night."

"Yeah? Who says so?"

"Her mother."

"She's no witness," Standish said scornfully. "She might have killed Jane herself. She had plenty of reason."

Joe lunged at Standish and yanked him out of his seat. "What are you talking about?"

"Jane told me how well she got along with her mother. They fought all the time. Your wife was jealous as hell of Jane."

Joe slapped Standish across the mouth, driving him back into his seat, then cuffed him across the bridge of the nose with the back of his hand.

"I gave you a tip, Standish," Joe said coldly. "I told you to talk or I'd— Well, we've turned up a witness. He saw you take Jane to the lake."

"Book me," Standish sneered, but some of his earlier bravado was gone and there was fear in his eyes.

Joe breathed deeply, counting to ten. "Look, Vic," he said softly, "if you've got nothing at all to hide, why don't you talk?"

"I can see a frame when it's around me. It wouldn't make any difference what I said. You'd twist it to make it fit."

"Where's the gun?" Joe snapped.

"I lost it. Anyway, I'd never fired it."

"Not more than once," Larry said, pushing forward. "Once was enough."

"Standish," Joe muttered, "you're stupid. Your story is full of holes. We can prove you picked Jane up but you can't prove you let her out at Broad and First. We can prove you had the right kind of a gun but you can't prove it was never fired. We can prove you had time enough to kill her, drive her body to the lake and bring the truck back to the bakery garage but you can't prove you didn't. Talk, Standish. It will go easier with you."

"I may be stupid," Standish said, straightening in his chair, "but I know one thing—you'll have to prove I killed her and you can't."

Joe sighed wearily. "Okay, tell the story again."

"It's the same as before. I picked her up about six and let her off at Broad and First. She seemed nervous. She kept fiddling with her gloves. She giggled a lot but it wasn't a happy giggle. It was like a—well, a woman who's drunk. But she wasn't drunk."

Larry looked at Joe questioningly. "That doesn't sound like Jane," he muttered.

"I don't know how many times," Standish continued, "she looked at herself in the mirror of her compact and she was all the time twisting the ring on her finger. You know how a woman does when she's nervous."

"Wait a minute!" Larry said suddenly. "Which ring?"

"Her engagement ring."

Larry looked at him sharply.

"That's what I thought," Larry said. He turned to Joe. "There was no ring on her finger when they brought her body to the morgue." Larry faced Standish again and Joe saw the rage in Larry's eyes. Larry tried to hold the fury under control but it was too much for him. He grabbed Standish's shoulders and shook the youngster like a rag.

"Cut it out!" Standish cried.

But Larry couldn't be stopped. "You even took the protection of her ring from her, didn't you? Where is it? The same place as the gun?" Larry let go of Standish's shoulders. Shuddering, he turned to Joe. "You'd better take over, Joe. I'll kill him. So help me, I'll kill him. He'll never live to make the chair!"

"You need a rest," Joe said quietly. "We both need a rest. And Standish could use a little time to think it over." He went to the door and called the men in the outer office. "I'm sending Standish out. Sit on him." Standish got out of his chair and left the storeroom, closing the door behind him.

"I DIDN'T mean to blow up that way, Joe," Larry said wearily. "But I've been holding in so long that it had to come out." Larry sat down in the chair. "I feel the same way you do about a frame, Joe, but it looks like that's the only way. Turn off the light, Joe. It's in my eyes."

"I like it this way," Joe said.

"What's wrong with you, Joe?" Larry said, squirming in the seat and trying to peer into the darkness where Joe stood. "Turn the damned light off so I can see you. Turn out that light!"

"Sure, Larry," Joe murmured. "What did you figure Standish's motive was? Jealousy, frustration, maybe both?"

"That's how I see it." Larry's red-rimmed eyes bulged under the bright light. He shifted his weight to his left hip.

"Go ahead, Larry," Joe said. "Make a try for it. Go for the gun. I'd like you to try that."

Larry lifted his hand, then dropped it. Beads of perspiration clung to his upper lip and brow, glistening in the strong light like strings of diamonds. "Joe, what the hell?"

"Standish wasn't lying, was he, Larry? He dropped Jane off at that corner just like he said. I should have remembered something about blind men, especially Shorty. I guess nature evens things up by giving blind men keen senses and keen memories. Shorty wouldn't get his days mixed up. He talked to Jane the night she was killed, not the night before."

Joe eased the gun in his shoulder holster. "The best way to hide anything, Larry, is to keep it in the open. That even works with patrol cars. You met Jane on that corner because she had a date with you. Shorty remembered the car but the radio room didn't have a record of it.

"And if anyone had seen your car when you drove Jane to the lake, they wouldn't have paid much attention to it. Patrol cars cruise out there all the time."

"Joe," Larry cried, "you're nuts! I loved Jane. We were going to be married. The date was all set."

"That's what you say. You pulled a boner, Larry, and you knew it as soon as Standish mentioned the engagement ring. You tried to throw it back at him. But if you wanted that wedding-date story to hold up, you should have made sure the ring was on Jane's finger. A young girl doesn't drop her ring in her purse—the place where Nora found it—unless she's through with it. Jane was through with you. She told you so and you killed her."

Larry's hand crept toward his hip. "You can't make it stick, Joe."

"I could send you to the chair, but I'd rather not. I'd rather shoot you the way you shot Jane. Go for the gun, Larry. See if you can squeeze off a shot before I can." Joe slipped his gun from his holster. "I'd like to see your gun anyway. If I was a murdering cop, the safest place for a murder gun would be on my hip."

His voice thick, Larry said, "You could pin it on Standish."

"What about the gun you took out of his glove compartment when you were supposed to be searching for it? That was smart. That gun could help prove he didn't do it, but if there was no gun, it would make him look guilty as hell." Joe stepped into the light and looked down at Larry thoughtfully. "Maybe you'd like to make a deal?"

"Sure, Joe," Larry said eagerly. "We could send Standish up."

Joe brought up his gun. Quickly, coldly, he whipped the barrel across Larry's left cheek and laid it open to the bone.

Larry jerked back, twisted out of the chair and rolled away from the light. He came to his feet in a crouch, gun in hand, and backed against the wall, melting into the darkness.

The bright light burned in Joe's eyes and spot-lighted him for Larry's gun. He jumped out of the light a split second before a shot crashed and reverberated in the small room. Now, the light no longer blinding him, he saw Larry in the far corner, his lips pulled back in a wild snarl.

Joe dropped to one knee and fired. Larry took the first two slugs in the chest. He doubled over and fell heavily, plaster snowing on him as Joe's third shot dug into the wall. Joe moved forward cautiously and rolled Larry over with his toe. Then, wearily, he opened the door to meet the detectives who were coming toward him, their guns drawn.

"He's dead," Joe said. He gave his gun to the first man to reach him and stumbled out of the room. Standish was waiting for him in the outer office. "Larry Daniels shot her, kid. I'm sorry I messed you up. Like you told me before, you've got a good case against us if you want to make anything of it."

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"I wouldn't make a Roman holiday of Jane's death, Mr. Ryan."

Joe's shoulders straightened. "Thanks. Did you love her?"

"No, we weren't in love."

"Did she tell you she was going to break off with Daniels?"

"No, or I would have told you about it."

"I wonder what she had against him?" Joe mused.

"A long time ago, Jane said she would never marry a man she didn't love completely. She said she—" Standish's face reddened and he averted his eyes. "Well, I got the idea she had seen too much of that kind of marriage around her own house."

"Yeah," Joe muttered. "I guess she had. I don't blame her for not wanting to take a chance on that kind of a life. Nora and I were never very close, but I need her now."

"You ought to tell her that."

"It's too late, son. She wouldn't believe me. I've hurt her badly. If she isn't packing to leave me, she's crazy. I'd better call her; though, and tell her about Larry."

Joe picked up the nearest phone and called Nora.

"Are you coming home?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm finished here. Larry did it—and I killed him, Nora."

She gasped sharply. "Joe! Are you all right? Did he hurt you?"

"Not physically." Joe choked up. He tried to speak words which did not come to him naturally. He wasn't much on fancy speeches but Nora knew that as well as he. "Nora," he said simply, "don't leave me, don't ever leave me. I need you, Nora. I've needed you for fifteen years and was too stupid to see it. If you can put up with a fool—"

"Don't tell me that now," she said softly. "Come home and tell me. I'm waiting, Joe."

NO HALFWAY MEASURES

IVAR KREUGER, Swedish financier who nearly succeeded in gaining world-wide control of the match industry, had as his motto, "Anything worth doing at all is worth doing well." And he definitely put it into practice!

When he began embezzling from the four hundred companies that he dominated, he fleeced investors of millions of dollars. Turning his hand to forgery, he was so painstaking that he produced nearly a hundred million dollars' worth of bogus bonds (though not all were sold).

His thefts detected by auditors, Kreuger decided to commit suicide. As always, his preparations were thorough. Fearing to trust one or two firearms, which might be defective, he bought a gross of pistols and a case of cartridges! But when he locked himself in his room and pulled the trigger, no repeat performance was necessary.

—David Crewe

*When his uncle, who'd never lived, died . . .
leaving him money which had never existed . . .
on that strange night Max first started to show—*

THE CRAZY SIGNS



Max grabbed my lapels. "They'll get me sure," he cried. . . .

I SAID, "I wish to hell your uncle'd never died."

Max set down his glass. He blinked his cherry-colored eyelids. "Everybody dies," he said. "Sooner or later everybody dies." He lifted a hand from the bar and touched a finger to the end of my nose.

I pushed it away.

"Everybody sooner or later dies. Remember that, Alfred. Everybody."

"Max," I said, "you're drunk."

"Everybody. Louie! We're gonna drink to that."

Louie laid his comic book on the bar, came over, dumped another shot of whiskey into Max's glass. Then he shuffled back to his literature.

By Mike Cohen

"Everybody dies. Everybody. Some day you're gonna die, too, Alfred. Poor Alfred. Alfred gonna die."

"Max, you're drunk," I said. "Come on, let's get outa here."

"Will you leave me fifty thousan' bucks when *you* die, Alfred?" Max started to laugh. He grabbed my buck-and-a-half tie in a hairy fist and hung on. "Thirty-five a week! How you gonna leave me fifty thousan' on that?"

I slid off the bar stool and yanked my tie free.

"I'm gonna raise you, Alfred. From now on you get forty bucks a week. Then you can—" I blocked his grab for my tie, then he swung for my lapel, caught it and hung on. "Hey, come on. Sit down. You ain't finished your drink."

I sat down.

He let go my lapel and looked around the room. It was one of those smoky little joints where the lights are dim and the men's room is labeled "Gents." "I'm gonna raise you, Alfred. Forty bucks. Then *you* can die and leave me fifty thousan', just like Uncle Matt." He was laughing again. He was holding the edge of the bar with both hands, his head was hanging down front, and his laughing was so big the drool hung off his lower lip like a fishing line.

"Max, that fifty thousand bucks is gonna be the ruin of you. Damn that Bateman. Ever since he showed up and told you you once had an Uncle Matt—"

He stopped laughing. "Let's have a drink on good ole Uncle Matt!"

"You've already had ten drinks on good ole Uncle Matt!"

"So we'll drink to Bateman. Louie!"

"Not me," I said. "The hell with Bateman."

"Hey, Louie! Two more. We're gonna drink to Bateman!"

Louie marked his place in his comic book, picked up the bottle and fixed Max up. He looked at me.

"Just one," I said. "The last one. I gotta open the gas station in the morning."

Max explained to Louie, "We gotta drink to Bateman. Finest lawyer in the world. The whole world. Walks in and tells me I got fifty thousan' bucks!"

I leaned on my stool, my elbow on the bar, and watched him force the stuff down.

"I don't need no gas station," he said. He stuck his chin forward and bubbled out a round little burp. "I hate that station! Ten gallons! Fill 'er up! Check the tires! Check the oil! Yessir! Yessir! Yessir! Goddam customers. Do this. Do that. Yessir this. Yessir that. I hate 'em. I hate 'em all!"

He lifted his glass and burped again.

"Max!"

"I got fifty thousan' bucks. I don't need nobody. Customers can go to hell. The gas station can go to hell."

"Max, you worked six years building up that station. You can't let it—" I watched him spill half his drink on his chin.

"Look at yourself, Max. Look what you're doing to yourself." I smoothed out my tie. "And the station, Max. Those signs—"

"The hell with the station. And the hell with you, too, Alfred. The hell with everybody. Even Bateman—after I get my dough. The hell with Bateman. And my cousins, too."

"What cousins?"

"The hell with my cousins in St. Louis, that's what cousins. They can't scare me." He wiped his chin with his sleeve. "I ain't afraid of no cousins in St. Louis. The hell with them."

He put down his glass. He touched a finger to the end of my nose. "You're cute, Alfred," he said. "Have another drink."

I stood up straight.

He waved for the bartender.

"Listen to me, Max. Forget Louie for

a minute and listen to me! You're no fool kid. All right. You've had your fling. You've been drunk now three days. You've had your picture in the papers, you and those crazy signs. You've bought a new car. You've rented a house in the desert. Okay. It's done.

"But you're a businessman, Max. You've got a gas station to run. You can't do business being drunk. What's more, you can't do business with those crazy signs. You can't do business by insulting customers!"

"Gimme a cigarette. Sit down Alfred. Gimme a cigarette and let's have a drink."

"Good night, Max," I said. "I'm leaving. If you're not interested in the gas station I am. Maybe you'll come to your senses. Meantime I'm gonna open up tomorrow at six as usual."

"Alfred—"

"And what's more, first thing I'm gonna do is tear down all those crazy signs!"

He leaped from his stool and grabbed me by the lapels. "You leave them signs alone!" I tried to shake him off, but he hung on. "You hear me? Leave them signs alone! That's my station! They're my signs!" He yanked at my lapels. "I hate that station! Six years for nothing. I'm gonna ruin it. I'm gonna ruin it! The hell with the customers!" He was screaming. "I'll tell them what I think of 'em!" His cigarette was in his mouth all the time he was talking and it bobbed up and down like a jack-handle.

"Okay, Max," I said. I pried myself loose. "You're the boss. But I'm getting out of here!"

Louie ran over to us. "Please, please," he whispered. I looked around. A man and woman had just come in the front door.

Max looked at me. "Sh!" he said. "Sit down."

"Max, let's get out of here."

"Sit down. Sit down and have one more drink with me, Alfred. Then we'll

blow this firetrap before the walls cave in!"

Louis was sniffing around again. "Please, please." I sat down.

Max whispered, "Look't the dame."

I WAS looking. She and the guy both were dressed like they were going to Swanky Manor to maybe drink caviar with the king of Brazil.

I didn't notice the guy much at first except that he was wearing tails and had the kind of haircut that still needs a haircut right after he's had a haircut. But I'd been adding up the dame ever since she walked in the door.

Most of the cloth in her dress was down at the bottom covering her legs. Up around her hips there was barely enough to go around and it fit tight like a coat of shellac. Then further up it petered out altogether and the top of the dame stuck out like a half-peeled banana.

Max didn't say a word. This dame was a swell looker all right. But that doesn't tell you what *kind* of swell looker she was. I could make you understand better if I could see you in person. I would mention her, then I'd hand you a wink. You know. Then you'd understand what she looked like.

She sat down two stools away from Max, leaving one empty in between, and the guy in tails sat himself down on the other side.

"What'll you have?" he said in a quiet voice.

"You know what I'll have, Frank," she yelped, "what I always have!"

The guy said to Louie, "One scotch straight and one Manhattan." He turned to the girl. "I wish you wouldn't be so touchy about it."

"Me touchy! Now who's touchy!" She threw back her head and glared at him.

"You've been acting very strangely, Polly," he said. His voice was still quiet.

She slammed her bag on the bar. "Well, who started this?"

"Please let me finish, Polly. What I started—what I started to say—"

"Oh, Frank, shut up! You make me sick!"

"Polly," he whispered, "remember, we're engaged."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why remember it?" She slid a ring off her finger. "I can forget it. I'll forget it right now! There!" She tossed the ring on the bar in front of him. It had a rock the size of a grape.

He pushed it back to her. "Polly!" Louie's eyes bugged out.

She swung around to the bar. "Take it. I don't want it."

"But Polly, please—"

"Oh, 'Polly please'! Take your silly ring and get out of here!"

"You're not yourself. I'll take you home." He didn't even look at the ring.

"Don't worry about me!"

"You don't have any money. You don't even have cab fare with you. Come on, Polly, let me take you home."

"I'll be all right. I'll be all right just as long as I never see you again!"

He stood up.

Half a minute later. He was still standing there.

"Goodbye, Frank," she said.

"Polly," he said, "you don't—"

"Oh, yes, I do. Now beat it. And don't forget your ring!"

He was combing his hair with his fingers, getting it more and more messed up. "I don't want the ring. I didn't lend it to you. I gave it to you."

She didn't say anything. He just stood there. She picked up her drink and finished it.

"Goodbye, Polly."

She put her glass on the bar and looked straight ahead.

"You won't change your mind?"

She didn't move.

He walked half way to the door, stopped, turned around. The dame sat looking at herself in the pink mirror behind the bar.

The guy did an about face and marched out.

She stared straight ahead. "Will you buy me a drink?" she said.

"Me?" Max gulped.

"Please," she said. She picked the ring off the bar, put it on her finger, took it off her finger and put it in her hand-bag. She looked at Max. "Will you buy me a drink?"

Max slid off his stool and climbed on the one beside her. "Hey, Louie!" he yelled.

"Max—" I said.

Max gave me a look like my nose was running. "Ain't you gone yet? You been saying good-by for an hour. Ain't you gone yet?"

Louie shuffled over and Max talked to him.

I got up then and said, "Goodnight, Max," but now he was talking to the dame and I might as well have talked to the flying red horse.

I heard her say, "Well, of course! Max Arkey! I should have known it was you. I saw your picture in the papers. Well, who didn't! That story about the gas station and those signs! 'Cars washed, three-hundred and fifty dollars and up,' 'Free air fifty cents a puff'. You must tell me about them. Is it true? Well, I thought it was the maddest thing! The most perfectly wonderful, the maddest thing!"

I walked over and touched his shoulder. "Max."

He curled away. He didn't even look around.

I stood there, smoothing out my tie. He was busy with the dame. The hell with him.

I left.

NEXT morning about nine o'clock a green Plymouth coupe pulled into the gas station and I saw it was Bateman, the lawyer. "Good morning, Mr. Bateman," I said.

"Good morning, Al."

I leaned against his door. "If you're looking for the heiress, Mr. Bateman, he ain't here."

"Max? Where is he?"

"Out yonder," I said, waving my hand. "Ever since you came in here with that fifty thousand bucks worth of legal papers Mister Max Arkley ain't been interested in the gas station business."

Bateman looked at me like I was a naughty boy. "How *is* the gas station business, Al?" he said.

"It's good," I said.

"Making lots of money?" Bateman's got a round head with three or four chins hanging down from it. He was smiling.

"Yeh, we're making money."

"Still got the signs, I see."

I didn't say anything.

He opened his door and got out. He pointed to a sign. "That's a new one, isn't it? 'Super Stupor Service.'" He laughed.

"Mr. Bateman," I said.

"Yes?"

"You know about people. You know what makes them unwind. Tell me something."

"What is it, Al?"

"Why did Max do this?"

"These signs?"

"Yeh, these signs. Max is a hard-working little guy. Six years he spent building up this business. From six A.M. till any time at night. You'd have thought there was nothing else in the world but this station. He'd run around checking tires and wiping windshields all the time as happy as a bird. Then bingo! Four days ago you come in and tell him he had a rich uncle who'd died. Suddenly Max is

a different guy. He puts up these crazy signs. Look—'If your windshield's dirty, wipe it yourself—we're too busy counting money'. He's trying to wreck the station, Mr. Bateman."

Bateman started to talk.

I interrupted him. "That's only half of it," I said. "Look at the customers. Used to be we couldn't get them in here if we gave the gas away. Now they read in the papers how Max Arkey inherits fifty thousand dollars and puts up these crazy signs to keep them away. I figured it was the end.

"So what happens? They mob us with business. I had to put two kids on to help out this morning. Keep up this way I'll need another one. Look, see that sign? 'Your car will spoil with Max's oil'? We used to tell them they could drive three-thousand miles on Max's oil. We didn't sell a tenth the oil that we do now. Am I nuts, Mr. Bateman? If I'm not, then everybody else is. What's wrong with people, anyhow?"

I didn't give him a chance to say anything because then a Buick drove up to the wash rack and I went over to explain to the guy that we don't really get three-hundred and fifty dollars for washing a car and if he'd just leave it I'd have one of the kids wash it for him for a buck. He walked off, stopping to read some of the signs and laughing to himself.

Then I got really busy, with four cars crowding up to the gas pumps, another wash job, and two guys leaving their cars for lube jobs. The two kids and I were running all over each other to take care of the rush.

And then I looked up and saw Max's car drive in. He'd bought it the day before and you couldn't miss it. It was a sports-edition orange, a big zippy convertible job, the kind that looks like it's doing eighty even when it's parked.

Bateman had been waiting around and he saw Max the same time I did. Max got

out of the car and ran toward the office. I'd never seen him like that. He was wearing the pants of his new suit, but no jacket over his shirt, and his tie was loose and his collar open. He needed a shave and his eyes were like two ripe tomatoes.

We got to the office in a dead heat. "What's wrong, Max?" I hollered. "Who's chasing you?"

"She's dead!" he yelled. "She's dead!"

He ran into the office and Bateman and I followed. Bateman closed the door. "Sit down, Max," he said.

Max sat down. Then he jumped up and looked out the window.

"Sit down, Max," Bateman said. "Who's dead? What's wrong? Is somebody following you? Max, what the hell's wrong?"

Max came away from the window and sat down. "No, nobody's following me. I don't think nobody's following me. I got away from them."

"What happened, Max?"

"What happened? I don't know what happened. Hell, I don't know what happened."

I gave him a cigarette. He was shaking so much I could hardly light it. "Now, Max, tell us what's wrong."

"I been driving around all night. First thing I knew I was in San Bernardino." He was staring at the floor. "Then I didn't know what to do in San Bernardino. So I drove around some more. Then I came back here." He bounced off his chair and looked out the window. "Maybe they *are* following me. Maybe they'll get me."

"Max," I said, "who's following you? Who'll get you?"

"You know who it is, Mr. Bateman. It's just like you said. My cousins. They're after me, all right. They tried to kill me. Last night when I got home. Just like you said, Mr. Bateman. I shoulda took your advice." The cigarette fell out of his mouth. I stepped on it

and lit him a new one. I made him sit down. "Max, tell us what happened. Just take it easy and start at the beginning. Who's dead?"

He took a drag on the cigarette. "That girl," he said. "The one in the bar, in Louie's—the girl with the big diamond ring—Polly. She's dead." He took the ring from his pocket, the same ring the dame had tossed on the bar the night before. "They shot her dead!" he groaned, "They shot her dead!"

Bateman walked over and stood in front of him. I couldn't see his face, but the back of his fat neck was the color of raw sausage.

Max kept talking. "In my house. They sneaked up on us. They bust in the windows. They were aimin' at me but they got her. They bust in the windows. They were shootin' and yellin' and comin' after me. I barely got away. But they got her."

Bateman shook his shoulder. "What on earth are you saying, Max? How much of this is true?" He turned to me. "Do you hear what he's saying?" he asked.

I had questions: "Max, you're sure it happened? You're sure you weren't drunk?"

Bateman's turn: "Who is this girl?" he asked. He took the ring from Max and nodded me over to the window. "Al," he said, "what do you know about this ring and the girl he's talking about?"

I told him about the night before and how Max met Polly in Louie's.

BATEMAN went back to Max. "Did she tell you this was a real diamond?" he asked. "Did she try to sell it to you?"

Max looked up. "She was broke. Sure it's a real diamond. She said it cost three thousand bucks."

"And tried to sell it to you?"

"She was broke. Yuh. Eight hun-

dred, she asked. I didn't pay her. You know I ain't got my uncle's dough yet." He was still shaking some, but now he was plenty sober. He went on, "After Alfred left, we had a couple more drinks, then the joint closed. I told her about my new house and she said yes, she'd come out for a few more drinks. On the way she gave me the ring and told me she had to sell it because she was broke. I said okay, I'd give her the money later.

"When we got to the house, she sat on the sofa and when I started for the kitchen for some ice, then it happened. The windows smashed, the shooting started. The girl yelled, 'I'm hit! I'm hit!' and she fell on the floor. I knew it was my cousins, Mr. Bateman, out to get me like you said. I musta got away from them cause the next thing I knew I was driving like hell on the road to San Bernardino."

Bateman sounded like a judge to a jury. "What have you decided, Max?" he asked.

Poor Max just looked at him. Then he looked at me.

"Decided about what?" I wanted to know.

"This," Bateman said sternly, "is a matter for Max alone to decide."

"What is a matter to decide?" I insisted.

Bateman looked at Max. I looked at Max. Max was looking at some point half way between our eyes. He said nothing.

Then Bateman put a hand on my shoulder. "This boy is in serious danger. We must help him."

"Sure," I said.

"He has dangerous enemies. They will stop at nothing. But they can be dissuaded. As an attorney—" He turned from me to Max.

"Let him alone," I said. "You can see he's in no shape—"

Bateman tried to ignore me.

"Let him alone." I said.

"You don't understand. This boy's life is in danger." Bateman looked at Max. "Your life is in danger. You must make a decision."

"I'll make that decision," I said.

Bateman's eyes were two bright balloons. Then I spoke my next line and the balloons exploded.

"We're going out to the house," I said.

Max jumped up and had me by the lapels. "No! no!" he pleaded. "They'll get me sure!"

Bateman shook his flabby face at me. "I wouldn't advise your going out there now," he said. "Max is right. It's dangerous."

"But we are going," I said.

"I wouldn't—"

"But you are. You, too, Mr. Bateman. Max may *need* a lawyer."

I should tell you at this point that I am a guy of six feet three. I wear a size seventeen collar, number twelve shoes, and everything else about me is in proportion. In this crisis, I moved a little closer to Bateman so he would be more conscious of the superiority of my type of argument. We said a few more words to each other, but its not necessary to tell you what they were.

The important thing is that five minutes later Bateman was sitting between Max and me as I drove Max's convertible out toward the desert. Aside from a few whimperings about turning back, Max was quiet. Bateman, for the first few miles, did quite a bit of protesting. But then, every time we had a right turn, my elbow happened to dig into his fat side. Finally, I guess, he decided that I could handle the wheel more expertly if the distracting conversation were eliminated.

We had been riding about an hour when we came to El Diablo. El Diablo is a little resort on the edge of the desert. In the summer it has fifty or so people who hide away in what shade they can find and think about the tourists who will

bring in fresh money next winter. As we zipped through, the nearest to living thing visible was a Model T Ford on its hands and knees outside the grocery store. It had no number plate and for all you could tell it might have been there since 1924.

We went a couple of miles more without seeing a single house, and then Max pointed off to the left. "There it is," he said, "you can just see the top of it."

I looked and saw a red tile roof surrounded by palm trees and a few Joshuas.

"It's that next road on that side," Max went on. Then he pleaded, "Please be careful, Alfred."

I turned down the road—it was just a single-track dirt lane—and headed toward the house. It was a neat looking place, stucco, ranch-style, with good shade from the trees. Then I saw a car, a black coupe, parked in the driveway.

Then Max was yelling, "Stop! Turn around! That car! Somebody's here!"

Bateman was yelling, "Turn around! Haven't you seen enough! Let's go back, you fool!" Bateman was still yelling when I pulled up behind the coupe and cut the motor.

Bateman was still yelling when a voice from inside the house said, "Hello!"

Bateman stopped yelling when the man of the voice opened the door and came out on the porch.

Then Max was yelling again, "Frank! That's Frank! That's the dead dame's boy friend!"

Frank was wearing tan pants, a race-track checked jacket, and instead of a shirt, a silk scarf tied like for Sunday morning on the patio. He gave us a lazy wave. "Come right up, gentlemen," he said. He was smiling like we were all lodge brothers.

I got out, ran around to the other side of the car, opened the door, and Max got out. Bateman needed a little more persuading but he got out finally and I shoved

him ahead of me up to the porch. Max followed behind like a little brown dog.

"Sit down, Mr. Bateman," I said.

"Yes, by all means," Frank said. "Be comfortable. "Here—" he shoved a canvas porch chair toward Bateman. "We can have a nice little chat."

Bateman ignored the invitation. He pointed a fat finger at Frank. "Max," he asked, "is this the man you met in the bar—the man with the girl?"

Max nodded.

"How do you do?" Frank smiled.

"You cheap, chiseling racketeer!" Bateman yelled.

There was a small table near Frank and he half-sat on it, one foot touching the porch floor, the other swinging slowly back and forth. "That's a good enough subject, Mr. Bateman," he said. "Racketeers. Tell us a story about racketeers."

"I'll tell you!" Bateman shrieked. His fat cheeks pooched out like he had two crabapples in his mouth. "You and your fake diamond! Damned two-bit racket!"

Max looked at me. "Alfred," he said, "Alfred—"

"Don't ask him," Bateman said, "ask me. You were played for a fish. That's what happened. This guy and that girl."

FRANK jumped to his feet. His smile was gone. Bateman stopped talking, his mouth hung open. He pressed his fat shoulders against the wall. Max looked at me and grabbed my sleeve. For a few seconds we all just stood there, quiet.

Then Frank sat back on the table. The smile came back. "Don't talk that way about Polly," he said. "Please." For a second the smile blacked out while he looked at Bateman, but it came right back and he said, "I'm sorry. You were talking."

"You want me to go on?"

"I'm playing with you, Bateman. I'm playing bed-time story. We're the little

children and you're the daddy. Go on, Daddy, tell us a story."

"I'll tell you a story! You read in the papers that Matthew Arkey had died in St. Louis and left Max here fifty thousand dollars. So you followed him to that cocktail bar and put on your act. Pretty girl in distress needs money."

"That girl," Max said. "A crook?" He looked at me.

Bateman had all his chins stuck out. "Yes, a crook." He wiggled a fat finger at Frank. "So's this guy. He tried to sell you a ten dollar fake for—for how much? Eight hundred? Damn right they're crooks!"

Frank was still smiling. "Let's not be offensive, Mr. Bateman," he said. "I'm not a crook. You know that." He pointed at the top button of his coat. "I'm a businessman." Frank shifted his legs so both feet touched the floor. He was talking slick and easy, like a guy selling magazines door to door. "I had a ring to sell. I wanted eight hundred dollars for it."

"A ten dollar ring!"

"You've bought rings, Mr. Bateman. Did ever ask the jeweler how much he was making on you? I had a ring to sell. I picked Max Arkey to buy it. For eight hundred he'd have had a ring to show. An honest deal. Legal. Legal as lemonade."

Max looked at me, than at Frank. "A ten dollar ring for eight hundred dollars," he said.

Frank was pleasant. "That's right, Arkey. Eight hundred." He turned up the palms of his hands. "Oh, sure, it was a speedy deal. It's loused up now. You've put me out of business. But I'm not the only unwholesome character going through your pockets. Eight hundred to me and you'd have a ring."

Bateman interrupted. "A swindle—"

"He'd have had a ring, Mr. Bateman."

Frank sat all the way back on the table so both his feet were swinging free. He's one of those guys who gets more and more

comfortable by getting into more and more uncomfortable positions. "A ring, Mr. Bateman," Frank went on, "is a lot more than he'd have had from you." He looked at Max. "Arkey, what did Bateman offer you for your money?"

"What money?" Max shook his head. "He didn't want no money. He gave me money. He brought me fifty thousand dollars from my dead uncle."

Bateman butted in, "Don't say any more, Max. You know what this guy is. Don't say any more. You don't have to tell this crook anything!"

Frank gave him a hurt look like he'd stepped on his feet. "I'm going to ask you to be quiet now, Mr. Bateman," he said. "You've finished telling your little story. Now Arkey and I want to talk it over. Do you mind?" He gave a real nice smile, teeth and all.

Then he looked back at Max. "Bateman must have asked for something, Arkey. A few hundred for a retainer fee?"

Max shook his head.

"Money for expenses?"

"No, no."

"Nothing?"

"No, nothin'."

Frank stood up. He frowned.

"You got him wrong," Max said. "He didn't want nothin' for himself."

"Not for himself!" Frank was smiling again. "But—"

"Well—" Max said.

Frank sat back on the table. Even his eyes were smiling now. "Go on, Arkey."

"Well, my cousins—"

"Your cousins?"

"My cousins—the ones who were cut out of the will."

Frank waved a finger at Bateman. "You rascal," he laughed.

"Mr. Bateman asked me for five thousand dollars for my cousins so they wouldn't bother me."

Frank whistled.

Max went on, "He told me to borrow it so he could pay them off and they wouldn't bother me. You been inside?" He pointed to the door. "You seen the girl? They wasn't tryin' to kill her. It was me they wanted. They killed her but it was me they wanted." He wiped his palms on his face. "I shoulda got it for them. I wish, I wish I'd got it for them."

"Five thousand," Frank said. "A round sum. And what about the fifty thousand, Arkey? When do you get that?"

"Oh, that—" Max looked at Bateman. "That takes time. Mr. Bateman said I'd have to wait a couple of weeks for that."

"A couple of weeks." Frank was on his feet. He stepped to the door that led into the house. He started talking fast and sure, like the guy on the radio spieling a football game.

"EVER check your uncle's address in St. Louis, Arkey? Ever even heard of him before? Ever see his picture?" His voice was soft, almost a whisper. "And Bateman—ever try to locate his law office? Am I getting warm, Mr. Bateman?"

"Don't listen, Max!" Bateman yelled. "It's all a lie!"

"Thanks," Frank said. "Very much. Thank you very much. That, kiddies, ends Mr. Bateman's delightful bed-time fable, 'Uncle Matthew'."

"But my cousins—" Max stammered—"my cousins tried to kill me."

Frank nodded toward Bateman. "There's your 'cousins', Arkey," he said. "You see, along with dreaming up the fake uncle, Bateman dreamed up the reason for asking for money—the cousins. And when you were a little slow about digging up the five thousand, he figured a little shooting scare would get instant action."

"You can't prove that!" Bateman screamed.

"You forget, Mr. Bateman," Frank said, "you didn't actually kill her." He pushed the door open. "Polly," he said, "come out here, please."

She had a wet towel wrapped around her head and she didn't look so hot with her hair all stringy and her make-up gone. But she was the same girl all right. And very much alive!

Bateman's round face was very sad.

"Is this the fat man you were telling me about?" Frank asked, pointing at Bateman.

Polly's thin voice sounded like two dimes rubbing together. "That's the guy. The fat swine!" She leaned back against the doorway and looked him over. "He's the guy who beamed me through the window with the rock. It's him all right. After Sir Galahad here took off and left me high and dry. I looked out the window and saw this guy shooting his gun in the air and yelling like an Indian." She saw the canvas chair and dropped into it. She looked around. "The biggest collection of foul balls ever assembled on one porch."

That evening, back at the gas station, I was explaining things to Max. "You see," I said, "stimulated by the promise of the first crook, you put up these crazy signs. That attracted the second set of crooks. But too many crooks cancel each other out, so you are safe and sound."

"Them crazy signs," Max moaned. "I shoulda took your advice. I never shoulda made them crazy signs. Next time, Alfred, I'll take your advice."

I didn't answer.

"No fifty thousand bucks, no nothin'. I'm gonna take your advice, Alfred. I'm gonna pull down all them crazy signs."

I didn't say anything. I was just thinking, "If you take my advice, you'll let those signs stay up." I opened the cash register and looked at the pile of greenbacks.

Then I said, "I've got an idea you'll make fifty thousand out of this deal yet."

DO YOU TAKE THIS LIFE?

By Day Keene

Many have sworn, "Till death do us part." Morgan was not the first to find that death is no parting—when murder calls the windup!



He carried the body to the ocean side and fed it to the hungry waves. . . .

IF THERE was a sun it was hidden. The sky in the south was a dirty yellow. The lull before the storm had broken. In a few minutes it would rain. The outer winds of the coming hurricane moving north at an unhurried twelve to fourteen miles an hour were already lash-

ing the palm fronds and rattling the time-rotted boards of the old sponge warehouse at Shark Key.

From Morgan's place in the open doorway he could see the rising Gulf, whipped by the wind, twist at the pilings of the equally rotted pier. By turning his head

he could see the sea. In three or four hours, six hours at the most, both bodies of water would meet and most of the key, including the Overseas Highway, would be under water.

There were still a few cars on the highway as storm-wise fishing camp owners and residents of the lower keys sought shelter in the hurricane blockhouses on the mainland against the one hundred and sixty mile an hour winds the Boca Chica Naval Base reported were already screaming through the streets and harbors of Key West, despite the fact the eye of the hurricane had passed some fifteen miles to the east. Three Navy craft had been damaged. Two Coast Guard boats had been driven ashore. Thirty privately owned boats had sunk.

Morgan mulled the figure in his mind. Thirty boats. And all he needed was one. One off-shore cruiser capable of making the round trip between Shark Key and Tampico. With tinned opium selling at five hundred dollars a can states-side, and two hundred dollars in Mexico, he could clean up a fortune in one trip. If he even had the boat he'd seen advertised in the *Miami Times*. He took the newspaper clipping from his pocket. If the hull was sound it was a buy.

Sacrifice. Newly painted 26 by 8 cabin cruiser, sleeps 4. Toilet, sink, ice chest, bait well, etc. 115 H.P. Chrysler Crown. New. Less than 50 hrs. Can be seen at slip 46, Sunshine Boat Club. Price \$1,750.

If it was any good at all that was practically giving it away. The hurricane would pass. They always did. But it said in the book of experience that opportunity knocked but once.

Her ear glued to the battery-powered radio, Addy raised her tremulous voice. "We better go, Giles. The last of the power lines is down and the reports are coming from Miami now."

He nodded. He looked at the pathetically few personal possessions Addy had

gathered to take with them. A few pots and pans. A few worn clothes. Her Bible. With the 1933 coupe out of which he had cut the back to make room for a fish box, and for which no self-respecting used-car dealer would offer a hundred dollars, they were their only possessions—with the exception of the Luger he had managed to bring home from the war along with his dishonorable discharge. He patted the hip pocket of his fishing pants.

He turned back and looked at the storm. The pines were bent almost double. The wind, rising steadily, was shredding the fronds from the palms. As he watched, a ten-foot length of one-by-twelve board was wrenched from the side of the warehouse and hurtled through the air. The rotting pier had almost disappeared. It was time to go. And still he lingered.

The dishonorable discharge had bothered Addy most of all. She still talked of it occasionally. She was filled with a lot of patriotic nonsense, always spouting off about it being a man's first duty to his country to be a good citizen, crime didn't pay, murder would out, the meek would inherit the earth. He would have to marry such a woman, and a sickly one to boot.

He allowed his mind to dwell on Nell Gilly. Now there was a girl. With Nell it was pass the bottle, boys, to hell with the law, and the devil take the hindmost. His lean jaw tightened as he thought of Nell. She liked him. He could tell by the way she wagged her ample hips whenever he was around. If he wasn't married to Addy, if he had enough to buy a boat and make regular trips to Tampico, Nell would snap him up in a minute. But he might as well wish for the moon. He was saddled with Addy for life. Her four brothers would see to that. What with her feeling as she did about his cutting corners they would never have any money as long as they lived together. And she came of a sickly but long-lived stock. She would probably live forever.

Addy switched off the radio. She had to scream in his ear now to make him hear her. "We'd best not wait any longer."

He nodded in agreement. He didn't know why he had waited as long as he had. There had been a vague idea in the back of his mind that possibly a ship might be washed ashore or he might have a chance to loot one of the boarded-up fishing camps on the key. But no boat had washed ashore and the owners of the surrounding fishing camps were almost as poor as he. Now if he could only be turned loose in Key West and come out of it alive. There would be rich pickings there. But there he would have the Navy to contend with. And its standing orders were to shoot all looters. The keys had gone soft. They weren't what they had been when the first Morgan to sail it had sailed the Caribbean. He had half a mind to move away. If he moved north or to California he and Addy could live quite well on the relief checks it was said they paid. And he would shed Addy's brothers.

She beat him with her puny fists. "You hear me, Giles? We'd best go."

With a last look at the Gulf and a still longer look at the sea, he nodded. There were no ships in sight. There was no use waiting any longer. As usual, he hadn't gotten a break.

HE CARRIED the pots and pans out to the car and put them in the fish box. He had to bend almost double against the wind to walk. The air was filled with flying things now. Thousands of land crabs seeking to escape the lashing waters sought refuge on the slightly raised landing platform of the warehouse, only to be scooped up by the wind and hurtled northward out of sight.

Morgan chuckled dryly. Some resident of Tarpon Springs or Tallahassee was sure going to be surprised when it rained fiddler crabs on his lawn.

Returning to the warehouse he got the

rope-tied paper suitcases and put them in with the pots and pans. Now if the old heap would only start. If it wouldn't, they were sunk. There was no use trying to take refuge in the rickety old warehouse Addy had tried hard to transform into a home. They would be safer in the open. There were no doors and few windows to batten. He had burned most of the doors for fuel. The old warehouse had lived through a dozen other hurricanes but it wouldn't live through this one. Once the full force of the storm struck it the roof would be hurtled seaward and the retaining walls would collapse in a pile of heavy but well-rotted timbers.

He stepped on the starter of the car and was relieved to hear the motor start. Then he remembered Addy. She had stepped down off the loading platform and was trying to reach the car but the wind was too strong for her. Her dress wet and whipped tight against her slight body, she was struggling with all her strength to lean into the wind but making absolutely no progress.

He sat in the shelter of the car cab comparing her body to Nell Gilly's and wondering how her brothers would take it if he allowed Addy to blow away. She was screaming for help now. He could see her lips move if he couldn't hear the words. In a few more minutes the wind would blow her away. All that was saving her now was her grip on the loading platform. Once she let go she would be blown across the highway and straight out to sea. The chances were her body would never be found or if it was found it would be unrecognizable once the churning waters and debris had finished with it. Her brothers, he imagined, would take it hard. They were a close-knit family. They might imagine a lot of things. And if her body was never found he wouldn't be able to prove that he hadn't killed her.

Leaving the car reluctantly he allowed the wind to carry him to her; then he

put an arm around her waist and they fought their way back to the car. She was crying but grateful when she reached the dry shelter of the cab.

"I thought you never would come. And I was most beat out," she admitted.

"I was loading the back," he lied. "I didn't see that you were in trouble."

She was pathetically grateful. "But when you did, you came and got me."

She kissed him wetly. The kiss was sour on Morgan's lips. The little fool still loved him. She thought that he loved her.

"We'd best wait for the lull now," he said, "then make a run for it. With any sort of luck at all we ought to make the high school at Homestead. Either way it will be better on the mainland."

He had no doubt they would make Homestead. Even beaten up as it was the heap would better twelve miles an hour and all that was necessary was to stay ahead of the hurricane.

More boards on the building went. He could no longer see the Gulf for flying spume and churned sea weed. There was a constant patter of sand and wind-blown shell on the windows and the windshield.

Addy snuggled closer to him. "Giles."

He grunted.

She continued. "If anything *should* happen to me there's something I want you to know. You know that insurance man, the one who stayed down to Harri-man's bait camp, the one you thought was sweet on me because you found us together one evening?"

He was amused. Good for Addy. He hadn't known she was woman enough to be untrue to him. He had made the accusation merely to see the city man squirm. Well, well. So Addy wasn't so goody-good after all. He pretended to be hurt. "So you did."

She shook her wet hair on his chest. "Of course I didn't. You know me better than that. But I did let him talk me into taking out an insurance policy. I paid for

it for a year with the money the boys sent me for my birthday. Hit's in the back of my Bible. And if anything should happen to me the insurance company will pay you two thousand dollars."

His body rigid, he forced himself to put his arm around her waist. She was worth two thousand dollars to him dead. And he hadn't known it. If he had allowed the wind to blow her away he would be worth two thousand dollars right now. He could buy the boat in the ad. He could make love to Nell Gilly this very night. And he like a fool, had saved her.

She snuggled even closer. "I just wanted you to know. Not that anything is going to happen to me."

Morgan wasn't so certain of that. Then he thought of her brothers. All were big men. All were adept with fish knives. All worshipped the ground she walked on. She was their little sister. Perhaps it was just as well he had saved her.

The wind was dying fast. There was no way of knowing how long the lull would last. When it had ended they would be a good distance on their way. He turned the car around and pointed it toward the road just as a seaweed-draped blue and white state police car swung in off the highway. The driver's face was lined with strain. There was still enough wind to force him to shout to be heard. "You folks better get gone in the lull."

Addy rolled down the window on her side. "That's what we're waiting for. I most got blowed away making hit to the car. I would have." She nodded at the foam-flecked sea. "I'd most like have been out in that by now if Giles hadn't risked his life to save me."

The trooper nodded with approval. He was glad for a moment of rest. "The lower keys have been getting hell. I hear both the Rock and the Sanke Creek fishing camps were washed away completely."

Morgan asked if anyone had been killed. The trooper said he didn't know. Then

Addy remembered her Sunday dress. It was still hanging in the warehouse. She was out of the car before Morgan could stop her. "I've got to get it," she insisted. "Hit's the best dress I have. I don't know how I forgot to pack it."

The trooper eyed the sagging ridge line of the warehouse. It was a wonder it had stood as long as it had. "Don't let her be long," he cautioned Morgan. "Then get like anything for the mainland."

He backed his car, pointing it north down the Overseas Highway, and drove off at seventy miles an hour to make certain all the bait and fishing camps on the key had been evacuated.

MORGAN watched him out of sight, then stepped out of his own car. The situation was made to measure. It was just what the devil had ordered. He would never have a better chance to get away with murder. The trooper had heard Addy say he had saved her life at the risk of his own. He had seen him attempt to stop her when she had gotten out of the car. He had seen her re-enter the warehouse. The trooper had looked at the sagging ridge line. He, Morgan, could be in no way to blame if the storm-weakened warehouse were to collapse on Addy. Even her brothers would have to be satisfied. He would put on a show of grief and meanwhile have the two thousand dollars to spend on a boat and Nell Gilly.

Automatically compensating for the wind that no longer existed, he almost fell. With the death of the wind the silence hurt his ears. It was hot and sticky. Before he had taken a dozen steps the back and armpits of his blue shirt were black with sweat. He found Addy with her dress over her arm trying to lift the radio.

"I do declare," she said tartly, "if hit weren't for me, Giles Morgan, I don't know what you'd do. I don't know how you even lived afore we were married.

Leavin' our radio behind. I'll take the radio. You tote the battery out."

Puzzled by his silence, she straightened. He was standing in the doorway swinging a piece of two-by-four he'd picked up from the debris-littered loading platform.

She wet her lips and wanted to know, "Why are you looking at me that way, Giles? What do you aim to do with that piece of board?"

His voice sounded loud in the unnatural silence of the lull before the hurricane struck in all its savage fury he told her frankly, "I aim to earn me two thousand dollars. I always did dislike you, Addy, as a puny, spineless thing. But I never thought I'd be obliged two thousand dollars worth to you for putting you out of your misery. Yes, ma'am. I aim to buy me a boat and get rich running atween here and Tampico."

She dropped the radio and stepped back. "No, Giles. You don't know what you're saying."

For answer he took three quick steps forward and swung the piece of two-by-four at her head.

He was fast, but she was faster. Screaming, she backed away from him and the vicious blow cut air. He followed her stolidly. Having gone this far he didn't dare stop. All she had to do was tell her brothers and, hurricane or no, he would be cut-bait by morning.

He swung the two-by-four again. She dodged. But not so agilely this time. Her heart and her feet were ice. Her eyes were dull. She didn't want to live. This was her man. She loved him. And all she meant to him was a boat. A boat and a chance to lead the loose life he had led before they were married. It had been a bad mistake to tell him about the insurance. "I'll tell my brothers," she threatened.

Morgan didn't bother to answer. He was wasting valuable time. His own life was at stake. He had no way of knowing how

long the lull would last. It might last half an hour. It might end in the next five minutes. "Stand still, you devil," he panted.

He finally backed her into a corner. The two-by-four lifted and fell. Her hold on life was slim. It didn't take much of a blow. She lay in the corner where she had fallen, her flowered silk Sunday dress covering her like a shroud.

Striding to the door of the warehouse, he looked at the yellow sky; then striding out to his car he opened the fish box in back and made certain the insurance policy was where Addy had said it was. He was careful not to touch either the Bible or the policy with his bare fingers. His best method of procedure was to pretend total ignorance of the policy. One of her women friends would find it in the Bible. But to make his story good he couldn't afford to have his fingerprints found on either one.

Locking the fishbox, he turned back to look at the warehouse. By bending a turn of the stout manila line he kept in the car as a tow line around one of the corner timbers of the warehouse and attaching the other end to the rear bumper of his car he could assist the coming storm in tumbling it down over Addy's head. Then even if the sea rose a few feet over the key the heavy timbers, bulwarked by the stout coquina foundation, would keep her body from washing away. It was important that it be found. Important for two reasons. The insurance was one. Her brothers were the other. It was essential that they believe the storm had killed her.

He worked fast. It seemed an hour since the state trooper had left but in reality it had been about five minutes. The rope secure, he remembered the piece of two-by-four and started into the warehouse for it before he put strain on the line. It was the little things like that that sent a man to the death chamber in Raiford; that proved the truth of Addy's much par-

roted adage—you can't get away with murder. But he was the exception that proved the rule. He wasn't forgetting a thing. The meek might inherit the earth but he would be satisfied with two thousand dollars.

HE STOPPED in the warehouse door, incredulous. He couldn't be seeing what he thought he saw. Stripped to a pair of sodden white duck pants, a pudgy stranger with sea weed tangled in his hair and his upper body smeared with oil was bending over Addy. A deep cut, no longer bleeding, gashed one cheek. His water-bleached hands were torn with corral.

As Morgan stared at him, he straightened. "She's dead," he said plaintively. "The woman's dead."

His voice was shrill with shock. Morgan recognized him as a "tripper." He didn't know him but he knew his type. He was one of the two-week-a-year know-it-all fishermen with whom the keys were infested during the season. This one was merely early. "Where did you come from?" he asked him.

The man pointed vaguely toward the Gulf. "Out there. All the rest of them are dead. They were washed overboard. We were fishing off Lower Matecumbe Key without a guide when a Coast Guard plane dropped a block warning yesterday that hurricane signals had been hoisted. The reds were biting good. We thought we had plenty of time to run for it, but we didn't." His shock-shrill voice turned plaintive. "We waited twelve hours too long. After that we didn't have a chance."

It was the old story, Morgan thought—a party of city fishermen with more money than weather sense who thought they knew more than the Coast Guard.

He jerked his head toward the Gulf without turning. "You swam in that?"

"No," the man said. "I can't swim. None of us could swim. I stayed with the

boat till it beached. Then somehow I got ashore. I saw this building and came in." He looked down at Addy again, then said as if imparting an important fact, "She's dead. The woman's dead."

Turning, Morgan looked at the Gulf. A once-sleek thirty-six foot off-shore fishing cruiser was beating itself to death in the maelstrom of shredded timber where the pier had formerly been. The lull before the storm had ended. The wind was rising again and wind and waves were combining to twist the expensive boat apart with fury. His boat had come ashore after all. But it was too late to do anything about it. He had a much more important matter with which to contend. The stranger knew Addy was dead. He knew she had died before the warehouse had collapsed. He was currently in a state of shock. He didn't know what he was saying or doing. But once the shock had worn off, a statement from the stranger to the police would be sufficient to send him to the death chamber at Raiford. Drawing his Luger from his hip pocket he shot the man through the head. He fell on top of Addy, and standing over him Morgan fired two more shots into his body to make certain he was dead.

Then snatching the body off hers before the blood could more than stain her flowered dress, he wrapped both the body and the bloodied dress in an old tarpaulin and carried it across the now deserted Overseas Highway to the ocean side and fed it to the hungry waves licking at the shoreline. As he watched, a wave lifted it high then whisked it out of sight. The next landfall he would raise would be the Bahama Islands. Morgan wished him luck.

He hadn't much time now. The wind was a mounting roar. He could feel the pressure in his ears. Racing back to the warehouse, he secured the piece of two-by-four, made certain with a quick glance that the stranger hadn't bled on Addy, got

into his car and eased it slowly forward. With the wind to help him it wasn't much of a pull. If there was any sound of wrenching timbers it was drowned in the growing roar of the twisting wind. The old warehouse toppled slowly like a house a child might build of cards.

Stopping his car and shifting from low to neutral, Morgan attempted to recover the rope and cursed in panic as he saw part of the wall of the building had fallen on the end of the rope bent around the timber. His hands were torn and bleeding when he finally got it free. Panting, his body soaked with sweat, he fed it and the two-by-four to the waves and saw them follow the stranger's body.

Getting into the car he drove north as fast as possible with the advance fingers of the hurricane whipping salt water at his rear bumper. The pine trees were bent double again. What fronds were left on the palms were shredding. A dozen times the wind hurled dry fronds like spears against the sides and windshield of the car. The thick butt of one shattered the window on the driver's side. It was raining so hard he could barely see the outline of the road, fast being obliterated by sand and seaweed and water. He was cutting it close. But the closer he cut it the better it would be for his story. His bleeding hands, instead of detracting as he first had feared, would add to it.

He rehearsed the story he intended to tell. Addy had gone into the warehouse for her dress. The trooper had seen her do that of her own free will. He had waited patiently until she had been gone overly long. Then he had gotten out of his car to go in to see what was detaining her and the warehouse had collapsed in the wind that had begun to blow from the south again. He had torn frantically at the timbers trying to reach her, calling her name, praying she wasn't dead. He had only ceased his efforts when he realized they were in vain. He had to leave

if he wanted to save his own life before the eye of the hurricane caught him.

Even if the body of the stranger were washed ashore before the sharks and crabs finished with it, there was nothing to connect the stranger with him. He had never even met the man. He had no known motive for killing him. He had committed not one, but *two* perfect murders. And the wages of sin was a boat.

. . . . newly painted 26 by 8 cabin cruiser, sleeps 4. Toilet, sink, ice chest, bait well, etc. 115 H.P. Chrysler Crown. New. Less than 50 hrs. . . . Price \$1,750. . . .

As soon as the storm was over and Addy's body had been recovered he would drive up to Miami and have a look at it. It might be several days or weeks before he could collect the insurance. Someone would have to find the policy before he could even put in a claim and he couldn't afford to hint or appear impatient about it.

But he could in some way manage to get the boat's owner to hold it for him by putting down a small deposit.

The roar of the wind matched his mood. Murder would out? Not this time. There was no way the law or her brothers could possibly prove he had killed Addy. They all would feel sorry for him. The Morgans could still take care of themselves.

Even Nell Gilly would be sympathetic. Now there was a woman. He would have liked to shut his eyes and imagine her in his arms but it took all of his alerted senses to drive. Besides, he didn't need to imagine. Nell would be in his arms tonight, and many a night thereafter. Of course they would have to be discreet for a time because of Addy's brothers. But that would only add a fillip to their association. And as soon as he had gotten his boat he would go to Tampico and Addy's brothers could go to hell.

He did some mental arithmetic. One thousand seven hundred and fifty dollars subtracted from two thousand left two

hundred and fifty dollars. He would stock the boat with a lot of fancy canned goods. He'd buy several cases of good whisky. He'd buy Nell a flowered silk dress. That would please her. New dresses always pleased a woman.

His fingers tightened convulsively on the wheel.

Addy had gone into the warehouse after her flowered silk Sunday dress. And any woman on Shark Key could describe it. He had forgotten to clean and reload his gun and when Addy's brothers saw him, they might insist the law look at his gun. And he couldn't afford the least breath of suspicion.

He considered both matters carefully. He was driving out of the storm. Before he reached the mainland and the shelter he would stop and reload his gun. But there was nothing he could do about the dress. It was out on the hurricane-whipped Atlantic somewhere, wrapped around the body of a dead man. The law might miss it, it might not. There was no way of telling in advance. But its being gone proved nothing conclusively one way or another. If the dress were missed and he was questioned he could always say it had been blown away by the wind, that he had seen it in the air when the warehouse had collapsed. Yes. He thought he could explain away the absence of the dress. But he was sorry that he had overlooked it.

Some of his wild elation and self-satisfaction faded. No matter how clever a man was, no matter how well he covered his tracks, once he had killed someone there was always some minor detail bobbing up to annoy him.

THE sun was a brassy orange hung high in a blue sky which was festooned with fleecy clouds. The Gulf lay limpid on one hand, the Atlantic only a slightly darker grey millpond on the other. Birds sang on both sides of the

road; long-legged, white and blue, glutted by the feast cast up on the beaches and into the shallows, they looked up incuriously as the long cavalcade passed. The only signs of the storm just over was an occasional oily swell, the debris-littered beaches, the uprooted trees, the holes in the road, the great ponds where dry land had been, and the roofless homes and pierless and devastated fishing camps. The damage had been extensive.

Giles Morgan rode in one of the first returning cars, a blue and white patrol car driven by the young state trooper. Addy's four brothers rode in the rear seat. And Morgan no longer feared them. Addy's brothers were his friends. He had been a fool to be afraid for even a single minute.

After he had told his story and showed his bloody and torn hands the young state trooper had told his; had told of how he had seen Giles and Addy in their car with the motor running and ready to go. He had told of Addy's boast that Giles had saved her life by risking his. He had told of Addy's insisting on returning for her dress and how Giles had tried to stop her but she had gotten out of the car before he could. He had told of how he had looked at the rickety old sponge warehouse and had wondered what was holding it up just before he had driven off. When the trooper had finished his story there wasn't a man or woman in the homeless group in the schoolhouse who hadn't felt sorry for Morgan.

All they had lost were their homes and their livelihood. He had lost the woman he loved. And Morgan had laid it on thick. He had blubbered all over the place.

Old Reverend Bascomb had even seized the opportunity to preach an impromptu sermon on vanity. And Morgan still chuckled to think how, emboldened by the reception of his story, he had seized the bull by the horns and how he no longer even had to fear the absence of the dress.

Every resident of the key could repeat his graphic description of how he had seen the dress that had cost Addy her life sailing through the air and out to sea.

Most surprising of all, her brothers had known of the insurance. Lon, a just, hard man and the oldest of her brothers, had gotten him to one side and made a startling revelation. Addy had known she was going to die. Her heart was bad. That was why she was puny and sickly. That was why she had jumped at the opportunity to take out insurance in his favor when the insurance man visiting the bait camp had offered to sign her up without her having to take a physical examination.

Morgan's first reaction had been resentment. Addy should have told him. Then he wouldn't have had to kill her. By waiting a few months he still could have had his boat. But there was no putting spilled blood back in a body. Not that Addy had bled much. The only mark on her would be where a "falling" timber had struck her. The important thing was she was dead and he could have Nell Gilly for the asking. All he had to do was crook his little finger.

The trooper was first out of the car. Addy's brothers followed. Big, simple men towering a head over Morgan, their massive shoulders bulging the seams of their shirts, they treated him like a man whose grief was even deeper than their own.

Moving toward the flattened warehouse, Con, the youngest of the brothers, patted Morgan's shoulder. "You just set and take it easy, Giles. Me and the other boys will heft the timbers to get to her. You done your share already."

Each big man was as good as a crane. The water-soaked and sea-weed-plastered walls and timbers were quickly lifted to one side. All four men took off their hats as the body was exposed. Morgan *had* to know how she looked. Scrambling up through the wreckage of what had been

the loading platform he stood beside the young trooper, looking down at her. Except for the faint mark on her forehead where he had struck her, Addy looked like she was asleep. If there had been any blood the heavy rains accompanying the hurricane had beaten through the splintered timbers to wash it from her face.

The dead girl's brothers, still clutching their hats in their massive hands, drew respectfully to one side to leave Morgan alone with his dead. Not so the trooper. His eyes thoughtful, he knelt beside the dead girl puzzled by the two small brown spots in her dress just over the region of her heart. Then, unbuttoning the dress, he examined the two brown spots.

When he got to his feet his face was grim. "You carry a gun, Morgan?"

Morgan stared at the two bullet holes in Addy's breast, incredulous. He couldn't believe it—they couldn't be there. "Why, yes," he admitted, "I do. A Luger I brought home from Europe. But—"

The trooper tugged it from his hip pocket. "I'll take charge of it as of here and now. The state ballistic expert will want to compare test shots with the bullets in your wife's body. But why tell us such a cock and bull story when you know the truth will come out as soon as her body is discovered. Why didn't you hit her with a two-by-four or something if you wanted us to believe she was killed when the warehouse collapsed?"

Sweat standing out on his forehead in huge drops, Morgan protested, "But I did." Realizing he was saying too much, he stopped. "That is—"

"You did what?" the trooper asked curtly. "You hit her with a two-by-four before you shot her?"

Completely confused now, Morgan blurted, "No. I didn't shoot Addy. I shot—" He stopped himself just in time. He couldn't admit to shooting the pudgy, horror-shocked stranger whose battered cruiser had beached on the Gulf side of the warehouse. Murder was murder. The law wouldn't care for whose murder it executed him.

He knew now what had happened. The stranger had fallen over Addy and he had fired two more shots into his back to make certain he was dead. But the high-velocity slugs hadn't stopped in the stranger's body. They had blasted their way through his flesh into Addy.

"All right," the trooper ordered coldly. "Start talking."

Sweat streaming down his face now and blacking the back of his shirt, Morgan protested, "No. I—"

Their simple, grief-stricken faces puzzled, Addy's four big brothers moved forward in a body. Lon touched the trooper's arm. "What's the matter, Officer?"

Weaseling away from Con's suddenly outstretched hand, Morgan leaped from the wreckage of the building and began to run, without direction, without hope. It didn't matter who caught him, Addy's brothers or the law. The result would be the same. Only one would be quicker than the other. It would seem Addy had been wrong in only one respect. Even now he wasn't meek. But he was about to inherit the earth—at least six feet of it.

— TO OUR READERS —

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



Solving Cipher Secrets



Founded in 1924

Article No. 843

M. E. Ohaver

A CIPHER is a secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Helpful hints appear in this department each month. Study them carefully.

CRYPTOGRAMS

No. 5235—Insurance for Shooters. By Joseph Miller. Hints for beginners: try lone C as "a," and phrase TOYL YLU as "with the," noting pair YL in both words. Check with LOY. Then substitute in CXBYLOXH, and fill in.

*ZUXXFBGXCOC*REYPL FEZUKFYOYOAX: ON C LEXYUK
FTCIF C XUT HEX ICKKUS TOYL YLU LUCKY AN C ICY,
YLU HEX TOSS LOY CXBYLOXH CY TLOPL OY OF COVUR!

No. 5236—Strange City. By Krypton. Singleton S and ending -YOGG will unlock GOS. Or try FLO, CLOHO, FU, and FLHUEML. Methodized alphabet will show letter for symbol Z. "KV *BSVSPE PKP *ZERYS *ZLSV S GFSFOYA TYOSGEHO

PUXO POQHOO; CLOHO *SYTL, FLO GSQHOP HKDOH HSV,
FLHUEML QSDOHVG XOSGEHOYOGG FU XSV, PUCV FU S
GEVYOGG GOS."—OBUFKQ KSXRKQG NHUX *QUYOHKPMO.

No. 5237—Buy Better Bonnets! By Alma L. Roy. Identify short words HLS, HE, HLSAO, HLAC, and AC, noting final -C. You will thus lack but two letters in *SUCHSO-HATS.

RETSD'C FEGAHAXUG XGKY KONSC UVEFHAED EP HLAC
*SUCHSO-HATS CGENUD: "DER AC HLS HATS PEO UGG
NEEV TSD HE XETS HE HLS UAV EP HLSAO FOSHHZ?"

No. 5238—Layers of Air. By Emil Lowe. Note short words ELY, EF, and FH. Next, try for FSL-NUPS. Or, noting high frequency of symbol S (used 25 times), complete YSXCSSR.

FSNGSCEFOCSR EZHDS SECFV'R ROCKETS: VOLYCSY ELY
RSDSLFA EZHDS QSCH *K. EF FVUCFA FH KHCFA NUPSR
OG! LSBF FSL-NUPS PEASC, SUXVFA YSXCSSR ZSPHJ!
LSBF FJSLFA-KUDS, LHCNEP ZHUPULX GHULF HK JEFSC!

No. 5239—Crooked Talk. By Zadig. Compare two-letter word NU with suffix -NUL. Follow with ASVK-LSNUL, noting SU. Another entry: EAK and pattern-word DEHKKE.

“AYDEONUL DASHED RUB DORZK LHNGE,” NU EAK ONULS
SG XNFTXSFTKED, VKRUD: “CSHTNUL SU EAK DEHKKE
FRHD RUB ONGENUL CROOKED GHSV ASVK-LSNUL XKSXOK.”

No. 5240—In the Van. By Vedette. Start with GRV and GP, and ending -VHH. Then try for starred words *ZPHGPS *SVMKVHH, noting MPG; etc.

AS YPDPSAUD XUEH, *NUKAU *DVV, MAMUSGAY *ZPHGPS
*SVMKVHH, PTGVS RVDLVX LPDAYV OVVL LVUYV. “HVSX
TPK *ZDUYO *NUKAU” KHUDDE NVUSG “GUOV GRV YFDLKAG
GP QUAD”! GRFH GRV LUGKPD BUMPS MPG AGH SUNV.

No. 5241—Domestic Menus. By °Dr. A. Guess PLACA by its use after the comma and starred word. Context will then suggest the right word for BLAH. Next, BCIBBACD, etc.

DAMACUS BCUMAS-BECAY *UVACEWUO ZSIXA-BCIBBACD,
ECFAY XH PICSY-PEYA WREDEOAD, LAUY JIC *UBLAOD,
PLACA BLAH AOTIH YASEWEIRD “LIVA WIIFEOZ”!

No. 5242—Outdoor Show. By *Sara. Affixes KF-, -KFH, and -ORO provide entry. Next complete KFRD and RSPF. Then APORO, VUDF, YADB, etc.

BDFGPX POLEUPO YADB LEHP, APORO ERDU YTEHUDTP.
RSPF TPEUO, RVAFO OPZPAET ODBPAOEVTR O BKN-EKA,
TEFNO VUDF SEBBDLG, CDVFLPO KFRD EUUTP-RAPP.
CAPERS-REGKFH BDFGPXOSKFPO EBEMP TDLET YDTGO.

No. 5243—Tense Moment. By °Volund. Interrogation mark will help with RPEF. Next, substitute for RP in YSYDMRPYDY and supply proper letter for symbol Y.

AXFYDXEFAUXEB AXHAGYXF HEOZYX RUDBG-RAGY KODUD.
YCHAFYG HDURGZ NEFPYD YSYDMRPYDY. HULLYXFEDUDZ
NDUR KDYXVAYG. RPEF PETTYXZ? LUSAY TDYSAYR!

No. 5244—Three Crackers. By H. L. Kruger. Here’s a problem for vowel spotters! Study your doubled symbols, noting frequencies and adjacent letters. Asterisks in crypts indicate capitalization.

LNGEC LUETPGK, NENOBKX XGQQULF, BUSSQNF YEUP
OEUFFZNGP, FKGSF KNOT. KUUFNH TRQQNE HEUSF
BVEUDXV BEGS, FKGSF KNOT. VDEERNH VGKXPGK
FBDPZONF HULK XRZZNB FBNSF. FKGSF KNOT. KNAB!

HERE'S the list, fans, of cryptographers who qualified for entrance to the various groups of our *Cipher Solvers' Club* during 1948! Three new members have won their dagger, marking †HC membership, by sending in solutions to 100 of our ciphers. And six cryptofans will henceforth carry the star, having made the *FHC with 500 answers each. While to *Yarbic goes the degree, highest SCS honor, symbol of the *ICC and 1,000 correct solutions. Congratulations, fans, on your respective achievements! Your roster numbers and names or cryptonyms, with entrance dates and scores, are duly recorded in the tabulation herewith.

**CIPHER SOLVERS' CLUB
NEW MEMBERS, JAN.-NOV., 1948**

*Inner Circle Club			
No. 209.	*Yarbic	.....May	1,008
*Five Hundred Club			
No. 479.	*Zizi	.....Jan.	506
No. 480.	*June	.....Mar.	506
No. 481.	*M. E. Cutcomb	.....May	500
No. 482.	*Invictus	.....July	505
No. 483.	*Amoroj	.....Nov.	507
No. 484.	*Florence B. Boulton	.....Nov.	503
†Hundred Club			
No. 1209.	†Hamlet II	.....May	107
No. 1210.	†Ray Boyd	.....May	103
No. 1211.	†Honey Dew	.....May	101

Solvers' names and cumulative scores appear in our periodically published Solvers' Lists. And previously accumulated scores are always available. Thus, †U. Solv'm, St. Petersburg, Fla., writes in: "Some years back, I cannot remember just how far back, I sent in answers to the crypts. Maybe you still have my record. At any rate, here I am again."—†U. Solv'm sent his last answers to the March, 1941, ciphers, and his top score at that time was 463 solutions. Welcome back, †U. Solv'm! Now you're within easy reach of the *FHC—Any reader may have his total score upon request. And solutions may be submitted to one or more ciphers in any issue. Every answer counts!

No. X-5246—Substitution Cipher. By †Hamcie.

GSRH DJOGFQ RH QFBKKZ GDL
 OQPAKFNT RM PMF, DRGS SXP
 HFYHGRGFGRML LFZT VNKOLBVW
 BKSQFQMBFSFKZ, LMV VSJKYJMH
 Z QFUFQTFC ZOKSZYVG, BMC
 GSV PSGFQ, IVEVIHVW OBJQT.

Current crypts include special No. X-5246 by †Hamcie. The plain-text will explain the system, and solution, though taking an unexpected turn, should follow through by regular cryptogram methods. *Arrowhead's No. X-5234, in last issue, used a self-contained key. Solution was accomplished by assigning to each letter in the cryptogram the numerical position indicated by its accompanying number. Thus, A-1, A-25, A-35, etc., located "A" as 1st, 25th, 35th, etc., letters in the answer; and so on. Full translation of No. X-5234: *A secret whose possession is admitted is a secret already half revealed. Answers to current puzzles will appear in the next issue.*

No. 5245—Cryptic Division. By Ednasande. A first puzzle from a new fan! Find zero by inspection, and eliminate for D. The key-phrase runs: 0 123456789.

E D N A) S A N D E Y (D Y
 P N Y D A
 S M A E Y
 S Y D O A
 U N Y

ANSWERS FOR LAST ISSUE

5223—Oklahoma City hubby and wifey staged domestic strip act, tore up each other's clothes. Police broke up free-for-all, left the two standing in a state of nature on the rag-littered floor.

5224—"Wintry boughs against a wintry sky; yet the sky is partly blue and the clouds are partly bright. Who can tell but sap is mounting high, ready to burst through?"—Christina Rosetti.

5225—Polar region explorers report that in extremely low temperatures of sixty degrees or more below zero, one can hear the breath freeze.

5226—John J. Sweeney, police judge who recently died in Pittsburgh, is reputedly responsible for the famous phrase: "Tell it to Sweeney!"

5227—"The scratch-pusher packs it in two keisters and the shack mopes behind," in crook jargon, means: "The firm's cashier carries the money in two satchels, and the guard follows him."

5228—Pontoon path: aquaplane zips over still water leaving white wake where large and tiny waves and ripples chase each other toward the shore.

5229—Question in New York state regents history exam: "Name two ancient sports." Answer by resourceful student: "Antony and Cleopatra."

5230—Cockney, dropping initial "h," and supplying that letter before initial vowels, asks, "Hiff haitch, hay, har, har, hi, hess, ho, hand hen hain't 'Arrison, what hin 'eaven his hit?"

5231—Profane prisoner pommels puzzled prosecutor, prostrates psychiatrist. Prognosis: pseudo psychopath parrying penalty. Proven pretendant, protesting "psycho" promptly procures prison.

5232—Gas mask, rifle, helmet, cartridge bandoleer, pack, canteen, bayonet, web belt, dirty face, plus muddled clothes: old "dog face" himself.

5233—Key:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
 Y O U , S H E , A N D I

All answers to current ciphers will be duly credited in our *Cipher Solvers' Club*. Address: M. E. Ohaver, *New Detective Magazine*, Fictioneers, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

(Cipher Solvers' Club on page 130)

Some guys are born to kill—others are born to run. But no matter how fast you are—

HE WAS still asleep when the nervous pounding on his door jarred him to consciousness. He opened his eyes, not sure he had heard it, then sprang off the bed as the pounding began again.

"Yeah?" he called.

"It's me, Jimmy. Peg."

He frowned, pulled on his shirt and faded brown pants and opened the door. Peggy shoved into the room, closed the door and turned to lean against it. Her eyes were wide as they stared into Jimmy's.

"You've got to get out of town." The words poured out with no voice behind them. "The cops are after you. I just left them."

"What the devil are you talking about?"

"You shouldn't have done it, Jimmy! You shouldn't have tried it! Vito's dead." She fell apart then and began to cry.

For an instant Jimmy Collins stared. Then his brain caught what she had said. He grabbed her and shook her hard.

"Vito's dead?"

"Don't you know, Jimmy?"

"Stop talking like a dope!" For the first time he noticed it was still dark outside. The battered alarm clock told him it was just after three in the morning. "What do you mean, Vito's dead? Make sense."

She was trembling now, and he let his fingers bite into the soft flesh of her arms. The pain steadied her and she kept going.

"The cops have been talking to me all night. Me and Brock. I was home and I guess Brock was too. They took us back to the restaurant. Vito was there. Him and a cop. Both of 'em laying there on the floor, bleeding." She began to tremble again.

"Take it easy, baby. How did it happen?"

100

"Somebody came in after closing. Shot Vito and robbed the place. Brock said there was over three thousand there when he left. Vito must have put up a scrap. Then a bull named Martell saw what was going on and came in to break it up."

"Martell!" Jimmy felt ice on his spine. "Mike Martell! Is he the one who got killed?"

"Stop lying to me!" Peggy burst out. "You know he was. You were there. You did it."

Fear made him lash her across the mouth with his bare right hand. Her gasp of pain cut into him and the ringing of his hand was like the burning of hot acid.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled. "Golly, hon, don't talk like that. You run me nuts when you talk that way. Why do you think I'd do a thing like that?"

"It's not just me, Jimmy. The cops think so too. They know it."

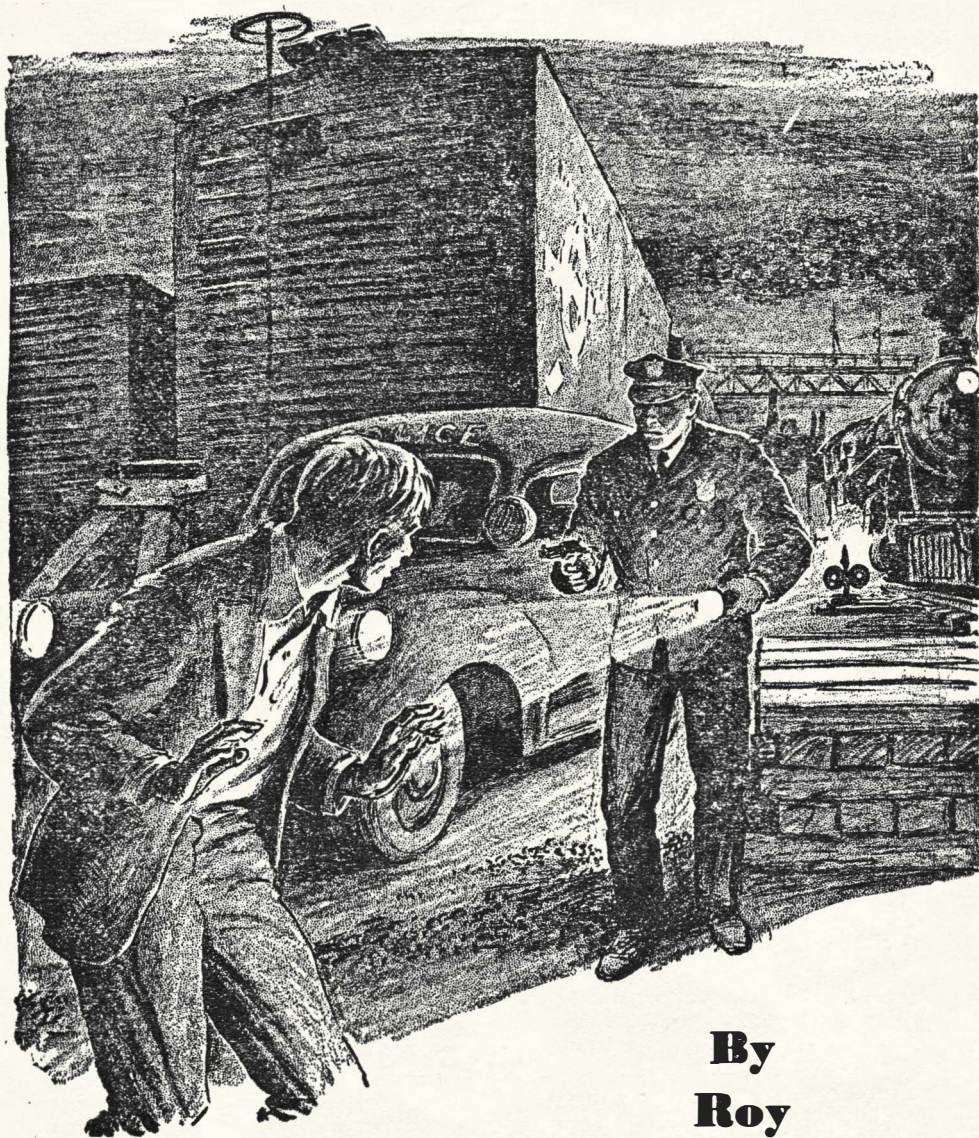
"How in blazes could they know anything like that?"

And then it came. "Because they found your gun there! Martell's brother identified it. And it's the gun that killed both Vito and the cop!"

Jimmy's mouth fell open. Then he moved. He jerked on his shoes and socks and beat it, pulling Peggy after him. They hit the street outside and Jimmy sped down the block, as fast as he could travel without running. He wondered if Peggy would make a break, especially when a prowl car siren whined and drew closer. She stuck with him.

They crouched in an alleyway as the prowl snarled past and pulled up before Jimmy's boarding house. Jimmy's lips tightened and he pulled Peggy after him for another six blocks. They were up in the hills now over Hollywood, far enough away from the Boulevard that the houses weren't too close. They climbed a long

DEATH RUNS FASTER



*The dragnet was thrown out,
and he was picked up again.*

**By
Roy
Lopez**

flight of steps leading up to a hillside road and paused at the half-way point. Peggy was gasping for breath.

"Now listen," Jimmy said, talking fast. "I didn't pull that job. I don't know who did. But if the cops think so, I'm sunk. You weren't just shouting when you said I've got to lam."

"You must have done it," Peggy said bitterly. "Your gun—"

"My gun's been missing for two days."

"Jimmy, for heaven's sake—"

"It's the truth!" he clipped. "I kept it in a drawer in my room. It's been gone since Friday."

"But who could have taken it?"

"Anybody, I guess. I never locked the door to that place."

Peggy shook her head slowly. "Do you expect people to believe that?"

"The cops sure won't. God, what a break! Martell's brother is the one who gets killed, and Vince Martell sees the gun." He swore under his breath. "He picked me up one night, Vince Martell did. He hauled me down to the Hollywood station for questioning. I had the gun on me then, and Martell made some crack about the way the butt is chipped. Yeah, he'd recognize it if he saw it again. And if the lab guys tie it up with the bullets that got Vito and Martell's brother . . ."

He turned to Peggy. "But you ain't the cops, baby. You've got to believe me. Do you figure me for a deal like that? Killing Vito? I liked the old man as much as you did!"

"Maybe. And maybe you didn't mean to kill him. But you and I had that argument last night." She dropped it there.

Jimmy Collins felt numb. That would sound swell too, if the cops pulled it out of Peggy. The way Peggy had pleaded with him, begging him to cut the shady stuff and go straight. The way she had threatened to give him the heave completely if he didn't snap out of it. The way she had

thrown Brock Hammond in his face, Brock who managed Vito's restaurant for him while Peggy worked there as a waitress.

Yeah, that would sound dandy. Sore at Peggy for reading him the riot act. Sore enough to thumb his nose at her by knocking over the very joint she worked in. And that gun of his. That would really do it.

"What time did this thing happen?" he demanded.

"About ten thirty, the police say. An hour and a half after closing time." She paused. "Wait a minute. You left me at nine thirty. If you went right home maybe somebody saw you. Your landlady. Maybe you've got an alibi."

"She saw me all right. After eleven."

"Eleven! Where did you go when you left me?"

He laughed harshly. "You won't buy this either, baby. I walked the streets. Yeah, that's right. I walked the streets, all by myself. I was burned up about you. The way I feel about you, and then you saying you'd ditch me for Brock Hammond. I took a walk to work off steam."

"Till after eleven." Again her voice had no substance, like a feather floating on a summer breeze.

"Good Lord, Peg, do you think I knew Vito was being bumped off? Do you think I was worrying about setting up an alibi for myself, when I didn't know what in blazes was going on?"

Then he thought of something. "Look, hon, you can alibi me. Tell the bulls I was with you. Forget about me leaving you at nine thirty. Tell 'em we were over at the park, the two of us instead of me alone. That's all I need, baby."

"No."

HE COULD see that her fists were clenched tight around her handkerchief, as though she could choke it to death and wipe out what had

happened that night. But her words slammed the door on Jimmy's last out.

"No," she said again, sharp and clear. "I used to like you. Maybe I still do. But I told you you and I were through if you didn't get straightened out. Maybe you didn't mean to kill Vito, but he was decent to me—"

"Blast it all, Peggy, I wasn't even there!"

"Start traveling, Jimmy. Start traveling before the cops catch up with me again. Because I don't believe you. I just don't believe you!"

He got up and she did too. He wanted to kill her for thinking this way. Instead he kissed her, kissed her hard, and she didn't fight it. When he left her he could hear her sobbing there in the hostile night.

He headed for the freight yards, and it took him till dawn to make it. He was sweating and tired when he finally hauled himself into an empty box car of a Santa Fe job heading east.

The breaks again, he thought bitterly. The same jinx which had haunted him ever since he could remember. The breaks were all bad.

It was easy for Peggy to get so high and mighty with him. Preaching comes cheap. But Peggy hadn't grown up in that stinking mill town where you breathed coal dust instead of oxygen. Peggy hadn't been one of nine kids, with an old man who spent half his time up the river and the other half sleeping off wine jags. Sure, talk was easy, unless you knew the setup.

The breaks. They had slapped him into reform school the first time he tried anything. Four kids in on it, but Jimmy was the one they got. It had been that way right down the line, right through the stretch of drifting which had brought him into L.A.

Then things had looked better. He had met Peggy one night when he dropped into Vito's for some grub. Big restaurant, Vito's, and Jimmy had cash in his pocket

and felt good. He had started dating Peggy then, whenever he could get her away from Brock. But Brock was rough competition. Good job, managing a place like that. Good dough. And Brock was jealous of Peggy, jealous enough to spend plenty on her to show Jimmy up.

It was easy for Peggy to tell him to get an honest job. Making peanuts, that would have meant. No kind of ammunition to fight Brock's free spending with. There were easier ways to get that ammunition, faster ways. But murder had been no part of those plans.

And yet the breaks were after him again. That gun. Anybody could have swiped it from his room. Anybody who knew him and knew where he lived.

Peggy herself could have done it.

He tried to forget Peggy as the freight banged east. Now that he had left L.A. he felt safer. Make Chi, that was the deal. He knew people in Chi.

But they picked him up at Kansas City.

The breaks again. Routine checkup at the yards, dragnet thrown out. Not looking for anything in particular. Just a stunt the cops pulled three or four times a year.

He still hoped he could sneak through the screening with the other road rats. But they put him in a room with a couple of dicks and shoved an All-points Bulletin under his nose. His picture was there. A wanted notice from the L.A. cops— Hold. Will extradite. Signed by the Los Angeles Chief of Police.

"And brother," one of the cops said, "that's just what they're aiming to do."

Once he admitted who he was, the cops didn't rough him. He got a cell to himself and more time to think about where he was headed. He wondered if Peggy still believed he was guilty. It didn't matter a lot now. He'd be fried as soon as he got back to L.A.

Then the Los Angeles dick showed up one night to take him back, and Jimmy

changed his mind. He wasn't sure he'd even get back to L.A. alive.

The man whose slate-blue eyes looked into his was Vince Martell.

"Too bad you came so far, Jimmy," he said softly. "Now you've got to turn around and go all the way back."

Jimmy's eyes met those of the cop. "I didn't kill your brother," he said. "I didn't pull that job."

"Sure you didn't. Your gun just walked around to Vito's and sat there. Just happened. The bullet in Vito's guts just happened."

The eyes were almost colorless as he added, "The bullet that killed my kid brother just happened, too. Right, Jimmy?"

The breaks, Jimmy thought bitterly. He'll kill me before we ever get there. Self-defense. Say I tried to jump him.

The local cops drove them to the station, and he was cuffed to Martell as the two of them walked through the train gates toward the Imperial. Good train, Jimmy thought grimly. Only the best for a cop-killer.

They had a drawing room in one of the old type Pullmans, and the upper and lower were already made up. Vince Martell closed the door, unlocked the handcuffs and said, "Sit down, Jimmy."

Jimmy sat stiffly on the couch while Martell slumped on to the lower, facing him. The detective kept his soft grey hat on. The train glided into motion and Martell glanced at his watch.

"Ten forty-five," he said softly. "Right on time. Where did you hide the money?" "What money?"

"Look, son, don't get me any madder than I am now. You won't like what happens if you do. I mean that three grand you lifted from Vito's safe."

"How the hell could I lift anything from Vito's safe—"

Vince Martell was a big man, but he was on his feet with the ease of a cat. A

steel-trap hand closed on Jimmy's, wrenched it hard behind his back. Jimmy sucked in his breath and closed his eyes.

"Maybe I ought to remind you of a couple of things," Vince Martell said in that soft voice. "Mike and me was more than brothers. We sort of looked out for each other. I was the one talked Mike into joining the force. It was on account of me he was pounding that beat the night he was killed."

Maybe it will be now, Jimmy thought. Before we're even out of Kansas city.

The smooth voice kept coming through the pain. "I tried to give you a break, Jimmy, the night I picked you up and took you down to headquarters. The night I saw that gun of yours with the chipped butt. I tried to scare you into going straight. Looks like I missed out." Another twist on the arm made Jimmy's whole body wrench. "It's a tricky business, giving a punk a good deal. Boomerangs on you sometimes. Like now."

"I didn't do it," Jimmy ripped out.

The pressure on his arm stopped. "Where were you at ten thirty that night?"

"Out with my girl."

"Peggy Sanders?"

"Yeah."

"She says different. According to her story you did have a date with her but you left her at nine thirty. Plenty of time for you to get back to Vito's. Furthermore, she says you were boiling mad. You two had been scrapping."

Jimmy didn't answer. "We've tried to find people who saw you," Vince purred on. "We found just one. Your landlady. She saw you when you showed up home. But that was after eleven, Jimmy. And you know what she says?" He took it slow. "She says you looked up in the air a mile. Maybe like you had just shot a couple of guys."

"Or maybe like I'd just had a fight with my girl. That's the truth, copper."

"Too bad you happened to pick that exact two hours to wander around fretting about it. It would be sort of convenient if you had let yourself be seen somewhere—say, around ten thirty."

IT WAS no use talking. The breaks had him again. He couldn't blame Martel for suspecting him. He's suspect himself, the way these cards had fallen.

"You picked the wrong place to start your trouble, son. I happen to know a little about that setup at Vito's. Mike used to drop in there once in a while when he was making his rounds. He used to tell me all about it, just like he told me about everything he ran into. Good cop, Mike was. Kept his eyes open."

"He couldn't have told you anything that would put the finger on me."

Martell didn't seem to have heard him. "He knew the way everything went, right up and down his beat. He knew when Vito took that money out of his cash register every night and put it back in the safe. Or sometimes his manager, Brock Hammond, did it. Those are things a good cop watches, and Mike was a good cop. He knew that girl of yours, only he figured her for Brock's girl. He even remembered seeing you in there. Mentioned it when I told him about picking you up that night."

The train was highballing now. Martell hung his grey hat on a hook. "Get set for bed," he said. "I'm tired."

Jimmy pulled off his shirt and shoes and let it go at that. At Martell's order he climbed into the upper berth. The detective handcuffed him in, then tied a rope to his left leg and swung it up and over the bar which held the upper in place. He attached the other end to his own leg, put his gun under his pillow and snapped out the light.

Jimmy stared up into the darkness, wondering if there was some way he

could get out. The answer was no. He saw now why the rope between the two men had been swung high over the bar and then down. Even if he could wriggle close enough to the edge of his berth, get his feet clear and kick the cop, he still couldn't get away with it. The minute his feet went down, Martell's foot would be jerked up.

But he had to escape somehow, Jimmy knew. Innocent or not, he was heading up the road on a one-way ride. The minute they got him back to Hollywood he wouldn't stand a prayer.

Martell shook him awake the next morning. The cop released him and said, "If you won't try an cuties, I'll take you into the diner for some breakfast."

"Thanks," Jimmy said.

The cop followed him through the train, let him put a decent breakfast under his belt and followed him back to the drawing room. Outside, the barren rainbow of the New Mexico desert drifted past. They stopped briefly at Tucumcari, then moved on. Martell waited until the town had dropped far to the rear and the train was laboring up a long grade. Then he rose.

"I'm out of cigarettes," he said. "Be right back. Don't go anywhere, chum."

The door closed behind him and Jimmy's eyes flashed. He threw a quick glance out of the window, searching desperately for the highway he had seen before. Yep, it was still there, a mile or so away from the tracks. More maybe. But it was there.

Jimmy did some fast figuring. They were just west of Tucumcari now. That road would be U.S. 66. Jimmy had made the trip once driving a truck. 66 would follow these tracks into Santa Rosa, then turn off toward Albuquerque while the Rock Island tracks headed on south toward El Paso.

"Good deal," Jimmy breathed. "Good deal."

Martell had left him free for these few

seconds. Maybe they would be enough. Jimmy opened the door cautiously and looked out. Nobody in sight.

He slipped out and moved toward the rear of the train as fast as he dared. A mother looked up curiously at him then continued playing with her two children. Jimmy passed through that car and into the next. This was the last, he knew. He had been watching the way the sun shadowed the rear end of the train on the hot New Mexico sands. The last car . . .

He passed the flagman half way through, felt the flagman's stare burning on the back of his neck. Maybe the guy had seen him come aboard with the cuffs on. Jimmy quickened his pace.

The back platform was empty. The train was still climbing the heavy grade, still slow. Jimmy vaulted over the back guard rail, held his breath and dropped off. He rolled over twice, felt a stab of pain in his right leg and caught a glimpse of the train crawling away from him. But only a glimpse, before he scrambled down the embankment and ducked out of sight.

The surge of relief which swept through him made the pain in the leg seem like nothing. He was clear. Crouching low, he watched the Imperial moving slowly away from him, further away by the second. He was safe now. Let Martell discover that he was gone and stop the train. Let them back up if they wanted. They wouldn't find Jimmy Collins sitting around waiting for them.

He looked for the road and saw it, further away at this point than he had figured. Limping, he headed for it. He had guessed a mile but now he remembered the deceptiveness of Western distance. The bugs which were cars and trucks seemed to come no closer. But he kept going, as the sun pounded down on him and the ache in the leg grew worse.

He made it at last, but dropped back out of sight as a car came along from the direction of Santa Rosa. That was the

gag. If Martell had left the train at Santa Rosa, he'd be coming back eastward looking for him. Thumb a ride toward Santa Rosa and through it, but duck anything coming from that direction.

He tried to flag a Chrysler going west and a Ford, then he flopped out of sight as a black Hudson came bowling along eastward. Two more cars passed going west, neither of them slowing down at his signal. He hid again as a Buick roared east, and began to get panicky. Damn these clothes he was wearing! Three days of cross-country freight grime. No wonder nobody would give him a lift.

The road was empty and he began to walk, but the leg yelled and he stopped. His hopes rose as a car approached from the east, and he thumbed anxiously. It was another Hudson. He could see it now as it bore down on him.

He spotted it too late. It wasn't another Hudson. It was the same black one which had roared past a few minutes ago, coming out of Santa Rosa. He had seen one man in it then. Now there were two.

And the second was Vince Martell.

He tried to run as the car's tires screamed. He had gone twenty feet from the highway when two revolver shots cracked out and sand kicked up in front of him. He stopped and turned.

Vince Martell lumbered toward him, gun in hand and his face black. Another man followed. Martell reached him, grabbed his right wrist and yanked his arm half out of its socket as he slapped the cuffs on him again.

"Kind of figured you'd be watching that eastbound traffic," he snarled. "So I told the sheriff to keep rolling fast, while I hid on the floor. We turned back a few miles beyond where the flagman saw you ditch the train. I had a hunch that would work."

Jimmy wondered if it wouldn't be easier to take a swing at the cop and let Martell clean up the whole business right there.

A lot of good getting back to L.A. would do him now. This break had fixed things up swell.

THE Santa Rosa sheriff drove them back. "Want the next train out of here?" he asked as they glided into the town.

"Next train hell," Martell growled. "We're going into L.A. on that same rattler. Where does this highway go from here?"

"Sixty-six? Into Albuquerque."

"TWA has planes through there, don't it?"

"Sure." The sheriff grinned. "You figuring on flying your prisoner for a while?"

"Just far enough to catch up with that train," Martell said grimly. "I'll be hanged if I'll let the boys in L.A. know this rat gave me the slip!"

The cop hired a car in Santa Rosa and took Jimmy with him into Albuquerque. The two of them left there on a TWA flight at seven fifty that night, and at ten twenty-five they landed at Phoenix.

"The Imperial gets here at three twenty-five," Martell announced as he and Jimmy reached the railroad station. "You'll sit and wait for it, punk. Maybe you want a cup of coffee."

"I could use it," Jimmy muttered.

"Try and get it," Martell said, and didn't speak to him again until the train rumbled in and Jimmy found himself shoved into the same drawing room like a sack of wheat.

The breaks, he told himself for the hundredth time. He couldn't fight the breaks. Martell hadn't killed him yet. But maybe that wouldn't be any advantage by the time the L.A. cops got through trying to convince him that he killed Vito and Martell's brother.

The breaks. They'd never be for Jimmy Collins.

The train glided into the Los Angeles

station at two that afternoon and an F-car from Hollywood sped the two of them out to the Hollywood station. Jimmy found himself booked and slapped into the cooler. He sat there for the balance of the afternoon wondering what was going on in the detective bureau upstairs, wondering what Vince Martell was cooking up for him now.

They sent down for him that night and he was taken up the wide steps and down the long corridor. He had been down that hallway once before, when Vince Martell had pulled him in for questioning. But this time there was a difference.

Peggy was there. He saw her recognize him, saw her eyes widen. The tightness gripped his inside again. He had asked her to give him a break, just an alibi for an extra hour that night. She hadn't done it. And now he was heading for the gas chamber.

Peggy tried to smile as he came in the room. "Hello, Jimmy," she said, but she choked on it. Jimmy didn't answer.

Brock Hammond was there too. And Vince Martell and a couple of other dicks. Brock Hammond said, "Tough break, kid. But they can't prove anything anyway." Jimmy didn't answer him either.

Vince Martell was seated at one of the tiny room's two desks. Somebody shoved a chair forward and motioned Jimmy into it. Jimmy tried not to look at Peggy.

"I asked you two to come down," Martell said to Peggy and Brock, "because I need a few more questions answered. This punk is still hollering innocent. Couple more facts thrown in his face, and I'm pretty sure he'll quit stalling."

He paused to light a cigar. "Brock, you've seen him around the restaurant, haven't you?"

"Sure," Brock said. "Lots of times."

"He picked Peggy up there, when they had dates together."

"Yeah."

"And he knew the setup plenty well

enough to plan a job like this. "Right?"

Brock shrugged. "I guess so. He's seen Vito take the money out of the cash register plenty of times."

"And the dough was still in the cash register that night?"

"Must have been," Brock said. "It was at nine, when I pulled out. And nobody could have gotten hold of it if Vito had put it back in the safe. Vito and me were the only ones who knew the combination."

There was a gasp. Everybody turned to Peggy. She was looking at Brock and her face was white.

"That money—" She gulped and tried it again. "Vito *had* put it in the safe that night."

"That couldn't be right, Peg. It must have been in the register," Brock said.

"It was in the safe, Brock." Martell's voice was picking up a sharp edge. "You want us to think it was still in the cash register, because that's the only way Jimmy Collins could have gotten hold of it. But it was in the safe. Peggy saw Vito put it there."

Brock's hands tightened around the arms of the chair. "All right, maybe the kid cracked the safe."

"It wasn't cracked. It was opened by somebody who knew the combination. You or Vito, Brock. And Vito was dead."

"My gun!" Jimmy exploded. "Brock could have swiped it! He knew where I lived. He knew I never kept the place locked, and he was sore about me cutting him out with Peggy."

"You're nuts, all of you." Brock's voice came out of cotton. "I left the restaurant when Peggy did, at nine—"

"And came back at ten thirty," Martell finished. The softness was gone from his voice now. "You had Jimmy's gun with you, a gun you knew could be spotted. Maybe you didn't plan to kill anybody. Just leave it there to be found. But Vito was still around, or he walked in on you

while you were opening the safe. You got him with Jimmy's gun. Then you got my brother when he heard the shot and came to see what was going on."

Jimmy looked at Peggy and found her looking at him. He couldn't get this.

"Mike was a good cop," Martell boomed. "He watched details. Details like the fact that Vito always stuck around his place on Sundays, even when he missed weekdays. Mike used to tell me about those things. He used to tell me how Vito always transferred that Sunday take from the cash register to the safe himself. Me, I remember things Mike told me. I'm a good cop too, Hammond—too good a cop to let you get away with a frame on Jimmy Collins."

Brock Hammond cracked. And he was the one, not Jimmy, who went back to that downstairs cell. Martell wasn't scowling at Jimmy now.

"You thought I was trying to cook you, kid," he said. "Maybe I was, long as I thought you were guilty. But I did some thinking, that night you and me left Kansas City on the train. Hammond's story was too good, and yours was too bad. Nobody who was really guilty could have left himself as wide open as you did. It was too pat against you, kid, and I'm suspicious of pat cases. So I did some thinking about Mike, and what Mike had told me about Vito's place." His face sagged and the power left it as he thought about his brother.

"Why don't you two get out of here," he said gruffly and shoved Jimmy and Peggy outside, slamming the squad room door.

Jimmy looked at Peggy, wondering how anybody could be so lucky. Then he realized the answer.

The breaks. They had worked his way this time.

And they might keep working his way from here on—if he gave them the right sort of encouragement.



ANSWERS TO THE THIRD DEGREE

(Questions on page 31)

1. You would expect your crook friend to be disappointed. "Blood money" is crook slang for a prison sentence.

2. In the language of the criminal, a "bing room" is a place where dope addicts congregate.

3. If a crook acquaintance of yours told you there was a "frog" chasing him, you would know that he was being pursued by the police.

4. False. A "flop worker" is a person who robs persons (generally sleeping) in waiting rooms, hotel lobbies, etc.

5. False. A "scratch man" is a forger—not a killer.

6. A "set up" is a one-day jail sentence.

7. True. "Steel" is crook slang for either knife or razor.

8. "Stick" is the housebreaker's term for crowbar.

9. If your detective friend told you he was looking for a "girl scout," you should know he was seeking a female spy who works for thieves. "Girl scout" is crook slang for that particular individual.

10. When the police give a man a "floater," they simply give him forty-eight hours to get out of town. Floaters, of course, are also sometimes handed out by local judges.

11. If as a detective, you discovered a person had been killed with an upward knife thrust into the body, you could logically suspect murder. Suicides, typically, kill themselves with a downward thrust of the knife.

12. True. When a person kills himself by stabbing with a knife, chances are he will get blood on his hands.

13. False. As little as two teaspoonfuls of nitric acid has sometimes proved fatal.

14. False. When a person has been poisoned with arsenic, chances are he will not die immediately. The fatal time for the poison may be as short as twenty minutes, but is sometimes as long as twenty-four hours or more.

15. Chances are it would be a bad risk for a murderer to try to poison a Chinese with opium. He might be an addict, and thus have built up some sort of tolerance for the drug.

16. When utilizing poison for murder, a person of low intelligence would be likely to select arsenic. Arsenic is readily available in many places, but arsenic poisoners are invariably caught.

17. False. Many dope addicts have been known to drink heavily.

18. False. One can probably become a cocaine addict in a matter of weeks.

19. Women generally require less oxygen than men in order to live. Hence, if the woman died first in the gas-filled building, her death might logically have been caused by some other means than asphyxiation.

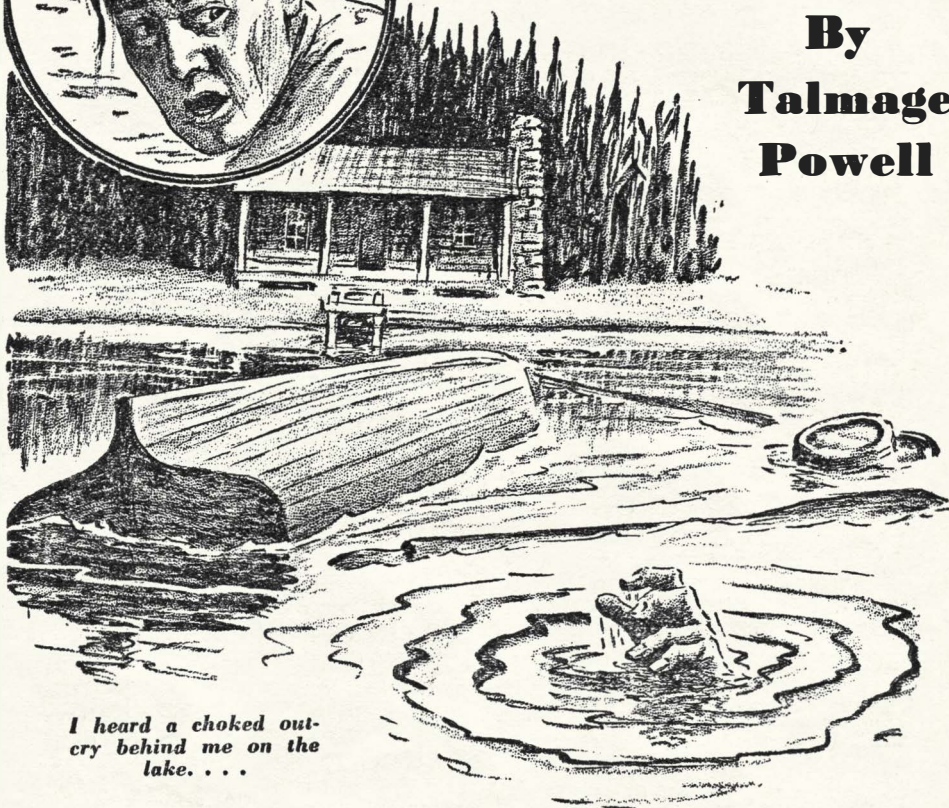
20. If a person testified he recognized an acquaintance at a distance of 500 yards, you should certainly tend to disbelieve him. It would be extremely difficult to recognize even a very well-known person at this great a distance.

A SLIGHT TASTE OF MURDER



*With her, he had everything—with
him she had nothing—nothing that
murder couldn't buy!*

**By
Talmage
Powell**



*I heard a choked out-
cry behind me on the
lake. . . .*

I WAS in a foul mood when I went into the bar. Ever since I'd come back to Pleasantville the old lady had been weepy and the old man had hounded me to get a job. I'd hear the old lady crying in the night sometimes, hear her whisper to Pa, "Where have we failed? What did we do wrong in bringing Eddie

up?" And the old man would say in a thick voice, "Don't worry, mama. Eddie's just young. That trouble he almost got in, in the city—well, Mama, it was the company he fell in. But Eddie'll be all right. Our boy will turn out okay in the end."

It was a hot summer and they thought

I was asleep, but I would be lying in my room, my door open, and hear their voices filter down the dark, hot hallway. Pleasantville itself was hick town enough to drive a guy nuts, but to have them mope around the house, puzzled and hurt and feeling like I was a stranger, that was too much. You'd have thought I was a criminal or something.

That afternoon the old man and I almost had had it. Mom was out of the house buying groceries. The old man hadn't slept much during the day after pulling his long night shift as watchman. But his feeling punk was no excuse, I thought. He got up, found me slouched in the kitchen over a racing form and cup of coffee and began riding me.

"Racing forms! The long years ago, Eddie, when it would still have helped, I should have tanned your hide!"

"You and who else?" I shot back at him.

His eyes were bloodshot. I watched his breath flare in his nostrils. "I still oughta break your neck for the things you're doing to your mother!"

"You're welcome to try."

He began trembling, and got so red it looked like the veins in his cheeks would burst.

And then he turned and slammed the coffee pot down on the stove. I shoved out of the room. At the door I glanced back and caught him looking at me. He jerked his gaze back around to the stove quickly, but it looked like he had a glimmer of tears in his eyes. There was a crazy kind of lump in my own throat as I went out of the house. Somehow the old man and I had just never been able to see eye to eye on anything.

I started walking down the street, hating the sunshine, the people that passed me.

By the time I'd reached the Pelican Bar, I was in a foul mood, ready for anything.

PLEASANTVILLE is a little shell-backed town built around a square. In the middle of the square stands a weathered monument to the Minutemen and in the face of the monument you can see the age of the town. Pleasantville sported only two or three really nice bars. The Pelican was one of them, glass brick, soft blue lights inside.

At this hour in the afternoon the place was just about deserted. I sat down on a high, uncomfortable leather stool at the mahogany. The bartender moved up. "Martini," I said. There was only me and a blonde lovely down the bar.

I watched him mix the drink; then as I tasted it, I saw the girl's face in the back bar mirror.

She was giving me the once-over. I turned my head, met her gaze full on, and it was like being jolted in the stomach with a brass-knuck punch. She was really an eyeful, all cream and gold, sheathed in blue silk. When I smiled, she smiled back. The bartender pretended disinterest as I picked up my drink and slid down the bar.

"Hello," she said. She had a throaty voice that pouted.

"I see your glass is empty."

"Well?"

"What are you drinking?"

"Bourbon and soda."

My roll was lean, but this didn't happen every day, even to a guy like Eddie. I pushed the remains of the Martini back, called to the bartender, "Two bourbons and soda."

I had a nice close-up of her now. There was a sullen restlessness about her full lips and sea-green eyes. The drinks came and we tasted them.

I looked at her over the rim of my glass. "Maybe I should have stayed in Pleasantville."

She murmured a laugh.

"The name is Eddie Conlan."

"I'm Cindy, Eddie."

"Your glass is empty, Cindy."

We moved over to a booth with that drink. Chatting about Pleasantville, I sensed that the burg was giving her the screaming meenies, the way it rolled up its sidewalks every night at nine and kept its party lines busy with strait-laced gossip. Cindy, I thought, I have you pegged. You're a dame hungry for excitement. You can't help yourself. Maybe Pleasantville is going to live up to its name after all.

By the fourth drink I was holding her hand, lighting a cigarette for her, watching her eyes toy with me from up under her lashes.

She leaned back, blew a cloud of smoke towards the ceiling, laughing softly. As the laugh faded, her face got bitter. "I shouldn't be sitting here with you, Eddie."

"Married?" I whispered, and she whispered back, "Yes."

We toyed with our glasses in silence. "I'm Cindy Macklin," she said. "Does the last name mean anything to you?"

I felt myself start. "Ralph Macklin is your husband?"

"Yes, Eddie." She sighed, finished her drink, and I called for another. "I thought once it would be fun, being married to Pleasantville, Eddie. No, I didn't think that really. I didn't think we'd vegetate here in Pleasantville."

I slouched back in the booth and thought about it. Married to Pleasantville. Well, she wasn't kidding. The Macklin name was the oldest in town. The first Macklin had come here when this was frontier wilderness. Ralph Macklin was the sole remaining scion of the family. He lived in the biggest house in town, donated to charities, and had the awe of the Macklin name and fortune behind him. He had been quite a hero during the war, in the Pacific theater, but on one of those islands he'd contracted a tropical fever that had left his heart about as dependable as a twenty-year-old dollar watch.

"Ralph feels that he owes Pleasantville something," Cindy sighed. "The Macklin

tradition. The responsibility of wealth, and that sort of thing."

"My tradition regarding wealth," I said, "is to use it for the purposes of living, laughing, and being merry."

"I'll toast that, Eddie boy!"

We toasted. And sat there with her thinking that she was chained to a sick husband and a burg like Pleasantville and me thinking I'd never met a dame with this much electricity before.

I would have taken her to dinner that very first night, blowing my whole roll, but she said no. I saw her into a cab at dusk. Before the cab door was closed, she leaned forward and gave me her hand. "It's been a pleasure, Eddie."

"Sure you won't have dinner with me?"

"Something like that would have to be arranged in advance."

"Then I'll call you."

"No! I'll call you."

I shrugged and gave her the number of Tony's pool room a few blocks from the house. "If you shouldn't catch me," I said, "you can leave a message."

"Good night, Eddie."

"Good night." Watching the cab roll away, I fingered my roll and decided I'd better head for Tony's and find a sucker for a game of bank or rotation. Drinks in the Pelican had been expensive.

I felt regret, but shrugged and chalked it up to experience. I was sure she would never call me.

Three days later she did. I met her at dusk and we drove her big canary yellow convertible all the way in to the city. I was flush that night, and we had dinner and went dancing. Her eyes glistened; her whole being glowed. The laugh was warm and husky in her throat that night. She danced close to me, and murmured, "Some life, people moving around you, music and lights and the sound of care-free voices! Eddie, you have saved me. I was going crazy, Eddie."

I held her a little closer.

As midnight neared, I saw the sullen shell growing about her again. She had told Ralph that she was going to a club meeting; now she said, "Make that the last drink, Eddie."

"But I just finished it!"

"I said it's the last one!"

"Okay, okay, Cindy."

"I didn't mean to bite, Eddie boy. But we have to go now. He'll wonder how I happen to be so late as it is."

"What'll you tell him?"

"That I had a couple of drinks in one of the girls' apartments after the meeting."

She was already heading for the check-room of the club where we were. "It's busting a wonderful evening off early, Cindy . . ."

"Don't talk about it, Eddie. There'll be other evenings."

And there were. During the month that followed I saw Cindy at every chance. But we had to be careful. You know towns like Pleasantville. Or maybe you don't. Maybe you've never lived in a town where eyes watched every neighbor. And Cindy was Mrs. Pleasantville.

There were stolen kisses in a parked car; the momentary glow always followed by the sullen, bitter gloom as she realized she had to get back soon or Ralph might begin to wonder. I was so much in love with Cindy my hands trembled at the thought of her.

I was going nuts, and I figured she felt the same way.

I never mentioned divorce or running away together to Cindy. I knew it would do no good. Whatever she thought of me or even of herself—she thought more of the Macklin fortune. She was like that, and I knew it. I knew there was ice in her heart.

By the end of the month an insidious voice was whispering to me constantly: Eddie, you've got to kill Ralph Macklin. Eddie, kill Macklin. Kill, Eddie!

It got so bad I would jerk my head around sometimes; the voice was plain enough for someone to be standing behind me, whispering in my ear. But no one was ever that close behind me. It was just a never-ending recording that had started spinning in my brain.

TONY saw me come into the pool-room that afternoon. He was like a fat lump on the stool behind the cash register. Through the haze of tobacco smoke in the green-shaded lights and the clicking of balls, Tony's voice boomed to me. "'Allo, Eddie! I have a message for you."

He handed me a slip of paper over the register. "She say you to call this number, Eddie."

I squinted at the slip of paper. Tony said, "She call four times, Eddie."

Four times. Cindy's number. Wanting me to call her. Frowning, I went back to the airless phone booth, slid in.

Her voice came to me, breathless. "Eddie, I know how well you handle a car. Can you get a chauffeur's license?"

"I could get one," I said. "What's up?"

"Our chauffeur quit this morning, Eddie. He got drunk and quit flat."

I felt my hand sweating on the phone. "You see what it means, Eddie?" she whispered.

"Yeah, yeah."

"I can't talk now. But come here. You were sent by the agency, understand? Leave everything else to me, Eddie. By tomorrow morning you'll be the Macklin chauffeur!"

When I hung up, I had to sit a moment in the booth, wipe my face, and laugh about it. I remembered the rich-women-chauffeur gags I'd heard.

I had never thought it would happen to me.

Cindy and I both thought it would be

better, but it was worse, much worse. She was even further away than ever, see? She was Mrs. Ralph Macklin and I was a servant and we had to act that way when anyone was round. And Mrs. Macklin and her chauffeur couldn't disappear too often at the same time. Now it was seeing her every day and having to say "Yes, Mrs. Macklin," "Right away, Mrs. Macklin."

And there was her husband. Ralph. The rich boy. The war hero. The guy whose ticker was so punk it made a near invalid of him.

I started to work on the big, landscaped Macklin estate prepared to hate him. I had him pegged for a snob. But he wasn't. He seemed to find in me something he liked. He kidded a lot, and even when he was in pain there was a grin on his face. He had good square shoulders, a square face, and curly black hair. He didn't look like a man who had suffered, unless you saw the pain wrinkles about his mouth.

Macklin had a way of managing things so that by the third day I had slid right into the well-oiled organization that ran the estate. He had an office in his house and usually worked three or four hours a day. I'd go down and bring the managers of the cement factory and the paper mill up to the house. Ralph Macklin's study would swallow them for two hours. I listened to the executives talk as I brought them up to the house and took them back to their offices, and I knew they regarded Ralph Macklin as something close to genius in organization. He had his fingers on every nerve throb of his business enterprises. Too bad, I thought, that he wasn't as wide awake where his wife was concerned. I tried to miss those moments when he reached for her hand, pulled her down and kissed her sullen mouth. He'd tease her about her pout, as if he thought it was cute.

In some ways those first three weeks weren't bad. The red-cheeked cook kept

delicacies for the servants in the kitchen and it was nice to go in there, listen to her fat, good-natured chatter, open my collar and have a meal. There were a couple of housemaids, a severe housekeeper, the droll gardener, myself—and Marian Cole.

Yes, there certainly was Marian Cole. She had everything Cindy had in a slightly different way. She was tall, with eyes that had amber lights in them, and hair so black it had purple highlights. She was Ralph Macklin's secretary, and I knew she was in love with him. It was in the way she looked at him, the way her face changed when he happened to touch her hand as she handed him a letter. If Cindy hadn't been around like a sullen blonde flame, Macklin might have had eyes for his secretary.

Marian Cole came out to my quarters over the big four-car garage one afternoon. I was sprawled across the bed reading. The door was open. She knocked, and when I saw her, I jumped up and began sliding into my coat.

"Never mind, Eddie. You're not wanted for anything."

She looked at my face and added, "You're wondering why I came out here?"

"Frankly, I am."

She was wearing a black dress with starched white cuffs and collar, but looking at her, I knew what she'd look like in something different from that dress. Something like Cindy worse, for example.

She tapped a cigarette on her nail. "Let's never have any pretense between us. Okay, Eddie?"

"Sure, but I don't get it."

"You're in love with her, Eddie."

She strolled about the room, and then stopped and lighted her cigarette. Then she smiled at me. It could have been a nice, friendly smile—or I could have taken it as something else.

"He's a nice guy, Eddie. With her he's

so blind, but we're not, are we, Eddie?"

She moved over to the door, paused. "I'm sure you're going to like it here. And we'll be friends. After all, we both work for the same boss."

"Sure," I said, and it sounded a little hoarse.

I listened to her going down the stairs. Then I moved over to the window, drew back the curtain and watched her cross the wide back yard and go into the house. I picked up the magazine I'd been reading and ripped it in two. As I flung the torn paper down and turned I got a glimpse of my face in the mirror. The expression that glowered back at me wasn't nice.

I wanted Cindy in the deal with me all the way, so deep she couldn't back out or throw me down when it was over. I told her two nights later. We had met on a backstreet in the village. It had been my day off. We'd driven to the city and on the way back I looked at her and decided to tell her.

I hesitated a moment. She was driving, her face half seen over the glow of the dash lamp. Her convertible was cozy with the top up, and the motor hummed a soothing rhythm, and Cindy was humming *Tea For Two*, the last number we'd danced to that night.

I said, "We're going to kill him, Cindy."

THE headlights weaved in the night as her hands went numb on the wheel. The humming died in her throat and I heard her gasp beat against her lips.

Something about the whole thing, this riding along in the night and saying that to her, tore a laugh out of me. "Hold the boat steady, sweetheart! You're not so shocked, not really. It's been on your mind for weeks, between the lines of our conversation. We've both been losing sleep over it."

The car was steady now. "Did you

have to say it like that?" she snapped.

"How else can you say such a thing. More than anything—except his dough—you want escape from Pleasantville, Cindy. I need you, and I wouldn't mind having his dough. It's like a jigsaw puzzle with one extra piece. Remove that piece and the whole thing falls in place."

Her lips were parted, and her eyes were shooting green fire. "How?" she whispered.

"I've been thinking of that. I keep coming up with the same answer—the Macklin country place. I understand he likes to fish. Now if there were an accident out in the middle of the lake . . ."

She shuddered. I dragged hard on a cigarette and matched her shudder with one of my own.

"And what do I do, Eddie?" she whispered.

"Get him to go up to the country place. You can do that, convince him the rest would do him good before the autumn begins to turn cold. That's your end—getting him to the lake. I'll do the rest."

She took one hand off the wheel, swallowed. "Hold my hand, Eddie."

I took her hand in mine. We rode that way into Pleasantville, cold, clammy sweat mingling with cold, clammy sweat, as if we had sealed a pact with it. . . .

A light autumn breeze stirred the surface of the lake under the midday sun. The wash of the water rocked the boat Ralph Macklin and I sat in. He was in the stem, I in the stern. Over his shoulder, beyond him, I could see the rustic Macklin lodge, the sweep of woods, the rise of mountains beyond. Macklin was hunched over his casting rod, grinning like a kid.

"These three days up here have really helped me, Eddie. And having a guy like you along has made it even nicer."

I grunted. I felt like last year's corn husk. Every nerve was worn to a raw

nub by this pretense I'd been under, this jovial piece of acting. I hadn't slept much. I looked at the tip of my rod and hated it. For three days now we'd fished. And I hadn't had a chance to do what I'd come here for.

I swallowed. Marian Cole and Cindy were back in the lodge, along with the cook, whom we'd brought up. It was hard to find the opportunity, the moment when I wouldn't be seen. . . .

I kept my gaze toward the house, but I didn't see the signal Cindy and I had arranged. I let my eyes drift back to Macklin. The filthy rich son! That's the way I had to think of him. I was nearly nuts from getting myself screwed up to this thing, to looking on him as just an extra piece in a jigsaw puzzle that had to be thrown in the trash can.

I jumped. Macklin had been talking again. ". . . And I used to dream of this place when I was in the Islands, Eddie. I'd remember the cool mountains, the streams, the way a pan-fried bass tasted, the smell of the place in the spring and autumn. Just look at it, Eddie. Every color in the rainbow. Just look at the woods and mountains in their autumn dress!"

"It sure is pretty, Mr. Macklin."

He looked at me with a twinkle in his eyes and laughed. "Sometimes I can't figure you, Eddie. Are you just trying to be the model servant? Look, I've made that point clear before. It's one reason I hired you, Eddie. I wanted more than just a chauffeur. I wanted a paid companion, a general man Friday. Anyway, I've said it to the people in my household, and I'll say it again—let's forget this servant stuff."

His words brought out sweat on me; not because of the words themselves, but because it made me sit there and think what it would be like to kill a decent guy.

I heard a voice call out, looked toward the pier. Cindy was standing there, the

picturesque lodge at her back. She had a basket on one arm. She called, "Sandwiches, boys!"

I tried to swallow, pasted a grin on my face, and caught up the oars. This is it, Eddie! This is it!

When I rowed over to the pier, she stepped down into the boat. I had never seen her looking more beautiful. She sat down amidships, flung the checkered cloth off the basket. "I'd like lunch on the lake myself," she pouted. "I'm practically a prisoner, with you two fishing and the housekeeper and Miss Cole doing their own tasks."

Macklin laughed. I pulled the boat back toward the middle of the lake, rowing hard.

"Right now," Cindy said, "Miss Cole and the housekeeper are out in the kitchen, going over a budget. I never get to see anyone!"

Those were her words, but she was telling me something different. She was telling me that no one would be in the front of the lodge for a while now, that no one would see what we were about to do.

I let the boat drift when we reached the middle of the lake. I gasped for air, wanting to speak, wanting to say, "No! Just a moment longer, Cindy. Just a second more of time for me to steel myself." But I didn't say anything, and there she was, a flash of wild beauty on the lake, going about murder.

She had taken a sandwich and thermos from the basket, and now she was standing up, turning as if to hand the food to her husband. But she was tottering, tilting, and water slapped against the side of the boat.

"Cindy!" Ralph cried out. Alarm in his voice. Afraid she was going to get her pretty head wet. He lunged up to help her; and that did it. Or maybe my own weight was behind that last heave that sent the boat over. I don't know.

The water smashed me in the face, icy cold from its source high in the hills. I felt the pull of the water on my heart. My insides were a mass of knots. I was fighting my way back to the surface. Overhead I could see the black shadow of the capsized boat. Macklin! I had to find him; find him and keep him under until that trick heart of his switched off. And she would be there to help in case he had a last burst of energy and strength.

Everything was going just as we had planned.

Then I felt a touch on my shoulder. I twisted in the water.

It was Macklin.

He thought I was drowning—he was trying to save me!

I choked. I suddenly thought of the old man and mom. I seemed to hear their voices, mingled with Macklin's decent, pleasant voice, echoing in my head like a thousand tongues.

I couldn't murder him.

I saw the pain on his face as that trick heart of his felt the load. He gasped, eyes suddenly jutting. And behind him, like a wet, beautiful creature of the deep, was Cindy.

Her hands reaching out now. Frozen hell on her face.

She wrenched him under, and I clawed at her. She whirled her face on me, and we all three went under the icy surface. We came up fighting, and I pushed away, feeling the fire of her nails raked across my cheek.

She seemed to recognize suddenly what had happened inside me. She snarled curses, and she wasn't beautiful any longer.

I got Macklin's collar in my hand, got his chin above the surface. He was limp, eyes closed. I started toward shore. Cindy darted in at me. I kicked at her, fought her away, almost drowning Macklin and myself in the process.

She tried three times; then she gave up

and treaded water there in the middle of the lake, sobbing out a horrible rage and frustration.

I wrestled Macklin's weight until I felt solid bottom under my feet. Gasping, I dragged him up on shore. His breath was coming short and shallow, but steady. Dry clothes. Medicine.

He'd pull through.

I heard a choked outcry behind me on the lake. I whirled around, and there was Cindy's face out there, rearing up, mottled with pain, teeth clenched. She got that one piteous cry for help past her lips; then she went under.

I knew from that one look at her face what had happened. Icy water. The sudden plunge.

She was in the gigantic grip of helpless cramp . . .

"Miss Cole!" I screamed loudly. "Miss Cole!"

My voice brought her to the porch of the lodge in a second or two. "Take care of Macklin!" I called out, pointing down at him. Then I was back in the water again.

I swam to the spot where Cindy had gone down. I surface-dived. The water was murky, green. I didn't see her. I broke surface, tried again. I don't know how many times I tried after that. Finally, I knew it was no use. I barely had strength enough to get back to the shore. I dragged myself up on the solid earth, sat dripping myself up on the solid earth, sat dripping icy green water and clammy sweat from every pore. I was alone. Miss Cole and the housekeeper had got Macklin to the house, must be busy with him up there.

Maybe now Marian Cole would be able to give Macklin the things in life he wanted.

For me there would be only the memory of the cold, naked, placid surface of the lake before me.

And tonight they would drag the lake with their grappling hooks, searching for Cindy.

***Danny Groff was in a hole—a hole as deep as
the eternity he faced—a hole in his best friend's
head!***

DANIEL GROFF closed his hotel room door quietly, leaving it unlocked. He had made sure that the carpeted corridor here on the twenty-seventh floor of the Hoffman Towers was unoccupied. There were two elevators; their doors were out of sight around an angle of the broad hallway. For an instant Groff stood alert, watching and listening. Then he turned to the exit door to the fireproofed stairs.

Groff went down one flight. He was a big fellow, in his forties, with a close-clipped bullet head of black bristling hair that had a little grey in it. His face was grim, set in hard, tense lines.

Once it had been a rather handsome face, but the ugly puckered scar on his cheek twisted the corner of his mouth, giving him a queer, grotesque look. That was where the damned copper's bullet had gone in and by some miracle hadn't killed him. His game leg made him limp as he went down the steep stairs. He'd got the leg when the same copper had taken a second and last shot from the hip as he lay on the ground and Groff thought he was dead.

The twenty-sixth floor corridor of the Hoffman Towers Hotel was momentarily empty as Groff darted along it. Just a couple of doors from the fire stairs was a mahogany door marked A-Twenty-six. Groff's hand was in the side pocket of his dark serge jacket, gripping his weapon. There would be just one shot. The silencer would make it not much more than a little plop, nothing that could be heard through the thick walls of this luxurious hotel.

Groff knew that, now at ten in the eve-

ning, George Mackenzie was here. The whole thing had been a stroke of luck, unexpected as a bolt out of the blue. Groff hadn't heard of Mackenzie in ten long years. He hadn't the least idea where the rat had gone, or what had happened to him. And then when Groff had come into this hotel to get a pack of cigarettes—here in this little city where he was looking for a job and had only stayed a day—the clerk at the desk had suddenly said to a bellboy,

"George Mackenzie. A-Twenty-six. Ice water—"

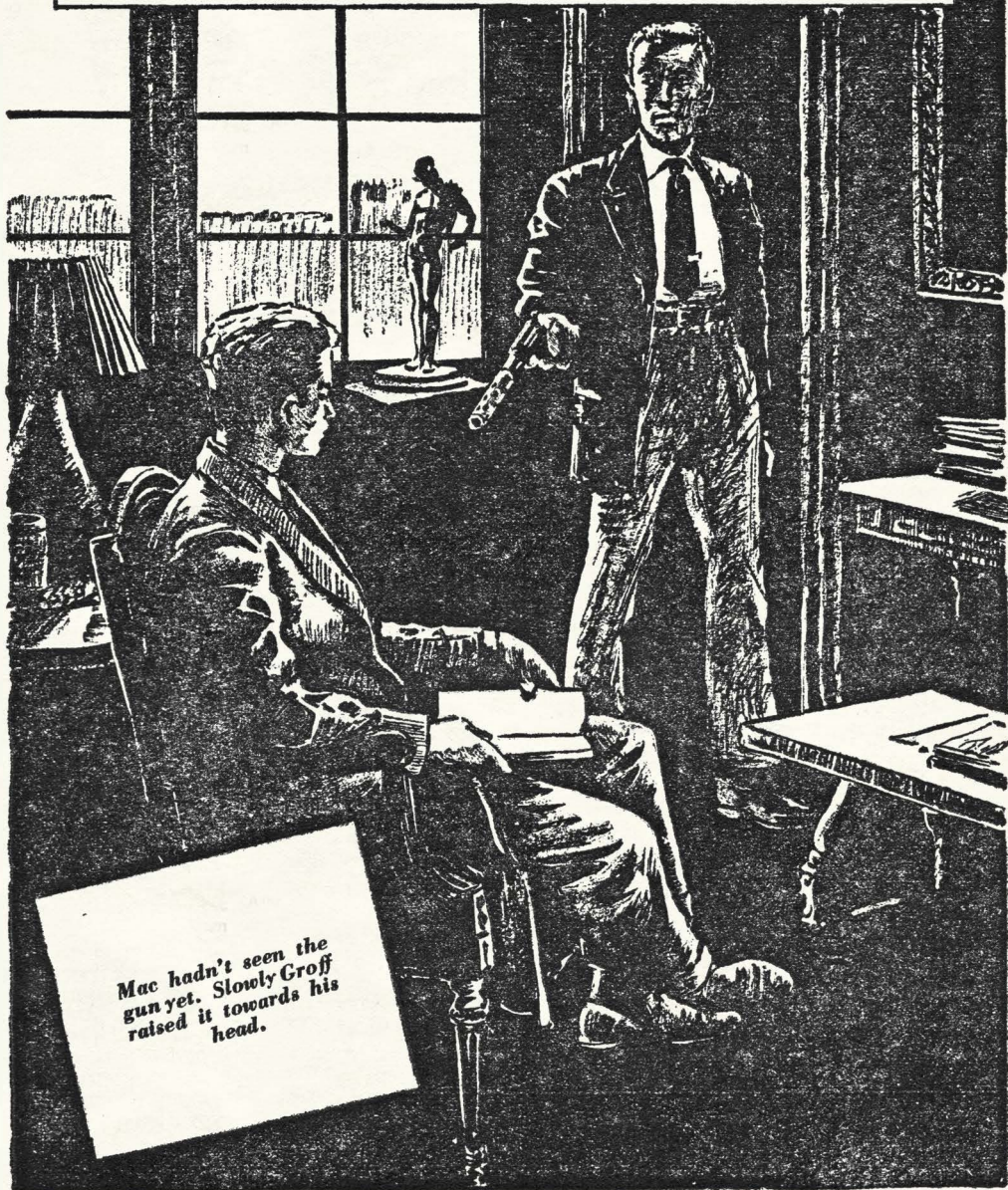
George Mackenzie! It could have been someone else of the same name. But it wasn't, because Groff had quietly followed the bellboy. He had been down the length of the corridor as the bellboy knocked and Mackenzie had come to the door, taken the pitcher, thanked the boy and tipped him.

The same Mackenzie! Then Groff had registered; a cheap little single room, C-Twenty-seven on the twenty-seventh floor. It was diagonally over Mackenzie's. Close to the fire stairs, so that Groff could get out of it, down to Mackenzie, and back into it again without being seen. He had registered under the name Peter Smith. Nobody knew him here in Glendale City. There wasn't a thing in the world that could possibly connect him with Mackenzie.

His revenge, at last. How often he'd thought of it, all those long years in the prison . . . Groff didn't knock on Mackenzie's door. He hoped it would be unlocked, and it was. He shoved it open, slipped through and closed it behind him. Mackenzie was here.

By Ray Cummings

SEE NO MURDER



The room was unlighted, but there was a sheen of city lights coming in its opened windows—enough light so that Groff could see he was in a handsome little sitting room and that Mackenzie, clad in a dressing gown, was seated in an easy chair. The light from the windows edged his wavy blond hair. He was a small, slim fellow; he seemed even smaller now than Groff remembered him. A big book was open on his lap, and his hands were resting there. He had evidently been reading, then turned out the light and maybe was dozing. At the sound of Groff's furtive entrance he looked up, said sharply,

"Who's that? What do you want?" Mackenzie didn't get up, he just stared, startled, in the dimness.

"It's me," Groff said. "Take a look, don't you recognize me? I haven't changed much, have I? Your old friend Danny Groff. Remember me, don't you, Mac? Sure you do."

Mackenzie couldn't miss the growling sarcasm in Groff's voice. He tensed as though he was going to stand up, maybe offer his hand. But he didn't. He sank back.

"Danny! Why—why Danny Groff! How are you, Danny? Sit down. How've you been?"

He was frightened. He knew what was coming. There was fear in his stammering voice. He was too frightened to make a move. He just sat there staring, tense in his chair. And stammering.

"Sit down, Danny."

"I'll stand," Groff said. "And you'll sit where you are. You won't move, get me? Keep your hands there on your lap."

Not that Mackenzie would have anticipated this and have a gun, but just to play safe.

"Of course, anything you say, Danny," Mackenzie agreed. "But you act so queer. What—what's the matter with you? An old friend, after ten years— Why are you just standing there?"

Maybe he hadn't seen the gun yet. It was in Groff's dangling right hand, down by his side in the shadows. But now he raised it up. The click as he cocked it sounded startlingly loud. It made Mackenzie gasp. He stiffened in his chair, staring, and then he seemed to shrink back, huddling in his big dressing gown. But he didn't dare make a move.

"You—you—" he gasped. "Now don't do anything foolish! Let's talk about this. Take it easy now. You—you live here, Danny? Nice hotel, isn't it? Queer we haven't met before."

Stalling for time. Well, let him stall. It sure was good to see him squirm. Groff's finger was on the trigger, but he waited. Let him know he was going to get it. Let him plead and sweat with terror turning him cold. How often Groff had sat brooding in his cell, going over this scene in his mind with George Mackenzie. He'd known there'd be a thrill to his revenge at last—but now that it had come, it was even better than he had thought.

"You—you like this hotel, Danny? I do," Mackenzie was saying. "Shall—shall we order up a little something to eat?"

"Don't make me laugh," Groff said. "Sure, it's a nice hotel. That all you want to talk about?"

"YES—well I mean, of course." Mackenzie was breathless, fighting his terror. "How you been doing, Danny? I guess maybe you got a nice suite here? Which is it?"

"Sure, I'm rich," Groff growled. "C—twenty-seven, right over you, and I just took it." He chuckled. "Nice and handy, see what I mean? Nobody saw me come down, and nobody'll see me go back. Peter Smith, that's me. And when they find you dead—"

Sure! That brought the sweat out on him. "Danny!" Mackenzie gasped. "Are you crazy? Okay, I'll talk about the past,

if that's the reason for your visit here."

"It damn sure is."

"I know what's in your mind, of course," Mackenzie said. "But listen, I was only a kid—remember that."

"A kid of twenty ought to have some sense—not be a lousy little coward and let his pal get caught."

"I didn't!" Mackenzie denied vehemently. "I'll admit I was scared. It was the first time I'd ever done anything like that."

"Then you shouldn't have gone into it," Groff retorted. "You were after the grand I promised you. You sure wanted the money."

"Of course I did. I admit it. But I got scared, there in the bushes—"

"You had a gun."

"I didn't want to kill anybody, Danny. I never had that idea. I got scared, I'm telling you—"

Groff's mind went back to that night. He had left the kid as a lookout, in the garden outside while he went into the empty mansion. Some neighbor had seen his flash as he worked at the library safe and the police had come, surrounded the house and caught him red-handed.

And where was his kid lookout all that time? Out in the bushes, armed. But George Mackenzie hadn't even fired a warning shot; not done a damned thing but run away, so neatly and swiftly that nobody had ever even suspected he'd been there. Nothing to connect him with it at all, while his pal had been shot up, almost died in the hospital and then gone to the pen for nearly eight years.

"But I didn't run away," Mackenzie was protesting. "Just—just give me a minute to explain it, Danny. It was a queer thing—"

"Okay, I'll give you a minute. And you better talk fast," Groff cut in. He stood with his back against the corridor door, with his victim huddled in the chair halfway across the dim room.

Mackenzie had sure done well by himself in these ten years. You couldn't miss it. This was a handsome hotel suite. It had a look of permanence. Mackenzie had his things here; drapes and paintings, statuary and books, and a very big, handsome radio with a long shelf of records behind it.

The light from the windows was behind Mackenzie, but there was enough sheen so



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that Groff could see Mackenzie's hands resting on the big open book on his lap. A big diamond ring was on Mackenzie's left hand. A diamond ring! The idea of robbery here hadn't occurred to Groff. But why not? That ring, and maybe his wallet—

"I'll—I'll try to talk fast." Mackenzie's frightened, breathless voice broke in on Groff's thoughts. "Listen, I know what you mean, Danny. You think I just deserted you."

"You did."

"But I didn't. I was crouching there in the bushes. I was scared. That's what you'd call great emotional stress—"

"Sure," Groff retorted sarcastically. "Fancy name for a white-liver."

"I'm telling you—everything all of a sudden went black—"

There was a coarse laugh! "And when it was all over, you just couldn't remember a thing!" Groff sneered. "That the best you can do, Mac? Okay. Say your prayers. I'm lettin' you have it in about thirty seconds."

"Danny! No! No—take it easy now!"

"Say your prayers."

"No, listen—I just stayed in that bush, crouching there, and nobody ever found me there at all. I guess it was the next day before I got away from there. I was so frightened—"

"Okay, and you got a right to be frightened now," Groff retorted. "I don't know what you been doin' all these years, but I've guess you've had a good time all right. Well, now you've come to the end. And I ain't sayin' a word about what you did to me with Annie, either."

"Annie?"

"Sure. My girl, remember? She ditched me, and married that fellow Blakely. You talked her into that. She wrote me a letter to the pen, then never even came to see me."

"I do remember I told her once she was too nice a girl to be mixed up with

crooks," Mackenzie said. "Myself included. But I never—"

Groff growled. "Time's up."

The end of him now, and he knew it! Nobody could feel any worse terror than this!

"Danny—Danny—"

Mackenzie had started out of his chair. Desperately he might have tried to leap, but the bullet met him head-on so that he sank back, with his hands still clutching the book on his lap and a red stain welling out on the white shirt over his heart. For a moment he was twitching, with dangling head and horrible, goggling face where blood was foaming at the lips. Then in the chair there was just a limp, sagging dead thing. . . .

The silencer had muffled the report, but still there was an urgency to get out. Play it safe. Groff stood for a moment remembering that he had touched nothing here, except the handle of the doorknob. He had dropped nothing; the dead man hadn't touched him or even come near him. Groff moved forward, took the big diamond ring from the dead finger. And Mackenzie's watch, and a diamond tiepin.

The sudden ringing of the telephone across the room stiffened him. Someone was calling Mackenzie! Groff didn't wait to try and find a wallet. He wiped off the inside doorknob with the tail of his jacket. He opened the door cautiously.

The corridor was empty. He wiped the outside door handle, darted to the fire stairs, went up one flight. There was no one in sight along the upper corridor. In another few seconds he was in his room.

THE thing was done. What could possibly connect this transient Peter Smith with the killing of George Mackenzie? Groff's instinct was to check out of the hote, beat it now. Absurd! That would draw attention to him. All he had to do, was do nothing, and he was perfectly safe.

Groff wrapped the gun and the little articles of jewelry in a soiled shirt and stuffed it into his suitcase. He locked the suitcase and kicked it under his bed. Now he was aware of a distant sound of commotion. He opened his hall door an inch or two, and the sounds were louder. Sounds floating up from the twenty-sixth floor, startled voices, the clang of elevator doors, running footsteps.

Already the murder of George Mackenzie had been discovered! The commotion grew. From his partly opened door, Groff presently called to a neighboring tenant, "What happened? What's up?"

"Dunno. Sounds like something's wrong downstairs."

"Fire maybe?" Groff suggested. "We better go take a look."

Groff locked his bedroom door. He and the man, both of them in their shirt-sleeves, dashed down the fire stairs. The twenty-sixth floor corridor was in commotion, people standing in their open doorways. An excited group of them clustered at the door of A-Twenty-six, which was partly open. A room service waiter was there, still clutching a little tray of food—a glass of milk, a couple of small sandwiches. A big man who somebody said was the house detective stood further inside with a couple of excited bellboys and the elevator boy; and now the horrified manager dashed in.

"It's murder!" somebody said. "A dead man in there. They found him."

The waiter had phoned up to inquire if Mr. Mackenzie wanted his usual supper sent up now, then he had brought it. The desk clerk had been puzzled that Mackenzie didn't answer, he was always in his room during the evenings. As he stood, just one of the excited onlookers, Groff shuddered at the narrow escape he had had. He could have been trapped in there so easily. But everything was all right now.

Then presently the police came. Groff,

with the others, crowded forward. There was a big police sergeant whom they called Vickers; three or four other policemen, a photographer and a fingerprint man. Fingerprints? The watching Groff chuckled to himself. There would be Mackenzie's prints; the hotel maid's; and maybe lots of others. But nothing of Danny Groff, known here just as Peter Smith. Not on your life. Not a thing could possibly connect him with this.

"Come on, you people—keep back!"

"Go to your rooms, everybody," the manager called. But nobody paid any attention to that. They merely let the policemen shove them back from the door, and then they crowded forward again.

Time passed. A doctor came. Then from the direction of the elevators a man came with two policemen guiding him, holding him by the arms. What was this? Somebody already arrested? No, he seemed somebody important. He was a young man, staring straight ahead of him, walking hesitantly as the deferential policemen led him through the excited crowd. And then Groff saw that the young fellow was blind.

"That's John Manners," somebody said, "assistant manager of the Glendale Institute for the Blind. This Mackenzie who got killed—he was the director there."

The crowd in the corridor was jabbering with the news. Among them Groff stood silent. Mackenzie had been blind! Of course Groff could understand it now, Mackenzie just sitting there in his chair in the dim room, staring blankly. Groff remembered now, how in the old days Mackenzie had always complained of eye trouble.

What was going on in there now? Groff tried to edge forward, but he could see very little. Sergeant Vickers was showing the blind young man something, and they were talking about it. Then a couple of grim policemen came out, shoved through

the crowd, went ahead up the fire stairs.

And then suddenly Groff's heart leaped with a chilling wave of terror sweeping him.

One of the bellboys suddenly was pointing at him excitedly.

"Peter Smith? Sure, there he is! Just checked in a while ago. I showed him to his room."

Abruptly everyone here was gazing at him.

Easy now! Hold steady!

"Me?" Groff said. "Sure, I'm Peter Smith."

What in hell was this? Now the policemen were gripping him by the arms, shoving him forward, shoving him into Mackenzie's living room. The thing in the chair was still there. Groff didn't like to look at it.

"You're Peter Smith?" Big Sergeant Vickers stood confronting him. The room blazed with lights. All the men in it were staring at Groff. The young blind fellow was here, seated in a chair.

"Peter Smith? Of course I am," Groff stammered. "What do you want?"

"Mackenzie was here in his chair, reading a book," Vickers said grimly. "A book printed in braille. We sent for Mr. Manners to explain it to us. Braille's an alphabet formed by tiny raised dots in the paper, and the blind man feels them with his fingertips."

Groff's mind swept back to Mackenzie sitting there, with his hands on the big book in his lap.

"The alphabet is formed," Vickers was saying, "by varying combinations of six dots in an oblong, the vertical side containing three dots and the horizontal, two. Sixty-three possible combinations, so that you get the alphabet, punctuation signs and things like that."

So what? "Why, that's interesting, Sergeant," Groff heard himself murmuring.

"Mr. Manners tells me that Mackenzie

has done some wonderfully inspirational work at the Institute," Vickers said. "He was—"

"Ever since he came," the young blind man said. "He was stricken suddenly blind, maybe about ten years ago. He never explained much about it—an eye disease, culminating in an acute hemorrhage."

Back there, that night in the bushes—great emotional strain, and then everything had gone black and the boy had crouched there in the terror of eternal darkness.

That's what Mackenzie had tried to explain.

"Mackenzie evidently had a visitor," Vickers was saying. "Somebody he knew. And he must have known too, that he was in deadly danger, because as he sat there, he was marking with his fingernail different letters of the braille alphabet on the book page in his lap. When I noticed that, I sent for Mr. Manners here, and he interpreted it for us. We described the marked letters, and Mr. Manners named them. Do you want to know what it says?"

The room was whirling around Groff. Dimly he heard himself gasping, "What do you mean? You—"

"It says: 'Peter Smith C27 is Daniel Groff—old enemy—help—he is—'"

Then Groff was aware that two policemen had shoved into the room. "Up in C-Twenty-seven—here's the stuff, sarge. We cut open his locked suitcase. Here's the missing jewelry and the gun. Guess we'll find it matches the bullet in the body all right, and his prints will be very plain on it—"

Nothing to connect Danny Groff with this murder? Here was just about everything!

"Needn't talk if you don't want to," Vickers was saying. "We sure got you dead to rights."

The mute, terrified Groff, numbly staring, could do nothing but agree with him.

ODDS ON CRIME

By Webb Garrison

AS YOU may have noticed when you bought this magazine, we're flying in the face of tradition—the tradition that says there's nothing *NEW* under the sun. We find that it's perfectly possible to have a New Detective Magazine—and to prove our point we present the following, a few brand new ways of getting into old trouble.

Many a sharper has made a fortune by fleecing persons whom he has persuaded that they are heirs to a mythical fortune. Oldest, and one of the most successful branches of this swindle, is the 'Drake Estate.'

The story goes that Sir Francis Drake, the famous buccaneer of the time of Queen Elizabeth, left a fortune still tied up in the English courts. Victims are shown fake pedigrees 'proving' them to be descendants of the doughty seaman, and are persuaded to help finance the mythical legal battle raging over the estate.

A single operator, Oscar Hartzell of Iowa, made more than a million dollars from the racket. Hundreds of other swindlers have profited from it to a lesser degree. The gullibility of the American public is shown by the fact that, although Sir Francis Drake died 350 years ago, there are still plenty of suckers willing to try to claim the estate. The latest conviction for this particular fraud was handed down in 1935, but authorities have reason to believe that it is still being successfully promoted!

One of the severest punishments in the annals of crime was meted out to Robert

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Damiens. In 1757, he attempted to murder King Louis XV, of France, and was caught in the act. The court deliberated for weeks, trying to devise adequate punishment. Finally Damiens was chained to an iron bed that was heated to 120°; his right hand was burned in a charcoal fire; his flesh was torn with pincers, and boiling oil and molten lead poured into the wounds. Then four wild horses were tied to him—one to each arm and leg—and he was literally torn apart.

Scholars believe that the famous story of 'Bluebeard' is based upon the actual deeds of an early wife-killer. King Henry VIII, of England, married six wives, beheaded four of them. He has been suggested as the original Bluebeard, but a more likely contender is Giles de Retz, Marquis de Laval. A French nobleman living in a town in Brittany, he married

seven women in succession, murdered six of them. Brought to justice in 1450, he was strangled and burned at the stake.

The term *cop*, as a designation for a police officer, is borrowed from the gypsy word 'cop,' meaning 'to take.'

Honolulu police recently solved a long series of robberies when they discovered that a member of the road gang had been slipping away from his guards every day at the lunch hour.

Military authorities in Lingen, Germany, worked for weeks to locate the headquarters of a gang of thieves, finally discovered it to be the local jail. Guards had been letting ruffians out at night on condition that they divide the loot with their warders.

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The Witness Chair

(Continued from page 6)

Gentlemen:

With your March issue I find a certain SOMETHING named STREET OF FEAR by Dorothy Dunn.

According to me this is about the best little yarn I've seen in anything touching on blood and murder in many's the day . . . that literary touch attached to terror, etc.—

I'm positive that this Dunn woman ended up the yarn in a splendid manner—for what else could a guy like him mutter but the words, "I HOPE I DIE BEFORE THE SUN GOES DOWN—"

Yours truly—

Joseph Dunphy
Manhattan

The next one is from an old friend, Dave Cooke, and isn't exactly what you might expect from old acquaintance. Dave, who tells us he's cooking up another anthology this year, including your favorites from this magazine, is mildly critical.

Dear Ed:

In the movies—and sometimes in magazines, even the best of 'em—they always have the detective very gingerly picking up the murder revolver with the aid of a breast-pocket handkerchief, so that fingerprints will not be "destroyed."

This always provides a good laugh for anyone who understands even the first thing about actual police methods, for a handkerchief would destroy rather than preserve prints. The best system would be to use just the bare hand.

In actual practice, however, detectives of the homicide squad rarely even attempt to check guns for prints, since they are invariably smudged and of little use. In the past 26 years not a single fingerprint taken from a small hand-arm has been presented in New York courts as murder evidence!

Yours,

David C. Cooke
Valley Stream, New York

The next one is slightly laced with poison and is from another guy who thinks he can give us a hand.

Editor

New Detective

Dear Sir:

The most vicious of the old New York criminal mobs was the Whyo Gang, whose very name struck terror to law-abiding citizens for many years. There was no limit to their savagery, and their slogan was, "A guy ain't tough until he has knocked his man out." The gang leaders had all killed at least two people.



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New Detective Magazine

Several members of the Whyo Gang met death on the gallows inside the walls of the Tombs Prison. And on one of these mobsters the police discovered a crime price list giving the following rates:

- Knocking down with fist.....\$2
- Blacking both eyes.....\$4
- Nose and jaw broken.....\$10
- Arm or leg broken.....\$20
- Shot in leg or stab wound.....\$25
- Doing the big job (murder) \$100 and up

And you people think your private gumshoes are tough! Hope you can use this bit somewhere to liven up what is on the whole a nice mag.

Sincerely,

Greg Elliott
Buffalo, New York

The following letter is from the Windy City—we checked the gentleman's statistics, however, and believe them to be reasonably accurate.

Dear Sirs:

Isn't it about time some of you people get behind an effort to rouse the ordinary citizen to an awareness of the realities behind crime? Fiction is all very well, and your stuff is clean and points a healthy moral, but sometimes cold figures are more dramatic than fiction.

Despite heroic efforts of the police departments of our country, it seems that the web of criminal activity is growing wider all the time. A check of the records indicates that every ten minutes someone in America is being held up by robbers; every six minutes someone is being assaulted or slain; every two minutes someone's car is being stolen; and every single minute of *this very night*, burglars will be entering someone's home or place of business!

These startling figures are based on reports of the F.B.I., which show that lawlessness of today far surpasses even the Roaring Twenties. Last year there were almost 200,000 *more* major crimes committed in America than during the previous year. Bank robberies alone shot up close to 175 per cent!

Altogether, criminals in this country perpetrate more than 1,500,000 major crimes annually—meaning that, on an average, they reached into every block and into every hamlet in America!

Too many of us simply look the other way when we hear or see activities which lead to making up statistics such as these—the tendency is to feel, "Let the police do it." It should be the privilege of every taxpayer to help the boys in blue along by assisting in some way in clearing up his district.

Sincerely,

John Kovacsek
Chicago, Illinois

The Witness Chair

In case you're planning a trip this summer, here's a warning:

Gentlemen:

Here's one for your readers:

Not long ago a gang of silverware thieves in New York City worked out an ingenious ruse for robbing a Park Avenue apartment. They day before the owner was to return from Europe, two of the crooks, dressed as expressmen, delivered a trunk which they said had been sent on ahead. Half an hour later they returned and explained that the delivery should have been made to the owner's sister, also returning from Europe, who lived in another apartment house. As they removed the trunk, they also carried out a third crook who had entered the apartment in the trunk and had used the time to rifle the rooms of valuables.

The only slip-up in the carefully laid plot was the fact that the building superintendent happened to possess what detectives "total recall." He was able to describe the expressmen so minutely, recalling so many details of their appearance that police had little difficulty determining the identities of the crooks and picking them up.

Yours very truly,

Raymond Weiss
New York City

The above, as a matter of fact, has been pulled in several localities all over the country and is assuming the proportions of a racket. On our own we know of a New Jersey contractor who put up a housing development, finishing his project late in the fall, and planning to open his houses for inspection early in the spring. When the snows had melted, he drove out and found that over half of his houses had been stolen. Inquiries revealed that some enterprisingly larcenous soul had simply backed up a fleet of trucks on the development, unloaded a gang of wreckers, torn down the houses, and carted away the new building material for resale.

Since we can't possibly top that, this might be a good note to close on. However, we are proud of Joel Townsley Rogers's *NEW*-length job in this issue and have another yarn by the same author in the inventory that will take a back seat from nobody. Look for it soon.

Keep in touch.

Ejler Jakobsson, Editor

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New Detective Magazine

Cipher Solvers' Club for March, 1948

Current Grand Total: 896,683 Answers

Eleven Answers—*Aachen, 307; †Amoroj, 460; *Attempt, 765; *S. H. Berwald, 1038; †Florence B. Boulton, 454; *Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 3933; *Carson, 1940; *Bessie Casey, 613; *Ciphermit, 3373; *Floyd E. Coss, 1683; *M. E. Cutcomb, 488; *Kay Dee, 639; *Drol, 2123; *M. E., 3770; *Eve Eden, 1307; Ednasande, 12; *Eidce, 1395; *Engineer 111, 1810; *Arty Ess, 3932; †Evie, 384; †Sally Fischer, 210; †Fern G., 224; *LeRoy A. Guidry, 890; †Gyrene, 346; *Henry J. Haewecker, 1937; Hamlet II, 95; *Hayrake, 401; *T. Hegarty, 3497; *Hopado, 1459; †Invictus, 482; *ayel, 4050; *June, 506; *Kate, 2888; *Betty Kelly, 544; *S. A. L., 443; †F. Mack, 283; *Theodote W. Midlam, 3292; *Lee A. Miller, 1843; Gum Miner, 12; *Mosback, 2499; †Clarence Neilsen, 348; †Pablo, 172; *W. F. P., 3075; *Kee Pon, 1135; *B. E. R., 1200; *Wm. G. Ringer, 1431; *Alice Routh, 3856; †Rush, 313; *Mrs. H. A. Seals, 3026; †W. E. S., 223; *R. B. Shrewsbury, 1598; *Logan Simard, 1162; *Sam Spiegel, 2709; *Mortimer G. Stambaugh, 1840; *ack-Stay, 3756; †Miss Tick, 272; *Tisen, 1289; *Valkyrie, 1155; †Arline F. Vaughn, 225; *Volund, 1907; †Ruth E. Weiss, 323; *Arthur Whitfield, 383; †Bret Harte Whitman, r., 405; *Wilray, 1477; *Yarbie, 996; *Zizi, 518.

Ten Answers—*P. W. B., 1326; †Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 348; Ray Boyd, 94; *Darn Cross, 1100; Sport La, 35; *Lucille E. Little, 2093. †L. Silverman, 156; *Nick Spar, 3262; *E. H. Werner, 1443; *Ike N. Wynne, 3490; *Doctor X, 3971.

Nine Answers—*Gold Bug, 1662; Honey Dew, 90; *Marguerite Gleason, 536; †C. Retherford, 168; *James H. Williams, 813.

Eight Answers—†Jay-em-en, 227; *Pearl Knowler, 2439; *Shadyside, 604.

Seven Answers—†J. E. L., 362.

Six Answers—*D. H. Holcomb, 1397.

One Answer—Raymond Evans, 6.

CIPHER SOLVERS' CLUB for MAY, 1948

Current Grand Total: 897,854 Answers

Eleven Answers—*Aachen, 3319; †Alphamega, 449; †Amoroj, 472; †Anidem, 404; *Attempt, 777; *See Bee, 2738; *P. W. B., 1337; *S. H. Berwald, 1049; †Florence B. Boulton, 446; *Gold Bug, 1673; *Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 3945; *Bessie Casey, 626; *Ciphermit, 3587; *Codela, 1493; *Floyd E. Coss, 1697; *Darn Cross, 1111; *M. E. Cutcomb, 500; *Kay Dee, 671; †Honey Dew, 101; *Gunga Din, 812; *Drol, 2135; *M. E., 3787; *Eve Eden, 1319; *Eidce, 1400; *Engineer III, 1822; *Arty Ess, 3943; *Estece, 1841; †Evie, 393; *Femo, 734; †Fern G., 236; *Clarence P. Greene, 1329; †Gyrene, 358; *Henry J. Haewecker, 1949; †Hamlet II, 107; *Hayrake, 1413; *T. Hegarty, 3509; *Jack-Hi, 1127; *Hopado, 1471; †Invictus, 494; *Jayel, 4061; †Jayemen, 239; Jim, 11; *June, 518; *Kate, 2899; Mrs. Captain Kidd, 83; *Betty Kelly, 556; *S. A. L., 455; †F. Mack, 295; *Theodote W. Midlam, 3303; *Lee A. Miller, 1855; Gum Miner, 24; *Mosback, 2511; Ella Nohr, 33; †Pablo, 193; *W. F. P., 3087; *Kee Pon, 1147; *B. E. R., 1212; *Wm. G. Ringer, 1443; *Alice Routh, 3868; *Mrs. H. A. Seals, 3037; †W. E. S., 235; *R. B. Shrewsbury, 1610; *Logan Simard, 1173; *Sam Spiegel, 2721; *M. G. S., 1857; *Jack-Stay, 3768; †Clement E. Taylor, 342; †Miss Tick, 284; *Tisen, 1301; *Valkyrie, 1167; †Arline F. Vaughn, 237; *Volund, 1919; *Mrs. James Wallen, 3678; †Ruth E. Weiss, 335; *E. H. Werner, 1454; *Arthur Whitfield, 395; †Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 417; *Wilray, 1489; *Doctor X, 3983; *Yarbie, 1008; *Zizi, 530.

Ten Answers—Alchemurg, 31; Diana Forrest, 64; *Marguerite Gleason, 546; *LeRoy A. Guidry, 901; *Lucille E. Little, 2103; †H. Pool, 209; †C. Retherford, 178; †Rush, 324; *Nick Spar, 3272; *James H. Williams, 824.

Nine Answers—†Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 357; †Ray Boyd, 103; †Mrs. James Gregg, 139; *D. H. Holcomb, 1400; *Pearl Knowler, 2448; †J. E. L., 371; *Ike N. Wynne, 4000.

Eight Answers—George Hein, 8.

Two Answers—A. Walrus, 62.

Corrections—†Anidem, and *Jack-Hi, 11 answers each for March; *Alpha Bet, and Diana Forrest, 10 answers each for March, not previously credited.

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