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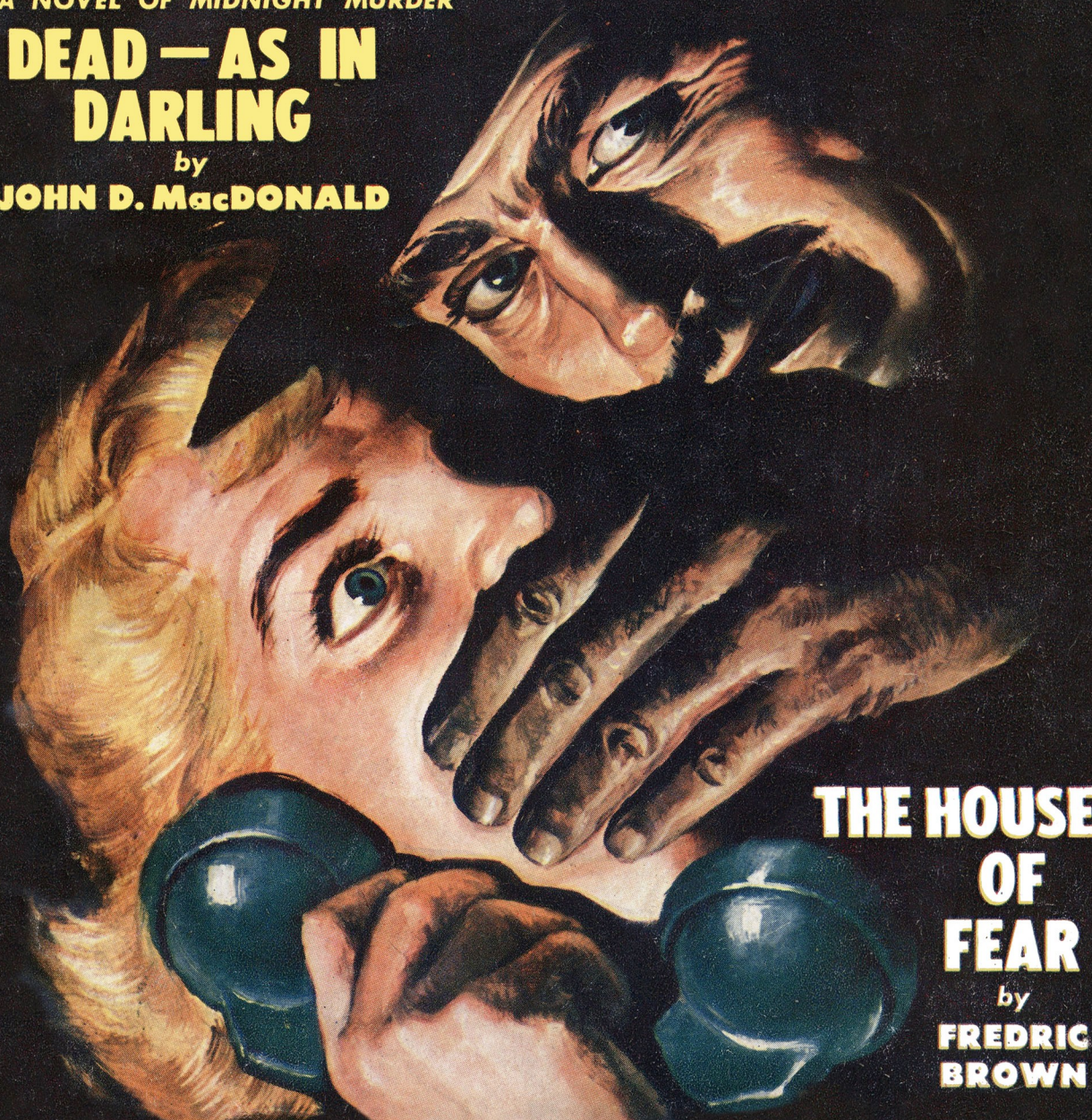
# NEW DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

A NOVEL OF MIDNIGHT MURDER

## DEAD — AS IN DARLING

by

JOHN D. MacDONALD



## THE HOUSE OF FEAR

by

FREDRIC  
BROWN



**NEED MONEY?**

**HERE'S PLENTY!**

**I'll Put a "Shoe Store Business" in Your Pocket!**



**You Don't Invest a Cent!  
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RESCUE CRAFT . . . JEEPERS! THERE  
SHE IS!

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RUN DOWN THE COAST IN THEIR NEWLY-  
PURCHASED SECONDHAND BOAT, WHEN..



MY ENGINE'S DEAD! ARE YOU  
THE RESCUE CRAFT?

NO, BUT I DO  
KNOW ENGINES.  
HEAVE US A  
LINE

ELENA  
MIAMI

20  
MINUTES  
LATER



WE'RE BLOWING  
ONTO THE  
SHOALS!

TELL YOUR DAD  
WE'RE O.K., MISS.  
THE ENGINE'LL  
START NOW



YOU GOT US OUT  
OF A NASTY FIX.  
I WAS ABSOLUTELY  
HELPLESS

CATFISH SHOALS  
HAVE BEEN BAD NEWS  
FOR MANY A VESSEL



COME ABOARD WHEN  
WE ANCHOR. WE'RE  
INVITED FOR CHOW

I'LL START SUPPER,  
DAD, WHILE YOU  
MEN CLEAN UP



SAY, THIS BLADE'S  
A PIP. NEVER GOT  
RID OF WHISKERS  
FASTER OR EASIER

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



WE PLAN TO FIX  
UP OUR TUB AND  
START A FISHING  
SERVICE

THAT'S A WASTE OF TALENT.  
MY CONSTRUCTION FIRM  
NEEDS MEN LIKE YOU

HE'S CERTAINLY  
HANDSOME

TAKE IT FROM ME, MEN, YOU GET  
SWELL-LOOKING, COMFORTABLE SHAVES  
WITH THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE THE KEENEST  
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4 BLADES

NEW TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED-BLADES





BEST IN CRIME FICTION 25¢

# NEW DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Vol. 13

Contents for September, 1949

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# POPULAR FILMS

**Good Movie-Going For Fiction Fans**

## Ted Palmer Picks:

**For A Western**—"Roughshod" with Robert Sterling, Gloria Grahame and Claude Jarman, Jr. (RKO).



As if they didn't have trouble enough, a quartet of women from the dance hall at Aspen, Nevada, join up with Clay and Steve Phillips (Robert Sterling and Claude Jarman, Jr.) who are headed for California with a herd of blooded horses. To make matters worse, an ex-convict is gunning for Clay. The brothers manage to get rid of all the women except Mary (Gloria Grahame) who has taken a shine to Clay—but Clay isn't taking. That is, until after a rip-roaring gunfight during which the outlaw bites the dust. *A "western" proving that men are still men.*

• • •

**For Suspense**—"House of Strangers" with Edward G. Robinson, Susan Hayward and Richard Conte (20th Century-Fox).



The strangers in this house are the four Monetti brothers. The story is of Max Monetti's (Richard Conte) personal vendetta against the others for allowing him to go to prison while trying to save their father (Edward G. Robinson) from jail. It's the love of a woman (Susan Hayward) and the final realization of how futile his motives are that saves Max. In between, *this film develops plenty of chair-gripping tension.*

• • •

**For Romantic Adventure**—"The Great Sinners" with Gregory Peck, Ava Gardner, Melvyn Douglas, Walter Huston and Ethel Barrymore (MGM).



Peck's a writer, Ava's his girl, Huston's her father, Melvyn's the churl. Mix them all up in a European gambling casino around 1860 and you have a story. Pauline Ostrovsky and her father (Ava Gardner and Walter Huston) have gambling in their blood—not so writer Peck. But when the Ostrovsky chips go down—and down, Peck risks his own money to prevent Pauline from marrying the

cad, Armand De Glasse (Melvyn Douglas), for his money. Peck loses at the wheel—and loses spiritually. He finally regains mastery of both—and the girl. *A well-played tale.*

• • •

**For Comedy**—"Sorrowful Jones" with Bob Hope and Lucille Ball (Paramount).



Damon Runyon's wonderful story of bookmakers, mobsters and "little Miss Marker" is retold here with Bob Hope in the title role. Filled with typical Hope clowning, Runyonesque characters like "Regret," "Big Steve," "Once Over Sam" and the beauteous Lucille Ball, this picture makes the best of a good story. Briefly, Sorrowful, as a miserly bookmaker, accepts a five year old girl as a marker for a bet on a fixed horse race. When the child's father is liquidated by the mob for trying to "unfix" the race, Hope takes it upon himself to protect her from the gang. In the end, the thugs are outwitted and everyone lives happily ever after. *This is an hilarious Hope vehicle for all.*

• • •

**For Music**—"Look for the Silver Lining" with June Haver, Ray Bolger and Gordon MacRae (Warner Brothers) Technicolor.



Perhaps all won't remember Marilyn Miller—one of the greatest musical comedy stars ever—but everybody will recognize the many tender and nostalgic melodies that stud this screen portrayal of her life. With June Haver as the star; Ray Bolger as Jack Donahue, one of the inspirations in her life, and Gordon MacRae playing Frank Carter, her first husband, this picture tells Marilyn's story of devotion to the stage. From her very first appearance as a child with the "Four Columbians" to her final performance in "Sally", she and all about her were a part of the theatre. Musical memories include "Who", "Sunny", "A Kiss in the Dark", "Time on My Hands", and, of course, the title piece. *A skillful blend of fact and music, solidly entertaining.*

• • •

**For Sports**—"The Great Dan Patch" with Dennis O'Keefe, Gail Russell and Ruth Warrick (United Artists).



The greatest pacing horse of them all was Dan Patch, and this is his story—more or less. He gets born, trained, raced on the Grand Circuit and made a champion. There's also some kind of plot involving people, but you'll be most interested in the harness racing on which this film is based.





## THE WITNESS CHAIR

**G**REETINGS, gun-and-gore fans! Your response to our invitation to submit letters to this department has been heartwarming. We didn't know how many friends we had before. The number of letters we've received has almost doubled in the past two months, and every one is welcome. Your suggestions make our job—providing the best in up-to-the-minute crime fiction and entertaining fact material—much easier.

Here's a letter opening a friendly quarrel with Hal Abbott, whose letter was published last issue.

Dear Editor:

I would like to raise my voice slightly in protest against Mr. Hal Abbott's idea that *New Detective* should be more devoted to short stories than to the longer efforts. Short stories are all right, but I think most detective readers will agree that the heart of this type of writing is in the longer stories, novels especially. After all, the detective story form has been principally developed through the novel, and the greatest masters work in novel-length stories, which give more scope for their talents. Personally, I would like to see more and longer novels in *New Detective*. The longer a really good story is, the better I like it, and I think a lot of readers feel the same way.

Here's an odd fact that I came across recently. Kidnapping, even before the Lindbergh case, has always been regarded as one of the most heinous crimes in the roster. But, at least once in American history, a band of kidnapers won public acclaim for their crime!

Late in 1871 an English swindler mas-

querading as Lord Gordon-Gordon arrived in New York with great pomp and ceremony. He awed financial circles by announcing that he planned to invest a million dollars in railroad lands.

He made friends quickly here, and through their influence became acquainted with several of the financial magnates of the day. From them he secured about one-half million dollars' worth of cash and securities and pretended to have bought a controlling interest in one of the largest eastern railways. He forced the president of the company to resign, and announced that he would name a new board of directors. Meanwhile, he was busy selling the stock secured from the financiers.

When his fraud was uncovered, he took refuge in Canada. Learning that he was at Fort Garry, Manitoba, several prominent Minneapolis citizens crossed the border and captured him, though they had no legal authority to do so. Canadian officials forced his release at the international boundary

(Continued on page 126)





THREE  
GRAVES  
HAVE I

By  
Day Keene



*Joel knocked the gambler from his feet. . . .*



*When a guy finds out on his honeymoon that there are two of him—it doesn't take him long to learn that—three's a shroud!*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Ring Three—for Murder

**I**T WAS four o'clock in the morning when the ringing of the phone awakened Hanson. Raising himself on one elbow, careful not to disturb Claire, he answered it.



"Joel Hanson speaking."

"This is Maxie," his caller said. He sounded tired. "Look. We're through fooling with you, Joel. Stalling won't get you anything but a slug. Get the dough on the line by this same time tomorrow morning."

Hanson attempted a protest but the phone in his hand had gone dead. He lay a moment longer, staring at it through the fragrant darkness of the room.

Then the switchboard operator said, "Was there something else you wanted, sir?"

"Yes," Hanson said. "See if you can find out where that phone call came from. We were cut off."

The operator said, "I will try to connect you again, sir."

Returning the phone to its cradle, Hanson lit a cigarette. He tried to cup the match so the flare wouldn't shine in Claire's eyes but the ringing of the phone had partially awakened her. Her voice still fogged with sleep, she asked, "Who was that calling at this time of morning, honey?"

He lied, "Oh, just some drunk trying to be funny."

Snuggling still closer to his back she laid one hand on his shoulder as though to make certain he didn't leave her while she slept, and returned her cheek to her pillow. "Oh," she said. "Oh." A moment later she was breathing rhythmically again.

*Like a baby*, Hanson thought. He lay smoking, waiting for the operator to call. He was mildly frightened, but didn't know exactly why. He did know his caller was neither drunk nor trying to be funny. The man meant what he said. It was the third time he had phoned. He was neither blustering nor bluffing. He was merely stating a fact. The hell of it was he didn't know any Maxie or why anyone should be through with him to the extent of threatening him with a slug if he didn't lay an

unstated sum of money on an equally unknown line. The other two phone calls on the two preceding nights had been of a pattern. The only difference in this one was that a definite time had been set.

*"Get the dough on the line by this same time tomorrow morning. . . ."*

There was an ominous sound to the sentence. The phone clicked and Hanson picked the receiver from its cradle before it could ring and awaken Claire.

"I am sorry," the hotel switchboard girl reported. "The outside operator said the call was made from a dial phone and therefore cannot be traced."

"Well, thanks, anyway," Hanson said.

HE SNUFFED out his cigarette and lay back on his pillow. It had to be a gag of some kind. He knew no one named Maxie. He had no underworld connections. Some of the gang back in the office in Chicago must have put one of their relatives up to making the calls. It would be about the type of humor that they would appreciate. One thing was certain. He wasn't going to let it spoil his honeymoon.

He lay reveling in the softness of the bed, listening to the pound of the surf on the private beach, thinking of the food, the service. This was the way he liked to live.

It was still difficult for him to believe that he, Joel Hanson, an obscure sixty-dollar-a-week copywriter at Durston, Blackette, and Benton, was married to a girl like Claire and that they were spending their honeymoon in a thirty-dollar-a-day suite at the swank Belle Aire Hotel. Two weeks ago he hadn't even known there was a Belle Aire Hotel. He hadn't known there was a Claire, for that matter.

It had begun with a lucky run of the dice in Charlie's place on Wells Street. He had won four hundred and thirty-eight dollars. The roll in his usually empty pocket had given him the confidence to speak to Claire



when she had sat on a stool beside him at the bar. What had followed was only natural.

She was a model, she said, alone in the city and lonely. It was the first time she had ever been in a bar alone but she was so tired of being cooped up in her room at the girl's club where she stayed that she could scream.

There had been no hanky-panky. He had said good night in the lobby of the club. But he had met her the next afternoon, and the next. And Claire had brought him luck. With her hand on his arm he had run the four hundred and thirty-eight dollars into almost two thousand.

Getting married had been his idea. Coming to the Belle Aire had been hers. She had always wanted to stay here, she said. Later they could economize. But a two week honeymoon at the Belle Aire would give their marriage a solid sendoff and them a memory that they would always treasure.

They had left by plane the night they had been married. Hanson counted his money mentally. Even after paying their hotel bill and their plane fares they would have over five hundred dollars on which to start housekeeping. It had been a perfect honeymoon so far—with the exception of the phone calls.

He closed his eyes and tried to sleep, and couldn't.

*"Get the dough on the line by this same time tomorrow morning. . . ."*

He wished Maxie, whoever Maxie was, would get his Hansons straight. He must be calling some other Hanson. Hanson was a common name. On the other hand he had called him Joel.

In sudden inspiration he picked up the phone again and asked the operator if there was another Joel Hanson stopping at the hotel.

She checked with her room list and reported. "There is a Mr. J. Hanson stop-

ping in one of the cottages, sir. But I have no way of knowing if his first name is Joel. Do you wish me to ring him?"

Hanson thought a moment, then told her, "No. But thanks."

The thing was beginning to intrigue him. Naturally curious, he wondered what it was all about. The surface solution was seemingly very simple. He had been getting the other man's phone calls. His caller had never allowed him fully to identify himself. The three times Maxie had phoned he had done all the talking and he had thought that he was talking to the other Hanson.

There were two things he could do. He could forget about it, or he could warn the other Hanson. He owed his namesake that much. He reached for the phone and changed his mind. He was curious to see what the other man looked like. Besides, it would be difficult to explain the rather involved matter over the telephone.

Slipping out of bed, careful not to awaken Claire, he dressed in the bathroom, then scribbled a note on a piece of hotel stationery on the chance she might wake up before he returned. He put the note under the ashtray on the bed table and stood for a moment looking down through the moonlight at the sleeping girl.

He might never have a lot of money. But he had certainly climbed into the upper tax brackets as far as a wife was concerned. He had never even dared to dream that a girl as nice as Claire would ever happen to him. She was as sweet and good as she was pretty. And she was as pretty as an angel.

*Like a baby,* he thought.

Stooping, Hanson brushed her hair with his lips. Then, straightening, he tiptoed softly out the door.

**T**HE night, even for Southern California in July, was warm. The fragrance of phlox and roses, mingled with the spicy tang of the salt air off

the ocean, filled the hotel grounds. Even in the moonlight the grounds were a riot of color. It was nice to be rich, Joel thought. Living at the Belle Aire was like living in a fairyland.

He walked briskly down the graveled path leading to the de luxe cottage that the switchboard operator had told him J. Hanson occupied. His namesake must have money, and a lot of it. He had checked on the cottage rate when he and Claire had wired for their reservation and the cheapest cottage began at fifty dollars a day.

The drape in the living room was drawn but light peeped out around the edges and he could hear the slap of cards and an occasional tinkle of chips. He lit a cigarette and rang the bell.

A big man in his shirtsleeves opened the door part way. He wasn't friendly. "What do you want?"

Joel asked him, "Is your name by any chance Joel Hanson?"

The big man shook his head. "No. My name is Cutter. But this is Joel Hanson's cottage. Why?"

"I want to see him," Joel said. "I think I have been getting some phone calls that belong to him."

The other man was openly skeptical.

"What are you trying to hand me? What's your racket, chum?"

Joel said rather hotly, "I'm not trying to hand you anything and I haven't any racket. I'm just trying to do him a favor. You see, I'm also stopping at the hotel and for the last three nights some guy named Maxie has been calling and laying down the law to me."

The other four men in the living room had continued to play cards. They stopped now and looked up.

"Oh," Cutter said. "I see." He opened the door its full width, suddenly concerned. "Come in, chum. Come in."

The living room was huge and even more expensively furnished than his suite

in the hotel. Joel looked at the men at the table. They were big-time hoods if he had ever seen any. All of them were in their shirt sleeves but their shirts were custom made. Two of them were wearing shoulder holsters under their left armpits. He almost wished he had phoned his namesake.

A light-complected man about his own size, but perhaps fifteen years older, tore in two the cards he was holding.

"Hey, Joel," Cutter said. "This guy says—"

The other man cut him short by saying, "Yeah. I heard him." Standing up, he offered Joel his hand. "I'm glad to meet you, fellow. Quite a coincidence, eh? Two guys by the same name stopping at the same hotel."

Joel admitted it was a coincidence. He didn't know why, but he didn't like this man. He could easily have lived the rest of his life without meeting him.

"Now what's this about Maxie?" his namesake asked.

Joel told him, "He's called three times. Once last night, once the night before, and again tonight. And tonight he told me—" he quoted his caller verbatim—"This is Maxie. Look. We're through fooling with you, Joel. Stalling won't get you anything but a slug. Get the dough on the line by this same time tomorrow morning." He shrugged when he had finished. "It didn't mean a thing to me."

The light-complected man's smile was tight. "It means plenty to me, and thanks for passing on the phone calls, chum."

Cutter said, "That's all very well, but how do we know this isn't a gag." He tapped Joel's chest with a finger. "Can you prove your name is Joel Hanson?"

Joel debated telling him to go to hell, and decided it wouldn't be wise. Instead he said, "I can." He showed Cutter his driver's license, his social security card, and several letters he happened to have in his pocket.

Cutter shook his head. "I'll be damned.



I will be damned. That's one for the book, all right." Friendly now, he asked, "And if it's not too personal, chum, what are you doing at the Belle Aire?"

"I'm on my honeymoon," Joel told him.

His namesake said, "Say, that's a shame. And I'm sorry you were bothered, fellow." He took a well-filled wallet from his pocket and extracted two five hundred dollar bills from it. "Look. How about letting me buy the bride a box of candy, or something?"

"No, thanks." Joel refused the money. He didn't want any connection with or favors from these men. All he wanted was to get out of the bungalow and back to Claire. He edged toward the door. "It was just when I found out there was another Hanson stopping here with the same initial as mine I thought you might want to know about the phone calls. So I came down and told you."

His namesake returned the money to his wallet. "Well, okay. And thanks a million, chum. Maybe some day I can do you a favor."

Cutter let him out the door and locked and bolted it behind him. Lighting a cigarette before he stepped off the stoop, Hanson grinned into the moonlight. Would he have something to tell Claire in the morning! Would he have something to tell the gang at the office! As soon as he got back to Chicago he would have to ask some cop just how big a shot this other Joel Hanson was and what part of the U.S.A. he hailed from. He was willing to bet he was plenty big.

Hanson retraced his steps down the graveled path.

*"Look. How about letting me buy the bride a box of candy, or something?"*

A box of candy. Wow. Those had been real five hundred dollar bills. Maybe he should have taken them.

Two huge purple bougainvillea vines flanked the entrance to the hotel proper.

As Hanson neared the entrance two men stepped out from the shadows of the vine on the right hand side.

"Hey, Hanson," one of them said.

Joel looked up instinctively. "Yeah?"

He says, "Yeah," the second man said, and swung the sap in his hand.

The blow knocked Hanson to his knees. He had a vague impression that the moon had suddenly split in two and one half of it had plummeted to earth and caved in the side of his head.

He tried to get back to his feet and the man with the sap hit him again.

"Lay down, chump," he said. "The honeymoon is over."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Shroud Across the Moon

**O**UTSIDE of a wino sleeping off his jag in the blown-paper-littered doorway of a pawn shop, and a few early rising workers, Main Street was deserted in the grey hush that preceded the dawn.

In headquarters, Inspector Almroth was yawning over the comic strip deductions of Dick Tracy when Sergeant Connors opened his door.

"This you got to hear," he announced. "This is one for the book."

Almroth looked at him over his paper and wanted to know what was one for the book.

"A big-time hood yelling for protection," the sergeant told him, and ushered Joel Hanson and Cutter into the inspector's office.

"Hi, Inspector. Thanks for seeing us," Hanson said.

Almroth choked back another yawn as he acknowledged the introductions with a nod. Both Hanson and Cutter had been small time dice hustlers in L.A. until they had branched out into big time gambling.

"A little out of your territory, aren't you, boys?" he asked. "I thought you

were big shots down around San Diego now."

His right hand shaking slightly, Hanson lit a cigarette. "That could be," he admitted. "But we—I—" he corrected himself—"have got a little problem, Inspector, and I thought maybe you could help me out."

The inspector was noncommittal. "Yes?"

Hanson told the story. Some months before, he had gotten into a poker game with one Maximillian Costello—Maxie for short—in which he had lost two hundred and twenty thousand dollars.

Cutter offered, "But the cards were stacked. He trimmed Joel."

Inspector Almroth waved him into silence with the stub of his dead cigar. "Let Hanson tell it."

The gambler continued. "Like Cutter says, I was rubed. So to date I have refused to honor my I.O.U. and now Maxie is starting to get tough about it. So—"

"Get out," Almroth said. He pointed to the door of his office. "Since when has the L.A. police force turned nursemaid for a welching gambler?"

"No," Hanson insisted. "You gotta listen to me. There is more than just money concerned." He hesitated briefly, then added, "Or does the department want another Bugsy Siegel case on its hands?"

"Go on," Almroth said.

"It's a fight for power," Hanson continued. "Maxie has run every other big time operator but myself off the coast. Now he's after me. He doesn't really want the dough he claims I owe him. He does intend to use that crooked game and my refusal to pay off as an excuse for dumping me into the ocean. If he succeeds in doing that he will control every bit of vice and gambling south of the Tehachapis."

Almroth asked, "But why tell me all this?"

Hanson's smile was wry. "Because I don't want to die. Maxie has tricked me

into a peculiar situation. I'm damned if I don't pay off and I'm damned if I do. If I don't pay off, every hood along the coast will think that I'm a welcher. If I do pay off they'll think I'm afraid of Maxie and I won't be able to get even a stick man to work for me."

Still puzzled, Almroth asked, "So why come to the department about it? What do you want me to do?" He was frank. "As far as we are concerned we'd like to see you kill each other."

Cutter asked, "Is that any way for a cop to talk?"

"It's the truth," Almroth said. It was. He knew and disliked Maxie Costello as much as he did Hanson. If the two men were to wipe each other out they would be performing a public service. The L.A. police, along with the other law enforcement agencies in southern California, had tried to get both men for years.

"Okay," Hanson said, "so you don't like me. I'm crying. But nevertheless I want to go on record. I've tried to keep the peace. I even went away for six months to Chicago and New York and let Cutter here run things for me. I tried to let Maxie cool off. But I'm back now. I'm stopping at the Belle Aire and not more than an hour and a half ago, Maxie called and threatened to rub me out unless I laid the dough on the line."

Inspector Almroth made a notation on the pad on his desk. This was, after all, threatened murder. And he was a homicide man.

"Costello made a definite threat, eh? He said if you didn't pay up he'd knock you off. He made this threat over the phone?"

"That's right."

"To you in person?"

The gambler explained, "Well, not exactly to me in person. You see he makes it to this other Joel Hanson who is stopping at the hotel."

Almroth pushed back his pad.



"What are you trying to give me?"

"It's the truth," Cutter said. "This other Joel Hanson is a young punk on his honeymoon, see? And for the last three nights Maxie has been calling him and laying down the law under the impression he is Joel, here. So tonight the punk smarts up enough to ask the switchboard operator if there is another J. Hanson stopping at the hotel. And when she says there is he comes down and tells us about the phone calls. And in this call, after identifying himself, Maxie said, *'We're through fooling with you, Joel. Stalling won't get you anything but a slug. Get the dough on the line by this same time tomorrow morning.'*" Cutter looked at his watch. "That's four o'clock tomorrow morning. Exactly twenty-two hours from now. But for all we know, Maxie may jump the gun."

Inspector Almroth looked at Hanson. "This other Joel Hanson looks like you?"

The gambler shook his head. "Naw. Like Cutter says he's just a young punk maybe twenty-six or twenty-seven on his honeymoon." He admitted, "He's about my size at that. And he's got light hair." He shrugged. "But it's not on account of that that Maxie calls. It was just a mistake on the switchboard. He's probably registered as Joel while I'm down on the card as J."

**A**LMROTH thought a moment. He was in as bad a spot as Hanson was. If he ignored Hanson's plea for help and the gambler was killed, every paper in town would shriek about the inefficiency of a police department that had been forewarned of a killing and had taken no steps to prevent it. It wouldn't hurt to at least check on Hanson's story. Picking up the phone on his desk he asked the police switchboard operator to get him the Belle Aire Hotel. The connection made, he asked to speak to Joel Hanson.

A woman answered the phone. Her

voice sounded as if she had been crying.

"This is Inspector Almroth of the Los Angeles Detective Bureau," Almroth identified himself. "Might I speak to Mr. Hanson please?"

At the other end of the wire, Claire gasped, "The detective bureau. Then something *has* happened to Joel."

Almroth wanted to know what she was talking about.

Claire said, "My husband. You are a policeman?"

"I am."

Claire said, "Then I want you to do something about finding Joel. Two hours ago our phone rang. He said it was just some drunk trying to be funny, but when I awakened a few minutes ago, Joel wasn't here. There was nothing but a note on the bed table saying he loved me and would be right back." She sounded frantic. "But he hasn't come back. And when I phoned downstairs to see if he was in the lobby, the girl said he had walked through the lobby two hours ago and that was the last she had seen of him."

His eyes thoughtful, Inspector Almroth suggested he might have gone for an early morning walk.

"No," Claire protested. "He wouldn't have done that—not without me. We're on our honeymoon. We've only been married five days and—" She stopped talking and began to cry.

"You stay right in your room," Almroth told her. "I'll either come right down myself or send a man down to check with you."

He hung up and looked at the two men standing in front of his desk.

"Now what?" Cutter wanted to know.

Inspector Almroth told him, "Young Hanson has disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

"That's right. His wife said he didn't come back to their room. What time was it when he looked you up to tell you about Maxie's phone calls?"

Hanson said, "Between four and four-thirty." He swore softly. "Say—you don't suppose—" He thought better of what he had been about to say and left it there.

"I don't suppose what?" Inspector Almroth said.

Hanson continued, "Well, that Maxie intended to jump the gun on that time limit. That he had a couple of his dumb hoods watching my cottage. Like I said, this young punk doesn't look anything like me but he is about my size and he does have light hair. Maxie would much rather scrag me than have me pay off. That way he could take over the whole coast. So what if the phone calls were a cover? What if he had a couple of hoods who didn't know me by sight casing my cottage at the Belle Aire? And what if they had orders to pick me up and they see this young punk come out of my place and they ask him is his name Hanson and he says it is and—"

The gambler stopped short and spread his hands in a, *And there you have it . . .* gesture.

**W**ITH the first returning consciousness Joel experienced cold. He was both cold and wet. There was a slap of water against metal only inches from his ear. His fingers explored through the dark and encountered strange and unfamiliar objects. Then somewhere in the near distance a bell buoy tolled and he realized he was on a boat. From the pitch and chop, it was anchored.

He sat up, the worst of his panic subsiding. He knew little about boats but decided he must be in a small bilge or locker room. The metal plates under him were covered with a half inch of mixed oil and water that swished with the roll of the boat.

He tried to stand up and bumped his already throbbing head. Crouched on his haunches, he held his head and wondered, *Why?* That was the big question. Why

had the two hoods slugged him and brought him here? Then he thought he knew. They thought he was the other Hanson.

He crouched, holding his head, cursing himself for a fool, thinking of Claire. Hours must have passed since he had been slugged. Claire would be awake and worried sick by now. If only he had used his head. If only he had phoned the other Hanson and told him about the phone calls, none of this would have happened.

A ray of light brightened his despair. Even now all he had to do was to establish his identity. Hoods in the upper income tax brackets in which Hanson and the mysterious Maxie seemed to travel didn't go around slugging and killing people for nothing.

"*My name is Joel Hanson,*" he would say. "*But I'm not Joel Hanson the big shot. I'm just a sixty dollar copywriter from Chicago and the only reason I could afford to spend my honeymoon at the Belle Aire was because I won two thousand bucks in a crap game.*"

He felt his pockets. Robbery wasn't the motive. He still had his watch and his wallet. He found a packet of matches and struck one. It was eight o'clock. Claire would be worried sick by now. In the light of his match he looked around his prison. It was a low locker cabinet, perhaps six by six and less than four feet high. And it wasn't a prison. Inches from where he squatted a steel hatch was propped up.

He looked out incredulously. He could see the sky and the sky was filled with stars. He hadn't been out for a few hours. He had slept the day away. It was eight o'clock in the evening.

A sore spot on his left bicep offered an explanation. His arm felt like it had after getting an Army tetanus renewal shot. After knocking him out, the hoods had doped him. It also explained why he still felt sluggish.



Somehow he had to get to Claire. The poor kid would be sick with worry by now. She probably had every law enforcement agency in southern California looking for him. A growing anger replaced his panic. This was a hell of a way to treat a couple on their honeymoon.

Standing up carefully this time, he laid back the hatch cover and pulled himself up on deck. A necklace of lights rimmed the shore, too far distant for him to swim to. A steady stream of what could only be car headlights flowed under the necklace. The boat, Joel decided, was anchored off Santa Monica, far out beyond the stone breakwater. Yes. There was the lighted pier jutting out into the water, the pier on which he and Claire had found the quaint little sea food restaurant.

He wished he were a better swimmer, but attempting to swim that distance would be tantamount to suicide. He returned his attention to the boat. It was a thirty-eight or forty-footer, with an open cockpit and two cabins. The aft cabin was dark but there was a light in the forward cabin.

He made his way forward carefully, rehearsing his set speech. There was no use of his trying to get tough. He had no weapon to back him up. The thing for him to do was to explain a mistake had been made and insist on being taken to Maxie immediately. Maxie might not know his voice over the phone but all he would have to do was look at him to realize he wasn't the Hanson he wanted.

A stream of yellow light flowed out the partly opened door of the cabin to form a small yellow pool on the deck plates. A thin-faced, aristocratic looking man was seated behind a desk, with both palms flat on the glass top. His face was white and strained. He appeared to be in an attitude of waiting.

Swallowing the lump in his throat, Joel rapped on the door.

"You in there," he said. Once he

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started talking, his voice gained strength. "I want to talk to you. There's been a bad mistake. I'm not the Hanson that you think. I—"

"Come in," a man's voice said. "Come in."

Joel opened the door and stepped in. What followed was always confused in his mind. He saw the thin-faced man raise his right hand from the desk top and streak it toward and under the left lapel of his coat. At the same time the lights in the cabin blinked out, to be replaced by bursts of gun flame and the scream of ricocheting lead.

Joel side-stepped instinctively, and bumped into a movable object that grunted. Someone pushed a gun in his face. He felt cold steel on his flesh and as much without volition as he had side-stepped he caught at the hand holding the gun.

He got the gun but didn't hold it long. This time when the moon left the sky the whole of it crashed into his head to send him stumbling across the cabin and into the desk. He caught at the desk, sagged to his knees, then fell flat on his back. With the last of his fading consciousness he saw a faint pin-prick of light a million light years away, a pin-prick that resembled a match flare.

Then, from the same distance, a man's voice said, "Well, I guess that's that. Right through the old ticker. And take it from me, pal, in the pictures they couldn't have done any better."

Joel later remembered wondering what the hell he was talking about. Then the last of his consciousness faded and all was night and silence.

**S**QUEAK-squeak—squeak-squeak.  
Joel lay a moment hoping that Claire would get up and close the door before its squeaking drove him completely crazy. He could feel the sound down to his toes. He lay still a moment

longer, under the impression he had the great granddaddy of all hangovers. Then a sharp pitch of the boat reminded him where he was.

He wasn't in bed at the hotel. This was still a part of the nightmare that had begun when he had gone to deliver Maxie's message to his namesake.

He sat up on the ankle deep carpet and looked around the cabin. The lights were on again. The squeak he heard was caused by the open door swinging with the roll of the boat. He got unsteadily to his feet and looked out on deck. He could see no one. There was no sound but the slap of the waves and the far off moaning of a foghorn. As far as he could tell, he was alone on the boat. Turning, he looked across the lighted cabin. Alone with the thin-faced man slumped forward on his desk in a pool of blood that had ceased to flow.

He felt a foreign object in his hand and looking down saw that he was still holding the gun he had wrestled out of the hand of his unseen assailant. That much he remembered. Holding it gingerly he approached the desk. The man slumped on it was dead. He no longer looked aristocratic. He looked like a dead rat.

Joel passed his left palm over his forehead. The whole affair didn't make sense. He had been a witness to a murder. There had been at least one, probably two other men in the cabin. Then after killing the man at the desk, why hadn't they killed him?

The silver glint of a cigarette lighter attracted his attention. He picked it up and looked at the engraved initials: M.C. The initials didn't make sense to him but a letter on the desk did. It was addressed to Maximillian Costello and it began with the salutation, "Dear Maxie—"

This, then, was the man who had phoned him and warned him to get the money on the line. He wondered if he had called from the boat. He studied the



dead man curiously. He had been of the same stamp as Cutter and Hanson—big time. His clothes were well cut and expensive. A huge diamond winked on one finger. The price of the diamond alone, Joel thought, would buy Claire and himself a bungalow and furnish it.

He raised his eyes and saw the safe behind the desk. One thing was certain. Maxie hadn't been killed for money. This wasn't a robbery. The thick door of the safe was wide open and neatly stacked in the safe were sheafs of bills totaling the devil only knew how much.

His throbbing head forgotten, Joel's mouth was suddenly dry as the devil crept up behind him and nudged him. There was enough money in the safe to keep Claire and himself in comfort for the balance of their lives.

Maxie no longer had any use for the money. No one but the men who had slugged and abducted him knew he was on the boat. It was reasonable to assume they were the same men who had killed Maxie. They wouldn't dare to talk. They would go to the lethal chamber if they did.

He thought, *If I could put the money in one of those sacks and get to shore somehow, even the men who knew I had it wouldn't dare to talk.*

His mind raced on. He could contact Claire, tell her to meet him back in Chicago and leave the California police to stew in their own juice. It wasn't as if he could identify the killers. He couldn't. Someone would get the money. There was no reason why he shouldn't have it.

But how to get to shore? He went out on deck and looked over the side and saw the solution to his problem. A small dingy was tied aft. He couldn't swim to the necklace of lights but he could certainly row that far.

In a fever of excitement he went back to the cabin and, kneeling in front of the safe, began to stuff the sheaves of bills into

the sack. His fever abated, then died as suddenly as it had sprung up. It might have been that before he met Claire he could have done this thing. He had never been exactly crooked but he had always been willing to pick up a fast buck. But all that had changed now. He had Claire to live up to. And Claire was good and sweet and honest. No matter how much money there was in the safe it didn't belong to him and Claire wouldn't approve of this thing that he was about to do. He emptied the sack reluctantly. Then, slamming the door of the safe, he twirled the dial and stood up.

To hell with the bloody money. He didn't need it to support Claire. He had a good job and prospects. He didn't want to live—didn't want her to live—the balance of their lives listening for a midnight rap on the door that might either be the law or the men who had killed Maxie come back for the money. His sixty a week wasn't much but there were no strings tied to it.

He felt better immediately. Some of the throbbing in his head subsided. The thing to do, he decided, was to get to shore and to the police just as fast as he could. This thing was their baby, not his.

QUITTING the cabin, he pulled the dingy up to the side of the boat and got in. The pitch and chop were much worse in the smaller boat. Rowing had looked a lot easier than it was, especially with a sea running. The necklace of lights seemed miles distant. Hanson pulled on doggedly, thinking of Claire. The poor kid was probably sick by now, wondering what had happened to him.

A few minutes after he quit the larger boat, a heavy fog settled down and he knew panic, wondering if he was rowing in towards shore or out to sea. Twice speeding power boats passed him, their running lights dim red and green in the thick grey mist. Then, through a break

in the fog, he saw the shore lights again. He was moving in the right direction. He was just outside the Santa Monica breakwater and the incoming tide was sweeping him in through the channel.

He made no attempt to make a landing on the lower level of the pier. He didn't know enough about boats. Instead he rowed doggedly the length of the pier and allowed a curling green comber to beach the dingy on the sand. Dripping water, he staggered ashore. It was after midnight. There were no couples on the beach. The fog was even thicker here than it had been on the water. He groped his way through it up a flight of stone steps to the drive in search of an open bar or restaurant from which he could phone Claire.

He found a small combination bar and sea food restaurant open and asked the cashier for change of a quarter.

She gave him two dimes and a nickel and some advice. "If I were you, mister," she said, "I'd hole up somewhere before the cops saw me. They're plenty tough with drunks in Santa Monica."

Hanson looked in the mirror as he dialed the number of the Belle Aire. He looked like he was drunk. His hair was matted with clotted blood and salt water. One of his eyes was turning purple. His suit was sodden and shapeless. He was so tired he felt he could lie down on the floor and sleep. He gave the switchboard girl at the Belle Aire the number of their room. Then Claire's voice came over the wire and he felt fine again.

"This is the boy friend, honey," he began the conversation.

She gasped in relief. "Oh, sweetheart! I've been so worried. Where are you calling from?"

He looked at the name on a menu. "The Lobster Claw, on Santa Monica Boulevard," he told her.

Her voice was more constrained. "Oh—I see."

"I've had a hell of a time since I last saw you," he continued. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you, baby."

She wanted to know, "But everything's all right now?"

"Everything's fine," he assured her.

She said, "And where do you want me to meet you? There?"

Hanson scowled at the receiver. He didn't know what he had expected her to say but that certainly wasn't it. "Why, n-no," he said slowly. "Not particularly. You see I was slugged and kidnapped, baby. Some hoods thought I was another Hanson and I just came to in a boat parked way out in Santa Monica Harbor."

Claire said, "You're kidding me, Joel?"

"No, I'm not," he insisted. "What's more, there was a dead man in the cabin and before I come back to the hotel I think I'd better go down to the police and tell them all about it."

She said, almost too quickly, "Oh, no. Joel—I wouldn't do that."

He wanted to know why not.

Instead of answering his question she asked one of her own. "Listen, Joel. Tell me this—" she spaced her words—"I know you don't want to talk over the phone, but did you—er—take anything from that cabin that we might not want the police to know about?"

He looked at the receiver again. This wasn't like Claire at all. Either Claire knew too much or she was making some very lucky guesses.

"No," he said finally, flatly. "But what makes you think I might have?"

Her words came in a gush of emotion. "I can't talk over the phone, Joel. Someone might be listening. But whatever you do, don't go to the police. Stay right where you are until I get there. And don't talk to anyone. Promise?"

He hesitated, promised. "Okay. But this joint is pretty bright. I'd better wait outside in the dark. How will you come?"



She told him, "In a cab," and then she hung up.

*we might not want the police to know about?"*

CHAPTER THREE

A Gambler Takes a Life

HE BOUGHT a package of cigarettes from the cashier and walked out into the night and the fog. Something was dreadfully screwball somewhere. Claire hadn't been surprised. She knew what had happened to him. He could tell by her reaction and by the tone of her voice. More, she had known about the money in the safe and for some reason she had expected him to take it. Standing back of a huge hibiscus bush from which he could watch the drive he lit a cigarette as he mullied over her words.

*"Listen, Joel. Tell me this. I know you don't want to talk over the phone, but did you take anything from that cabin that*

His head began to throb again. To hell with the police. He tried to figure it.

The wind off the ocean was cold. He stood shivering in his wet clothes, hoping Claire wouldn't be too long. She obviously knew something he didn't, otherwise she wouldn't have warned him not to go to the police. He began to feel even more abused and pushed around. This was a hell of a way for a man to spend his honeymoon. He wished he had taken the two five hundred dollar bills from Hanson. He wished he had taken the money in the safe. It all just went to show a guy what happened when he tried to play things on the up-and-up.

A car parked a few feet away at the curb. For a moment he was hopeful that it was Claire's cab. It wasn't. It was a private job with a couple of petters in it. They sat with the car radio playing, pay-

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ing no attention to it, screened from the passing traffic by the fog. He stood trying to ignore the very personal conversation, listening to the radio as he waited.

Then, somewhere in the night, a clock tolled one and the car music turned into a newscast as an announcer broadcast the morning's headlines. He had finished with the local news and was well into Mr. Vishinsky's latest bombast when he interrupted himself to say:

"Stop the press—this *is* news. According to a bulletin just handed me, the Santa Monica Harbor Police, acting on a tip, have just discovered the body of Maximilian Costello, better known to gambling Californians as Maxie, in the cabin of his palatial sea-going cruiser anchored off of Santa Monica—"

Hanson thought wryly, *The police get around when they want to. Why didn't they come around while I was in a jam?*

The announcer continued:

"The finding of Maxie's body climaxes a hectic day of an intensive police search for a young Chicago honeymooner of the same name believed to have been kidnapped by Costello hoodlums under the impression they were kidnapping Joel Hanson, the gambler, who is alleged to have welched on a quarter of a million dollar debt to Costello. Young Hanson, the honeymooner, was reported missing by his bride at six o'clock this morning, shortly after Hanson, the gambler, admitted to Inspector Almroth of the Los Angeles police that his newly married namesake had appeared at his swank Belle Aire cottage at four o'clock that morning to tell the gambler of phone threats made by Costello to the bridegroom, under the mistaken impression that he was talking to the gambler. In a scene almost unprecedented in Los Angeles police annals, Hanson, the gambler, pleaded with Inspector Almroth for police protection this morning. It is further understood that—alarmed by the kidnapping of the honey-

mooner by the same name—he settled his debt to Costello and in cash without further delay. Now, however, with Costello dead—"

The girl half of the petting couple freed herself long enough to twist the dial to a disk jockey program and *Buttons and Bows* replaced the newscaster.

Hanson snuffed out his cigarette, no longer cold. *Claire will be able to explain. She reported me missing at six o'clock this morning. If she didn't want me to go to the police it's for my own good. There's plenty in the wind that I don't know about.*

A yellow cab felt its way through the fog and stopped in front of the Lobster Claw. Stepping out from behind the bush, the startled female petter's gasp dogging his heels, Hanson walked to the cab and opened the door.

But Claire wasn't in the cab. There was a man in it.

"Get in," Cutter ordered.

His voice was cold. The leveled forty-five caliber automatic in his hands gave emphasis to his words.

The cab driver left his seat and came around the cab as if to close the door and Joel recognized him as one of the four card players he had seen in Hanson's cottage.

Poking a second gun in Joel's back he repeated what Cutter had said. "Get in or we'll have to let you have it right here on the street." He sounded hurt. "You ought to see a psychiatrist, pal. Your reactions ain't normal. And on account of it, you've give us a lot of trouble. Just when everything was going fine."

**T**HERE was little traffic on the road. Both Cutter and the driver rode in silence, refusing to answer questions. Joel hadn't the least idea where they were. He knew the cab had turned up one of the canyon roads leading from



the coast to the interior, but he had no way of telling which one.

He rode holding his aching forehead with one hand, wishing he knew what it was all about. At first his main worry was the fear that Claire would show up at the Lobster Claw and be worried not to find him there. Then he wasn't so certain she would be worried.

Incredible as it seemed, Claire had to be mixed up in this thing. It had to be Claire who had sent Cutter to pick him up. No one else, not even the man or men who had killed Maxie, could possibly have known where he was.

He asked Cutter if he could have a cigarette. Cutter said he could not, explaining the canyon road was in a posted area and there was a fifty dollar fine for smoking either in or out of a car.

Joel asked him how big a fine there was for kidnapping at the point of a deadly weapon and Cutter told him to shut up.

The cab pulled in finally between two huge stone gate posts and, winding still farther up the steep grade, stopped in front of what appeared in the moonlight to be a large rustic mountain lodge. Through the window of the cab Joel could see what must be the lights of Santa Monica and Beverly Hills and beyond them Los Angeles proper.

Still a third man opened the door of the cab. "You got him, eh?"

Cutter nudged Joel out of the cab with the barrel of his gun. "Yeah. We got him."

"And he didn't glam on to the money, eh?"

"No. It would seem, unfortunately, he didn't."

"So what do we do now?"

"I'll be damned if I know. Probably wait to see which way the cat is jumping."

Their words didn't make sense to Joel. But then nothing had for the last eighteen or twenty hours.

Cutter prodded him up the stairs of the

lodge and into a large living room with a natural stone fireplace at one end.

A half dozen well-dressed men were warming their backs at it. Joel wasn't too surprised to see Hanson among them. Whatever this thing was, the gambler was in it up to his neck. It all had started a few minutes after he had left Hanson's cottage.

His eyes cold, Hanson addressed him. "So a couple of Maxie's boys picked you up and took you out to his boat, eh."

Instead of answering what seemed to be obvious, Joel asked, "Where's my wife? Where's Claire?"

The gambler's smile was wry. "Probably still having hysterics, pally. It would seem the dumb cluck went beyond and above the call of duty and fell in love with you."

The men standing in front of the fireplace laughed.

Cutter wasn't amused. "To hell with that. I want to know what we do now. This could mean all our necks." He repeated, "I want to know what we do now."

"Wait," the light-complected gambler said coldly. He looked at his expensive wrist watch. "So we missed with one barrel—"

"Yeah. A quarter of a million dollar barrel," Cutter broke in hotly.

Hanson ignored the interruption. "In a few minutes Jimmy is due to call up from H.Q. and let us know what we got with the other."

The phone rang as he finished speaking. Picking it up, Hanson identified himself, listened intently for a few minutes, then hung up.

"Well, we got bear with the one barrel," he told the waiting men. "Inspector Almroth is handling the case himself. More, he took an L.A. safe expert with him out to the boat and they have recovered the two hundred grand, which backs up my story that I paid Maxie."

Cutter said sourly, "Money thrown away."

Hanson shook his head. "No. Not if it saves our necks." He looked at Joel. "True our little bird dog here was supposed to bring it back to us. How come you turn so honest all of a sudden, son? With all that dough staring you in the face why didn't you glam onto it?"

JOEL thought of Claire and felt sick. Claire wasn't the sweet and innocent young thing she had pretended to be. Claire was mixed up in this thing. Claire had known the money would be in Maxie's safe. She had expected him to take it. Of course. That explained her question about his taking something from the cabin of the boat he might not want the police to know about. And he had believed her to be sweet and honest.

*Like a baby*, he thought wryly.

"Hanson asked you a question," Cutter said.

"To hell with him. To hell with all of you," Joel said hotly. He pounded on the arm of a chair. "I want to know what this is all about. And I want to know where my wife figures in."

Hanson, the gambler, was amused at Hanson, the copywriter. "Listen to the little rooster."

Joel fought to keep his faith in Claire. Perhaps he was doing her an injustice. Perhaps Claire was acting under duress. Perhaps these men had forced her to say what she had said over the phone.

He said, "If you've harmed her—"

Cutter cut him short by pushing him in the face with his palm. "You'll do what?" He turned back to Hanson. "What else did Jimmy say?"

Hanson said, "Well, as far as the punk is concerned we made a perfect score. The fingerprint men have found his prints all over the cabin, including a smear on the barrel of the gun with which Maxie was killed. And the police figure just as we

thought they would, that when two of Maxie's dumb hoods show up with the wrong Hanson, there is a brawl and somehow the punk, here, got his hands on a gun and plugged Maxie. We've got that pinned on him solid and not even Maxie's own boys can prove differently. Then, too, just as we figured, the police assume the punk, frightened by what he had done, took it on the lam." There was regret in his voice. "No. All we miss on is getting the money back."

Joel listened incredulously. The deeper into the affair he got, the more fantastic it became. The police thought he had killed Maxie. "You're crazy," he told Hanson. "I didn't kill that guy on the boat. And what's more, when I go to the police and tell them my story, they'll believe me."

"But that, pally," Hanson said softly, "is the point. You don't go to the police. In fact, you don't go anywhere. You've been."

A long moment of silence followed the statement. It was difficult for Joel to breathe.

*"You don't go anywhere. You've been. . . ."*

These men meant to kill him. And once he was dead the truth about Maxie's murder would never be discovered. This wasn't something his namesake had thought up on the spur of the moment. Outside of his not taking the money, they had meant it to happen this way. This had been planned for a long time. This went back farther than the Belle Aire and Maxie's phone calls. This went back to Chicago and Charlie's crap game on Wells Street. His winning the two thousand dollars, his meeting Claire, her willingness to marry him, had all been a part of the plot. Claire hadn't ever loved him. She had just been the lovely bait that had lured him into this murder trap.

Cutter broke the silence by laughing, "A hell of a honeymoon, eh, chum?" He



sobered. "But dammit, I wish you'd grabbed that money."

Of course. The whole thing had been staged, staged right from the start. That was why, after shooting Maxie, the man on the boat had said, "*Well, I guess that's that. Right through the old ticker. And take it from me, pal, in the pictures they couldn't have done any better.*"

Out in the blackness of the night a car labored up the hill and stopped in front of the lodge. Most of the men at the fireplace slipped their hands under their lapels. Cutter drew his gun.

"Forget it," Hanson said shortly. "There isn't going to be any trouble. Brad Murphy and the rest of Maxie's boys think the punk here killed Maxie. They aren't any smarter than the cops. And I have the cops twisted around my finger." He laughed. "They think I was afraid of Maxie. I told Inspector Almroth I was."

Still eying the door, several of the men laughed with him.

One of them said, "Still, two hundred grand is a lot of dough."

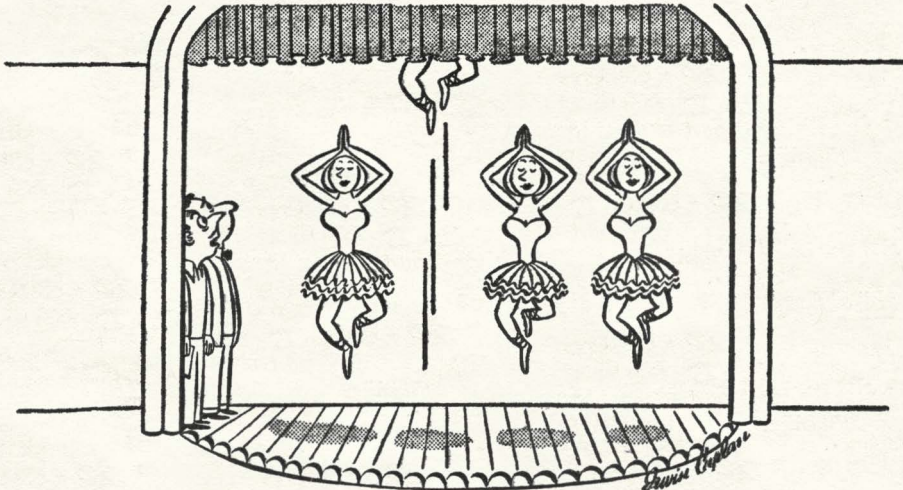
Hanson the gambler said, "Forget it. We'll make it back in a month. From now on we own the coast."

"That," Cutter said wryly, "is good news. But I'll feel better when I hear how Brad Murphy is taking this. Brad is plenty tough."

**F**EET scraped across the porch. Joel looked at the door with the others as Claire came into the living room of the lodge, accompanied by the other two men he had seen around the poker table in Hanson's cottage on the Belle Aire Hotel grounds. Both her eyes and her nose were red as if she had been crying for hours. He tried to hate her, and couldn't. He loved her too much—despite the fact that as Hanson had said, she had come to love him too late.

Hanson asked one of the men if he was certain they hadn't been tailed. He addressed the man as Gleason.

Gleason said, "Yeah, positive." He scowled at the girl. "But I think Claire was about to rat. We caught her sneak-



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ing out of their hotel room a few minutes after she got the phone call from the chump. And my guess is she was headed for police headquarters to blow the whole thing sky high."

"Oh," Hanson said. "I see."

Joel looked at Gleason. He recognized the voice now. It was the same voice that had told him to come in when he had rapped on the door of Maxie's cabin. It was the same voice that had claimed that in the pictures they couldn't have staged Maxie's murder any better. This, then, was one of the killers. And he was holding Claire by the elbow.

Hanson asked Gleason if Claire had given them any trouble.

Gleason shook his head. "Naw. All she does is bawl."

Crossing the floor of the living room to the girl, Hanson lifted her chin with one finger. "You've cost us a lot of money, baby. I thought you told me my name-sake was a wise guy. I thought you told me he could be trusted to pick up any money that was lying around loose."

Claire buried her face in her hands and cried.

"Look at me, damn you," Hanson said. Lifting her face again, he slapped her, hard.

Evading Cutter's clutching hand, Joel took two quick steps forward and knocked the gambler from his feet. "You keep your hands off Claire."

Cutter promptly slugged him and, getting to his feet, Hanson kicked Joel while he was on the floor.

"No!" Claire sobbed. "Please!"

Feeling his jaw, Hanson asked her. "Please what?"

"Please don't hurt him."

Cutter yanked Joel to his feet. "We aren't going to hurt him, baby," he told Claire. "All we are going to do is blow a hole in his pumpkin head and then dip his feet in some concrete so he can stand upright, somewhere out beyond Catalina."

Joel licked the blood from his lips. This couldn't be happening to him. Such things didn't happen to sixty dollar a week copywriters whose only underworld contact was an occasional glass of beer and a few throws of the dice in some such place as Charlie's back room on Wells Street. In any of the movies or detective books that he had read, two things would be happening by now. Either the police would come charging in and save him, or he would somehow miraculously overcome the eight gunmen in the lodge and fight his way to freedom.

But the police didn't know where he was. If they did, they would arrest him for murder. The frame against him was tight. It was doubtful the police would believe his fantastic story, even if he could reach them. These men meant to kill him. And they would. They were as afraid of the dead Maxie's boys as they were of the police. They couldn't afford to allow the true story to leak out.

There was only one bright spot in his despair—Claire had tried to escape. Claire had tried to reach the police. No matter what she was or had been, Claire now loved him.

He found her hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze. Her fingers were cold as ice. She looked at him through tear-filled eyes but failed to return the pressure. Instead she started to sob again.

Hanson said, "For Pete's sake, do we have to listen to that all night?" He nodded at one of the doors opening off the huge living room. "Put them in there for the time being."

Two of the men hurried Joel and Claire into the room that Hanson had indicated. Its only furnishings were a chair, a table and a bed.

"I want," Hanson continued, "to get another bulletin from Jimmy before we take them out and dump them."

*Before we take them out and dump them.* They were going to kill Claire, too.



*Of course, Joel thought. Claire knows too much.*

Cutter's smile was evil. "Have a good time, children," he said from the doorway. He looked at his watch. "You still have, I would say, about three hours of your honeymoon left."

The thick door closed solidly behind him. An iron bolt snicked shut. In the wan glow of a low-watt bulb hanging from a frayed cord, Joel looked from the door to the window. It was neither high, nor small, nor barred.

CLAIRE sat on the edge of the bed and wiped her eyes on the hem of her skirt.

Her voice was toneless. "There's no use asking you to forgive me, or say that I am sorry. But I am." She hurried on, as if trying to say what she had to say before she broke down again. "But, believe me, Joel, I didn't know it would turn out this way. I didn't realize what I was getting us into." Her voice broke.

"Oh," Joel said. He tried to think of something else to say, and couldn't.

Claire continued. "I was broke and desperate. And when Hanson offered me two thousand dollars to marry you," she swallowed hard, "I jumped at the chance. I—please believe me, Joel—I liked you."

Joel heard his own voice asking, "Then our marriage was legal?"

Claire said, "Perfectly legal." She was eager for him to believe her. "And I'm not really bad, Joel. I'm not. I meant to be a good wife to you. Maybe I would have been afraid to marry you without Hanson's two thousand, but I liked you. He said he just wanted to use your name to confuse some creditors—to win time to pay a business debt." She buried her face in her hands. "I didn't know that right from the start Hanson was planning to kill Maxie and pin it on you."

Joel tried to hate her, and couldn't. He asked, "And those phone calls?"

"They were as phony as the murder frame," she told him. "One of Hanson's boys made the calls. Maxie didn't know a thing about them." She stopped crying and looked up. "Why didn't you take the money in the safe, Joel?"

He told her the truth. "I started to. Then I thought of you and I couldn't. I didn't want anything crooked or nasty hanging over our marriage."

She cried even harder than before. He examined the room carefully. Crying wouldn't get them anywhere. Whatever he did, if he could do anything, would have to be done in the next few hours. He didn't want to die. He didn't want Claire to die. There was nothing out of the ordinary about the window. It was locked but the lock was on the inside. He unlocked it and raised it a fraction of an inch. Then, his eyes still thoughtful, he picked up the bar of soap from the container on the combination table and washstand and greased the slides of the window thoroughly. It slid easily after that. There was no screen.

Claire looked up at him and shook her head. "There's an outside guard. I saw him when I came in."

Joel closed the window and lit a cigarette. "We'd have a chance at least," he said. "I don't mean just to sit here and let it happen."

He didn't. Crossing to the door he listened for a moment, then leaned his back against it and looked at the frayed lamp cord dangling from the ceiling.

"You willing to take a chance?" he asked Claire.

She dried her eyes on her skirt. "I'll do whatever you say."

"I'm going to douse the lights," he told her. "Then, outside guard or not, we're going out that window." Putting the chair under the cord he stood on it and ordered her to open the window. "The minute the light goes out, you scam. And make it fast, because I'm going to be right be-

hind you." Joel reached for the lamp.

Claire took her place by the window. Joel crossed mental fingers and yanked at the lamp fixture. For a moment nothing happened—then the wire broke and the light in the room went out. Fumbling in the dark for the live ends of the wire, he touched them together and took enough shock to hurl him from the chair as an arc of flame flared briefly.

"Now," he ordered Claire.

There was a blast of curses and a scraping of chairs in the living room. Joel scrambled to his feet and raced for the window as the bolt on the door shot open, only to find Claire still in the window.

"I'm caught on something," she gasped.

He pushed her hard and heard a rip of cloth. Meanwhile the door had opened and feet were pounding across the room.

Cutter's voice rasped through the dark: "A wise guy, eh?"

Joel felt the air stir as the vicious blow of the gun barrel missed his head by an inch. Then grappling with the other man, he knew a sharp spurt of pain as the gunman pulled the trigger of the gun. Desperation gave strength to his fingers. Twisting the gun away from Cutter he beat at the dark with it, felt it thud against solid flesh, heard Cutter groan. Then, reversing it in his hand, he fired twice at where he imagined the doorway to be and was rewarded with a curse of pain.

"Look out," Hanson shouted. "The punk must have Cutter's gun. One of you guys let him have it."

A burst of flame erupted in the doorway. Cutter yelled again. Lead thudded into the wood on both sides of Joel. A second sharp needle of pain pierced his already wounded side. Then, the gun still in one hand, he was out of the window, clinging to Claire and running toward the front of the lodge and the drive.

Hanson's curses filled the window behind him. "You, Jack," he shouted, "stop them! The punk's got Cutter's gun."

It was growing more difficult for Joel to breathe—he was leaning more heavily on Claire with every step. "Make for the first car you see," he panted.

A man, running hard, rounded the corner of the lodge and loomed large in the faint moonlight.

"You there. Hold it," he ordered.

Instead, Joel raised the gun in his hand and fired again. The man in their path disappeared as if by magic. He seemed to sink right into the ground. But the men on the porch of the lodge were shooting now. Claire guided him to the far side of a car on the drive, lead screaming off the metal.

"Get in and drive," Joel ordered.

Reaching around the end of the car he fired the last three shots in the gun to discourage the men on the porch, then somehow scrambled in beside her.

"You're wounded. You're hurt," she sobbed.

He said, "To hell with that. We're dead if we don't get out of here. Wheel this thing down the hill—and fast."

THE car jack-rabbed forward on the drive, rounded a bend in the road and Claire had to swerve sharply to the left and stand on the brakes to avoid running head on into another car. When they came to a stop, a half dozen men had leaped out of the other car and were holding guns on them.

Joel leaned weakly against the seat back. *It isn't fair*, he thought. He wasn't a gunman. He didn't know a thing about guns. But he had gotten Claire out of the cabin—only to be stopped by a bad break. She had begun to cry again. He didn't blame her.

A big black-haired man thrust his head in the open window. "What the hell gives here?" he demanded.

"They've shot Joel," Claire cried. "They're going to kill us."

"Who is they?" the black-haired man demanded.



Joel's voice was toneless. "As if you didn't know. If you weren't one of them, you wouldn't be here. Go ahead. Shoot us and get it over with. But I hope some day that Brad Murphy and the rest of Maxie's boys find out it was all a frame and kill every one of you."

Other car motors were racing up on the hill top now. The black-haired man thought a second then told one of the men with him, "Block the road with our car until we find out what gives here." Turning back to Joel, he asked, "Just who are you?"

"Joel Hanson."

"The punk who killed Maxie?"

Claire had stopped crying and was studying the big man's face in the faint light from the dash board. "You are Brad Murphy," she accused.

"That's right," the big man admitted. "We came up to try and make a deal with Hanson. About him paying us what he owed Maxie—and all the time we thought this thing was on the level. But now I'm beginning to wonder. One of you talk fast."

A hundred feet up the hill, a car rounding the bend braked to a screaming stop and the man Brad Murphy had sent up to block the road called, "What now, Brad?"

"Hold them a minute," the dead Maxie's first lieutenant called back. "A couple of you guys go help them. Something's screwball here." Then, looking at Joel, he said, "Who killed Maxie?"

Fighting back the waves of weakness that momentarily threatened to engulf him, Joel said, "I didn't. I—I think it was a man named Gleason."

"Oh, oh," Murphy said. "Now it begins to make sense." Looking at Claire he added, "You take it from there, sister. It looks like your boy friend is in a pretty bad way."

Claire told the story as succinctly as she could.

"I see," Murphy said when she'd concluded. "Now it begins to make sense. You see, we just flew down from Frisco and we've been wondering why Maxie called for a showdown while most of his boys were away—why he'd hire a couple of dumb outside punks to put the arm on Hanson. And now it would seem he didn't."

Behind them, on the road, hot, angry voices filled the night. Hanson wanted to know, "What the hell is the big idea?"

Brad Murphy withdrew his head from the window of the car and walked back toward the voice. "Well, I'll tell you, Han-

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son," Joel heard him say. "It's about a guy named Maxie."

There was nothing ahead of them on the road. Claire released the brake and the car rolled forward of its own momentum. No one tried to stop them. Around a second bend, Claire switched on the ignition again and the car increased its speed.

His right side hot and sticky now, Joel rode, trying not to black out, trying to figure the next best move for Claire. He didn't want her to go to the police. They might claim she was involved. She might have to stand trial with Hanson.

He tried to tell her as much and the words came out confused. He remembered telling her to drop him somewhere and to get away before she became involved, that no matter why she had married him or what her past had been, he loved her, that he would always love her.

**T**HEN suddenly his mouth and his throat were dry and there was a bright light in his eyes and nothing was real or familiar but Claire's lips cool on his own.

"That's fine. He'll do just fine now, Mrs. Hanson," a strange voice said.

Shifting his eyes, Joel looked at the man. He was removing a gauze mask as he spoke. Two uniformed policemen were standing behind him. There was a heavy-set plainclothesman with an air of authority on the other side of the table.

Claire read the question in his eyes. "It's the police emergency hospital," she told him. "I drove here as fast as I could."

Joel protested, weakly, "But, Claire—"

She stopped his protest with another kiss. "It doesn't matter. Nothing matters but you. You have to believe me, Joel."

He found her hand and squeezed it. Then he looked at the heavy-set man with the air of authority. "Who are you? And how much do you know?"

"I'm Inspector Almroth," the man identified himself. "And I guess I know just

about all that there is to know." He studied the blond girl's face. "Your wife's been talking for twenty minutes."

Joel started to say, *But Claire had nothing to do with it. She wasn't in on the frame.* It was the truth in a sense. But Claire had to be in on the frame, at least technically.

Claire read his mind again. "It doesn't matter, believe me, Joel. I'm willing to take whatever is coming to me. Nothing matters but the fact that you're going to be all right again."

One of the uniformed men standing back of the doctor asked, "Well, how about it, Inspector? You want us to raid the lodge or not?"

Inspector Almroth looked at his watch.

"Let's hold it a few minutes," he told the uniformed man.

Joel asked the question on his mind, "Please, Inspector. Does Claire—that is—"

He stopped, unable to continue.

Almroth looked at the youth on the table, then at the girl beside him. He had been an officer of the law for a long time and he had never known prison to reform a single person he had sent there. If the girl's story were true, she was technically guilty of conspiracy to murder. But only technically so. "How do you feel about it, Mrs. Hanson?" he asked Claire. "Do you really love the guy?"

Claire said, "So much!"

"And if things turn out so we could keep you out of this, would you make Joel a good wife?"

She said, "I'd try. Believe me."

Almroth thought for another long moment. Then he grinned, "Okay. We'll see what we can do."

Patting Joel's shoulder lightly he left the room, followed by the uniformed men and the doctor.

Alone with Claire, Joel increased the pressure on her hand. Things were going to be just fine with them. He knew.



By  
Donald  
King



*The kid had looked so pathetically young lying there in his own blood. . . .*

# The KID I KILLED LAST NIGHT

**M**ORNING was sour in Steve Breen's mouth when he reluctantly opened his eyes. Or maybe it was the one over six Matt Connelly had insisted on buying to celebrate Steve's miraculous escape from death. It had been close—too close. He looked at the grey

fedora he had tossed on the dresser when he had come off shift. If the three holes had been punched through the band instead of a quarter of an inch above it, he and not the punk he had shot it out with would be saying, "Good morning, God," this A.M.

*Sergeant Breen wanted to be a hero like the kid he shot wanted a bullet in his head—a bullet too small to name all his killers—just big enough to dig their graves!*

It made his flesh creep to think of it. He wasn't afraid to die. All men died some time. But what with the house only half paid for and Jerry still with three years of high school to go, his dying would leave Mattie in one hell of a mess. He had chipped in for the wives of too many dead brother officers not to know.

A big man with a simple, open face and the build of a heavyweight fighter, Breen found his cigarettes on the bed table and lit one. The first cigarette in the morning was usually one of the high spots of his day. It was the prelude to a hearty breakfast. He lay listening to Mattie in the kitchen making the homey, familiar sounds he would never have heard again if the punk hadn't shot quite so high. This morning his cigarette tasted sour. He snuffed it out and swung his feet to the floor, preparatory to showering.

He had killed men in the line of duty before. He had killed four of them. All of them had deserved to die. The world was a better place to live in, with them gone. None of them had ever come back to haunt him. But they had been grown men. With the punk it was different. The kid had looked so pathetically young lying there on the pavement in the spreading pool of his own blood.

Mattie opened the bedroom door. "I thought I heard you getting up, sweetheart." She sat on the bed beside him and held up her lips to be kissed. "Still love me?"

Breen played out their morning game. "Well, I dunno. It's kinda nice having you around. But about that love business—give me a chance to find out. After all we've only been married for sixteen years."

She kissed him, hard, "You—man." She clung to him longer than usual. Then, her eyes bright with tears, but smiling, she got up and raised the shade. "Breakfast will be ready whenever you are,

Steve. But don't be too long at your shower. We've strawberries and cream and waffles. And the pork sausage is already in the pan."

Her eyes avoiding the hat on the dresser, she shut the bedroom door behind her.

Breen sat a moment longer. It was his favorite breakfast. That meant that Mattie knew. It was probably spread all over the front page of the morning paper. But Mattie was a copper's wife and they'd had this thing out before, back in the days when he had still been pounding a beat. There were to be no scenes or tears or hysterics over any chance risk he encountered in the line of duty. He was paid to enforce the law. If someone objected and took a shot at him, that was all a part of the job. There would be time enough for tears when the slug with his name on it found him.

He padded on into the bathroom and turned on the shower. If only the kid hadn't been so young. Hell. He hadn't been much older than Jerry.

**S**HOWERED and wearing a freshly pressed suit and a clean shirt, he walked out into the kitchen. The table looked like a party. Mattie had even used the good silver coffee pot her Aunt Grace had given them for a wedding present. He thanked her with his eyes. They had no need of words between them. They had been too close too long.

Then he saw Jerry sprawled on the parlor couch, reading the morning paper, and automatically looked at his watch. It was ten and past. He should have been in school for an hour. Seeing his dad in the kitchen, Jerry came in, wide-eyed in hero worship.

"Boy, oh boy—did you give it to that punk, huh, dad?" He referred to the paper in his hand. "It says right here, 'Ignoring the fact the would-be car thief already had his gun in his hand and was pouring a murderous fire of lead in his



direction, Sergeant Breen, calmly drawing his own gun—'

Breen said, "Shut up." For a moment he thought he was going to be sick. He'd had to kill the kid. It was the only thing he could do. But the punk hadn't had a chance. He'd been so high on reefer he'd hardly known what he was doing.

Jerry was hurt. "But gee, dad, all I was doing was being proud of you."

Mattie said, "Please, Jerry. Your father doesn't like to talk about such things. You'll understand why when you're older. Now sit down both of you and eat your breakfast."

Jerry subsided, muttering. "But weepers. If I was a sergeant of detectives and I killed a guy I'd be proud. I'd be plenty proud."

Breen changed the subject. "Why aren't you in school? You sick or something?"

Mattie explained. "You know, I told you the other night, dear. The classes are so crowded they have two shifts now. One from eight to one and the other from twelve to five."

Jerry poured syrup on his waffle. "Yeah. And I have to catch the late one."

It didn't make sense to Breen. He said so. "If they're so crowded, why don't they build more schools?" The idea hit him then, rubbed against the raw edges of his depression, and he knew the answer.

The force had asked for a raise at the

same time the teachers had and both had been turned down because of insufficient funds. This was more of the same. There was plenty of money for new official Cadillacs and miles of paving that led no where because somebody's second cousin had a lot of asphalt he wanted to sell and was willing to cut the boys in, but the cops and the teachers could go whistle.

And now the kids.

He asked, "What happens to the kids that get out of school at one o'clock?"

"What do you mean what happens to them?"

"What do they do all afternoon?"

"Oh, just bum around, I guess. Maybe play a little ball in summer or go swimming. And in the winter take in a show or maybe shoot a little pool."

"You see he stays in the second shift," Breen told his wife. "And you stay out of pool rooms," he ordered his son. "Pool is a nice game. I like to play it. But the pool rooms in this man's town are—" He realized he was saying more than he had intended and dropped it. The kid he had killed last night had all the earmarks of a habitual poolroom cowboy. "A fine thing," he substituted, "when a town has to send its kids to school in shifts. Somebody ought to do something about this town."

Mattie agreed. "They ought to. But what can they do? And who?"

There didn't seem to be any answer to

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that. Breen left it there. But the thought bothered him all morning. He wished that he was smart enough to figure out the answer instead of being just a dumb sergeant of detectives who, if he lived that long, would be able to retire in fourteen more years on a pension that wouldn't keep a canary alive.

USUALLY he spent his morning and the early afternoon either working in the yard or puttering around the house. Today he was too restless. He wasn't due on shift until four, but early afternoon found him crossing the walk to the Bureau.

Acting Lieutenant Harris was on duty. "Am I glad to see you, Steve!" he greeted him. "And by the way, congratulations about last night. Another commendation for the old record, eh?"

"Yeah," Breen said shortly.

He didn't particularly like Harris. An accomplished brown-noser, he had wormed his way up to the post of acting lieutenant in less than six years on the force. The next posted civil service list would probably make the commission permanent while he stayed on the rolls as a sergeant. Harris knew the right people. He was seen in the right places. He delivered even more votes than his quota. Still more important, he didn't make fool arrests like the time Steve had arrested the mayor's son and damn near sent him to the pen over the death of the sixteen-year-old high school kid who had either jumped or been pushed from a fourteenth floor hotel room. Not that it had done any good. Like Mattie said, what could one man do? By the time the fixers and the boys in the back room had finished with the case, it was a wonder the jury hadn't brought in a verdict accusing the dead girl of attempting to impair the morals of the mayor's son.

"Why're you so glad to see me?" he asked Harris.

Acting Lieutenant Harris lighted a ci-

garette. "Swen and Cartier both reported sick this morning."

"So?"

"So we've been short-handed all day. And the coroner is raising hell for the name, age, race, etc., of that kid you had to kill last night, so he can close his books on the case. Be a good guy, will you, Steve? Before you go on duty, skip out there and get what dope you can get on the punk."

"He didn't have a record?"

"The B. of I. says not."

It was as good a way as any to kill time. "Okay," Breen said. "Why not?"

Leaving the building he met Mayor Fair and Police Commissioner Rand on the walk. Both men insisted on shaking his hand.

"Good work, Sergeant," Rand complimented. "I only wish that we had more men like you on the force."

"A thousand more," Mayor Fair beamed. "We'd clean the city up in jig-time, then, eh, Sergeant Breen?"

Breen knew both men well. He had graduated from St. Sylvester's with Rand and booked his first arrest in front of Fair, then a young municipal court judge. Both men were nice fellows. Neither beat his wife or got drunk in public. Both went right down the line with the party. But when you had said that about them you had summed them up. He wondered who Jack Fair thought he was kidding. A thousand more men—hell! If the political don'ts and taboos and sufferances were lifted, half of the present force could close the city as tight as a drum inside of twenty-four hours. But no one wanted that to happen. The mayor and Rand and the D. A. and all of the rest of them would have to live on their salaries then.

He began a hot retort and thought better of it. After all, what could one man do? He knew what he would do if he had it all to do over again. He'd stick his hand out with the rest. Stick out his hand?



He'd steal the steeples off the churches. Both Rand and Fair had been basically honest men to begin with. It really wasn't their fault. It was the "system" that had gotten them. Only fools like himself even attempted to buck it.

"Yeah. Sure. In jig time," he told Fair.

His car was parked in front of Matt Connelly's saloon. A big man given to fat, Connelly was standing in the open door.

"Hello, lucky," he greeted Breen. "How's dead-eye Steve this morning?"

"I've a bit of a head," Breen admitted. He meshed his car into gear and pulled away from the curb. He was a fine one to think such thoughts about Jack Fair and Harry Rand. He, along with everyone else in the know, knew that Matt Connelly was the nerve center of the system. If you wanted to open a bookie joint or get a paving contract or merely find out why your sister Nellie's girl had been out of Teacher's Normal for three years and was still on the substitute instead of the assigned list, you laid your money on the line and cleared whatever it was you wanted with the fat saloon keeper. Otherwise you were butting your head against a stone wall.

Not that Matt was Mr. Big. There was no Mr. Big. Mr. Big was the system. Little of the money stuck to Matt's fat fingers. Depending on what you wanted, he had to "see" the current head of the morals squad, the D. A., the superintendent of streets, or perhaps a ward committeeman and an alderman or two. They, in turn, had still others to see. He knew as well as his name was Steve Breen he could head the civil service promotion list and be commissioned any time he was willing to lay two thousand dollars on Matt's bar.

He had saved up the money twice. But both times, at the last moment, something deep inside him had stopped him from laying it on the line. Perhaps he was

wrong about stealing the steeples off the churches. He didn't want to climb the golden ladder that way. He doubted Mattie would want him to. On the other hand he shuddered to think what the free beers and shots he had consumed through the years at Matt's bar would total.

His trouble, Breen guessed as he stopped in front of the address on the card Acting Lieutenant Harris had given him, was he was just petty at heart. He was willing to chisel a ten cent beer at the public trough but balked at the sight of real money.

THE house was old and unpainted, on a business street, sandwiched in between warehouses and equally shabby grocery stores and bars. A group of little girls were playing sky-blue on the walk with a flattened beer can for a lagger. Some slightly older boys dodged trucks in the street as they attempted to play ball. A quarter of a block away a half dozen teen-aged youths lounged in front of a pool room, sucking on cigarettes and eyeing his parked car thoughtfully.

Breen felt the bile that had been rising in him since he had awakened that morning boil near the spilling point. If he remembered correctly, three elections ago the citizens of the city had voted a five hundred thousand dollar bond issue to establish playgrounds for underprivileged children. But only one had been built—that in a well-to-do neighborhood. But the president of the board of local improvements happened to live in that neighborhood. What had become of the rest of the money was anybody's guess. For that matter, what had happened to the slum clearance program?

He stood with his fists on his hips staring at the roach-warren the kid he had killed had lived in, suddenly so mad he failed to hear the car with the press sticker in its windshield pull up, or to see the blonde girl who was driving it get out.

"Ah! The hero," she said dryly. "What's the idea, Sergeant? Come out to exterminate the rest of the family?" Gale Burke looked at the sagging old house with distaste. "Not that it might not be a good idea."

Breen grinned at her. He liked Gale. Most of the press of the city "went along with the boys." Gale Burke was different. The pretty little reporter still had the stuff in her eyes that dreams and nations are built on. She called her shots as she saw them. Surprisingly her paper printed most of them. Perhaps because her daily column, *The Gadfly*, was different and the paper's circulation had nose-dived on the two occasions they had attempted to dispense with the column at the insistence of local bigwigs who had felt its sting.

"Just getting some data," he told her. "The punk was so unimportant the night shift didn't even bother to get his background and Doc Harvey is raising hell. He wants to close his file." He walked up the sagging stairs. "What's with you, Gale?"

She said, "The same. I'm supposed to do a human interest story."

"Oh," Breen said as he rapped on the door. "I see. Well, the morning paper boys had most of their facts right. The kid was high as a kite on reefers. And when I caught him trying to jump the ignition on the Lincoln he pulled a gun on me." His voice was apologetic. "And us only being six feet apart, I couldn't be too choosy where I shot him."

Gale said, "Don't get me wrong, Sergeant—I'm not blaming you. I meant that hero stuff. If there were a few more men on the force like you this might be a nice town to live in."

Breen's mild glow faded on sight of the woman who opened the door. She had obviously been crying and he cursed Harris under his breath. He hadn't thought of it before, but it was a hell of a thing to send the cop who had done the shooting out to

question the dead kid's mother. He asked as few questions as he could. The woman answered in a monotone.

Yes, the name Bill Thomas found on the dead youth had been his right name. He was seventeen years old. She corrected herself tearfully. He had been seventeen. No, he had never been in any trouble with the police before. Bill was a good boy.

*They're all good boys*, Breen thought sourly, *until they wind up in a bull pen or stretched out on a slab.*

Gale asked, "You haven't any idea, have you, Mrs. Thomas, whether your boy was attempting to steal the car for, well, shall we say a joy ride, or whether he was connected with the local ring that makes a business of stealing new cars for export?"

Mrs. Thomas said she had not.

Breen asked, "How about the reefer angle? How long had Bill been smoking the stuff?"

His mother said she hadn't the least idea. "I work nights in a laundry," she explained. "And I have to sleep some time, so I didn't get to see too much of Bill. But he, well, he'd been acting strangely for four months. Ever since they let him out early at the high school and he had nothing to do with his afternoons but—" she jerked her head in the general direction of the pool room in front of which Breen had seen the teen-aged loafers—"hang around Al's poolroom."

Breen concluded the interrogation. If Harris or Harvey wanted more data they could send one of their stooges for it. He wanted out of the house before Mrs. Thomas, blinded by her grief, recognized him from his picture in the paper as the detective who had killed her boy.

Back on the walk, Gale asked, "Now what?"

"I want to talk to Al," Breen said.

"What about?" Gale asked.

"About a kid," Breen said grimly.



**H**E DIDN'T have to tell the pool room owner who he was. Both Al and the teen-aged loafers knew him by reputation and gave him a grudging respect. From force of habit, Breen flashed his shield. His voice was crisper than the thoughtful-eyed girl reporter had ever heard it before.

"I'm backtracking on the kid I killed last night," Breen said, "and I don't want a lot of back-talk or evasion. Who was supplying him with 'Mary'? And who's heading the export car mob these days?"

The pool room owner's smile was oily. "Look, officer, I should know? All I do is—"

The smack of Breen's big fist knocked him against the wall. The detective caught him by the shirt on the rebound and shook him as a great dane might shake a rat. "I said I didn't want any back-talk. I'm sick up to here with the way things are run in this town and I might just as well lose my job for slapping in your teeth as any other reason I know of."

He accompanied the statement by tremendous back-handed slaps that had the pool room owner spitting blood and teeth before he could gasp—

"Petey Holtz."

"The ward committeeman's brother?"

"Yes, sir."

Breen opened his hand and allowed him to fall to the floor, a sniveling mess of battered flesh and broken teeth. Then he

turned to the wide-eyed teen-agers and laid down his own newly made law. "And as for you punks. Get this. And get it straight. You saw what happened to Al. Well, the same thing will happen to you if I ever catch you even as much as looking through the window of a pool room or a bar before you are twenty-one. You got that?"

One of them gulped, "Yes, sir."

"Then get on home and study your algebra," Breen ordered.

The teen-agers scurried out of the pool room. Breen followed, wiping the blood from his fingers on one of the freshly laundered handkerchiefs his wife never failed to put in the hip pocket of a newly pressed suit. The handkerchief made him think of Mattie.

He wondered how she would feel if, say in a year or two from now, a detective were to show up at their door one afternoon and ask her: "Are you Mrs. Breen, the mother of the kid I had to kill last night?"

The thought was monstrous. The back of his neck turned crimson. The muscles of his throat stood out like steel cables. It wasn't too remote a possibility. All kids of a certain age were excitement and gun crazy. Given time on their hands, bad counsel, a skinful of muggles and a gun, and you had a potential killer no matter what kind of home he came from.

The more he thought about it, the red-

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der the back of his neck got. And he couldn't think of anything else. He had almost reached the prosperous storage garage Petey Holtz used as a front before he realized that Gale Burke was still with him. She was, in fact, sitting in the back of his car.

He asked, "What are you doing back there?"

The reporter told him the truth. "I'm admiring the back of your neck, Sergeant. There's nothing quite as pretty in my book as the back of the neck of an honest cop who has finally gotten a skinful."

"A bellyful," Breen corrected.

He drove his car into the garage and called to a mechanic, "Where's Petey?"

The mechanic, busy tuning up a motor, jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "Back in his office, I guess."

Gale Burke dogging his heels, Breen walked back through the garage and jerked open the door marked: OFFICE. One of a pair of soft-voiced, cold-eyed hoods got up from the chair in which he was sitting and held up a restraining hand.

"Just a minute, Sergeant. Mr. Holtz is busy right now. But if you would like to see him I would be pleased to make an appointment."

Breen hit him so hard his head bounced on the floor. The other hood got to his feet, sliding his hand inside his coat.

Breen's voice was as flat as his eyes. "I have one, too," he told the hood. "Mine is a Police Positive .38, with five notches on the butt. Would you like to be the sixth, son? Or would you rather lie down and play dead?"

The hoodlum sat back in his chair. Breen walked on into the inner office.

Holtz looked like a prosperous business man. He was. He got thousands of dollars for the hot cars he exported to South America and northern Africa. They cost him little, a hundred bucks and an occasional bottle of booze and a handful of reefers to the punk who stole the car. He

was, as Breen entered the office, surrounded by a dozen such, few of them out of their teens.

Without getting up from his chair, Holtz scowled across his desk. "You crazy or drunk, Sergeant? You got no right in here. I lay my money on the line."

Ignoring him, Breen looked at the youngsters in the room. "A pep talk, eh? What happened to Bill Thomas was only a bad break. Don't you believe it, guys."

His big arm shot forth like a chain drag and his fingers closed on the garage man's coat lapels. Lifting him out of the chair Breen used his left hand to give Holtz the same treatment he had given the oily pool room owner.

"See what I mean? Petey has been playing you for chumps. You get a hundred a car, a ride through the clouds and a coffin while he gets all of the white meat." Breen amended the statement. "That is he used to get all the white meat. Now all he gets is what goes over the fence last. And I'm going to see if I can't burn that."

Gagging on his own teeth, Holtz gasped, "You're mad!"

"Damn mad," Breen agreed. "That kid I killed last night could have been my own boy!"

He dragged the dazed garage man to his car and threw him into the front seat. None of the teen-agers or the one conscientious hood made any attempt to stop him. The teen-agers were afraid to. The hood was too busy on the phone.

**T**HERE was a precinct station a quarter of a mile away. Parking his car in front of it, Breen dragged Holtz inside and draped him on the desk.

"I'm booking this guy for murder," he told the sergeant on duty. "Throw him in a single cell, Charlie, and don't let him see anyone, including the ward committeeman, until you hear from me again."



The desk sergeant protested, "But, Steve. You can't do this to Max Holtz's brother."

"The hell I can't," Breen said. "I've done it."

"But who did he kill?"

"I don't know," Breen admitted. "But you can damn well bet he's going to fry for murder if I have to kill his brother and pin it on to him. But if you have to have a charge right now, book him for car theft, possession and sale of narcotics and contributing to the delinquency of perhaps fifty minors."

The desk man was an honest cop of Breen's own age. He also was a father. He began to get an inkling of what was pounding through the other man's mind.

"Sure. Whatever you say, Steve." Calling a turnkey he sent Petey Holtz stumbling and sobbing with pain and mortification back to the cell block. "I'll book him and hold him as long as I can. But you know as well as I do, Steve, that one man can't buck the system. I can't help you. All you are doing is building up one hell of a headache for yourself."

The phone rang as he was speaking. "No, Lieutenant," he lied into the phone, "I haven't seen Sergeant Breen. . . . I see. . . . Yes, sir. If he comes in I'll humor him and try to keep him here while I contact you."

The desk sergeant's face was grey as he hung up. "See what I mean? That was Harris. He says he's just had a report that you're in this neighborhood and roaring drunk; that you've already beaten up one respectable business man and kidnapped another."

Gale sniffed, "Respectable?"

"Get out, Steve, please," the sergeant begged. "I'll give you a full five minutes. But then I've got to make that call to protect my own job. Smart up, fellow, and make your peace with H. Q. Sure. The whole set-up is wrong. But we're a part of it."

Back in his car, Gale sitting beside him now, Breen drove aimlessly, without a destination. His anger hadn't cooled. His distaste for the whole situation was as great, if not greater, than it had been while he had been talking to Mrs. Thomas. But beating up pool room owners and jugging ward committeemen's brothers for crimes he couldn't prove wasn't going to get him anywhere but up before a trial board. The best that he could hope for would be a thirty- or sixty-day suspension.

He felt suddenly let down, emptied of all emotion—and dumb. He had been a fool to start something he hadn't the least chance of finishing.

"Maybe he's right," he told Gale. "After all, I owe my job to the system."

Gale Burke lit a cigarette, her pretty forehead wrinkled in thought. "It would seem you do. Then, maybe the system owes you something, too. A man, or even two men might not be able to do much, but a man and a woman might. Look at all the wars Adam and Eve started."

Breen looked at her with interest. "Just what had you in mind?"

"Plenty," Gale told him. "If you were a fireman instead of a cop and the boiler room of a forty flat caught on fire, where would you play your hose? On the smoke coming out of the roof?"

"Why no," Breen said. "Of course not. I'd—" He stopped short in thought. "Yeah. Sure. I see what you mean," he said finally.

THE long barroom was cool and dim after the heat of the street. Breen looked at the clock on the wall. It was fifteen minutes after three. He hadn't too much time. In another fifteen minutes the boys on the four-to-midnight would begin to trickle in for their hair-of-the-dog on the house before they began their tour of duty. A few minutes after four the off-shift men would belly to the bar for a pair of crutches to

help them hobble along home to supper.

Two free drinks to a man was the rule. From then on until morning Connelly's Bar would be packed with police brass, aldermen, ward committeemen and precinct captains, hopeful political candidates, lawyers with clients to spring or apples to polish, and the heads and subordinates of the various city departments from the politically appointed head of the garbage disposal plant to the superintendent of public parks and playgrounds.

Right now, except for a lone transient who had stopped in for a quick one, Connelly and his three barmen, the long bar was deserted. From the back end of the bar, Connelly smiled sourly at Breen.

"What's the matter with you, Steve?" he demanded. "What's this I been hearing about you beating up merchants and trying to jug Max Holtz's brother? You drunk or just blow your top?"

"I'm in a bad spot," Breen admitted. "I—wonder if I could talk to you privately, Matt?"

Connelly shrugged. "I don't see why not?"

He led the way back through the building toward his steel-file lined private office. Connelly's files were a standing joke, and sometimes not so funny. A cautious man as well as a capable nerve center for a system composed of men, with all of men's failings, Matt Connelly had no intention of ever winding up his days in jail for assisting in other men's normal and financial peccadillos. In the twenty years he had run his bar directly across from the city hall and next door to police headquarters he had kept a written and accurate record of every transaction and every dollar that had ever passed through his hands.

Only a few nights before, Breen had heard a half-drunken assistant D. A. wise-crack: "Yeah, man. If Matt's files ever become public property there are a lot of guys in this town, including my-

self, who are going to pray for a fast boat to China and a handful of steamer and plane tickets for far away places with strange names."

To his credit Connelly had never once used a single item in his files as a lever for extortion. He was as much a victim of the system as the men he helped trade horses. What had begun as a favor to a friend had grown into the system. And all the fat saloon keeper wanted was to protect himself.

The office was small. A heavy steel door and two barred windows opened on the alley. Inside the office, with the door closed, Connelly turned.

"Well?"

Breen carefully snuffed out the cigarette he was smoking. Then, doubling his big hand into a fist, he knocked his fourth man off his feet inside of two hours. In this case, however, there was no anger behind the blow. It was cold, deliberate, judicial. He made no attempt to follow it up.

Connelly got to his feet feeling his lips. "Just what was that for?"

"The kid I killed last night," Breen told him. "It shouldn't have happened, Matt. It didn't have to happen. It isn't going to happen again."

A fat Buddha in a pink-striped silk shirt, Connelly nodded. "Yeah. We were afraid that was what was eating on you." He held out an olive branch. "Look, Steve. Punch in the jaw, or not, I like you. Maybe I had the punch coming. None of us are perfect. We're all in a dirty game. But we're in too deep now to stop. It's too involved. We've all scratched each others backs too many times." He bit the end from a cigar. "Most of the boys like you, including Jack Fair and Andy Rand. You'd have had a commission long ago without even paying for one if you hadn't been so stiff-necked about letting money stick to your fingers. Look. Why not climb down off your horse? Max



Holtz is chewing hunks out of Rand's tail to bust you. But if you'll throw in with the boys and call off this one man purity crusade, I think I can fix it up. I might even fix a commission."

Breen shook his head. "Nothing doing."

"You're out to smash the system, eh?"

"That's right."

The fat man sighed as he repeated. "We were afraid of that." He lifted his voice slightly. "Okay, Harris. You and the boys can come out of the washroom now. It looks like we're going to have to take measures with Steve."

**A** SMIRK on his thin lips, Acting Lieutenant Harris walked out of the office washroom followed by Cartier and Swen, the two officers who had reported in sick. They were "sick" most of the time. Ostensibly first grade detectives and carried on the payroll as such, there wasn't a man on the force who didn't know what they really were—paid killers. The system had grown so big it had to have them. Whenever a man got out of line, Swen and Cartier called on him. Usually a warning was sufficient. If it wasn't, they used whatever means to shut his mouth seemed feasible at the time.

"You fool. You utter fool, Steve," Harris said. "Just what did you hope to do?"

Breen indicated the files. "Well, I

thought if I could get enough out of Matt's files to use as a club—"

"There's plenty there," Connelly admitted. "But you never had a chance, Steve. You should have learned by now never to trust a woman. Gale Burke of the *Clarion* called five minutes before you showed up and tipped us to what you meant to do in exchange for exclusive news breaks in all big stories from now on."

Swen lifted the gun in his hand. "And it looks like you're going to be the first one, Steve."

"Yair," Cartier agreed. "I can see the headlines now—Veteran Detective Blows Out Brains In Remorse Over Killing Innocent Seventeen-Year-Old."

Breen said, "So now he was innocent. All he was doing was patting the car."

"That's right," Harris agreed. "We got to take care of Petey, don't we? How would it look at the next election to have the brother of the most prominent ward committeeman in the city doing time for running a hot car ring?" He nodded at Swen and Cartier. "Okay. Let's get it over, boys."

Swen took an uncertain step forward, stopped.

"That's wise," Breen complimented him. He had transferred his gun from its holster to the side pocket of his coat and its barrel was bulging the cloth as he stood with his hand on its butt. "Remember a guy who blows out his brains can



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only have one bullet hole in him, Swen. I'm not faced with the same problem. I can shoot you and Cartier as many times as I please. Which of you boys would like to be first? And would you rather be shot through the guts or the kidneys?"

Sweat starting on his forehead, Harris said. "This is ridiculous, Steve. You can't get away with this."

Breen pointed out, "I'm doing fine so far."

Cartier braced himself. "Okay. Wise guy. Take this!"

As he lifted his gun to attract attention to himself, Swen shot. It was an old trick of theirs. But they had used it once too often. Swen's bullet screamed by Breen's ears as the big man flung himself sideways. It ricocheted off of one of the metal file cases.

But even off balance as he was, Breen didn't miss. The three shots were almost as one. Breen felt no compunctions about it. This wasn't a killing—it was an execution.

Swen crumpled immediately, a small brown hole in the center of his forehead and no back to his head. Cartier's gun dropped to the floor as he laced his fingers across his middle in a vain attempt to cap the gusher of blood that was spouting from the spot where his navel had been. Then he raised one bloody hand as if to beg Breen not to shoot him again. The gesture overbalanced him and he followed his outthrust hand to the floor.

Not taking his eyes off Harris, Breen locked the office door with his left hand.

"What are you sweating about, Joe?"

Harris tried to speak, and couldn't. His mouth opened and closed. His lips moved but no words came out.

"There's not a thing to worry about," Breen assured him. "None of the boys in the know will dare to interrupt us. I'm blowing my brains out. Remember? Veteran Detective Blows Out Brains In Remorse Over Killing Seventeen Year Old."

Putting the door key in his pocket he crossed the office and unlocked and shot the bolts on the heavy steel door opening into the alley. Gale Burke stood just outside. Behind her was a huge truck and a dozen huskies from the Clarion's circulation department.

Pointing to the files, Gale said, "Those are the files, boys, that Mr. Connelly just sold me for one dollar and other valuable considerations." Smiling sweetly she took a dollar bill from her purse and pressed it into the fat man's hand. "Didn't you, Mr. Connelly?"

Looking at Breen, the saloon-keeper gulped hard and nodded.

Breen added cheerfully, "And don't let the dead men bother you, boys. They just tried to stick up the joint and I was forced to kill them. Wasn't I, Lieutenant Harris?"

Harris still couldn't speak, but he could nod.

WITH twelve huskies to move them the files were removed from the office to the truck in a matter of minutes. There was only one slight delay. That was when Sergeant Breen remembered a promise he'd made and fingered through the H file until he came to the name he wanted. There was ample data on the man for his purpose. Then the files were in the truck and Gale was ready to go. She stopped in front of Breen, facing him.

"You're married, aren't you, Steve?"

"That's right."

"What's her first name?"

"Mattie."

Gale stood on her tiptoes and kissed him. "Tell Mattie for me she's married to a man."

Then Gale and the truck and the files were gone and a deep silence settled on the office. Breen closed and locked the big steel door. The room looked strangely bare.



Connelly's sigh came from his belly. "Well, that's that. The odds were a city to one against you, but you did it, Steve. I guess a lot of us had better be packing our bags before the next edition of the *Clarion* hits the street."

Breen shook his head. "No. That would mean a hell of a mess." He wasn't a brilliant, not even a learned, man. He spoke carefully, choosing his words. "Believe me, Matt—and this goes for you, too, Harris—I had Miss Burke make that call so I would be sure you were here to bear witness to what I am about to tell Matt. No one name in that file will ever be printed unless the man who owns it makes it necessary. By arrangement with the editor of the *Clarion*, they are headed for a bank vault. I haven't the least idea which one. Miss Burke will be the only person who will ever have access to it, unless something should happen to her or myself. Then the *Clarion* will go to town. Otherwise everything goes on just as it always has—with several major exceptions.

"From now on everyone lives on his salary. There're going to be no taboos and no fixes. All existing laws are to be enforced starting as of now. When a guy has it coming, he gets it. That goes for the civil service promotion list. Also for all bond issues, including the playground deal and slum clearance." He looked at Connelly. "Tell the boys to put it back,

Matt. And tell them no more dipping into the tax till. We need a flock of new schools. We better see we get them."

Breen lit a cigarette. "So, if I were you, Matt, I'd get hold of the president of the board of education and the comptroller and tell them what I've told you. The system is still in force and you're still the big wheel."

Connelly said, "And anyone who don't go along gets in the paper, eh?"

"That's the idea."

The fat man seemed more relieved than unhappy. "Yeah. Sure. I've got you, Steve. I'll spread the word."

Breen picked the phone from the desk and dialed the Division Street precinct station. "Steve calling, Charlie. Have you still got Petey in the tank? Oh, the big brass came down in a cloud and you had to let him go, eh, Charlie. . . . Well, pick him up again, Charlie and throw him back in a cell." Breen consulted the one record he had extracted from the files. "Let's see . . . I'm charging him with those highjack killings last fall. I'll be out and give you the dope on it later this afternoon. . . . No, I'm not drunk and I'm not crazy. . . . Here, I'll let you talk to Acting Lieutenant Harris." Breen handed Harris the phone. "Go ahead. Make it official."

The corners of his mouth green, Har-

*(Continued on the next page)*

In San Diego, a cripple was nabbed by the strong arm of the law for speeding in his wheel chair.

And a Transvaal farmer was recently awarded ninety days at hard labor for biting off the tail of his ox.

In La Porte, Indiana, two toughs were jailed and fined for shooting at one another with cap pistols.

—George W. Black



(Continued from the preceding page)  
 ris looked as if he was about to be violently sick.

"Or—" Breen gave him an alternative then—"would you rather read your name and record in *The Godfly* tonight?"

Swallowing hard, Harris spoke into the phone. "You heard Sergeant Breen, Sergeant. Pick up Petey Holtz. We're booking him for murder."

Breen unlocked the door of the office. "Well, it's almost four. I'd better report for my tour."

Harris protested, "But Swen and Cartier."

Breen looked at the bodies on the floor. "They would seem to be your problem, Lieutenant. You brought them in here—I didn't."

The long bar was crowded with uniformed men and detectives about to report for duty. Breen ordered his usual double rye and laid eighty cents on the wood.

"Nix, Steve," the barman laughed. "What's the big idea?"

Breen quoted the law. "The owner of any saloon or any of his barmen shall at no time furnish free drinks to a patron in an attempt to stimulate trade.' What's more, get those drapes out the window. According to the law, you are supposed to be able to see in from the street."

It was thirty-five minutes after midnight when Breen parked his car in his drive. He was tired, dead tired. It had been a long tour of duty but he had never known a more pleasant one. He had been offered everything from cash to the post of commissioner of public safety. But he was still a poor man and a sergeant.

Lights were burning late in every department of the city tonight. The city was heaving and gagging and sweating like a man coming out of a protracted drunk. Heated confabs and conferences were going on in dingy squad rooms and around polished directors' tables. Men were pounding on tables and saying, "I'll

be damned if I will. . . ." But in the end they would. They had no choice in the matter. By morning the general consensus of opinion would be, "If you took something out of the pot, boy, you'd better put it back in. . . ."

Her face flushed from the heat of the stove, a smudge of flour on her nose, Mattie had steak and mashed potatoes and hot baking powder biscuits for supper. She lifted her face to be kissed as Breen came in the back door and tossed his new hat on a chair.

A twinkle in his eyes, he complained, "Tch-tch. This is getting to be a problem. All the time good looking women wanting to kiss me."

Mattie pooh-poohed the idea. "What woman kissed you today?"

"A blonde."

"Young?"

"Oh, twenty-three or twenty-four."

"Pretty?"

"Very."

Mattie cupped her hands in back of his head and kissed him again, much harder this time. "Did you like it as well as that?"

Grinning, Breen admitted. "No. I must say I did not."

He hung up his coat and gun holster then tiptoed down the hall to Jerry's room to make certain his son was safe under the parental roof before he sat down to his supper.

"Tough day, sweetheart?" his wife asked as she put his steak in front of him.

"No," Breen said. "It was a nice day."

Mattie took her place across from him. She knew, from knowing him, there was something on his mind. She knew that it was pleasant. In due time he would tell her. Right now it was enough to have him home again and in good humor. She knew him for what he was, a gentle, kindly, simple man and she gave a little mental prayer of thanks he had been able to forget the kid he'd had to kill last night.



# LAW WITHOUT ORDER

*There oughta be a law — or there  
hadn't oughta be people!*

**By Lon Perry**

A Tennessee judge recently delivered the opinion that 'A husband has no right to kick his wife out of bed, even though her feet are cold.'

\*

Judge Samuel Heller, of Chicago, has ruled that a landlord cannot evict a tenant for refusing to get a haircut or shave for 18 months.

\*

As late as the nineteenth century, the English criminal code included a list of nearly two hundred offenses punishable with death. For a man to attempt the life of his own father was a misdemeanor; but the theft from a shop of an article worth five shillings was punishable with the death sentence.

\*

The Michigan Supreme Court has solemnly ruled that: 'For old maids, widows, and cautious females to look under the bed for a man is not evidence of mental deficiency.'

\*

Early Saxon law provided specific pecuniary compensation for all kinds of injuries. The cutting off of an ear involved a penalty of thirty shillings. A person whose front tooth was knocked out could get six shillings damages; but the loss of a molar brought sixteen shillings. Threatening a person by drawing a sword brought an automatic fine of three shillings; and the murder of a commoner resulted in a fine of 267 shillings. Anyone able to pay his fine drew no other punishment.

In Kentucky, a state law provides that 'No female shall appear in a bathing suit on any highway within this state unless she is escorted by at least two officers, or unless she be armed with a club.'

\*

In Trieste, a handsome young swindler was arrested for selling a sunken battleship to sightseers.

\*

Not long ago, a New Hampshire jurist ruled that 'Although a woman may decide that her husband is a louse, it is neither lawful, nor her right, to place DDT or other insecticide in his food.'

\*

In the State of Washington, it is against the law to carry a concealed weapon more than six feet long.

\*

Because citizens argued for years over the relative merits of the pronunciations Ar-kan-sas and Ar-kan-saw, the state legislature finally took the matter in hand. The result, an enactment making the latter form legal!

In like manner, the city fathers of Joliet, Illinois, passed 'An Ordinance Declaring the Proper Pronunciation of the Word Joliet.' Deploring the 'great confusion that has arisen,' the enactment directs that 'the only official, correct, and proper pronunciation and spelling of the name of this city shall be Jo-li-et; the accent on the first syllable, with the 'o' in such first syllable pronounced in its long form.'

*I barely sensed the vicious  
arc of his fist . . . then I  
was flying into the pool . . .*

**By John D. MacDonald**





*A night conceived in hell . . . a girl mindless as music  
. . . and a killer who could not rest till she was—*

# DEAD-AS IN DARLING



## CHAPTER ONE

### So Dead the Rogue

**I** CAME up through the tepid water in a slow arc, grasped the pool edge and pulled myself out, scrambling to my feet before the tiled edge, baked to oven heat by the almost roaring Texas sun,

could sear my knee. It was hot and sultry.

I flipped the quilted mat over, sat on the cool side of it. Five days earlier I had dropped off the bus in Kerrville, just because a wide, rugged old guy named

Dal Rolter had thumbed through my maps and had said, "Brant, I like the look of it. Come on up to my place in the hill country. We'll talk about ways and means."

All I wanted from Rolter was three hundred thousand. Sinking wells takes that kind of money. The options had eaten up too much of my cash. Rolter had made his with black gold, the way I wanted to make mine.

The station wagon had picked me up at Kerrville after I called and had taken me out through Ingram to a sizeable hill owned by Dal. It was an effort to keep my jaw from sagging as we drove up to it by his private road. A rambling place in native stone, sunk into the shoulder of the hill as though it had grown there. Mexican gardeners puttering a round, keeping the imported turf from turning as brown as the rest of the March landscape. A main forty foot lounge, paneled in pecky cypress.

Seventy feet behind the house was the pool.

Five days and I hadn't been able to get the conversation around to my options, around to the interesting question of money. The house was crowded with people who treated me with the same warm affability that you find in a New York hotel lobby. They were too busy hating each other to spend much time in table talk with Brant Lawlor, wildcatter.

The only people who didn't seem mad at anybody were Dal and myself. From my mat beside the pool I could look over and see him under the improvised awning sweating out a bridge hand. The shock of unruly white hair made his wide red face look redder. Sweat glistened on his multiple chins.

His wife, Teena Dane Rolter, was his partner. I had gotten the pitch on her in the city. In the early twenties she had been a pixie-type actress, emoting in minor parts. Twenty-five years of Texas

sun and dryness had bitten so deeply into her that she looked like a sad little lizard that had fallen into an open bureau drawer and clambered out swathed in filmy stuff, ribbons and a jangle of costume jewelry.

Her voice was like a back-handed slash with a rusty straight razor.

"Jackass!" she said distinctly, as Dal muffed a finesse. The opponents were two of the parasites which had fastened onto Dal's good nature, apparently a year or so before.

Tim and Betty Fowler—writers. In five days I hadn't seen any writing done. It seemed to be the Rolters' way of supporting the arts. It was hard to keep Tim and Betty separated in my mind. They were both grey, fortyish, lean, nervous and eager to please. They talked with a flat Maine twang, ate with dainty gestures and the appetites of wolves. They made fidgety little jokes at which they laughed too loudly and too long.

**T**O KEEP myself amused, I had spent a good part of the five days sorting the parasites. Behind me, on a cushion spread on the grass, Phil Sarjen exposed flabby and hirsute expanses of his anatomy to the sun. The dark glasses which always slid down his nose when he stood up were, for once, in place.

It was hard to believe that Phil Sarjen had left New York twenty years before. He dressed, acted and talked like a Jersey City horserom character, damp cigar in the corner of his mouth. Cold little eyes, such as taxidermists stick in hunting room trophies, were suspended over a beefy smile. He was bald, soft and short. And he was referred to as Dal's private secretary.

On my second day I had cornered Sarjen. "Maybe as Mr. Rolter's secretary you can give me a hint on when he'll be ready to talk business."



Sarjen had given me a meaty clap on the shoulder. "Fella, I don't handle that stuff, so I couldn't tell you."

It was quite a question as to what Sarjen did handle—that is, if you don't count an individual shaker of Martinis before dinner, and liberal portions of brandy afterward.

Mick Avery was next on my list of people to try to avoid. He was comparatively recent, having been around only six weeks or so. If somebody could have taken just a little of the curl out of Mick's blond locks, moved his eyes a shade farther apart, firmed up a pretty loose mouth, he could have Apolloed his way up the Hollywood ranks. As it was, he apparently exhibited his tidy self on myriad tennis courts and let people entertain him for the sake of his vulpine boyish charm.

He was definitely the type that makes me dream of the hearty smack of fist on flesh. And he was brawny enough to make it interesting.

Both Mick Avery, stretched out on the pool edge below the diving board, and Stanley Haskell, cross-legged like a consumptive Buddha at the far end of the pool, were spending each moment busily inspecting the charms of the genetic miracle of the Rolter marriage.

The Miracle was definitely to be looked upon. It certainly couldn't carry on much of a conversation. Not my type. Take an

airbrush pinup off the wall of your favorite barracks, make it even flatter and narrower in the places where it should be flat and narrow, considerably more abundant in the places where abundance is indicated, crown it with silver-blond hair, give it the face of a minor goddess, with big violet eyes of a stupidity almost incredible, stuff the hair in a transparent cap, the frame in a few whisps of fabric and bake all to a honey tan—and, brother, you have something which is enough of an extreme to be verging on the grotesque.

I guessed her I.Q. at about 77. After two days I had her routine down pat. Twelve or so hours of sleep, three hours of feeding, six hours of leaping into the pool and three hours of playing bop records over a full-throated amplifying system which unfortunately had satellite loudspeakers planted in places so strategic that you would have to get out of the county to find peace.

Her diving had a metronome fascination about it. She would stand, back arched, at the tip of the board for thirty seconds at a time. Then she would retrace her steps, come back a-running, leap high, arc down and cut the water with barely a ripple. The shining head would emerge and she would take three slow strokes to the edge, heave herself out like a wet, tan porpoise, walk back to the diving platform with a lilting roll that would have made money on any runway,

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clamber up and go into a trance on the end of the board again. The proud parents watched her with pride, devotion and abject wonder.

In a dizzy flight of whimsy, they had named her Symphonie.

Her expression was one of constant, mild, porcine good nature.

Mary Ellen Smith was more my style, and not to be labeled a parasite. In the city I had heard about her. A "ward" of the Rolter family. When she was little her mother had died. A month or so later her father went too, just because Dal Rolter forgot to tell somebody that a chain in the bed of a truck was flawed and needed two new links.

Mary Ellen had a lean, tanned body. A very definitely gnome face peered out from under a thatch of copper hair and her voice had a whispery huskiness.

As "ward," she seemed to do all the buying, supervise the kitchen help—all of whom seemed to be named Maria—keep the household books, police the joint, type letters for Dal and anything else that seemed to need doing.

At the moment she was sitting beside Haskell, talking to him in low tones. Stanley Haskell kept nodding wearily, never taking his eyes off Symphonie. As near as I could figure it, Haskell had been the architect who had designed the house and who had supervised its construction some three years before. And he had never been able to leave it. He didn't look like a well man. The current fiction was that he was planning an addition to the house. I guessed that Mary Ellen was trying to find out how far his plans had gone.

Mary Ellen sat with her feet in the water. She wore a faded blue bathing suit and I grinned to myself as I saw the look of exasperation on her face. She emphasized each point by stabbing a stubby forefinger into the palm of her left hand.

I had every one of them placed and classified, with the exception of a character whose name was Patrick Zik. Mrs Rolter had referred to him pointedly a few times as "Mary Ellen's guest," inferring that none of the Rolter family would have such a person in the house.

He was a big, shambling, loose-jointed man of about thirty, and I guessed that there was a lot of power in that frame of his. His reddened hands were marked with the pale lines of old scars. Under thinning blond hair his sleepy face was a pattern of thickened tissue, old acne scars and sunburn, looking more like a pile of radishes than a face. He talked with a trace of Pennsylvania coaltown vernacular.

He had arrived the day before I did.

I STRETCHED out on the mat again. The late afternoon was peaceful and as the sun got lower some of the sting departed. I could hear the lazy *swash* as Symphonie hit the pool, the distant nostalgic tinkle of the lead goats with the herds on the other side of the hill, a jangle of ice as Haskell drank, the slap of cards on the plate glass table top.

The sense of waiting, of something imminently pending, was so strong that I began to wonder if I had gotten too much sun.

I was waiting for Dal to call me into his office and start talking oil. Mick Avery looked as if he were waiting for a chance to leap to Symphonie and drag her out of all this. Haskell clapped dry palms from time to time as Symphonie dived. Maybe he was waiting for her to swim over to him.

Teena Dane Rolter could have been waiting for a grand slam, or for a chance to let Mary Ellen know that she was in the servant category.

Sarjen was waiting in his sleep for cocktail time. The others had drinks at hand. Tall cool ones. They were set in



green wrought-iron gimmicks that stuck into the ground and had petals like flowers to enclose the glasses.

At either end of the pool were stone structures, three-sided, with the open side facing the pool, the roof steeply pitched away from the pool.

The bridge game, though at ground level, actually took place right over the dressing rooms. The rooms were reached by stairs that dipped down. Inside there were portholes below water level through which greenish light came.

Symphonie could have been waiting to come alive.

I liked the thought of a drink. To go around the pool was too much of a walk. I stood up, went out in a flat dive, let the momentum take me across. The little bar was on wheels beyond the bridge game. I mixed a cool something with ice, lime, rum and a bare touch of sugar.

I looked over Tim Fowler's shoulder. He was declarer. Dummy was down. Betty hitched in her chair and sat with one shoulder high. The right shoulder. Tim had a finesse he could take either way. He took it through the right, through Dal. It worked.

It was too hot to make a scene. Besides, the Fowlers probably needed pin money. No game is easier to rig than bridge with set partners. They had it rigged.

Tim made his game and it was rubber. They totted the score, broke up the game and went down into the dressing rooms—all except Teena, who was just smart enough not to get into a suit.

Teena looked at Symphonie on the tip of the board. "You've had enough, dear," she said sweetly. The affection was a pink ribbon tied on the meataxe voice.

Symphonie obediently quit hurling herself at the water. She walked toward the little girls' shower room steps, reaching absently for the gimmick between her shoulderblades that fastened the halter.

Mick Avery held his breath and stared in bug-eyed fascination, but Mrs. Rolter spoiled the game by snapping, "Wait until you're out of sight, darling!"

In a few moments I went down to the men's facilities. Rolter, Tim Fowler and Avery were down there. The place was as cordial and friendly as the men's room in the Pennsy station.

I had to wait for a shower stall, and as a consequence when I climbed into slacks, shirt and sandals, I was alone. I came slowly up the stairs to find the sun just dropping behind the distant hill, the shadows turning misty blue, the stars ready to pop out on signal.

Zik, still in swimming trunks, leaned against the diving tower and talked in low tones to Mary Ellen. She wore a white linen dress and she seemed to be standing in a very rigid manner.

The others were gone. I looked over and was surprised to see Sarjen still there. The last pale fingers of sun touched him—and suddenly I knew he was dead. I didn't know how I knew it at first, and as the first low-pitched gasp of surprise reached my lips, I knew that it had been the absolute quietness of the man, the lack of motion in his heavy chest, the flaccid, shrunken, poured-out look of him.

I stood uncertainly for a moment, not knowing whether to run for the house or go to Sarjen. It was heart, I assumed. He had looked to be a heart type.

There was a scuff of leather on concrete and Zik, his unlaced shoes scuffing, moved in on me with surprising speed. Mary Ellen was behind him, her dark eyes wide, her thin brown fingers interlaced and held tautly at her neckline.

"Easy does it, laddie," Zik said softly. "I was afraid you might catch."

"He's dead," Mary Ellen said, a perfectly superfluous remark. Sarjen looked incredibly dead. Supremely dead.

"I'll tell the others," I said. "Have you phoned yet?"

"Slow and easy, laddie," Zik said. "The man didn't die rightly—not right at all."

I didn't like the look of Patrick Zik. I didn't like the warm smile or the eyes like slate or the big, freckled knuckles. He wanted very badly for me to relax, to take no responsibility.

"Who are you and what are you trying to gentle me for?" I demanded.

"I'm just a guy working for Miss Smith. That's all you have to know. I got plans for Uncle Phil."

"You killed him?"

He gave me a look of utter contempt. He turned and looked through the darkening shadows toward Sarjen's body, pale against the blanket. I followed his glance, barely sensing the vicious upward arc of his big fist. I arrowed a hundred miles into the Texas sky where the bright sun-glare lingered and hurled sparks into my brain. I turned slowly, lazily, knifed down again, striking the center of the pool, only this time it was filled with viscid black ink, a thousand yards deep. I came to rest on the bottom of the pool. . . .

SOMEbody had removed my chin and pasted it back upside down. I stirred a thickened tongue, found a tooth splinter and was too weak to push it out of my mouth. Insects shrilled with a night sound, and the back of my head and my neck were craftily fitted to something soft and warm.

Before I opened my eyes, I inserted a thumb and finger into my raw mouth, found the splinter, extracted same.

Above me a froth of hair was silhouetted against the star frenzy of a Texas night. By deduction, the item under my head became a feminine thigh encased in white linen.

"You have lovely friends," I said thickly.

"He had to do it, Mr. Lawlor," the sweetly husky voice said. She reached over to one side. Ice tinkled in a shaker.

"Can you sit up and take nourishment?"

I sat up and the world came into proper perspective. We were at the rim of the pool. The drink didn't start any tooth nerves screaming, so I assumed that the chip hadn't made a dentist essential.

I took three long swallows, muffled a cough and asked, "How long have I been out?"

She giggled nervously. "Long enough so that the others must think I have designs on you. A sudden infatuation."

She picked up her glass and the rim rattled against her teeth in shudder tempo.

"The last thing I remember is a small, unimportant discussion about a body. Let's continue with it."

My eyes were used to the starlight. I looked over and saw the grass, faintly silver, and very bare at the place where Sarjen and his cushion had been.

A quiet voice, close behind me said, "Body?"

It startled Mary Ellen too. "Oh, Pat!" she said. "I didn't hear you."

"What body?" he asked.

"One—there was a body. Two—it was the body of Mr. Sarjen. Three—it is gone. Give, people. Give."

"Mary Ellen," Zik said, "this citizen must have fallen and busted his head. Why, the three of us were standing right here when Phil said he had a headache and was going to take a walk down the mountain. Isn't that right?"

"Perfectly correct," Mary Ellen said crisply.

"Mr. Lawlor," Zik said, "do you think Mr. Rolter would be anxious to finance your hole-digging if he hears you raving about bodies of people?"

I finished the drink. I stood up. I said, "Mr. Zik, will you please lead with a light left?"

He didn't take his hands out of his pockets. "Okay, so I sucker-punched you.



Just so you wouldn't tell. But I promise you, laddie, that if you flex your muscles, I'll flex mine and you will sleep some more. Never play the other man's game."

He wasn't bragging. He was reading out of his own book, and it was a very factual book. The cold confidence of it took the heart right out of me. I stopped making knuckles.

"Okay, so I play it your way. I don't trust you, Zik. But I get a good story, or I have every cop in Texas up here."

He said, "Mary Ellen can tell you as much as she wants. I'll wander back and see that you aren't interrupted."

She filled my glass again before she started. "Mr. Lawlor, I don't—"

"Make it Brant, Mary Ellen."

Her smile was a glint of white against the deep tan of her face. "Fine. Well, Brant, I've been with the Rolter family a long time. I'm not quite a member of the family, but I'm not quite a servant either. I'd die for Dal, if necessary.

"Ten days ago things started to go very wrong. Tension. Fear. A funny atmosphere. It bothered me. There's a main phone and three PBX connections in the house. I wanted to call the market in Ingram. I picked up the phone. Somebody was whispering. The voice said, 'But you won't live that long.' There was a click as the connection was broken, and then a sigh, a second click. Like a darn fool I sat there, petrified. By the time I thought of

looking around to see who could be using one of the other three instruments, it was too late. Brant—that voice wasn't fooling. Not a bit.

"Dal lets me handle certain funds and he trusts me. I sat and thought about his affairs. Right now he's pretty thinly extended. He's wide open for something like this—there're people it would pay to have him either dead, or with a murder to explain. He's been taking chances. Dal always gets bored unless he's gambling in one way or another.

"I made inquiries, and used the money to hire Patrick Zik. He's thoroughly honest, I'm sure. And he's discreet. I gave him the story. He's being paid well enough to risk being accused of impeding the process of law. He was to prevent a crime. But this afternoon, in full sight of everyone, someone managed to stab Phil Sarjen through the right eye."

She stopped, held the back of her hand tightly against her mouth for a moment, her head bent.

"When you noticed that Sarjen was dead, Brant, Zik had already told me that he had noticed the body an hour before, and had been watching to see if he could detect any anxiety on the part of—of anyone. I told him that it would have to be concealed until we had a case to hand to the police. He didn't want to do it. I had to raise the price a little. He agreed to do it—for four days. Then you acted as

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though you were going to break things open. There wasn't time to explain. While you were unconscious, he took the body away, along with Sarjen's clothes that were down in the locker room. I want him to try to find out who did it. If he can't find out in four days, then he'll call the police. By then certain of Mr. Rolter's deals will have come through and his position won't be so dangerous."

"What was he stabbed with?"

She made a helpless gesture. "Pat couldn't find the weapon. The only people not in swim clothes were Teena and Stan Haskell. He managed to bump into Haskell and he's sure Haskell wasn't carrying the weapon. The wound was—it was wide and very deep."

"In the pool?"

"I'm having the pool drained in the morning. Pat is going to see that no one comes near it during the night."

"Dressing rooms?"

"We looked there. Of course it could have been thrown off into the brush, but that would be a pretty hard gesture to conceal."

"Any harder than the act of stabbing the man?"

She didn't answer. But her shrug, barely seen in the darkness, was expressive of her feeling of helplessness.

"What can I do?"

"Just try to remember if you saw anything suspicious. As near as we can figure, Phil came to the pool at three. He swam for a little while, then spread his blanket and went to sleep. At about five-thirty Zik noticed he had stopped breathing. Zik walked over and took a closer look. He saw why."

"What else can I do? I don't remember anything out of line."

"You can stay out of it, Brant," she said firmly. "Completely out. Back us up on Phil's walking away. The murderer will know that the three of us are lying, and he won't know why."

"Where's the body?"

"Brant, you've a nice grin and all that, but we don't trust you that far."

She stood up. I picked up the empty shaker and the glasses and walked with her to the house. The perennial bop music, which had just been a jarring counterpoint out by the pool, became an active irritant at the house.

THE scene in the big, forty-foot lounge was almost disturbingly peaceful. With the exception of Sarjen, all were present and accounted for. Zik sat calmly at a deep window seat, his white shirt open to show his heavily corded throat. Dal sat on the biggest couch, with Teena and his glass. There was a cocktail glass in every right hand or at every right elbow.

As we came in, the white-jacketed Mexican lad came over to us with a wide smile and a tray with two cocktails. I put the empty shaker and glasses on his tray while Mary Ellen held our two drinks.

Dal called to her and she handed me my drink and went over to him. I sauntered over to Zik, determined to show him that I could be casual in spite of the painful lump on my jaw.

He glanced at me with distant amusement and his eyes returned to a constant swing from face to face.

"That's an odd name you have," I said.

"I simplified it. I took out all the Polish consonants that you don't pronounce."

"The Patrick is unusual too."

"Patrick Michael Mallory Zik."

The last plaintive squeal of tail-twisted clarinets signaled the ending of one of the bop epics. In the silence, as the changer clattered, Dal said, "How come Phil is missing the drinks?"

Mary Ellen said, too casually I thought, "He said he had a headache and he went off down the road to walk it off."



Dal's response was lost in the introduction to the next fragment of Symphonie's esoteric world.

The big room had the chill look of too much money and not enough judgment. It was a room in which there would never be conversation. There might be remembrance of things past, or the calculated insult, or a constant, talking proof of an innate sense of superiority—but never conversation.

I noticed that Zik kept returning to Teena Dane Rolter, kept her under constant observation. She was one of those women, who, as they grow older, merely intensify the gestures and attitudes of extreme youth. Kittenish is the standard word. I wondered if she had been the one to kill Sarjen. It was possible. In her little world, where the only constant was pretense, murder could be a slightly more intriguing form of play-acting.

One of the plump Marias came to the doorway with the submissive look which said that dinner was served.

Dal looked at his watch and said, above the music, "No need to wait for him, folks. We'll go in."

Symphonie came up off the floor with a sleek motion, very effortless, very graceful. She clicked off the set, turned on the radio, hunting for quiet music that would be a background for dinner.

Mrs. Rolter, in the dark as to my commercial importance, kept seating me at her right. Dal was at the far end of the table. Across from me, diagonally toward Dal, Phil's empty chair was as apparent as a missing tooth on a chorus lassie. It seemed impossible that he would not come swaggering in, give the group his beefy smile, slide into the chair and hunch forward with the determination of a true trencherman.

I wondered where Phil Sarjen lay.

After dinner I caught up with Mary Ellen as she left the paneled dining room. I said, "Come take a ride with me. Do you

good to get away from that bop a while."

She nodded, went and spoke to Dal. In a few moments she joined me in the side hallway. Her car was parked out on the gravel. I helped her in, got behind the wheel and drove down Rolter's curving mountain road to the highway.

"Where to, Brant?" she asked.

"A drive-in where we can get beer and conversation," I said.

She directed me. We went through Ingram, on down to the outskirts of Kerrville. It seemed warmer there. We parked and she showed me which button would put the top down. The stars were low overhead. The carhop brought the tray and hooked it on my side. A juke wailed of cowhand sadness and twanging guitar.

She sighed and settled back in the seat. "This is better, Brant. I'd just like to drive away and never come back. Never."

"The house is haunted," I said.

"It's like dreaming something awful and then you wake up and you find that what you dreamed is true."

"Maybe that's a characteristic of murder. But to get down to cases, Mary Ellen, I'm playing with a lot of different motives. Where did Sarjen fit in the household?"

Her copper head was against the seat back and she looked diagonally up at the night sky. A liner went over, running lights winking against the night.

"He was there when I came. That was sixteen years ago, Brant. At that time he was a sort of guest. He'd been there for a long time. I was two years older than Symphonie. I was nine. He was just beginning to get bald then. But he was just about the same. I mean he had the same habits."

"Has there been any change recently?"

"I've been back about three years. They sent me to school and then after school I went into the Waves. When I got back he was the same. But during this past year he's been getting—well, restless."

"What was his hold over the Rolter family?"

She turned her head quickly and looked at me. "You decided that quickly, Brant. It took me until I was about fourteen to figure that out. I don't know what his hold was, but it was a good one."

"A little stunk can make such a brave stink that the creatures with bigger teeth will let him walk around in freedom. But maybe one day the stink gets tiresome, or he begins to stink louder."

"There used to be quarrels," she said. "I used to hear the heavy voices late at night. Dal and Phil. But I never heard the words. Phil never worked, all the time he was with the family. Once a month he always went away. He'd come back in five or six days, bleary and tired and irritable."

"The man must have had them in a pretty rugged grip. Can you guess what it could be?"

"I've tried to think of everything, Brant. There just isn't anything that could be traded for a life of ease for this many years. I know what Dal is like. I don't see why he'd stand for it."

"Who's your candidate, Mary Ellen?"

Her shrug was expressive. "At one time or another during the afternoon, everybody walked near Phil. Anybody could have done it. Except, of course, you or me or Zik."

"Where did Phil go on his monthly binges?"

"He always went to New Orleans. And he was due to go in another few days. I heard him ranting on the phone to the cleaners about his clothes."

"How do you tie it in with that whisper you heard on the phone?"

"I've been trying to puzzle that out. Phil was up in his room at the time. One of the extensions is outside his room door. The phone hadn't rung, so he must have placed the outside call. If he placed it, he certainly knew who he was talking to, so

why the whispering? It doesn't add up."

"Who else was in the house?"

"Everybody but Haskell."

"But he couldn't have been killed by an outsider, Mary Ellen. We'd have noticed any outsider who came close enough to the pool to kill Sarjen."

She moved closed to me. I took her hand in mine. Her fingers were cold. On an impulse, I leaned over and kissed her lightly. I said, "I'm on your side, Mary Ellen."

"I like you, Brant Lawlor."

She held up her lips again. The second kiss was just a bit longer. She pulled away and said, "I can go back there now, Brant. That is, without getting the screaming meemies."

She sat close to me during the long ride back, and on the straight stretches, my fingers were interlocked with hers. Her hands were warm now.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A Heart for Dying

I WAS up early. I put a robe over my pajamas, padded out of the house to the pool. Zik was there, staring down at the pool, which was slowly filling up. He wore a disgusted expression.

When he saw me, he said, "No weapon, damn it. I ought to bring the cops in on this, in spite of what Smith says."

I went down and pulled on my trunks. When I came up the pool was full, the water like green crystal. I shivered on the edge and plunged in. Zik was crawling around in the brush.

When I came out he said, "Lawlor, you know this country better than I do. Would this sort of thing happen?"

I listened to his idea and approved it. Any idea which would take the lid off the smouldering tension in the house was a good idea for my money.

He waited until everybody was around.



He picked his spot, the terrace on the east side of the house. Dal, Avery and Symphonie were still eating. Teena was smoking a cigarette, saving the dregs of her coffee.

I had barely time to give Mary Ellen a whispered warning when Patrick Zik tossed a thin gold wristwatch on the breakfast table. The crystal was shattered and the gold mesh band was torn apart.

Everyone stared at it much the same way they'd look at a snake. Zik said, "Sarjen didn't show last night. His bed wasn't slept in. I found this down on the shoulder of the highway, along with some tire marks, and a little glass. It looks to me as though somebody sloughed him with a car, took him aboard and took him off into the back country to hide the body."

The calm morning was suddenly ominous, as though a cloud had passed in front of the sun.

Symphonie broke the spell. She broke it with a vibrating underlip, tears welling out of her violet eyes and a wail that would have fit the vocal chords of a seven year old. Another wail followed the first and she stared desolately at the wristwatch.

Teena swung a thin brown hand across empty space and it nearly knocked Symphonie off the chair. She swung it back in a backhand blow that straightened the golden girl up again. It cut the tears off in mid-torrent and the violet eyes were wide with shock.

Symphonie held her hands to her bruised cheeks and stared at her mother.

"Why this exhibition?" Teena demanded.

"He—Uncle Phil—he was going to take me to New Orleans with him. Tomorrow."

Avery's jaw sagged and Haskell, standing at one side, gasped as though he had been nudged in the stomach.

"Explain yourself, girl," Dal said heavily.

"I was to— to pack my bag and he was going to put it in his car and then I was going for a walk and he was going to stop and I'd get in the car."

"Don't you know, dear," Teena said with acid sweetness, "that a good girl can't do that sort of thing?"

Symphonie wailed again. "But it was only Uncle Phil, mommy."

Dal said three words that would have scorched the neck of an iron doorstop. He shoved his chair back, wiped his mouth on his napkin and started toward the house.

Zik said softly, "We'll have to call the cops right away."

Dal turned slowly. His face had come apart. There was a greyness under the deep red. His lips moved for a moment and no sound came out. Then in a strained voice he said, "No need of that yet, young man. No need at all. Why, we're only guessing. Just guessing." He laughed without humor.

"Anything you say, boss," Zik said.

The Fowlers sat side by side on a bench. They looked like two grey sparrows sitting in the first blast of winter wind.

Teena got up and hurried after her husband, her eyes showing her concern.

Symphonie gave a few last sobs, picked up her fork and dug anew into the mound of eggs and sausage.

The show was over. I walked out to the pool, trying to make sense out of what had happened. I stared down at the glassy water, and suddenly an idea began to grow. It was based on hunch, and just the frailest of facts. But behind it was a major inconsistency that I hadn't yet considered. Dal Rolter had asked me to come up to talk business. He had seemed ready to advance money in big figures. And yet Mary Ellen said he was over-extended.

I went back and found Mary Ellen. I said, "How much was Dal going to stake me to?"

She cocked her head on one side. "Let

me think. It was a full three hundred thousand. He was going to get you a certified check for the balance this week."

"The balance?"

She gave me a wide-eyed look. "Yes, the additional hundred thousand."

"Of course," I said. I ignored her odd look and got out of there. Sarjen's restlessness made a bit more sense.

I didn't move until I had everybody placed, until I knew where they were. And then I went to Sarjen's room. The door was locked. My room had a key. The key, as I had expected, fit his lock. The upper hall was quiet. The key made a small grating noise and sprung slightly as the lock slid back. I moved the key to the inside, locked it behind me.

It was a big room, bright and comfortable. It had a private bath. A small glass front bookcase held a varied collection of pinups.

The suitcase was under the bed. I pulled it out, unstrapped it and clicked the fasteners open. From the close-packed depths rose a scent of male perfume—pine, leather and heather.

At first I thought it was not there. I took everything out of it, felt the thickness under the lining. The rip had been carefully sewed. Thousand dollar bills are wrapped with fifty to a sheaf. Each one has a ludicrous number of zeros after the figure one. There were four new sheafs, crisp and firm. Thousand dollar bills do not become pocket-worn.

I slapped them together, put them in the inside pocket of my jacket. As I replaced the first items of clothing in the suitcase, I heard the rattle of the knob behind me. I held my breath, then with silent haste replaced the rest of the clothes, strapped the bag. The latches would have made too much noise. Hearing the hammering of my heart in the silence, I pushed the suitcase, inch by inch, back under the hanging counterpane.

The new noise was a key which hit

against the key I had left in the door. Then there was silence. Even a fool would know that someone was in the room. I moved close to the door. I thought I could hear slow breathing on the other side of the thick panel.

Then, in the distance, I heard Zik say, "Fancy meeting you here!"

There was a sharp intake of breath on the other side of the door, the sudden thump of running feet.

"Not so fast," Zik murmured.

There was a thudding sound, a faint cry—and silence. With stealth I withdrew my key from the lock and waited. I counted slowly to fifty. Then I replaced the key, turned it and opened the door, swinging it wide and jumping aside to take advantage of the factor of surprise.

The doorway was empty. Fifteen feet down the hall toward the stairs was sprawled the lank form of Patrick Zik. He stirred as I looked at him. I locked the door behind me, dropped the key in my pocket and went to Zik. There was a great egg on his forehead over his right eye. He stirred and moaned. I got water and wet his forehead and rubbed his wrists, but he was a long time coming out of it.

At last he sat up, his mouth slack, his face greenish under the lumps and scars. He looked at me and cursed in a flat and monotonous tone. I helped him to his feet. "Who was it?" I asked.

"Come on. It was that damn sparrow, Fowler. I caught him coming out of Sarjen's room and I didn't think he had any fight. But the son of a gun was carrying a length of pipe. I didn't duck fast enough."

ONE of the Marias finally informed us at some length that the Fowlers had departed in their ancient sedan and that, as far as she knew, they had taken all of their belongings with them.



Zik cursed some more. We gathered the household and he explained what had happened. He looked squarely at Dal as he said, "Could Fowler have taken anything of value from Sarjen's room?"

The wad of currency in my pocket seemed to burn with a penetrating fire.

Dal coughed and said, "I paid Mr. Sarjen a good salary. His expenses weren't high. If he'd kept his savings in cash—"

Zik strode toward the phone. Dal said, "Wait! Let them go. If they took anything from Sarjen, I'll make it good to Phil. I'd rather not have the publicity."

"But maybe I'd like to press an assault charge," Zik said, his eyes bright.

"Mr. Zik, if you would set a—a value on your injuries, I'd—"

"I feel five hundred bucks sick," Zik said.

"Write him a check, Mary Ellen," Dal said. Mary Ellen glared at Zik but went obediently out into the other room.

"As soon as you get your check, Mr. Zik, I'd like to suggest that you may have business some other place. I don't want to seem inhospitable, but this excitement has been hard on my nerves," Teena said.

Zik gave her a courtly and sardonic bow. "Better to put up with a devil you know, Mrs. Rolter. The police I'd send here might be more trouble."

Teena's eyes narrowed. "Just who are you, Mr. Zik?"

"I'm an investigator, ma'am, hired by your ward, Miss Smith."

When Mary Ellen came back, waving the check to dry it before giving it to Dal for signature, she was met with two hurt and angry glares, one from Teena and one from Dal.

"Child, why did you do this?" Dal asked heavily, nodding his head in the direction of Zik.

"I felt that something was going to happen," she said meekly.

"Then why didn't you come to me?"

he asked. "You know I'd have helped you."

"Because I thought it was going to happen to you and if I'd come to you, you would have laughed, wouldn't you?"

"There are things you don't understand, Mary Ellen," Teena said crisply.

Mary Ellen lost her humbled look. She lifted her chin. "I understand, Mrs. Rolter, that someone killed Phil Sarjen."

"Lady," Zik said lazily, "should you want to go out into the storeroom beyond the kitchens and take a look in that deep freeze, the big one that isn't in use, you'll find Uncle Phil curled up in there with a hole into his brain you could use as a quarter bank."

Teena sat on the edge of her chair and looked at him. She leaned further and further forward. Suddenly her eyes rolled up so that only the whites showed. She went over onto the rug, her face thumping softly as it hit, her thin frame poised at an absurd prayer-rug angle before it toppled over onto its side.

Dal's thick knees thumped as he dropped beside her, reaching for her hand. Haskell walked shakily through the open french doors, went to the edge of the front patio and was noisily ill. Symphonie stood where she was and began to wail in a heartbroken manner. Mick Avery put on his manly look, walked over to her, put his arm around her and began to comfort her.

He had some success and it emboldened him. He released Symphonie, marched over to Zik and said, "Are you handling this so good? Let's get the cops in here and quick. I can't stand this kind of publicity. Hell, I want to clear myself and get out of here."

"Shut up and sit down, junior," Zik said.

Avery swung at Zik with his Sunday punch. Zik stepped inside it, pivoted and caught Avery an inch below the belt buckle with a left hand. Avery's heels

went off the floor and he came down in a sitting position. He held his stomach with both hands and his face was bitter green. His eyes bulged and he said weakly, "Aah—aah."

Symphonie flew at Zik, hacking with her nails, screeching and kicking. Zik collected three long gouges down his cheek before he pushed her away. She stumbled over Avery's legs and fell heavily on top of him. She sat up, held Avery's head against her bosom and rocked him back and forth, cooing to him and glaring at Zik.

Haskell stood in the doorway and stared bleakly at the happy little scene.

Zik patted his gouges with a handkerchief and said, "The question before the house is whether or not the Fowlers killed Uncle Phil. If yes, we go after them."

Teena was helped to her feet by her husband. She was making mewling sounds. They walked like very old people to the doorway and went up the stairs together. Mary Ellen gave me a quick glance, full of concern, and followed them.

The phone rang. Zik took it. I saw the first look of surprise cross his face, and then he became very grim. "Yeah. House guests. No, they'd left. Not that I know of. We'll try to find out and call you back. Sure, any undertaker is fine."

He hung up. He said to me, "The Fowlers left in too big a hurry. They met an oil pipe truck just outside of Kerrville. The man says the edge of the pipe trailer hit right across the windshield of the Fowler car. The whole chassis of the sedan wedged under the trailer and the whole works burned."

The money was suddenly very heavy in my pocket. Zik had seen Fowler coming out of Sarjen's room. Dal would think Fowler took the payoff he had made to Sarjen. The money would thus have burned. Because of the serial numbers, I probably couldn't risk turning them in. They could be fenced at a discount, if I

took my time. I was in a hell of a spot.

I looked at Symphonie. She still sat on the floor with Mick Avery. He had begun to enjoy himself. She stared open-mouthed at Zik as he told of the Fowlers. Then she turned to Avery and covered his mouth with a wide, damp kiss.

Haskell made a sound that could have been a sob and disappeared from view, apparently going around the side of the house.

I had a sick feeling inside me. I remembered countless discussions of ethics, of how much money it would take to turn thief. I remembered saying jokingly once that if I could grab a half million, with a reasonable chance of getting away with it, I'd do it. The pack of bills was thick and substantial. Forty years of pleasant life in some banana republic.

"Better call the police," I said to Zik.

"See what you can get out of Mary Ellen first, Lawlor," he suggested. "She's paying me."

The door to Teena's bedroom was closed. I could hear muffled voices. There was a heavy sadness in those voices. I stood for a time across the hallway, my hands in my pockets. I thought of hiding the money, but I felt more secure with it on my person.

I was at the head of the stairs when the bedroom door opened. Mary Ellen came out, subdued and depressed. She beckoned to me and I followed her. Her room was tucked back at the far corner of the wing. It was small, compact and very plain.

She shut the door behind her. I took the chair and she sat on the bed. She looked beyond me out at the blue hills, and spoke in a faraway voice.

“O NCE upon a time, Brant, there was a silly young girl who was stage-struck. She was going to be a great actress. The greatest. She made mistakes. Quite a



few of them. And one day a man showed up and she fell in love with him. He had warmth and kindness and all the things she needed badly. He wanted to marry her. She was very weary and she knew that she no longer could hold onto those hopes of being famous. She wanted the peace that he could offer. She wanted it with all her heart. And so she married him.

"He brought her back to Texas and they were very happy. They had a child. If the man had lived very quietly, had made just a little money, they would still be happy. But the girl's husband made a good deal of money. His name became known. And pictures were published. Pictures of him and his actress wife.

"When Phil Sarjen came on the scene, he came well prepared. He carried with him a photostat of the marriage certificate. His marriage to Teena. That was one of the mistakes that Teena had kept to herself. She had thought she could run away. But not from Phil Sarjen. He had the proof that Teena had made a bigamous marriage, and the daughter was a club over the head of the Rolter family.

"Dal offered Sarjen every cent he had in the world to go off and get a Mexican divorce so that the Rolter marriage could be legalized. Sarjen, enjoying the cat and mouse game, refused. His offer was simple. He would move in and demand suitable luxuries. He would get a certain fixed sum each month. He would be a part of the happy home. In that way he would not only insure that Teena wouldn't slip away and get her own divorce, but he would also make the extent of the scandal broader should it ever come out.

"He explained that the original of the certificate, along with a notarized statement, was in the hands of a law firm. They clearly understood that he would call them once each month. If two months went by without a phone call, then the law firm was empowered to place the

sealed envelope in the hands of the most lurid and unprincipled yellow journal in the country.

"So husband one fastened himself like a fat white leech to the household of husband two. Now he's dead. They have a few weeks of grace and then the news will break. And such fine news! 'New Design for Living in Texas—' "

I frowned. "And so neither of them killed him."

Mary Ellen shook her head. "No, Brant. Neither of them."

"Why was Phil Sarjen restless?"

"He was attracted to Symphonie. He saw that she was carefully watched. He decided to bargain. He told them that if they would let him marry Symphonie and settle a reasonable sum on her, he'd see that they got the papers back, and he'd get a Mexican divorce so that they could make their marriage legal."

"And Dal refused?"

"Of course he refused! He told Sarjen to go ahead and do his damndest. Sarjen saw he was licked in that direction and said that he was getting bored and he'd take a large hunk of cash in return for the certificate and then he'd leave them alone. That was after your talk with Dal in the city. Dal took two hundred thousand from his enterprises and gave it to Sarjen in cash. Sarjen was taking his time leaving. He acted smug. They didn't know what he was planning. Symphonie spilled the story at breakfast today."

"Sarjen tried to have his cake and eat it too."

"And he nearly did."

"But who killed him, Mary Ellen?"

She sighed as though it was of little importance. "I don't know. Maybe one of the Fowlers saw the money and killed to get it. People have been killed for one per cent of that amount, you know."

One per cent of the amount in my pocket.

"Or did Haskell or Avery learn Sar-

jen's plans to take off with Symphonie?"

"It doesn't seem important," Mary Ellen said. "The money is gone. Two people are sitting in that room down the hall watching the fine structure of their lives collapse. Murder has touched them and touched their daughter. They've been soiled by it. When this case breaks there's every chance that a lot of Dal's gambles that would otherwise have been good will turn bad. He's too old to start over. Phil Sarjen left them with nothing. Nothing."

She turned and stretched out, face down, her shoulders heaving, but uttering no sound. A weary little girl with a gnome face and a heart half again as big as her home state.

Without knowing why, I took the four packets of currency, took her wrist and put them in her open hand.

We sat side by side while she made me tell her about the money.

When we went out into the dim hallway, I stopped suddenly. There had been just the smallest hint-of motion at the far end of the hall. Furtive motion.

My first thought was that someone had been listening at the door and had fled as they heard us getting ready to leave the room.

"Did you see that?" I demanded.

Mary Ellen's laughter was soft. "Darling, even your nerves are going bad."

Zik was alone in the lounge. We brought him up to date. He waited until we were quite through and then walked over to the window seat, slumped and tucked a cigarette in the corner of his mouth. The smoke curling up his face gave him a malevolent look.

"I don't like the Fowler answer," he said. "Too pat. And since we're in this deep, we might as well keep our feet wet. When the blowup comes, we got the yarn that whoever killed him hid the body in the freezer and we found it eleven seconds before we called a cop."

"But even if it isn't the right answer,

Pat, don't you think it will be enough to—"

He interrupted Mary Ellen. "Miss Smith, I've been conked on the head and I've been given a runaround over a sharp, pointed weapon. I'm sick of this place and I don't like any part of the whole deal. I'd be happy to go away. But I want the right answer before I go. The whole answer."

## CHAPTER THREE

### Love Some Body

**I**N THE late afternoon Zik drained the pool again, having forgotten to see whether the weapon had been tucked down the drain by a swimmer. It had been an oddly sleepy afternoon. Dal and Teena had remained upstairs.

Symphonie was the only one who swam. Mary Ellen and I sat in the shade, out of the sun, and talked in low tones. Haskell watched Symphonie with rapt attention and Mick Avery lay on his stomach beside the pool and dozed. Zik walked about restlessly.

The question of the weapon still bothered him. The blast of the sun quieted strained nerves while heat waves misted the concrete apron of the pool.

Finally Symphonie was gone, chased away by the advancing chill of dusk, and the last of the water had gurgled out of the pool. Zik came up the ladder at last, his expression indicating his defeat.

"I think I'm going to give up," he said. "I'll call the cops in after we get a night's rest. I didn't get to sleep last night because I was watching this miserable concrete hole in the ground. I'm going up and sleep some now."

He shambled off, hands stuffed deep in his pockets, shoulders slumped.

Symphonie came up the stairs, dressed in pale aqua, gave us a vacant smile and went toward the house. Haskell was there, waiting for her. We heard the distant,



plaintive whine of his voice, saw Symphonie brush by him contemptuously.

"Poor guy," Mary Ellen said.

"Next he'll have to kill off Avery."

She shivered. "Don't make those kind of jokes. Please!"

"Sorry."

The blue shadows lengthened and the distant bells tinkled and all was right with the world because I was alone with Mary Ellen. When the sun was gone she went to the house, came back with the familiar shaker, the two glasses.

We talked in low tones and, in the darkness, we kept silent when Symphonie went by with Haskell. He was still yammering at her, pleading with her.

Mary Ellen muffled a giggle, and then decided that she was cruel to laugh at him. When I kissed her, the heavy bulk of the money in my pocket hurt her and she said that it wasn't every girl that could be bruised by that much money, and we put it in her small purse, barely able to fasten the catch.

The were periods of silence and periods of much conversation, and we gradually came to know each other.

We decided to skip dinner. The silver moon rode high and the light fell across Mary Ellen's face and I saw that she had become very beautiful.

I sat with my legs crossed, my arms propped on my knees, and she was on her back on the grass, looking up into my face.

At first I thought it was a cloud that had covered the moon. The cruel length of metal almost touched Mary Ellen's eye, the point resting against the inside of the curve of her eyebrow.

The voice said, "Don't try to turn your head, Mary Ellen. Don't try." It was a thin little faraway voice, crystals of fragile ice.

Mary Ellen didn't move. The point was so close to her eye that, had she turned her head, it would have torn into the

fragile tissue. She couldn't move an inch.

The metal bar was as rigid as though held in a vise.

I looked up into the shadowed face that bent over Mary Ellen. The thin glass cracked between my fingers.

It was a feral face. The eyes were drawn to slits and the skin seemed tightly stretched over the bones. The mouth was cruel and thin.

"I want the money now," the voice said. "Right now."

I knew that I could not lunge fast enough to keep the point of the metal bar from sinking deep into the brain of Mary Ellen. Mary Ellen had not uttered a sound.

"Where is the money?"

"In—in her purse."

"Take it out and put it in my hand."

I LOOKED up into that face. I saw the expression and I knew that when I had turned over the money, the point would be plunged down. There was hate in that face—hate born of years of resentment.

"Why are you doing this, Symphonie?" I asked softly.

She smiled then. "They think I'm not clever. All of them. He showed me the money and he said we were going away together. He was dirty and he stank. Not clean like Mick. Not at all like Mick. Where's the money?"

I had to play for time. There was madness in her eyes.

I knew why Zik hadn't found the weapon. It had been too obvious.

"You were clever the way you killed him, Symphonie."

"Of course I was clever. I had to wait until Stanley went away for a little while. He is the one who watches me every minute. I got a drink. And then I took the stand so I could put my drink over in the grass by the diving platform. As I went by Uncle Phil I pushed his glasses

down with the point and leaned hard. It slid in like butter. Just like butter—" She looked down at Mary Ellen, her lips drawn back.

"Symphonie!" I said sharply. "Was that the only reason?"

She turned her face slowly back to me. For a moment she looked bewildered. "No, there was something else. Oh, I remember. He said that unless I went away with him, he would do something that I didn't understand. It was something that would make mommy sick. I didn't want him to do that. He said that he'd make her feel sick. He made a funny noise with the money, rattling it with his thumb. He said he was waiting for something and when it came we would go. I wanted to scare him away. When he called the village about his shoes, I got on another phone and whispered to scare him so that he'd go away. But he knew I whispered. Afterward he caught me in the upper hall and he hurt me here."

She touched her neck with her free hand.

Sudden contempt hardened her voice. "I wanted Fowler to kill him. I told Fowler all about the money hidden in his room. Then I pretended to Fowler that I shouldn't have told him. But Fowler couldn't do it. Now I want the money and I am going away with Mick in his car and we're never coming back. Because if I come back they'll put me in a home. Uncle Phil knew about me. I tried to choke him and he said I ought to be in a home."

She tilted her head on one side. She said, in querulous accent, "Do I belong in a home? Just because all these things go on inside me and I don't show them. I don't show them that I'm smart. They would have sent me away to school, but they didn't think I was smart. I'm smarter than Mary Ellen. Do you know why?"

"Why?" I asked, my voice hoarse.

Her laugh was as dusty as an unentered

attic, as dry as autumn leaves. "Because I can kill Mary Ellen and she can't kill me. That's why!"

The metal spike was of wrought iron. She held it just below the ridiculous curling metal leaves that were supposed to cup the glass when it was driven down into the earth.

"Give me the money. Right now," Symphonie said.

I reached slowly for the purse. My plan was set. When I put the money into her hand, I would attempt to grab her wrist and yank her away from Mary Ellen. It wasn't a good plan, but I knew as well as I knew that I was living, that Symphonie would no sooner close her hand on the money than she would plunge the crude metal shaft into Mary Ellen's brain. And she could withdraw it quickly enough to impale me before I could get to my feet.

My cold hands closed over the purse. I clicked it open and grasped the wad of currency. In a very calm and casual voice, Mary Ellen said, "Get me a drink of water, Symphonie."

Symphonie stiffened and the metal bar moved upward, away from Mary Ellen's eye. It might have been shock at the casualness of the request. Maybe it set in motion old habit patterns. Whatever it did, it stopped Symphonie in full flight for a moment.

Mary Ellen's hands flashed up and grasped the metal as she twisted to one side. Symphonie drove the bar down, but it plunged, harmless, into the ground.

Mary Ellen screamed with all the power of her lungs. The scream echoed off the house, reverberated from the dusky mountain.

I was on my feet and made a grab for Symphonie. She twisted away and I grabbed the collar of her aqua dress. She plunged against the restraint and there was a tearing sound. I held the dress in my hand.



There was a cry from the house and someone clicked on the floodlights. The pool sprang into brilliance.

Mick Avery, his eyes wide, came running out. Symphonie, her face still contorted ran to him and said, "Kill them! Kill them!"

Mick was less concerned about who he was supposed to kill than he was about the appearance of the demoniac young lady who, crouching like an animal, screamed her orders at him.

Mick put helpless hands up, palm out, and with very obvious distaste and a tinge of horror, he backed away from Symphonie.

All of the fury went out of her. She straightened up and looked at him with placid blankness, her mouth slack, her violet eyes wide.

She turned and walked toward the pool.

Patrick Zik, who had come out in time to see the end of the tableau, came out of his trance quicker than anyone else. He gave a sharp yell and ran toward her. She was partway up the ladder. She kicked back at him viciously, held the iron bars and wrenched her ankle out of his grasp.

Zik wavered and fell heavily. He got up. Symphonie was on the board. She walked out to the end of the board, kicked off her cork soled sandals. They fell with a dry clatter to the tile bottom of the empty pool.

Symphonie stood poised, her back arched, her arms outstretched. She smiled vacantly and absently in the full glare of the floodlights, launched herself out into space. She held the swan dive position as she flashed out of sight below the lip of the pool.

At the sodden sound of her landing, Mary Ellen crumpled silently. I barely had time to catch her. I carried her into the house. . . .

I left three days later. The road stretched out ahead of me as I drove

down out of the hill country. I had the currency in my pocket, along with a note from Dal to the bank to explain that it was all right for me to deposit it in my account. The balance was promised.

As I drove along, I thought of Stanley Haskell. He hadn't been found until morning. He was on his back in the tangled rocks, his palms pressed against the hole over his heart, his vacant eyes staring up at the morning sky.

I thought about Dal and Teena. Fortunately Dal had been available to take the special delivery envelope addressed to Sarjen. In it he had found the document which had cost him so much. It hardly seemed important to him any more. It was what Sarjen had been waiting for, to leave it as a last bitter joke before going off with Symphonie.

He had waited too long.

"They'll be all right," Mary Ellen said. I turned from the road ahead and looked down at her face, at the lines of strain which were so quickly fading away. She smiled up at me.

"Where are they going?" I asked. "Did they tell you?"

"South America for a while. Maybe the Orient. Dal has a lot of strength. He'll hold Teena together." She moved closer to me and asked, "Aren't you excited about your new job?"

"Which one?" I asked blandly.

"I resent being classified as a job," she said.

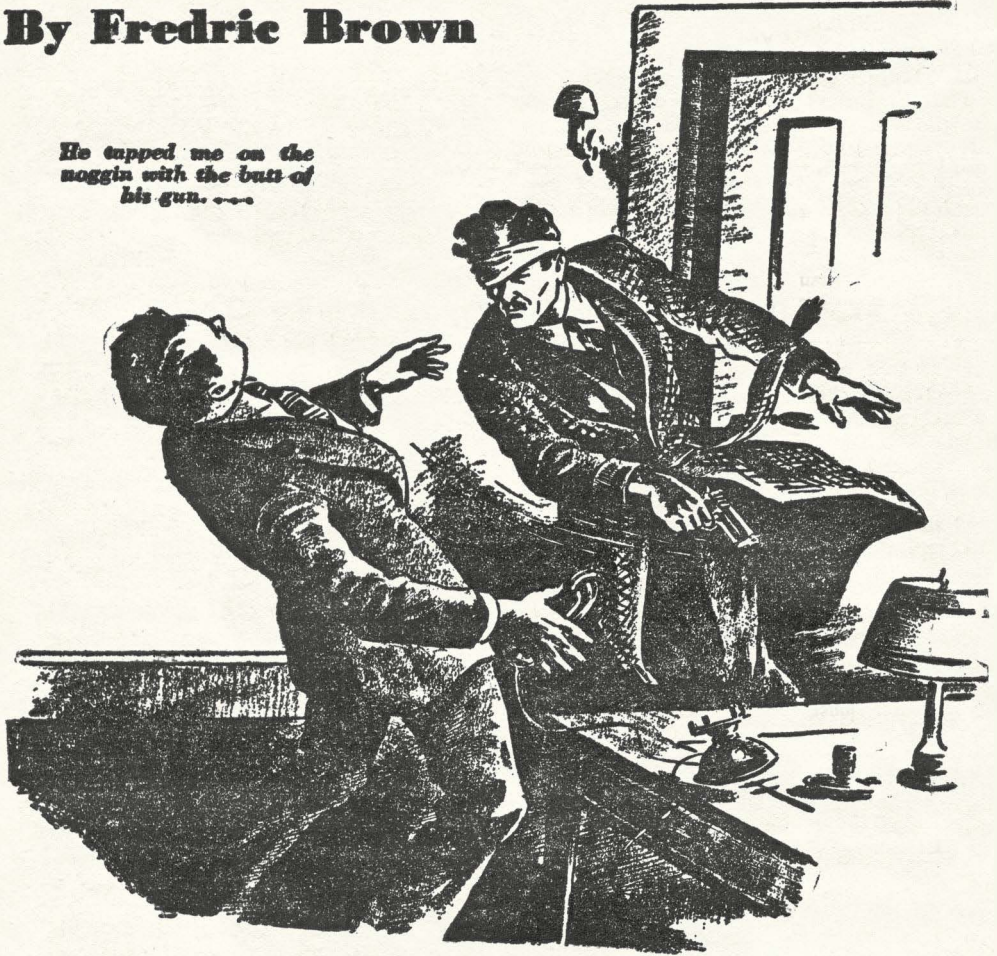
"Oh, you mean the job where between us we guide the massive destinies of the Rolter Oil Interests? All on your power of attorney? That's the job that's only medium exciting."

I took my right hand off the wheel. She held it in both of hers and stared thoughtfully at my knuckles. "You meet the most impossible people in the middle of a nightmare," she said.

It seemed a good time to park for a few minutes. We had a lot to forget.

**By Fredric Brown**

*He tapped me on the  
noggin with the butt of  
his gun. —*



## **THE HOUSE OF FEAR**

**S**HE was just beginning to worry when he phoned at a quarter after six. He said, "Lissa honey, I'm awfully sorry I forgot to call you sooner. Got stuck overtime at the bank."

She should have been angry; dinner

was ready to put on the table ~~right now~~. If he was still downtown it would take him half an hour more to get home and dinner would be spoiled. But there was a note of worry in Carey's voice that kept her from mentioning the spoiled

*Carey was not in his grave—nor was he anywhere out of it . . . and all he left behind him to worry the cops and his wife was—a nonexistent hole in his nonexistent head!*



dinner. She'd not trouble him about it.

Instead she asked, "Is something wrong, Carey?"

"Not a thing. But listen—I'm awfully sorry, but you'd better not hold dinner for me. I've got to drop around to see a man for a few minutes. Right near here and not for long—I'll be home by half past seven and I'll take pot luck. I'll make myself a sandwich out of something in the icebox."

He always called the refrigerator the icebox and it always annoyed her, but this time she didn't call him on it. She asked again, "Carey, is something wrong?"

"Not a thing, honey. The check clearance totals were off thirty cents and two of us had to stay till we found the error. I'd have paid thirty cents myself to get off on time, but you know how banks are."

Lissa knew how banks are. She asked, "You found it?"

"Sure. Somebody read a figure two for a five. If Hardwicke had been here, he'd have been raising merry hell all over the place. Good thing he's on vacation this week."

Lissa understood that. Carey had told her plenty about Wayne Hardwicke, the head teller. If you could imagine an adding machine with the soul of Simon Legree, that was Hardwicke. Yes, if something had gone wrong, she could understand that it was well that it happened during the head teller's vacation.

"You say you'll be home by seven-thirty?"

"Word of honor."

"Then I'll warm something up for you. But I won't be able to watch you eat it—I'll have to leave by seven forty-five. I'll eat now."

"That's right—this is one of your nights at the university. Forgot. Your logic class?" There was amusement in his voice now and for once it made her feel better. Carey approved of her two eve-

ning classes at the U, but he kidded her a lot about the fact that one of the classes this semester was in logic. He said—well, so many amusing things about Lissa versus logic that it was a good thing she loved him so much or she'd have crowned him with a textbook.

She said, "Yes, darling. Logic. Do you have an appointment?"

"Why, no. But it's important that I see him."

"We could eat together if you come home now. You could go back downtown and see him later. Call now and make an appointment."

"N-no, Lissa. Of course, if he's not in when I call there, I'll come right home, and in that case we can eat together and I'll go back downtown when you leave. But I'd rather get this over with right away if he's in his room now."

"But how will I know?"

"If he's not in, I'll call you from the hotel, and tell you that I'll be there within half an hour."

"From what hotel? Listen, Carey, don't be so mysterious. What is this all about? And where are you now—still at the bank?"

"No, I'm at Murphy's—the tavern around the corner from the bank. Stopped in to phone you and have a quickie to celebrate finding that thirty-cent error. And the man I want to see, if he's in, is at the Randall House. You know where that is—two blocks from here. I'll be there and know if he's in his room within ten minutes. If you don't get another call from me within fifteen minutes from now, by—um—six thirty-five, then you go ahead and eat."

"But you'll definitely be home by half past seven, whether I hear from you or not?"

"Promise. And if anything should come up that will keep me later than that, I'll call and let you know right away. And—I'll tell you what it's about when

I get there. It's too complicated to try to explain over the phone. But it's nothing to worry about, honey."

She hadn't been worrying, not really, until then. But he'd said he'd explain and she couldn't dog him about it now, over the phone. She waited for him to say something else, or good-by, and the pause grew into seconds.

Then he said what really scared her. "Uh—Lissa. I want to tell you the name of the man I'm going to see at the Randall House. Will you remember it? It's Hamilton Dexter."

The sudden fright made her speak flippantly. "That's easy, Carey. That book on heraldry I read, remember? 'Dexter' means on the right side of the shield and 'sinister' means on the left—as in 'bar sinister.' All I have to do is think of him as 'the sinister Mr. Dexter' and I won't forget."

He laughed with such genuine amusement that she felt relieved.

"That's good, honey," he said. "The sinister Mr. Dexter. Well, don't worry about him and I'll tell you all about it by seven-thirty at the latest. Unless you've already figured the whole thing out by then, by combining heraldry and logic. Not to mention a spot of intuition."

"Never touch the stuff. But Carey—"

"But Carey nothing. Honey, if we talk all night, I never will get home. There's nothing to worry about and all will be explained with diagrams. 'Bye.'"

The receiver clicked.

SHE put down her own receiver slowly and stood there. For a moment she considered looking up Murphy's in the phone book and calling back. But he'd have left by the time she got them on the phone, and even if he wasn't, what could she say except the good-by that had been cut off by his abrupt hanging up. And that would be silly.

She looked at her wrist watch and saw

that it would be six thirty-seven in the fifteen minutes he'd given as a deadline for calling back if the man he wanted to see—the sinister Mr. Dexter—wasn't in. She decided to give it a little longer than that—if he hadn't phoned by six forty-five, a nice even time to remember, then she'd go ahead and eat alone. She was hungry—or was she? She had been getting hungry ten minutes ago, before he'd phoned.

She'd turned the oven low just before the phone had rung—now she turned it out. It would hold heat until a quarter of eight, if she were eating alone then. Otherwise, if Carey called and said he was coming home right away she'd turn it on again at. . . .

She concentrated on little details of timing to keep from worrying.

But the table was set. Everything was ready. There wasn't a thing to do but go into the living room and sit down.

Sitting down, she tried to read, and couldn't. It wasn't like Carey Blake to forget to call her on the few occasions when he had to work late at the bank; in fact, he'd never in the three years that they'd been married been more than a few minutes late without having let her know. There'd been something on his mind—something more than thirty cents—or he'd have remembered to call her sooner. And then this business of the mysterious Mr. Dexter at the Randall House—why, it just wasn't like Carey at all. Above all, his telling her the name Hamilton Dexter and asking her to remember it, as though—face it—as though possibly something awful might happen to him there and he wanted her to know where he'd been going, so she could tell the police! As though he really thought something might happen.

Her wrist watch said six forty-five. Then Carey wasn't going to call to say he was coming right away—it was eight minutes past the time limit he'd given



for that already. She got up and walked out into the kitchen. She'd have to eat before he came home then, or she'd be late for her class at the university.

She dished some of the meat pie onto her plate, poked at it with her fork and managed to eat a little. She hadn't, obviously, been as hungry as she'd thought. When she'd eaten all she could, she took her plate and silverware to the sink and washed them, mostly to have something to do to help kill the time and keep herself from thinking.

The sinister Mr. Dexter! Why had she ever thought of that association to help her remember it?

Carey's story had better be good to make up for this hour she was going through. She poured herself a cup of coffee and drank it and by that time it was seven-fifteen. She went to the door and looked through the glass panel. He wasn't in sight yet.

But he'd be here in fifteen—no, fourteen minutes now. He'd promised to be home by half past seven. Would the meat pie still be hot by then? She'd better turn on the oven again. She did. And she turned the gas on, just a bead, under the coffeepot.

Then resolutely she went into the living room and turned on the radio. She sat and listened to it. At least she sat. She wouldn't let herself go to the door to look for him until the very dot of seven-thirty. He wasn't in sight yet and she told herself that she wanted a breath of fresh air, so she went out on the porch and then down to the sidewalk and looked in the direction from which he'd be walking from the car line. He wasn't in sight.

If she stayed there and watched for five minutes, surely he'd come. But then she realized that the phone might ring and she wouldn't hear it, so she hurried back into the house.

And then it was a quarter to eight, the time he knew she had to leave the

house if she were going to get to her logic class in time. Not that she was worrying now about her class, but it wasn't like Carey to be fifteen minutes late when he knew she had an appointment. Especially in a case like this when he must know, if he had any sense at all, that she'd be worrying about him, after the things he'd said over the phone.

She went out to the sidewalk again, leaving the front door open so she'd hear the phone if it rang. She peered down the dark street—he wasn't coming. No one was coming at first. Then, at the next corner but one, a block and a half away, someone turned the corner Carey would be turning. She watched until the man came near enough for her to see it wasn't Carey, that he didn't look anything like Carey. And still she watched until he turned into a house a quarter of a block away and the sidewalk was empty again for as far as she could see.

She went in, shivering from the cool air. She shut the door and immediately turned to look through the glass pane, which she knew perfectly well was ridiculous—if he was on his way home from the car line he must be a block and a half away or she'd have seen him from the sidewalk in front.

It was eight o'clock.

She went to the phone table and took out the phone book from the shelf under it. She looked up the number of the Randall House in the yellow section under hotels and called the number. It rang what seemed to be an interminable time before the voice of the hotel's switchboard girl said, "Randall House."

"Do you have a Hamilton Dexter registered there?" she asked, and then wondered why she'd asked that. Did she disbelieve Carey? Ridiculous—he never lied to her about anything important. She continued quickly, "Will you ring his room, please?"

"One moment, ma'am."

The moment stretched interminably. Lissa wondered if the girl were looking up the number, ringing the room, or merely powdering her nose. She couldn't hear any number being rung but she knew that all hotel switchboards weren't equipped so one could hear the ringing of the room phone.

Then the switchboard girl's voice said, "One moment, please," as though to let her know that she was not completely forgotten.

"Are you ringing the room?" she asked, but there was no answer although the line was still live. She hadn't been cut off. She waited, fidgeting. What must have been minutes went by.

**A**ND then at last there was a voice on the phone, a masculine voice. It said, "Hello?"

She asked, "Is this Mr. Hamilton Dexter?"

"Yes."

"Is Carey Blake still there in your room, and, if so, may I speak to him? This is Mrs. Blake speaking."

"He is not here now, Mrs. Blake. You say he intended to come here?"

"Yes. Didn't he?"

"Concerning what, Mrs. Blake?"

"I don't know—he didn't tell me. He just told me he was going to see you on his way home, and he's late, very late. Was he there?"

"He didn't tell you what he wanted—why he was coming?"

"No. Was he there? Do you know where he is?"

There was a slight pause. Then the voice on the phone said, "I'm sorry, Mrs. Blake—this is not Mr. Dexter speaking. This is the police—Lieutenant O'Hara speaking. But please don't hang up, Mrs. Blake, it would only waste time. Your call was traced before you were connected with the room here. We know your phone number and your address—

and that you gave the right name to match them. Will you please describe your husband?"

Hanging up was the last thing on earth she'd have thought of. She was gripping the phone as though it might try to get away from her.

"What's happened?" she demanded. "Is Carey there? Is he all right?"

He spoke as though measuring his words. "As far as we know, Mrs. Blake, nothing has happened to your husband. He is not here. Tell me, does he fit this description—five feet nine, medium build, about thirty, dark or fairly dark hair, wearing dark suit, grey hat?"

"Why—that's close. He's five feet ten and he's thirty-three, but yes, he wore a dark suit and a grey hat today. You've seen him then?"

"Not I, Mrs. Blake. But that's the description the hotel employes give of a man who did call on Mr. Dexter at about half past six. So if your husband fits that description and told you he was coming here, that would have been him. Does the time fit?"

"Yes. He phoned me at a quarter after six and said he'd just left the bank and—"

"Which bank, Mrs. Blake?"

"Merchants and Farmers—he's assistant teller there. He usually gets off at five-thirty but tonight he phoned me at a quarter after six and said he'd just left, would be late getting home because he had to stop and see a Mr. Hamilton Dexter at the Randall House, and he said he was going there right away, so half past six would have been the time he'd get there, within a few minutes. What has happened? Who is Mr. Dexter, and why are you in his room?"

"Mr. Dexter has been—injured. He has been taken to the hospital. We don't know who he is yet, except that he's been a guest here for a few days. About your husband, Mrs. Blake. Is he—"

The doorbell pealed and, torn between



listening to what the police lieutenant was saying and wanting to run and answer the door, Lissa did neither and missed the last part of his question. She said frantically, "The doorbell's ringing. Will you hold the line? Maybe it's Carey now." The minute she'd said that, she realized how absurd it was—Carey wouldn't ring the bell.

The voice on the phone said, "That'll be the squad car boys. We sent two of them out as soon as we traced your call. Yes, I'll hold the line while you let them in—and then put one of them on the phone."

She put the receiver down on the telephone table and ran to the door. A big man in blue serge was standing there. At the curb was a car that could have been a squad car, but no one was in it.

"Police, ma'am," the big man said. "You're Mrs. Carey Blake?"

"Yes. Lieutenant—uh—O'Hara is on the phone and wants to talk to you. But he said he was sending two men in a squad car."

He stepped in and had started for the phone, which was in sight from the hallway. Over his shoulder he said, "Pete's out in back. 'Scuse me."

He picked up the phone and said, "Yeah, O'Hara. This is Willis."

She ran to the back door and opened it. A tall man in a brown suit was looking through the window of the garage. She called out, "You might as well come in, officer. My husband isn't here, so he won't be sneaking out the back way."

He turned, grinning a bit sheepishly. As he came up the steps he said, "Your garage is empty. Does your husband have the car with him?"

"No. It's being repaired at a garage. A burned-out bearing."

"What garage?"

"The Acme, on Center Street."

The man in serge who had called himself Willis called out, "He wants to talk

to you again, lady—I mean, Mrs. Blake."

But the man in brown was walking ahead of her and got there first. He said, "Let me talk to him a second first, Mrs. Blake." He picked up the phone and said, "This is Pete, Lieutenant. Listen, his car isn't in his garage but his wife says it's being repaired at the Acme on Center Street. We ought to check that. He could've got it out again, even if she doesn't know about it. Want me to call 'em or do you want to?"

He listened a moment and then said, "Okay. Here she is," and held out the receiver to Lissa.

She said, "Hello" into the phone and the lieutenant's voice said, "I'd like to talk to you, Mrs. Blake—in person, that is. Is it possible for you to come here? I'd rather stay here at the middle of things, but I can come out there if you'd rather."

"Why, I'd be glad to come down, but what if Carey should come home or phone while I'm gone?"

"You needn't worry about missing him. One of the boys is staying there anyway, in case your husband does come home or phone. If he does, he'll tell your husband where you are and let me know right away. The other one will drive you down here to the Randall House."

She said, "All right, I'll come down. Shall I put one of the squad car men back on the line?"

"No, they know what to do. Just tell Willis you're ready to come down here. Well, I'll be seeing you in a few minutes, then."

And it was only a few minutes—eight minutes, to be exact—for a trip that took half an hour by streetcar or at least fifteen in Carey's car with Carey driving—and Carey wasn't a slow driver. But Carey didn't have a siren. Somehow the siren helped Lissa, inside. Possibly it did her screaming for her.

And Lieutenant O'Hara looked reas-

uring. He looked solid and stolid, but not stupid. He looked very much like an uncle of hers who, Lissa had always thought, was the smartest member of her family, even though he'd never amounted to much.

**I**T WAS a medium-sized hotel room, well furnished and with a private bath, but not swanky. It was about a five-dollar-a-day room, Lissa guessed. O'Hara stood in the middle of it like a slowly revolving column. He'd put her in a comfortable chair in one corner. The squad car man named Willis stood leaning against the closed door, waiting for orders. But the lieutenant didn't give him any.

He quit turning and looked at Lissa. He asked her, "You've told me all you know about this, Mrs. Blake? Everything that might possibly have a bearing on where your husband is?"

Her hands clenched tightly. "I know he's—he's not all right wherever he is, or he'd have let me know. But yes, I've told you everything he said to me over the phone—every word."

"And he hasn't acted unusual at any time recently?"

"No. Listen, Lieutenant, won't you tell me the whole story—the whole thing? I've got a right to know. I'm trying to help you and I don't even know what I'm helping with. And I'm not dumb. I'm—" She almost backed out of saying it, but she didn't—"I'm studying logic. Let me try to apply it."

He smiled—she'd thought he would. But he said, "All right, Mrs. Blake. I'll tell you what little I know, and it's very little. And not because I expect you to pull any rabbits out of any hats, but because something in connection with it may strike a chord and make you remember something you've forgotten. If so, will you stop me, and tell me?"

"Of course."

"Okay, then. This man Dexter, Hamilton Dexter, registered here four days ago. Signed the register as Hamilton Dexter, Chicago. We don't find any Hamilton Dexter listed in the Chicago phone book or directory, though, and he didn't give a street address when he signed. He's been around here three days, in and out, but nobody at the hotel knows what his business is, or anything about him."

"Hasn't he any papers?"

"No, no papers that we've found. Either on him or in the room. And here's the funny part, Mrs. Blake. He's in disguise."

"What?"

"In disguise. He's been wearing a false mustache—I thought they went out with Charlie Chaplin—and a big bandage around his head, over one eye, as though he'd had an eye operation. When they got him to the hospital to treat his fractured skull they found there's nothing wrong under the bandage. And there are no laundry labels in his linens—not because they've been taken out, but because they're all new and haven't been laundered yet. And there just isn't a doggone thing to help us identify him or tell us anything about him. He just appeared out of a void. He could be anybody from anywhere. He could be your husband, for that matter. Has he been away from home much in the last few days?"

"Not except working hours. He leaves at nine in the morning and gets home at six at night. Let's see—no, for the last three days he hasn't been away a minute otherwise. Yesterday evening we stayed home together—the two evenings before that we went somewhere, but together."

O'Hara shook his head. "That's out, then. This Dexter has been here most of the time. Anyway, he's slept here."

Lissa Blake forced her hands to unclench themselves. She said, "I'm wor-

ried about Mr. Dexter, Lieutenant. I'm worrying about what happened to my husband. What happened tonight?"

He said, "Your husband, or a man answering his description, asked for Mr. Dexter at the desk at about half past six o'clock, or within a few minutes of that. The desk clerk doesn't remember exactly. Desk clerk told the switchboard girl to ring six-o-eight. She did, and Dexter answered and she put the call on the phone at the desk. Desk clerk told your husband to pick up the phone and he did and said, 'Mr. Dexter?' and that was all of the conversation the clerk heard because somebody else came up to the desk and asked about a room.

"But whatever was said, it was a short conversation and then your husband put down the phone and walked over to the elevator. The elevator boy remembers letting him off on the sixth floor, so there isn't any reasonable doubt that he went to Dexter's room, six-o-eight. Right?"

Lissa Blake didn't say anything, but apparently he hadn't expected her to.

He said, "So at six-forty—and we've got the time accurate on this, although we don't know whether it was five or ten minutes after your husband took the elevator to six—the light for six-o-eight flashes on the switchboard. Girl plugs it in and a voice says, 'Send the police to six-o-eight.'"

He wagged a finger at her. "And don't ask whose voice it was, because the girl didn't know. She says she'd know the voice if she heard it again, because it startled her. But the call she'd put in to six-o-eight a few minutes before was the first call she remembers that had been made to or from his room, and she didn't notice or remember the voice at all. She hears thousands of voices a day.

"She didn't know what to do. She'd worked for the hotel, I'd guess, just long enough to know how touchy hotels are about matters concerning the police, so

she left her switchboard and went over to the desk clerk and told him what had been said. The manager wasn't in at the time, or she'd have called him.

"The desk clerk told her to go ahead and call the police and ask them to send a policeman around, but if they asked why, she didn't know and wasn't to give the room number or anything. And when she'd done that she should call six-o-eight and connect it with the desk phone and he'd try to find out what the matter was and maybe, when the policemen got there, they could tell him it was a mistake. I'm telling you this in a lot of detail, Mrs. Blake, because I'm thinking it out myself as I tell it."

Lissa said, "Please go on."

"Well, she called the police and told them, and then she called six-o-eight back but didn't get an answer. That worried the desk clerk and he rang for the bell captain and sent him up. The bell captain called down in a few minutes—from the hall phone—and said there was a light on in the room but no one answered and the door was locked and what should he do?

"The desk clerk told him to stay there and wait and keep an eye on the door, and decided he might as well wait till the police got there. The switchboard girl hadn't made it an emergency call because nobody had told her it was an emergency, and it was fifteen minutes before a policeman came in. The desk clerk told him what the score was, took the ring of pass keys and went up in the elevator with the policeman. When they got to six, the bell captain told them no one had come in or out and nothing had happened. The clerk sent the bell captain down to keep an eye on the desk and he and the policeman knocked and then used the key. The door was bolted on the inside, but once the main lock was unlocked, they could break the door open without breaking it down. If you



look at it there, you'll see the hasp of the bolt is pulled off. They don't make those inside bolts too strong just for that reason—so if there's an emergency they can get in without breaking the door down.

"Anyway, they broke in and found Dexter lying on the bed. There was a fresh wound on his head and blood had run down on the bandage that was around his head and over one eye. He had a maroon dressing gown on over shirt sleeves. He was unconscious—at first they thought he was dead. The policeman figured it for attempted murder and phoned in for homicide and for the ambulance. Yes, I'm from homicide, although strictly speaking it isn't my case unless Dexter dies. But I was sitting around the station doing nothing anyway." He took a deep breath. "And that's all."

**“Y**OU think my husband did it? Hit him over the head, I mean?"

"Lady, I'm just starting this case—I don't know what to think. But your husband was here at the time it happened, and I'm sure looking for him to get his version of what did happen. And I'd like to know where he is right now. What time did you expect him home?"

"At seven-thirty." Lissa bit her lip. Her wrist watch showed about eight thirty-five. She asked, "Do you suppose he could have phoned home, or got there, by now?"

O'Hara shook his head. "I'd hear the minute anything could happen on that end. Look, Mrs. Blake, I think you're all square on this, no matter what your husband's done, so I don't mind telling you we've even got a tap on your phone by now. If he phones there we'll know where he's phoning from. And by the way, he didn't get your car out of the Acme garage—it's still there. Got any

idea at all where he might possibly be?"

Lissa shook her head listlessly; that was what was so utterly hopeless—she didn't have the faintest idea where Carey might possibly be. Only desperate urgency of some sort, desperate danger, would have kept him from phoning in a case like this. He had his faults, but he wasn't inconsiderate, and he must have known that she'd be worried and wondering, even before seven-thirty.

She thought of something. "How could Ca—I mean, how could whoever attacked Mr. Dexter have got out again if the door was still bolted on the inside when the policeman broke in?"

"No mystery about that." He waved a hand toward one of the two windows. "Fire escape. Leads down to the alley back of the hotel. He'd have to hang and drop the last floor, but that wouldn't be hard. And the window to the escape was wide open when they busted in."

"How—dangerous is Mr. Dexter's condition?"

"Not sure yet. I talked to the hospital again just before you got here. They say it's a fracture and concussion and they don't know how long he'll be unconscious—maybe hours, maybe days. They think, though, that he'll live and that he'll be all right when he does come around, but they're not sure. They say his condition's fair, and you know what that means in a hospital."

"And it was there they found out he was wearing a disguise? No one suspected it for the three days he stayed at the hotel here?"

"That's right. Not that you can blame them. Without taking the bandage off, as they did at the hospital while treating his head wound, you couldn't tell that there was no wound or sore under it. And as for a false mustache, how can you tell it's one unless it falls off—or unless, as it happened, he's getting cleaned up at a hospital?"

Lissa shook her head, as though his question had required an answer. But it was bewilderment rather than negation that she was really expressing. And it was frightening to be so bewildered, when Carey was missing. Where was Carey? What was he doing? Why didn't he get in touch with her?

The lieutenant had picked up the phone and had asked for a number. He got it, but he wasn't saying much. He was mostly listening and she didn't try to follow.

When he put it down he smiled at her. He said, "Talked to headquarters. Pete had just reported in. All quiet on the home front, except for a meat pie you had in the oven. He turned off the oven."

She didn't even answer.

"Want to go home?" he asked her gently.

Lissa said, "I don't know." It didn't matter. It would be awful to go home—it was awful staying here. Where was Carey? At least if she stayed with the lieutenant she'd know anything that transpired a few minutes sooner than if she went home.

She said, "I guess I'd rather stay, if you don't mind."

The phone rang and her heart jumped with the sound.

O'Hara spoke his name into the phone and then listened. He said, "Wha-at?"

Lissa was on her feet. "Carey?" she asked breathlessly. "Is it anything about Carey?"

He shook his head at her and asked the phone, "How much? Do they know?" And then after a minute, "Okay, Inspector. You're taking care of the roads, the railroad station, the airport, all of that? No, he hasn't got a car with him, but he might steal one for a getaway. . . . Yes, I'll do that."

He put the phone back on the hook but didn't get up right away. He sat there looking at Lissa but not seeing her until she spoke.

"What—is it?"

His eyes came to focus on her then. He said, "The bank—it's been looted."

She didn't believe it. "The Merchants and Farmers? Carey's bank? It was robbed?"

"Not robbed," he said. "Not even burglarized. Someone let himself in with a key and knew how to open the vault when he got inside. Took all the money

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in the vault—nobody knows yet how much. Headquarters is trying to get hold of the president or the head teller to find out."

She said, "The president is Mr. Greenough. The head teller is away on vacation this week. That's Mr. Hardwicke."

"They'll find someone. They've got the list of officers."

"Carey would probably—" She started to say that Carey would probably know how much had been in the vault, since he was more or less acting as head teller in Mr. Hardwicke's absence, but she realized how silly it would sound to the lieutenant if she said it.

The police were looking for Carey doubly hard now.

It was perfectly obvious now what Carey had been doing, why he hadn't come home. It was perfectly obvious, but it wasn't true!

The lieutenant sighed and stood up. He said, "Well, I'm not in charge of this any more—the inspector has taken over. And I've got a routine job to do now, a check at the railroad station. I'm afraid I'd better send you home after all."

Home to a house where a tall thin man in a brown suit waited to arrest Carey if he came home—she'd go mad, sitting at home and waiting. "Can't I go to the railroad station with you?"

He hesitated and then said, "Well, I don't suppose it'll matter." He said to Willis, "You stay here, then, till you hear from me or somebody comes to relieve you."

Willis said, "Okay, Lieutenant," and went over and sat down on the bed.

Going down in the elevator O'Hara said, "I shouldn't be taking you along on this, but I know how you must feel, Mrs. Blake. I can see why you don't want to go home anyway."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Just what are you to do at the station?"

"Routine. There's a man there already to watch everybody who gets on a train, but the chief wants me to talk to the ticket agent and the porters and then give a hand on the nine-twenty train. If it's a long one, and it generally is, it'll take two men to watch it. He'd probably try to board it at the last minute without having bought a ticket. And that train's the best bet."

"Why?"

"Because, if he's going by train at all, instead of some other way, it's the first train out he'd be likely to be able to make. The one before the nine-twenty was at seven-thirty. Well, he didn't leave the hotel after attacking Dexter until six forty-five and we don't think he'd have had time to loot the bank and still make that train. But if he doesn't know we're looking for him, he'll try to take the nine-thirty."

L ISSA glanced at her watch as they got into O'Hara's car; it was nine o'clock. He didn't talk as he drove and she was glad of that because she wanted time to think. Not that thinking seemed to get her anywhere; her thoughts went in circles and nothing made any sense at all. The only thing that seemed to make sense—that Carey had attacked Mr. Dexter, then looted the bank, and was now trying to get away, unless he already had—didn't make sense to Lissa because she knew Carey. The police didn't, so it seemed comparatively simple to them.

But if the police were wrong, where was Carey? She forced herself to try to analyze it logically. Logic. Wasn't this a problem that she could apply logic to? She had an edge on the police—she knew that their assumption that things were what they seemed was wrong. She knew Carey wasn't a crook. She could start from there.

But where was Carey?



She thought, *If all other premises are proven false, then the remaining premise, however unlikely it seems, must be true. . . .*

And, through that, there was a glimmer, just a glimmer of an idea in her mind when they pulled into the parking space by the railroad station. But there wasn't time to brighten the glimmer, because O'Hara was walking into the station and she had to walk fast to keep up with him.

There was just one big room, aside from the ticket office, in the station. There were ten or twelve people in the room but none of them was Carey. The quickest glance around showed her that, and then she was following O'Hara over to the ticket window and listening while he asked questions and got answers.

She heard him tell O'Hara that he'd sold only six tickets for the seven-thirty train. Two were to women and none of the four men remotely resembled the description O'Hara gave him. In fact, the ticket agent knew two of the men personally—one of the other two was quite elderly and the other was fat. If Carey Blake had taken the seven-thirty train,

he'd got on without a ticket. And there'd been no trains in or out since then.

She could see the clock through the ticket agent's window. It said ten after nine. Less than three hours ago, she'd just begun to become impatient because Carey was late for dinner.

Three hours! Where was Carey? The little glimmer of an idea began to come back. *If all other premises are proven false, then the remaining premise, however unlikely it seems, must be true. . . .*

But it was so absurd! How could Carey be—

O'Hara was turning from the window. He said, "Nothing there. Well—" His eyes began to rove around the station and her eyes followed his.

The man standing over there by the gum machine, his back to her, looked familiar. Didn't she know him? Of course—it was Mr. Hardwicke, the head teller.

She grabbed O'Hara's arm. "That man—it's Mr. Hardwicke, the head teller who was away on vacation. He must have just come back. Let's tell him—"

And then she remembered that the

*(Continued on page 129)*

Heads he wins, tails she loses. . . .

## Sinner Take All

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Thackeray Hackett's deadly cane started slashing . . .  
when a minked blonde gave Preston a tumble—  
into a homicidal harem.



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*Four grand will buy either mink or murder—but no  
money will buy the right answer to—*

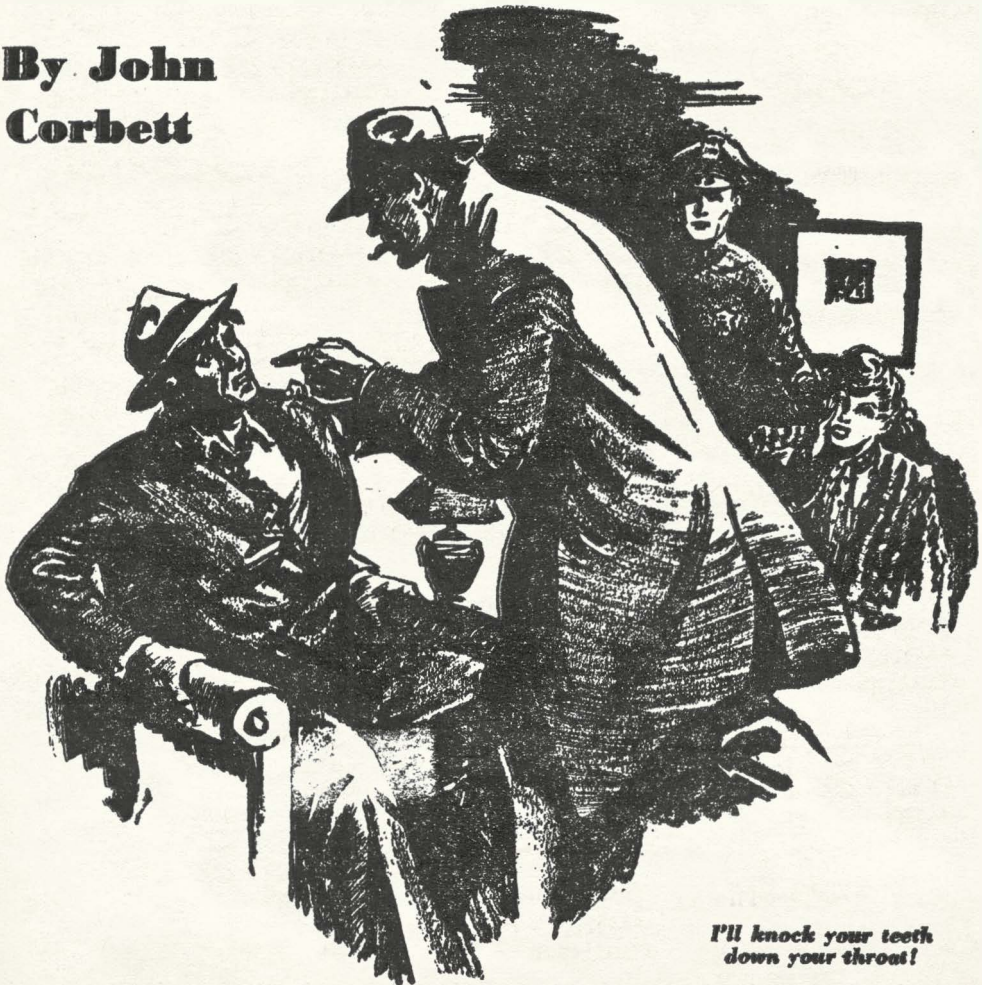
# WHO DIES LAST?

**T**HE five-eleven local out of Times Square was crowded. As usual, Marcia Williams had to stand. A smartly dressed girl in her middle twenties, whose big grey eyes dwarfed the rest of her rather plain face, she rode hanging onto an upright bar, wondering if there were any gentlemen left in the world. If there were, one didn't meet them in the

subway. And one certainly didn't marry them.

At least she hadn't. Her marriage to Jack had been a mistake. She could see that now. Now that it was too late. For all of his drinking and gambling and absolute refusal to accept the responsibilities that went with the privileges of marriage—she was hooked. Her pride wouldn't

**By John  
Corbett**



*I'll knock your teeth  
down your throat!*



allow her to divorce him. Whatever move was made would have to come from him. And Jack was seemingly quite content with the status quo.

Fighting her way out of the subway and up the stairs at 86th Street she walked east toward Central Park West thinking hotly, *Why shouldn't he be? He has one woman to support him and heaven knows how many women to make love to. . . .*

Indignation almost overcame her.

*"Could you let me have fifty, baby. I'll pay it back tomorrow. Word of honor. I've got a sure thing in the fifth at Hialeah. . . ."*

Word of honor. Jack had no more honor than—

Tugging open the outer door of her apartment building, Marcia wondered how many hard-earned fifties she had lost on "sure" things at Hialeah, Belmont, and Santa Anita. Jack was a failure even as a gambler. He couldn't pick the winner in a one-horse race. Of one thing, and one thing only, she was positive. Jack had wheedled his last dollar out of her. She had made that plain during their last turbulent scene. If he wanted money he could get it from that Pat person one of the girls at the agency had seen him with at Toots Shor's!. Marcia burned when she thought of the telling. She had never been so embarrassed.

Mr. Benson, the building superintendent, called something to her as she closed the grille gate of the self-operated elevator but she had already pushed the button for the fifth floor. Besides she didn't want to talk to anyone.

*Happy is the bride the sun shines on. . . .*

Well, the sun had shone on her, and she wasn't happy. Jack wouldn't be home. She knew it. He wouldn't even think of coming home for such a minor matter. She would spend the evening alone listening to the radio and wondering what this Pat person was like. It would be one hell of a first anniversary.

She had been right about Jack's not being home. He seldom came home now, even to change his clothes. Perhaps Pat had bought him a new wardrobe. Perhaps he was handing her the same line.

*"Could you let me have fifty, baby? I'll pay it back tomorrow, honor bright. . . ."*

THE apartment was small—a living room, bedroom, and kitchen, tastefully and expensively furnished. She had paid for everything in it. The only thing Jack had ever contributed to their marriage was himself.

Putting her coat on a hanger in the hall closet she went directly to the kitchen to prepare her lonely meal. There were chops and a steak in the refrigerator, but she suddenly wasn't hungry. She should have eaten out, she decided. But first she would mix a martini. For all of Jack's kidding about being able to take a girl out of the country but not the country out of the girl she still couldn't see any sense in paying eighty cents for a drink she could mix for fifteen at home.

She was still shaking the mixture without enthusiasm when the door bell chimed. It was Mr. Benson, carrying a large box tied with wide white satin ribbon.

"I tried to get you downstairs, Mrs. Williams," he explained. "This came for you about two hours ago."

Marcia had to set the cocktail shaker on a chair to take the box.

Mr. Benson's tone was hopeful as he eyed the frosted shaker. "Having a little drink, eh?"

"Yes," Marcia, smiled sweetly. "Thank you so much, Mr. Benson."

She closed the door in his face. Let the old goat buy his own drinks. She was through with all men for all time.

Alone, she stared at the swank label on the box. She had an account at Mace Phillips. She bought quite a few of her clothes there, but she hadn't purchased anything recently, nothing that she re-



called. Still, the box was addressed to her—Mrs. Jack Williams, Park Apartments, Central Park West.

Her eyes puzzled, she untied the ribbon. The contents of the box was mink, and beautiful. She ran her fingers over the fur, then, taking it out of the box, she held it up. She had never seen a more beautiful mink coat. The store had made a mistake, of course. The coat was for some other Mrs. Williams and some stupid clerk had confused the addresses.

She wet her lips with the tip of her tongue. Or had the store made a mistake? Jack was registered on the account. He had made small purchases there before: once a nightgown for her birthday, once a set of matched golf clubs for himself.

She slipped her arms into the sleeves of the coat. The soft silk of the exquisite lining clung to her like a whisper. It was beautiful, exotic, lovely. All her life she'd wanted a coat like it. A faint smile replaced her frown as she studied her reflection in the bedroom mirror. There had been no mistake. She knew now what had happened. It was typical of Jack. He hadn't forgotten. He had purchased the coat both as a peace offering and as an anniversary present. The fact that she would have to pay for it would never enter his mind. He would be along in a moment full of smiles and fresh resolves and new long shots that couldn't help but pay for the coat.

She wouldn't keep it, of course. It was far too expensive for a hundred and fifty dollar a week copywriter. It was entirely out of her class. Besides, she'd been saving her money. It was nice, though, to know he had remembered. She plunged her hands into the deep side pockets, reveling in the feel of the fur, and felt the envelope.

It was a plain gift envelope with a stiff card inside. Opening it, she read:

Dear Pat:

The old girl has about reached the end

of her rope as far as I am concerned. It's the old heave-ho for Jackie. So here's one last gift on the house. I'm having it charged to her account but sent directly to you. Now is that smart, or not? I ask you.

Until tonight, love and kisses.

Jack

Marcia wondered why she didn't faint. It was too monstrous; such a thing couldn't happen to her. She looked at her watch. It was fifteen minutes of six. The store would be closed but Mr. Carson, the credit man, might still be at his desk. Her ears were burning, as, still wearing the coat, she dialed Mace Phillips' number.

Carson was just leaving. "Why, yes, Mrs. Williams," he said in answer to her question. "The sales girl who brought up the charge slip for my okay did have another address to which the coat was to be sent, but, it being a four thousand dollar purchase, I took the liberty of phoning your building superintendent—" he laughed—"And on learning you hadn't moved, I assumed Mr. Williams had made a mistake in giving the address as the salesgirl said he had been celebrating your first anniversary rather strenuously. I hope I did the right thing."

Marcia assured him he had. "Now, tell me just one more thing, Mr. Carson. What 'mistaken address' did Mr. Williams give the sales girl?"

Carson asked her to wait just a moment. "Why, the address the girl had on her slip," he said as he came back on the phone, "was Mrs. J. Williams, Apartment six, twenty-three Gay Lane. And that's way down in the Village somewhere. Off Grove Street, I believe."

Marcia thanked him and hung up. Her temper, slow in forming, was beginning to spread through her body until she felt as if she were on fire. She was both ashamed and humiliated. *The old girl has about reached the end of her rope. . . .* Jack had never loved her. All she had ever meant to him was an easy touch, a source of supply. *One last gift on the house. . . .*

That meant there had been others. Heaven knew how much she owed Mace Phillips, or a dozen other stores at which she had accounts for business reasons.

The frosted cocktail shaker looked cool and inviting. She had made too much, as usual. It wouldn't go into the little cocktail glass. She strained what was left into a water glass and drank it. It tasted good going down, but failed to cool her. Instead it added more fuel to the steadily growing fire inside her.

She wanted to hurt someone, hurt them as she had been hurt.

Getting up from the arm of the sofa she looked in the bed table drawer for the one gift Jack had purchased with his own money, that time the whole neighborhood had been alarmed over a reported apartment prowler. The small, .25 caliber, silver-barreled gun looked like a toy, but it fitted easily inside her handbag. Jack for all his big talk was a coward. She would turn his one gift on him and force him to tell her the truth. That would be poetic justice. The triple gin in the oversized martini was catching up with her. She might even pull the trigger. The nicest thing she could think of right now would be Jack Williams with a little round hole through his head.

Mr. Benson was in the lobby. "Going out, eh?"

Marcia nodded as she passed him. She was afraid to open her mouth for fear her anger would spill over before she could vent it on Jack.

"Your new coat looks lovely," he called after her, immediately adding, in case Mrs. Benson might be listening, "Boy—I sure wish I could afford to buy one like that for my wife."

Marcia hadn't realized she was still wearing the coat. She thought of returning to her apartment and then thought better of it. What difference did it make? What difference did anything make?

From force of habit she rode the sub-

way to Sheridan Square. A light rain was falling as she emerged from the kiosk. She hailed a cab to protect the coat. Purchased for another woman or not, it was a lovely thing. She wished she could keep it.

She knew the building as soon as the cab had stopped in front of it. It was an old cold-water tenement that had been remodeled into studio apartments with the inevitable bistro in the basement. Jack had once taken her to a party in the building, an affair of long-haired men and short-haired women who had talked a language she hadn't understood. The screwball fringe, Jack had called them. But the green-eyed red-haired girl who had thrown the party had been anything but a screwball. Marcia tried to remember the girl's name and couldn't. All she could recall about her was that she'd had red hair and green eyes, had been about her own size, and had talked intelligently about something. She'd only been married a week and Jack had filled her life to the exclusion of everything else. It had been Jack this and Jack that until she had driven her friends almost crazy. They still kidded her at the agency about the fluffs she had made in her copy during those first few weeks.

Marcia wondered if the red-haired girl were Pat. Surely not even Jack would have the nerve to do that to her.

Sucking a well-chewed toothpick, the cab driver slid back the glass partition. "Not that it's any of my business, you understand. It's your dough, lady. But do you just want to sit here and wait out the rain, or what?"

Marcia paid him the forty cents on the meter and added a dime for a tip. Then she walked down the steps of the bistro. She was coldly angry now. It showed in her slightly narrowed eyes. She wanted to know a little more about the other Mrs. Williams before she confronted her and Jack.

A thin-faced Italian woman sitting back

of the cash register eyed Marcia's mink coat with open approval and admiration. This truly must be a great lady. Only the very good or the very good at being bad could afford to wear such a coat.

"*Si, signora?*" she beamed.

To save time Marcia opened her purse and laid a five dollar bill on the glass. "Pardon me for being so blunt about it. But I wish you would take this in exchange for the answer to a few questions. Do you know the Mrs. Williams who lives in this building?"

"*Si, signora!*"

"Then this," Marcia said, "is what I would like to know."

The Italian woman tucked the bill in the bodice of her dress and gladly answered Marcia's questions. Mr. Williams evidently traveled a lot, but had been home quite a bit the last few months.

Marcia thanked her and left the restaurant. She intended to have the dubious pleasure of speaking to Mr. and Mrs. Williams. With every step her anger mounted. It was difficult even to breathe. To think that Jack, that any man, could have done this to her!

Apartment 2 was at the head of the stairs. Apartment 6 was down the hall, in the rear of the building. Marcia moved blindly down the hall. She felt sick and ashamed. All of these months she had been living in a fool's paradise. And both of them had been living off her. Jack had even dared bring her here to show the red-haired girl the simple little copywriter he was taking for a ride. Both of them were vermin, scum. The world would be better off without their kind.

Lifting her gloved hand she rapped on the door just below the numeral six.

"See?" Jack called from a distance. "I told you it couldn't miss, Pat. There's your coat now."

A woman's voice said, "Well, don't just stand there like a fool. Open the door and get it."

"Oh—too lazy even to open the door, eh?"

Marcia felt the small veins in her temple begin to pound. Her heart was knocking against her ribs. It was even more difficult to breathe. She had to lean against the outer door jamb for support. She hoped she didn't faint out of sheer anger before she told both of them off. Lifting her hand she rapped again.

"Oh—all right," the woman's voice said, "just a moment."

High heels clicked across a bare floor and the door opened.

It was the same red-haired girl who had thrown the studio party to which Jack had taken her. It was the same studio apartment, with a small entrance hall and a fairly large living room hung with grotesque, arty pictures. The girl was as bad as the pictures. She was wearing one of those house dresses.

Backing a few steps instinctively the red-haired girl chewed at her lower lip. "Oh, it's you."

In the heavy silence that followed, Marcia walked into the small entrance hall, closed the door and leaned against it. Her heart was still hammering, but she couldn't—she wouldn't faint.

From a side room opening off the hall, Jack called, "What's the matter?"

The red-haired girl laughed shrilly. "Perhaps you'd better come see for yourself," she said with forced gaiety, "Yes. Do come see who just walked in!"

Jack's face, swimming in a haze of sudden and unwanted tears, appeared in the doorway of the room to Marcia's right. "Well, I'll be damned," he breathed.

Marcia remembered fumbling in her purse for a handkerchief. Then everything went black. . . .

**T**HE men were kind, very kind, especially the big homely young man in plain clothes, who would not take off his hat. But all of them knew their jobs.



And all of them were quite thorough.

Sitting as quiet as a mouse on the couch in the studio living room, the mink coat that had brought all this about lying in a crumpled heap on the floor, the knuckles of her bare right hand pressed to her mouth to keep from screaming, Marcia refused to allow herself to think about the red-haired girl. The red-haired girl was dead. And she had killed her.

One of the men who had come after the first group of men sat on the couch beside her, took her hand gently but firmly from her mouth, and smeared it with a liquid paraffin-like substance which quickly became glove. He peeled it off, wrong side out, and carried it over to the small portable work table filled with vials, tubes and trays which had been set up in one corner of the room.

"Positive paraffin," he called a moment later.

Marcia asked the homely young man what that meant.

"That you fired a gun very recently," Lieutenant Bob Becker told her.

"Oh," Marcia said. "I see."

She could have told them that. The gun had been in her hand when she had come to on the floor with Jack out in the hall screaming, like the coward he was, for the police. *I should have shot him, too.* Marcia thought. *I wonder why I didn't.*

She looked across the room at Jack. He was sitting in a chair not far from the blanket-covered object on the floor, his face buried in his hands. He felt her eyes on him and looked up.

Marcia wondered how she could ever have thought that he was handsome, how she could have been so madly in love with him. His eyes were shifty. His chin receded. He looked like what he was—a weakling. From the way the detectives in the room treated him she imagined they had another word for a man who lived off the earnings of a woman.

An older man, who seemed to be in

charge, said, "I suppose we'd better be at it." He didn't seem pleased by the prospect, whatever he meant by "at it." Pulling up a chair he sat straddling it, facing Marcia. "How do you feel, Marcia?"

Marcia appreciated his not using the title Mrs. Williams.

"Like screaming," she admitted.

"Yeah. Sure. I know," he said. "But do you think you could make a statement?"

Marcia said she thought she could and one of the men took a notebook from his pocket and squatted down beside the couch.

Giving Inspector Cassidy a dirty look, Lieutenant Becker warned her, "Remember now, Marcia. Anything you say can and will be used against you."

"Please, Bob," the inspector reproached him. "Believe me—I'm not trying to railroad the girl."

"I know that," Becker admitted. "But it makes me sick to my stomach to see a nice kid like her in a jam like this over a louse like Williams. And she's in a jam. A bad one. Her bringing the gun from her apartment and stopping in the spaghetti joint downstairs to get the lay of the land makes this premeditated murder."

Her eyes round, Marcia said, "I can be sent to the electric chair for that, can't I?"

Bob Becker said, "Dammit," and patted at his forehead with his handkerchief.

Inspector Cassidy's voice was gentle. "Let's start at the beginning, Marcia. You married Williams exactly one year ago today. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"And where did you spend your honeymoon?"

"Right here in New York. In my apartment. Jack said he was temporarily short of funds. I wasn't to realize for some months it was a chronic condition."

"At any time during this past year did he support or attempt to support you?"

"No."

"Did he give you any presents?"

Marcia gave him all credit due. "Jack did buy the gun."

Lieutenant Becker's eyes lighted in interest. "Oh, he bought the gun, eh?"

"Yes." Marcia explained. "That was during that prowler scare about four months ago."

The light faded from Becker's eyes. "I see."

Inspector Cassidy resumed his questioning. "How long was he good to you, Marcia?"

"Two, possibly three months. Then, having borrowed practically all that I had in the bank, he began to stay away—sometimes for weeks at a time. The last eight months I scarcely saw him. The few times he did come to the apartment, it was to change his clothes and borrow a few dollars." Her smile was wry. "Looking back now I can see his visits usually coincided with payday."

"Where do you work, Marcia?"

"Burston, Dunman, and Phillips. I'm a copywriter."

"And what is your salary?"

"Well, my take home pay is one hundred and fifty dollars a week."

Two dozen eyebrows lifted in respect. It was more than any officer in the room, with the possible exception of Inspector Cassidy, was making.

Cassidy said, "Now coming down to the present, Marcia. This was, you thought, your first wedding anniversary." He indicated the coat on the floor. "That coat was delivered to your apartment. You thought at first it was a present for you from your husband." He held up the note she had given him earlier. "But on finding this note in a pocket and calling Mace Phillips you learned that Williams had asked that it be sent to this address. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Suddenly realizing the true state of

affairs—that Williams was using your money to make expensive presents to another woman, who also used your name—you took this gun—" he showed her the gun—"from a bed table and brought it here with you."

Her voice small, Marcia said, "Yes, sir."

"Then what happened?"

Marcia admitted, "I don't exactly know, Inspector. I remember rapping on the door. The girl I knew as Pat opened it. I remember how shocked she looked to see me. Then she called to Jack to come and see who had just walked in. I remember seeing his face in the doorway of the room to the right of the hall door." She buried her face in her hands and began to cry. "Then everything went black. When I came to myself again I was lying on the floor with the gun in my hand, the red-haired girl was dead and Jack was out in the hall screaming for the police."

One of the detectives said, "Somebody better tip her lawyer not to use that 'everything went black' gag. Juries are up to here with it."

Marcia looked up at him through her tears. "But it's true! Everything did go black. It was as if someone had turned all the lights out—and it hurt my head. I don't remember a thing after that until I came to on the floor."

Bob Becker asked, "Anyone check on elapsed time?"

One of his squad said he had. "The guy and his wife in the next apartment, a Mr. and Mrs. Southworth, both swear not more than two seconds elapsed between the time they heard the shots and the time Williams began to yell copper."

Becker crossed the room to Williams. "Where's the master switch that pulls all the lights in this apartment?"

A smirk on his face, the blond man told him, "There isn't any, copper. Look. Why drag this out? I'm a heel. I admit it. Book me for it if you want to, but

that's all you've got to charge me with."

"There's the coat."

"Don't make me laugh. I'm registered on the account. Besides, it was delivered to Marcia."

"And Marcia killed Pat."

The blond man shuddered. "Brother, and how she killed her. She was crying a little see? And when she reached into her purse I thought she was going for a handkerchief, but she comes up with that damn twenty-five. She gets Pat with her first shot." He swallowed hard. "Then she flips a couple at me. Fortunately they go wild."

One of the tech men said, "His story stands up, Bob. We dug two slugs out of the plaster in the hall."

Williams continued, "I find out later that Marcia blacks out after she flips those last two. But at the time I didn't stick around to see what happened. I made a bolt for the door and yelled copper." The blond man smirked. "You're kinda nuts about the kid yourself, aren't you, Lieutenant? So nuts you'd pin this on me if you could."

Becker knocked him off the chair. "When we pull out of here one of you fellows drag this vermin along with us."

Marcia regarded the big youth through her tears. Lieutenant Becker was nice. Against the normalcy of the thought, she realized the enormity of her offense for the first time. She, Marcia Williams, had killed a woman. More, the law would say that she had planned the crime. Neither the state attorney's office nor the judge or jury would believe that everything had blacked out. They would think she was just making that up to keep from being sentenced to die in the electric chair.

She was suddenly cold. Her voice small, she said, "I—I wonder if I might have my coat."

Inspector Cassidy said, "Of course." He got up from the chair he was straddling and put it back against the wall.

"Okay. Get your things together, fellows. We've done all we can here. We'll prepare a statement for her to sign after we get back to the bureau."

The technical men began to pack their equipment. Two uniformed officers put the blanket-covered body on a stretcher and carried it from the apartment. Back in his chair again, a cigarette dangling from his lips, Williams watched them without emotion.

Lieutenant Becker picked the mink coat from the floor and settled it gently around Marcia's shoulders. "I could wish, kid," he told her, "the minks that are in that coat never had been born."

Her fear a vicious thing now, tearing at her vitals, Marcia nodded agreement. "So could I."

She was cold, very cold. She attempted to draw the coat closer around her body and cold, wet, matted fur touched her neck. She felt of the skin, fearful at first it was blood. It wasn't. When she examined her hand it was only wet and muddy.

Lieutenant Becker looked at her hand. "Where did that come from?"

She said, "The neck of my coat."

His eyes thoughtful he wiped the palm of her hand with his handkerchief and asked if she had fallen down enroute between the two apartments.

Marcia said, "Of course not. I rode down in the subway as far as Sheridan Square. And as it was raining when I came up I took a cab from the subway to here so I wouldn't get the coat wet and give Mace Phillips a chance to refuse to take it back."

"Oh," Becker said. "I see." He seemed suddenly very pleased about something. Removing the mink coat from Marcia's shoulders he substituted his own topcoat for it and handed the mink coat to one of the tech men. "Scrape some of that mud off the collar and put it in a tube for me, Bill," he directed.

Cassidy wanted to know, "What's the



big idea, Bob? Have you got something?"

"I'm not quite certain, Inspector," Lieutenant Becker admitted. "But I hope to be in a few minutes."

Crossing the room, he glanced at Jack Williams' shoes, then, crawling through the rear window, clattered down the fire escape leading to a small and refuse-littered yard.

Williams sucked hard at his cigarette. "That guy," he said, "is nuts."

"If he's nuts, then it's a new thing with him," Cassidy said. His shrewd gray eyes narrowed slightly. "What are you sweating so for, chum?"

Williams lighted a cigarette from the butt of the one he was smoking and made no answer.

Lieutenant Becker reappeared, whistling, even more pleased with something despite the fact his immaculately shined number tens were splattered with mud.

"One of you tech guys," he ordered, "clip down in the basement and go over the fuse box for this apartment. You can't miss it. It's marked. But be careful when you step off the fire escape. It seems it rained lately."

Ignoring Williams, he crossed the room to Marcia. "How does your head feel, Marcia?"

She told the truth. "It aches."

He was concerned. "So?" Sitting on the couch beside her he felt the back of her head with strong, capable fingers.

When he touched the spot, Marcia said, "Ouch."

Becker whistled one of the tech men to him. "You will observe this bump and enter it on your report."

The tech man felt where he was feeling, then parted the hair to look. "Yeah. There is a slight contusion," he admitted. "She must have smacked the back of her head when she fell."

"When she fell forward on her face?" Becker scoffed. He sat a moment in thought, then crossed the room to Wil-

iams. "Hold up your feet," he said shortly.

"Why should I?"

Lieutenant Becker told him. "Because if you don't I'll smack your teeth so far down your throat it will take a Geiger counter to find them."

Williams held up his feet.

Becker compared the shoes with his own. Both pairs of shoes were muddy. It looked like the same type of mud. Unlacing one of Williams' shoes, he tossed it to the tech man to whom he had entrusted the coat. "Give me a comparison on the mud, Bill." Then he jerked Williams to his feet. "And you come with me, sweetheart. I wouldst converse with you." The youthful lieutenant looked at Marcia. "What room did you say you saw him in?"

Marcia pointed to the bedroom. "In that doorway. He said, 'Well, I'll be damned'. Then—everything went black."

"I'll bet it did," Lieutenant Becker sympathized. His big fingers tightened on Williams' arm. "Well, shall we adjourn to the bedroom? Or would you rather have me beat your brains out right here?"

His face ghastly, Jack Williams wet suddenly dry lips with an equally dry tongue. "Now, wait. Just a minute, Lieutenant. You can't do this to me!"

Becker cuffed him lightly. "The hell I can't, sweetheart. This may not be exactly according to the manual, but before I get through with you, you're going to be singing Sweet Adeline in three part harmony."

His voice sharp, Inspector Cassidy ordered, "Hold it right there, Lieutenant! What the hell is this all about?"

Lieutenant Becker enumerated the main factors on his fingers. "Some mud. A mink coat, a blown fuse and an extra gal that Williams didn't want any more. Would you care to join us, Inspector?"

Cassidy looked at Williams' remaining shoe, the mink coat on the work table, the

ceiling light, then back at the now cowering Williams. "Yes. I think I would, Lieutenant."

**T**HE diner was small and smelled of sizzling hamburgers and onions. Marcia had never smelled anything quite so beautiful in her life. Lieutenant Becker had started to take her to Lindy's then changed his mind at the last moment.

"You'd better begin to get accustomed to how the other half lives," he'd told her.

Her eyes shining, Marcia hoped she knew why.

His big, friendly face with the bridge of freckles across its nose working as he talked, the youthful lieutenant continued, "So all the time I'm saying to myself, 'How could a sharpie like Williams expect to get away with snatching an expensive fur coat like that? After all, your address, not his girl friend's, was on that account.' He must have known the credit man would do a little checking. Then you found the mud on the coat and the answer came to me. He didn't expect to get away with it. He planned the whole thing to happen just the way it did."

"From there on in," Becker resumed his story, "it was easy. Everything did go black just the way you claimed. But it wasn't because you'd blown your top. It was because he'd blown a fuse. We found the wire in the bedroom. Then he tapped you on the back of the head and left you stretched out on your face while he went down the fire escape and screwed in a new fuse."

Marcia asked, "She, that Pat person, was in on it?"

"On clipping you, yes. That's all. She hadn't the least idea she was going to die. But she did. Once back in the apartment all Williams had to do was put on a pair of gloves, take the gun out of your purse, shoot her between the eyes, take off your right glove, put the gun in your hand, squeeze a couple of shots into the plaster

and then run out in the hall and yell copper."

"But what if I hadn't brought the gun with me?"

"He had its twin in the apartment." Becker massaged his skinned knuckles. "And after a little urging he told us where to find it." Becker had the grace to grin. "Yeah. He got quite talkative. He told us a lot of things. From his viewpoint, it was a pretty sweet setup. No jury in their right minds would have believed your story about everything going black."

"But why?"

Lieutenant Becker sighed. "The same old motive—security. He had it with you—the other gal threatened it. Framing you for murder would still leave him with your bank account. He would have returned the coat. True, it wasn't a long term investment, but you'd just about cooled off on him anyway. Maybe he had another wealthy dame lined up. Anyway, he would have gotten away with it if he hadn't gotten his muddy feet on the collar of your coat while he was putting the gun in your hand." He stroked the fur of the sleeve. "Maybe it's a good luck coat. Maybe you better keep it, huh?"

"It goes back in the morning," Marcia said. She wanted nothing that might remind her of Jack. He was already beginning to fade from her mind.

"Look, Marcia. I know you've had a raw deal from one guy and I don't want to push myself on you." His ears grew red. "But I said to myself the minute I laid eyes on you, 'Bob. That's her.' His ears grew even redder as he corrected himself. "I mean, 'That's she.' So, well, I kinda wondered if you would mind my dropping around once in a while to take you out to a movie or maybe a dance or something—"

Her eyes shining even brighter, Marcia reached across the table and put her small hand in his big one. "When shall we start, Lieutenant? Say—tomorrow night?"



# STRANGE TRAILS

## THE CASE OF THE INNOCENT KILLER

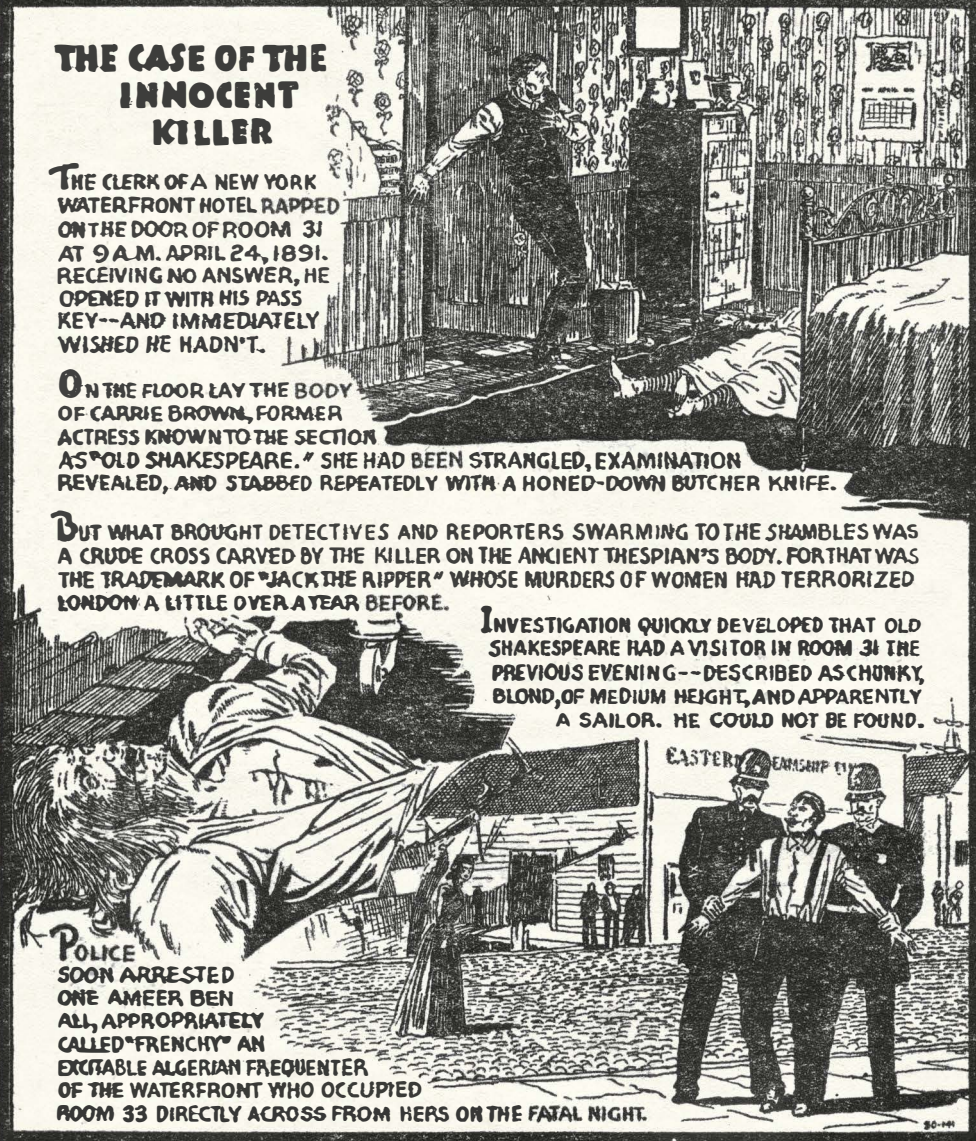
THE CLERK OF A NEW YORK WATERFRONT HOTEL RAPPED ON THE DOOR OF ROOM 31 AT 9 A.M. APRIL 24, 1891. RECEIVING NO ANSWER, HE OPENED IT WITH HIS PASS KEY--AND IMMEDIATELY WISHED HE HADN'T.

ON THE FLOOR LAY THE BODY OF CARRIE BROWN, FORMER ACTRESS KNOWN TO THE SECTION AS "OLD SHAKESPEARE." SHE HAD BEEN STRANGLERED, EXAMINATION REVEALED, AND STABBED REPEATEDLY WITH A HONED-DOWN BUTCHER KNIFE.

BUT WHAT BROUGHT DETECTIVES AND REPORTERS SWARMING TO THE SHAMBLES WAS A CRUDE CROSS CARVED BY THE KILLER ON THE ANCIENT THESPIAN'S BODY. FOR THAT WAS THE TRADEMARK OF "JACK THE RIPPER" WHOSE MURDERS OF WOMEN HAD TERRORIZED LONDON A LITTLE OVER A YEAR BEFORE.

INVESTIGATION QUICKLY DEVELOPED THAT OLD SHAKESPEARE HAD A VISITOR IN ROOM 31 THE PREVIOUS EVENING--DESCRIBED AS CHUNKY, BLOND, OF MEDIUM HEIGHT, AND APPARENTLY A SAILOR. HE COULD NOT BE FOUND.

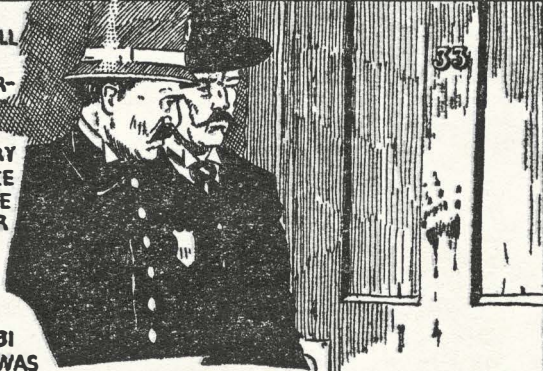
POLICE SOON ARRESTED ONE AMEER BEN ALI, APPROPRIATELY CALLED "FRENCHY" AN EX-STABLE ALGERIAN FREQUENTER OF THE WATERFRONT WHO OCCUPIED ROOM 33 DIRECTLY ACROSS FROM HERS ON THE FATAL NIGHT.





# to MURDER by LEE

THE PRESENCE OF BLOOD IN THE HALL ON THE DOOR AND INSIDE ROOM 33, ON FRENCHY'S SOCKS AND UNDER HIS FINGER-NAILS, WAS LATER TESTIFIED TO AND IDENTIFIED AS THE CORPSE'S. WHEN THE ALGERIAN GAVE AN UNSATISFACTORY EXPLANATION AND COULD NOT PRODUCE A SIMILAR KNIFE HE WAS SAID TO HAVE OWNED, POLICE THEORIZED THAT AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF HER VISITOR HE'D QUARRELED WITH OLD SHAKESPEARE AND KILLED HER.



THOUGH THE MISSING KEY TO ROOM 31 WAS NOT FOUND--AND THOUGH HE WAS OBVIOUSLY NOT JACK THE RIPPER--FRENCHY WAS CONVICTED AND SENTENCED TO LIFE.

TEN YEARS LATER THE KEY TURNED UP, ALONG WITH A BLOODSTAINED SHIRT, IN A ROOM OCCUPIED BY A MAN RESEMBLING OLD SHAKESPEARE'S VISITOR, WHO HADN'T BEEN HOME THE NIGHT OF HER MURDER AND WHO'D VANISHED SHORTLY THEREAFTER.



THIS, TOGETHER WITH THE FACT NOT BROUGHT OUT AT THE TRIAL THAT COMPETENT WITNESSES AVERRED THERE WAS NO BLOOD ON THE DOOR PRIOR TO THE ARRIVAL OF THE HORDE OF CURIOUS, CAUSED GOVERNOR ODELL TO COMMUTE FRENCHY'S SENTENCE AND HE SUPPOSEDLY RETURNED TO ALGERIA POST HASTE.

POLICE NEVER DID FIND THE MYSTERIOUS BLOND SAILOR. THEY NEVER DID FIND JACK THE RIPPER, EITHER.



*He was inking toward  
a window, the big snake  
gun in his hand. . . .*



**By  
Talmage  
Powell**

## **CORPSE FOR A DAY**

**I**N ALL the vast world of heat-hush there was silence, except for the rustling of palmetto as Quincy moved toward the sun-baked house ahead. Neither was there movement, save for Quincy's own, and the slow wheeling of a few vultures off over the swamp. Quincy gave the vultures but an idle glance.

Here in the muggy, dream-like stretches of the Everglades vultures were not novelties, but an integral part of the lush, heat-ripened land. Quincy had seen vultures so thick on the Trail, far to the south, that it was almost impossible to drive a car for them. That always happened of an early morning, when the great, ugly birds came

*Silent, merciless as his Everglades was old Quincy, as  
his life devoured those who sought his death!*

down to rend and feed upon the bodies of the small creatures that had been hit by passing cars all through the night.

Quincy's twenty-gauge was in the crook of his arm; half a dozen quail hung from his belt; his sleek spotted dog, Lady of Shannon, trotted beside him. Quincy spat, and stepped upon the wide planks that formed the porch of the house. When he pulled the wobbly screen door open and stepped inside, he felt cooler. It wasn't a house like you see in the housing magazines, but it suited Quincy. It was a solid old house, with a living room that had a stiff, unused air about it. An old-fashioned portrait of Quincy's grandparents hung in an oval frame, over the wicker settee that Quincy had bought once at a fire sale.

Quincy went back to the kitchen. There was a sand-scrubbed table, flanked by two benches, a small, wood-burning range, the lingering smells of corn pone and frog-legs and fried chicken, as if the odors had seeped into the wood of the house itself.

Quincy laid his quail on the table, went out on the back porch, dipped water into a tin basin. He washed his face with snorting sounds, pulled a feed-sacking towel from its nail, and dried. He turned to go back in the house, and stopped. He looked at the two men standing in the kitchen. His grey gaze wandered from their stony faces to the guns in their hands. Something happened to Quincy's eyes, like a light flicking off and on; other than that, his expression didn't change. Like the swampland that had spawned him, Quincy was ageless, enigmatic.

Quincy said, "You sure you gents're in the right place?"

The man standing nearer Quincy was slender, freckle-faced, with curly red hair. He looked like a college kid somehow—harmless. But Quincy noted the lines about the taut mouth and eyes and the cold, flat light in the eyes themselves. Not a college kid's, those eyes. And not harm-

less either, with the blue steel of the gun pointed at Quincy's middle.

"We got the right place," the man said. It was a flat, dull voice, out of keeping with the redhead's trim slimness. "Step inside."

Quincy stepped inside. The redhead said, "We saw you coming toward the house. We were in the bedroom when you came in. While you were snorting in that washbasin we eased out to say hello."

"Do you have to say it with that thing in your hand?"

"Let's not kill time with him, boss," the man behind the redhead said. Quincy looked at the speaker. He was big, solid, with hulking shoulders. He had a wide, hanging face with dewlaps like a hound's. There was a whiskey redness in his skin. His eyes were big, bulging and seemed to point out in opposite directions. Quincy wondered which eye the big man was using to look at him.

Quincy let his gaze flick for an instant to the open door behind him. He swallowed—his heart felt stifled, as if all the heat outside had swirled in to smother him like hot molasses.

He had never seen the pair before. But he remembered—words that had been spoken through tears to him. To confirm the realization in him, Quincy said, "You must be Claude Rorick."

The redhead nodded.

"Son," Quincy said, "you don't look like a hotshot Miami criminal to me."

Claude Rorick laughed. "Sit down." He jerked his head to the big man behind him. "Tiny, get the old man a chair."

Tiny snatched one of the benches at the kitchen table, swung it out to the middle of the floor. He did it like a bear picking up a matchstick.

Quincy sat down. They stood side by side, facing him.

Rorick said, "Where is she?"

"She?"

Tiny growled in his throat. Rorick put



out his hand in front of the big man, not taking his eyes from Quincy.

"I want to talk to Joan," Rorick said.

QUINCY looked at the sunlight outside, at the vast, wide miles of freedom. His Adam's apple moved up and down in his slim, weathered neck. "What makes you think she's here?"

"I've been looking for her long enough," Rorick said. "She never did tell me where she came from. I had to trace her. It was a lot of trouble and expense."

Quincy looked up into Rorick's face. "You're afraid," he said softly. "It's like a sick thing in your gut."

Tiny reached out and slapped him. The sting of the blow rocked Quincy sideways and made his cheek feel as if the skin had been ripped away.

"Afraid?" Rorick said. "Why should I be afraid? She's my wife. I want to talk to her."

"She won't go back to you. She didn't know what she was getting into when she married you. But I know she won't go back. She gets sick every time she thinks of you. After that last thing you pulled, she got so sick she ran away. Coming here ain't going to do you any good."

Rorick's lips shook. "Shut him up, Tiny!"

Tiny slapped Quincy in the mouth. Quincy clutched the edge of the bench with his hands, sucking on his split lips, a kindling flame in his stare. He looked at Rorick's eyes, and damned himself. He had said too much; he had let his unbridled hatred and wrath for this man he had never seen loosen his tongue.

"You're a fool," Rorick said. "And she's probably a bigger one. It's why I can't sleep nights."

Until you've found her, Quincy thought—and killed her. He shuddered. Looking through the open doorway, he saw two or three vultures wheeling in the distance. The gaunt-necked birds of death had the

power to change the day now for Quincy from something pleasant to a period of slow suffocation.

"She knows too much," Tiny said. "The boss can't have a shadow like that hanging over him the rest of his days, never knowing when she might say or do something. And theres a D.A., looking for her, figuring her to be a weak sister."

"What Tiny means," Rorick said, "is that she might be foolish and fix things so as to be able to testify against me. I've been wanting to get away for some time myself. I want to give her a cruise. To South America. All the places she's always wanted to see."

"Yeah," Quincy said.

"Where is she?" Rorick said.

"I don't know."

Tiny hit him again, this time with his fist. Quincy crashed back on the floor with a jar that shook the kitchen. The bench overturned. Quincy lay gasping against the pain that smashed out from his bruised cheek.

Tiny tilted the bench upright with his toe, picked Quincy up by the collar, hoisting him on it.

Quincy looked up at them through the film of pain. And he knew. The climate was hotter than hell in Miami for Rorick. Rorick was desperate. Rorick was at the end of his rope. Rorick had reached the point where he was going to drive for one central objective without pause, reason, or mercy.

"Where is she?" Rorick said.

Quincy shook his head. Tiny had slipped his gun in his pocket. He reached out, grabbed Quincy's hair with one hand, jabbed the thumb of his other hand deep in the soft spot under the lobe of Quincy's right ear. Quincy writhed, set his teeth, and slumped back when Tiny released him. It felt as if his brain had been burst.

"We know she's staying here," Rorick said. "We saw her things in the bedroom. The only question is, where is she now?"

Quincy shook his head.

Tiny started the blow at his middle this time. With a crazed roar, Quincy heaved himself up off the bench. He rolled with the blow and smashed Tiny's nose with his fist. The big man rocked back, surprise rolling his jutting eyes, paralyzing him for an instant. Quincy hit him twice more, then Rorick danced in and jabbed his gun barrel into Quincy's kidney.

"Sit, old man!"

Quincy stiffened, slowly sat.

Tiny walked up to him. "You never know, do you? You never can tell by their age how tough they are." His eyes glittered like two chips of ice with hot sunlight reflected from them. He drew back his fist again, lips fanning from his teeth.

Rorick laid his hand on the balled fist. Tiny didn't uncock his arm, but stood breathing through his teeth.

"Joan." Rorick said. "What time will she be back?"

Quincy said, "I don't know."

Rorick took his hand from Tiny's fist, and it came at Quincy with the power of a pile driver. He didn't make it to his feet this time—he rolled with the blow, but not enough. The fist hit the hard wall of his flat stomach muscles, and the wall folded in.

Quincy skidded on the floor, doubled up, hands clutching his abdomen, sucking for breath and finding none. The cords stood out in his neck with his effort to keep living through the pain.

*Remember that first morning, Quincy, how it was with her back home? All at once sunlight was in every corner of the house.*

*Bill Hyder came by the house later that afternoon. Something happened, when he saw her, to the big, husky 'glades farmer, standing there with his throat working.*

He sucked in an ounce of air, another.

The cloud began to fade from his mind. He turned, sat up slowly. Claude Rorick and Tiny were still standing over him.

"You might as well tell me, old man," Rorick said. "I'll stay here until she comes back."

Quincy crawled on the bench, still gagging for air. He forced a few stumbling words out past his lips.

"Isn't there any other way out of this?"

"Can you name one?"

He dragged himself along the bench. Rorick watched him coldly. Tiny watched him with a vivid, ecstatic light in his jutting eyes—in a moment now Tiny was going to hit him again.

HE HAD pulled himself to the end of the bench. He lurched to his feet. Tiny moved toward him. He reeled back against the cabinet. Then he saw Tiny stop as the sound of whistling came to them on the superheated air outside.

Quincy swallowed. The *clop-clop* of a horse's hoofs, and a whistling man. It was Bill Hyer, Quincy guessed.

He didn't have time to think further. Rorick turned to the window, swinging back the curtain. Tiny turned also, the reflex action of a man highly keyed up. When Tiny twisted his head back, Quincy had snaked down the long, gleaming knife from its rack beside the cabinet.

Tiny's eyes went white-hot with sudden terror. He opened his mouth like a gaping fish, and his hand dug for his gun. Quincy jabbed with the knife, felt it sink into quivering flesh. Tiny screamed, grabbed the knife handle protruding from his wishbone, tripped over the bench and fell. Rorick spun. Quincy was flashing through the door. Rorick's gun crashed in the stillness and heat, and the bullet knocked Quincy off the porch. He almost tripped, touched the ground with his fingertips, lunged, and kept running.

Rorick fired at him twice more. Then



Quincy was lying flat in the rustling palmetto. Through breaks in the fan-like green growth, he saw Bill Hyder's mare standing in the yard. Then he saw Bill standing pressed against the side of the house, big, solid, square-faced. Bill was pulling a heavy old pistol from the waistband of his pants. From the looks of things, Quincy guessed that Bill had been working pigs in the brush. He'd finished up somewhere nearby and decided to drop on over to the Quincy house before heading for home. Now he was inching toward a window, that heavy snake gun in his hand, knowing that an armed person in the house had just tried to kill his future father-in-law.

With every slow, hard thump of Quincy's heart Bill Hyder drew closer to the window. The gun came up. Bill shouted something. His gun crashed; and another gun inside the house answered his, causing Bill to duck below the window sill.

He moved around a corner in a crouch, out of Quincy's line of vision. Another shot sounded inside the house, and Rorick appeared on the back porch, hunched low, running hard.

He came straight toward the palmetto stretch where Quincy lay. Quincy gathered himself. Rorick looked back as he entered the palmetto. A shot sounded from the house, and Rorick snapped one back. As he turned to run on, an old, whip-leather form reared up beside him, crashed into him.

They went down together. Quincy had his fingers on the gun, his other hand at Rorick's throat. They writhed and the green, hard palmetto cut Quincy's face. He felt his strength going. Rorick was a little soft from Miami living, Quincy thought, nothing like the problem that Tiny would have been. But if he were going to do anything, Quincy knew he had to do it fast.

He gave the gun a hard wrench. He

couldn't tear it from Rorick's fingers. Rorick was sobbing curses. He slammed his body around, almost tearing the gun from Quincy's grasp. And Quincy heard the muffled explosion of the gun.

For a moment he couldn't understand that it was all over, that Rorick was lying there with a bullet hole in his chest, limp. Quincy dragged himself away, sobbing breath in and out, great drops of perspiration spilling from his brow.

He was aware that someone had knelt beside him. He looked up in Bill Hyder's face.

"Hit bad, pop?"

"Not too bad. But I'm mighty winded."

"I'll get you back to the house."

Bill helped him to his feet. "I can navigate," Quincy said. But he didn't move right off. He stood there looking. Wide acres, a good solid old house, a wide, flat sandy stretch of back yard shaded here and there by tall, moss-bearded pines and a big banyan tree.

"Bill," he said, "the little boogers will have a fine time playing in this yard."

"Yeah," Bill said, looking a little worried.

Quincy laughed softly. "I ain't heat-touched, Bill. I'm speaking of kids. Yours and Joannie's."

"Yeah," Bill said. But it was different this time. The word held as much soft meaning as a speech.

"She's in town now, Bill, meeting a certain D. A.'s assistant. Let's get this mess cleaned up before she gets back. We'll lay the two critters out in the back.

"Okay. If you're sure you feel up to it."

The two men went into the house together. Quincy examined his wound, sterilized it, staunching the blood. By the time he'd finished, Bill had dragged Tiny and Rorick together out to the back yard.

Fifteen minutes later there appeared two vultures in the oven-like day. They circled slowly, with infinite patience in the deep, blue sky.



# THE THIRD DEGREE

## By Hallack McCord

(Answers on page 107)

**H**OW sound is your knowledge of scientific criminal investigation? Or, put differently, in the investigation of a homicide or other major crime, how would you stack up? Below are listed twenty questions on crime investigation and criminals in general. If you can answer eighteen or more correctly, you have the makings of a top-notch investigator. Answer sixteen or seventeen, and you're still good. But answer fifteen or fewer, and, well, better brush up if you're thinking of becoming a scientific sleuth. Good luck!

1. If an underworld character acquaintance of yours told you he was going out tonight and "root with oliver," which of the following would you do? Call the police? Wish him luck in his gambling game? Bid him goodby on his long journey?

2. "Salesman" is a polite underworld slang term for what kind of crook?

3. What are two underworld definitions for the term "needle man"?

4. True or false? "Monk" is underworld-ese for "judge."

5. True or false? If a crook acquaintance of yours told you he was being sent to the "menagerie," this would mean he was being placed in a cell house.

6. What is the meaning of the underworld slang expression "on the med"?

7. How does a "jack roller" operate?

8. What is the meaning of the underworld slang term, "in the kick"?

9. Ballistically speaking, what is a "gallery load"?

10. When making a scientific investigation of a crime, it is sometimes necessary to examine the dust contained in clothing. Would it ever be possible to remove this dust with a type of vacuum cleaner?

11. True or false? Fixed, bulging eyes,

bluish eye-whites, dilated pupils, disordered vision, and nausea, are symptoms of poisoning by digitalis.

12. True or false? Aconite is a type of poison that you might expect to be used in India.

13. If an underworld character told you he was "putting the dog eye" on something, what would he mean by this?

14. What is a "dead man's shirt," and how does one happen to become owner of one?

15. What is the meaning of the underworld slang expression, "cutter"?

16. If you heard an underworld character ask for "cotton," which of the following types of criminals would you probably expect him to be: A confidence man? A foot pad? A drug peddler?

17. How would a gambler go about "bucking the tiger"?

18. What is the meaning of the crook term, "to broom"?

19. True or false? Arsenic is a poison often found in rat biscuit.

20. True or false? The fatal time of acetic acid is generally considered rapid but uncertain.



*Some guys are born killers, others achieve murder  
—and some have their own thrust upon them!*



*Joe slammed down on  
the man's gun.*

# KILL AND CRY

**By Walt Sheldon**

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**J**OE SUNHAWK had come into Mr. Wilson Carteret's place to give the gambler two warnings. Only one was friendly, and that warning was from Joe's boss, not Joe himself.

Joe got the first over with right away. He stood a little apart from the bar, hands at his sides, big frame straight, but relaxed. He spoke in a quiet voice. He'd learned this manner as an M.P., handling ram-bunctious officers on Saturday nights dar-

ing the war. He said, "I'm supposed to tell you to expect something at seven o'clock tonight."

Wilson Carteret's eyes flickered briefly to the other man at the bar, the dark, good-looking, expensively dressed man who stood next to Joe and sipped a plain ginger ale.

"What in blazes is the matter with those guys?" asked Carteret. He had a booming voice and a very professional Western manner. The tourists liked it when they came to gamble. He boomed just a little more and said, "We pay plenty to keep these phoney raids away. Uh—you *do* pay 'em, don't you, Casine?"

The dark man said softly, "Certainly I do," then sipped away the last noisy bit of ginger ale. He had a very pleasant voice and a nice, well-rounded accent. He had come to Tesqua, New Mexico, from the East, and now he was Wilson Carteret's full-fledged partner. Carteret never talked about it much one way or the other, but everyone in Tesqua knew that Jack Casine hadn't moved in on the gambler's cordial invitation. Not exactly. Muscled in was the phrase.

Joe ignored Casine and said, "Now I've got a message from myself, Mr. Carteret."

"What? What's that?" Wilson Carteret blinked at him and worked his brow up and down nervously; the low hairline did a kind of dance.

"You've been kicking Indians around, Mr. Carteret," said Joe. "The ones that hang around in front of your place. They've been doing that for a lot of years, Mr. Carteret. I don't think you ought to kick them around like that."

Carteret blinked again. His voice became harder. His thick finger came forward and hung in the air like a club on a string.

"Joe," he said, "I think maybe you better mind your own damn business and keep out of the white man's business."

Joe held himself—that is, he kept his loose stance, and the quiet expression on his face. Inside he felt the stab. Wilson Carteret wasn't the only one in Tesqua who disapproved of an Indian as deputy marshal—even a lot of Indians themselves didn't like it. No more than they cared for, or used, their new right to vote. Some of the older bucks, especially. They were afraid of taxes, and on top of that they just plain didn't care to mix in with the white man's affairs. Moments like this could make Joe wonder if maybe they didn't have a kind of wisdom about it. Joe had been given his deputy's star in a public ceremony on the plaza and vips had made bright-eyed speeches about how far the poor, neglected red man had come, and they had sent a newspaper photographer all the way up from Albuquerque. Look at us, everybody—look how fine our town, our state, treats the poor red man. But almost everybody in Tesqua knew or sensed the truth. They knew that Digger Thompson, town marshal, wanted to run for sheriff next year and he was just making a play.

Joe Sunhawk, deputy, found himself little more than an errand boy. Bill Fountain knew this. Bill was the big, freckled state cop for the district—sometimes he took Joe along on emergency calls, but Joe knew that was just because Bill felt sorry for him. In the end, Bill Fountain's concern just made it hurt all the more.

But no anger came into Joe's voice. He said, "I'm making this thing my business, Mr. Carteret."

"Well, now, just hear that!" Carteret rubbed his sun-peeled nose. He hooked his thumb into the silver and turquoise of his concha belt. He looked at Casine. "You hear that, Casine?"

"I heard it," Casine said. He stood perfectly still, but his words shrugged.

"Joe," Carteret said, "I understand you're a college Indian and everything, but just the same I think maybe you didn't



get enough learning. You act plenty dumb."

Casine's soft voice came from the side. "Yes, I think my partner's right, Joe. I think you need a little education."

JOE turned, looked, and saw that Casine was pointing a short-barreled revolver at him. The long roll-flap of Casine's two-button drape was slightly out of place from the drawing of the gun.

Casine said, "Take that gun belt of yours off, Joe, and drop it on the floor."

"Do you know what you're doing?" said Joe. "Do you know the charges you're open to, doing this?"

"I don't think you can tell me much about the law, Joe," said Casine. He smiled a little. He gestured again with the snub-nose and said, "Come on, Joe, take off your gun. Drop it. If you don't I'll shoot where it hurts. That could be an accident—and both my partner and I will swear it was, of course. Let's go, Joe."

Joe unbuckled his gunbelt and let it slide to the floor. Casine kicked it to one side. There was a big silence in the long room, now. Behind Joe, and across from the crap tables, a couple of tourists had been playing the slot machines. Joe heard the scuffling back there and knew that the stick man from the dice layout was hustling them away—and probably going for a walk himself.

"All right, Carteret," said Casine.

Carteret came around the end of the bar and then headed for Joe. He was about Joe's height; much thicker through the chest. He had a faint roll of fat over the concha belt, but it was just a layer. There was muscle under it. His brows were working up and down and his hairline was dancing nervously again.

He swung at Joe.

Joe saw it coming—a wide, clumsy, power crane swing. He blocked it. He stopped some of it, but what was left broke through, and Carteret's knuckles scraped

his cheekbone. Joe started a counter-punch, a low punch for that roll of fat just above the concha belt.

He felt suddenly a kind of explosion at the side of his head. Hard, painful. A loud noise, but not loud enough to be a gunshot. Something very hard, like a gunbutt, crashed into his skull. Glowing things started to form a shower diagonally past his eyes. He knew he was falling, but he couldn't exactly decide in which direction. He knew also that it must have been Casine who had stepped in and gun-whipped him.

Then he was on the floor and he was beginning to feel things again. He felt a kick in his side. He bent double, covered his face with crossed arms, and drew his knees up to protect as much of his mid-section as possible. He'd be out in a minute, of course—the first kick or two to his temple would do that. He sensed that both Casine and Carteret were kicking him now. It hurt like hell. He tightened his crouch. He was getting sick and dizzy and, in the core of his hurt, he wondered if his arms and legs would lock like a dead man's after he became unconscious, or whether they'd be able to pry him apart then and do some real damage.

A foot caught him on the temple, and one on the back of the head. There was one last, loud noise on his skull and Joe drifted away. Somewhere through the dimness he heard another explosion, that seemed different than the one that knocked him out—more like a gunshot. But he couldn't be sure. It was fuzzy and unclear, like everything else.

He came to again in approximately the same spot on the floor of Wilson Carteret's gambling place.

He opened his eyes and there were people standing around; he saw them as a forest of blurred legs. It all began to come back, aching, seeping. Directly above him was the roly-poly form of Digger Thompson, his boss. Doc Gerhardt was behind the

marshal—bent over something. And beyond the doc, dark and disinterested, stood another deputy, Diego Consada.

Joe came slowly and painfully to a sitting position. He shook his head, he fingered the bruises. He looked around and saw that Wilson Carteret still stood at the bar, leaning heavily upon it with his elbows. Then he saw Doc Gerhardt was kneeling. Jack Casine, the Easterner, was sprawled out on the floor below the doc, and there was quite a bit of blood, and Casine looked very dead.

**T**HE marshal helped Joe to a standing position before he said anything.

Then he pursed flabby, infantile lips and hooked chubby thumbs into his belt.

"Joe," said Digger Thompson, "you used damn bad judgment in this. Guess maybe you're in trouble now, Joe."

Joe shook some of the fuzz from his head again. He was a little startled, when he finally spoke, at the hoarseness and thickness of his own voice. "These boys started it, Digger." He pointed to Casine's body, which the doc was leaving. "Sorry I couldn't keep that from happening. I wasn't on my toes. They were too quick."

Digger Thompson squinted, cutting down some of the baby brightness of his eyes and said, "What in the hell are you talking about, Joe? Are you trying to say you didn't shoot Casine?"

"What?" said Joe. He blinked. He shook his head some more. He moistened his lips—they felt very dry. Then it came to him, suddenly and sickeningly, in a big burst of realization. He let his jaw hang for an instant. "Wait a minute. I didn't—I didn't shoot anybody! Carteret and Casine jumped me. I went out. I—"

Wilson Carteret lumbered forward. "Digger, if that ain't the most baldfaced lying I ever heard!" He stared at Joe. "Might have known you'd try to squirm out of it like that. A typical Indian trick, Joe. You know damned well you came in

here and picked a fight and shot Casine. You know damned well that's what I knocked you out for!"

Joe opened his mouth to say something and then he shut it, hard and quick. His eyes moved back and forth. The sheriff, Doc Gerhardt, Diego—all were looking at him in the same way. And Carteret, all but smiling at the clever way he'd got rid of his annoying new partner.

Thompson said, "Joe, we better go to the office. The doc can patch you up there, and then there's a lot of formalities we might have to go through. I think I'm gonna have to book you for manslaughter, maybe."

Joe looked directly into Thompson's baby-blue eyes and said, "Sure. Let's be very legal about it—this time." Thompson's eyes flickered. Tesqua, the tourist town, the gambling town, wasn't noted for its tight law—sometimes if there were no funds to prosecute, a case was just neatly dropped. Things like autopsies, investigations, were refinements. Tesqua had its own ways, and took care of its own, and there wasn't much reason to change things.

But Thompson's anger was short enough. He said in a friendly, weary voice, "Come on, Joe. We better get going, now. And come along easy—I don't want to have to tell Diego to handcuff you or anything."

They left with Joe still shaking his head every once in a while, trying to dislodge the last traces of the daze.

**H**E WAS more or less back to normal the next morning. Thompson, it seemed, wanted to have a good heart-to-heart talk with him—that was why he waited overnight. He'd suggested that Joe sleep in the town hall, though, and Joe had done that, and now Joe found himself alone with Thompson in the latter's office.

The office was a room in the front of the



town hall; it had a large window which overlooked the plaza. Thompson offered Joe a cigarette and Joe very deliberately shook his head, then lighted one of his own.

"Now, Joe," said Thompson, rocking fatly in his swivel-chair, "I hope you're going to be sensible about this. You know we had to call off our raid last night—that would have attracted too much attention after a killing, too. But we've got to have that raid some time, just to please some of the citizens. You sure fouled things up, Joe. I hope you're gonna start to get sensible now."

"What do you want me to do—sign a confession that I killed Casine?"

"We won't need that, Joe. I checked up on the angles. You killed him in line of duty. The only thing is, there'll be some publicity on it—a stink or two. So, of course, I'll have to let you go and make the investigation look good, if you see what I mean."

"Digger," said Joe steadily, doggedly, "the only thing is—I didn't kill Casine."

Thompson nodded quite casually into the fat under his chin and said, "I know you didn't kill him, Joe."

Joe lifted his head, fast. "Then, what are you trying to do here? What's this line of duty stuff?"

"Joe, be reasonable," said Thompson. "Casine was an outsider, a man who butted in. Wilson Carteret was one of our own local boys. I think Carteret played it very smart, killing Casine the way he did—with your gun. And I think you'll find him a pretty good friend to have if you back up his story. You did it in the line of duty."

Joe said, "Digger, when you took this office, you took the same oath I did, didn't you? About upholding the law and everything?"

"Now, Joe," said Thompson, in a fatherly kind of voice, "let's not let our emotions get the better of us."

Joe said, "I'm an Indian, Digger. I've been to college and a couple of things, but still an Indian. I've got blood in me, and a feeling. Stuff you'd call corny. But that's what I've got in me, Digger—and I don't like to see Carteret get away with anything any more than Casine. Or one of my own people."

"Joe," Thompson said, "I'm kind of glad all this happened, now. I can see where maybe we might have had some trouble with you at times. I think maybe it's just as well you're resigning from your job."

"Am I?"

"I think maybe you better do it that way, Joe. I think your own people out at the pueblo'll feel better about it, if you do. Without prejudice—I think that's what they call it."

"Digger," said Joe, "I might just be able to prove that Carteret really did kill Casine. I might dig up witnesses. His fingerprints will be on that gun. How about that, Digger?"

Thompson's plump, easy smile didn't change. He folded his fingers across his round middle. "Now, Joe, we're not that dumb. That gun of yours is still at Carteret's. We kind of forgot to pick it up. He'll have plenty of time to wipe it clean. As for witnesses, I think we can depend he took care of that."

Joe leaned forward and narrowed his eyes and pointed his finger. "You're backing him up," he said. "That makes you an accessory after the fact. Gambling's one thing, Digger, but murder's another. Do you realize that?"

"Sure," smiled Thompson. "Only we local boys have to stick together."

Joe was silent for a moment. He stared at Thompson. He felt red anger boil somewhere inside him and he felt that he wanted to lash forward suddenly and smash that fat smile from Thompson's face. But he didn't do that. He kept his throat tight, and his teeth together.

He said, "Maybe I'm all mixed up, Digger, maybe I've got to think this thing out. I need a cup of coffee."

"All right, Joe." Thompson nodded genially. "You go ahead and get a cup of coffee. I've got some things to wash up. I think maybe you'll be ready to turn in a resignation when you come back. Believe me, Joe, that's the best way."

**J**OE left the town hall, then, and started across the plaza to the coffee joint. He took the flagstone walk across the square, which had a lawn and some trees and a bronze plaque to the war dead set in granite. A one way street ran around the square, and facing this were low, southwest style buildings housing Tesqua's main business places.

Joe didn't notice the big, dark blue state police car at first.

As he stepped from the square, ready to cross the street to the coffee shop, the big dark blue car pulled in front of him. Bill Fountain stuck his freckled head from the window and said, "Hello, Joe. *Hee-uh-hawgh, poya!*"

"Hello, Bill," Joe said. He didn't feel like smiling, but he smiled anyway.

Fountain's eyes were grey and always seemed to be looking at things below the surface. "Joe, I'd like to hear the real story about what happened at Carteret's yesterday. Some time I'd like to hear that."

"I'll tell you some time," said Joe.

Fountain nodded to show that he understood that Joe didn't want to talk right now. "All right, Joe. I can wait. It doesn't smell right to me, though—any of it. I'd look into it, town jurisdiction or not, if this highway patrol didn't keep me hopping. I've got to get to my office and make out sixty or seventy reports now, when I ought to be looking around down in Rincon."

Joe said, "We'll talk about it some other time."

Fountain looked at him for a long second, then nodded and said, "Whatever you say, Joe." He put the car into gear and drove away.

Joe continued across the street. He was halfway across when the idea came to him.

He stopped short. An Iowa convertible full of tourists barely missed him. He didn't even turn to look after them. He squared his shoulders suddenly, left the plaza, and headed for Wilson Carteret's place, in the straightest route possible. He looked to the side only once, to glance at the bus depot on the main highway, and see that the big blue and yellow coach had already pulled into the alley.

Carteret's place was under its usual morning quiet. The body and the mess had been cleaned away and Wilson Carteret was behind the bar again, smoking, smiling, reading the Santa Fe paper. He looked up as Joe came in, and his smile went away.

"The hell! You back again?"

Joe nodded. "Digger wants the gun. The one that killed Casine. It's municipal property."

"Oh, is that all." Carteret couldn't quite keep from grinning in a knowing way. He reached under the bar. "Got it right here. Only I'm surprised he sent you after it—thought you'd be out by now, Joe."

Joe said, "He wants me to resign. I haven't done it yet."

"Well, that would be the thing to do. You're wising up, aren't you, Joe? I'm mighty glad to see that. And I'll see you get treated all right, too. Any time you need a little wine, or something, Joe, just come around the back. In the end, you'll be glad you played it our way, Joe. You'll see."

Joe held out his hand for the gun.

Carteret's eyes moved just once, a little suspiciously, and then his hairline came down in a frown and he said, "Just a sec-



ond, Joe. I'll take these cartridges out. I'm just not taking any chances."

As casually as he could, Joe said, "Take 'em if you want to, Mr. Carteret. Only Digger'll probably send you a bill. They cost about six cents apiece."

Carteret laughed. "You're all right, Joe," he said. "For an Indian you're not a bad guy at all." He handed over the belt, the holster and the empty gun.

Joe looked him in the eyes and said, "You're sure the gun's—uh—been taken care of?"

"Of course it has, Joe. That was the first thing I did. Wipe it clean."

Joe nodded. Then he smiled, very innocently. "You know," he said, "it's too bad we don't have a criminological lab in Tesqua. They do some marvelous things nowadays. They can take a gun that's been wiped, for instance, and raise fingerprints on it. With the right equipment, I mean, like they have down in Albuquerque."

"Is that right?" said Carteret.

Joe kept his smile, nodded again, then waved casually and went to the side door. Just before he passed through it, he turned. He squinted at the clock over the bar. "Is that clock right. Mr. Carteret?"

"Huh? Sure."

"Thanks," said Joe. "The Albuquerque bus leaves in about a minute, and I don't want to miss it. Of course I wouldn't say the fingerprints would be conclusive evidence, but they might certainly start a lot of people asking questions."

He turned quickly and went through the door, and just before he turned he saw the beginnings of Wilson Carteret's half-puzzled, half-startled frown.

**H**E TROTTED to the bus station. The driver was already getting in. Joe yelled for him to hold it and then ducked into the telephone booth. He called Bill Fountain's office. Bill wasn't there and the girl from the Real Estate

office in the same room answered it.

"Get this message straight, word for word," Joe told her. "Tell Bill I'm ready to talk to him. Tell him I may not even have to explain if he'll get to Rincon in a hurry and be there when the bus arrives."

Then he grabbed his ticket from the counter, ran to the bus, and boarded it. The bus grumbled away from the depot and started out on the highway, south.

Joe sat in the front seat, on the right. He had a reason for that. He leaned back and half-closed his eyes and took it easy. He wouldn't have to start worrying until the first stop at Rincon. He might as well relax till then. He probably wouldn't notice the car that would overtake and pass them—there'd be dozens which would.

He rested, half-slept and through slitted eyes watched New Mexico go by. He loved New Mexico. He loved the big country that you could follow clear to the horizon; he loved the desert when it was turquoise blue with chamiso, he loved the sharp spines of the mountains. He loved it, and he didn't like to see it lawless.

The bus took the highway in long surges, like a thirsty man drinking from a straw. Minutes later it was winding down the big canyon of the Rio Alto, dropping at the rate of a hundred feet a minute.

Then the windmill and the red roof that marked Rincon came into sight.

The driver turned and yelled back, "Rincon! First stop!"

Joe opened his eyes fully and straightened in the seat. He saw a familiar sedan parked at the bus stop ahead.

He turned around and looked back into the bus, at the passengers—a couple of herders, a young Spanish fellow with his wife and baby, a long-haired kid in a basque shirt. Small load, today, but people. The kind of people they always called innocent bystanders afterword. He felt misgivings. Only he couldn't back out

now—he'd already set things in motion, and it was too late to back out now.

The bus air-braked to slowness. Joe saw the red flag arm that meant a passenger in the combination gas station and general store of Rincon. That was all Rincon was, a spot in the road.

The bus stopped.

A man came from around the corner of the sedan, instead, husky, thick chested, wearing a concha belt and frontier pants. He had a white handkerchief over his face, showing just his eyes. The turned-down brim of a silver-belly hat shaded them.

The driver was puzzled. He stared at the man.

The man walked right up to the open door of the bus, and then pulled a gun from behind him. The woman in the back of the bus screamed.

"Not a word," said the man, pointing the gun directly at Joe. "Not one word. I'm gonna shoot if you so much as grunt. And I want that gun of yours, Joe."

Joe dropped his hands to the buckle of his gunbelt and loosened it. He glanced at the parked sedan and saw the silhouette of another figure through its windows. He relaxed—and then tensed his muscles.

Joe moved fast when he took the gunbelt off. Cat-speed—Indian speed—he whipped the heavy buckle into the stocky man's gun hand.

The gun went off, but it was pointed down and to one side. Joe lunged. He slammed down on the man's gun wrist, pulled the man forward and then punched the back of his neck with all his might. The man fell flat; the gun clattered away. Joe pounced on it. He pushed himself forward, and then tumbled from the open door of the bus.

Town Marshal Digger Thompson, plump and trembling, came from behind the sedan. He had the gun—he was steady-*ing* it with both hands and firing wildly.

Joe took quick, easy aim and shot him

twice—once in each leg. Thompson dropped and began to howl and squirm.

A siren wailed; the sound of yowling brakes came with it, and the dark blue car of the state police came to a wild stop beside the bus. Officer Bill Fountain bounded from the front seat, his gun drawn.

"It's all right," Joe said in a tired voice. "No more trouble now. We've got them for highway robbery—with witnesses if nothing else."

Fountain looked around, took it all in quickly, then helped Joe drag Wilson Carteret from the bus and bring him to. He said to Joe, "Why didn't you tell me you were pulling something like this?"

Joe grinned and said, "I didn't get the idea until the last minute. Us Indians are a little slow on the uptake, you know."

Fountain began to pay attention to Carteret, who was beginning to open his eyes and work his pinched brow up and down in a bewildered way.

"Joe," Fountain said, "get on that phone, and get a doctor for Digger Thompson, quick. I'm going to have a little talk with Carteret. I think maybe he can tell me a few things about that Casine murder, too. And you can tell me your story later."

Joe nodded and got up and started for the store. Then he turned. "Say, Bill," he said, "you know a lot about fingerprints and things. Can they raise them on a gun after it's been wiped?"

"Hell, no. Nor when it hasn't been wiped, either. Why?"

Joe grinned. "I just wanted to find out if I was making a legitimate play, or just pulling another one of those damned red-skin tricks."

Fountain stared back without completely understanding, so Joe turned and went on toward the telephone. He kept grinning. He was going to feel a lot better about Tesqua, and justice, and things in general from now on.





# Solving Cipher Secrets



Founded in 1924

Article No. 845

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. 5259—Paws without Pause. By °Theo. W. Midlam. Try a common single-letter word for T, used alone. Substitute that letter in ZOTZ, and fill in. Next, ZOA, ETL'Z, and EOAAZTO. ZOA EOAAZTO, PNBGX'R STRZARZ SNKB-GAFFAX TLUDTG,

BKLR XNPL OUR YBAV UL T HGULXULF RACALZV DUGAR  
YAB ONKB RYBULZ, HKZ ETL'Z ONGX ZOTZ RYAAX GNLF!

No. 5260—Prize Replies. By °Prof. Xenon. Short words OSN and ES supply all letters for pattern-word \*ESNEOSO. Also compare UT and THUD; IRY, IU, and UIRYHZ; etc. PHONY ZBRUUM GAGEM THUD \*IAMZO, \*UXMO., NYTESYN

"ZGESZiyH" OZ "JOBRYMUH'Z LETY." UIRYHZ PAYZZYN  
IRY GMAHOM UT 'UC" IU JY "UCKPYS," OSN MUBOIYN  
IRY "OMEDYSIOHK BOSOM" ES SUHIRYHS \*ESNEOSO!

No. 5261—Rows and Furrows. By Anita Midlam. VJG, YJGTG, and VQ, correctly guessed, will unlock \*KQYC, UVCVG, and JCU, duly noting ending -U. Use UJQTV as a check word. \*KQYC JCU DGEQOG VJG UVCVG YJGTG VJG UJQTV EQTP

ITQYU. PKPGVA-PKPG RGT EGPV QH VJG UVCVG'U EQTP  
CETGCIG PQY KU RCNPVGF VQ UJQTV-UVCNMGF JADTKFU.

No. 5262—Through the Blue. By Jim Devine. Start with LEE, and phrase BL BY. Use letters thus found, and supply unknown letters in JBLV and LVOBN. Then try for FGELVON, etc.

ATYLONBEXY PUTBGS RBYHY AFT DO YZFHO LNFKOUONY,  
PNEA FGELVON ZUFGOL BG EXN XGBKONYO, JENNTBGS  
FDEXL YXG YZELY HEGHXNNOGL JBLV FLEA-DEAD OFNLV  
DUFYLY. FPLON FUU—BL BY LVOBN YXG, LEE!

No. 5263—Political Problem. By \*Ty Roe. Examine endings -EXI and -LEVX. Then substitute in HEXFZZD, noting doubled symbol in suffix. Next, VHHEAEFZO.

“OCXN YC YD \*FUOVX \*L. \*RFZZFPN,” FGFD-HPVY-SVYC  
 JVLCP GPVLC CZCALEVX RVFPN. VHHEAEFZO HEXFZZD  
 OVZJCN UKBBZEXI PCTKCOL, OCXL “FROCXLCC RFZZVL.”

No. 5264—Back-stage Doings. By Old Man Mose. Identify endings -RA and -RAARA, also -EHC occurring twice after low-frequency symbols. Continue with DRA and UDD.

FOEFGRHB, FOUBRA TP \*FOUNDER SYN FOYL BXR P BOYL,  
 DRA VRNNP FOUBR UDD UNYXHA PUNA. RZOUXBKRA,  
 \*FOUNDER FDXTTTRA FDXFGEHC FOEFGB UVEABK SDPEHC  
 SRUKORNB. VRHX: “BONRAARA FOEFGRH FOYM VREH.”

No. 5265—Tragic Tramp. By \*Jack-Hi. Suffix -DEF, following doubled symbol, provides entering wedge for HBRP-PEDFAL, checking with LHRDE. And so to suffix -ULU and SRWU.

ABCCDEF GHKDFAL, HBNNDOPDEF HBRP-PEDFAL STOPU  
 VDELHW XNRULU. LHRDE YBBZU UBTLA. SRWU CRUU.  
 NRESKS RZDSUL \*GNBHDSR XNDYYRHS, ABXB UVBBEU!

No. 5266—Beams and Girders. By H. L. Kruger. Thrice-used suffix -ELS will unlock SERLF, and supply all but two values in distinctive pattern XLSELXXHEL.

BNDLSGFXHG JDEZVAB SHRGK XLSELXXHEL VLNT-UNT,  
 CDEAY QXHHEG TUXXA, CRGZDAX CHEYSX, KRHRZUDFX  
 PDOK, TRAVELS SERLF, NFUXH XMZEFELS OXZURLEZRA  
 ONYXAG, TEFU TNHAY-QROXY TNLYXH-FNB, \*XHXZFNH!

No. 5267—A Noise in Illinois. By Rambler. Note terminations -R, -RB, -N, and -RN, with due attention to frequencies, etc. Then complete KRRN BARN.

BPVHLR LHB RCXVZNRB, \*XEHPER \*BUHUR BPVZ GHVVB  
 FZVVHXBR HLHPDBU SHED, SHED KZVNB OXZD KRRN  
 BARN, KRRN BARN TDZFTB ZQRE GPDNYPVV, GPDNYPVV  
 NEZXB ZDUZ YHFAPDR BARN. KHEYAZOBR ODNHYHLRN!

No. 5268—Meditative Moods. By \*Betty Kelly. Lastly, here's a list of catalogic crypt that merits study! Spot your own clues in this one. Asterisks are prefixed to capitalized words.

DREAM MOURUOTRYM DZSL “SLRYKLSHYG”: XERFZANUS,  
 PRKZSVUS, VSSNUSZFN, PRUMZANEVSN, PRUSNTXGVSZFN,  
 ENHGNPSZFN, LNNAHYG, PVYSZRYM, XNUMZFN, AENVTO.



READERS who have asked us to publish their solving records will find their total scores listed below! And in this connection, fans, congratulations are in order for \*Nick Spar—known to the uninitiated as Allan B. Price, Sr.—who becomes our latest octogenarian cryptofan, having reached his 80th Birthday on May 7 of this year! \*Nick has been a faithful follower of "SCS" since December, 1930, and still finds ciphers an unequalled source of enjoyment. For \*Nick Spar, orchids—and many more happy years of crypt cracking!

The following requested scores include March, 1949, solutions: \*Theo. W. Midlam, 3358; \*Kate, 2954; \*Lee A. Miller, 1912; \*Kay Vee See, 1721; \*LeRoy A. G idry, 958; †Ruth E. Weiss, 392; †Ian, 354; and Helcrypt, 22. And in this second group, scores include the January, 1949, answers: \*Nick Spar, 3312; \*Wilray, 1535; \*Jesse C. Leach, 1205; †Bombadier, 236; †Wes, 172; †Jughaid, 159; †Rebbina, 101; A. Walrus, 63; Alchemurg, 43; Rosemary Larsen, 33; and W. A. Buck, 12. Similar lists will appear in subsequent issues, to take care of further requests.

No. X-5270. Night Light. By †Rebbina.

ECMLMEMCA      CELMCA      ALEELE  
MMLE    AELMLE    LMLLCAM    ACEL  
CEMMCLELCA    ECML    LCLELLE  
CCCLCM      CEAL-CLEEL-CLMMLE.

†Rebbina presents a clever variation of the so-called keyphrase cipher in her No. X-5270, where a five-letter word, repeated under the plain-text alphabet, replaces the customary key-sentence. Suggested solution: anagram for the 5-letter keyword, and prepare a trial-alphabet. Additional hint: one of the letters acts as its own cipher symbol! Here's the answer to last issue's No. X-5258, by \*LeRoy A. Guidry: "Your telephone dial holds the key for unlocking this message as you will discover upon solving the cipher. Thus, A, B, and C, with figure 2 on the dial, become 21, 22, and 23, respectively, in cipher; D, E, and F, similarly are 31, 32, and 33; and so on. Number 11 served as word-separator.

Three newcomers mix their cipher magic with that of the old-timers in the current crypts, Nos. 5259-69! Jim Devine makes his bow with fantastic No. 5262! And Anita Midlam, author of No. 5261, writes: "This is the first cryptogram I've sent in. I've watched my Dad many a time. I constructed this cryptogram myself." "Dad," of course, is veteran solver \*Theo. W. Midlam, who sends along No. 5259. Lastly, \*Betty Kelly, who composed No. 5268, says: "My 13-year-old son has suddenly become interested in my solving ciphers, and pestered me until I promised to send you his contribution along with my solutions!" So young Mr. Kelly offers No. 5264, glances askance at his mother's solving score of over 600, and shoulders the cryptonym "Old Man Mose!" Answers to current ciphers will appear in the next issue, fans. Keep your solutions and contributions coming!

No. 5269—Cryptic Division. By †Ian. Key-sequence indicated by left-hand symbols in 3rd subtraction will limit Y in 2nd subtraction to two possible values. The key is geographical, and is numbered thus: 01234567 8 9.

S U N ) H O O R A Y ( H H T  
T H Y T  
H M T A  
T H Y T  
T U U Y  
U H O N  
N Y R

#### ANSWERS FOR LAST ISSUE

5247—With all its rivers and bayous, inlets and coves, Florida, often used by old pirates for hideouts, may be a gold mine in fact as well as legend.

5248—English-born frontiersman, Richard W. Clarke, died at his cabin near Deadwood, S. Dak., in Nineteen Thirty, aged eighty-five; is believed prototype of Deadwood Dick, dime novel hero.

5249—Potatoes, tomatoes, and tobacco, all belong to the same botanical family, the nightshades. Of the first we use the roots; of the second, the fruit; and of the third, the leaves.

5250—Amni Machen, little-known mountain in eastern Tibet, may be even higher than Mount Everest, according to reports by World War II airmen.

5251—Sherlock Holmes, hero of series by Doyle, was an able cryptanalyst, if the tale of the little dancing men may be taken as evidence.

5252—Rimsky-Korsakov, composer of Scheherazade, amazing symphonic orchestral work, realized his inspiration from "Arabian Nights," rich source of Oriental fantasy and adventure.

5253—Could you decipher the following palindromes or "mirror" words: toot, civic, peep, rotator, noon, radar, solos, refer, sees, level, madam?

5254—Baggage-laden commuter ignores red-caps. Hurries, scurries up ramp. Collides with on-coming passengers. Worn, loosened suitcase strap snaps. Clothes scatter helter-skelter. Misses train.

5255—Diminutive dwarf dwelt near dwindling stream. Circus impresario traveled many miles, finally found humanoid oddity. Great money attraction!

5256—Ancient barouche travels hazardous mountain country detour. Fenders wobble, front spring creaks, rear spring grunts, Zerk fittings spout grease, driver fumes more than radiator.

5257—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  
M U S I C A L T O P

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 128*)



## ANSWERS TO THE THIRD DEGREE

(Questions on page 95)

1. If your underworld friend told you he was going to "root with oliver," you should call the police. For this would mean he was planning to commit a crime while the moon was not out.

2. "Salesman" is a polite name for confidence man.

3. According to the underworld's way of thinking, a "needle man" is either a dope addict or a person who needles beer with alcohol.

4. True. In underworldese, "Monk" is a slang expression for judge. Generally, the term is applied to judges of the higher courts.

5. True. If your crook acquaintance told you he was being sent to the menagerie, this would mean he was being placed in a cell house.

6. "On the med" means that one is occupied as a fake or quack doctor.

7. A "jack roller" is one who either rolls drunks, or robs his friends while they sleep.

8. "In the kick" simply means "in the pocket." "Kick" is a slang expression for pocket.

9. A "gallery load" is a lightened charge used while firing indoors.

10. Yes. Some scientific crime investigators have found a modified vacuum cleaner useful in removing dust from clothing. The dust, of course, is then examined in the laboratory.

11. True. The symptoms named are all

possible symptoms of poisoning by digitalis.

12. True. Aconite is definitely a type of poison that you might expect to be used in India. According to authorities, it is sometimes mixed with either food or drink, and thus given to the victim.

13. If an underworld character told you he was "putting the dog eye" on something, this would simply mean that he was watching something very carefully.

14. A "dead man's shirt" is the shirt which is issued to a man upon his release from prison.

15. A "cutter" is a prosecuting attorney. The term "cutter" is also sometimes used in this connection. Needless to mention, the underworld tends to use both terms in an antagonistic fashion.

16. If you heard an underworld character ask for "cotton," chances are excellent this character would be a dope peddler or one involved in the dope traffic. "Cotton" is the underworld term for any cloth or fabric through which drugs are strained.

17. A gambler "bucks the tiger" when he plays against the house.

18. The crook term "to broom" means to run away or flee—usually from danger.

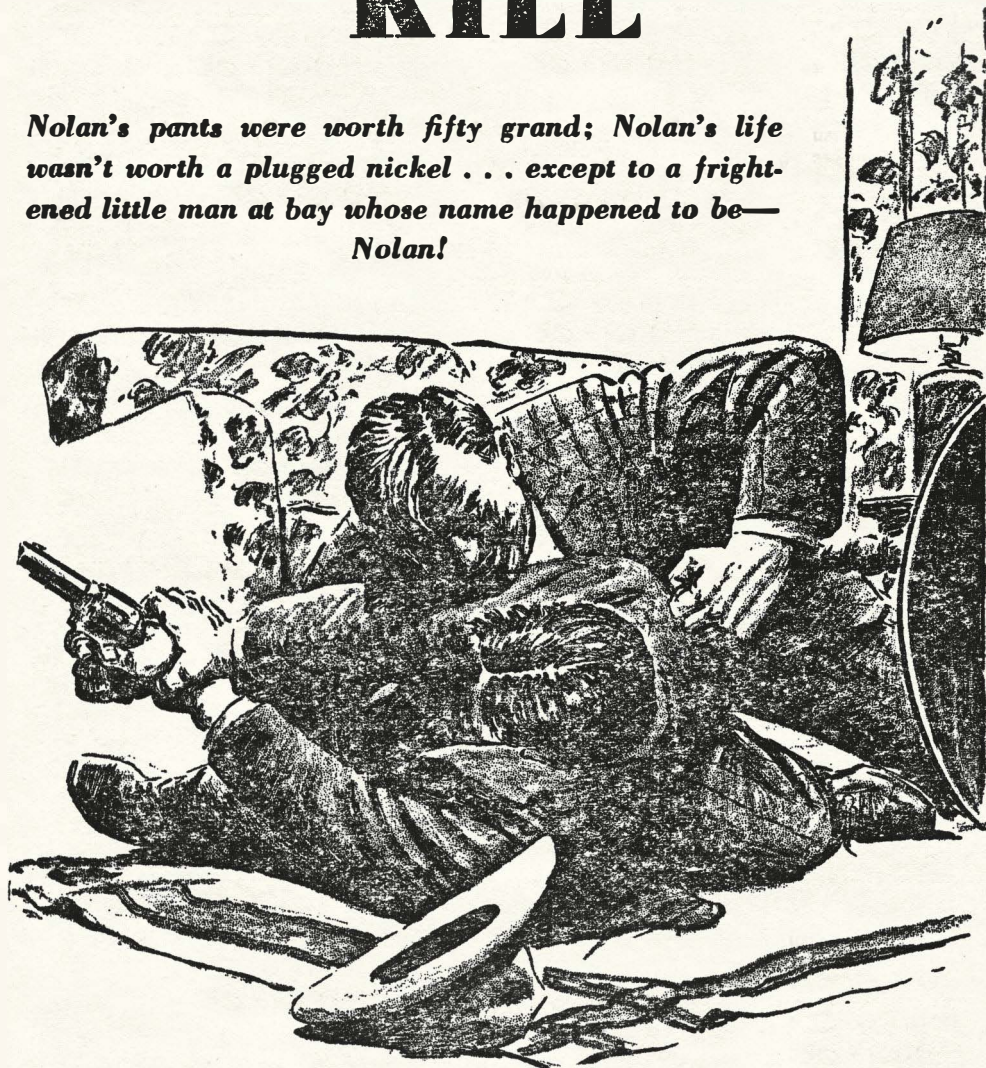
19. True. As a general rule, you could expect to find arsenic in rat biscuit. This will not always hold true by any means, but is often the case.

20. True. The fatal time of acetic acid is generally considered to be rapid but uncertain.



# UNDRESSED TO KILL

*Nolan's pants were worth fifty grand; Nolan's life wasn't worth a plugged nickel . . . except to a frightened little man at bay whose name happened to be—  
Nolan!*



## CHAPTER ONE

### A Kill to Suit

**F**IRST it had been letters, and very nice ones, too—expensive stationery, slightly perfumed as if they had been carried in a woman's handbag. From the handwriting on the envelopes, they looked as if they were saying something very charming on the inside, but Jimmy

Nolan never found out, for they weren't really addressed to him. At Christmas time it was a box that might have contained a tie. And now—a pair of pants.

Nolan chuckled. He was beginning to feel as if he were actually sharing the life of this other Nolan—the Nolan across

**By Larry Holden**



the street, in 308 Elm Way. Mailmen and deliverymen were always confusing them. His initial was *J*, and the other's was *S*—not too dissimilar—and his own address was 303 Elm Way. The confusion was natural.

But pants. This was the first time they had shared pants. Nolan laughed and held them up. They had come with his own sport jacket from the cleaner. The cleaner's delivery slip was pinned to them, and it said very plainly, Nolan, 308 Elm Way. It was a very beautiful pair of pants—dark brown sharkskin and expensive, and almost a perfect fit. Just the right length, but a little full around the waist.

Nolan had a sudden urge to see what this other Nolan looked like. Maybe they were twins. He cocked his head and looked at the slacks. Why not take them over? It was a dull evening, and maybe the thing would be good for a laugh.

He draped the slacks over his arm and, grinning, left his room. Three-o-eight was diagonally across the street. He'd gone up and down that street every day for six months, but this was the first time he'd taken a really good look at the address. The house, like some of its neighbors, was a gloomy, forbidding Victorian monstrosity, festooned from cellar to peak with wooden lace. A small sign in the front window said bluntly: **NO VACANCIES.**

The vestibule roster told Nolan that his namesake lived in apartment D-2 on the fourth floor. The front door was open. The inside held genteel dusk, and the quiet was more a hush than a silence. There were two feeble lights on the fourth floor, one at the head of the front stairway and one at the head of the rear stairway.

Nolan groped his way down the corridor, beginning to regret the impulse that had brought him here. *S.* Nolan wasn't



going to be any fun, not in this house. It wasn't a house for fun and mirth and laughter.

D-2 was almost at the end of the corridor, close to the rear stairway. Nolan sighed and knocked on the door. There was no bell or buzzer. The door swung in about a half inch. He knocked again. His knuckles made a hollow, disapproving sound, startlingly loud. The door swung in a little more.

Nolan opened it, stuck in his head and called, "Hello? Anybody home?"

Light streamed from the room and he blinked into it. Then he almost dropped the pants. S. Nolan was at home, all right, and—he'd guessed it—wasn't going to be any fun. He was lying on the floor in front of the ornate marble fireplace, and he was as dead as a brutally wielded poker could make him.

Jimmy's stomach churned and he looked quickly away from the back of that ruined head. S. Nolan was lying on his face, his arms haphazardly outflung. One leg was drawn up and the other lay crookedly pigeon-toed. He had on an expensive tweed sport coat and the tail of a plaid sport shirt showed from beneath it. He had on Argyle socks and a pair of russet benchmade shoes.

The only thing needed to complete this jaunty ensemble was the pair of slacks that hung over Jimmy's arm.

Nolan stood, frozen motionless. This was death at its most violent, at its bloodiest, and the fact that it had been inflicted on a man who bore his name seemed to make it just a little more horrible and personal.

**T**HE room looked as if a giant had churned it with a stick. Clothes were strewn everywhere. The closet door was open and Jimmy could see that it was empty. A pigskin bag had been gutted on the bed, and the drawers of the high, old fashioned chest

hung agape, draped with flung shirts, socks and underwear.

Jimmy walked toward the body with slow, compulsive steps. He knelt down beside it and gingerly touched the outflung wrist, feeling for a pulse. There wasn't any. There couldn't possibly have been, but he had to be sure. The flesh did not have that cold, set feeling of a body long dead, and the blood, though turning brown, had not fully dried.

The scream came from behind him with the shatter of breaking glass. He jumped and turned. In the doorway through which he had just come, her plump hand still on the doorknob, stood a short, very fat woman, dressed completely in black except for a high white collar of lace. Her eyes swung slowly up from the corpse to Nolan's gaping face, and she screamed again. She turned and waddled down the hall, shrieking at the top of her lungs.

That she thought him the murderer was obvious. Nolan sprang for the door, calling, "Wait a minute, I didn't—"

She was at the head of the stairs, babbling at a man and girl, who had just come up.

She was crying hysterically, "I saw him sneak up the stairs and I followed him, and there he was, killing poor Mr. Nolan. He killed him and took his pants. I saw him!"

The man looked up sharply. He was squat and had the heavy, indestructible look of an enormous turtle. He came up the hall toward Nolan with a deliberate but wary stride.

"What's going on here?" he growled.

Nolan gulped. "She's got it all wrong. I just walked in and he was dead." He gestured with his arm and the pants flapped.

The squat man said, "Oh yeah?" He made a lunge and caught Nolan by the other arm, at the same time swinging his left in a short, vicious arc. Nolan ducked

and the fist caught him on the shoulder.

He twisted his arm away and said angrily, "Wait'll I tell you what happened, can't you?"

The squat man grunted and swung, but his fist tangled with the pants, losing its force. Nolan's temper flared and he hooked for the man's wide jaw. Nolan weighed a hundred and eighty and it was a solid smack. The squat man went back, digging frantically with his heels to regain his balance. Then he tripped over a rug and crashed into the wall. He fell, scrabbling down the wallpaper with his fingers. He swore furiously, squirmed up on his left hip. There was a dull glint of metal, and Nolan turned and sprinted for the back stairway.

A gun bellowed, and somewhere behind Nolan a window glass collapsed with a musical tinkle. He flew down the stairs and hit the door at the bottom with his full weight. It crashed open with a splintering of wood, and he lurched out into the backyard. He scrambled over a six-foot wooden fence, dropped into the neighboring yard, thundered through a battery of empty ashcans, down an alley and out to the street. There was a Buick convertible parked at the curb. He dived into the rear seat and crouched on the floor. A plaid blanket lay on the seat, and he pulled it over him. He lay there panting, trying to listen.

He was waiting for running footsteps, excited voices, police whistles, sirens—anything to tell him that the chase was really hot. But there was nothing. Somewhere in the dark a cat sang a brief, furious aria; somewhere on the river a tired tug hooted; somewhere a door slammed, and somewhere a radio was playing—all ordinary night sounds in that neighborhood. He held his breath, straining to hear.

He knew he'd made a mistake, running like that, but the squat man had attacked him so savagely that he hadn't had time

to think. When the gun was pulled, he should have stayed there and raised his hands. But then he remembered the look of fury that had convulsed the man's face. It hadn't been the face of a man who would have paid any attention to raised hands.

Maybe if he went back, now that everybody'd had time to cool down, and explained things. . . . Then he heard the police sirens, and a wave of cold panic swept over him. A police siren has a queesting, inhuman sound, like the cry of an animal in full voice after its quarry. Nolan's fright had been mingled with anger before, but now he was simply scared. He had forgotten, for the moment, that there would be police.

What would they think of the setup? The fat woman in black had seen him bending over the body, then he had knocked down the squat man and fled. Nolan swallowed hard and tried not to think of how the police would react to his story.

He slid cautiously out of the car. All he wanted to do now was get back to his own room and think things over. He looked down at the pants still over his arm—he had hung on to them from some instinctive urgency not to leave anything behind him in that murder room. His first impulse now was to get rid of them—but that wouldn't do at all. They were the only evidence he had that he had walked innocently into that room.

He circled the block, keeping well off Elm Way, and got into 303 through the back door. He didn't switch on the light immediately when he walked into his room. He went to the window, parted the curtain with his finger and looked down into the street. There were two cars parked in front of 308, both of them bloodily stabbing the night with red spotlights. Police cars.

He muttered, "Now what?" and pulled down the shade. He turned on the floor



lamp beside the lounge chair. He dropped into the chair and automatically felt for a cigarette. Yeah, now what? What to do about it? He had to do something.

There were three people who could identify him—the girl, the man and the fat woman in black, who was probably the landlady. With every tick of the clock, he knew, he was making it worse for himself by staying in his room—but he did not want to walk across the street to certain arrest.

His heart did a flip-flop when the knocks came on the door. He could literally feel the blood drain from his face; he was suddenly cold. He twisted in his chair and stared at the door. The knocks came again. For a moment he wanted to run—then, angry with himself, he jumped up and strode to the door.

**I**T WAS a girl. He had expected police, and it was only a girl. She had on one of those new, long, cape-like coats with an attached hood thrown back on her shoulders. Her hair was short, red and curly. Her face was very lovely—and very scared. In one hand she clutched a crisp of yellow paper, and in the other she held a saddle-leather handbag to her bosom. She was quivering between the impulse to run and some kind of forced determination not to.

"M-Mr. Nolan?"

Nolan stared at her. There was something familiar about her. Then he got it and his stomach turned. She was the girl who had been with the squat man at the head of the stairs in 308. His jaw dropped.

"You're Mr. Nolan?" she said, seeming to take courage from his silence.

He looked over her shoulder into the gloomy hallway. There was no one there, not even the sound of anyone. She was alone.

"That's right," he said guardedly.

She gulped. "The police are looking for you." Then, quickly, she added, "But

I didn't bring them with me. I didn't even tell them. Can I come in? I want to talk to you."

He opened the door wider and stepped aside. She came in cautiously, throwing him a sidelong glance, like a cat walking into a strange place. He closed the door, and she jumped.

"I don't know what you want to talk about," he said defensively. "but I didn't do it. I didn't kill anybody. I didn't even know that man. I was just taking his pants over to him. How did you know where to look for me?"

Timidly she held up the bit of yellow paper she was holding.

"The c-cleaner's delivery slip. It came off the pants when Mr. Searle tried to hit you. I—I picked it up."

"That doesn't have my address on it!"

"I—I know. When I saw the slip, I thought maybe you were delivering the pants. I tried to tell them that over there," she said breathlessly, "but they were all making too much fuss to listen. So I went to the cleaner myself—it's only two blocks up." Her face suddenly became very watchful.

"And you found out I wasn't the delivery boy. I could have told you that before, if your friend hadn't been in such a hurry to pull his gun. The pants were delivered here by mistake."

She was still watching him, and she gave her head the slightest perceptible shake. "I thought of that, too," she whispered. "I asked the cleaner." She stopped.

Nolan said slowly, "You asked the cleaner? What did you ask the cleaner?"

She opened her mouth twice before the words would come. "I—I asked him if the pants could have been delivered to anyone else by mistake, so he called in his son. His son delivers things. The son said, 'Which Nolan?' Then he said he was always very careful, because the Nolan at 308 was very fussy about his

clothes. He said—" she swallowed—"he said he couldn't possibly have made any mistake."

Nolan felt as if the rug had been suddenly jerked out from under his feet. "Naturally he'd say that!" he shouted. "What else did you expect him to say? Guys like that don't admit they make mistakes. You did a good job on that—now he'll swear up and down that he delivered those pants to 308. He'll even remember handing them over personally. You fixed me fine that time. Thanks. Thanks a lot!" He glowered at her.

She took two steps backward away from him. "I—I'm sorry," she quavered.

"Thanks again. When they sit me in the electric chair I'll let you hold my hand." He turned away from her and walked to the window. The two police cars were still outside. She had ruined the one alibi that could have gotten him out of this mess. Now he had no story to take to the police—and they were looking for him.

"What did you come here for?" he asked dully, without turning.

"To make a deal."

That startled him, and he jerked around, incredulous. "To make a what?"

"A—a deal. For the negatives."

"Negatives? Negatives of what?"

She didn't believe him, he could see that. She had expected a denial. She thought him a killer, and she was afraid of him—but still she had come. Her face was pale and her mouth kept twitching as she fought to keep it composed. This was over his head. Why should she stick her neck out like that?

"What kind of deal do you mean?"

"I'll give you twenty thousand dollars for the negatives, and I won't say anything to the police. And neither will Mr. Searle. That's fair, isn't it?" Her eyes were wide, anxious.

Twenty thousand dollars. He barely refrained from whistling.

"What's on these negatives," he asked, "the atom bomb formula?"

"You—you don't know?"

"Not yet. But anything worth twenty thousand dollars is worth knowing about."

He felt his nerve ends tingle with excitement. There was more to this than just a killing. Maybe there was still a way out for him. He waited tensely for her answer.

She knitted her fingers in an agony of indecision. "I think twenty thousand dollars is enough," she said defiantly. "I shouldn't have to tell you anything for that much money."

"Not ordinarily, but now—yes. There's a murder involved."

She loosened her hands in a gesture of helplessness. "All right," she said with difficulty. "If I didn't tell you, you could find out anyway, simply by looking at the negatives. It's my sister. She's married to a wonderful man—Walter Coyne."

This time Nolan did whistle.

"You mean Million-A-Day Coyne? Is that the one?"

"He doesn't make a million a day, or anything like it. That's silly!"

"All right, he makes just enough to pay his bills. Go on."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Earn Your Slay

HE gave him a look, but otherwise ignored the interruption. "Enid, my sister, has a lot of pride, but she's not very bright. She met Nolan in Miami last year. He called himself Townsend then. Walter was busy in New York, and she was lonely. Townsend took her places and gave her the attentions a girl likes to have. She was grateful and she—she mistook it for something else." It was pure anguish for her to say all this.



"When she left Miami, she was convinced that she was in love with Townsend, and she sent him a number of letters. Walter had gone to Japan on some mission for the government. When Walter returned, she realized that Townsend meant nothing to her, absolutely nothing. She tried to tell Townsend, but—" She faltered.

"He blackmailed her," Nolan said.

"You do know!" she said.

Nolan shook his head wearily. "No," he said. "But I've read a tabloid or two. Go on."

"Well, he did blackmail her. The worst kind. He kept threatening to tell Walter, and demanded money all the time!"

"She paid him?"

"Of course she paid him," the girl said. "What else could she do? She paid him, and she bought back the letters, one by one, until she had them all. Then what do you think? He doublecrossed her. He'd photographed every letter before he sent it back to her, and he started blackmailing her all over again."

"It was mean," Nolan said dryly. "What gave between your sister and Townsend?"

"Nothing. Really nothing—except the letters."

"Then why didn't she go to her husband and tell him? You know, most men are pretty decent guys. If I had a wife, and she did something silly, I certainly wouldn't club her over the head for the rest of her life because of it. Or is Walter a louse?"

"He's a wonderful man!" she flared. The fire died quickly and she said dejectedly, "It's Enid. Sometimes I think she has butterflies instead of a brain. She really loves Walter. She'd rather die than seem a fool in his estimation, and she was a fool with Townsend. She couldn't tell him. Don't you see?"

"You mentioned somebody else—a Mr. Searle. Where does he fit in?"

"He's a private detective. I—we hired him to get the negatives from Townsend."

"And he's letting you run around after blackmailers and murderers like this?" Nolan demanded harshly.

She lifted her chin. "He's not letting me. I made him take me with him when he went to see Townsend. He doesn't know I'm here, if that's what you mean."

"Does your sister know what you're up to?"

"N-not exactly."

"I'd like to talk to your sister."

"You would?" she took an eager step toward him. "I could take you there right away."

He wanted to say, "You poor, funny kid, maybe I can help you," but he couldn't. His one chance of getting out of this mess was to find out what it was all about. He couldn't start feeling sorry for anybody. Still, this girl touched a part of him that he hadn't known existed.

He asked, "What's your name?"

"Ellen."

"Look, Ellen, dammit—"

The door was thrust open. The stocky man—Searle—stepped quickly into the room and slammed the door behind him. His heavy face was dark, but as stolid as if carved from wood. He gave Nolan a brief glance and then turned to the girl.

"Wait down in the car for me, Ellen," he said. "I want to talk to this monkey for a minute."

Nolan said quickly, "We're all going out to see her sister."

He didn't want to be alone with Searle. The man owed him something and looked as if he were ready to pay it back. This wasn't the time for it.

Searle said gratingly, "Shut up, you!"

Ellen looked from Nolan to Searle, and her face was troubled. "You—you knew I was here?" she asked in a small voice.

He waved his hand impatiently. "A blind man could have followed you here. Now, will you go downstairs and wait in

the car before the cops walk in on us? You don't want to have to explain to them, do you? Just let me handle this and everything'll be okay."

Nolan started toward the door. "Nuts to you, brother," he said. "I'm talking to Ellen's sister, not to you."

Searle glowered and repeated heavily, "Go down to the car, Ellen—will you please go down to the car?"

Before she could answer, Nolan squeezed her arm and said quickly, "We're going out to see your sister, or it's no deal."

She wavered, glancing from Nolan to Searle.

"Leave me alone with him," said Searle thickly, "and I'll get it out of him without any shenanigans."

He shouldn't have said that, for it decided her. She lifted her chin again; it seemed to be a characteristic gesture when she was crowded.

"We'll all go out to see my sister," she said with an unexpected note of authority in her voice. "I think that's the best way to handle it, Mr. Searle."

The "Mr." put Searle in his place. His face mottled. He swung around, saw the closet and strode toward it. He flung open the door.

"Have it your own way," he said grimly. "We'll all go out and see your sister. Maybe it's better that way. We'll have more room. But Mr. Nolan will take some clothes along. Maybe he'll stay a while!"

THEY went in Ellen's car, a Ford roadster. She drove, Searle sat on the outside, and Nolan sat in the middle. Before they left the city, she called her sister to say they were coming.

Searle's attitude had changed entirely.

"Getting the jitters, Nolan?" he grinned. "You're in a spot, you know. On the left, there're the cops—on the right, there's me. That's the way you

make mashed potatoes. Beginning to feel like a potato yet, Nolan?" He laughed and leaned back in his seat, relaxing. He lit a cigarette and watched the Kearny meadows go by.

Nolan did not answer him. From time to time, Ellen threw them troubled, side-long glances, but she was too wound up to talk. It was a tense, silent ride, though, as they roared through the Holland Tunnel, over the Williamsburg Bridge and out to Long Island. Ellen drove like a zombie, her eyes fixed on the relentlessly unwinding road. Nolan glanced frequently at her, curiously wanting to touch her hand to give her reassurance—yet knowing he himself needed it more.

The Coyne house backed on the Sound. His first impression of it proved deceptive—its simple lines concealed its bulk. The veranda was huge, but the twelve two story columns gave it a graceful proportion. The wings branched north and south from the main house and they, too, in their simplicity, served to hide the actual extent of the dwelling. There was a half mile of long, curving road, between carefully manicured lawns, before you reached the main entrance, and only there, at the foot of the wide veranda steps, did Nolan become aware of the size of the main building. It loomed four stories high, and spread wide on either side. Wryly, he estimated that the window cleaning concession alone would keep him in Harris tweeds for a long, long time. The place was immense.

Oddly enough, it was Walter Coyne, himself, who answered the door. He was a plump little man, dressed in an old sweatshirt, dungarees with copper rivets at the pocket-ends, and a pair of tattered, dirty-white sneakers. He greeted them with a happy smile on his apple-cheeked face.

"The servants are off tonight," he said. "We're roughing it!"

Ellen said, "All of them, Walter?"



Nolan did not miss the narrowing of Walter's eyes, but Walter said blandly, "Well, not exactly all of them, my dear. Cook is still on, but we can hardly expect her to answer the door, can we? Come in, gentlemen. We've been expecting you. My wife wanted me to mix a gallon of Manhattans, but I said that's hardly a man's drink. You'll have to be content with scotch."

He laughed, kissed Ellen on the cheek and shook hands with both Nolan and Searle as she introduced them. Nolan noticed that Walter asked no questions, or even looked askance at the bag Nolan was carrying. He seemed to take that for granted, and the fact gave Nolan a sticky, uneasy feeling, as if he were walking on flypaper.

Walter said heartily, "Enid's inside listening to records—something awful, like Sibelius. You two go in and rescue her while I show Mr. Nolan his room."

He grinned at Nolan, but the grin didn't go beyond the corners of his mouth. He picked up Nolan's bag and trotted up the high, vaulted hall toward the curving stairway. Nolan followed him while the other two walked more slowly across the hall. His room was in the south wing of the house. It had a Chippendale tester bed, a huge Chinese lacquered chest of drawers and an oriental rug that glowed like jewels.

Walter Coyne closed the door and put his back to it. It was a hard, hostile gesture. The grin had faded from his face and his eyes were as cold and gray as January ice.

"I'll come to the point immediately," he said frigidly. "I don't like beating around the bush. How much, Nolan?"

Nolan didn't start. He was used to it now. He turned and saw, to his surprise, that there was more danger in this plump little man than he would have supposed. Coyne stood at the door with his thumbs hooked into his belt, and there was a bulge

in his right hand pocket that could have been a gun. Walter looked fully capable of using it.

He snapped, "Well, name your price, Nolan. I want those negatives."

Nolan shook his head, wondering how much he could tell the man. "I don't have any negatives," he said. "Also I'm supposed to think you don't know about this. How come?"

"Mr. Nolan, this is a large house, and there are many telephone extensions. During the last few days I have heard several very significant conversations, and tonight, when Ellen called, I heard a particularly significant one. I know you have the negatives of the photographs of my wife's letters, and I know you're holding them for a price. How much, Mr. Nolan?"

He leaned forward toward Nolan and his eyes glittered. He made no motion toward his gun, but in that little motion of leaning there was more actual menace than in the headlong savagery of Searle.

Nolan licked his lips.

"Listen," he said, "I'm here on false pretenses. I don't have those negatives. I'm here only because I want to get myself out of a mess that I walked into."

Quickly, he told Coyne how he had gone over to 308 Elm Way with Mr. S. Nolan's slacks, and just what he had stumbled into there. Coyne's eyes narrowed, then gradually they spread with surprise and thinned again with sympathy. When Nolan finished, Coyne's brows were knitted.

"Dammit, Nolan," he said, "every time I turn around there's a blank wall! I can't go to my wife and say, 'Darling, pay no attention to this—it's all right.' I want to, believe me! But she has a certain kind of pride. Maybe it's foolish, but it's there." He shook his head and went on forlornly, "I want to help her out of this, and I don't know how. I'm out on a limb. I'd hoped—well, if you don't have the

negatives, there's nothing more I can say. But I know this will be a terrific disappointment for Enid. And believe me, Mr. Nolan—" he smiled wryly—"I wish I could help you out of your trouble."

"When we find the man who has the negatives of those letters," Nolan said grimly, "I'll get out of my trouble."

Coyne nodded, looking down at his sneakers. "We'd better go downstairs," he suggested, "or they'll start wondering. I'm not supposed to know about this, you know." He turned to the door, then turned back sharply. "One last thing," his eyes were hard, "if you let on to my wife that I do know, Nolan, you'll regret it. I love her very deeply, and I won't have anybody making her unhappy. Understand that!"

Nolan followed him down the curving stairway. At the bottom Coyne turned and said with seeming casualness, "By the way, how long did you know Townsend, Nolan?"

Nolan said steadily, "I didn't know him at all. And now—don't you think I'm entitled to a base on balls? There've been an awful lot of wild pitches going by me."

Coyne shrugged, half humorously, and led the way to a small room at the west side of the wide hall. The music swelled into *Finlandia* as he opened the door, and those sitting inside seemed to be fast in the grip of those gloomy chords. Ellen was sitting in a dejected huddle on the floor at the feet of a girl, who could have been no one but Enid.

THE resemblance was striking. Each had the same smoldering red, curly hair, the same delicate cameo face—the difference was in the eyes. Ellen's shone with an almost reckless light; Enid's had a kind of neurotic pride. Her chin was pointed and weak, and she seemed to be trying to compensate by holding it just a little too high. Searle

sat lumpishly in a leather lounge chair, glaring.

Ellen jumped up quickly as Nolan and Coyne entered the room.

She blurted, "This is Mr. Nolan, Enid, and he's very interested in first editions, so why don't you show him your collection?" The words came out with a rush, as if she had been rehearsing them in her mind.

Enid rose stiffly and tried to smile against the tautness of her face. That was for the benefit of her husband. The result was a thin, tooth-hard grimace, like something painted on a corpse. She picked up a leather handbag from the chair in which she had been sitting and spoke in a stilted voice.

"I'll be glad to show it to you, Mr. Nolan, if you're really interested." Her composure was shaky and on the edge of shattering.

Nolan said quickly, "Thank you—I'd very much like to see it."

He saw pleading in Ellen's eyes and in spite of himself thought, *Dammit, am I falling for that little busybody?*

After some desultory conversation he followed Enid unhappily out of the room. Walter Coyne's plump face was rigid and he stared straight ahead at the huge Capehart that occupied almost the entire wall opposite him.

Enid led Nolan into the next room, the library. The only light was on the flat-topped Chippendale desk in the corner, and the dark books, row on row, rose to the ceiling. It was a room that closed in on you with old shadows. Enid shut the door and listened tensely at it for a minute before she turned to Nolan. She made a vague, almost apologetic gesture.

"I don't want my husband to know about this," she said nervously. "I think I'd kill myself if he found out. I'd kill myself!"

He believed her. There was an intensity in her voice that made him shiver.



"Mrs. Coyne," he said, "I don't have the negatives. I tried to tell Ellen that, but she wouldn't believe me. If I had them, I'd give them to you. I'm not a blackmailer. But I'm just as interested in finding them as you are. The police are looking for me. I have to find the man who has those negatives."

His voice trailed off. He hadn't seen it before, but she was in a state of frozen hysteria. She had hardly heard a word he had said—except the few that pertained directly to her. It was futile, talking to her.

She said whitely, "I know you have them—you have to have them. Mr. Searle searched Townsend's room thoroughly, and they weren't there. You were seen coming out of that room—" her voice shrilled hysterically—"and I know you have them, I know it!"

Her hand dived into her leather bag and came out with a gun in it. She was so close that the gun was against Nolan and involuntarily he sucked in his stomach. He held out his hands and his finger ends quivered. It would take only a whisper and she'd shoot. He felt the sweat beads prickle on his upper lip, but he managed to keep his voice steady.

"I don't have the negatives, Mrs. Coyne. Shooting me won't mean a thing."

"Fifty thousand dollars," she whispered. "I'll give you fifty thousand dollars for them. It's all I have. If you ask one cent over that, I'll shoot you. Fifty thousand dollars."

He whispered back in the same tone she had used, "Fifty thousand, a hundred thousand, a million—I don't have the negatives. I'm not holding you up. I don't have them!"

She wavered, and suddenly she began to cry. The tears welled up in her eyes, spilled down her cheeks, and she made no move to stop them. She just stood there in silent misery, and the gun wilted slowly in her hand, and the hand dropped to her

side. She was defenseless, and she had almost touched bottom—one word, Nolan knew, and she'd turn the gun on herself.

He said swiftly, "Let's wait until the man who has the negatives calls you—and he will. He'll want money. I want him because I want to get myself out of my own mess. Searle wants him because he wants to earn his fee. There are two of us working for you. You're not alone, Mrs. Coyne. There are two of us helping you."

If Enid Coyne heard, she gave no indication. He gently took her arm.

"Let's go back and listen to the music," he said. "We'll talk about it in the morning, and make plans to get you out of this. We'll talk it over—you, Ellen, Searle and I. Four heads are better than one."

She was beyond believing any part of it, but she turned obediently and let him lead her out of the room. Coyne looked up sharply as Nolan opened the door to the other room. Enid balked in the doorway.

"I—I want to go to my room," she mumbled. She turned and ran across the hall, but not so quickly that Coyne had not seen her reddened eyes. He glared at Nolan.

Ellen jumped up and ran out of the room after her sister.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Hot Seat Freeze

**S**EARLE sat upright in his chair and said explosively, "Well, ain't that something!" He looked directly at Coyne, whose plump hands were clasped, white-knuckled, on his knees.

Coyne avoided looking at Nolan. He said heavily, "Suppose we have a drink, gentlemen?"

He heaved himself up out of his chair as if he weighed more than his bulk and plodded across the floor to the cellarette.

that was concealed in the Capehart. He brought out a bottle of Courvoisier and three tiny glasses. He set the glasses on the lamp table beside Searle's chair with unnecessary care and, with the same meticulousness, filled them. Still avoiding Nolan's eyes, he handed one glass to him, another to Searle, and took the third back to his chair with him.

He raised his glass.

"Here's to whatever it's to, gentlemen," he said woodenly. "Drink hearty."

The doorbell rang. It made a muted *bong*. Coyne put down his glass and pushed himself erect. He made no excuses as he plodded from the room. Searle looked at Nolan, then jumped up and went swiftly to the door, peering down the hall.

Nolan heard Coyne say, "Yes, gentlemen?" There was a mumble of voices, then Coyne said harshly, "Yes, he's here. Follow me."

Searle whirled. "Cops," he said crisply. His arm shot out, pointing toward a door at the end of the Capehart. "Out there. Quick!"

Nolan dived for the door. It was a powder room. He shut the door and it was dark. He barely breathed, holding his ear against the panel of the door.

He heard the tramp of feet and then Coyne's voice demanding, "Where's Mr. Nolan?"

Searle's voice answered casually, "He just went upstairs. He said he wanted to wash his hands. Are the police after him?"

Coyne said dryly, "Mr. Nolan seems to have committed a murder."

Nolan gritted his teeth.

A third voice ordered authoritatively, "Tell 'em to cover the grounds. He can't get very far."

There was the sound of running feet, then silence—except for the Capehart that went on playing *Fislandia* for the third depressing time.

"Nolan," Searle's voice whispered through the door, "stay put. They'll be gone in a half hour. Coyne's taken a couple of them upstairs to look around—the rest of them are outside. Just stay put, and maybe you'll be okay."

Nolan stood in the dark, holding his breath, straining to listen. Furiously, he wished Searle would turn off that damn record, but the music pounded gloomily on and on. Once he could hear the tramp of feet upstairs as the police went through the room directly overhead. It made them seem closer than they actually were.

Nolan licked the sudden sweat from his upper lip. He began to feel trapped. There were no windows in the tiny room—there was no way out except the way he had come in. Fear was a suffocating emotion—it clung to his throat, it squeezed his heart, it made him shrivel and draw into himself.

"Still with us, Nolan?" it was Searle again. There was a note of malicious enjoyment in the whisper. "You haven't fainted yet, son? Coyne just took them down into the cellar. He's got a load of liquor down there. Maybe they'll all get soused and forget about you, eh?" He laughed. "Hold tight, lover boy—you've still got a prayer."

Nolan snarled, "Go to hell!"

Searle laughed again. "Naughty, naughty. Bad word. Policeman wash your mouth with soap. And don't forget, sonny, I'm doing you a good turn."

Nolan turned angrily away from the door. His pocket caught on the knob and ripped his trousers to the knee. He swore.

Searle snapped, "Shut your trap. They're coming back."

Nolan heard a farther door open and stood very still.

The policeman's voice was saying, "What I don't understand, Mr. Coyne, is what he was doing here in the first place."

Coyne said quickly, "You're sure they haven't caught him outside? We've gone



through every room in the house and he's skipped, all right. But he can't get far on foot."

"You'd know if they got him. But you haven't answered my question, Mr. Coyne. What was Nolan doing here?"

Even Nolan, in that dark room, could feel the tenseness of the sudden silence.

The policeman said impatiently, "Well, Mr. Coyne?"

"This—is very difficult for me," Coyne said slowly.

"Is it?"

"Yes, it is, my friend!" Coyne's temper flared. "I'm not in the habit of entertaining criminals in my home."

"Who is? Let's cut out this stalling, Mr. Coyne. It's a question you're going to have to answer!"

"All right. But it's very painful to me," Coyne's voice dragged. "He was blackmailing me—he and this man he killed. He came here tonight for money. The final payment, he said. I hope I can rely on your discretion in this matter, officer. I don't want this to reach the ears of my wife."

"It doesn't have to," the policeman said woodenly, "as long as you're in the clear yourself. What was the blackmail?"

"Oh, that!" Coyne made it sound as if that were actually of little importance. "I was at a party in Miami, and some photographs were taken. As far as I was concerned, it was entirely innocent, but the young lady in the picture with me—one of the entertainers—was rather scantily clad. Not the sort of photograph," Coyne said dryly, "a man's wife would put in the family album."

It seemed to go over. The policeman asked several more questions about the mythical photograph, but it was evident that he had swallowed Coyne's story and was satisfied.

"If that's all there's to it, Mr. Coyne," he said finally, "don't worry about it's getting to your wife. And don't worry about

Nolan. The boys are going over the grounds with a fine comb. We'll get him pretty soon."

"Fine, thanks, and by the way—"

The voices faded out of the room. Nolan raised his hand to wipe his face and was not surprised to find his fingers trembling.

After a few minutes, he heard Coyne come back and Searle growl, "You should have stalled them."

"I'm done with stalling," Coyne said angrily. "Did you see my wife's face after she got finished talking to him?"

"So what? He's still got the negatives, ain't he? If you're trying to protect your wife—"

"Dammit, Searle, I told you I'm finished with all that, didn't I? I'll handle this my way now!" The violence of his temper was like a drawn sword. "The police know how to handle blackmailers. They won't let anything come out. And if I get my hands on Nolan, I'll kill him! He's tortured Enid for months."

There was a brief pause, then Searle said heavily, "Well, it's your wife. I hope you know what you're doing."

"I do! I'll show you to your room. I'm going to bed."

"I'm gonna sit up for a while. I want to see if they get him."

"Suit yourself. Your room's the first one to the right at the head of the stairs. Good night."

**N**OLAN heard the door slam—but the violence still hung in the silence like radioactive mist. There was no doubt that Coyne had meant every word he said.

Nolan waited until he heard Coyne's footsteps on the second floor overhead, then called softly, "Searle—"

Searle growled, "Shut up and stay put. I'm thinking."

Nolan leaned against the door jamb.

He wanted desperately to light a cigarette, but he dared not. He started as the outside door opened again, but this time the voice was Ellen's.

"Did—did he get away?" she faltered. "I heard them come in, and I hid his bag upstairs, so they would think he'd gone. Did he get away, Mr. Searle?"

Searle said warily, "I didn't hear them get him."

"I hope he did get away. I'm sure he had nothing to do with all this until tonight. I talked to Enid, and she's sure he's innocent, too."

Searle hesitated, then said shortly, "He's in there."

"In the powder room?"

"Whatever it is, that's what he's in. Stay away from that door! The place is crawling with cops outside. Im trying to figure how to get him outta here. Your brother-in-law's blown his top."

"Yes. I heard him. His temper is terrible when he lets go. That's why Enid is afraid of him. I—I could take him to my apartment."

"Maybe you got something there, sis," Searle said slowly. "Yeah. If I could draw off the cops for about five minutes, you could slip out with him in your car—maybe. How can I get one of Coyne's cars?"

"The keys are usually left in the station wagon."

"Okay. I'll take the station wagon. It might just work. But be sure they're following me before you pull out." He crossed to the powder room door. "Got all that, sonny?"

Nolan growled, "Get me a pair of pants. I practically ripped these off on the door-knob."

Searle laughed softly. "The nervous type, eh?" Then to Ellen, "Get his bag for him. He's lost his pants."

Nolan gritted his teeth. Ellen ran out of the room and was back in a surprisingly short time. The door of the powder room

opened briefly and Searle tossed a pair of pants in Nolan's face. Shaking now with anger, Nolan pulled off his torn trousers and stepped into the fresh pair. Something ripped as he shoved his foot down the leg; he swore and jerked the pants up to his waist.

Outside, Searle whispered impatiently, "C'mon, snap it up, Flash. I've doused the lights. You can come out now."

Nolan slipped out of the tiny room. In the faint light that came from the hall, he saw Ellen standing tensely by the door. She gave him a wan, apologetic smile.

Searle said, "Let's go. Or we'll have Coyne on our necks again, and now he's poison."

Ellen led the way through the kitchen to the rear of the house.

Searle whispered, "Now be sure I've pulled them off before you make a break." He slipped out into the night.

Ellen drew in her breath and Nolan felt her shiver. They heard the motor of the station wagon snarl to life, saw the car swoop backward out of the garage. It turned and roared down the driveway. Police whistles shrilled, and a few minutes later two cars sped after Searle.

Nolan grasped Ellen's hand. "Now!" he said.

They made it to her roadster. He crouched on the floor, and she covered him with the car robe. They drifted down the driveway. Nolan felt the car surge as she turned west and stepped on the gas. They were two miles from the Coyne house before he sat up beside her and reached shakily for a cigarette.

"You're sticking your neck out—do you know that?" he said.

"I helped get you into this, and I want to get you out." She gave him a quick, apologetic glance. "Enid told me what you said to her tonight—it broke through her hysteria when she realized you were in trouble too. She feels encouraged. I'm very grateful."



She faltered and looked quickly away—then concentrated on the road.

SHE drove carefully; it took them an hour and a half to reach her apartment in Jersey. She ran the little car into the parking lot behind the apartment house, then let Nolan in.

"I wish this were over, all of it," she said unhappily. She switched on the lights. "Can I make you a drink? You look as if you could use one."

He nodded and grinned. She went into the kitchen and within a few moments he heard the cheerful ice being dropped into tall glasses. He sat down on the sofa and sprawled wearily, glancing around. It was a bright little apartment, and not nearly so lush as the fabulous Coyne home. There was a small radio in a good Sheraton cabinet, a delicately made Duncan Phyfe drop-leaf table. The drapes were made of colorful California prints, and the two small paintings on the wall reminded Nolan of Utrillo, though they probably weren't. Ellen came back into the room, carrying two glasses and smiling a little.

"I'm just a working girl," she said. "The room looks a little bare now, but I'm saving like the dickens to buy myself a pair of fireside chairs—fan-backs."

For some reason, this confession of enforced thrift lifted Nolan's spirits, and he grinned at her over his glass.

"Some day, when things aren't all cluttered up with cops," he said. "I'll take you to the zoo."

Her eyes brightened. "And we can have lunch in that outdoor restaurant under those gay umbrellas—" The momentary gaiety faded from her face, and she looked forlornly at him. Things were still cluttered up with cops, and Nolan was in her apartment only because he dared not go to his own.

"Oh, I wish Enid had never heard of that awful Townsend man!" she cried.

Nolan looked down into his glass, then asked slowly, "How did you happen to be going to see him tonight?"

"I made Mr. Searle take me. I—I was going to offer him fifty thousand dollars for those negatives. Enid's money, not mine. We didn't think he'd refuse."

"Searle knew about that? The fifty thousand?"

"Why, yes. I told him over the phone after I talked to Enid, and he met me in the lobby of the Hotel Franklin—"

"Searle knew about that and he knew Townsend's address!" Nolan's voice was suddenly charged with excitement. "He knew all that?"

"Of course. We told him everything when we hired him, but Enid didn't decide until this afternoon to offer fifty thousand. She wanted—"

There was a knock on the door—then Searle's voice came. "It's me. C'mon, let me in."

Ellen ran to the door, and Searle entered scowling.

"That's the last time I pull a stunt like that," he said bitterly. "I let them catch up with me, and that was okay—but then they called Coyne. He wanted them to crucify me. He's a smart, nasty onion. He knew something was up. But he calmed down and told them to let me go. He could have sloughed me on a stolen car rap." Searle looked at Nolan. "And all of that just to get Smartypants out of his mess. You gonna keep him here?"

Ellen nodded defiantly. "Until he's clear. I can move in with Enid for a few days."

"Calm down—it's okay with me. There are a few things I wanna go into with him—"

"No more tonight, please!"

"But I want to talk about it," Nolan said.

"No, please. I've had all I can stand—besides, I've got to get back to Enid's tonight."

"But I want to get this straight!" Nolan said tightly.

"Please—no more tonight! I'll sew your trousers. You've torn them again."

He said, "Damn the trousers!" But he looked down. The cuff of the right leg hung raggedly, where he had caught his heel in putting them on. Then he saw that they weren't his trousers at all. They were the slacks that had been delivered by mistake. He was wearing the pants that belonged to the dead man. Despite himself, his skin crawled.

"These are Townsend's slacks!" he said with repugnance. He bent down and fingered the tear. Something thin, hard and flexible scratched against his hand. He gripped it and pulled it out from inside the cuff of the slacks and held it up between his thumb and forefinger.

It was a strip of developed film, a half inch wide and about seven inches long.

"The negative!" Ellen gasped.

**N**OLAN held it to the light. The pictures were tiny, but he could see that there were six photographs of letters, too small to read.

Searle swore. "That's where he had them hid! I went through everything else—"

If he hadn't stopped short, Nolan would have thought nothing of it, for Ellen had said before that Searle searched the apartment after the murder. He looked up sharply at Searle.

"After you killed Townsend?" he asked slowly. "Look at him, Ellen. Look at his face!"

Searle's face flamed.

Ellen gasped, "You—"

Searle's hand dipped under his coat and flashed out, holding a gun.

"So now you know," he said. "At last you go to the head of the class. Y'know, sonny, sometimes a guy can be too smart. Maybe you—maybe me." He stood with his legs apart, covering both of them with

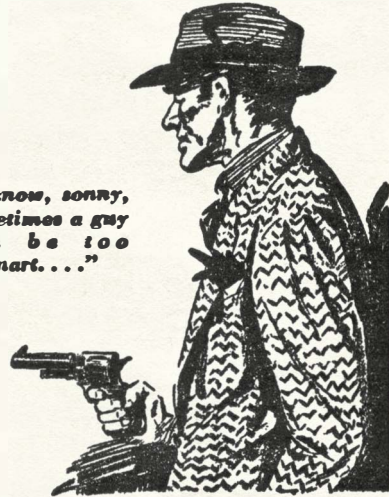
the gun. He shook his head. "I'm gonna have to figure this."

Ellen stammered, "But why—why did you kill Townsend?"

Nolan said, "He wanted the negatives. He wanted the fifty thousand dollars."

Searle grinned. "He's right. He knows all the answers. He's a bright boy. And maybe he knows, too, what the cops'll say

*"Y'know, sonny,  
sometimes a guy  
can be too  
smart..."*



when they find the pair of you dead here. I know some answers myself."

Nolan leaned back in his chair. "Some—but not all," he said. "How much do you expect to get for the negatives?"

"Fifty thousand—guaranteed!"

Nolan laughed. The sound was shaky and he could feel it rattle in his throat. "Peanuts," he said. "Go along with us and there'll be better than fifty thousand for each of us."

"Sure—a cool million. Quit your kiddin', sonny."

"Okay," said Nolan quickly, "don't believe me. Ask Ellen. We were just talking about it when you came in. She knows how far she can go with her sister. She's fed up with working. All she needed was the right kind of man."

Searle said incredulously, "Her?" His eyes flickered at the girl sitting on the



floor. There was uncertainty in his face now, a kind of bewilderment and suspicion. "What's she got to do with it?"

Ellen said steadily, "Why shouldn't I have something to do with it?"

Searle stared. "Your own sister?"

"Why not?" she had better control over her voice now. "I have to work forty hours a week and save like a miser just to buy myself a few sticks of furniture, and her husband has millions. Why shouldn't I get some of it if I can?"

Searle looked slowly from her to Nolan, then back to her again. Nolan took a cigarette from the box on the table beside the sofa.

Searle said angrily, "If this is on the level, why didn't you let me in on it earlier? I damn near ruined it tonight, calling in the cops. I wanted to throw a scare into Nolan, but I never expected Coyne to blow his top."

"Why should we have let you in?" Nolan asked coolly. "You killed Townsend and tried to pin it on me."

"We can fix that up. I'm a witness, ain't I? Suppose I don't identify you. Hell, you don't expect me to confess, do you?"

Nolan said, "No-o-o," and scratched the match. He leaned forward as if to hold it to his cigarette—then suddenly held the flame to the strip of negative. The film flared and he flung it from him. Searle yelled hoarsely and dived for it, beating at it with both hands to put out the fire.

Nolan sprang on him and hooked a fist to his jaw. Searle grunted and twisted, trying to level his gun. Nolan grabbed his arm in both hands and bent it backward. Searle heaved and threw himself backward on top of Nolan. They rolled against the coffee table and it went down with a splintering crash. Nolan had Searle's arm in a hammer lock now and he was slowly breaking it. Searle clubbed his face with his free hand. Nolan buried

his head against Searle's arm and grimly increased the pressure.

Searle screamed. The gun dropped from his hand. Nolan snatched it up and scrambled back. Searle remained crouched, holding his arm, groaning.

Nolan panted, "Call the police, Ellen."

Searle turned his head and looked up. "Sure, go ahead," he said hoarsely. "It's your word against mine. *You're* the one they want. Go ahead and call them!" He laughed harshly.

A fist thundered on the door. "I heard that, Searle!" It was Coyne's furious voice. "I heard every word of it. Let me in, Ellen. I knew he was up to something tonight. That's why I had the police let him go. I followed him. Let me in, Ellen. I'll take care of him!"

Ellen looked at Nolan. He shook his head violently.

"Call the police," he whispered. "We don't want another murder."

Coyne attacked the door with his feet. "Let me in!" he yelled. "Do you hear me? Let me in. I've got a right to come in! Listen to me now—"

Searle was quiet now; he stared palely at Nolan.

Coyne was still raging at the door when the police arrived ten minutes later. It took Nolan and a husky cop to keep him off Searle, who was now thoroughly cowed and frightened. There was death in Coyne's writhing face.

An hour later it was over, and Searle was safely locked away. Coyne had calmed down. As he walked from police headquarters with Ellen and Nolan, he said contritely:

"I'm sorry for what I tried to do to you, Mr. Nolan. Look, why don't you and Ellen come out to Long Island for the weekend and—"

Ellen smiled at Nolan. "I'm sorry, Walter," she said, "but Mr. Nolan and I have a date tomorrow. We're going to the zoo!"

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By  
**Webb B. Garrison**

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## New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 7)

line. A few days later, the determined kid-nappers found Gordon-Gordon in a cottage near Toronto. Whether he committed suicide or was killed, no one can say with certainty. But so great a commotion did their crime create that two of the kid-nappers were later elected governors of Minnesota, and three were sent to Congress!

Wright's various corporations issued watered stock to the extent of more than one hundred million dollars. Yearning to be a big-time operator in the social as well as financial world, the swindler bought yachts, race horses, and country homes. One of his establishments was built at a cost of a mere \$2,500,000. It included a billiard room built beneath his private lake; through the glass ceiling, players could watch the fish above. When his empire collapsed, many prominent English families lost their social standing, and have never been able to make a come back.

Sincerely yours,  
Jack Candless  
Toronto, Ont.  
Canada

That's an odd tale indeed, Mr. Candless. As for the long-vs.-short story controversy, we'll leave that to you and Mr. Abbott. We can't take sides, obviously, because both factions are represented among our readers. All we can do—and we hope we can do it well enough to please—is to strike a balance.

Still another faction, and by no means an unimportant one, is the group of readers who follow the Cipher Solvers' Club regularly. Some of them have been regularly represented for all of the more than twenty-five years of the club's existence. That's something of a record, even for people as indefatigable as the cipher fans, and we think both they and the CSC director, M. E. Ohaver, have something to be genuinely proud of.

Incidentally, Mr. Ohaver's followers are meeting this year in a national convention over the Labor Day weekend, in Providence, Rhode Island. Those interested should write to him for further information.

Here's a letter from a new reader:

## The Witness Chair

Dear Editor:

I have just finished my first copy of *New Detective Magazine*. I have been reading detective fiction for a number of years, but for some reason had never picked up a copy of your magazine. I was amazed to find when I had finished the stories that there was not one I did not like. Usually there are two or three, in all other magazines I have read. I especially enjoyed "Blood On My Doorstep" by Joel Townsley Rogers and "The Cold, Cold Ground" by John D. MacDonald, but all the others were good too. From now on I'm one of your steady readers, and only wish I had discovered the magazine sooner.

I notice you sometimes publish factual stories sent in by your readers, and wonder if you would be interested in some information about medieval criminal practice. For instance, medieval burglars believed that they could rob without danger of detection, provided that they burned a 'thief's candle' while at work. Custom prescribed that the device be made of the finger of a newborn or, still better, unborn child. It was thought that, once these tapers began to burn, nothing but milk would put them out. As late as the seventeenth century, robbers murdered pregnant women in order to extract 'candles' from their wombs.

Medieval criminals also thought the hand of a man executed by hanging would serve as a charm to preserve them from the same fate. So jailers and executioners operated a thriving 'black market', selling the hands of the persons whom they put to death. 'The hand of glory,' as such a member was called, was dried and carried about much as moderns carry four-leaf clovers and rabbit-feet.

The first person to hang by means of a 'drop' was the notorious Earl Ferrers, executed in 1760. Prior to that time, hanging was by suspension. Incidentally, English law still provides that if a nobleman is sentenced to hang, he can claim the privilege of being hanged with a silk rope!

I can supply more items like these, if you're interested.

Truly yours,  
Martin G. Welch  
Louisville, Ky.

We'd certainly be interested in reading more of the same, Mr. Welch. By all means let's hear from you again.

We're sorry there isn't room for more letters this time, friends; thanks to all of you who wrote in. Net time we'll try to pry a little more space for The Witness Chair into the magazine. We'd be very glad if we could run *your* letter then.

—THE EDITORS.



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# New Detective Magazine

Cipher Solvers' Club for November, 1948

Current Grand Total: 901,033 Answers

Eleven Answers—°Case Ace, 1217; †John Aitken, 210; †Alphamega, 485; °Amoroj, 507; °Attempt, 811; †Mrs. H. H. Bailey, 261; °See Bee Bee, 2772; °Alpha Bet, 1831; °Florence B. Boulton, 503; °Gold Bug, 1705; °Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 3979; °Carso, 1962; °Bessie Casey, 659; °Clphermit, 3623; °Codala, 1516; †Codet, 417; °Floyd E. Coss, 1732; °Darn Cross, 1144; °M. E. Cutcomb, 535; °Kay Dee, 707; °Honey Dew, 133; Gunga Din, 845; °Drol, 2169; °M. E. 3920; °Eve Eden, 1352; °Engineer III, 1852; °Arty Ess, 3976; °Estece, 1875; †Evie, 428; °Femo, 767; †Fern G., 270; Diana Forrest, 96; °Clarence P. Greene, 1349; °LeRoy A. Guidry, 934; °Gyrene, 893; °Henry J. Haewecker, 1971; °Hayrake, 1448; °T. Hegarty, 3531; °Henty, 1040; °Jack-Hi, 1160; °Hopado, 1496; °Invictus, 528; °Jayel, 4094; †Jayemen, 271; Jim, 44; °June, 551; °Kate, 2932; °Betty Kelly, 592; †S. A. L., 489; †F. Mack, 317; °Theodore W. Midlam, 3530; °Lee A. Miller, 1889; Gum Miner, 58; °Mossback, 2544; †Bagio, 230; °W. F. P., 3120; °B. E. R., 1248; °Rebbina, 89; °Wm. G. Ringer, 1479; °Alice Routh, 3901; †Ru. S. H., 357; °Mrs. H. A. Seals, 3070; °R. B. Shrewsbury, 1643; †L. Silverman, 189; °Logan Simard, 1195; †Sourdough, 232; °Sam Spiegel, 2754; °M. G. S., 1892; °Jack-Stay, 3803; †Clement E. Taylor, 866; †Miss Tick, 318; °Tisen, 1337; °Valkyrie, 1203; °Volund, 1955; °Mrs. James Wallen, 3101; Leona Watts, 34; †Ruth E. Weiss, 369; °E. H. Werner, 1484; †Arthur Whitfield, 431; †Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 451; °James H. Williams, 857; °Wilay, 1523; °Doctor X, 4016; °Yarbie, 1042; °Zisi, 505.

Ten Answers—°P. W. B., 1258; †Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 387; †Ray Boyd, 134; †J. E. L., 399; °Lucille E. Little, 2183; †H. Pool, 236; †C. Retherford, 207; †U. Solv'm, 473; °Nick Spar, 3302; †Arline F. Vaughn, 267; †Virsat, 155; °Ike N. Wynne, 3529.

Nine Answers—°Marguerite Gleason, 675; °Pearl Knowler, 2457; †Wes, 172.

Six Answers—°D. H. Holcomb, 1424.  
One Answer—A. Walrus, 63.

Cipher Solvers' Club for January, 1949

Current Grand Total: 902,247 Answers

Eleven Answers—°Aachen, 3354; °Case Ace, 1229; †John Aitken, 221; Alchemurg, 43; †Alphamega, 497; °Amoroj, 519; °Attempt, 823; °See Bee Bee, 2783; °P. W. B., 1370; °Alpha Bet, 1842; †Bombardier, 236; °Florence B. Boulton, 615; †Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 398; W. A. Buck, 12; °Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 3991; °Carso, 1973; °Bessie Casey, 670; °Clphermit, 3635; °Floyd E. Coss, 1744; °Darn Cross, 1155; °M. E. Cutcomb, 547; °Kay Dee, 719; °Gunga Din, 856; °Drol, 2181; °M. E., 3831; °Eve Eden, 1363; °Efdee, 1428; °Engineer III, 1864; °Arty Ess, 3987; °Estece, 1887; †Evie, 439; °Femo, 778; †Diana Forrest, 108; †Fern G., 281; °Clarence P. Greene, 1361; °LeRoy A. Guidry, 946; †Gyrene, 405; °Henry J. Haewecker, 1982; °Hayrake, 1460; °T. Hegarty, 3543; °Henty, 1052; °Jack-Hi, 1171; °Hopado, 1507; °Invictus, 539; °Jayel, 4105; †Jayemen, 283; Jim, 56; °June, 563; °Kate, 2943; °Betty Kelly, 604; °S. A. L., 500; †J. E. L., 410; †F. Mack, 328; °Theodore W. Midlam, 3247; °Lee A. Miller, 1901; Gum Miner, 70; °Mossback, 2556; †Pablo, 242; °W. F. P., 3131; °Kee Pon, 1169; °B. E. R., 1260; †Rebbina, 101; °Ray F. Richer, 1500; °Wm. G. Ringer, 1491; °Alice Routh, 3913; †Ru. S. H., 369; °Mrs. H. A. Seals, 3081; °Kay Vee See, 1709; °R. B. Shrewsbury, 1654; †L. Silverman, 200; °Logan Simard, 1206; †Sourdough, 244; °Sam Spiegel, 2766; °M. G. S., 1904; °Jack-Stay, 3814; †Clement E. Taylor, 378; †Miss Tick, 330; °Tisen, 1349; °Valkyrie, 1215; †Arlne F. Vaughn, 279; †Virsat, 167; °Volund, 1967; Leona Watts, 46; †Ruth E. Weiss, 380; °E. H. Werner, 1495; †Arthur Whitfield, 443; †Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 463; °James H. Williams, 869; °Wilray, 1535; °Ike N. Wynne, 3540; °Doctor X, 4028; °Yarbie, 1054; °Zisi, 577.

Ten Answers—†Ray Boyd, 144; °Gold Bug, 1715; †Honey Dew, 143; Helcrypt, 10; †Ian, 345; °Jesse C. Leach, 1205; °Lucille E. Little, †C. Retherford, 217; †U. Solv'm, 483; °Nick Spar, 3312.

Nine Answers—°Marguerite Gleason, 584; †H. Pool, 245.  
Seven Answers—°D. H. Holcomb, 1431; †Jughaid, 139.

## The House of Fear

(Continued from page 77)

ticket agent had said there'd been no train in or out since seven-thirty.

"Lieutenant!" She could hardly get breath to say it, because now the whole thing fitted—and she knew where Carey was. "That suitcase by him—the money from the bank is in it!"

And it was.

**B**UT it wasn't until four o'clock in the morning, after Carey was conscious and coherent, that they put every little piece of it together. There were gaps they had to fill out for Carey and things he had to explain to them, despite the fact that they had, by then, a full statement from Hardwicke.

He'd gone into debt and trouble over his head and had been planning to abscond after he returned from his vacation, but he didn't want to run with the law at his heels. He had picked his vacation as a time to establish another identity, an alter ego, right in town; an identity into which he could slip while the police were trying to trace the course he had taken. Then, after a few days, he could leave town at leisure and no one would try to trace the Mr. Hamilton Dexter who had been staying at the Randall House.

Carey said to Lissa and Lieutenant O'Hara, "I saw him on the street during my lunch hour today, and I was pretty sure I recognized him from the back the way he walked and everything. I knew if it was Hardwicke it meant he was planning something like—like he was planning. I followed him to the hotel without his seeing me and found out the name he was registered under.

"But then I had to get back to the bank and I was late as it was. If I'd been sure it was Hardwicke I could have called the police. But I wasn't that sure—I wanted to meet him face to face first. I was so worried about it I forgot to

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## New Detective Magazine

call you, Lissa, to tell you I had to work overtime. But I did call you before I went to see—what did you call him? The sinister Mr. Dexter?"

"Was he glad to see you, Carey?"

"He was not. I recognized him the minute I walked in—his disguise wasn't as good as he thought it was. He tried, though, to give me some gruff about the stunt being a practical joke. I wouldn't buy it. I picked up the phone and told him I was going to call the police. He pulled a gun on me.

"I told him shooting me wouldn't do any good because I'd told someone where I was—and I had, of course. I'd told you, Lissa. And I knew he'd know the sound of a shot would bring things down around his ears. So I called his bluff and took the receiver off the phone and asked for the police. And he called my bluff and tapped me on the noggin with the butt of the gun. That's all I know."

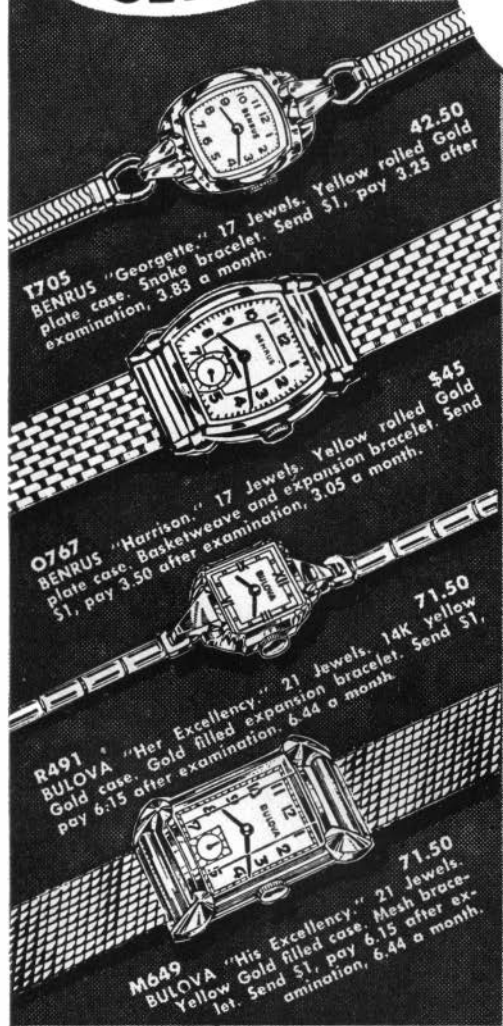
Lieutenant O'Hara said, "He knew the game was up anyway, then, and took a wild flyer—one he'd have got away with, too, if it hadn't been for your wife, Mr. Blake. He figured he had about ten minutes before the police would get there and he worked fast. He put his dressing gown on you, took your suit coat off and stripped your pockets, put you on the bed, put his bandage and false mustache on you, and got away down the fire escape.

"And that's all, except that he cleaned the bank and tried to get away and your wife caught him." The lieutenant added gravely, "By using logic. Say, Mrs. Blake, do they give that course every year, and could a guy with just a high school diploma take it?"

Carey Blake said, "They do and he can." He slipped his hand into Lissa's but looked past her at O'Hara. He said, "I'll see you there, Lieutenant."

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