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NEW

DETECTIVE

MAGAZINE

ONE WAY



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FAR ENOUGH!**

A SUSPENSE NOVELETTE

by **G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS**

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SWELL! LET'S GO!

HIDING NEARBY, ROD SEES THE FLASH AND COMES TO RESET THE CAMERA, BUT THEN...

UGH!

I'LL TAKE THAT GUN!

ALL SET! SHERIFF'S GOT AN EMPTY CELL FOR THIS BIRD. SAYS WE CAN DEVELOP YOUR FILM, TOO

SWELL! LET'S GO!

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THIN GILLETTES ARE PLENTY KEEN AND EASY SHAVING!

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BEST IN CRIME FICTION 25c

NEW DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Combined with **BLACK MASK DETECTIVE MAGAZINE**

Vol. 17

Contents for April, 1952

No. 3

TWO BIG NOVELETTES

- YOU CAN'T RUN FAR ENOUGH! G. T. Fleming-Roberts 14**
 Putting one foot out into the 'crime fringe' often means a hood's foot in your own doorway, an opening wedge for death.
- BLIND AD FOR MURDER Richard Sale 52**
 I wanted out of this picture—but this time I was really in, held fast by its fool-proof, 24-carat murder frame!
- Copyright 1938 by Popular Publications, Inc.*

SHORT CRIME ACTION STORIES

- A DEAD MAN'S CHEST Charles Beckman, Jr. 38**
 Each step he took toward the hiding place, marked out the path his enemy had waited five long years for him to show.
- THE TWO-FACED CORPSE Fletcher Flora 47**
 Trixy Vincent, alive, had been too slippery for the cops. But Trixy, dead, put an entirely different face on things.
- BRING YOUR OWN COFFIN Bryce Walton 81**
 Can you hide from death—in a coffin?
- THE CRIMSON TRACK Robert Zacks 91**
 Could one noose save his neck from the other?
- NOT MY FUNERAL Donn Mullally 94**
 . . . but the next one might be!

DEPARTMENTS AND FEATURES

- THE WITNESS CHAIR The Editors 6**
- DEATH SIGNS THE GUEST BOOK Greg Kennedy 10**
- SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS M. E. Ohaver 78**

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THE WITNESS CHAIR

THERE has come up recently an intriguing theory that when the wind blows from a certain direction the destructive minds that lurk along the dark fringes of our society are activated beyond their usual wont.

The fact that murder and other crimes seem to be committed more often when the wind blows from the south has been brought forward to substantiate a still older fascinating theory that the mind which is set against organized society is even further unbalanced by cosmic influences.

The older theory puts forth the idea that crime rises when the moon is at the full. Once believed in toto, then discredited, there now appears evidence that this is true, as the following letter from Jerry Klein, of Newark, N. J., indicates:

Dear Editor:

A Boston physician, Dr. Manfred Curry, has long studied weather's relationship to the forces which make men commit crimes, says south winds carry a particular kind of air. This air contains only relatively small amounts of a type of oxygen called ozone and the ozone-scarcity incites certain people to do wrong.

Curry says persons upset by a shortage of ozone generally have distinguishing physical features: large, wide-set eyes, broad noses, thick lips and ruddy faces. They dress lightly, love sweets and are "occasionally" vulgar.

But when an ozone-scarce south wind begins to blow, Curry says these individuals tend to lose control of themselves. As partial proof of his theory, the doctor points to Chicago where there were four suicides on one day and three on another—both days being light in ozone supply.

The doctor also cites a November day in San Francisco when three persons jumped to their deaths from the Golden Gate Bridge. No suicides had been reported for weeks before, but on that day he says an ozone-rich north wind gave way to an evil breeze from the south.

Not only are suicide and murder predictable among ozone-sensitive persons, Curry believes, but other types of crime as well. When a south wind blows, look for robbery to increase, too, for "robbers are potential murderers."

Some persons may be upset by north winds because then they get too much ozone. These close-eyed, narrow-nosed individuals are usually pale, egotistical and partial to meat and spices.

To find out which ozone group you belong to get into a phone booth and shut the door. In a few minutes, if you feel nervous, choky, hot and restless, Curry says you're the type who's irritated by the south wind.

There's still enough air in the booth, but you've decreased the supply of ozone. Get out before you tear the phone off the wall!

As for the other cosmic theory—the influence of the moon—some have laughed at the theory of "moon madness" and some police officials in West Orange, N. J., for example, claim to be able to predict when certain habitual trouble-makers will be arrested by checking the stage of the moon. When the moon is full, they get the cells ready.

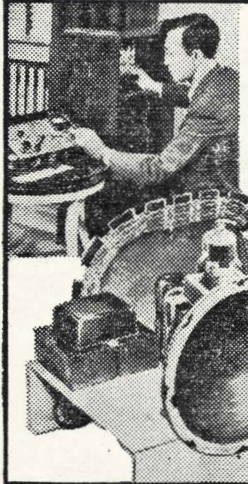
It's regarding the crime of arson, however, that police authorities are most outspoken about the influence of the moon on the potential criminal.

Dr. Carleton Simon, former New York City deputy police commissioner, for example, said you can blame the moon for leading astray arsonists who every year set fires that result in both deaths and many thousands of dollars damage. He cited fire records kept in New York City over a forty-two-year period as indicating that "with

(Continued on page 8)



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The ABC's of SERVICING

How to Be a Success in RADIO-TELEVISION

NAME _____ AGE _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ ZONE _____ STATE _____

(Continued from page 6)

a full moon there is an increase in pyromania." Dr. Simon said that without doubt, "arson always rises with the full moon."

EVER fascinating, strange and baffling to the average person, are the workings of the criminal mind. Here is an odd bit sent in by Bill Donovan of Auburn, N. Y., showing the pattern of logic and action which appeals to those who function outside the law and how they follow through—more often than not straight into the unsympathetic arms of the law.

Dear Editor:

A two-year stretch in Sing Sing in 1873-74 had taught "Little Dave" Mooney to be wary. The second-story artist, whose boyish face was framed by curly brown hair and a fringe of beard, had no desire to be a guest of the state again. Every move he made in future was to be fool-proof, he decided. He had a pal, "Frenchy" Lavoie, whose right arm was partly paralyzed as the result of a fall, but steered clear of him except while they were on a job together. The less they were seen together the better it would be for both.

Little Dave did all the veranda-climbing himself, while Frenchy, standing discreetly in the shadows below, served as a lookout and kept him covered with a Smith & Wesson. Frenchy could shoot with his good left hand almost as straight as Mooney could with his right.

They would pick a quiet residential street, where homes of the well-to-do were thickly shaded with trees and shrubbery, and would narrow their choice to a place easy of access. As a final precaution, they would study in advance the occupants of that house, inspecting with trained eye the jewelry of all persons who entered or left, familiarizing themselves as well as they could with those persons' habits and meal times, and noting with care the customary movements of domestic help at night.

Little Dave, small, agile, in his mid-twenties, could mount a veranda like a monkey. As a rule he worked bare-handed, sometimes using a spiral wire or chain ladder that could be compactly rolled or folded, hooked at one end. He'd attach this hook to a window sill, rain spout or projecting cornice, climb rapidly, and enter an upper-floor window. Then he'd lock the door from the inside by bolt or key to guard against his being disturbed by the sudden appearance of someone in the household. After that, he would ransack the room for valuables. Wearing rubbers, he stepped as silently as a cat.

The two men traveled from city to city, from fashionable resort to midtown hotel, invariably leaving a neighborhood when it grew too hot for them. For several months the team prospered.

Then came a foggy, raw, February night at Boston in 1880. Little Dave, with Frenchy's

help, invaded a banker's mansion with his usual technique and made a rich haul—jewelry, stocks, bonds. Their eyes must have glittered as they estimated their loot as worth nearly \$15,000.

That was their last burglary. On the very next night a seedy-looking character, en route to his room in a Florence Street lodging house in the Hub City, saw through the crack in a door left ajar the body of Frenchy sprawled grotesquely over his bed. Cautiously he pushed open the door. He saw by gaslight a bullet hole in the forehead and cold stiff fingers clutching a pistol. Nearby on a taretore lay a scrap of paper on which was scrawled: "Dear John: I am sick of life. Please forgive me. I remain yours, Marshall." He called the police.

A ham might have sized up the case as suicide, especially when the script was identified as the dead man's writing. But the Boston police were not hams. By painstaking work they discovered that Frenchy's real name was Edmond Lavoie and his alias Charles E. Marshall, that "John" was probably a fake, that the deceased had been known to associate with David Mooney and that he had given his girl friend a costly pair of diamond earrings just before he was shot. Further check-up revealed that those earrings had been among the loot stolen from the banker.

Bit by bit the jigsaw puzzle fell into place. Little Dave, picked up for questioning, stoutly denied at first all knowledge of the murder. Later, he was "persuaded" to confess.

"Yes, I shot him—in self-defense," said Mooney. "We quarreled over the earrings. Frenchy would have shot me first if I hadn't beat him to it."

But the police didn't believe that story. The jury didn't, either. They found him guilty and the judge sent him to state prison for life. The second-story man, after slaying his accomplice, had tried to make the crime look like suicide by placing a pistol in Frenchy's right hand. He might have gotten away with it, too, if in the excitement he hadn't made one big mistake. He had forgotten that Frenchy's *right* arm was paralyzed!

Thanks for the crop of evidence you witnesses brought in this time.

And now we'll bear witness that the new story by Hugh Pentecost, the lead for the June issue, is a sure-fire bet to raise the hair on the back of your neck.

Death rode right along with the gee-gees when Jeff Larigan's Sockomo copped the Goshen trotting race. . . . But Jess was going to ride with death across another grimmer finish line if he couldn't win his own grim race to find out who had killed driver Bailey—and why. . . .

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DEATH SIGNS THE GUEST BOOK

By Greg Kennedy

*Dr. York, who stopped one night at Bender House, was wined
and dined—to a fare-you-well. . . .*

THERE may be people still living who remember the strange tale of the Bender House which came to light in 1873. This lodging for the night stood on a road in Kansas followed by travelers between Fort Scott and Independence.

It was built in a hollow, a low erection of wood with a sort of attic above in which travelers could sleep. The main floor was divided in two by a canvas partition, close to which was a table on which meals were served.

One of the chairs backed up against this canvas. There was purpose in this arrangement.

Behind the canvas the Bender family lived and ate. They were four in all, and of German origin. John Bender, tall dark, sullen, his wife a sour silent woman, a son without distinction, and Kate Bender, a bold voluptuous brunette with many attractions for men.

In addition to helping about the inn,

Kate was interested in spiritualism and used to give talks on the subject in nearby towns. She also claimed to have healing powers as well as being clairvoyant, and there is no question that she had an hypnotic power which she exercised on male victims.

The Benders had been carrying on their business about a year when vague rumors began to encircle the family and the inn. There was nothing definite to go on, but at times the family seemed to have more money than their circumstances warranted. They certainly did not make it in the miserable store they ran in connection with the inn, nor, did it seem possible, in the inn itself.

And there was a good deal of talk about Kate's standing at the inn door, displaying her charms in tightly-fitting dresses.

No definite charge was made until April, 1883, when Dr. York of Independence had

(Continued on page 12)



6

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Name

Address

City Zone.... State.....

.....

(Continued from page 10)

been missing two or more weeks. He had been visiting his brother, Colonel York, at Fort Scott, and left him to ride home. He had a good horse, and carried a handsome gold watch and a substantial sum of money.

The doctor was last seen by some friends, whom he encountered while riding alone, on the road to Bender House. He told them he was going to rest there and eat a meal about noon.

As he never came home, word was sent to Colonel York who began to trace him and finally discovered he had been seen heading for Benders'. He made inquiries in the neighborhood before going to the inn, and heard some strange stories.

The Benders, he was told, sold drugged liquor. They insisted on travelers who had meals sitting with their backs to the canvas walls. One man had been struck a savage blow on the head, through the canvas, by someone behind it, but had managed to stagger out and ride away. And it was suspected that in some cases fatal blows might have been dealt in this stealthy, treacherous way:

Colonel York formed a posse of vigilantes and went to the Bender House. He was hoodwinked, however, by the family who denied knowing anything about his missing brother.

A week passed and then the colonel came to the conclusion that he had been fooled, and that he ought to search the house again. He gathered the posse once more. The house was quietly surrounded, but it was too late. The Benders had packed up and vanished without leaving a trail.

Amidst the refuse with which the house was packed there appeared to be no sign of a crime, but the colonel kept searching obstinately, and in the cellar came upon a spot still moist with blood, but there was nothing beneath the dirt floor.

The searchers then went out to the garden and orchard. They saw that in one spot the earth had been disturbed and

began to dig. There they found the body of Dr. York. The back of his skull had been driven in with a blow from some heavy dull instrument.

In frantic excitement the diggers kept on at their task, and within a short time had uncovered the remains of eleven bodies, including that of a little girl. The adults had all been killed in the same way by a crushing blow on the back of the skull, delivered no doubt through the canvas wall on which the head had been resting. The child had been buried while still alive.

Identification was made of the victims, one young woman excepted, and it was learned that the murders had in every case been profitable, to the killers.

The news spread like wildfire over the country and an angry mob pressed forward to the scene of the crime.

A wretched man who had been on speaking terms with the fugitives was all but lynched.

Investigation disclosed a number of instances where men had been fortunate in escaping the death intended for them. One old man had discovered Bender lurking at the back with a heavy axe in his hand, poised to strike. There was no doubt as to how the killings had been carried out. Kate kept the guest entertained and busy until her father chose the moment of death.

Scouts sought everywhere for the Benders, but they had been able to get a good start, and it was estimated that they had about seven thousand dollars in their possession.

There are varying stories as to the fate of the Benders. They either got away unscathed, or as one story has it, a posse caught up with them, and shot down the whole crew without trial and divided the booty as reward. Another story is that they were lynched.

Whatever really happened is enveloped in a discreet silence, but justice was apparently done, even without the assistance of the law.



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YOU CAN'T RUN FAR ENOUGH!

By G. T.
Fleming-Roberts

Putting one foot out into the "crime fringe" often means a hood's foot in your own doorway, an opening wedge for violence and death.

CHAPTER ONE

The Entering Wedge

MAYBE you wonder what they are really like, over there on the other side. You read sensational stuff or go to a movie or tune in the TV—any keyhole that offers a peep at the show of violence. But you're content with the keyhole; you never open the door. You don't bother them, and you don't think they'll ever bother you.

You're sure about that, are you? Because I'm not. I think you're vulnerable all the time. You don't have to open the door. They'll get in if they want. Security is just a catch word anyway, and to them it simply means that you're ripe.

I had it—security. I'm the Williams of



*"You killed Campagna,"
I told him.*

Carter & Williams, Builders of Homes, with a nice place of my own in the Pike Creek addition. Number 22 Hillside, with the tall white pillars and stately veranda. With the creeping bent lawn extending all the way to the creek at the rear. Wrought iron lamps on the gateposts. A three car garage. Housekeeper and yard man. Two wonderful youngsters, Bob and Pug— Oh,



A SUSPENSE MURDER MYSTERY

I had everything and I had nothing and I was walking alone through the soft May night along Broad Ripple Avenue. I'd spent the evening cooped up in a flat over the drugstore, talking house with some people named Norwick, hearing their dreams. After I gave them an idea of the cost and explained the new mortgage restrictions, I went out of there feeling as though I'd re-

luctantly drowned a pair of appealing kittens. Nice people, the Norwicks, but they weren't building a house. Not now, anyway.

Now was a hell of a time, I reflected as I walked back toward the spot where I'd left my car. Bob was looking forward to college, if the draft didn't get him. Pug, remote and bewildered, was insisting that

I call her Mercedes. As for me, at thirty-nine, every important thing likely to happen to me seemed to have happened.

Then I saw the woman staring into the photographer's window.

She stood in the recessed entryway so my first glimpse of her was through two sheets of glass that formed the corner of the display window. I got an impression of peaked prettiness beneath short dark hair that flowed gently back from her face. That, and a soft red mouth trembling. Another step, and I got a good look at her. She was tall. The indefinable shabbiness of her black suit was largely offset by nice legs and tight neat hips.

I went on by, but my pace slackened.

I saw myself, Fred Williams, reflected in the glass front of a store building, tall and sort of gangling. My complexion, which goes with sandy hair, was parboiled from a weekend of golf.

I stopped and glanced back. With the clock crowding midnight, the sidewalk was deserted except for a big fleshy man in a wrinkled brown suit soft-footing it along on crepe rubber soles. He had a gray felt hat plastered on the back of a balding head. When he saw the woman in the entryway, the smile came to the surface, big-toothed and unpleasant.

He turned in there.

I moved back a couple of doors to see what this was. The woman was standing in exactly the same spot. The fleshy man had edged in beside her as though he, too, wanted to look at the photographs. But then he suddenly glanced over at the woman and said something under his breath. From where I stood, it sounded like "chee-chee." Maybe it was something new they were saying, like awhile back it was "hubba-hubba." Beyond a slight, a wary stiffening of her body there was no indication the woman had heard.

The fleshy man said, "Hello, baby."

She looked over her right shoulder, her lips drawn thin. Her blue eyes slashed him.

"You've made a mistake," she told him coldly.

He laughed. "Don't tell me. Two nights now. This same window—" He made a grab for her as she started to draw away, and I moved in.

The fleshy man glanced around at me out of yellowish eyes that had squint wrinkles at their extremities.

"Scram, buddy, before I pop you one," he said. For popping, he had a freckled fist that looked like a cantaloupe.

I rammed stiffened fingers deep into belly softness and, when he started to fold, I swiped up at his face with my left, heel of the palm in under his big nose. He stumbled backward up the slight incline and sat down hard on the rubber mat in front of the photographer's door.

He was hurt. There was blood on his face.

"Get up," I said.

He said, "I didn't want any trouble."

"Nobody would know."

"I thought I knew her." He nodded toward the woman, who now stood rigidly in the mouth of the entryway.

"Go on, beat it." I kicked his hat within reach. Even with a pushover like this, I didn't want any more. I watched the man get up and sidle along in front of the window. The yellowish eyes squinted and darted once more to the woman, and then he moved off down the sidewalk.

The woman was clutching a cracked black plastic purse in both hands. Pallor had edged in under her rouge.

"You shouldn't have, really," she said to me. "But thanks." Her smile was like a tattered flag waving.

I mumbled something, and noticed that her big, sober blue eyes followed the fleshy man as he cut diagonally across the street toward a dark green coupé parked farther west. I looked at the woman's profile limned in the pale glow from the street—the straight, rather short nose, the soft mouth, the little chin kept firm with an effort. She'd

be somewhere in her thirties, I decided.

She turned to me, put out a hand for me to hold briefly. She said thanks again, and started to walk east.

"Wait—" As I came up beside her, she gave me a cautioning glance out of the ends of those lovely eyes. The frail tether of gratitude—that's all I had; she was telling me as much with that look. "Just to the trolley stop," she said quietly. "I'll be perfectly all right."

I walked beside her, and I had a strange feeling that this was the beginning of something important.

I said, "You were crying, weren't you?"

"No, I—it was a cinder in my eye."

"I have a special knack with cinders. Other peoples' My own just digs in deeper."

"You, too?" Neither of us was talking about cinders. We both knew that. We clicked. "Try blinking."

"I have. Also walking alone. That's no good either."

We had reached the trolley stop, and distant lights told me I didn't have a whole lot of time. "No," I said, "I was about to turn to the last resort. The one remaining remedy for a cinder in the eye or a skinned knee."

"What's that?" she asked cautiously.

"A cherry-lemon phosphate."

She uttered an odd little laugh.

"Remember?" I asked. "You were skating and skinned your knee, and Mom took you around to the corner drugstore for a cherry-lemon phos, and the cure was spectacular."

She was watching the trolley. It had stopped to pick up a passenger two blocks away. "I don't want to seem bitter, but I must have missed something."

"You did. You haven't lived." The trolley was on the move again. I put a hex sign on it; it could blow a fuse, maybe. I touched her arm— After that, I clutched desperately at the threadbare crease of her jacket sleeve. "Want to try it now? My

car is across the street, and there's an all-night drugstore on Meridian."

"You can stop with one cherry-lemon phosphate?" she asked, her smile small and dubious.

"Sure," I promised.

"After that you'll see me to a bus line?"

"Drugstore and bus line."

"I'm going to gamble on you, Mr.—"

"Williams." I was laughing for the first time in a long while. "Call me. Fred."

"Martha, here. Crazy Martha who thinks when the man says drugstore and bus line he means drugstore and bus line."

THE man meant drugstore, and in the cold fluorescent light that reached into our booth I looked at her and concluded she probably wasn't beautiful. Her face was too thin. But she had a trick with an eyebrow; she'd say something and no part of her face would move except that eyebrow, yet she got more out of it than most women get out of everything they have. I sipped and ate and watched her, liking the small mouth she made about the thin soda straws and the touch of elegance her slim fingers lent to a drugstore sandwich. She wasn't wearing any rings or jewelry, except a lapel pin—a gold filigree medallion, something fine and old she'd managed to save.

"How's your cinder?" I asked.

"How's yours?" The eyebrow twitched.

"All right, Martha. About my cinder."

I made some pleats in the flimsy paper tube that had packaged my soda straws, and told Martha how Jo-Ann and I had married before I'd finished college, how Bob was born during gala week. How I'd accepted a junior partnership in my father-in-law's construction business, here in Indianapolis.

"That was practical," Martha commented.

"Yeah, also expedient. Later, we had Pug—her name is really Mercedes—and I got to be boss of Carter & Williams when Jeff Carter retired. Then the war hap-

pened, and I fought valiantly from behind a desk at Great Lakes."

"Complaining, Fred?"

"No, I was lucky. After the war, we built a house for ourselves on Pike Creek." I paused, thinking that if I told her about the house, if I oversold at this point, she might get the idea I thought she was cheap. I glanced up from what my fingers were doing and got the uneasy notion I'd already slipped somewhere. Her eyes were cool, her smile scarcely amused.

"Go on, Fred Williams, tell me your wife doesn't understand you."

I winced. The pleated paper tube dropped from my fingers. "Jo-Ann always understood. Past tense, Martha."

"Oh."

"Nearly three years ago. Quietly, like going to sleep." Then I was alone, and the kids stopped calling me Freddie, as Jo-Ann always had. Now I was father or dad—respectful, but not the same. "Now you get it, Martha. An evening like this, we'd often walk—" I spread my hands on the table, palms up, empty.

"I know, Fred," she said softly. "Evenings like this."

"We both know."

A shadow flitted across her face. Was it fear?

"Martha, tell me, what were you doing in front of the photographer's window alone, at night?"

"I can't tell you."

"But one can guess Bride-and-groom picture—right groom, wrong bride?"

She was shaking her head.

"Meaning no?"

"I can make up something or just shake my head."

"Meaning it's none of my business."

"You said that, Fred—I didn't. You also said bus line, remember?"

We stood, facing each other as we left the booth. We smiled, but it wasn't the same. No click. No spark when our eyes met. I followed her to the front of the store

and out to the curb where the bus would stop. She stood, her head tipped a little, looking at me.

"That was fun, Fred."

"Was." My candy had dissolved to thin brittle sweetness, and Martha didn't intend I should have any more.

"Don't look so—so desolate."

"Give me a reason not to. Just one. Like a telephone number, or even a last name."

"Reasons, the man wants." She looked at me wonderingly for a moment, then opened her purse and began sifting the contents. "Your nice life. Your two children. You want reasons?"

I noticed a faint blush on her thin cheeks.

"Funny," she said, then, "I seem to be fresh out of change."

She was broke. There was everything in that purse except money. I got out my wallet and shelled out three tens. Martha was shaking her head. I laughed. "It's a loan."

"Just fifteen cents bus fare. Tomorrow's pay day."

"Tuesday is?" I watched her color deepen. "Now, Martha—" I caught one of her hands and wadded three tens into it. I closed her fingers on the bills and held the little fist tight. "You need a job, Martha?"

"What kind of a job?" Her voice was small.

"For two weeks now, morning and afternoon, we've been looking for an extra girl for the office." We hadn't. Our Miss Bishop is the flat-heeled soul of efficiency. But if I could have Martha around all the time, then to hell with buses and trolleys beating my time. I could take it sweet and slow, starting with lunch tomorrow.

My mind was racing ahead of my words as I made up this job. Some typing, I told her. Some book work.

Martha seemed to listen thoughtfully. There was a bus on the way. She opened her purse and put two of the tens inside.

"We sell some of our places on contract,"

I went on explaining. "Each purchaser has a little book he brings in when he makes a payment, and you'd jot down the amount, see?"

"I see." She nodded soberly. "And I can't do it."

"You can't—" I closed my mouth. "Look, Martha, sure you can. Anybody could."

"That's the point. Anybody could. You'd open your nice life to just anybody. You ought to have your head examined. Anybody could walk in and take—"

What the hell had I said? She was crying again.

"—take you for everything."

"Martha—" I saw the damned bus on the way. "What'd I say? You're not just anybody."

"You—you don't know." This as the bus skimmed in close to the curb. "You just don't know anything about me at all." And she boarded the bus with a pretty flash of beige nylon while I stood numbly on the sidewalk, her words seeping into me, slow and cold.

Anybody could take me, she'd said. Maybe so. Maybe this was a racket. She'd be planted, say, in front of a photographer's window, waiting for you. And the fleshy man would come along and make his pass just to draw you into it. He'd be a push-over, make you the big hero, and she'd take it from there. Thirty bucks wasn't bad for a single performance.

It seeped into me like slow poison as I stared after the bus, wondering about a wrinkled brown suit and a gray felt hat. I could see through the rear window. Then it hit me. The fleshy man—he was there on the bus. He'd apparently followed us from Broad Ripple in his car. He'd probably watched us through a window of the drugstore while we were eating. Then he'd gone to the first bus stop north, had boarded there to be with her when she got on. A pair of grifters. A team, working a smooth little racket.

And I thought, the hell with it.

Only I didn't mean the hell with it, because on the way home I swung over to Broad Ripple to park on the avenue in front of the photographer's place. I turned my spotlight into the darkened display window, got out to stare at the framed photographs. Brides. Sweet girl graduates from some private grade school. Babies. Men in uniform. Men of distinction. One golden wedding anniversary couple. Did one of them mean something to Martha? They all smiled their dumb smiles, and it was no good standing there, because if it wasn't a racket it could be something infinitely worse—for Martha.

When I got home, the kids were waiting up for me, for a change—Bob half-eyed with sleep on the living room sofa, while Pug paraded around in a café-au-lait negligée that didn't go too well with dirty brown-and-white saddle oxfords. Though neither Bob nor Pug asked what I'd been up to that evening, I noticed they both eyed my coat lapels, looking for lady dust.

And, damn it, there wasn't any.

* * *

She phoned me at the office next morning. "Martha, Fred—Martha Lindstrun. I simply had to say thanks again for everything."

"Not at all." I was trying for restraint. "How's the cinder this morning?"

"Much better, thanks. I—uh, about that job—"

"It's still open. Want to talk it over?"

"Any time that's convenient."

"Right now is fine."

"Then I'll be in pretty soon." She hung up, and the seeping process began again in my mind. Maybe she'd liked the thirty dollar sample. Well, I'd wait and see. I wasn't going to ask her about the fleshy man or anything else. I was going to play dumb and be smart.

Like I said, they can get in any time they want. Martha had been with us a week

when the fleshy man walked into my private office on what he said was a personal matter.

That was it—the thin, entering wedge.

CHAPTER TWO

"I Warned You!"

HIS name was Gormley, and even before he said anything more than that, I was hating his guts. I'd spent the previous evening with Martha. It wasn't exactly a date. One of my prospects got hot all of a sudden, sent around a blueprint wanting a cost estimate right away. Martha volunteered to stay on in the evening to operate the adding machine for me, and by ten P.M. we'd run that estimate down to the last keg of nails. We had a late supper downtown and something to ease the tension.

Martha asked how the kids were, and I said fine. I told her I wanted her to meet Bob and Pug some time, and she said she'd love to. We left it like that because there was no bus on the way and I was taking it sweet and slow to make sure I knew where I was going. And with whom.

When I parked in front of her shabby lodging in a narrow side street on the south side of town, I wondered if I was going to kiss her. I looked over at her sweet profile dimly illuminated in the glow from the instruments, and I thought maybe I was going to try. But then she faced me and that eyebrow twitched.

"Like me, Fred?" she asked softly.

"From the first."

"I was afraid of that," she said.

"Afraid, Martha?" She'd turned on the cushion, her back to the door, facing me, her black skirt taut across the smooth roundness of her knees. "What are you afraid of?" I asked her.

"Everything." A shiver rippled her shoulders. "Good night, Fred."

That was last night.

This morning, it was Gormley.

Martha was out; I'd sent her to a wall-paper house to pick out the walls for a little bungalow we expected to have on the market the following week. Gormley and I were alone in the little room, and I stood back of the desk while he hiked up a chair and piled himself into it. Seen in daylight, he was a big untidy man in his fifties whose few hairs were like tarnished copper ravelings from an old pot scraper. He smelled of cheap cigars and talcum and sweaty wool.

I said, "I haven't much time."

"This won't take much." He smiled broadly and his yellowish eyes pecked about the periphery of my face. "It's about your daughter, Mr. Williams. She's meeting the wrong people."

I don't know what I had expected from him, but it wasn't this, and it rocked me. I stared at his big freckled face, hating his guts. My right hand closed on a glass paperweight, and I started around the desk, aware, at the same moment, of the easy flowing motion of Gormley's right hand down to the sagging pocket of his brown suit and then up. All motion stopped. It was as though the fat of him had suddenly congealed, acquiring toughness and edge. There was a small black gun in his speckled melon of a fist.

"You can make it hard for yourself, Mr. Williams. Real hard. Now, suppose you back up and sit down and stop acting smart."

I sank down onto the edge of my chair. Gormley put the gun away. His left hand went to the inner pocket of his coat and brought out a glossy photo enlargement which he handed across to me. It showed Pug and a young man on the same side of a small table, sipping malteds, their heads about two inches apart. The man couldn't have been much over twenty. He had a sharp dark face, a smirky mouth, and greasy looking black hair, thick-stranded like an old paintbrush that's been standing

in oil. His suit had a touch of zoot about it.

I said casually, "I don't see anything bad about this. The boy is a little too old for the high school crowd, maybe."

"Yeah, he graduated already." Gormley chuckled. "Reform school. His name is Campagna, and he's a hay merchant."

"A what?"

"Peddles hay. You know—" Gormley waved a freckled hand. "Tea, reefers, sticks."

I got it. then, and I turned cold all over. Marihuana . . . Pug mixed up with a marihuana peddler! Only she couldn't be in very deep. Gormley would have showed me the worst, and all he had was this picture of Pug and Campagna in the Sugar Bowl. It was bad enough, sure—just the idea of a sweet kid like Pug exposed to scum—but it wasn't nearly as bad as it could have been.

Gormley said, "I thought you ought to know."

"Thanks," I said dryly.

"There's a little more to it than that, Mr. Williams."

"But you have to have a hook somewhere."

"I've got a hook." Gormley let his knees sag apart and piled one foot on top of the other. He looked pleased. "I've got a lot of stuff on the hay traffic, its menace to teen-agers, which I'm going to hand over to a certain newspaper, maybe including this picture—Mercedes Williams, daughter of the well-known builder, tête-à-tête with a well-known tea peddler."

"They wouldn't use it."

"Sure, they would. They wouldn't give the kid's name, and they'd block out her features, but it tells a story, gives a warning to parents, and they'd use it. Somebody in your daughter's crowd would remember the dress she's got on. It'd get kicked around, and it'd queer the kid for a long time."

Martha had been running with a pretty high-toned crowd. They wouldn't like it.

I worried my lip. "How much, Gormley?"

His smile was soft. "Two grand."

"You're crazy."

"If your kid had to have an operation or be disfigured for life, you'd dig up the money in a hurry."

"I've got to think this over, Gormley."

"Sure, think it over." He stood up, and plastered his hat on the back of his head. "Until tomorrow noon, because I promised to turn over this stuff by two in the P.M., and I'd like to leave this picture out."

I said, "Wait a minute," and Gormley paused on the way to the door. "Monday night of last week you tried to pick up a woman in Broad Ripple."

Gormley's yellowish eyes became flat. "I made a mistake."

"But who did you think she was?"

"An old flame." He opened the door. "I was wrong. Inez would be around forty by now."

I thought he was lying, but I didn't say anything. As soon as he'd left, I called the high school, told whoever answered to have Mercedes Williams meet her father outside the main entrance at noon. It was then eleven twenty-five. I got up, then, reached for my hat, and went to the door. Martha was just coming in off the street. I stepped back, waiting for her, my hand still on the knob. I watched her walk toward me the way I'd pictured her coming into my arms some time, her eyes shining, her smile radiant.

"Fred, I've found the loveliest paper." She opened her purse as she came through the door. "I brought samples. See what you think."

I closed the door, my mind numb. "Gormley was here."

There was silence. About ten tons of silence, there in my little room. And it settled on her, forced the blood out of her face, and dragged down on the ends of her mouth.

At last she whispered, "I warned you."

I stared. "You did?"

"Yes. The first night. I said you oughtn't to open your nice life to just anybody. I warned you."

"That was sporting of you." I went out, and closed the door quietly.

PUG is one of those girls who never seem to have enough skin, and the stretched look about her eyelids lends her small face a touch of the exotic. Her eyes might belong to somebody named Mercedes, but the rest of her is Pug—all soft roundness and little girl.

"It is grandad, Father?" she asked anxiously in her thin sweet voice as she hurried to where I waited beside the car.

I shook my head and worked on what I hoped would be a smile. "No. Nobody hurt." Just me. I was hurt, but I wasn't going into that. "I want to talk to you a minute, uh, Mercedes." I held the car door for her, then got in beside her. "This fella you've been meeting at the Sugar Bowl, this Campagna—"

"Scamp." She was nodding vigorously. "What?"

"Scamp Campagna." That special tone of voice reserved for benighted parents. "Scamp is his sobriquet. He was on the stage down in Cuba."

"No doubt played the tuba." I laughed feebly. But Pug was too young. Or I was too old.

"He's a dancer."

"Among other things. But you haven't had dates?"

Pug nodded. "Last night."

"I thought you were out with Barney Dahl." It seemed to me she'd told me she was going somewhere with Barney, but I couldn't be sure.

"Barney Dahl?" She was prettily aghast that "yes father" stuff, they're listening sibly. Scamp and I went to the movies."

I knew only one way to handle a situation like this, and I wasn't sure it was the best way.

"Now listen, Mercedes," I said, "you're not to meet Campagna again."

"Why?" Her "why's" are always prolonged, demanding, and they descend four full tones of the musical scale.

"Because he's too old, for one thing. For another, he's been in jail."

"That's not true." Pug turned angrily. "You've been listening to Bob."

I shook my head. "We won't argue. You just won't have any more dates with Scamp, and you won't meet him after school. Tonight, you'll be home when I get there, and we'll see what you'll do after that. Got all that?"

"Yes, Father."

"You're sure?" Because when they start that "yes, Father" stuff, they're listening only with their ears; their minds are shut-tered against you.

She said it again, and I felt as though I'd flubbed the whole thing.

When I got back to the office, Miss Bishop told me there was trouble out at our Arlington Avenue job. Walling had broken a power cut-off saw, and would I see that he got a replacement at once? I said I would. I glanced over at Martha's desk.

"Where's Miss Lindstrun?"

Miss Bishop looked up from a ledger, pince nez wobbling. "She went out to lunch one hour and thirty-five minutes ago."

Miss Bishop, who had never extended her lunch hour by as much as ten seconds, thoroughly disapproved.

I went back to my room to pick up pipe tobacco before I started out on the daily inspection tour of our various jobs. The wallpaper samples were smoothed out on my desk, and on top of them was a long envelope bearing my name. Inside was a Carter & Williams letterhead on which Martha had typed:

Yes, I knew it wouldn't work, but your kindness made it so tempting I had to try. Take good care of Bob and Pug. They must be swell kids.

I stood there with my knees sagging against the end panel of the desk. This note—it was something Martha had dropped in full flight. I read in it longing and emptiness and fear. Instead of a signature it carried a lipstick impression of Martha's mouth. The kiss I'd missed last night—

I crumpled the note into my pocket, wondering how dumb could I get. Martha wasn't in anything with Gormley—he had something on her. He knew her secret, whatever it was, knew why she'd been crying in front of the photographer's window. I remembered his words that night: "*Don't tell me. Two nights now. This same window.*" Gormley knew. He'd been waiting for her there, and again on the bus The fat, patient brown spider. . . .

I went out through the door into brassy afternoon sunlight and over to the parking lot to get my car. I drove to the lodging house where I'd left Martha on the night before, but I was thirty minutes too late. She'd packed and gone, the landlady told me. One suitcase. No—no forwarding address. No rent owed.

I burned rubber on every curve on the way back downtown. This time, it was the railroad station, where I tried the ticket windows, asking questions. A tall girl with short dark hair, blue eyes, wearing a black suit and carrying a suitcase? I got looks like I was crazy. I tried the bus depot. The same questions. The same looks. How could anybody forget Martha? I wondered as I turned away. Then I grasped at the slim hope that she hadn't left town—that she had merely changed her address. I started in on all the cheap hotels in the Mile Square, one after the other, asking my questions. And I walked alone in the crowds, staring into them until all faces were alike, none of them Martha's.

Dusk came down and lights pushed up to meet it, and I was still aimlessly pounding the pavements. It was no good. Anna's night off, I recalled. Bob and Pug would

be home. I went back to the car, headed for Pike Creek. Home. The big Southern colonial, the flower beds, the islands of deep shade cast by huge beeches, the velvety lawn sloping down toward the creek—I had wanted to show all this to Martha, I thought regretfully as I turned in the drive.

There was a light in the downstairs hall and another upstairs in Pug's room on the southeast corner. When I got back to the garage I was relieved to see both the convertible and Bob's battered jalopy. I berthed the sedan between the other two cars, was just getting out when angry dots of sound spattered the evening hush. Pistol shots.

I sidled between cars, crossed the front of the garage to its southwest corner, and stared down toward the deepening shadows that bordered the creek—the willows, the scarcely definable ink blot that represented the vine-covered summerhouse. The shots had come from down there, or possibly from along the county road that outlined the lush bottom land on the other side of the creek.

A door opened at McNally's, my neighbor on the east. I could hear Mrs. McNally's voice without being able to distinguish her words. Then McNally's gruff rumble. "How the hell would I know?" They were standing in the back door, listening.

I saw a figure break away from the shadows along the creek and move up toward the garage, long-legged, striding. "Bob?" I called, and he answered. From the house next door, McNally said, "The Williams boy, plinking." The McNally door slammed. Bob was running up the slope, and I started down to meet him. The silhouette of his right arm was extended by the long barrel of his Colt's Woodsman pistol.

I asked, "What gives?"

"Weasel," he panted. "Some kind of varmint."

Some kind, maybe. "You didn't get him, did you?"

"No."

WE CAME around the corner of the garage together and into the light.

I glanced at Bob's face—a good face, but right now it had a thin look. I put a hand on his shoulder, checked him, and, with the same movement, swung him roughly around to face the light. I'd had about all I could take for one day.

"Just don't lie."

"No, sir." Bob swallowed. "I didn't want to worry you. It's Pug. She—well, I locked her up in her room. She said she was going down to the summerhouse to read, but I noticed she had on hose and a good dress."

"Comes the weasel, huh?"

"She's been dating a character who hangs out at the Sugar Bowl. A nogoodnick."

"Name of Campagna?" I said, and the look of wonder Bob gave me made me feel as though, just now, I was doing all right as a father. "So Pug was meeting Scamp in the summerhouse, and you needed a gun?"

Bob flushed. "Campagna carries a knife with the blade jacked out a little by a sliver of wood, so that, when he brings it up out of his pocket, the point catches and it comes out wide open. He showed some of us once—that draw of his. I wasn't taking any chances."

"No, you weren't," I said dryly and took the Colt from his hand. "You might have killed him, that's all."

"I shot way over his head, just to throw a scare in him."

I said we'd let the matter drop for the present, and I was secretly pleased that he was determined to look after his sister. We went into the house, and Bob asked me if I was going to eat my piece of pie. I said I might if I had a chance. I took the gun into the library, locked it in a drawer, and then went up to Pug's room. She was lying face down on the bed in a crisp yellow dress, her face buried in a pillow. When I sat down on the edge of the bed, she wouldn't look at me.

"It's tough, baby," I said, "but Bob was so right."

"I—I hate him!" she sobbed. "I'll never speak to him again!"

That sounded normal. I stood up. "Okay, honey, we won't talk about it now if you'd rather not." I left the room, closed the door, but did not lock it.

Down in the kitchen, I ate some of the cold dinner Anna had set out, while Bob hung around wondering about the pie. I let him have it finally, and he went upstairs to study. The house was very quiet except for the lonely clatter of my cup and saucer as I sipped scalding coffee. After a while, I went out to the garage, got out the convertible, and drove into Broad Ripple. The photographer's place again. The same faces were in the window—the brides, the babies, the sweet girl graduates, the men in uniform—and one of them meant something to Martha. I parked across the street, smoked my pipe, and watched until the lights went out in the display window at midnight. I hadn't found Martha, and I hadn't come to any conclusion as to what I was going to do about Pug and Campagna. Nor what I would do about Gormley.

The next morning I was awake at faint yellow dawn. There always seems to be something special about dawn along Pike Creek—something exclusively mine that I never had to share with any of my wealthy suburbanite neighbors. After I'd showered, shaved, and dressed, I walked out into the cool morning, tracked through the dew and down toward the creek. I thought, Sometime I want to show Martha dawn along Pike Creek.

I pushed through willows beside the summerhouse and stepped onto the path of crumblng brown shale that edged the sluggish stream. A frog plopped into the water. I glanced in the general direction of the plop and saw the black-haired man in the bright blue suit lying there in the tall grass. I knew it was Campagna. He was on his back, legs spread a little, one arm flung out,

and there was a toad sitting on the flat plane of his right cheek. I saw all that and thought that, even if he'd been trying, Bob couldn't have done a neater, a more thorough job. There was a small caliber bullet hole in the bridge of Campagna's nose.

CHAPTER THREE

The Missing Clue

I STOOD there with my knees caving and tried to get a good breath down past the cold fear that lumped within me. I couldn't think of anything except Pug and Campagna, and Campagna and Bob. Those two combinations rattled around inside my skull like a pair of dice I was afraid to roll because they'd given advance notice that they were coming up snake-eyes.

The Pug-Campagna combination provided motive. The Campagna-Bob combination supplied opportunity. And the McNallys were sure to remember that Bob had the weapon.

Motive, opportunity, weapon. Snake-eyes for Bob. And he didn't even have the slightest idea that one of his slugs had connected. He simply couldn't kill a man, walk into the house, pick up a slab of pie in his red right hand, and go away eating. I knew that, but nobody else knew it, and the thing to do was to get Campagna away, far away, and then go on as though nothing had happened and keep my mouth shut.

I stumbled over to the body and sank down in the tall grass to go through Campagna's pockets. If there was anything of value on him, this might frame as a killing-to-rob. I found the knife Bob had mentioned—what I'd call a "frog sticker" with a five inch blade tightly closed. The cheap leather wallet contained six dollars, and I took the money before returning the wallet to a pocket. Then I found the little jewelry store gift box with its fancy paper cover. Inside was a gold ring mounting a very tiny

diamond. The box and ring fell from my shaking fingers.

My God, I thought, Pug is nothing but a child. Sure, she wore Barney Dahl's class ring for a while, but this—I was pawing through the grass to recover the ring. This was real and earnest. On Campagna's part, anyway. But Pug? Pug didn't know anything about love. She was just a little girl.

I put the ring in the box and the box in my pocket. I stared at the waxy face of the dead youth for a moment. Campagna and Pug. Bob and Campagna. The dice were rattling again, and I couldn't get rid of them at all. Not ever.

I crawled backward until I could get hold of Campagna's ankles, and then stood. He was stiff, a clothing store dummy in a cheap, too blue suit. I dragged him out onto the path and downstream for about twenty feet to a crooked line of stepping-stones bridging the creek. I crouched, hauled Campagna up onto my thighs, got my arms under him, and finally stood. He wasn't heavy. He wasn't exactly light either. He was damned awkward to handle, and I missed my footing on the last rock, floundered knee-deep in water. I fell forward with him, crashing through brush on the opposite bank. Glancing up at the sky, I saw that I still had the dawn. That was on my side if nothing else.

I left Campagna there within ten feet of the edge of the county road but well hidden by brush and weeds, crossed to the other side of the creek, and ran up the slope to the house. I dropped the ring and its box through the door of the gas-fired incinerator in the kitchen. Then I got car keys, went out to the garage, bundled a painters' drop cloth into the rear of the sedan before I backed out of the garage.

I turned north off Hillside onto the state highway then west at the mouth of the county road. I parked back of my property, got out, and then I couldn't find Campagna. Not for a while. Not until I'd thrashed the brush in three or four wrong

spots and worked myself up into a panic. I stood beside him, panting, and stared up and down the road and across the bottom land on the north side. The coast was clear. I dragged Campagna to the car, got him into the rear compartment. He wouldn't sit.

He was too long to lie on the floor. I had to wedge him in diagonally, head up against a rear window, feet against the bottom of the opposite door. I covered him with paint-stiffened tarp. To me, it looked exactly as though I had a corpse covered with a drop cloth in the back of my car, but to the casual observer it might have been anything.

I got back onto the highway and drove north again. A few miles from Westfield, I turned off onto another county road. Here was flat farm land with far and unbroken horizons. I was sure nobody saw me take Campagna from the car and drag him down into a culvert of a dry drainage ditch.

I reached Hillside Drive again in time to pick up Anna on her way from the bus. She'd spent her night off at her daughter's place where they had a new baby. Anna knew my habit of rising early, and she made no comment.

I insisted that Pug come down for breakfast, and she sat grandly at what had been Jo-Ann's place, poured my coffee, and gave Bob and me the silent treatment. Her face was swollen from weeping, stiff with powder, and she'd rouged her mouth heavily to emphasize her pallor. To Pug, at least, she was the lovely tragic lady in a play. She stepped out of her rôle only long enough to ask if she might drive the convertible to school. I said she couldn't; she'd ride in her brother's jalopy as usual.

When Bob asked if Dracula's bride would please pass the sugar, Pug got up in a flash of temper and left the room with much little-girl skirt switching. It would have been funny except for the dead youth in the culvert and his pitiful little diamond.

I SAW Bob and Pug off for school in the jalopy, then drove downtown, dreading to see Martha's unoccupied desk. The insolent blare of a horn checked me as I was about to enter the Carter & Williams office on Ohio Street, and there was Gormley's green coupé at the curb. He opened the door, leaned on an elbow, and looked up at me, his freckled face sober. A shallow cut on his number two chin was partially covered by a strip of adhesive already soiled from contact with the dirty collar on his shirt. A more useful citizen would have developed blood poisoning.

"Get in," he ordered.

I did, and closed the car door. "You said noon."

"Uh-huh." Gormley was moistening a fat cigar. He nipped off the end of it in his big teeth, spat, and the soggy clipping stuck to the windshield in front of me. "Something new," he said finally. "Campagna had a date with your girl last night."

I stared at him and shook my head. "My daughter was in her room all evening."

"I happen to know he was heading for your place."

"Then he didn't make it. I was there. Pug was in her room all evening." I picked up something from the seat cushion—a half-inch length of safety match stick—and rolled it between left thumb and forefinger. Gormley's yellowish eyes squinted.

"Campagna didn't come home."

"So?" I kept rolling the piece of match.

"His car didn't come home, either."

I stopped breathing, my mind tight. Campagna's car. I hadn't thought about how he'd got out to Pike Creek, hadn't thought about a car at all.

"I found it parked about a block from your place on Hillside," Gormley went on evenly, "and I thought, 'Mr. Williams wouldn't want a heap like that in his neighborhood, it'll ruin his social standing.'"

I said, "I can do without the sarcasm."

"So I moved the car." Gormley chuckled. "Wired around the lock and moved that

heap clear over to the other side of town. . . Parked there on Hillside that long, I don't doubt but what some of your neighbors noticed it, but they'll probably forget." Gormley snapped his lighter and set fire to his cigar. "Unless somebody reminds them."

I sat there trembling. Inside, I was trembling.

Gormley stuck a fat arm through the steering wheel and turned on his ignition switch. "I thought I'd tell you so when you went to raise the two grand you could get eight more. Save you the bother of an extra trip."

"Ten thousand?" I shook my head. "Not possible."

"Don't tell me that. You can raise it. Sell some bonds. Cash in some insurance. Put a mortgage on that cute little mansion you've got. I don't give a damn how you get it, just so you get it."

"It'll take time."

"I'll give you time. About three days ought to do it. But I want the two thousand this noon."

I told Gormley what he was, distinctly, my voice low and even. He took it smiling. He hadn't just opened my door, he'd moved in and attached himself, as permanent as the plumbing. More permanent, because I could foresee the Williams family living in a tent, no plumbing, and we'd still have Gormley.

He started the engine, and as I opened the door to get out he said, "About the weapon—whatever you used—" That caught me with one foot on the curb. I looked over my left shoulder at Gormley, who seemed to get quite a bang out of whatever he saw on my face. "Better ditch it, Mr. Williams—if you haven't already."

I didn't say anything. I got out, started back toward the parking lot thinking what a lousy murderer I would have made. Bob's gun—of course I had to get rid of it. As I turned onto Pennsylvania Street somebody said, "Hi, Fred—" A man, and I don't know yet who it was. I was in a dream.

Anna was dusting in the living room when I got home three quarters of an hour later. I told her I'd come back for a blueprint. Then I went into the library, got the gun and shoved it down into the top of my pants. I was on my way to the front door when Anna said, "I thought you came back for a blueprint, Mr. Williams." See? I was no good at this game. A six-year-old suspected of throwing spitballs at the teacher could have done a better job of deception.

I got rid of the gun. Nothing fancy, no originality at all. I simply left my car in front of St. Vincent's Hospital, crossed Fall Creek Boulevard, and sauntered down the strip of grassy parkway to the edge of the water, then to the foot of the Illinois Street bridge. I pulled and tossed the gun with the same motion. It hit the water under the bridge with the loudest splash I'd ever heard. I turned quickly—and stopped. A second before, I would have sworn I was the only person in that section of the park between Illinois Street and Capitol Avenue, but here was a bat-eared, round-eyed boy of eight or nine, standing there with his bubble gum showing.

"Hey, mister—" He tongued his gum into a cheek. "Why'd jah throw 'at revolver inna water?"

Like that. I was caught cold, and I tried to edge out on a technicality. "That was no revolver."

"It was so. I seen it. Why'd jah ditch it, huh?"

I scowled, fiercely, I hope. "Okay, sonny, you just forget about it and maybe I'll forget that you are supposed to be in school."

A cowed look came over him. He backed a few steps, his mouth hanging open, then turned and started up the bank. He looked around at me once before breaking into a frightened lope.

You see? After they get past your door, get wound up in your life, it does something to you. You change. The decent stuff doesn't go any longer. It's straight animal

from then on. Teeth-and-claw. The dirty in-fighting. When you start that, you're down to their level. And I was down so low I was throwing the scare into an eight-year-old to shut his mouth.

I went downtown, dropped in at Fletcher Trust to draw two thousand in hundreds from my personal account. There wasn't much left in the way of a balance. I didn't know what I was going to do for the rest of Gormley's blood money. I couldn't dip into operating funds without closing down some of our jobs. In the building game, if you close a job before you've got a roof on it, you lose material and man-hours. You're apt to alienate labor, and after you've done that you might as well build a doghouse with your own hands and crawl into it. But I had the two thousand, and with it I could buy off Gormley for three days. I guess I was hoping for a miracle.

I spent the rest of the morning on the phone in the office trying to round up gyp-lath to finish three small homes we had under construction on Arlington Avenue. Between calls I wondered about a lot of things—where Martha was, how long before somebody discovered Campagna's body, what all this would do to Pug, and where I could get eight thousand dollars without sacrificing Bob's chance for a college education. I didn't get any answers, and I didn't seem to have what it takes to wangle gyp-lath out of a short market.

Miss Bishop went out to lunch promptly at noon, so I was alone in the office when Gormley came. I handed him the money and watched him count.

"What about the car?" Campagna's, I meant. I added dryly, "I want to make sure I'm getting my money's worth."

Gormley nodded while licking a thumb. He didn't answer until he'd finished counting. "All taken care of. You got nothing to worry about." He chuckled. "I'm a pal, I am."

I wished I'd thrown my pal through the photographer's plate glass window when I'd

had the chance. His yellowish eyes pecked around my face.

"I got eight grand more coming, remember."

"Friday," I said. "You'll get it." As he turned and padded toward the door on his crepe soles, I checked him. "What have you got on Martha Lindstrun, Gormley?"

He stared at me and palmed his topmost chin in a freckled hand. "Lindstrun, Lindstrun—I don't believe I know the name."

"All right, damn you." I stood with my nails biting into my palms and watched the fleshy man move out onto the sidewalk

LESS than a minute later, the door was opened by a gaunt man of middle age wearing a neat gray sharkskin suit. He had a straight black mustache over a thin stiff-lipped mouth, and the vertical wrinkles in his cheeks were like deep scars. His eyes were black and unfriendly.

"Snathe," he said. "Detective Bureau." Quick. No lost motion.

Panic washed over me, and I thought, I've flubbed again. Somehow I've flubbed.

I glanced up from his badge in its leather folder. "Now what've I done?" I was trying for the light touch, but my smile felt limp.

Snathe nodded toward my private office. "Can we go back there?"

I led, the way, didn't close the door after he'd entered, moved behind the desk, and nodded toward a chair. The detective didn't sit down immediately. He silently offered cigarettes which I didn't use, took one for himself, and borrowed the desk lighter. I noticed his eyes lingered on the three photos in the triple frame—Jo-Ann, Bob, and Pug. Finally he sat down, tipped back his head, blew smoke toward the ceiling, and looked down his thin nose at me.

"Know a young man by the name of Xavier Campagna, Mr. Williams?"

I ought to have had it all worked out in my mind ahead of time—whether I was going to lie straight down the line or give out partial truths. I hesitated for a critical

instant, my pulse hammering at my temples. "The name is familiar," I said cautiously. "Worked mornings in a juke joint across from North Side High School, just cleaning up around the place," Snathe said to refresh my memory.

I nodded. "My youngsters have mentioned Campagna. Didn't he get into some sort of trouble with the law?"

Snathe drew on his cigarette. "Did a trick at Plainfield for selling marihuana cigarettes two or three years ago."

I picked up my tobacco pouch and filled my pipe with nervous jabs of my forefinger. "Seems funny you police would let a hay peddler stake out across from a school." I threw it into him like that, and Snathe's eyes got hard and shiny. I placed him as career cop, proud of his job. Any criticism leveled at the department would be taken as a personal affront.

"Ex-hay peddler," he corrected. "You've got to give them a break or you'll find yourself with a habitual offender on your hands. We've been watching Campagna. In fact, I've just come from North Side High where I've been checking up with some of the students, Mercedes Williams included. She's been dating Campagna."

I didn't say anything. I couldn't because I didn't know what Pug had told Snathe. She might have said anything. If she was sore enough at her brother, she might have gone out of her way to involve Bob.

Snathe was saying, "She had a date with Campagna last night, didn't she?"

I shook my head. Snathe hadn't mentioned that Campagna was dead. His oblique approaches were intended to hedge me into a corner where I'd contradict myself. "Pug was in her room all evening. Nobody called for her."

The thin mouth quirked into a kind of smile. "We've got to go at it this way, Mr. Williams," Snathe said, almost apologetic.

"Go at what? Where's the gripe?"

Snathe stared at me a moment. "The gripe is—he's dead. Campagna. Shot

through the head. A farmer found him in a culvert near Westfield this morning."

My attention was drawn from Snathe by the opening of the street door. A stocky man in a navy blue suit and gray felt hat came in, walked back to where we were seated, nodded affably to me, leaned against the door jamb, and smiled at Snathe. Another cop, I decided—chunky, muscular, sleek.

Snathe asked, "How'd it go?"

The chunky man laughed. "Chicago Dutch Gormley hisself. Like always. Right hand of the late Maxie Schoen. He can't forget."

Snathe blew down his nose. "A finger, maybe."

"Yeah, the pinky."

I pulled on my pipe and pretended I was elsewhere. Apparently Snathe and the chunky man had been on their way to my office when they'd seen Gormley in the same block.

"Dutch had a roll," the chunky man said. "Asked me, 'It's against the law to have money?'"

The two cops laughed, then Snathe turned to me again. "It takes all kinds," he said almost pleasantly and leaned forward to prod out his cigarette in my ash tray. "This is beside the point, Mr. Williams, but what's a Never-Leak Tub Hanger?"

I frowned slightly. "A fastening device for mounting a built-in type bathtub. It has an interlocking lip that keeps water from seeping in under the tile pointing."

"Good thing, is it?"

"It's all right. We sometimes use them on custom jobs, usually only one specification. It's an added cost, it doesn't show, and most of our customers are just as happy without them."

"I see." Snathe stood. "The reason I asked, I'm remodeling my bathroom and somebody said I ought to use one when I installed my tub. Where do I go to get it?"

"Erlenmeir Plumbing Supply."

Snathe tore a sheet off my scratch pad,

pushed it in front of me. "Will you put that down, Mr. Williams?"

As I picked up a pencil, something went *click* in my head. A warning. I didn't know what Snathe was driving at, unless he wanted a sample of my handwriting, and I couldn't see where that would fit. I never write anything in longhand except my signature. I letter—maybe you'd say I print. It's a habit architects and engineers are apt to pick up in college. To cover my hesitation, I said, "You'll have to tear out whatever kind of finish wall you've got now and get down to lath."

"Sure," he agreed readily. "I'm going to."

The chunky man said, "That'll be a bath, that will."

I wrote in unfamiliar longhand, *Erlenmeir Plumbing Supply* together with the address and phone number. Snathe thanked me and pocketed the slip of paper. But I thought he looked a little disappointed as he and the chunky man left the office.

I SAT there at the desk, scared. There's no other word for it. I didn't know how scared I was until after the two cops had left and the tension broke and I started to tremble. An inner trembling I couldn't get hold of, couldn't control. The cold shakes, deep in my belly. I was caught between Snathe and Gormley.

Oh, I was on the loose right then. I had a little time. Like a mouse in a small tight room with two cats has a little time. But what could I do with my little pie-slice of time? Run around like the heroes in books, outsmart the police, and come up with the real killer to save my own skin at the last possible moment? That's in books. In the movies and TV shows. That's the glimpse through the keyhole, and it isn't the same. I knew Bob had killed Campagna; that's what I was trying to conceal, even from Bob. So—no solution. I wanted a stalemate with Snathe, and if I did get it, I'd have Gormley on my back for the rest of

my life. Gormley could bleed me to death. I sat there and gnawed my pipe and wondered about Gormley. Reduced to essentials, Gormley was like the bat-eared boy on the bank of Fall Creek. I'd countered the kid by threatening to tattle on him if he tattled on me. Could I work the same thing on Gormley?

I'd gathered from the intra-department chatter that I'd overheard, between Snathe and the chunky cop. that Gormley had been a very small wheel in the organization of the late Maxie Schoen, whoever that was. I'd heard of "Lucky" Luciano, Tony Accardo, and "Greasy Thumb" Guzik. Those are names in the news, but I'd never heard of Maxie Schoen.

I'd never been in a newspaper morgue, either, but I went over to the *Courier* building to catch up on my reading. There were no clips on Chicago Dutch Gormley but there was a great plenty on Maxie Schoen.

You'd know about Maxie if I gave you his real name. You'd remember how he came up from the slums west of Broadway to become one of our top-bracket gamblers. *The Club Jinx. The Javanese. Stop Seven-Eleven.* Those were all Maxie's in his day. The big show places, and a lot of smaller joints that didn't show except to a select clientele. Handsome Maxie Schoen with the best address on the East Side and a villa in Miami. Maxie Schoen who practiced free enterprise until he had to be combed out of his competitors' hair.

That had happened one cold winter night, twelve years ago—the combing out of Maxie Schoen. He was coming out of the *Javanese* at the time. Just twelve feet of sidewalk between the door and Maxie's bullet-proof Cadillac. Twelve feet of danger for Maxie. He'd hurried, his head low, his collar turned up against squawling snow. Three steps, and he'd have been out of the cold and the danger. And then it had happened. The blast of gunfire had slammed Maxie around on his feet before he was spilled on the sidewalk. "Riddled" was the

word in the clipping. A good word for Maxie's condition.

You'd remember all that if I used Maxie's real name, but I wonder if you'd know he had married. I found this near the bottom of one of the clips: "Schoen's pretty wife could not be reached for comment. A daughter, Jean, age two, survives."

I read that and my heart started to pound. You know how the boys in the books always put two and two together?

Try two and twelve.

Fourteen, isn't it? And a child starts to school at six. Take six from fourteen. Eight. And eight years of grade school before graduation.

Or if math isn't your forte, take that name Jean. Pet-name her Jeanie. Now baby-talk Jeanie, and what would it be—Chee-chee? Maybe Chee-chee, the first word I'd ever heard Gormley say. He'd said it to Martha. And he'd said, "*Don't tell me. Two nights now. This same window.*" The photographer's window in Broad Ripple where all the sweet graduates of Rosentary Grade School for Girls were lined up in a row.

If that isn't enough, remember this!

Martha to me: "*Reasons, the man wants. Your nice life. Your two children. You want reasons?*" Thinking, no doubt, that if it were possible for her to have *her* child and any kind of a home, she wouldn't have asked for more in this world.

Now you know who Martha was. You know why she haunted the photographer's window, why she was crying. You get it, and I had it, and I went out of the *Courier* office, stalking blind. I couldn't have seen anybody but Gormley, and if I'd run into him, I'd have killed him for what he'd done to Martha; for what he was doing to me and mine. For those reasons and because, since he was the only one of his kind I'd ever encountered, he personified the whole species of brass-gutted, red-handed gutter spawn, I would have killed him. Schoen, Luciano, Accardo, Guzik—to me they were

all Gormley, and I knew now what they were really like and that no door is proof against them.

What could I do, with the clock nibbling away at my little pie-slice of time? I didn't know. Wait, I guessed. Hope. I went out on the jobs, scattered over half the town. My hate and my fear were with me, warping my viewpoint. All the walls seemed out of plumb. Studs looked off center. rafters all wrong. But I got through the day without tearing out anything, without firing a man. And on the way home, I stopped off in Broad Ripple. The photographer's window again. I thought I'd be able to pick little Jean's face out of the group. She'd have something—some part of that Martha look.

But they were gone. All of the sweet girl graduates gone from the window. My one lead to Martha was gone.

I went across to the car, got in, hand reached for the ignition switch, when I saw her hurrying through the thin crowd on the opposite side of the avenue. The same black suit. . . .

She was two doors from the photographer's when I left the car to jay-walk, timing it so that as she turned from the window, her face shadowed with disappointment, I was there in the entryway. I thought gayly, Now try to get away. Just try.

She took half a step toward me and stopped, her eyes half eager, half afraid.

"Hello, Martha."

"Why, Fred—" She glanced nervously toward the window.

I said, "Jeanie's gone. But you've got me. such as I am. The expert on cinders, quick with the cherry-lemon, remember?"

She came back to me. Her look was all fear.

"Silly. I won't talk." I caught her two arms in my hands. "Martha, alone is no good. Together we'll beat it."

"Not Gormley, Fred. You don't know."

"Yes, Gormley. You and I. We'll beat

Gormley." I drew her close, into my arms, my mouth seeking hers, hers fighting and rigid for an instant, and then I felt her sigh. We made it a kiss, the real thing that lasted until a fat woman came along, wanting to get into the photographer's, and glared at us. We laughed, just not caring much what a fat wall-eyed woman thought. Then I took Martha across to the car, helped her in, got in beside her.

"Now, Martha, where were we?"

"Wait, Fred." She had the old frightened look. The wrong look. "You don't know."

"Sure, I do. Everything. Beginning with Chee-chee. Adding two years to twelve."

"Such a tiny little girl. She couldn't say Jeanie."

"And you gave her up for adoption. You made that sacrifice for her, Martha, because of the stigma."

She nodded. "I could look ahead. I could see fingers pointing, hear the whispers. 'There goes Maxie Schoen's daughter.' She didn't have a chance, with me. I tried running away with her, hiding. But they always found us—the police, the newspapermen, the tax collectors. Max was supposed to have had a lot of money. They couldn't locate it. I didn't have it, God knows. I didn't want anything that had been his. I sold all the jewels he'd given me. Anything that reminded me of him, I got rid of. Still, they kept hounding me."

I put my arm around her shoulders, but she was wound up tight, her eyes big with seeing old ghosts.

"The crazy things a girl of fifteen will do. Think of it, Fred. I was fifteen when handsome dashing Maxie came along."

I thought of Pug and Campagna. "You didn't know."

"You mean I wouldn't listen. My father told me. If my mother had been alive—but that's just my excuse to myself."

I kept thinking of Pug. I said, "It's a good excuse. Valid. Don't reproach your-

self, Martha. Just close the book, dear."

"It's closed. Oh, I've kept track of Chee-chee. I've even caught glimpses of her now and then. Her foster parents are wonderful people. They're rich. She'll have her chance, or would have, except for Gormley. He must have recognized me from the picture Max kept on his desk at the Javanese. I never saw Gormley until that night he followed me here. You don't know, Fred, what he can do with a set-up like this."

Didn't I, though? "I'll handle Gormley." I didn't know how I would handle him, but I could brag. I could swashbuckle a little in front of my girl. "You're coming home with me, Martha. Right now."

"Home." She repeated the word dreamily.

"I want you to meet the kids. Pug has been having a hard time. She needs to talk to somebody exactly like you. Look, Martha—" She looked, her eyes shining at me. "I'll telephone Anna, my housekeeper. You wait here— No—" I broke off, laughing. "No, I won't risk that. You come with me to the drugstore while I phone."

I drew her out of the car, held onto her arm as we walked to the corner and crossed. I took her to the back of the drugstore with me, showed her where to stand in front of the phone booth. I went in, smiled at her through the glass in the door. Anna answered the phone, and before I could tell her to put another potato in the pot, she was saying, "I'm so glad you called, Mr. Williams, there's two policemen here now—"

"What?"

"Detectives, I guess. They questioned Miss Pug and me. Now they're down by the creek."

I thought, My God. "All right, Anna. I'm on my way home. Is Bob there?"

"No, this was his night for the DeMolay dinner, remember?"

"Okay. Tell Pug I'll be there in a few minutes." I hung up, went out of the booth. I felt pale, and I must have showed it,

because Martha's eyes became wondering and anxious.

I said, "You'll have to take a rain check, Martha. I've got some trouble, and I've got to get home as fast as possible."

"The children? Is somebody sick?"

I shook my head, urging Martha toward the door. "Nothing like that. Look. Where are you staying now?"

She gave me a Sixteenth Street address. "Upstairs. A hall room, two doors down from the bath."

"All right. Go there and wait. Can do, Martha? I don't know how long this will take. Will you wait till you hear from me?"

She was nodding, her eyes sober and locked with mine. "I'll wait, Fred. I don't care how long it takes. I'll be there when you come for me."

We kissed lightly, there on the corner, and I went back alone to the car.

CHAPTER FOUR

Last Turn of the Screw

PUG came running into my arms as soon as I'd opened the front door. We clung to each other, and she sobbed against my chest, and she said it was all her fault for not listening to me. Which was nice to hear, but it mended no broken crockery. The police, she said, had got something out of the library—a piece of paper from the wastebasket, she thought. And now they were down along the creek.

"Why would they go down there, Daddy? Poor Scamp—it didn't happen there, did it? I thought it was near Westfield. But those shots I heard last night—that wasn't, couldn't have been—" She broke off, searching my face through her tears.

I said, "You run along up to your room now, honey. It's all right. It's just that you knew Scamp—that's the only reason the police are here now."

I avoided the kitchen and Anna, went out the side door, to the back of the house, and

down toward the creek. There was cigarette smoke rising into the still evening air through the vine-covered roof of the summerhouse. I could hear voices. The chunky detective appeared in the doorway as I approached. He nodded. He said to somebody inside, "Here's Williams now."

I looked into the summerhouse. I said, "Hi. What goes on?"

Snathe was stooped over the picnic table, brushing something that looked like brown sand into an envelope.

"Well, quite a bit goes on." He raised the envelope to his mouth and licked the flap. Then he took a stump of pencil and wrote on the outside of the envelope: *Sample of shale dust path along Pike Creek back of Williams' property.*

The chunky man motioned me into a hickory chair. "Sergeant wants to talk to you."

Snathe put the envelope in the inner pocket of his gray sharkskin coat. He carefully dusted a corner of the picnic table and sat on it, cradling one knee in thin, laced fingers. His black eyes indicated the pipe in my hand. "Go ahead, smoke."

"No, thanks," I said dryly. "I want to know what gives. What was all that yak about a bathtub hanger in my office this noon? I want to know where I stand."

Snathe said, "You don't stand so good. Where they found Campagna in the culvert, there was a slip of scratch paper off a pad like the one on your desk at the office. Somebody had printed *Never-Leak Tub Hanger* on it together with some dimensions."

Now I remembered. A memo I'd written to myself two or three weeks ago. I'd meant to check on the cost of the tub hanger in order to figure a job we were trying to get. But the prospect had folded before the estimate was complete. I'd carried that memo around in the breast pocket of my coat, I suppose, and it had worked out and dropped when I'd stooped to drag Campagna into the culvert.

Snathe said, "You weren't too smart, writing that Erlenmeir address for me. All the notes in your wastebasket are lettered—not in longhand."

"You figured I was trying to hide something."

"Yeah. Then there was your daughter's connection with Campagna. And now we got some crumbled brown shale from the path back here like got stuffed up inside the back of Campagna's coat collar when you dragged him down to the stepping-stones." Snathe smiled, pleased with himself. "About all we need now, Mr. Williams, would be the gun."

I gnawed my cold pipe. "That'll be tough."

"What's tough about it?"

"The gun's under the Illinois Street bridge over Fall Creek."

I looked up. Snathe was staring at me, no trace of emotion on his deeply lined face.

"Not too tough," he said. "You want to get the whole thing off your chest right now, Mr. Williams?"

"Not here. Isn't there some place we can go?"

The chunky cop laughed unpleasantly. "Yes, there is, Mr. Williams. There sure is a place we can go."

The place he had in mind was a stuffy, buff-walled room at police headquarters where I sat with Snathe, the chunky cop, and a male stenographer. All the while I was talking I kept thinking this was one way to beat Gormley. The hard way, maybe the only way. I'd bring Gormley into it, tie him up tight, and maybe they'd put him away for blackmail. Then Martha would be safe.

My story stuck close to the truth except that I didn't involve Bob in any way. I said I'd objected to Campagna seeing my daughter. When he'd arranged to meet her secretly in the summerhouse and I'd found out about it, I'd gone down there with the gun intending to scare him. I said that

actually I didn't know one of my bullets had hit him until the following morning. Then, of course, I'd moved the body.

Snathe listened without comment. When I brought in Gormley and the blackmail angle, I noticed the chunky man pricked up his ears and presently left the room.

"You want me to sign anything?" I asked Snathe when I'd finished.

"Not until we make a transcription, I got to check your story for, er—" His trap of a mouth quirked into a sour smile. "Well, for possible errors. And I'll hold you on suspicion until your lawyer gets here with a writ."

I said, "I don't need a lawyer now. I didn't mean to kill the kid. When I go out of here, I'll be staying out."

Snathe stroked his black mustache with a thumbnail, and appeared puzzled. "That's a funny attitude. You won't like it here."

He didn't know that I wanted to be there when they brought in Gormley. One way or another, I was going to get Gormley.

I was a guest of the city for dinner. About nine-thirty, a uniformed cop came to the cooler and led me back to the buff-walled room. I fully expected Gormley to be there, but he wasn't. Snathe was there, nobody else. His black eyes jabbed a couple of holes in my face. "We got the gun from where you said." I followed his curt gesture to the desk where the Colt's Woodsman lay. Snathe caught my shoulder and spun me around. "Who're you trying to kid? That's not the gun that killed Campagna, and why the hell would you throw it into the creek?"

I backed away from him and sank down on the edge of the desk. I had the shakes again.

"If you're dealing off the bottom, Snathe, cop or no cop, God help you."

He laughed harshly. "You got one way to find out."

So I took the one way. I told him exactly what had happened, bringing Bob into it, not omitting the part about Bob and the

pie. All the while, I watched the dark face for indications that I'd fallen into a police trap.

When I'd finished, Snathe said, "I'll buy that. What I couldn't buy in your previous version was that 'I-shot-him-but-didn't-know-it' angle. Campagna was killed at close range. Three to five feet from a man, you know if you get him. And if you'd known you'd have disposed of the body under cover of dark. You wouldn't have waited until daylight." He gave me one of his rare smiles. "Now get out of here before I put a couple of other charges on you I could think of."

AT TEN o'clock I walked out between the blue lights, and I didn't know who'd killed Campagna and I didn't care. Bob hadn't—that was the important thing. I went to a drugstore and called home. It was Bob who answered.

"And where, for cripe sakes, are you,

Dad? Don't you know you've given Pug and me a rough time?"

"Yeah," I said, laughing. "I'm a problem parent. But I'm on my way now, and tell Pug if she's got on that fancy negligée, not to wear saddle oxfords. Tell Anna to fix something to eat—"

"Anna's gone to bed."

"Then you and Pug fix sandwiches, because I'm bringing a guest. And slick your hair, Bob. That kind of a guest."

Bob said wonderingly, "Well, for cripe sake!"

I meant it to be a kind of homecoming celebration for Martha. I got out of a taxi in front of a greenish painted stairway that opened directly on the sidewalk along Sixteenth Street. I hurried up worn treads of the long, steep flight to a hall. There were two rows of brown doors against sickly green walls, and a sign that said *Bath* sticking out like a semaphore. Two doors down from the semaphore I knuckled a gay little

I was the square at the square dance!

I CAN'T GET A GAL UNLESS I ROPE ONE!

SMARTEN UP, SON! GALS WOULD STAMPEDE YOU IF YOU'D GET GOOD-LOOKING WORK PANTS AND SHIRTS MADE OF PEPPERELL FABRICS!

AT THE NEXT DANCE

CHANGE PARTNERS? NOT ME. I COULD DANCE WITH YOU FOR LIFE!

AM I GLAD I GOT ME THESE NEAT DUDS OF PEPPERELL FABRIC!

PEPPERELL FABRICS.

When you buy work clothes, look for this fabrics label.

Pepperell Manufacturing Company, Boston, Massachusetts

tattoo on a drab brown door. Martha was there. She'd promised to wait, no matter how long. I heard her footsteps.

The door opened, and she stepped back with it, her face thin with fear. I could see a portion of the room and a length of wrinkled brown trouser leg and a soiled white sock falling down over the counter of a crepe-soled oxford. I had that, and Martha's blue eyes, bright with danger. And the black hate started to boil up in me.

I stepped into the furnished room and straight to the old Morris chair where Gormley had piled himself. His little automatic pistol lay on the flat right arm of the chair. His freckled hands were busy with a penknife, paring his nails. Yellowish eyes looked at me; his grin spread.

"What do you want, Gormley?"

He nodded toward Martha. "Ask her."

Martha said, "The same thing. The money that was supposed to be in the safe at the Javanese the night they killed Max. I've told him I haven't got it. Would I live like this if I had fifty thousand dollars?"

"You might," Gormley said. "It's happened. Look, I'm not particular *what* fifty grand. I'll make a package deal with you two. Get me fifty grand and I'll go to South America. I'll let you alone. I'll let Cheechee's foster parents alone. How's that?"

"Don't listen to him, Fred," Martha warned. "You can't do business with him."

Gormley closed his penknife against his thigh, and as the blade snapped shut something clicked in my mind. I remembered a half inch piece of safety match stick I'd absently picked up in Gormley's car. My eyes flickered to the dirty strip of adhesive tape across Gormley's number two chin. I thought of a ring with a tiny chip of a diamond intended for Pug, and I laughed in Gormley's face.

"You'll let everybody alone. Dead, you will."

"Now, now." Gormley put his big right hand over the gun on the chair arm.

"You killed Campagna." I stood on splayed feet in front of Gormley and pushed that at him and saw his yellow eyes squint. "Sure, you did. You followed him to our place last night. That picture you had of Pug and Campagna sipping malteds—it wasn't much. You thought you could get something with a little more leverage. Something real nasty, maybe. So you followed. and you were there when Bob put the scare into Campagna and shot over his head.

"And as Campagna moved away in the dark. you got to him, took him to your car, somewhere up the county road, maybe. You wanted to talk, you told him. You made him a proposition. You'd help him get Pug if you could be on hand with a camera to get the kind of a picture you wanted. What you didn't know, couldn't possibly guess, was that Campagna was in love with Pug. The real thing. Not real to Pug—she doesn't even know what it's all about—but real to Campagna. He'd bought her a little ring. In his eyes, you were filth. He blew up, when you made your proposition, and pulled his knife.

"He carried that knife with the blade jacked out a little way with a match stick so that, when he drew, the point would catch on his pocket and the knife would come out fully open. He went for your throat with it, pinked you before you shot him. Then you took him back to our place, dumped the body about where Bob had fired his random shots. And you had all the leverage you needed, for blackmail, because Bob *might* have killed Campagna."

Gormley hadn't moved, his eyes hadn't left my face all the while I'd been talking. A worm of sweat crawled down his cheek, around his chin, and under a corner of the adhesive tape.

I said, "There'll be blood on Campagna's knife. Your blood. Just a trace is all they'll need. And your bullet in his brain, maybe a bloodstain you've missed in your car. You're not exactly tidy, you know. They're

looking for you right now, Gormley. They'll get you and fry you, and you'll let everybody alone."

Gormley shook his head. "Not me, they won't."

I glanced over at Martha, standing rigidly beside the door. "Is there a phone anywhere?" I asked her.

"Down the hall."

"Then get on it."

Gormley flowed up and out of that chair, very smooth, the little gun in his melon fist. I sidled between him and Martha, my back to Martha. Gormley said, "Don't, baby. It gets you a dead boy friend." And the gun tipped up toward my head, eyed me as it must have eyed Campagna. It made me nervous, I guess, because I batted it down again, intending to reach him with a fast right. But the gun went off, and the little bullet tore into my side. I backed off, scared, hurt, feeling dizzy.

I saw Gormley lunge for the open door, shove Martha, screaming, out into the hall.

I kept on my feet and waddled to the door, saw Gormley heading for the stairs. I went after him. It was like wallowing thigh-deep in mud. He must have been five or six steps from the top when I used what I had left and jumped him from behind.

The building turned over several times and it was full of a lot of sound, like old bricks tumbling out of a dump truck. Then the sound and the motion stopped, and I got up off Gormley at the foot of the stairs, no breath in me at all, nothing but pain—

a lot of sharp shooting pains blending into one ache. I looked down at Gormley with his legs sprawled up three steps and his big shoulders on level floor, and there seemed to be something cockeyed about the way his head was pegged on. His face looked sort of blue. Everything looked grayish blue, deepening to black. And the mud I was wallowing in sucked me down, down.

There was a dream. They all thought I was dead—Pug, Bob, and Martha, standing around crying, and I was trying to tell them. I was still in this world, only I couldn't move, couldn't utter a sound. And then they buried me in the mud again. When I came out of that, it was like the dream—Pug, Bob, Martha standing around. But smiling. A red-haired nurse with thick glasses, not pretty, standing around smiling. Snathe, even Snathe smiling.

"I just wanted to tell you, it's okay about Gormley. The bullet in you matched the one we got from Campagna," Snathe said.

"Gormley, Gormley. How is Gormley, anyway?"

"He isn't," Snathe said. "Broken neck."

So Martha's secret died with Gormley. We never mention it. The kids don't know. A closed book. And the reason I'm sitting here, chewing the fat, is that I'm waiting for my bride to buy a new dress. Yellow, she said. "Yellow, yellow, catch a fellow," she said.

And I said, "Now, Martha, you've got a fellow, remember? Your husband. The expert on cinders." ■ ■ ■

Their Just Desserts

IT IS reported that when Queen Cleopatra of Egypt, about 45 B.C., would order a man of degree executed for a crime, she would first grant him the privilege of asking for any food he wished if it were obtainable within her kingdom. Many, of course, asked for a certain type of nut that grew one thousand miles from the capital and required about three months to fetch. Their request was honored every time. Thus may have originated the last meal courtesy now extended to criminals about to be executed. In Florence, about 1200, a somewhat similar custom is supposed to have prevailed but the criminal was limited to food and drink within the city.

—*Simpson M. Ritter*

A DEAD MAN'S CHEST

By Charles
Beckman, Jr.



*There was a shot
. . . she coughed
and stumbled. . . .*

*All his hopes of life and freedom
were buried in that box. . . . But
each step he took toward its hiding
place, marked out the path his
enemy had waited five long years
for him to show. . . .*

FIVE years—it had been a long time.

I walked down to the corner of Schatzel and Chaparral Streets and watched Corpus Christi turn on its night time sparkle. The familiar salty, shrimp smell blew in from the Gulf.

Then I saw her.

She was a woman you were apt to notice, even at night on a crowded sidewalk. She was trim and clean cut, like a slender sailing boat.

Five years had done things to her, polished her hard and pretty, like bright enamel. It hurt to see her again. Every second I looked at her was like pushing a knife an inch deeper in my stomach.

She stood just outside the drugstore plate glass door and suddenly she noticed me at the curb's edge. Her face whitened.

Five years, Jeannie. How long has it been for you?

I moved toward her and the crowd melted and swirled around us like vapor.

What could I say? "I'd like to kill you. I'd like awfully well to put my fingers around your throat and squeeze until your eyes come out of your head and your tongue is black and swollen. Five fingers around your throat, one for each year I rotted in the penitentiary. . . ."

These things I could say, because they were true.

But I said nothing and she said nothing, and the thing I had once felt for her came alive inside me again like a sickness in spite of what she'd done to me.

She was wearing an expensive bit of velvet molded to her sleek blond head. Her simple gray dress hugged her in the right places and was bare in the right places. I wondered who had taught her to wear clothes like that. Alex Savoy?

He came out of the drugstore behind her. There was no surprise in his eyes at seeing me.

He lit an elongated cork-tipped cigarette, tossed the match in the gutter.

"Glad to see you out, Danny," said he.

I looked at him steadily. When you lived with hate for five years it was no longer a smoldering flame, but a blade of cold, sharp steel.

I told him very deliberately, "I came back for two things, Alex. One of them is to kill you."

His mouth quirked. "Better find the other, first, Danny. You'll have to run a long way and a lot faster this time."

He wasn't afraid of me. He was after

something, too, the other thing I'd left unmentioned.

The stakes were high.

In my hotel room, I stood before a mirror, sweating. It was no accident that I had run into them. Alex had followed me down here. He could have picked Joe. Either one of us would have led him straight to what he wanted—fifty thousand dollars buried in a gasoline can on Padre Island. . . .

* * *

Six years ago a tanker had steamed into Corpus Christi harbor. The fog was a thick cottony blanket smothering the docks and the North Beach section of town. That night the deck hands were paid off and they walked down to where the lights winked through the fog and nickelodeons blared invitingly.

One of the hands was a young guy with a slight limp. He had broad shoulders and muscular, tattooed arms. Water Street on North Beach was no different from a hundred waterfront sections he'd seen all over the world. There were sea food restaurants, bars, tattoo shops, souvenir stores. There were sailors, walking arm in arm down the narrow sidewalks, singing in off-key, foreign voices. Down near the beach was an amusement park with a ferris wheel and a hooting calliope.

It was a place for a sailor in port to buy a drink, spend his money, find a girl, or get into trouble.

The young seaman with the broad shoulders and strong arms was the kind to get in trouble, that night. I know, because that was me, six years ago.

I ran like hell afterward. There was a lot of yelling and pistol shots and a screaming police siren. I dodged down black, cluttered alleys, past stinking shrimp boats. Up a rickety stairway to the small room I'd rented.

I cowered back of the door like a hunted

animal. The salty breeze came in from the bay, stirring the curtains. The excitement was going on down in the streets. After a few minutes it passed on. My arm hurt like hell. I gripped it, trying to hold back the blood that dripped between my fingers.

Finally, I got to my feet, went into the bathroom. I didn't know exactly what to do.

I was scared and sick. My head was swimming. There was blood all over.

Then the front door opened. My heart beat a tattoo like a tap dancer's heels. I took the gun out of my pocket and staggered back into the front room.

A slim figure stood there, outlined in the doorway. The person moved in, closed the door. The light switch snapped on. Then the girl moved swiftly to the windows, pulled down the shades. She faced me.

Right from the first second. That's the way it was with me. I'd never seen anyone like her. New Orleans' French Quarter, San Francisco, Singapore—I'd seen them all, but I'd never seen one like her, anywhere.

Her blond hair hung down in a loose shoulder length bob. The bones of her face outlined her shadowy cheeks. She had large blue eyes well spaced and a wide mouth like hot spice. Those portions of her not covered by her cheap white blouse and short brown skirt were soft and white and tempting.

She moved close to me. Her bosom was moving rapidly. Her perfumed breath touched my cheek like sweet incense. Maybe she was scared. I didn't know.

"That was a lousy bungle," she said angrily.

Now I remembered. The girl with the sailor at the bar, next to the cash register.

...

She slapped me, hard. "If you do something," she said, sucking her breath in, "do it right." I saw that she *was* frightened. "Now let's fix your arm—"

LATER, we sat in the darkness, letting the breeze from the window cool the perspiration on both our faces. I could see the pale blur of her face. She let me look at her for a while, then she got up and moved close to me, so I could feel the warmth of her body. "Do you want to kiss me?" she asked.

My mouth felt dry and hot. She slipped her arm around my neck. Her breath moved over my face, then her lips were against mine hard and she moved her head slowly from side to side.

Shakily, she drew away. She lit a cigarette and sat on the floor, resting her forehead on the window sill.

"What's your name?"

I told her.

"Danny Williams." She said it over to herself, slowly, as if tasting it. "It doesn't mean much, does it? It's a name you could hear anywhere. It makes you think of a baseball player or a barber, or a shoe salesman. . . ." She crushed out the cigarette. "Why did you try to hold up that bar tonight, Danny?"

That was what she really wanted to know. She was looking at me eagerly. I didn't know what she was hoping for.

I felt the crumpled letter in my shirt pocket. How could I talk about Jody, my kid sister, my only family up in Michigan? I took the cigarette she'd lit for me. My shoulder throbbed under the bandages she'd made by tearing up her slip. I looked through the window at the lights of a tug on the water. I wanted to talk, but the words came slowly. I told her about Jody. "I haven't seen her in years. But I got pictures of her. She's a pretty kid." I touched the envelope in my pocket. "A message caught up with me tonight. Our parents were killed in a car wreck."

The words had sharp, hurting edges in my throat. I guess Jody was the only person in the world I gave a hang about. I'd do anything for that kid. And now, except for me, she was all alone. She was

staying with a distant aunt. But the aunt was poor, with kids of her own. She couldn't afford the things that were important to a young girl, clothes, medical care, the right kind of food, and later, college.

Jody was depending on me—and I couldn't help her. "I counted the money in my pocket when we docked. Fifty bucks. I'm twenty-five years old and all I got to show for it is fifty lousy bucks! I had to get some money somehow—for Jody."

Her fingers bit into my arm. "I want money, too. I want to dress in nice clothes and see the wonderful places they show in magazines." She was shivering. "You can't get that kind of money by holding up a little waterfront bar, Danny, or picking up drunk sailors.

"Team up with me, Danny," she begged. "You need help. You've got to hide until this blows over and your shoulder heals. I need help, too. I've got the contacts, but I'm not a man. I can't work it alone. I can show you how to make real dough for your kid sis. And for me, to buy me what I want. I go with the deal, Danny. . . ."

So we got married. She found a hiding place for me in a fishing shack on Padre Island. We spent six wonderful months there. And as the days slipped by, I promised, "It won't be long, Jody. I'll see that you have a better start than I had—better than Jeannie had."

* * *

Four hours after seeing Jeannie and Alex tonight, I rented a boat, rowed across the Laguna Madre's black waters to Padre Island. I could have driven over the wide new causeway that had been built since I left the island, but Alex had probably had someone on my tail ever since I walked away from the penitentiary three days ago. Maybe on Joe's, too. Okay, let 'em try swimming after me!

In an hour the prow of my boat scraped sand. I stood up shakily, then waded ashore, home again after five years. It

did something to me inside, like the night gulf smell in Corpus Christi. Only more, because this island had been my home.

In the six months Jeannie and I had lived here, I had grown to love the surf that curled around your toes on the beach, the unseen wind that rippled and shifted the sands with ghostly fingers, the hot clean sun in daytime and the cold stars at night. The great flocks of sea birds and the forlorn howl of coyotes off in the sand dunes. This was Padre Island, a desolate strip of a sand bar four miles wide and a hundred and thirty miles long stretched down the Texas coast from Corpus Christi to Brownsville.

I had brought a shovel. I dragged it out of the boat and struck out across the island. The night wind carried the distant wash of surf across the island from the Gulf side.

Here the sand was flat, hard-packed and covered with a coarse grass. Soon the hard surface gave way to soft, loose sand, tugging at my ankles. The moon scudded from behind clouds. I climbed a high dune topped with sea oats and hunted for landmarks.

More than a mile down the beach, I could see a tiny light. That would be the driftwood shack where Jeannie had lived with me for a little while. Bubba was living there now.

Soon I found the spot.

I propped my flashlight in the cradle of a sand hummock so the beam spread over this area. Then I dug easily, unhurriedly. There was no rush, now. I had beat Joe, Alex and Jeannie to this spot. Under my shovel there was a rusty gasoline can holding fifty-thousand dollars.

I wiped my face with a handkerchief and paused to pick up an oddly shaped sea shell.

I remembered the collection I started while living on the island waiting for my shoulder to heal and the police to stop looking for me. Jeannie had helped me. It

seemed a long time ago that we walked the beach, turning up a new *Lanthis ianthus*, or a delicately tinted "Scotch Bonnet."

It seemed a long time ago for both of us.

I rubbed the shell, dropped it in my pocket and continued digging.

The moon came out. A coyote howled somewhere. The wind whispered an old buccaneer song through the stirring sea oats with a dry chuckle.

*Sixteen men on a dead man's chest,
Yo, ho, ho and a bottle of rum. . . .*

My shovel bit into the sand more swiftly. It struck something. Eagerly, I snatched up the flashlight and crawled into the four-foot hole, clawing at the sand with my fingers.

Then I stopped. I had been wrong. Joe had beat me here.

He looked up at me from the bottom of the hole where I'd scratched the sand away. Joe's face with wide open eyes—But there was a lot of sand in them.

THE money was gone. Joe had been left behind in its place, buried five feet deep in the sand.

The legends say that when Jean Lafitte, the pirate, buried his chests of gold on Padre, he left behind the skeletons of two crew members so their spirits would stand guard. Somebody left Joe behind that way. . . .

I walked down the beach, my shirt glued to my back.

The old shack where Bubba Peterson now lived was near. Bubba used to have a place farther down the beach, but I gave him our cabin when we left because it was bigger.

Built out of driftwood, it was a single lopsided room, perched up on six-foot pilings like an oversized bird house. I could see Bubba's hulking, bearish figure

moving past the window. I went up and opened the door without knocking.

The shack smelled of tar, rope, shrimp and coffee. Bubba was holding a battered coffee pot in one hand. He weighed two hundred and twenty-five pounds, was big all over. He had reddish hair that stood up all over his head in little wiry tufts and pale blue eyes magnified behind thick-lensed glasses.

Bubba had lived on Padre Island all his life. He'd taught me how to fish, the names of the birds, and the sea shells. At night, around campfires, he'd spin yarns about hurricanes that had swept the island, old wrecked ships washed up on her shores and pirates that used to haunt these waters.

He always wore a faded blue denim shirt and ragged trousers held up with a piece of rope. He smelled faintly of fish and tar.

I looked past Bubba, at the girl huddled on the edge of the cot, holding a tin cup filled with steaming coffee.

Now, in the light, without so much makeup, Jeannie no longer looked smart and enameled. She was pale and thin, as if she'd been sick a long time.

"Danny. . . ." Her hand started shaking and she spilled the scalding coffee on her fingers. She dropped the tin cup with a clatter.

Bubba looked from Jeannie to me without breathing. "It's—it's good to see you again, Danny. . . ." His voice trailed.

I walked past him. The cramped shack looked the same. Books and magazines filled one shelf across the far end. Bubba's surf rod and rusty shotgun hung on wall pegs. A rickety table with a kerosene stove, a camp cot and some chairs made out of barrels were the only furnishings.

I looked at Jeannie again, at the smart blond woman with delicate white skin, hollowed cheeks, long, slender, nylon sheathed legs. She wore shoes with three inch heels and a few cross straps that made her feet

look more naked than if she'd gone bare-footed.

I compared the picture with the girl who had picked me up on North Beach six years ago. Jeannie had come a long way since then. . . .

"Where's Alex?"

"Danny." She got up.

She moved toward me, shaking her head slowly, looking at me with eyes that were big and wet. "I've—I've got to tell you something."

Bubba went outside.

I noticed for the first time that her clothes were damp, torn.

"Danny, I've been through five years of hell. That's okay, I had it coming to me. I'm—I'm not asking you to forgive me or anything." Her eyes were anxious, trying to make me understand that.

"I'm sorry for all the trouble you've been through." She closed her eyes, touched my sleeve with her finger. "Danny," she whispered, "I swear I didn't have anything to do with that double cross five years ago. It was Alex's idea. There hasn't been anything between us. There never was. He's been after me for five years, but I couldn't get you out of my system." Her voice cracked. "That's a laugh, isn't it? Jeannie in love, like you read about in books. . . ." She choked.

I laughed hard and flat. It was like slapping her across the face. She took a step backward, her cheeks white. "Listen, Danny, whatever you think about me, don't get in any more trouble over this money." She was crying now, without making any noise about it, just letting the tears run down her cheeks. "Don't stay around here, trying to find that money you and Joe hid. Alex wants it and he won't stop until he has it."

I grinned tightly. Was she really ignorant of the fact that Alex had already gotten to the money? Or had he sent her here?

"Honey, write this in your little book

and take it back to Alex. I want that money even more than Alex does. I sat in jail for five years and the only thing that kept me from going nuts was thinking about the things I was going to buy for Jody when I got out and how I was going to spend the rest of the money having fun."

She cried, "Can't you understand, that money will only buy you more trouble, maybe time in a casket! You can't fight Alex. You don't know what he's like—"

I caught her arm, turned her savagely. "Where is Alex?"

Her lips trembled. "I don't know."

I shook her until her hair spilled over her face. "I want that money," I said. "Alex beat me to it, but he's not getting away with it."

The whole wasted five years washed over me with a sickness that made my knees buckle.

Jeannie had been born with big ideas. Raised by a drunken tugboat captain who beat her skinny legs blue at regular intervals, she'd nurtured her underfed body with dreams. One day, she'd get enough money to leave the waterfront. She'd have a big car to drive and dozens of new dresses.

How she was going to get them, she didn't know. Until one day when she was sixteen, she looked in a mirror. From then on, she had the answer.

She needed a man. A guy with strong arms and a hunger for money as great as hers. He'd be a stepping-stone out of the waterfront. I'd been elected.

THE deal with Alex and Joe had come off after we'd lived on the island six months. Jeannie had known Alex before she met me. He was a smooth guy with a convertible Packard and a private cruiser tied up in the yacht basin. She introduced me to him, helped me go to work for him. First it was little things like holding up filling stations. Then it was something big. A bank hold-up. Real

money. The stake that I needed for Jody.

But Alex outsmarted everyone. He planned it so another guy, Joe Mason, and I took all the chances. Then he tipped off the police to grab me. He wanted my share of the money . . . and he wanted Jeannie. Jeannie wanted him too, I guess. I was sure she'd worked with him on the double-cross. They were two of a kind.

Joe and I got out of the trap. With the state police after us, we took the ferry to Port Arkansas, drove all the way down the island to Brownsville and the Mexican border. They picked us up at Matamores. But they didn't get the money. We'd buried that on the way down Padre.

So, for five years, Joe and I had waited to serve out identical sentences. Alex had waited too, waiting to follow us to the money's hiding place.

My kid sister, Jody, had had a tough time of it. I stayed in contact with the aunt who was keeping her. But I hadn't wanted Jody to know I was in prison, so I hadn't written her. She thought I'd deserted her. She needed a lot of things, dental care, some decent clothes. She'd wind up like Jeannie had if I didn't do something for her.

"Danny," Jeannie whispered, "I don't know if Alex found the money or what happened. But I won't tell you where he is. He may kill you—"

I slapped her. She looked at me without blinking. I knew I could have broken her neck and she wouldn't tell me. I turned and walked out of the shack and down the beach.

In a few minutes she came running up behind me. "I'll take you to where his boat is anchored," she said dully. "If you prowl around there without knowing, he may shoot you first."

Bubba had followed. He'd always been good to me and I didn't want him to get hurt. I told him to wait for me back at the shack. But he stuck doggedly with us.

Walking beside me, Jeannie suddenly

said, keeping her eyes straight ahead, "For five years Alex has been after me. Maybe I've been a fool. He can give me everything I always thought I wanted. But I kept thinking about you and me, here on the island. I guess it was something more than the money that made me follow you that night you held up the place on North Beach. Something I didn't understand. Something that only happens once in your life. . . ."

She said she'd swum in from Alex's boat tonight to get away from him and be with me. I didn't believe her. I still thought she was playing a part in a new double-cross Alex had cooked up.

A moment later, as if confirming my thoughts, a bullet sang past my ear.

I swore, dove for the sand. Jeannie was near, looking at me, her eyes wide in the moonlight. She knew what I was thinking—that I'd let her walk us into a trap.

"Run for it, Danny," she whispered.

Then she slid through the grass, away from us, and stood upright.

I tried to get to her, drag her down. But the next shot from behind the dune beat me to it. She coughed and stumbled.

Alex moved from behind the dune with a powerful flashlight. I was holding Jeannie. My hand against her left side was getting wet and sticky.

Alex herded us aboard his cabin cruiser anchored just off shore in the intracoastal canal. I carried Jeannie in my arms like a baby. In the cabin, I gently laid her on a bunk. "Why didn't you run, Danny?" she asked, crying.

"We've got to get her to a doctor," I said, facing Alex.

He wasn't looking at her. His face was dark and mean. "I'm tired of playing games, Danny. I want that money and I want it now."

I swore at him. "Now you're playing games. Can't you see she's bleeding to death?"

His lips were tight and flat against his

teeth. "That's okay with me. She's not any good to me." I saw the insane fury of frustration in his pale eyes. I knew then that Jeannie had told me the truth about the last five years. It was hard to believe.

"But," he went on, "if she's still important to you, maybe we can make a deal. Show me where you hid the money and I'll get her to a doctor. Otherwise, she bleeds to death."

I called him names in dock-hand language.

The dark red stain was spreading. She groped for my hand. "It hurts, Danny," she whispered. "Hold my hand so I won't be afraid."

"You've got the money," I pleaded with Alex. "You killed Joe for it. What more do you want?"

"Don't be a fool," he said impatiently.

THE picture was all wrong, like a jig-saw puzzle where the pieces won't fit. Who else but Alex could have killed Joe and taken the buried money?

There was something . . . it had been going around in the back of my mind ever since I dug for the money. Something that bothered me . . . something all wrong.

My hand, reaching for Jeannie's, brushed my pocket. Then I had it. I reached in my pocket. The sea shell was still there—the tiny acorn shaped shell I had picked up almost unconsciously when I dug at the spot where the treasure had been buried.

Perhaps I wouldn't have even noticed it, except that it was an unusual shell.

A very unusual shell. My memory of shells from five years ago and the study on shells I'd done in prison, had unconsciously reacted when I first saw it. I held it to the light. It was a pale blue *olivella*. I had seen pictures of them in Bubba's books on shells, and in other books in the prison library.

I said aloud, "I found it when I was dig-

ging for the money at the spot where Joe Mason's body is buried."

I looked across the cabin at Bubba Peterson. He was swaying with the rocking motion of the boat. His eyes were fascinated by the shell. Sweat came out all over his face in little trickling beads. His thick glasses got foggy. He kept staring at the shell as if it were a small atom bomb.

"There's nothing unusual about finding sea shells on this island," I said thickly, "except that an *olivella* is found on mud flats from North Carolina to the West Indies, not in these waters. It couldn't have washed into the sand. The only way it could have gotten there was to have fallen out of somebody's pocket—somebody who collects shells from all over the world and sometimes carries a few in his shirt pocket."

Bubba looked from me to Jeannie, whom he loved a great deal, too. Jeannie, who would die if we didn't soon get her to a doctor.

Bubba mumbled, "Joe came on the island early this morning. I saw him going up the beach and I followed him. I was behind a sand dune when he dug up the money. More money than I'd ever seen in my life," the big beachcomber said thickly. "I killed him and took the money. . . ."

He moved quickly. Before Alex could swing around, Bubba had rammed a heavy shoulder against him. The two men rolled across the cabin floor. There was a muffled explosion. Bubba pushed himself away from Alex and staggered to his feet. He looked surprised. A red stain was soaking through his shirt. He clubbed a heavy foot down, crushing Alex's gun hand. Then he picked up a pistol and carefully pulled the trigger.

The hulking, bearish man swayed, looked at Jeannie. "Get her to a doctor, Danny," he choked. Then he was gone.

I stepped over Alex Savoy's body, followed him on deck. The last I saw of Bubba, he was out in the Laguna, wading

toward shore. He stumbled once in the waist-deep water. He struggled to his feet, splashed on a few more yards. Then he fell again. This time he didn't get up. In a few minutes, the rippling waves were still above him.

I went back into the cabin, started the engine. I'd leave Alex's boat with his body in the yacht basin, later. The police wouldn't be too concerned over how the hood got killed. There was a doctor in Corpus Christi who would take care of Jeannie without reporting the bullet wound. I remembered him from when I worked for Alex five years ago.

* * *

A couple of weeks later I was back on the island, in the dunes. I'd found, in the shack, a crude map drawn by Bubba. It led me to the spot where he'd reburied the money. I dug it up, pried open the can. It was all there. Fifty thousand dollars.

Down the beach, in the shack, Jeannie was resting on a cot, waiting for me. She was pale and weak. It would take a lot of nursing to make her well again.

The money could buy us a lot. It could buy my kid sister, Jody, happiness and security. It would buy beautiful clothes for Jeannie and rich living for us both.

But it would also buy trouble, as Jeannie warned. Three men had already died because of it. I'd have to sell it to a fence. The serial numbers were on record and it

was still hot. That would leave me open to blackmail and it might get Jody in trouble later, because of it.

It was a lot of money, but would it buy Jeannie and me anything like the six months we'd spent here on the island? Six months hadn't been enough to satisfy our hunger for each other five years ago. I don't think a lifetime would be enough.

The five years had done something to Jeannie. The old ideas were gone. All she wanted, she said, was for me to love her again.

I thought about what the money had done to patient, slow-moving Bubba, who'd been happy on the island all his life with never more than fifty cents in his pocket.

I had gotten a job on a shrimp boat working near here. It wasn't the most important job in the world, but I could be home at night with Jeannie and it cost nothing to live on the island. It wouldn't take too many months to save money—clean, honest money—to send to the kid sister, Jody. And I could buy medicine for Jeannie.

I put the money back in the can, swung it over my shoulder. I'd box it up and mail it back to the bank from which it had been stolen, in a way the package couldn't be traced.

Trudging back to the shack, I whistled. I felt like a rich man. And I had the feeling that somewhere Bubba was glad about the whole thing. You see, he was Jeannie's brother. . . . ■ ■ ■

Dough Boy

By ROBERT JACOBS

The following is no argument for raising taxes. But if you're budget-minded, this may interest you. Early this century, the State of Missouri contended that Dr. Bennett Hyde had poisoned off a neat handful of his wife's relatives—three died, two recovered—in order to inherit the family nest egg. This, the doctor denied. They thought they had him dead to rights, when, suddenly, after three trials, they had to drop charges and let him go. Their reason was probably the strangest in the annals of justice, and may never happen again.

Seems Dr. Hyde was still able to pay legal fees, etcetera, forever—but the state had run out of funds with which to prosecute him!

Trixy Vincent, alive, had been too slippery for the cops who were after his take. . . . But Trixy dead put another face on things . . . a fifty grand face that a hunted man would try to lift. . . .



"Put the gun away," he said. "I don't like it."

THE TWO-FACED CORPSE

By Fletcher Flora

"HANK TORGEN'S got a place called the Zero Club," Malory told Lonigan. "We'll go there."

The place was locked up tight. Malory banged and waited. After a minute, he

banged and kept on banging. A key rattled suddenly in the lock on the inside, and the door was jerked violently inward away from Malory's persistent knuckles. A Galento-type guy with shirt sleeves rolled back off hairy forearms stood in the opening.

"What the hell's the idea, trying to knock the door down? You looking for a fat lip, maybe?"

"We're looking for Hank Torgen, goon. Now tell us he's not here."

"Okay. He ain't here."

"That's a good boy. Now we'll just come in and look around."

The fat guy cocked a hairy arm and moved forward. Malory waved a badge under his flat nose, and the cocked arm came down.

"Oh. Coppers."

"Yeah. You must be new around here, goon."

"That's twice you've called me goon. Lay off."

"Sure, goon. Take my advice. Learn to recognize the right faces."

Malory pushed in, Lonigan at his heels. They went down a short hall, past the check stand, into the main room of the club. Later on, at playtime, it would be soft-lighted and crammed with ersatz gaiety. Now it didn't have its makeup on. Glitter washed out in gray light. About as gay as a crutch.

In a back hall that abandoned all pretense of luxury, Malory knuckled a door and pushed in without waiting for an invitation. From behind a desk, a man with a broad, rocky face looked up from under craggy brows. His eyes were the color of slate and looked about as hard. When he saw who his visitors were, he stood up. Five feet eight or nine, vertical. Horizontal, there wouldn't have been much difference. Built to last.

"Hello, Malory. You didn't give me time to say come in."

"I knew we'd be welcome."

"Sure. Any time, Malory. Find a chair."

Malory did. Lonigan stayed by the door, standing. Sitting behind his desk again, Hank Torgen reached for a bottle.

"Drink?"

"No, thanks. Ask me some time when I'm not official."

"I never see you when you're not official."

"Yeah. I guess that's right. It's hell to work for a living, isn't it?"

A smile brushed Torgen's lips. Really just the shadow of one. There wasn't any humor in it.

"I know my line. I'm supposed to say I wouldn't know. You might be surprised. I might work harder than you think."

"Maybe. There are lots of ways to make a living. I guess you could call any of them working. Seen Trixy Vincent lately, Hank?"

The slate-colored eyes were suddenly very still. So was the blocky body. Only the lips moved.

"Come off, Malory. Trixy took a powder over a year ago. You know that."

"Sure. I know. Right after the Cornelius Jewelry Store heist, wasn't it? I always had an idea Trixy might have crossed someone on that job. You sure you haven't seen him?"

"I haven't seen him. I haven't been looking."

"No? Neither have I. But I've seen him just the same. In an apartment out on Eighteenth. He'd had a job of plastic surgery done. Didn't look like the same old Trixy at all. It was him, though. Right here in town all the time, Hank."

"This a joke, copper?"

"Not to Trixy. He's dead. Someone gunned him."

A long sigh hissed between Torgen's stiff lips. He stirred in his chair, and a little life returned to his eyes.

"Tough. Thanks for telling me, Malory. I'll want to send flowers."

"I thought you would. You with friends all last night, Hank?"

"You're wasting your time. I've always got friends around."

"Sure," Malory said, getting up. "A guy as popular as you never has to worry about being lonely. Or guilty. Thanks, Hank. See you around."

He went out, collecting Lonigan at the door. In the car, he took the wheel himself and drove slowly around the block. Not quite all the way. On the side street coming back, he pulled to the curb and stopped.

"Hank's black Cad was at the curb," he said. "Heading this way. He'll be crossing the intersection pretty soon. We'll wait."

HANK TORGEN sat quite still at his desk for a long time, looking across the room at nothing with blank eyes. He was thinking that Trixy Vincent had got a facial. Now Trixy was dead. Murdered. The way Hank saw it, you could go three ways from there. One: Trixy was killed by a new connection. Someone he'd met after changing his identity. Two: he was killed by someone who had caught up with him from behind. Three: he was killed by someone who had been in on the fade from the beginning. Someone who'd known him with both faces all along.

It was the third way that appealed to Hank. It put a name in his head. It gave him someone to start with. Getting his hat, he went out of the office and down the short hall into the large main room of the club.

The goon was behind the bar, mixing himself a drink. Hank was tempted to give him hell for letting the coppers through but decided against it. After all, it was a lucky break that the coppers had made it. They had put him back on the trail of half a million bucks worth of ice that he'd just about kissed good-by. Without speaking, he went on through and out to the Cadillac at the curb.

Driving across town, he pulled up in front of an apartment house that had the name Corinthian Arms chiseled in stone above the front entrance. Inside, he rode to the fifth floor and knocked on a door. When the door opened, he entered without speaking. He was in a nice room, but he wasn't in the mood to appreciate it. The

blonde who followed him in from the door was even nicer. Tall. Wearing soft satin pajamas that let the softer curves of her body show off. A face that fell into the beauty class if you didn't object to eyes and a mouth on the hard side. She was called Pepper. That wasn't her real name. Trixy Vincent had tagged her that because her last name happened to be Minter. Trixy always had a taste for the cute.

Hank turned in the middle of the room and looked at her. There was usually a certain light in the eyes of men who looked at her. There was one in Hank's too, but it wasn't the right light.

"Hi, baby."

"Hello, Hank. Long time no see."

"Yeah. I've been busy. I guess you have, too."

"Not especially."

"No? I'd call gunning an old boy friend being busy."

"You're going too fast, Hank."

"Okay. I'll play games for a minute. Trixy Vincent has turned up. Dead. No news to you."

"It is, Hank. I swear it is."

He took two quick steps to reach her. The back of his heavy hand smacked her mouth, flattening red lips against white teeth. She took it without flinching, watching him with eyes that slowly filled with hate as a drop of blood appeared on her lower lip. The tip of her pink tongue slipped out to remove it.

"Don't bother to lie any more, baby. I've got it figured. You were in the fade with Trixy. You've known all along that he had his face changed and stayed right here in town. After Trixy peddled the ice, you were going to take a powder together. That's what Trixy thought. Not you. Maybe you didn't like Trixy so well with a new face. More likely you just liked the money Trixy got from the ice better than any face. Pretty smart, letting him peddle the stuff for you before you did the job. You killed him, baby. You have the idea that no one

would recognize the body? A smart cop caught the facial right away."

"You're all wrong, Hank. I didn't know anything about Trixy's facial."

He hit her twice more. Once on the left side of the head with his right hand. Again on the right side with his left hand. Hank's hands were big and hard. Like rock. Her knees buckled a little inside the satin pants, and a whimper escaped her bruised lips.

"You're lying, baby. You're a cheap little liar. You know what happens to dames who lie to Hank Torgen."

"I'm not, Hank. I swear I'm not."

He spun away from her and went to work on the apartment. Looking every where a smart dame might have cached a wad of skins. Not carefully. Not bothering to leave anything as he found it. When the living room was a shambles, he moved into the bedroom.

Pepper stood in the middle of the living room and listened to him work. The hate inside her was almost more than she could bear. There was a .38 in the drawer of the table beside her bed. She wondered if she could get it and kill him, but she shook her head and stayed in the living room. She'd always had a level head. Smart. She'd figure a way to get him. Later and good, without any danger to Pepper.

He came out of the bedroom and stopped in front of her. His eyes were burning with fury, but his voice was slow and patient. As if he were reading a lesson to a dumb kid.

"I've just started. If those rocks have gone through, I'll find out. If they have, it means a lot of lettuce is somewhere around. Hank Torgen's lettuce. You say you didn't have anything to do with it. If you didn't, you're lucky. If you did, I'll be back. Don't bother to run. One rat got away from Hank Torgen. It won't happen again. The facial Trixy bought himself was nothing, baby. Nothing to the one you'll get. For free."

Wheeling, he went over to the door and out.

PEPPER stood in the wreckage of her apartment and went on thinking from where Hank had left off. She was smart. Smarter than Hank. He had got as far as her and bogged down. She was already way down the line. The minute he'd mentioned the facial, the perfect answer had jumped into her head. Hank'd get to it later. The smart cop, too. In the meantime, a smart girl could sew it up. A smart girl could always use the money. Say two hundred grand, maybe. She said it and liked the sound of it.

Pouring herself two fingers of rye, she slugged it down neat. In the bedroom, she got out of the satin pajamas and into street clothes. From the floor where Hank had dumped it, she retrieved the .38. Rejecting her purses with zippers, she found one with a simple catch and slipped the .38 into it. Then she went out to the telephone in the living room and rang the garage downstairs.

"Miss Minter speaking," she said into the mouthpiece. "Please get my car ready to go out. I'll pick it up, myself, in the garage."

She went down the service stairs at the rear of the building. Half an hour later, she was standing before the front door of a brick house in a fashionable suburb. Beside the door was a neat little bronze plate that said: *Maurice Connerty, M. D.* Pepper had been here before. The night Trixy Vincent had to have a slug dug out of his leg. She opened the door and stepped into the hall.

No one was around. Ahead of her, the right side of the hall took to the stairs and went up to the second floor. The left side was the low road, going straight back to a closed door at the end. She took the low road to the door and knocked. A voice told her to come in.

The man she found on the other side of the door had a thin, dark face below thick, dark hair that was turning silver at the temples. He lifted an eyebrow and waited, looking at her.

"You'll remember in a minute," she said "Minter. Pepper Minter. I came here once with Trixy Vincent."

"You seem to have something on your mind. I've no idea what it is."

She followed him to the desk, standing close enough to watch his hands.

"It's no use, butcher. You don't have to be smart to figure this one. A year ago Trixy Vincent took a powder with half a million dollars worth of ice. For that much he was willing to do it right. Knife work and everything. But it didn't work. Last night he was murdered. Either Hank Torgen or I would have loved the job, but someone beat us to it. You, butcher. Trixy finally peddled the ice, and you killed him for what it brought."

"You must be insane."

She took the .38 out of her purse and pointed it at him.

"It had to be someone who knew Trixy with his new face. You're the one. You knew because you gave it to him. There was even a chance that no one would recognize the corpse. Tough luck for you that a smart dick was on the case. He spotted the stiff for Trixy right away. Tell me, how much did Trixy get for the ice?"

He laughed again and lifted his shoulders. He'd already decided that it wouldn't do to let her go away alive.

"You know how it is with a fence. You're lucky to get half."

"It'll be plenty for a mink coat. Get it."

Placing his thin hands flat on the desk, he started to rise slowly.

"I think not. And you can put away the gun now. I don't like it. Even with a beautiful girl behind it, I don't like it."

She shot him in the right shoulder. The force of the slug slammed him back into the chair.

"You've made mistakes, butcher. You're making your biggest one right now. Or would you enjoy being shot to death by inches?"

He lay back in the chair, holding his

smashed shoulder and looking up at her with a sick pallor in his thin face. When he nodded wordlessly at the top right drawer of the desk, she went around quickly and jerked it open. It was there. Just lying there like so much paper. Four thick packets. One by one she dropped them into her purse. Then she lifted the .38 again.

"I said fifty per cent. I meant of the value. Sorry, butcher."

This time she shot him in the head. Without waiting until he had slipped out of the chair onto the floor, she dropped the .38 into the purse with the money and moved swiftly toward the door.

Putting the gun away was a mistake. She didn't have time to get it out again when Malory stepped in and waved his own at her. He stopped just inside the door and looked at her bitterly.

"I wish you hadn't done that. Killed him. I mean. I don't like sending pretty women to the chair. It makes me feel bad."

Pretty, he said. As far as anyone could see, she was. But not inside. Inside, she was suddenly old and incredibly ugly. Like death. He kept on looking at her, shaking his head a little and sighing.

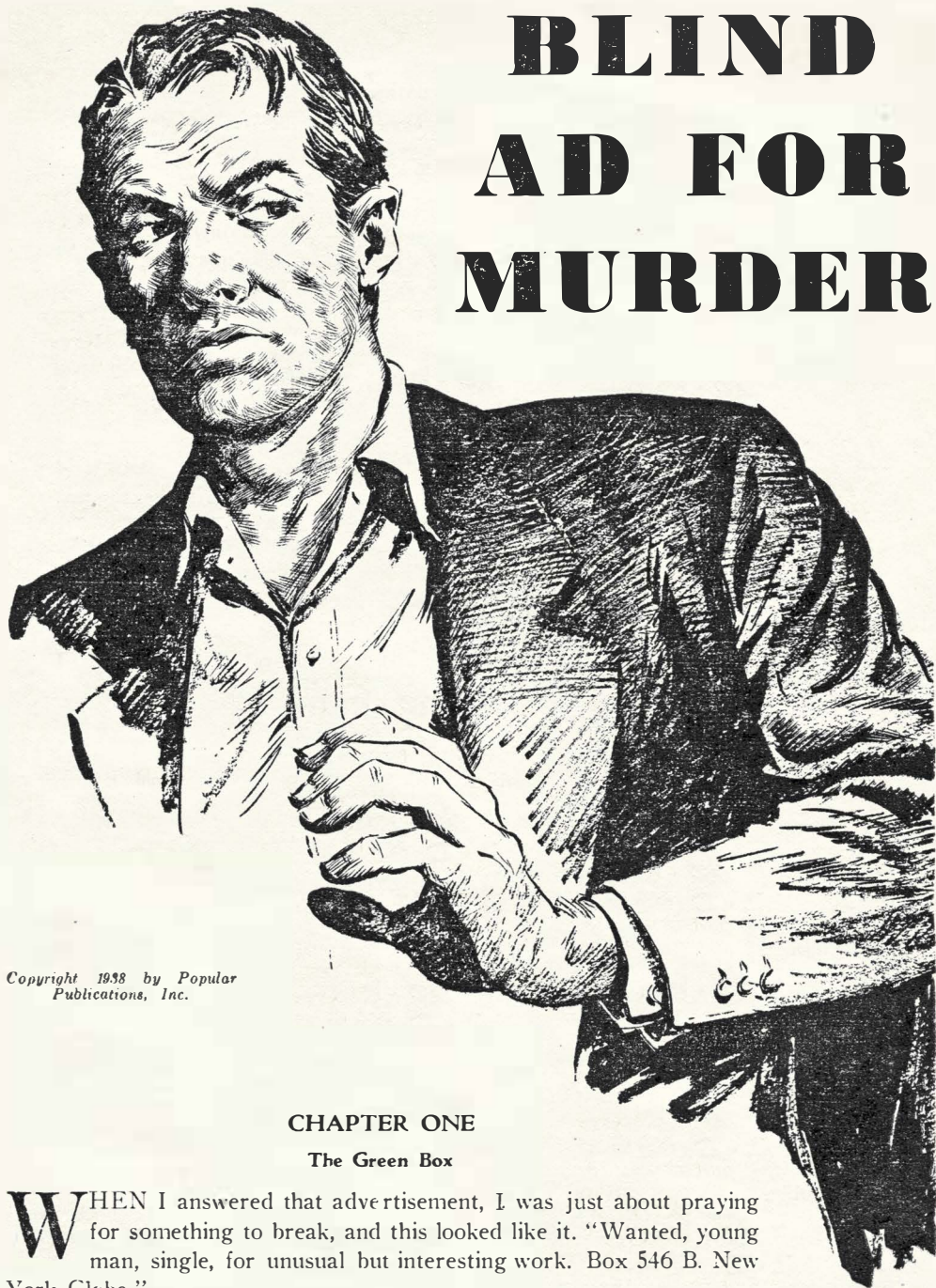
"I had a doctor in mind from the start. But I didn't know which one. I thought maybe Hank Torgen would get the same idea and show me the way. I should have known better. Hank's too dumb. Not you, honey. You're smart. As soon as you got in the game, I had it won."

She found her voice then. It fitted her inside better than her outside. Hoarse and ugly. Filled with a desperate fear.

"Look, copper. There's plenty in this bag. Cops don't make much money. Half of this would be a lot of money for a cop. Just for letting me get out of here. No one would know you didn't come too late."

He shook his head again. Regretfully. "Sure. No one but Lonigan out there in the hall. It's tough that Lonigan has to be along. Sorry, honey. Thanks just the same." ■ ■ ■

BLIND AD FOR MURDER



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CHAPTER ONE

The Green Box

WHEN I answered that advertisement, I was just about praying for something to break, and this looked like it. "Wanted, young man, single, for unusual but interesting work. Box 546 B. New York Globe."

That was all there was to it; not very elaborate nor promising. But I'd got to the point where I was chasing straws in a heavy wind. For two years out of Ohio University I had gone without a job, using up the balance of a small inheritance left from tuition expenses. Then a year

By
Richard Sale

A CRIME NOVELETTE

The really tough thing about this job was how to step out of the picture. . . . For I was in this one, held fast by its fool-proof, 24-carat murder frame!



*"Stand just the way you are,
face to the wall. . . ."*

and a half of doing anything I could for my cakes. Then two years of the lousiest work a guy ever had—special, private vice-investigator. After that, eight months of watching my cuffs fray and my shoes wear thinner without work of any kind.

That vice job!

Maybe you remember a few years ago when the powers that be in New York City decided to allow a yammering bunch of clubs to try their hand at vice suppression. They'd allowed 'em to hire special investigators, and clubbed the cops into cooperating with them. I was one of the "special investigators." My job was to go to cafés and taverns as a customer, order drinks, see if there were back rooms where unprenny acts were committed; or if minors were served liquor; or if marijuana or other drugs were dispensed.

I kept it up a couple of years, feeling my soul get brown and bitter around the edges at the things I saw. And then I quit, with no prospects in sight, just running out on a filthy picture and not caring where I ran to.

But now, when I'd seen that blind ad, I was almost at the point of trying to get back on the nosey squad again. But a letter to Box 546 B, in *New York Globe*, had drawn an answer; and now I was applying at the address given. And praying as I applied.

"Suite 917, Singer Trades Building, 3rd Avenue. Ask for Mr. Swayne."

I stopped in the dingy corridor outside 917, and tried to steel myself in advance against disappointment. I'd answered so many ads, and had drawn so many blanks. Then I opened the door and walked into as bare a little office as I've ever seen. One chair, one desk, one man behind the desk. You didn't have to "ask for Mr. Swayne." He was all there was, there wasn't any more.

"Good morning?" he said, with an upward inflection.

"Thomas Penny, answering your letter," I said.

"Oh, yes. Yes, of course, I'm Mr. Swayne." He picked up an application blank I'd filled out and sent with my letter. "Five feet eleven, hundred and eighty-five pounds, dark hair, gray eyes. Single. Varied business experience. Knowledge of shorthand and typing. . . . You've done office work, then?"

I didn't want to tell him I'd learned shorthand so as to take unobtrusive notes on tavern and café visits and had picked up typing to make neater reports to the federated clubs.

I just nodded.

". . . shorthand and typing," he went on. "College graduate, free to travel. . . . You seem to fill the bill."

I looked around. Bare office, no name on the corridor door, no letterhead on this man's answering letter.

"What bill?" I asked.

Swayne smiled a little. He did it easily, but, it seemed, meaninglessly. He was a rather toothy man anyway, with a long nose and a fat face. About forty-five and too well dressed.

"The job you're applying for, my boy," he said, "is a very fine one. Don't judge by appearances. Could you be the confidential secretary of a very wealthy manufacturer? Such a position would require, as you can guess, more than a mere ability to type and take shorthand. It's almost an executive position."

"Could I?" I gasped. "I'll say I could."

"Excellent. You seem the most promising of several hundred young men I've talked to. You will report to Bar Harbor in the morning. Take the night train. The salary will be seventy-five a week to start. Here is a hundred dollars advance for expenses."

I was a little numb by now. This was heaven.

"And who am I working for?" I said, in a slightly unnatural voice.

"Mr. Carey B. Stearn," he said.

That did knock me in a heap. Carey B.

Stearn! You know him. Everybody does. He heads a dozen plastics products companies, making everything from telephone instruments, and automobile distributor caps to cigarette holders and electrical appliance fittings. Celluswell, Arcalite, Formalose—a score of well-known plastics brand names are his. It was too fantastic that I'd answered a blind ad and drawn a secretaryship with such a man.

That last thought stuck. I looked around that dingy, bare office and then back at Mr. Swayne.

"You should never look a gift horse in the mouth," I said. "but—it seems kind of odd that a confidential secretary to a man like Carey Stearn should be hired out of a place like this on Third Avenue!"

Swayne smiled again, easily and meaninglessly.

"Good boy," he replied. "If you hadn't questioned the—er—discrepancy, you'd have been no fit candidate for the position offered. It's like this, Penny: Every young man in Mr. Stearn's regular organization would be after such a job if they knew it was open. Hiring a man through his regular employment department would thus disappoint a great many, and would be bad for office morale. If an open ad were run, the employees would be bound to see it and the effect would be even worse. They'd all think he should have picked from among his own. It was thought best to run a blind ad, interview men from this temporary office, and pick a likely candidate with no one but that man and Mr. Stearn himself the wiser."

A goofy explanation? Sure. You don't have to be very smart to see that. I can't imagine, now, how I fell for it. And I didn't, really. But I'd been given a hundred dollars in real money for "expenses," and I was to get seventy-five a week and the effect of that on a guy who'd have been tickled with fifteen a week as a shipping clerk knocked common sense out the window.

"I'm sure you'll be satisfactory," Swayne said, turning on his meaningless smile. "Mr. Stearn is spending the summer at his Bar Harbor place, so you will live and work

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out there. Not too bad for a young man, eh? As I told you, you will take the night train and report out at his place in the morning."

I shook his hand, and didn't like the feel of it. I went out, to get some clothes and a ticket—and try to realize the beautiful break that had been handed me. The first two were easier than the third.

Why had a break like that been given me? There must have been applicants with more secretarial qualifications than I had. There must have been many who would fit better into a rich man's country estate. I'm a shade on the thick-shouldered, heavy-handed side; no drawing-room lily.

The freakishness of the thing perplexed me more and more as I wore the day down; and it was still growing when I took the train for Maine. It gnawed at the almost awed thankfulness I felt for what the gods had given. It whispered that something about this was crazy. Crazy, and wrong.

I GOT off the train in clear Maine morning sunlight in a brown fog of doubt. And the rather frantic skepticism was increased by the fact that there was no one at the station to meet me. No nice station wagon or block-long sedan was there from the Stearn place. I went to a somnolent taxi.

"Where is Mr. Carey Stearn's residence?" I asked.

"'Bout three miles up that way," replied the driver, pointing.

I debated walking, and decided against it. Not impressive enough.

"Okay. Take me out there."

We drove along a winding road. The sea was to the right; but you seldom caught more than a glimpse of shimmering blue water, because from road to shore, a distance varying from a quarter to a half a mile, one great estate after another hid it behind acres of shrubbery. To the left were much more modest places; some were summer bungalows.

The driver stopped at one of the biggest gates of them all. I wondered why he stopped; why he didn't drive right up the wide, hard-topped lane. Then I saw that a chain looped flatly from one gatepost to the other.

"Are they expectin' you?" said the driver, gazing with one eye closed speculatively at the chain. "Want me to unfasten that thing and drive you in?"

"Of course they're expecting me," I said loudly, persuading myself as well as him. I cleared my throat. "But I—I'll walk from here in, I guess. I want to see the grounds, anyway."

I paid him. He stared at me with one eye closed, and turned and rolled back. Across the road from the big gate was a stained shingle bungalow that would have looked fine anywhere else but which seemed like a shanty opposite this huge estate. I looked at it, half fearing someone would yell for me to stop as I stepped over the sagging chain and started toward the hidden Stearn mansion. But the bungalow was obviously untenanted and only stared at me with blind eyes of curtainless windows.

The unreasonableness of this business piled up on me as I walked down a driveway such as you see in pictures between acres of perfect landscaping. What would I be told at the Stearn house? Would they throw me out? Tell me the whole thing was a joke, or a preposterous fantasy of my own?

But you don't get a hundred dollars expense money on a joke, do you? Or do you?

I heard a soft sound in the grass to my left, and a girl stepped from behind a great white-boled birch. She was in shorts, with legs like cream with a bit of coffee in it, and beautiful, lightly tanned arms, and a tanned smooth face that was very pretty. But in that face were dark eyes that were hard. Boy, were they hard! So this is high society, I thought. Beautiful, but flinty.

I half expected to be ordered out of the joint right then. but I wasn't. "Oh," she said. "You startled me, a little. You're the new secretary, aren't you?"

My gasp of relief must have sounded like a blowout. So it was all right, in spite of appearances.

"Yes." I nodded. "I'm Mr. Stearn's new secretary."

"I've been waiting for you," said the hard-eyed beauty in shorts. "I'm Loretta Spicer. An old friend—a very old friend—of Patricia Stearn. Pat is Carey's daughter. I rather expected you to come in a car."

"I came by taxi to the gate," I said. The girl wasn't moving, so I saw she wasn't through with me. "Should I go on to the house?"

"Not for a minute," she said. Her tone was thoughtful, and her face was anxious. The anxiety overshadowed the hardness in her eyes. "Confidential secretary to Carey Stearn," she said in a low tone. "It's a position requiring a good deal of tact—and intelligence. I believe you have both. Thank heaven for that!"

I could only stare at her.

"As it happens," Loretta Spicer went on, "you're to be put to the test right now, the minute you set foot on Carey's estate. At least I think you'll allow yourself to be put to the test, in Carey Stearn's best interests."

"I'm awfully anxious to make good, of course," I fumbled. "Anything I can do. . . . What seems to be wrong?"

The Spicer girl caught a red lip between white teeth.

"Oh, dear, this is so very confidential, but so very important. As you'll find out pretty soon, Patricia, Carey's daughter, is sweet and fine—but a little wild and apt to get into scrapes. She got into one a few weeks ago. To get out of it she impulsively decided to do a dreadful thing. In exchange for certain letters she agreed to deliver to a—certain man—a new formula Carey brought up to Bar Harbor to study. Some

new plastics made with forma—formal—"

"Formaldehyde?" I suggested.

"Yes. That's it. It's tremendously important. She went out of here with it a half hour ago. Took it to the shingle bungalow across the road. You happened to notice that?"

I nodded. "Looks vacant."

"It is. That's why it was chosen as an exchange spot. She was to put the formula, in a green tin dispatch box, on the dining room table. The place is furnished. The man was to pick it up at noon, and leave the letters in its place. She was to get them at one in the afternoon."

L ORETTA SPICER dabbed at her dark eyes.

"She's such an impulsive little silly! There that important box is, waiting to be taken. And she isn't even sure the man won't doublecross her and not leave the letters after all. But there's your first job, Mr. Confidential Secretary."

I must have looked blank.

"Go there and get the dispatch box!" she said, a bit impatiently. "Save Pat Stearn from herself. Get that box, put it in your suitcase, and smuggle it back into the house. Then I'll slip it back where she got it from, and everything will be all right."

"What about the letters threatening her?" I said.

"We can fix that. A private detective, some of my jewelry—anything but the exchange of that formula for them. I really believe Carey would disinherit her if he ever found out she had stolen such a thing."

Her hand touched my arm.

"Will you do that, and earn the undying gratitude of your new employer's daughter, when she comes to her senses?"

What was there for me to say?

"Sure," I told her. "A green dispatch box on the dining room table. Consider it in your hands."

I set my suitcase down by the big birch.

"You'd better take that with you," the

girl said. "If someone saw it, it might come out that you'd been in the grounds and then gone out again. You'd better enter with the box in your suitcase as if it were the first time you were passing the gate."

I picked up the suitcase and walked back toward the entrance to the grounds.

"You don't know how much depends on this," Loretta Spicer called softly.

I turned and waved reassuringly, and went on. There was a car coming down the road so I stepped behind a gatepost till it had passed. Then I crossed the road to the bungalow. I heard the car stop, and start again, but paid no heed.

Around me, birds were trilling and tree-branches were rustling cheerily in a light breeze. Everything was sunshine and beauty. But as I went to the front door of the house, hidden from the road by arborvitae, I felt like shivering. Don't ask me why. I don't believe in hunches, psychic or otherwise. I just suddenly felt cold, that's all.

The front door opened at a touch, as you'd rather expect: a place used as a rendezvous wouldn't be locked. I stepped into a dismal hall of the for-rent-furnished type, and walked down it. I passed an open door showing a living room, and got to another revealing a dining room.

Eight chairs, a buffet, a table, a couple of pictures. That was all. I mean, that was really all. The thing I'd come for, a green dispatch box, was not in sight. The top of the dining room table was bare.

I hesitated an instant on the threshold and then went in. I didn't like the feel of this place at all; but I'd been given a job to do that was important as it was irregular, and I wanted to make good. Perhaps the dispatch box was there, but not in the place Loretta Spicer had been given to understand it would be.

I hurriedly looked through the buffet. The drawers were empty. I opened a swinging door and looked into a thoroughly empty kitchen. I opened a second door,

revealing a shallow closet which you'd hardly expect in a dining room, and a man's dead body fell straight forward out of it onto its face.

CHAPTER TWO

"It's Murder!"

OUTSIDE, the birds were trilling and the tree-branches were rustling merrily. The sounds seemed horrible as they mingled with the thud of my heart in my ears. Horrible, and interminable. For it seemed as if I stood there staring at the corpse for an endless length of time.

Actually, I suppose, it was only a few seconds. Then I did the most natural thing under the circumstances: I turned to run out of there. But I turned with a lingering visual impression of something small and oblong and green, and by the time I'd got halfway to the door it stopped me.

The green dispatch box! It was on the shelf in the closet. And now, under the circumstances of murder, it was more than ever imperative that I get it.

I turned back, stepping hastily over the dead body. It was that of a man forty or so, I saw in a swift glance. Shot in the side of the head, under the left ear. Well dressed, hatted and gloved. Thin face, black eyes open and staring. I got the dispatch box and leaped back with it. It took about fifteen seconds to open my suitcase and jam the box in; but I thought it better to resist my wild impulse to run away and take that fifteen seconds. Better to take it out in the suitcase instead of openly, in case I was seen.

I started down the hall, and heard a car slide screeching to a stop. It was right in front of the place. I heard a man yell something, and another man answer.

I raced on tiptoe to the back door. It was fastened by two bolts and a lock. My fingers got in their own way in their haste to

open the things. There was a sound of steps at the side of the house—steps running toward the rear.

I got the door open and jumped out. A man yelled, "Stop or I'll shoot." I ran on. There were trees right behind the house. I got in among them. I saw a scrap of something vividly red hanging to a thorn-bush, saw it fall into deep leaves as I brushed past, paid no further attention to it.

There was a shot from behind. I heard a bullet slap into a tree over my head, heard the man behind say, "Next time I'll shoot lower."

Then I stumbled out of the trees into a clearing with a rocky cliff ahead and no woods on either side for a hundred yards. I was caught. The gun behind me spoke again, kicking up dirt near my feet. I turned, dropped my suitcase and raised my hands. A red-haired man in police uniform came toward me.

"Stay that way, guy," he said, coming toward me with a .38 revolver on a line with my body.

He walked behind me and I felt his hands frisk me for arms.

"Walk back to the house," he said. He raised his voice. "Got him, Mike! Go through the house and see if he did any damage."

I heard him pick up my suitcase, heard him follow me closely. That was all I did hear till we'd got back through the belt of trees and were entering the rear door. Then I heard a man in the house yell—"It's murder, Jim! There's a dead man in here."

The man behind me jammed his gun against my spine.

"So! Don't make any funny moves or I will let you have it."

"In here, Jim," called the man named Mike.

Jim marched me into the dining room.

My brain wasn't functioning at all, by now. Caught by the police in a house with

a man shot through the head! It was so colossal that my mind didn't fully grasp it for a minute. But the grasp came soon enough—when Mike, big and still-faced and hard-eyed, ran his cold eyes over me.

"Uh-huh. We get a tip that somebody's breaking into this place, and we come and find a guy dead. Why'd you shoot him, punk?"

"Me?" I said. "I didn't shoot him. I found him like that when I got here. Dead. He was in that closet."

"Who is he?" said Jim, equally still-faced and hard-voiced.

"I don't know," I said. "I never saw him before."

"Who are you?"

"My name is Thomas Penny. I'm Mr. Carey Stearn's new secretary. You know—the place across the way."

"What were you doing in here?"

That stumped me. I knew they'd go through my suitcase, knew they'd find that box and open it—and see the formula. Yet I didn't feel that I should get Miss Stearn into this.

"I came on an errand," I said finally.

"What errand? Who sent you?"

I locked my lips over that one. They'd been studying me a little less belligerently since I'd told them who and what I was.

"Old Stearn's secretary, huh?" Jim said, after a minute. "Well, we'll just check on that."

FOR a second time I stepped over the chain stretching from gatepost to gatepost of the Stearn grounds. After me came Jim and Mike, Jim carrying the suitcase. They were probably the entire Bar Harbor police force, I thought. At that, they looked competent enough to be a whole force.

We went along the driveway. I passed the big birch where Loretta Spicer had stopped me. She was the one warm thought in a sea of icy cold ones. If worse came to worst, she could alibi me, tell why I was

in the bungalow. It would mean revealing the theft of the formula by Stearn's daughter; but that was surely less serious than a murder charge against an innocent man.

We came to a tennis court. A man and a girl were playing on it. The girl, a brunette with a coy expression, saw us first; saw me being marched along by two men, one of whom carried a suitcase and the other a leveled gun.

"What on earth—" she gasped. "Lucian—look."

The man, tall and languid in white flannels, turned. The two came over. They followed us, babbling till a turn in the drive revealed the house.

It was enormous, a sort of turreted affair like a castle. It was on a forty-foot cliff over the sea, with green woods like emeralds strewn about it. There was a broad terrace on the side, half overlooking the sea, half overlooking the woods. On the terrace was everybody in the world, it seemed to me. Actually there were only about twenty people in slacks and shorts and sweaters.

They stopped their babbling as we came up, and stared as people will at something in a zoo. A grey-haired man whose face was familiar got up from a deck-chair and came to the entrance steps of the terrace. His face was familiar because I'd seen it in rotogravure pages. He was Carey B. Stearn.

"What is this, Mike?" he said. His voice was smooth, deep, authoritative. His face, pink and sixty, was still and composed. His eyes, slate-gray, ran over me slowly.

"We caught this guy across the road," said Mike. "He killed a guy there."

"What?"

Everybody on the terrace seemed to draw a deep breath at the same time.

"Yeah. Murder. In the brown shingle house across from your gate. Well, aren't you going to say anything to him, Mr. Stearn?"

"Me? I don't understand. Why should I say anything to the fellow?" The slate gray eyes were passing expressionlessly over my face. I could feel that face whitening.

"Don't you care if your secretary commits murder?"

"Secretary!" Stearn's mouth opened a little as he stared first at me and then at Mike. "I never saw him before in my life."

"I know you haven't, Mr. Stearn," I said urgently. "I just arrived this morning from New York. Hired yesterday by your man, Swayne, at the office on Third Avenue."

Stearn looked like a glacier about to break up in small pieces.

"What on earth are you trying to say, young man?"

"That I'm your new secretary, that's all," I said. The words were a little hoarse. "Hired by Swayne—"

Stearn interrupted with a call toward the house. "Oh. Harry, come here a minute."

The French doors opened onto the terrace. A young fellow, tanned, pleasant-faced, clad in gray flannels as immaculate as the clothes of any of the guests, came out.

"Allow me to introduce my secretary, Harry Mosely," Stearn said acidly. "He has been my secretary for five years, and I expect he'll continue to be indefinitely. I have no desire for a new one, never took steps to hire one, and generally haven't the faintest idea what this ambitious young murderer is talking about. Take him away, Mike."

"Wait a minute!" I said. "Please, wait! I can explain this. If I can please have one of your guests say a word—a Miss Loretta Spicer. I don't see her around. . . ."

"The man's insane," Stearn clipped out. "There's no one by the name here."

I almost literally staggered. "But there is!" I gasped. "There is! Young, dark hair and eyes, wearing natural-linen shorts."

She stopped me as I came in the grounds a little while ago. Stopped me and told me to go to the bungalow."

"There is no one of that name here," Stearn repeated. But he held up his hand, with curiosity on his face as Mike started to jerk me around. "Wait a minute. You claim somebody called Loretta Spicer stopped you and told you to go to the place where you killed a man. Was that what she wanted you to do—commit murder?"

"I didn't commit any murder." I took a long breath. The hell with this business and all its works. The hell with Stearn and his "sweet but impulsive" daughter. The hell with her thefts.

"She wanted me to pick up a new plastics formula your daughter, Patricia, stole from you," I said deliberately.

There was a silence that might have resulted had I kicked the great man in the stomach. In the silence his face took on a look of something made out of ice.

"Go on," he said, dangerously calm "You filthy-talking rat. Finish."

"I'll finish, all right," I said. "Your daughter got in a jam and took that formula to get out of it. She left it in the house across the road, expecting to go back at one this afternoon and pick up some letters in exchange for it. Loretta Spicer told me I'd better get it and bring it back before the loss of it was discovered."

"So my daughter stole a plastics formula," purred Stearn. Then his face purpled with long-suppressed fury. "You were in deep enough before, young man. You'll find you're in deeper than ever, after this deliberate attempt to embroil my daughter in a murder. I'll have you know I've never had a formula of any kind here in my Bar Harbor home. I keep such things in a bank deposit box, and I've never had one stolen."

"It was a plastics based on formaldehyde," I began.

"Bah!" he ground out. "Half the plastics made are based on formaldehyde!"

"All right," I said, "open my suitcase. In it you'll find a green tin box I took from the closet where I found the dead man. Your formula's in that. You'll believe it when you see, I guess."

Mike started to open my suitcase. The rest were crowding around. I looked at the French doors and got a glimpse of a girl through them, who was not joining the others on the terrace. For a minute my heart flopped. I thought it was the girl who had stopped me near the gate. But it wasn't. This girl was a blonde, a little taller and slimmer than the one calling herself Loretta Spicer. She had on a white dress, with a red sash. She looked at me, at the others, then turned and went away out of sight.

Mike got the suitcase open and picked up the green dispatch box. Stearn bent lower, with a slight scowl of perplexity blending with the look of cold fury on his face. Mike opened the box.

There was a revolver in it.

The thing was packed in crumpled newspapers so it wouldn't ram around. Mike spun the cylinder. Feeling as if somebody were slowly choking me to death. I could see, as could everyone else, that there was one bullet missing.

"So you went to get a formula my daughter 'stole' from me," Stearn said, very slowly. "And this is it. Why, you—"

"Take him to lockup?" said Mike.

"Not just yet," Stearn said. He was icy cold again. "I'd rather like a look at this dead man. I'd like to know what suggested to the killer that he drag the Stearn family into it."

Moving like you do in a nightmare, I went down the terrace steps between the two policemen. Stearn came behind. We started along the driveway. But first I turned for a moment, and behind the French doors I saw the blond girl again. She simply stood there and watched, as if too aloof even for curiosity to draw her out. The second glimpse told me something

that hadn't quite registered before this.

I'd seen that girl somewhere, before now. Had seen her in circumstances that indelibly impressed her on my mind. I seemed to remember her a-running, chased by something with her face twisted by fear. Which appeared to be plain insanity, of course. For where could I have seen a guest in such a big house runing in fear from something?

We got back to the bungalow. I walked into it, beyond words, on feet that seemed made of lead, as they are sometimes in nightmares. We went to the dining room where the dead man lay. Stearn stared with slate-gray eyes at the corpse.

"Peculiar," he murmured. "I know that man. He used to work for me, New York main office. He was discharged for dishonesty, I believe. Yes, that was it. His name was Fenton. Richard, I think." He swung back to me. "Were you and Fenton partners in some scheme to rob me? Did you have a thieves' falling-out? Is that why you're here—and he is dead?"

I couldn't have said anything even if I'd been able to think of something to say. Speech was physically impossible.

Stearn's jaw set like a trap

"Take him away," he said to the officers. "And don't be gentle on my account."

CHAPTER THREE

Turn of the Screw

THREE faces glared at me, and a hot white light beat down on my face. Yes, they have those things in back rooms in Bangor, Maine, too. I'd been taken to the city from Bar Harbor. I was now being grilled.

I was a little knocked around, but not much. Just enough to make me feel dizzy and a little sick. And some of it was my own fault, I'll admit. When the first cop applied the flat of his hand to my face I lost my head and knocked him across the room. I've said I was a bit thick in the

shoulders and heavy in the hands. That cop wasn't there any more; but the others had made it up for him.

Still, I knew that this was just a prelude to what I was going to get later, if I didn't talk. They ran through their lines again, in an effort to break me down.

"Why did you go to Bar Harbor in the first place?"

"I was hired by a man named Swayne to be Stearn's private secretary." The words came of themselves, I'd repeated them so many times.

"No one has been able to locate such a man, and Stearn never heard of him. How did you get in touch with him?"

"Through a blind ad." A blind ad for murder. I could see now. Wanted, ambitious young man to play murderer.

"We've traced that ad, through New York. It was put in the *Globe* by the Manhattan Lampshade Corporation, a perfectly honest outfit with no connection whatever with Stearn."

"The man calling himself Swayne must have got hold of some of the letters of application in their box, then," I said wearily. "One, at least, he got. Mine."

"Nuts! If you know what's good for you, you'll split."

"I'm telling the truth."

My head rocked on my shoulders.

"Where did you meet Swayne?" said the rocker, grimly.

"Singer Trades Building, Third Avenue," I mumbled. "Suite 917."

"New York headquarters reports that Suite 917 in the Singer Trades Building has been vacant for eight months."

I ran my tongue over my lower lip, where a little blood tasted salty. They were being comparatively gentle with me now, but later. . . . I knew what can happen to a man, from my work on that rotten vice squad. And I could do nothing but tell the story that sounded so hopelessly thin.

"So a man named Swayne hired you to be Stearn's secretary," the cop who was

phonographing at the moment bit out. "He hired you in a dirty little office with no name on the door, after running a blind ad—for a job like that! Boloney."

"All right, it's boloney," I said wearily.

"Swell! Now you're being smart. What really happened?"

"That really happened. I thought it was a little fishy, but I needed a job, and the guy gave me a hundred dollars. For expenses. That looked real enough."

"Where's the hundred dollars?"

"I spent it for clothes and a ticket to Maine."

The cop tried a new tack. Or, rather, he tried another tack another time.

"Where did you meet Richard Fenton, the man you shot?"

"I didn't meet him. The first time I saw him was when he fell toward me out of a closet, dead."

"Is it true he worked for Stearn?"

"I haven't any idea. Stearn said so."

"What were you and Fenton planning to do when you made a headquarters of that bungalow across from Stearn's place?"

"We were planning to study the love life of the white ant," I said bitterly. My head locked again.

"The gun you killed Fenton with is his own, we've found. Did you steal it from him?"

"I never saw it before you took it out of the dispatch box. I thought there was a formula in that box."

"You say a dame named Spicer told you to go and get the formula to 'protect' Miss Stearn. Yet no one of that name had ever visited the Stearns. How do you explain that?"

"I can't," I said.

They went on with it, and I gave them the same answers. I could understand why people give phoney confessions before I was through. But I was damned if I'd do that.

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They led me to a cell and I sat down on the iron bunk and thought it over.

There was one bright light in my black situation. That was, that a coroner had said Fenton was dead from forty-five minutes to two hours when the cops caught me in the bungalow. And the Bar Harbor taxi driver had picked me up at the station only about twenty to twenty-five minutes before I was nailed.

Furthermore, the driver stubbornly insisted that he had seen me get off the train. Which made it impossible for me to have gone to the bungalow first and then have sneaked back to the station and openly hired a cab. Also, there were no prints on the gun in the dispatch box. Also, it was silly for me to have carried the gun in a box, wrapped in newspapers, if I were the killer.

Because of that blessed taxi driver, I'd sensed more than actually discovered that I was not yet charged with murder. But I would be, very soon. As soon as the cops could make it stick. For this killing was big newspaper stuff because of its connection, however tenuous, with Carey B. Stearn. Big headlines, screaming sensation. So the cops would move heaven and earth for a fast conviction. And there was Tom Penny, without a family or intimate friends, caught beside the dead man with the murder gun in his suitcase.

So the driver saw me get off the train? Well, I might have just got on it. On the other side, a few seconds before. Gun carried absurdly in a tin box wrapped in newspaper? That would mean nothing to a jury. No prints of mine on the butt? Of course the first thing I'd do would be to wipe the butt after the shooting.

My work with the vice squad had made me a kind of half-bright detective, used to the ways of the police. So I knew what I had to face if I couldn't get out of this frame.

And what a frame! I thought it over from start to finish and couldn't see a hole in it.

SOMEbody had known days in advance that Richard Fenton would be in that bungalow at ten or so that morning, and had planned to kill him with his own gun. Somebody had known there would be a big commotion because Fenton was a former employee of the famous Carey Stearn, and because the body would be found right across the road from Stearn's place. So?

So the simplest solution was to hire a man to take the rap.

The mechanics of the thing were fairly plain, now.

There was a man calling himself Swayne, who might be my mysterious Somebody, or might be merely a hireling. Swayne had taken some letters from a newspaper box rented by a perfectly legitimate and innocent company advertising for help. He had sneaked into an unused office for the "interview." I was the catch.

At Stearn's next morning, a girl called Loretta Spicer had stopped me, warned in advance when I'd arrive. She was a tool of the Somebody's. She'd sent me to the place where a man had been killed just before my train was due to arrive, and then had scrambled herself. I remembered that just before I'd crossed the road after I'd left her, I'd heard a car stop and start up again. The car had stopped to pick up the girl, who had run to the wall right after I'd left her.

Only one explanation had occurred to me that stood up on reexamination: This frame that had taken money, cleverness and time, must have been engineered by somebody connected with the House of Stearn. Somebody fearing an investigation resulting from the murder of a former Stearn employee. Otherwise, if an outsider had contemplated the murder, he wouldn't have cared whether an investigation turned Stearnward or not.

There was one more point that I kept dwelling on. That was, the girl I'd seen for two swift instants through the French windows opening off the Stearn terrace. The

honey blonde. She had worn a red sash at the waist of her white dress, and the sash was frayed in back.

I had seen a bit of red fabric on a thorn-bush near the back door of the bungalow as I fled. That made it look as if she had been in that house shortly before me. And if so, she might have shot Fenton. The only flaw being that I couldn't imagine how a girl would have the strength to prop a dead man upright in a closet.

There was another thing about the honey blonde. I'd remembered where I had seen her running from something, with the look of fear on her face. It had been a vice squad raid on a joint near upper Broadway just before I'd quit the snooping business. She had managed to skim out a rear entrance before the cops could pick her up. I could have stopped her; I was nearest; but I'd let her go. I'd let many a girl go, before, who looked too decent to be hooked in a doubtful place.

But how would a girl of the social standing to be staying in a place like the Stearns' Bar Harbor mansion come to be in a cheap dive—and what did the peculiar circumstances buy me?

I reached restlessly for a cigarette, remembered that they had been taken away from me, and then saw a cop at the door.

"You're wanted in the chief's office," he said sourly.

Another grilling? So soon?

But it was not a grilling I'd been called for.

The chief, a gray-haired man built on T-square lines, was sitting beside his desk biting his lips. With him was a lean, lanky, shrewd New Englander smoking a thin cigar and looking at the smoke.

"Well, you're sprung," the chief said sourly to me. "This is Kirk, your lawyer."

It was the last thing in the world I'd expected. I felt things whirl around me, and stared at the lean, cagy man designated as my lawyer, Kirk. I learned nothing from that lank face. Kirk might be a perfectly

respectable lawyer, or the smartest crook in Maine.

"Who—" I blurted.

His heavy eyelids flickered a little, and I got the message that I was to say nothing. The chief eyed me hopefully and growled something deep in his throat when I didn't go on.

"You won't be out long," he said. "As soon as we clear up one more little point, we'll pin murder on you. Then there won't be any big shot lawyers coming around at two in the morning to spring you."

I didn't know whether he was bluffing about the "one more little point" or not. I was afraid he wasn't.

"Stay right around!" the chief snapped. "Don't go out of this town. If you try it, I'll hang you myself, personally."

I was out on the street with Kirk, and I was moving in a crazy dream again. Money and pull had gone into this; it took both to release a man in as bad a jam as I at two in the morning.

"Who—" I began again.

"You'll stop here, at the Penobscott Hotel," Kirk said smoothly.

He steered me in through an unimpressive double door and up to a desk. He got a room, and went with me to the door of it.

"Do as the chief says and don't try to get away," he said, lantern jaws moving almost imperceptibly with the words. "You couldn't, anyhow. He'll have half his force watching this place. And I'll have a man on the door myself."

"But who hired you for me?" I said. "And why was I brought here?"

"You'll find out," he said curtly. And he left.

But I had no intention of waiting to find out—if I could possibly help it. And I discovered, after locking the door and going to my window, that perhaps I could help it. In spite of cops and Kirk's man, there might be a way out, to a man in as bad a mess as I was.

A line of roofs showed when I looked

out my window, with the nearest one about sixteen feet away and down about a half-story. At the bottom of the sixteen-foot gap was cement.

Nice, hard death waiting if I missed a jump that no one in his right mind would have attempted. And I almost did miss it. I felt my feet slip as they didn't quite light on the parapet after the most prodigious jump a fairly fit ex-broadjump title-holder could make. I smashed on the parapet on my stomach with an agonized oooph! and hung with my legs dangling over five stories of space till I could drag myself to safety.

Down at the end of the block there was a fire-escape; and three blocks from there was a big gas station that stayed open all night. I hung around till a farm truck clanked up, begged a ride, and got hauled a good forty miles out of Bangor. In the dawn, I saw a freight slowing on a curve near the road. It was heading toward New York. I've flipped freights before. I did it again, and in a minute, with the curve passed, she began to roll fast—toward New York, toward the big city in which this hell's scheme that had netted me seemed to have been spawned.

CHAPTER FOUR

Framed Dame

RICHARD FENTON, ex-employee of Carey Stearn, my supposed murder victim! That was the boy I wanted to do some checking on first. I had a short cut in that: in the Bar Harbor lockup, I'd heard Jim read off one of Fenton's cards to Mike while they were discussing the case.

The address had been one on Christopher Street, near the Village; and I was on my way there now. On foot. Because I hadn't a nickel for subway fare.

I looked like nothing on earth—dirty and shabby from my freight ride, unshaven for thirty hours, and bareheaded, for I'd lost

my hat. I had not one thing in my pockets; the cops at Bangor had filed everything and neither Kirk nor I had demanded it when he came with his writ of habeas corpus. I hadn't even thought of such a thing.

I was light headed from hunger that was advanced enough to have hollowed my cheeks under the stubble a bit. Altogether I was something to shrink from on a dark street, but I couldn't let appearances slow me up.

I got to the Christopher Street address. The building was luxurious, a new and expensive one soaring from dirty joints all around. There was a doorman, and there would be elevator boys and perhaps a man at a desk in the lobby. I racked my brain for a way to get past them, looking like a tramp as I did; and thought I found one.

I stepped up to the door. The doorman stopped me at once, as I'd thought he would.

I clutched at my inside coat pocket. "I found a wallet belonging to a guy here," I said. "I came to return it."

"I'll take it up."

"No, you won't. I'll take it up myself. There ought to be a reward. I want it."

The doorman walked me inside. There was a mail desk, and a dapper man behind it. I repeated the story.

"Who does it belong to?" asked the clerk. "Was there a name in it?"

"Yeah," I said. "On a bill. The address is clear, but the name isn't. I think it's Flinten, or Floten, or something like that. There's eighty-one bucks in the wallet."

"Fenton?" said the man. "We had a Fenton in five-eighteen, but it probably isn't him. He was killed yesterday morning up in Maine."

"He could have lost it before he went up and got killed, couldn't he?" I said. "I don't know how long the wallet had been lying where I found it. But look—if he's dead, who gives me my reward for turning it in instead of keeping it?"

"You probably won't get a reward. The police will want that wallet. They were

here yesterday and they'll be here again today, soon. You can give it to them then."

This wasn't going at all as I'd hoped. So I tried another tack.

"Okay," I said resignedly. "I'll give it to 'em then. But I wish I'd just kept the eighty-one bucks. Can I wait up in this Fenton's joint for the cops?"

"Certainly not!" snapped the clerk.

"All right, buddy." I shrugged. "I'm a little down on my luck, and I show it, that's all. I just thought it would look better for me to be out of sight than to hang around the lobby of a tony place like this."

The clerk looked at my crumpled, dirty suit and stubbly jaws.

"Maybe the guy's got something there," said the doorman. He was as big as I am, and heavier. He gave me a nasty look.

"All right," said the clerk. He handed the man a key. "You go up with him—and wait with him till the police come. They'll go straight up to five-eighteen, anyhow. And they may be quite interested in how this man happens to have Fenton's wallet. Maybe he didn't 'find' it."

The doorman unlocked five-eighteen, and the two of us stepped in.

"Don't try to steal the wallpaper," he began contemptuously.

I whirled and hit him on the side of the jaw, with all the strength in me. I was fighting for my neck, and he was off guard anyhow. He went down so hard I was scared—but I felt his heart pumping okay under his coats, so I left him and began looking around.

I wasn't the first to look around here. The police had searched first, and the place showed it. But they might have missed something. I'd gambled a lot that they had, and that I could find it. Though I hadn't the faintest notion what "it" might be.

There were four rooms to the place—living room, dining room, bedroom and full-sized kitchen. The rooms were lavishly furnished: Fenton had lived high for a

discharged office worker who'd never had much of a job in the first place.

I hit the kitchen first, and went through drawers, can, boxes, even the refrigerator. I found nothing of any significance. Only traces of a search before mine. I hit the dining room. There was no closet here; I searched fast and found nothing. Then came the living room. There was one remarkable thing about that: there seemed to be no phone in it. Yet there should have been at least a house phone.

I opened a wall cabinet and found the instrument. I looked for memorandums or phone numbers, one of the first things we'd been trained to search for in the vice work. There wasn't a scrap of paper in the cabinet. Maybe the cops had taken them.

Then I saw something that I was pretty sure the cops hadn't. I saw it because the eleven o'clock sun slanted in the window at just the right angle to spotlight it.

On the inner edge of the wall-cabinet door, only to be seen if the door was wide open, were several penciled figures:

B
H
4.
4.

It looked like a code number and it looked as if it should have meaning, even though I couldn't read it at the time. I made a mental note of it, and shut the cabinet. There was a small table nearby. On it was a silver photograph frame. The cabinet-sized picture that had occupied it was gone, taken by the police. But slantwise in the back, where it had rested behind the big picture, was a small snapshot. The cops hadn't bothered with that after they got the big one.

I BENT over it. The snap was a dark-haired, curvy girl in a come-hither street suit, standing in front of an entrance marked "... ers' Ent. ..." A corner

of a newsstand showed beyond the door.

I heard an exclamation come involuntarily from my lips. The girl was the hard-eyed beauty who had called herself Loretta Spicer. The doorway in front of which she'd been snapped was one I'd watched for a week, once. A side door to Emil First's Eight-Ball Café, marked "Performers' Entrance," and with a newsstand right next to it. On the snap was written, *Love, Laura*.

I put the picture in my pocket and started to turn to go into the bedroom. But I was not to do that. Somebody was in it that had guessed it would be my next move, and had decided not to allow it.

"Stand just the way you are, face to the wall," I heard a voice behind me.

I froze. It was a girl's voice, and it was hysterically tremulous. If she had a gun, and if her trigger-finger were as unsteady as her voice, I was in deadly danger.

I heard soft steps going behind me from the bedroom door toward the outer door. The girl intended to slip away unseen. Who was she? The dark-eyed jane in the snapshot, alias Loretta Spicer? If so, a large-sized chance at salvation was slipping through my fingers.

The telephone suddenly rang. I flirted with death—whirled and sprang. I'd gambled that the girl's eyes would jerk toward the source of the unexpected sound, and I won. I got a slim white wrist, heard a small gun drop to the floor. And I looked, not into the dark eyes of the Spicer headache, but into the blue eyes of the honey blonde I'd seen behind Stearn's French windows.

I picked up her gun.

She stared at me with panic in her face. But I didn't stop to say anything. I went to the phone, dragging her along. Dangerous to let the phone go unanswered: the doorman, up here with me, should answer at once. If he didn't it would indicate trouble.

"Yeah?" I said into the phone.

"Warren? This is the desk. I just phoned to say the police are on their way up. I told 'em about the bum."

I slammed the receiver up and ran, towing the blonde. Out the door and down the hall.

"Wait!" she gasped. "I'll scream for help!"

"Cops!" I said. "On their way up. You won't want to see them any more than I do, I'm betting." I opened stair doors and started down them. "I want to talk with you!"

We got to the lobby floor. By now the police would be pounding on the door of 518 and getting suspicious when it didn't open. One of them would be down here fast for a duplicate key. I ran the blonde through the lobby.

"Hey—" bawled the clerk, getting around his desk and in front of me like a monkey on springs. I slapped him flat, and we went on. There was a cab at the entrance.

"Central Park," I said.

We rolled off. I drew a deep breath of relief and looked at the girl. She was already looking at me, with her hand over her breast.

"It's—you," she said. "I didn't recognize you till this minute. I thought you'd be up in Maine."

"I guess I'm supposed to be." I nodded.

"I should certainly guess you are," she said slowly. "It's murder, now. That taxi driver at Bar Harbor went back on his statement that he saw you get off the train."

I leaned back while I took that in. The sole friendly testimony in my favor—gone. I was as good as in the chair right now, if the police laid hands on me. What the hell had made the driver backtrack like that? But the answer was easy. Whoever had worked so deliberately to put me on the spot in the first place, had got to him and bought him off. That was all.

We were going slow, up Eighth Avenue, staring at each other warily, like a couple

of fighters penned in a small booth. I fainted first.

"I saw you yesterday through the French doors."

She didn't say anything, just looked at me.

"You had on a white dress with a red sash. The red sash was torn in the back."

She stared, all eyes.

"Just before that," I said deliberately, "I'd seen the piece torn out of that sash. On a thorn-bush twenty yards from the back door of the bungalow in which a man lay dead."

She gasped as though I'd hit her. I hurried on with it.

"You were in that house, my lovely friend, just before I was. You ran out the rear door, circled back to the Stearn place and got in unseen. Something scared you. What? The sight of a dead body, of course."

She moistened pale lips.

"I'm not charging you with murder," I said. "That isn't because your face is so beautifully innocent-looking but because I don't think a girl of your size would have the strength to prop a dead man upright in a closet after she'd killed him. But I am charging you with having seen that dead man—and of deliberately standing by later and watching me take the charge for it when you knew he must have been dead when I got there!"

THE girl's shoulders drooped.

"Yes. I knew," she sighed. "And I did stand by. But I wanted to help. And I did, later. At least I meant to, Mr. Kirk—"

I gasped. "You hired the lawyer for me?"

"Yes. I had him take you to the hotel. I was going to sneak in and have a talk with you later. I wanted to know if you knew anything about Fenton, even though I was pretty sure you hadn't killed him."

"I was all eyes, now."

"That sounds as though you were mixed up with Fenton yourself," I said finally.

"I—I was."

"What was he to you?"

I wasn't bludgeoning any more. The wind had been taken out of my sails by her statement about Kirk.

"He was a blackmailing rotter!" the girl said, a spot of red appearing for an instant on each cheekbone.

I could see that she didn't intend to go on with that part of the account; but I had an opening there myself.

"Cooper Tavern, Ninety-Eighth Street, ten months ago," I said. "You barely missed being caught in a raid."

She shrank back from me, looking wild and beaten.

"How did you know that? You were in with Fenton! You—"

"Hold it!" I said. "I didn't get that from Fenton. I saw you there with my own eyes. I was on the vice investigation squad that brought Cooper Tavern to the attention of the cops. I quit the work shortly afterward. Was that what he was blackmailing you about?"

"Yes. In the last ten months I've given him nearly fifty thousand dollars."

I whistled, then shrugged. "Well, maybe it was worth it, to keep it out of the papers. Particularly after the payoff. That joint was a dope-den, a white slave station, and a lot of other quite filthy things."

"It was worth it, to me. My father—thinks rather highly of me. I couldn't let him know I'd been there."

"Your father?"

"Yes. The man you thought had hired you as secretary."

"Wait a min— You mean Stearn?"

"Yes."

"Your father is Carey B. Stearn?"

She nodded.

So my benefactress was Patricia Stearn. Benefactress? I began to have bleak doubts about that. When Kirk had freed me, I'd had the thought that perhaps I'd been

sprung only to be framed more tightly for murder, somehow. That thought came back to me now, plus the conviction that somebody in the House of Stearn itself had done the framing. Somebody connected with the big house across the road.

"You say you paid because you didn't want your father to know about your visit to Cooper Tavern," I said. "Are you sure he doesn't already know?"

"Of course I'm sure! If he did—"

Her voice trailed away, and I kept on with an ugly but logical train of thought.

Stearn was a very smart man. He might have easily have found out about his daughter's blackmail mess, and have found out that Fenton, an ex-employee, was the blackmailer. From there it would be only a step to discovering that Patricia met him in the bungalow across the road and paid him off.

Then? Well, Stearn was ruthless as well as brilliant. Suppose he decided to kill Fenton for his child's sake. But the murder of a discharged employee, across the road from his estate, would turn the spotlight on his establishment. Hence, he'd better get a goat to take the rap and free his house from all suspicion at the outset.

For killing a rat who threatend his girl, I couldn't blame the man. But for the rotten act of framing an innocent outsider, I did blame him! That was unspeakable.

"Why are you—looking like that?" said the girl. "The raid at the tavern. . . . I wasn't there because I made it a practice to go to such a place. I was there because a phone call said that an old school friend of mine was there, and there was to be a raid and I'd better get her out in a hurry. She'd been staying with me in my New York apartment, and I knew she was a little wild. That's why I was there. Believe me!"

I DEALT off the top of my mind, playing mainly with homicidal thoughts of Carey B. Stearn.

"Was the friend there?"

"No," said Patricia Stern. "I guess the whole thing was engineered. Just to get me there so I could be blackmailed later."

"How would that be enough? I don't think any of the raiders saw you but me. It would be your word against Fenton's. And the word of a Stearn would carry a lot of weight," I added bitterly.

"There were pictures of me running before the raiders," said Patricia in a low tone.

"Pictures?" I was jolted into closer attention. "How on earth could pictures have been taken at such a time?"

"Well, there were. Fenton said so."

"And he showed them to you?"

"I—no."

"Good heavens! And you just took his word for it?"

"I didn't dare to question it. Because if I hadn't paid, and there had been pictures— The fact that he knew I'd been there in the first place, and that there'd been a raid, convinced me."

"If it'll do you any good," I said gloomily, "you've been paying on a dead horse. There couldn't have been pictures. I was there, and I'm sure of it."

Her hand was tight on my arm. "Oh! Then if anyone tries to take over where Fenton left off, and blackmail me again, you can clear me."

"I don't think a convicted murderer can do you any good." I shrugged.

"But maybe you can get out of it."

"Maybe you wouldn't like the result if I did," I said. "Maybe it would be better for you if I took the rap than if the real killer did."

"I—don't understand," she said.

I let it go. Maybe she was in with her father, maybe not. In any case, why alienate her now when possibly I could use her?

"You went to the bungalow to pay off Fenton again?"

"No," she said. "Not exactly. I was to go at noon. I went early to try—somehow—to get my hands on the pictures he

swore he had. He wasn't in sight, so I was searching the bungalow when I came to that closet in the dining room." She shivered. "I opened the door a little, felt the pressure of a body against it and actually saw the face. I slammed the door shut again, as hard as I could, and ran."

"You were still after the pictures at Fenton's apartment awhile ago?"

"Yes. I—had been to his place before. With money. I got through the lobby and upstairs unseen. I hadn't any idea how I was to get into the place, but the door opened when I touched it."

"I was in there at the time?"

"Yes, though I didn't know it. I saw the body of the doorman and started to run. Then I saw that he wasn't dead. Like a little fool, I went toward him, and then heard steps coming from the kitchen. It was too far to get to the outer door, so I jumped into the bedroom."

The taxi was nearing Central Park.

"Go east," I called to the driver.

Patricia looked at me inquiringly.

"We'll hit an out-of-the-way store with a phone booth on Second Avenue," I said. "I've got a phone call to make, and I don't want to attract attention—I don't look very dapper at the moment. By the way, you'll have to take care of the cab fare, too. I'm broke."

"Of course." She nodded. "Anything whatever that I can do to make up for not being able to clear you yesterday—"

She looked okay—but I wondered. I saw her father's cold, slate-gray eyes, and reviewed the facts against him. And—I wondered.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Last Trick

I PROPPED the snapshot of "Loretta Spicer" on the shelf in the phone booth. Signed, *Love, Laura*. Taken at the Performers' Entrance of the Eight-Ball

Café; proprietor, Emil First. Had the police spotted the doorway as I had? Perhaps. Some one of them on the vice detail might have been familiar enough with cafés and taverns around town to do it.

Emil First was one of the few who had fought against the special vice investigators, and won. He had drag like a horse. It was rumored that a certain councilman was behind that pull of his. A councilman, and a ward heeler named Jake Dieppe. I'd run into Jake, personally. A man with a dead eye and a husky voice.

I dialed a number. It was First's apartment number; he wouldn't be at the Eight-Ball at this hour.

"Hello. Emil?" I said, husky-voiced. "This is Jake."

"Hi-yah, Jake," came a sleepy voice.

"Did I get you out of bed?"

"What? Say, I can hardly hear you."

I raised my voice a little more, but kept it muffled and indistinct.

"I say—did I get you up?"

"Uh-huh. Coffee's waitin', 'though. What's on your mind?"

"I'm calling for a friend, Emil. About a dame that works in your floor show."

"What's she done?"

"Nothing. The guy just wants to know where he can find her. That's all. Guess he's kind of nuts about her looks. She's a nice-looking brunette, he says. Name's Laura Something."

"Brunette named Laura? What the hell, Jake. I got lots of brunettes and a couple called Laura."

"Okay, if that's the way you feel about it," I said huskily.

"Wait a minute. Don't go off the handle like that. Is he a right guy?"

"Would I be callin' if he wasn't?" I asked him.

"Oh, well, I guess Laurie can take care of herself. Last name Price." He gave me an address on West End Avenue. "I ain't seen her for a couple weeks. Don't know if she's in some kind of a jam or not."

Say, Jake—on that license business—”
 “I’ll fix that later,” I said, voice husky.
 “In a hurry now. Thanks for the address, Emil.”

I clicked the receiver and went out, with Patricia beside me. “And now?” she said.

“West End Avenue. You know about the girl calling herself Loretta Spicer who sent me into that bungalow?”

She nodded. “Dad told me about her.”

“Well, her real name’s Laura Price, and that’s where she lives.”

I flagged another cab. Patricia was tense beside me.

“If you can get to her—make her talk—”

“That’s what I’m hoping,” I said. The blue eyes certainly looked on the level. But I couldn’t forget the case against her father. “Want to go along?”

Her head came up. “I certainly do. I’m sure you’re innocent of Fenton’s murder—and, besides, you helped me out of a bad spot back at his apartment when the police came. I want to help you if I can.”

So she was either the world’s best actress—or else. I’d got to the point where I could look at her face and hate to think of the “or else.”

The West End place was as gilded as Fenton’s building. But why not? If the girl knew Fenton well, as the snapshot would indicate, and if Patricia had given Fenton fifty grand in ten months, all concerned could live gilded lives.

There was a doorman. He looked hard at me, perplexedly at Patricia, opened the door and let us in without a word. Her appearance passed us. In the lobby there was no desk, or clerk, and the elevators were automatic. A row of chrome mailslots with bells beside them gave Laura Price’s apartment as Number 735. We went up.

Patricia knocked on the door, while I stood to one side. We heard a rustle of silk, a man’s subdued voice, and then the door was opened six inches.

The dark-eyed gal who had been my guide to a cell was in pale blue negligée.

I’d seen her before in shorts; this revealed more than the shorts had. She looked irritably at Patricia.

“Well?” she said. “Who are you? What do you want?”

I shoved the door open, banging her back with it.

“Surely you recognize your old friend, Carey’s daughter,” I said. “The one who stole the formula and needed saving from herself— Oh, no, you don’t!”

There was a man behind the brunette, and with a glint of metal in his hand. I leaped for him. It was in midair, so to speak, that I recognized the toothy mouth and the long nose and the fat face. It was the buzzard calling himself Swayne.

Nice, I said to myself. And my fist went into his face with the memory of the back room in Bangor, and hunger and fear and the unjustified threat of the electric chair behind it.

Monsieur Swayne lay down on the floor, in a very awkward sprawl, and stayed there.

“You’ve killed him! You—”

Screeching longshoreman’s oaths, the brunette was on me. And I socked her too. Not as hard as I’d hit Swayne, but hard enough to set her down with a bang. She stared up with dazed and blinking eyes.

I grabbed the first thing at hand that looked as if it might have binding power. That was a long curtain at the near window. I tied Laura’s weakly struggling arms to her sides, and put another curtain around her legs. Swayne got fixed up with a third curtain, and with his own belt.

I went to the bathroom and got a glass of water, which I dashed over Swayne’s face. The girl didn’t need it; she was ragingly conscious, and fighting her bonds. Swayne gulped a minute and opened his eyes. They dropped fast as they rested on my face.

“Thomas Penny, secretarial ability, applying for the job in the blind ad,” I said. “Remember me?”

The toothy mouth remained closed.

"Thought I'd ask you a few questions," I said. "I hardly expected to find you here, but it's a break that I did. Did somebody hire you to horn in on that blind ad and get a murder goat? Or was it your own bright idea?"

SWAYNE stayed still. I remembered how my head had rung in the Bangor room with the cops around, so I gave him a taste of it. "Answer me!"

He stared at me. Patricia had cried out softly at the blow, so he looked at her too, and then back at me.

"You'll talk," I said. "Either to me or to the police."

"Would you be calling the cops?" he sneered. "Go ahead. I think they'd like to see you about now."

"I can make hash of that fat face of yours."

"Sure. And I can yell my head off."

"One yell," I said, taking Patricia's little gun from my pocket.

Fear leaped into his eyes. But his lips were shut in a sullen straight line that I knew I couldn't break. He had me, and I knew it. The girl tied beside him knew it, too. I could see it in her furious dark eyes. But I turned to her just the same.

"All right—you talk. Who killed Fenton?"

"You did," she said calmly. "Sucker."

"You're pretty free with your friendships, aren't you?" I snapped. "First Fenton, and then, when he is knocked off, this guy."

"You know where you can go, don't you?" said Laura Price. "Untie me or you'll wish you had."

"Got her voice?" I asked Patricia.

She looked as perplexed as Swayne and the Price dame.

"A little on the low side, and kind of hard," I said. "With a bit of blasphemy mixed in in the right spots."

"I don't understand you," Patricia said.

"You will." I took down the fourth cur-

tain, and ripped two large squares and a couple of strips out of it. I went to Laura, stuffed a square in her mouth as she opened it to swear at me, and bound it with the strip.

I turned to find Swayne's toothy mouth open for a yell.

"That's one thing you'd better not do," I said, with the little gun in my hand again.

I gagged him so tight that Patricia gnawed at her lip.

"He'll strangle," she faltered.

"I hope he does," I said.

I dragged the two into the next room and shut the door on them. Then I went to the phone stand with Patricia. There was a phone on it, fussily hidden by a doll's head and long skirts.

"BH 4 4," I said to her. "Does that mean anything to you?"

She looked at me with incredulity in her blue eyes.

"How did you get hold of that number?"

"It does mean something to you, then?"

"Why, yes. It's my father's private wire number, at Bar Harbor."

"I thought it might be something like that," I said. "Just how private is it?"

"No one in the house uses it but him," she said. "The phone is in his upstairs den, with an extension in a cabinet by his bed. He gets only the most important calls on it. The number is unlisted. Where did you get it?"

"You remember the phone at Fenton's apartment was in a wall cabinet?" I said. "Well, that number was penciled on the inner edge of the cabinet door. I guess Fenton felt he had to write it down because it wasn't listed and he couldn't get it again in an emergency. And he picked that as a likely spot for no one to see it but him."

"My father's private number—in Fenton's apartment?" Patricia said. She almost whispered it, through set lips.

"Yes," I told her, face expressionless. "Now, you heard the Price girl's voice a few minutes ago. Well enough to imitate

it over a long distance phone if you're any good at all. I want you to call B H 44, in Laura Price's voice. When you get an answer, say this: 'The frame has slipped. The goat's here in New York and there's hell to pay. You'd better get here fast. By plane.' Got that?"

She was staring at me with a breathless, white look on her face.

"But that's—that's my father's private number. If I phone that, I'll get my father on the line."

"Yes," I said. "It looks that way."

"But—you don't think dad—" Her voice died in shocked stillness.

"I wouldn't know," I said. "Maybe it's him, maybe not. Remember what you're to say when you get an answer."

"I won't do it!"

She glared at me, panting.

"Wait a minute," I said. "You surely aren't afraid to find out—who answers?"

"I won't do it!"

I reached toward her with the phone. "Remember: 'The goat is here in New York and there's hell to pay. Come by plane to my place.'"

"I WILL not put through that call!" she said. She was so white that I expected her to keel over.

"You'd see an innocent man burn in the chair instead?" I shot back.

"I don't care! I don't care about—anything, I won't phone!"

"You will," I said, "or have me tell the police everything I know about Fenton's blackmail and your trip to the bungalow before me. I can tell them where to find that red strip from your sash. Yes, you'll do it."

She glared, panting.

"Well," I said. "You don't want the whole rotten thing to come out?" I felt like six kinds of a heel, for I was sure she wasn't in on the frame, by now. But this was my neck. "You know, your father will be drawn in anyhow, if I talk."

"I still won't phone," she said, quiet, now, and with her slim shoulders ruler square.

I took a turn up and down the room, with her shocked, defiant blue eyes following me.

"You've known your father for a long time," I said, in a different tone. "You know him better than anyone else on earth, I'd say. Out of that knowledge, you refuse at any price to call his number from here. That means you know he's guilty."

"I do not! I don't know anything of the kind!"

"But you're afraid to take a chance on it—afraid to bet your own father's not a murderer?" I jeered.

"I—"

"Well, I don't blame you." I shrugged. "Because a call would prove precisely that. He's guilty as sure as we're both standing here."

Patricia's small white teeth clicked shut audibly.

"He's guilty, a murderer," I said.

"Give me that phone."

I felt weak in the knees. I'd won a fight that I'd known in advance would be harder than the physical scrap with the two tied and gagged in the next room.

"You'll probably regret it," I said. "Your father—"

"Give me that phone!"

I hung at her shoulder as she gave the number. I heard it go through the several exchange boards. "Calling Bar Harbor 44. New York, calling Bar Harbor 44."

I felt a queer difficulty in breathing. I'd used my last resources, in time, in strength, in thought, to get this trump card. Would it be high enough to take the trick? Or wasn't it a trump at all? I knew I wouldn't get another chance to wiggle out of the electric chair.

I literally held my breath when I heard Operator say, "Go ahead, New York."

"Hello," Patricia said, in a quite fair counterpart of the Price girl's voice.

"Hello!"

Patricia's eyes were strained and her hands clutched the phone tight. My hand on her shoulder must have left a bruise the next day.

The voice on the other end was obviously disguised.

Patricia could have doublecrossed me by screaming her name in the phone. I almost expected her to. But she didn't. White-lipped, she played it through.

"This is Laura. The goat's here in New York, and there's hell to pay. You'd better come to my place at once."

"I can't do that!" snapped the unidentifiable voice. "It would look bad."

"You'd better come—fast. Take a plane."

"But see here—"

Patricia unhurriedly hung up. She looked at me, and there were shadows under her eyes. I shrugged.

"He won't be here for four hours, anyway. Make yourself comfortable. A pot of coffee would go well. Will you raid the kitchen?"

"He?" she said.

"Whoever answered the call. With luck, he'll come walking in that door late this afternoon. Till then, there's nothing to do but wait."

THE sun was low and the clock said a quarter of six. Nearly five hours had passed since the phone call. A sizeable ashtray beside my chair overflowed with Laura Price's cork-tipped cigarette stubs. Patricia sat straight and still, not smoking, not doing anything but stare at the door.

"Nobody's coming," she said, for the hundredth time.

I looked at the clock and made my hundredth reply: "Somebody's got to, or I'll die for a murder I didn't—"

I stopped. A step in the hall? I couldn't hear it when I listened harder. Maybe there had been, and it had been made by a neighbor to this apartment.

The steps sounded again, and they were coming to this door. They stopped there—and a knock sounded.

I was on my feet, legs feeling as if they wouldn't support me much longer. Patricia was upright, too, with her hand at her throat. The knock sounded again.

I went to the door on tiptoe and stood flat against the wall next to it, nodding for Patricia to open it. She stood with her hand on the knob; and if I was going through a couple of private hells, so was she. She opened the door.

Her father walked in.

"Dad!" she whispered. It was a sort of croak. "Dad!" And you know, for a minute I almost felt sorry for the man. Almost felt sorry that my plan had drawn fire, even though it did save my own hide.

"Pat!" Stearn exclaimed. "What in the world—"

He looked from his daughter to me, slate-gray eyes going frosty.

"So it's our murderer," he said. "Watch that gun, young man. You might hurt somebody with it."

That did it. I was furious again.

"Except for your daughter's presence," I snapped, "I'd just love to hurt somebody with it! You framing, hypocritical, weaseling cheat!"

Down the hall the elevator door clanged. Stearn's gray eyes suddenly widened, and then narrowed till they were like slate chips.

"So you didn't know anybody named Loretta Spicer," I said. "But a call direct to you over your private wire brings you right to her apartment. Stay where you are!"

"I think I see," Stearn said, as if to no one in particular. He continued to walk—toward the room where I had Swayne and Laura Price refrigerating. I waved Patricia's .25.

"Stay where you are!"

"Shut up, you fool," said Stearn in a voice as calm as it was low, "and get on that door again."

I don't know why I didn't drill him. I guess it was because some men seem able to just say something, and everyone within range instinctively hops. Then I heard steps slowing as they neared the hall door, and I jumped to my place beside it, flat against the wall again.

This time there was no knock at the door. A key was thrust into the lock instead, with the sureness of long practice. The door opened.

"Miss Stearn!" exclaimed a voice.

A man came in swiftly who was young, well-set-up, in light summer tweeds that were a tailor's masterpiece. And a large light began to glow in my brain. Maybe it should have glowed before. I don't know. But as I said, I'm not what you'd call a full-fledged detective.

Harry Mosely, Stearn's confidential secretary from Bar Harbor, slammed the door shut after him in a hurry and grabbed Patricia's arm in a way that made her gasp aloud.

"What the hell are you doing—" he began harshly.

Then he saw me, with the gun in my hand, and not very quiet.

"Hello, murder advertiser," I said. "Got any more murder raps you'd like to pass on to innocent bystanders?"

His hand made a fast move.

"I'd like very much to use this," I said, moving the .25 a little closer to him.

He calmed down, and looked around out of the corners of his eyes.

"The lovely Laura is in there," I said, nodding toward the closed door of the next room. "She tipped me to all this, and Miss Stearn took the liberty of phoning in your girl friend's voice. Only she's not a very good girl friend. Did you know? She kind of liked Fenton, for one thing."

Mosely's face looked like a wolf's snarling muzzle. How had I ever thought it was pleasant and clean-cut? It seemed I'd made a hit there.

"One reason you killed Fenton was that

CIPHER SOLVERS' CLUB WINNERS

APRIL, 1951

Grand Total: 917,424 Answers

Eleven Answers—*Amoroj, 673; *Anidem, 508; Carl Adra, 96; *Attempt, 975; *W. C. Babcock, 770; *Alpha Bet, 1998; *Florence B. Boulton, 669; *Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 4145; *Carso, 2120; *Bessie Casey, 816; *Ciphermit, 3790; *R. C. C., 774; *Floyd E. Coss, 1873; *M. E. Cutcomb, 701; *Kay Dee, 874; *Drol, 2333; *M. E., 3974; *Mr. E., 99; *Eve Eden, 1512; *Engineer III, 2012; *Arty Ess, 4130; *Estece, 2037; *Evie, 582; *Femo, 923; *Diana Forrest, 243; *LeRoy A. Guidry, 1099; *Gus, 318; *Gyrene, 559; *Henry J. Haeweker, 2115; *S. R. Hart, 931; *Hayrake, 1614; *T. Hegarty, 3706; *Helcrypt, 155; *Henty, 1200; *Jaybee, 1544; *June, 713; *Kate, 3089; *Betty Kelly, 758; *Ksea, 143; *S. A. L., 648; *Marcia, 1348; *Theodore W. Midlam, 3490; *Lee A. Miller, 2048; *Gum Miner, 208; *Mousie, 120; *Les Noyse, 71; *Pablo, 393; *Ray F. Richer, 1647; *Wm. G. Ringer, 1647; *Ty Roe, 1583; *Alice Routh, 4061; *Rush, 532; *Mrs. H. A. Seals, 3227; *Kay Vee See, 1852; *R. B. Shrewsbury, 1798; *L. Silverman, 344; *Harold R. Smith, 128; *Sourdough, 396; *Sam Spiegel, 2914; *M. G. S., 2053; *Jack-Stay, 3968; *Geraldine Taber, 55; *Miss Tick, 455; *Tot, 334; *Valkyrie, 1368; *Arline F. Vaughn, 403; *Volund, 2120; *Leona Watts, 175; *Wes, 269; *Arthur Whitfield, 594; *Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 617; *James H. Williams, 1018; *Doctor X, 4180; *Zizi, 708.

Ten Answers—†Aralc, 110; *Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 528; A. E. Cusick, 99; H. R. Derr, 55; George Hein, Jr., 72; Jaybar, 68; *Jaythemen, 392; *Lucille Little, 2271; *F. Llewra, 687; *C. Retherford, 346; *U. Solv'm, 581; *Nick Spar, 3412; A. D. Walters, 82.

Nine Answers—*J. E. L., 545; †Capt. H. F. Pool, 378.

Eight Answers—Doc V., 45.

Seven Answers—*N. Dak. Ump, 861.

Four Answers—*Shady-side, 643.

Correction—*R. C. C., 11 Answers for May, 1950, not previously credited.

JUNE, 1951

Grand Total: 918,524 Answers

Eleven Answers—*Amoroj, 685; *Anidem, 519; †Carl Adra, 108; *Attempt, 987; *W. C. Babcock, 781; *Alpha Bet, 1999; *Florence B. Boulton, 681; *Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 4157; †Canco, 184; *Carso, 2131; *Bessie Casey, 827; *Ciphermit, 3802; *R.C.C., 783; Corbeau, 46; *Floyd E. Coss, 1885; *Curley, 677; *M. E. Cutcomb, 713; *Kay Dee, 886; H. R. Derr, 66; *Gunga Din, 946; *Drol, 2344; *M. E., 3985; †Mr. E., 110; *Eve Eden, 1523; *Efdce, 1463; *Engineer III, 2023; *Arty Ess, 4141; *Estece, 2049; *Evie, 593; †Ewlee, 430; *Femo, 934; †Diana Forrest, 254; *LeRoy A. Guidry, 1110; †Gus, 329; *Gyrene, 571; *Henry J. Haeweker, 2126; *Hayrake, 1626; *T. Hegarty, 3717; *Helcrypt, 167; *Henty, 1212; *Jaybee, 1556; *Jayem, 3196; *Jayemen, 403; *June, 725; *Kate, 3100; *Betty Kelly, 769; †Ksea, 155; *S.A.L., 659; *J. E. L., 556; *Marcia, 1360; *Theodore W. Midlam, 3501; *Lee A. Miller, 2059; †Gum Miner, 220; *Mossback, 2715; †Mousie, 131; *Les Noyse, 83; †Pablo, 404; *B. E. R., 1391; †Rebbina, 173; *Ray F. Richer, 1658; *Wm. G. Ringer, 1659; *Alice Routh, 4072; *Rush, 543; *Mario Saiz, 11; *Kay Vee See, 1864; *R. B. Shrewsbury, 1809; †L. Silverman, 355; †Harold R. Smith, 140; †Sourdough, 408; *Sam Spiegel, 2925; *M. G. S., 2065; *Statist, 554; *Jack-Stay, 3980; *Geraldine Taber, 67; †Miss Tick, 467; †Tot, 345; *Valkyrie, 1379; †Arline F. Vaughn, 414; *Volund, 2131; A. D. Walters, 94; †Leona Watts, 187; *Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 628; *Doctor X, 4191.

Ten Answers—†Aralc, 120; Phil Baker, 51; *Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 538; †A. E. Cusick, 109; *Lucille F. Little, 2281; †Capt. H. F. Pool, 388; †C. Retherford, 356; *U. Solv'm, 591; *Nick Spar, 3422; *N. Dak. Ump, 871; *James H. Williams, 1028.

Nine Answers—Jaybar, 77.

Eight Answers—Mrs. Marvin Jacoby, 8.

Six Answers—*Shady-side, 649.

Corrections—*Mossback, 11 answers for April and Phil Baker, 10 answers for April, 1951, not previously credited.

he was horning in with Laura, wasn't it?" I said. "Well, you'd have had another man to shoot for the same reason. The pet you call Swayne in in there, too. He was with her when I arrived, all arms around the neck—"

Mosely tried it, then. I'd read in his eyes that he would. Why not? It was get me out of the way and beat it—or face the chair himself. But half prepared as I was, he was too swift for me. His foot lashed up and knocked the gun from my hand, and then he was on me.

I'm big, and I'm solid through the shoulders. But I'd passed through a bad thirty-eight hours or so; and Mosely showed me what training, tennis and swimming and golfing can give a man. He had me down and my eyes were glazing when Patricia joined the game. Her eyes looked very like her father's as she raised a table lamp and brought the base down on his head. He groaned, rocked back on his knees, and dove for her. So I picked up the .25 and shot him.

STEARN and Pat told me the missing links in the commissioner's office, to which an extremely affable sergeant had led me.

"Mosely cooked up the brilliant scheme of getting Pat to the Cooper Tavern," Stearn said. He snorted at his daughter. "You crazy kid—why didn't you tell me about it at once?"

He turned back to me.

"Having laid a blackmail net around his employer's daughter," he said, "he got in touch with a discharged man of mine, Fenton, to actually collect the money. Mosely couldn't appear himself, of course, living right in my house as he did. Too risky. So Fenton was front man. But Fenton did two things. He began playing Mosely's girl, Laura Price, and he began holding out money on him after collecting from Pat.

"He decided to kill Fenton. But because of the connections, he knew he'd better get

somebody to fasten the charge on. He'd picked a man named Ryker, alias Swayne, to take Fenton's place when and if the plan succeeded. Swayne hooked you—and then you refused to stay hooked and hooked Swayne right back again, and Mosely with him."

"I thought it was you I was after," I said. "When you came in the door—"

"I heard the phone ring in my private den," said Stearn. "After that, I wasn't called to it. It occurred to me that it had rung several times recently, and I hadn't been called. Which meant that Harry must be using it himself. I didn't like the idea, so I picked up the extension in my bedroom and listened in. I heard a woman say something about the goat being in New York and hell to pay. I thought that meant—what it did mean. But I couldn't be sure. It was too serious and astounding a thing. I followed Mosely to the airport. He took a plane, I hired a faster one. I traced the caller on my private line and got the Price woman's address. Then I beat him there."

"Darling—why did you want to get there ahead of him?" said Pat. "He might have killed you."

"I wanted to talk with the woman who'd called him, first. I had an idea a good-sized sum of money, plus promise of immunity from arrest, would make her come clean to me. Then I meant to confront Harry with the truth—with a few policemen nearby. Instead, I saw you—and Tom Penny."

He stared speculatively at me.

"You were applying for a job when you fell into this mess, weren't you?" he said.

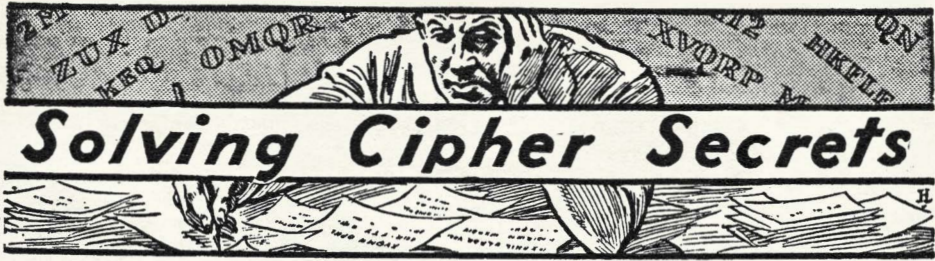
I nodded.

Pat smiled suddenly, and I saw that she had dimples.

"Well, Mosely seems to have preferred the death cell to my office, which leaves me without a secretary. Want to try it?"

My mouth opened but I couldn't speak. Pat laughed.

"He says yes," she said. "And we both appreciate it—very much indeed!" ■ ■ ■



Founded in 1924

Article No. 860

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. 5439—Note from Newcomer. By A. T. Bernhard. Try singleton T and two-letter-word TO as "I" and "in," in connection with endings -TOS and -UTROC as "ing" and "-tions."

GYUBRNSB T BGPD FDDO CRYPTOS UBD EVJXURSVGZC
 GXXDGVOTOS TO JRVN ZGSGHTOD IRV G ONZFDV RI JDGVC,
 T BGPD ODPDV UGADO RXXRVUNOTUJ UR CDOL TO UBD
 CRYNUTROC NOUTY ORK. YDU'C ADDX 'DZ ERZTOS!

No. 5440—Athletic Skill. By Ty Roe. Start with Y and phrase YA AOJ. Follow up with YCU and AOJC. Then substitute in OTCUSJU, and fill in missing letters.

KBDJ RBZK PSBD *EYFJ *NHCCXJKYTFJJ, JGXJSA YA AOJ
 XYKAHDJ VYEEJU OBVFJZ, SYC TX Y KVBSJ BP Y OTCUSJU
 YCU PBTS, AOJC KFHXXJU BPP AOJ HVJ IJSZ VBVFZ!

No. 5441—Untravelled Territory. By John DeVore. SXN and SA, common short words, taken with connective THZ, will unlock YAGSXNOH and HAOSXNOH. The rest will readily follow.

SXN *RAYS *SOUTHERN, CNSDNNH YAGSXNOH *QXUHT
 THZ HAOSXNOH *UHZUT, YSO THEN RTHZ RUSSRN-VHADH
 SA NFKRAONoy, UY SXN XAPN AL PTHB OTON THUPTRY.

No. 5442—Volatile Product. By Isomer. Note short words and endings HE and -HAES; IS and -HISH; HLO, HLOS, and LOSMO; etc. Thus to ISHROGT, etc.

WISP POIGT ICE, BOTHGYMHADO BATHARRIHAES EX
 BOOG ISHROGT FIT YTOB HE WIZO LEYTOLERB IWWESAI,
 HLOS, IT SEF, IS AWUEGHISH BOHOGCOSH. LOSMO
 HLO ERB SIWO "TUAGAHT EX LIGHTLEGS."

No. 5443—Alone at Last. By Alma L. Roy. Spot TGA, used after the word-series. Note also KD and affix -KDX. Proceed then with GET, phrase KC DYG, pattern RDAYBBYD, etc. GET CROOKS “-ATUT” KC DYG RDAYBBYD KD *TDXNKCE:

HAATUT, FTATUT, ZFTATUT, CTATUT, TGA. QRG TDUKDX
“-CTUT” YAARFC YDNP KD YDT VYFU: CRZTFCTUT.

No. 5444—Flaw in Title. By *Dr. A. W. Pangrammatic text, using all 26 letters, so look for “q,” followed by “u,” and then another vowel. Question mark will help with ZRALA’Y.

“EMIGRAL COMA GITKIEG USNG FING!” YAFOMPSAMG
NGSYAMG JISLMAY. “XSG ZRALA’Y VIS FAEWA OG?”
ENQAY NVJTEGRAGOK CLOAMY. “MIZRALA!” AHTFIYAY
FINAL. “EM IFY TEF IC JOMA LAKIDMOBAY OG!”

No. 5445—One Good Turn. By *Nujack. Enter through affixes UA- and -UAS, substituting next in OUXUSPAEXB, duly noting repeated symbol X. Continue with OZUXB, FKASFEPG, etc.

TDAEPG, GPEDGAUAS TKYP, NZDSTE UAVDGPO ETGDFT,
HDE RPZETPGPO FKASFEPG ZEKH SZYP. LUGO. ADGFPO
OUXUSPAEXB, GPCZGOPO TDYZAUEB CUET OZUXB FKAS.

No. 5446—Tonsorial Troubles. By Presbyos. Alliteration, all words starting with the same letter, pattern words, doubles, etc., provide ample material for vowel spotting.

TUTANBAD TWOTHO, THDIUJK TATTNUJK THCHOWKH,
TWDYHE THDUEH TWTTNUJK TOBBY. THZBNEUJK THWO
THJHWIZ, TUTTHO THDIOWEENHE TWO THE TWOOUHO.
TOAUJ, THQUNHOHE, TWRYHE THZUJE TOUHOS TADZ.

No. 5447—In Sunny Spain. By *Sara. Compare FNOOP, OZNOFP, and EPOZE, duly noting high frequency of symbols O and F, O used as double, and endings -F and -OF.

TROOPLAD XENEBUP FVGF FROPFS, OZNOFP EPOZE,
HUDBDS NRYEPNF TREP KVZK FNOOP. TPUYB EGGDEABF.
KPETOLAD HUY GPUMOF LENED. HOEFN KUPOF FOZUP.

No. 5448—A Vivid Vision. By *O. E. Dennison. Find your own clues, fans, in this final cipher. Asterisks prefixed to cipher words indicate capitalization.

FTLB AESVDFA AUGXKLD B. VBCDG YLBPEUGL ANGKLA,
FGKLA RKDL. OLDZRFGXGP KEFRBL RKA FDHT LGFELXA
RBVG; EXEAEKH XDZRFV KLG GXAEGA. NLDFGA PLGKV.
YLBPEUGL LGKPA AULDYF. AVDHGA, BOOGLA UBXFLKUF.

TWO more cryptofans join the ranks of our contributors by publishing their first ciphers in this issue! A. T. Bernhard makes his bow with a regulation crypt, leading off the current puzzles, which incidentally include another of 'Ty Roe's amusing limericks! While Lieut. James C. Devine presents an intriguing special, a transposition-null cipher, with some novel twists to captivate your interest! But here's that special!

No. X-5450—Cause and Effect. By Lieut. James C. Devine.

RRRRR	RRRRW	WWWZ	UEUEI
AEEO	HEAOZ	TDLAC	PMPSE
IALRZ	HZEPH	INUUF	RPLLZ
LARZE	NABLU	LOODZ	EBSAS
GNLTL	WNPZZ	SCZBZ	ZTIZZ
ISZAZ	SDACA	AZCAA	NZABZ
ZEBDB	BASBB	DABCZ	AFCEC
CBZCC	ZBCDC		

Some comment on No. X-5450 may now be in order, though not enough to spoil the fun. And old-timers, of course, may skip the next few lines if they so wish. The cipher uses a transposition rectangle, each line containing one plain-text word with null letters as necessary, the cipher being taken out by verticals and grouped by fives. Unknown factors for you to discover: size of the rectangle, method of inscription, identity of the nulls, and order of extraction. For full explanation, see our next issue. The translation, key, and example of encipherment of 'Ty Roe's No X-5438, last issue, are given herewith.

No. X-5438. "The little toy dog is covered with dust; but sturdy and stanch he stands; and the little toy soldier is red with rust, and his musket moulds in his hands."—Eugene Field.

abc defghi ijkl mnpqrs tuv wxyz
THE LITTLE TOY FRIENDS ARE TRUE

Message: "The little toy dog . .
Cipher: "ALI YEAAYI AIU LIT . .

Here's another of our rules for solution of cryptic division puzzles, and this one will help with 'Rebbina's No. 5449. Rule: *In a subtraction, the left-hand symbol in the minuend and the left-hand symbol in the subtrahend signify digits in numerical sequence when they show no difference-symbol below the line.* Application: Sequences OS and HO here indicated in the 1st and 3rd subtractions combine to form triple-sequence HOS, which thus must be 123, 234, 345, etc. Using these trial values, only one set will fit $H - S = S$ in the 2nd subtraction. And with these three values known, you will also have the first product OOOH, and so on. Answers to current puzzles will appear in next issue. Keep your answers coming, fans!

No. 5449—Cryptic Division. By 'Rebbina. Zero can be limited to two symbols by inspection. Two five-letter words, numbered 01234 56789, form the key.

S H D) S W I I H O (T I S
 O O O H

I D H H
 E O I S

O R S O
 H T E I

D O G

ANSWERS FOR LAST ISSUE

5427—Even animals are superstitious, says jokester. He gives as an example, the rabbit that carried the left hind leg of a man with him for luck.

5428—My housekeeping now is a treat; my address, Number One Easy Street. I save work every day with the Easy Street way—(First prize for lucky last line isn't fifty thousand bucks!)

5429—The common act of walking up stairs apparently uses more physical energy than hardest work or sport carried on for the same length of time.

5430—Convivial visitor to small boy: "At what hour do your folks usually have supper?" Young host to inquiring guest: "Mostly at six, but ma says tonight we'll have it as soon as you go home."

5431—At one time in their career, Currier and Ives, printers of celebrated American pictures, had eleven hundred subjects listed in its catalog.

5432—Alert citizens quickly nab man squirming from small hole chiseled through wall surrounding jail house. Police question escapee. "Culprit" was merely stonemason repairing prison rampart.

5433—Born Eighteen Forty-Three, died seventy years later, Aaron Montgomery Ward originated mail order merchandising, wide contemporary practice.

5434 — "Homoeidoheterosemantophonoglosses," mighty thirty-three-letter term, denotes words spelled alike but with different meanings in various languages, as "kind," German for "child"; etc.

5435—Stovepipe hats magnify apparent altitude, lend added dignity. Swallow-tail coats, long beards, stiltts further emphasize vertical dimension.

5436—Pattern words suit your fancy? Some having doubled frontal syllables: acacia, bobolink, cacao, cocoa, icicle, mimicry, ovoviviparous, papaw, susurrous, tsetse, ululant, vivid.

5437—Key:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
 M U C H L O N G E R

All answers to current ciphers will be duly credited in our *Cipher Solvers' Club*. Address, M. E. Ohaver, *New Detective Magazine*, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

See Page 76 for April, June 1951, Grand Total of Cipher Solvers' Club Winners!



Barbara took the gun, making little sounds of apprehension....

BRING YOUR OWN COFFIN

By Bryce Walton

The last place to hide when you're running away from death is in a coffin—anybody's coffin. . . .

DON LEWIS stood concealed on the porch and watched the station wagon drive up the graveled path to the cabin and stop in the rainy dark. Professor Gaer's short body bounced aggressively up the steps. The porch light blinked on, and Gaer returned to the car. Lewis saw the other man in the gray trenchcoat who had been with the professor and his daughter, Barbara, earlier, when he had seen the police questioning them at the dock. But so far, he hadn't seen Cal, the professor's adopted son.

And there seemed, according to the cops, a possibility that he would never be seen again, anywhere.

Gaer and the other man were sliding

a mummy box out of the rear of the station wagon. They had a lot of luggage they hadn't brought out here. They were giving the mummy top priority.

They carried the case inside. Barbara's voice had an edge to it as she answered her father's question:

"I'll be in in a minute!"

He was standing close to her now. She had dropped the hood of her parka back, and her blond hair now had sun streaks in it. Very becoming. Maybe a lot of women with degrees in anthropology had the physical attributes that Barbara Gaer had. But somehow Lewis had remained convinced that such a shape and face were exceptional additions to feminine intelligence. The oval face and pointed chin and the distinctive qualities of good breeding in the aloof set of her eyebrows made her harder to forget than she was easy to look at. For the year she had been in Europe, Lewis had been trying to forget her, so he knew how hard it was to do.

Right now her face was troubled, he could see that plainly enough. And that bothered him, that and the police having been so interested in them as they came off the ship. He'd checked on that.

He was a little embarrassed as he stepped out of the shadows to reveal himself. His lurking about was an obvious manifestation of the existence of at least a smouldering coal or two of the old flame. He'd denied this to himself. There were rationalizations for everything. Wasn't he an old friend of the professor? Couldn't his presence be explained by the fact that he was science editor of the *Tribune*, and the professor should be good for a story?

She gasped. When she turned, he was shocked to see the utterly undisguised fear in her eyes.

"Oh— Oh, hello Don."

"Well, well. After all these months, and I'm not even greeted on the good-brother level. And thanks, Barbara, for the strict-ly travelogue notes."

She touched his hand. The rain fell. The leaves whispered under the rain. "Don—I'm sorry that I've made any trouble for you. You're a nice guy. You really are. But something about you I never liked, and I've never been able to figure out what it is. For one thing, you're a Missouri mule of stubbornness. At the same time, you don't take life seriously, and I like to take things seriously. And maybe it's just that damn ridiculous little mustache!"

He started to grin, then didn't.

Her hand shivered a little, then she jerked it away.

"You're afraid," he said. "What is it, a curse put upon all those who desecrate the sacred remains of King Bob-hip-Koodeakoo?"

She started inside. He moved in front of her. "I'll shave off my mustache," he said.

She shook her head. "You're hopeless. Even without the mustache you'd still be a kid doing antics on the back fence."

"Who is the dark stranger in the gray trenchcoat?"

"You don't know about Borlan?"

He said he didn't.

"He is—was a friend of Cal's. Supposed to be a writer, and Cal talked father into letting him go with us—to get material. I've never seen him writing anything except his name on his uncle's allowance checks. His uncle has a few millions, I believe."

"Where's Cal?" The name of his rival for Barbara's sometimes doubtful capacity for love didn't come casually from Lewis' lips.

Her voice was harsh and barely a whisper. "I—I don't know!"

"Wha— Listen, what's all the mystery? Mummy cases, a dark man, a disappearance, the cops. This is all like something out of a Sunday supplement!"

"I'd rather not talk about it, and I mean that, just that! I don't understand what's

been happening. The whole trip was unpleasant, all kinds of personal tensions, and disappointments. Father found his mummy all right, but—but Cal disappeared. And before that, well—there was trouble. Lots of trouble. . . .”

“What do you mean—he just disappeared?”

“He was aboard the ship, and then, a few days out, there was some trouble between father and the captain. Questions, and father was upset and wouldn’t talk about it. That night, Cal, he—just disappeared.”

“But that doesn’t make sense,” Lewis said.

“Maybe he’s dead,” she whispered. “Maybe he jumped overboard. . . .”

Lewis had often thought during this past year how nice it would be if Cal would do something like that. This made everything different.

He felt a little guilty now, and Barbara was really upset.

“Father’s desperate,” she said. “And Borlan acts like a villain out of a melodrama. And I know father’s life’s in danger. I saw him looking at his revolver on the way out here.”

LEWIS saw the light go on in Gaer’s study in the left wing of the mountain cabin. He couldn’t think of anything intelligent to say. If she knew nothing, he knew even less. From the outside, it seemed like a gag. Mummies have been props for corny mystery so long it was hard to take this seriously. The fact remained that Cal had disappeared at sea, and she assumed he’d jumped overboard. And Gaer was beginning to be strongly attracted to his .38 revolver.

“The jewels of the lost Queen of the Tigris are concealed in the mummy’s mouth,” Lewis said.

She frowned at him. “Why don’t you admit, Don, that you have to make a gag out of everything to keep from admitting

to yourself that you’re afraid of honest feelings?”

“I haven’t been psychoanalyzed yet,” Lewis said.

“Well, anyway, the mummy’s not valuable, except as a museum piece. Father bought it because he’s always wanted a mummy in his study, that’s all. Like some people want to have a bust of Shakespeare in their study, or a collection of the Encyclopedia Britannica. What I want to know is why I never realized what a spoiled brat Cal was.

“We were both away to schools. I never really knew him until that year he came back from Paris.”

“The year you gave me my exit speech. Cal had a mustache too, when he got back from Paris. He also had a spade-beard. The artist, the ex-patriate from the left bank. Hey— Maybe if I grew the spade-beard—”

“Listen, Don, if you continue this juvenile gaucherie, we won’t even talk as friends.”

“Oscar Wilde said that men and women are either lovers or enemies.”

“I can eat crow,” she said. “I made a mistake about Cal. On this trip I realized that. Father hinted at things. He didn’t know I was taking Cal seriously until we left on this crazy trip. He always thought that you— Well, he doesn’t care one way or the other about mustaches. Anyway, he hinted at some sort of financial trouble between himself and Cal. Seems Cal had been spending a lot of money in various ways in Paris. At art school. More than was reasonable. And that Cal had gotten into trouble several times. I don’t know what kind of trouble. And I don’t care. A pretty wild individual, it seems, and it also seems funny because he always appeared to be just the opposite.”

● “That’s the way with me,” Lewis said. “Just the opposite from what I seem. Really quite serious about the ultimate meaning of things. Really not stubborn at

all. And the mustache is really just a disguise—”

“And,” she went on, “there was some trouble this time. In France—”

Lewis knew a little about that, but he hadn't had much time to spend with the police.

“Don't the professor or Borlan know anything about Cal's disappearance?”

“I suppose they know.” And she seemed very tired all at once, and Lewis wanted to comfort her. But somehow it didn't seem like the right psychological moment to comfort her—not in the way he wanted to. “But neither of them,” she said, “are handing out any signed statements.”

“Let's go in,” Lewis suggested. He pulled his coat collar up around his chin, and his hat down, and gave an evil chuckle. “I will track down the source of the mystery, for I am The Cloaked Avenger.”

She sighed. He followed her inside. She did not, Lewis noted again, walk as you would think an anthropologist would walk. Though an anthropologist with esthetic tastes would be interested in the subtle suggestiveness of her casual stride.

GAER'S reactions to Lewis were immediate and obvious. He was surprised and happy to see him. He also was uneasy because Lewis was here, and he wanted Lewis to leave. This only made Lewis determined to stay.

Gaer paced nervously in the shadows and the mummy case glowed in the lamp-light. Mr. Borlan had retired to his room upstairs. Solid and square-jawed, Gaer didn't look like the popular concept of a man of science. More like a good middle-weight who had kept his jaw covered. Now he puffed at his pipe, kept on pacing back and forth in front of the mummy case. Then, as on a sudden impulse, he opened the case. It was lying horizontal, on the window-seat. After opening it, Gaer also opened the window a little. Then he stood

in front of the case and meditatively puffed at his pipe. Barbara stood by the wall and a cold fireplace.

Lewis said tentatively. “I was at the dock, saw the police questioning you. So I didn't horn in there. What's wrong, Earl? Anything I can do?”

Gaer shook his head. “No, no, nothing wrong. Not now. It's all over with, and now things are all right!”

Lewis didn't mention Cal. He knew how strongly Gaer had always felt about his adopted son, upon whom he had lavished, as they say, an astonishing amount of affection. More, perhaps, than if Cal had been his own son.

“We're all tired, that's all,” Gaer said. He hesitated, then added, “You staying here tonight, Don?”

Lewis was supposed to say no. “I think I'd better stay here. The water was up close to the bridge when I crossed, but I guess you noticed that too. It's a bad night generally. I don't trust the roads.”

“Ah— Yes, of course. Well, you'd better stay, then.”

“Thanks,” Lewis said. “I'm tired, too.” He glanced at Barbara. “I don't want to pry, Earl, but if there's anything I can do, just holler. After all, I once was almost a part of the family.”

Lewis walked toward the mummy case. “Your trip was a success, I see, Earl.”

“In a way,” Gaer said tightly. “It's a fairly valuable relic. Nothing outstanding. One of the minor priests.”

“Interesting thing about the Egyptians,” Lewis said, “was that they paid more attention to the dead than to the living.”

He stared at the shiny wood. “Can I take a peep at the creep?”

“Just a lot of musty wrappings,” Gaer said. “Ah— That's close enough. It hasn't been sprayed yet—with antiseptic, that is. Never know what germs are preserved, not from the ancient Egyptians of course, but from the subsequent handling.”

So Lewis stopped where he was, about

five feet from the mummy. He could barely see the interior, and that was partly in shadow. Padded crossbars held in place a kind of travesty of a human figure, layers of wrappings, that would be partly decayed and wholly unromantic. He wished he could get a better look—he didn't know exactly why. Then figured he could sneak down later for that purpose.

Lewis turned away as though wholly disinterested. "An imagined mummy is a lot more interesting. Nothing to shatter the illusions like a real mummy. Once you see a real one, you know it'll never come to life, or level a cursing finger."

Gaer, said, "I don't know about you, but I need sleep. Don, you can have the guest room at the end of the hall." It was obvious that Gaer wanted Lewis to go upstairs first. So Lewis nodded. He went upstairs and into his room, then stood up against the door listening.

He heard Barbara's distinctive footfalls on the stairs, then in the hall. He heard her voice as Gaer's footsteps came up the stairs. "I'll fix your hot milk for you, Dad."

He heard Gaer go down the hall, close the door, then Lewis stepped out and confronted Barbara. She was going back down the stairs to the kitchen to fix the hot milk Gaer always needed. He went with her.

"Your father's a very worried man. You sure you don't know anything?"

She nodded. "I wish you hadn't come up here, Don. I don't particularly like reporters, either. Curiosity is good, but reporters have the wrong kind. Human beings are just grist for their professional mill."

"As they are to scientists," Lewis said. She stopped at the foot of the stairs, and he said, "In case you're a little curious yourself, I'm still obsessed with you. I can't call it love, because that would be placing myself in the position of a martyr, a masochist, and a fool. But I will say that you're still an obsession."

For a minute she seemed on the point of softening up, and then she shook her head quickly and went on into the kitchen and slammed the door in his face.

Lewis sat down in the semi-dark and looked at the rain-washed glass while she pattered in the kitchen of the big cabin. He lit a cigarette and realized that he was not sleepy, not even tired. That he was, in fact, tense. Finally, because there was something distasteful about sitting down there with a mummy, he decided to go up to his room without waiting for another talk with Barbara. He would have taken another look at the mummy, but he wanted to wait until everyone was asleep. The cuckoo jumped out of the clock and squawked the fact that it was eleven o'clock.

He opened the window of his room, turned out the lights and sprawled on the bed with a cigarette and a throbbing in his head. The air was fresh with the heavy damp smell of spruce and fir and wet earth.

Some time later, he got up suddenly and went into the hall.

He would talk to Borlan, the dark man of mystery.

HE STOOD there a minute, listening. Though he'd never said anything to Barbara about it, Lewis knew a great deal about that side of Cal's character that Barbara had only recently become aware of. As a reporter, Lewis had access to sources of information denied to many. Investigating rumor, he had discovered unpleasant facts.

One of them was that young Cal, during his first year abroad, and even earlier, had needed money for gambling purposes badly enough to forge Professor Gaer's name to a check. This had, actually, happened several times. There were other equally unsavory affairs. But Gaer had loved the boy, and had never preferred charges.

The friendship between Cal and Borlan had started in college, but he hadn't found

out much about Borlan—except that his father was a millionaire, and that Borlan was also addicted to unsavory affairs—except that he had more than enough dough to smooth things over.

He stopped walking toward Borlan's room, turned quickly at a sound from below. A faint light glowed from the lamp over by the mummy case. A shadow moved. He heard a sigh, a kind of whispered, horrible sighing sound.

A peculiar coolness slid across his back as he went carefully down the stairs. Across the room a figure twisted suddenly. The room was so dimly lighted he couldn't make out who, or what, it was. Then the small flash went off, and the room was totally dark. A board creaked under Lewis' foot. He didn't feel like the Cloaked Avenger now—he felt as vulnerable as a floodlighted thief.

Then a grunt sounded near, the harsh, out-breaking of breath, the sudden rush of power. Lewis yelled something, he didn't remember what, as he saw the glint of gun metal suddenly, a slight glint of metal that caught somehow the invisible light that's there even when you think it's dark.

Lewis tried to duck, and his other yell was covered by the shot. Incredibly, the orange flame belched out, and he dropped as he felt the slashing burn along his side. He lost his balance, went rolling down the stairs. And he lay there, hearing the rapid footsteps going up the stairs, the closing of a door, then the lights going on upstairs and more footsteps.

That shot hadn't been accidental. The only accident about it was that Lewis was still alive. Barbara had said that Gaer had a gun, a .38. . . .

Groaning a little, Lewis got to his feet. Voices murmured up there, and then Barbara called his name.

He stumbled up the stairs, feeling dizzy and scared. Borlan was sticking his head out the door of his room, and Barbara came hurrying toward Lewis, tightening a light

blue negligée about her slim figure. Even under these circumstances, the sight was highly effective.

Borlan stepped into the hall. He was short, rather stockily built, with black hair and a stolid, expressionless face and gray eyes and a thin mouth. Borlan calmly unwrapped a cigar and began lighting it. He was dressed in undershirt, trousers and a green dressing gown.

"I thought," he said, "that I heard a shot."

"What happened?" Barbara whispered.

Lewis said, "Somebody was in a conference with the mummy, and when I broke up the party, they took a shot at me. No, not the mummy. The other one."

She sighed. "I thought—it might have been father. I—but he should have heard the shot."

"He always takes a sleeping tablet with his hot milk, doesn't he?" Lewis said.

"Oh—yes, yes, usually. Anyway, I'm going to see if he's all right."

"Forget about me," Lewis said. "I've only been shot."

"So you've been shot," Borlan said. "So what if you die? What's the value of human life in this schizoid world any more? Everything's nihilism, and who cares?"

Lewis stared at the man as he followed Barbara past Borlan toward Gaer's room. Lewis took a handkerchief out of his pocket, pressed it against the deep flesh wound in his upper arm to stop the bleeding.

Lewis said to Borlan, "You're okay. All you need is psychoanalysis, a pre-frontal lobotomy and a positive approach."

Borlan sneered. "If anyone can find out what the devil's going on around here, I wish they'd tell me. Meanwhile, I'm going back to sleep."

"We'll tell you," Lewis said.

Barbara knocked on her father's door, and then she knocked again. Then she turned the doorknob softly and looked in.

"We can't wake him up," she whispered. "He always has a hard enough time get-

ting to sleep, same as always. It would be a shame to wake him up."

Lewis said, "There's someone here who wants to kill someone else. I don't know who was down there. Whoever was down there didn't know I was Me. We don't know who wants to kill whom. And it all ties up with the mummy. It may *have* the jewels of the Queen of the Tigres in its mouth, after all. In other words, I think we ought to warn him, wake him up!"

"Oh," she said. "Don, you're hurt!"

He groaned, then turned and went down the hall, back down the stairs, and switched on the wall light. In the dim glow, he approached the mummy case. Then he stopped. Maybe Gaer had been truthful about the germs. Then he saw the blood. It was blood all right. You could tell. Anybody could tell blood, fresh blood, when they saw it. And Lewis saw it. It was running down the side of the mummy case.

Lewis turned slowly. He had an idea, and he was also getting sick, so that the idea didn't percolate too well. He turned on around, feeling stiff, like a mechanical man. His arm throbbed painfully, and he knew he'd better treat it fast. Sweat was running suddenly down under his collar. After a thousand years or so, however long it was, you didn't expect a mummy to bleed. That is unless you were involved in a nightmare or a horror movie, and this wasn't a nightmare or a horror movie. Therefore, by a process of deduction, or was it induction, you arrived at the irrevocable conclusion that—

He heard Barbara scream. He ran upstairs. Borlan was also running with him down the hall. They both ran into Gaer's room.

Barbara was babbling, and then she quieted a little and said. "I can't wake him up! I can't wake him up, Don! He won't open his eyes—"

Lewis looked at the emptied glass of milk. He thought of the sleeping tablets.

"He's doped," Lewis whispered.

"But not that much! You can always wake him up!"

Lewis saw the bottle of tablets on the table, only there weren't many tablets in the bottle now. He leaned down. Dim and distant, Gaer's heart was still beating. Leaning down, Lewis saw the glint of steel, the muzzle of Gaer's revolver protruding slightly from beneath his pillow.

"He was always ready for an emergency like this, wasn't he?" shouted Lewis. "I remember him saying that you could never predict the effect of even a normal dosage of the drug. He kept something around, an antidote? Coramine—something like that!"

"Yes, yes, I'll try to find the coramine. . . ." Borlan said.

Borlan was watching Lewis as he dragged Gaer's body off the bed, got it standing up, the arms swinging loosely. "It deadens the nerves and reflexes," Lewis was saying, for no particular reason that he could ever figure out. Maybe it helped give him a feeling of confidence, that he knew what he was doing, that it would do some good. "So you've got to stimulate the victim as much as possible."

"So he dies," Borlan whispered. "Pretty soon atomic bombs are going to blow up the world, so what does it matter? A person should worry about one man, an old man, not waking up?"

Barbara came back into the room. "Nothing like that in the bathroom." She clawed crazily at Gaer's suitcase, which he'd been too tired to unpack, and she started throwing articles out of it all over the floor.

"We've got to keep him on his feet, keep him moving around!" Lewis said.

"Why?" Borlan said.

"That's going to get tiresome," grunted Lewis. Then he caught Borlan's movement. He took a step back toward the door and his hand moved up under his dressing gown. Lewis held Gaer up, somehow, with one arm. Pain shot into his head, al-

most blinding him as he forced his wounded arm to move fast, dart under Gaer's pillow, come out with the professor's gun.

Borlan's gun was coming up to position as Lewis covered him with Gaer's .38 revolver.

Borlan stood there stiffly, not moving anywhere. Even his eyes were glued on Lewis, with a leaden and dying stare.

"Take his gun!" Lewis said to Barbara, who was staring uncomprehendingly. "Throw it in the closet and lock the door and drop the key somewhere!"

Barbara took the gun.

She did this, making little murmuring sounds of fear and incomprehension, while Lewis kept his gun trained on Borlan.

Barbara never did remember where she disposed of that closet key.

"Now, Borlan, you damn nihilist," Lewis said, "help me get Gaer outside into the air! We've got to walk him around in the rain, Borlan. Come on, jump!"

Borlan did that. Lewis was in a dangerous spot, and he knew it. Borlan could play this for an escape, and once Borlan was loose, he would be dangerous, very dangerous. Lewis knew how dangerous Borlan was.

They walked Gaer around in the rain, around and around the cabin, over the soggy ground, under the dripping leaves, through the dark and the rain. He began to jerk and finally mumble, and then he was snapping out of it. Barbara, who had been following, keeping the gun trained on Borlan, was overcome with relief. She forgot what she was doing with the gun, and ran with her arms wide toward Gaer.

Borlan turned and sprinted. Lewis grabbed the gun from Barbara and sprinted after him. His arm felt as if someone was burning it with a hot iron. He tripped and felt the wet leaves swipe his face. He slid, got to his hands and knees, kept on going. He dived and his fingers touched Borlan's heel, and Borlan plunged headlong into a tree-trunk.

Borlan, dazed, slid up the tree. His face had a wet shine and the gun came up, wet and very shiny and dark—like Borlan's face.

"All right," Borlan whispered. "Maybe we both die, and that doesn't make any difference either."

But Lewis' gun got in there first. Borlan smashed back into the tree again, then slid down it. He had the gun in his hand, but he couldn't seem to hold it straight out as he wanted to. He kept staring at the gun, his lips working, trying to get it to come up to the right level.

It never did come up.

Lewis twisted it out of his hand, and got Borlan's arm over his shoulder and dragged him back, up the steps, across the porch, into the big front room. He dropped him in the middle of the floor on a bearskin rug. Then Lewis collapsed.

He was aware of Barbara administering to him. It was very nice. Very nice indeed. Her cool hands, and her lips on his lips. That payment heroes always got from beautiful ladies— Damn it all, it was worth it!

Lewis closed his eyes and just enjoyed it.

IT WAS awhile before Gaer could talk. Lewis was sitting in a chair, and he was feeling a lot better. In fact, despite his arm, which Barbara had efficiently fixed up with a dressing, he felt better than he'd felt in a long time.

Gaer sat drinking black coffee and shaking his head. Borlan had regained consciousness and was still lying on the floor. Barbara said she had called the police. They would be right up.

Borlan wasn't looking at any of them. He had twisted his head to one side and was staring obstinately at the wall.

Barbara sat by the fireplace, which she had lighted.

She shivered a little.

"So Borlan took a shot at me from the

mummy case. You say he came in to see you, Earl, just before you dropped off. That's when he put the extra sleeping tablets in the milk . . ."

Barbara was staring at the mummy case. Lewis had closed the lid. "But why—" Barbara said.

"Don't open it," Lewis said. "It isn't a scientific curiosity in there any more. Only something for the police to deal with."

Gaer looked suddenly a lot older and very tired.

Lewis said, "After seeing you at the dock, naturally I was interested. I called the police. They told me about that message received aboard your ship from Paris, that Cal was to be held for a crime he'd committed in Paris. I don't know what."

Gaer whispered, "Robbery and manslaughter, and a sordid business with an entertainer in a nightclub. Cal got drunk—a brawl—I didn't know what it was all about until the captain told me about the radiogram he'd gotten. Cal was hiding on the ship, and Cal had to tell me the truth, that he was really escaping the Paris police.

"He wanted me to help him get ashore. I loved him too much I guess—or maybe

I loved someone I thought he was, or wanted him to be. So I helped him, this one last time. We, Borlan and I, sneaked him into my cabin, wrapped him up in bandages and threw the real mummy overboard. I kept the mummy case in my cabin, of course, and the door was locked. He could breathe. I kept the wrappings thin around his face. He could get up once in a while, and walk around. Then I'd see that he got back into the case, and I'd put the wrappings around him again. It fooled the police, all right. But then . . . I guess it had to end . . . this way . . ."

"I should have killed him years ago," Borlan whispered. "He was a worse louse than I am."

"Killed—" Barbara whispered.

"Yes," Lewis said. "I saw that blood on the mummy case after someone took a shot at me. It was Borlan. I didn't know, then, who it was. But seeing the blood, I knew what the unknown man was down here for.

"I knew it was no mummy in there. Borlan came down and killed Cal while he was lying helpless under the wrappings. Killed him with a knife. The knife's still in the case. Borlan dropped it in there, fig-



ON THE NEWSSTANDS

THE DEATH MAKER

By Austin J. Small



One man alone held the power to wipe out a great city in one night, to obliterate an entire nation in seven short days. And he meant to do just that, secure in the knowledge that there was no possible defence against his dread weapon that would soon make him the mad master of all human destiny!

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uring to come and get it later and hide it."

"Oh," Barbara choked.

"Why did you kill Cal tonight?" Lewis asked Borlan. "Aside from the reason that human life doesn't mean anything more in this nihilistic world?"

Borlan kept on looking at the wall. "Cal's been blackmailing me for a long time. Something I did at the university, when he was there with me. He was my roommate then. It was a dirty business. I was involved with a tough dame and she committed suicide afterward.

"I had a lot of fun with her while I experimented. I used to experiment emotionally and psychologically on people, for my own amusement. Mostly girls. Girls are interesting. Cal found out about it. He knew my uncle would disinherit me if he ever found out. I knew I couldn't have much fun without money. So I paid Cal and kept on paying and paying so Cal wouldn't tell. When Cal invited me to take this trip with him I accepted. I knew the real reason—it was so I wouldn't get away from him. So he'd have an animated check book with him.

"Your allowance wasn't ever enough for him, Professor. I accepted because I thought there might be a chance to get rid of him somewhere along the way."

"Leopold and Loeb," Lewis said softly. "A couple of useless young men, bored, and looking for excitement."

Borlan looked out of the window at the rain, and went on:

"We both got in this brawl at the café in Paris. The lights went out. I knew the girl was dead. I saw a chance to frame Cal for it, get rid of him. But he got away and aboard the ship. That's why I cooperated with you, Professor, in helping smuggle him ashore as a mummy. My other plan hadn't worked out right. So I had to go on playing the game a little longer. I figured to kill him before he ever got out of the case."

"And then," Lewis said, "you figured

that as long as the professor was responsible for smuggling Cal ashore swathed as a mummy, he would also be blamed when Cal was found dead. No reason to connect you with the crime. You had to get down here and act fast, though. You knew Cal wouldn't be left in the case very much longer."

Borlan nodded. "I knew that Cal was to get out of the case at twelve-thirty. Sooner, except that you were here, Lewis. It was arranged with Cal, though, that he would know when it was twelve-thirty . . . the cuckoo clock would tell him. He had a knife in there to rip the wrapping with . . . the knife . . . the knife I used. . . ."

Borlan moaned slightly, then dropped his head on his arms.

Gaer got up.

Then he turned wearily and started for the stairs. He turned back again to look at Barbara. "I made a lot of mistakes with Cal," he said softly. "But thank God you're still here, Barbara. Thank God you're the wonderful and sane and sweet person you are."

He went on up the stairs.

Lewis looked at Barbara. She wore a rather odd smile now, he thought. She was studying him carefully.

"Don," she said. "You keep the mustache. Don't shave it off."

"Why?"

"Well— Stubbornness can be a good trait, too, on occasions. And after all, a newspaper reporter did once win a Pulitzer Prize. And where would this crazy world be without a sense of humor? Besides, I'm healthy enough to be able to adjust myself to a mustache."

He grinned.

He'd always known one thing for sure. That when Barbara did fall in love it wouldn't be subtle, or oblique. It would be direct and to the point. And now he walked toward her, stepping over Borlan's body, because that was the way he was, too.





*"I don't kill
people I
hate..."*

THE CRIMSON TRACK

By Robert Zacks

•
*Johnny's last hope was in the one
noose which might save his neck
from the other!*
•

AS THE coroner's inquest proceeded, the courtroom got hotter and Johnny closed his eyes to rest them from the glare of sun pouring in through the windows. He was aware that people near him were staring round-eyed at him. Ritterly was being questioned now and was putting, with each answer, a rope around Johnny's neck.

Closing his eyes was a mistake. The scene came back, that moment on the set when Dennis Carter was killed. The director had yelled, "*Roll them! Action!*" Dennis, his makeup melting in the heat of the incandescent lights, opened the closet door, and the prop gun, as it was supposed to, exploded with a bang!

Very realistic, the way Dennis Carter fell into the crumpled position of death. Until they saw it was real blood pouring from his chest. . . .

And now the inquest to find if it was an accident or murder!

"John Harkness take the stand."

He opened his eyes. Ritterly was going to his seat, his handsome face sober, his iron gray hair mussed, as if he were distressed at having proved Johnny had bribed his way onto the studio lot, had fled with incriminating evidence, the film of the sound track containing Dennis Carter's last whisper, and had destroyed that evidence. As Johnny took his seat he thought, That guy would make a good actor. Then the questioning began. The man facing Johnny had told blue eyes and a polite voice.

"Name?"

"John Harkness."

"Occupation?"

"I used to direct motion pictures. Mr. Ritterly stopped that."

"Why did he do that? Could you say?"

Johnny said tightly, "Mr. Ritterly and I differed. He knows absolutely nothing about pictures. He came here with a lot of money and bought up World Studios, a small independent I worked for. He bought stories that were hopelessly bad. He hired as female lead a girl he was interested in and who didn't know a damn. . . ."

There was an angry objection from Mr. Ritterly. They warned Johnny to stick to facts not opinions. He nodded.

"Anyway, I got kicked out and since I was a new, young director just starting

up the ladder, my name was mud with the other studios."

"How do you make your living now?"

Johnny shrugged. "I have a small business. I sell film strips of sounds the producers use."

"Will you explain that, please?"

"Well, if the director needs the sound of a bird singing or a cow mooing or a bell ringing, instead of shooting it fresh he comes to me. If I've got exactly what he wants I sell him the film for five dollars a foot. . . ."

"The sound is on film? Not on a record or wire?"

"Yes, on film. Sound is photographed by changing it to light and making the light shimmy, then taking a picture of the result."

"Very interesting. How do you make out in this business?"

"Not too well," said Jimmy bitterly. "I have to do other things. Anything I can cook up to make a buck. I put photos on handkerchiefs, or any fabric you like, I handle blowups—"

"Blowups?"

"That's my own description of it. Sometimes an actor blows his lines before the camera and starts cursing and the camera is still rolling so the whole thing is caught. There are collectors who will pay a lot for such a blowup of a famous actor, the way some people collect books."

The man questioning Johnny nodded. He was quiet for a moment. Suddenly he shot a question at Johnny. "You hated Dennis Carter?"

The audience leaned forward.

Johnny nodded. "I did," he said. "He was an old roué and a drunk. He was no good. Mr. Ritterly hired him against my advice. I refused to direct him. That's why my contract was broken and I got fired."

"So you hated him. Did you kill him?"

"No," said Johnny quietly. "I hated Mr. Ritterly even more. Did I kill Mr. Ritterly? I don't kill people I hate."

"You were barred from the lot," snapped the questioner. "Yet you were present at the killing. Everybody there had a job to do but you. The prop man who set up the gun has been cleared. Somebody put in a real bullet when there was nobody watching. . . ."

"Not me," said Johnny. "Possibly Mr. Ritterly did it. He had the run of the lot, too."

"Never mind that, young man. We'll find out. Right now you have some explanations to find. How did you get on the studio lot?"

"I knew Mac, the gateman, from happier days. I explained why I wanted to get on the lot. I knew Dennis Carter couldn't remember lines any more and I was hoping he'd blow up and I could sell the blowup to collectors as. . . ."

"Now that," snapped the questioner, "is a pretty fancy story. A man you admit hating is killed on a studio lot you're barred from, and which you managed to get onto. You were free to wander around and could have substituted the real bullet for the blank. Mr. Ritterly says you would be happy to make it appear he might be guilty and so get even with both of them for your

being fired. And yet all the evidence points to you as the guilty one."

"Circumstantial evidence, may I point out?" said Johnny softly.

"Pretty damn good circumstantial evidence if I may say so. Everybody has testified, the soundman, Harry Smith, included, that as Dennis Carter fell he whispered something they couldn't hear. It was a long shot and nobody was near him. Even the soundman couldn't catch it in the ear-phones."

"So?" asked Johnny, curiously unafraid.

"So," snapped the questioner, "you got Harry Smith to give you the film of the sound track and you hurriedly left with it. And when Mr. Ritterly followed you to recover it, he found you had burned it and, in so doing, accidentally burned down your entire shop; or did you do that to make it look like an accident?"

"A MAZING. . . ." murmured Johnny. "Simply amazing."

"Young man, perhaps you will take this more seriously when you realize you are very close to being indicted for murder!"

(Continued on page 112)

THE MAN FROM LIMBO

Powerful Suspense Novelette

By John D. MacDonald

Wally Block, phony crusading reformer, was a cinch to be the rankest, richest mayor in Brasher's history—until he tipped his hand to the man who knew too much . . . and couldn't remember it!

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He fell forward, sprawling into the street. . . .

NOT MY FUNERAL

. . . but the next one might be! Especially if, like Maris, you take a picture of the wrong corpse!

By Donn Mullally

AS THE funeral started to roll down Grant Avenue in San Francisco's Chinatown, it was the exclusive property of the Chu family, their friends and sympathizers. They were intent only on providing the deceased, one Chu Lin Sam, with a send-off commensurate with his position as a very wealthy and influential member of the family. Sam had been a big wheel politically. He owned nightclubs, restaurants, an importing firm; operated big and successfully in the commodities market; was generally accepted as the Man behind most of the Chinatown lotteries. He had died in an alley—shot

down by a person or persons unknown.

Jerry and Maris Phelan were simply two faces in the crowd of people who lined Grant Avenue to watch the funeral procession. There were other tourists—service men, shoppers, probably even other newlyweds—in the narrow street at the time. No one the Phelans knew. They'd had their wedding breakfast at the hotel, decided to go sightseeing on their own. Maris had never been in San Francisco before. Jerry had. A police lieutenant in Los Angeles, he'd come up on department business. When they were discussing their honeymoon plans, Jerry had said, "I think



A
NOVELETTE
OF HIDDEN
MENACE

we could have a swell time in San Francisco." Maris thought so, too—any place where she'd have Jerry entirely to herself sounded wonderful to her.

They'd strolled out Grant Avenue; freezing a little in the middle of the blocks where the sun shines only at high noon,

thawing when they came to the intersections. It was a perfect day. The fog had burned off early; the sky and air seemed washed pure. The wind was busy, and so were the girls trying to walk in it.

The Phelans were only a few hundred yards into Chinatown when they encountered the funeral procession. Two motorcycle cops were out in front, clearing the street, followed by a couple of highly polished black limousines, then the main body of mourners on foot—several hundred of them, marching along with more quiet dignity than military precision. After them came the hearse, with a tremendous, red-framed picture of the deceased mounted on the roof. Far back, they could hear a brass band playing *Danny Boy*, very slow and sad. Maris had never seen anything like it. She tugged at Jerry's arm.

"Think they'd mind if I took some pictures?"

"Why should they?" He grinned. He held her handbag while she fussed with the camera.

Maris was like her camera—a miniature job, but beautifully made. Jerry got a terrific charge out of just looking at her. He loved it when her face wrinkled with concentration; her small mouth tense, an almost fierce look in her eyes. Her hair was blond and long, and kept blowing in her way. Jerry liked the small, nervous gesture she made when she brushed it out of her face. He loved her. He was a lucky guy.

Maris had her camera ready by the time the hearse crept up to them. She got one shot of the picture mounted on top of the hearse, then turned and started running toward the next intersection the funeral would pass. She was an expert broken-field runner, could slide through the smallest kind of opening in the crowd—places where Jerry had to slow down or bowl people over.

"Hey!" he shouted after her. "Where are you going?"

She didn't answer until she'd rounded the corner and was twenty feet or so up the hill—a little winded, excited. "The light's better here," she explained, "and I can get the crowd in the picture, too."

She took a couple of deep breaths to steady her hands, raised the camera to her eye and started building herself an album of old Mr. Chu's last ride. The hearse rolled across the intersection; and after it, the San Francisco Police Department Band, tootling a solemn march. There were more limousines in back of them and, as they passed, what sounded like a Hop-along Cassidy chase sequence broke out on Grant Avenue.

"What's that?" gasped Maris.

Jerry grinned. "Firecrackers," he said. "An old Chinese superstition. The merchants are scaring off any evil spirits who belonged to the dead man in life and are now looking for a new home."

"You're wonderful." Maris beamed at him. "How do you know these things?"

"I'm an old China hand, baby," shrugged Jerry. "There's a Chinatown in Los Angeles, too, you know."

The shopkeepers at the corner touched off their strings of crackers. Maris and Jerry could see the man across the street from where they were standing. He'd come out of the doorway of his shop, lit the fuse on a long string of fireworks tied to an awning pole. He seemed very solemn, as though setting off firecrackers to ward evil spirits away from his place of business was part of the daily routine. Like sweeping the sidewalk.

There was a sudden, frantic milling in the crowd of people at the corner. It surged back, like a herd of sheep infiltrated by wolves. Frightened people, trying to get away from something. Jerry saw one man standing alone in a widening circle of empty sidewalk. He was bent over, nearly off his feet. He was able to lift his head, momentarily; half turned in Jerry's direction. His face was covered with blood.

His hat had fallen in the gutter. He leaned over as though he were going to retrieve it; fell forward, sprawling into the street.

Farther up Grant Avenue, firecrackers were still working on the devils. It looked like one had been passed over, somewhere back here.

Jerry took Maris's arm. "You're getting out, baby," he said, rushing her across the street to a cab waiting for the funeral to clear the intersection. He put her in it before she could muster a protest; gave the driver their hotel address.

"I think I'd better hang around awhile," he told her. "See if I can lend the local boys a hand." He slammed the cab door, watched the driver jockey around in the narrow street and pull up the hill.

Down on Grant Avenue, the crowd had closed in again, almost seemed to be sniffing at the dead body in the gutter. Jerry saw a big, red-faced San Francisco cop peeling through the mob from the other side—met him at the body. He held back a few of the more eager citizens while the officer examined the man lying in the street.

The cop stood up, said, "He's dead."

"I thought he would be," Jerry said. "He got it through the head, didn't he?"

"Yeah." The cop nodded, eyeing Jerry suspiciously. "Did you see him shot?"

Jerry shook his head. "I was standing up there," he jerked his thumb in the direction of the hill. "Saw him after he was hit." Jerry showed the officer his Los Angeles police identification, adding, "I'll take over here while you make your call."

The officer hesitated, uncertain.

"Go ahead," Jerry told him. "Los Angeles is still in California. We work for the same people."

JERRY PHELAN had his hands full, preventing souvenir hunters from walking off with the body before reinforcements got there. It was a real relief when the police started pouring in and

Jerry saw Ted Brand's square, brown face and bulky shoulders moving through the crowd. Ted looked like a professional wrestler; walked like one. Jerry had worked with Brand on several cases which involved most of the State of California before the killers were nailed; knew Ted to be a fine officer and a swell guy.

When Brand saw him, he grinned wide. "Hi, Phelan," he said. "Can't you find enough work in L.A., you have to muscle into my territory?"

"Ten minutes ago, I thought I was on my honeymoon," Jerry replied glumly, nodding at the stiff in the gutter as he added, "then this joker gets himself shot right in front of me."

Brand glanced at the body. "No foolin'?" he said. "You're married! How about that? I suppose you wouldn't even have called me, let me meet your bride, if this hadn't happened. Fine thing!"

"This is my honeymoon," Jerry reminded him. "I was hoping I wouldn't have to share it with anybody's police department."

"Okay, okay," waved Ted Brand. "You're forgiven. You say you saw this man shot down. How did it happen, Jerry?"

Phelan said, "I'm not sure how. A Chinese funeral procession had just passed. The merchants were all lighting off firecrackers, you know, that sort of thing. This man was in the crowd down here on the corner. All of a sudden, he's standing alone with blood streaming out of his face. The killer had used the sound of the fireworks to cover the shot."

"You didn't see anybody make a getaway?" asked Brand.

"No." Jerry shook his head. "The crowd just drew back from this man, a couple of seconds before he fell."

Brand knelt beside the body; turned it over slowly, nodding. "Somebody sure wanted to stop him," he said.

From the cheekbones down, there was

very little left but mangled flesh where the bullet had come out.

"My guess would be a .30-30 fired from one of the roofs," added Brand, squinting at the gilt pagoda-style gingerbread along the cornices of the buildings on either side of the street. "Incidentally, if our man was standing in the crowd, it took some shooting. I wonder if this was really who they were after?"

Ted fumbled through the dead man's pockets, found a wallet and card-case; whistled between his teeth when he opened the former. "I wouldn't be surprised if it was," he said.

"Know him?" asked Jerry.

"Yeah . . . a private eye around town. Fairly rank reputation, know what I mean? Named Kip. Al Kip. He's been on the ragged edge of losing his license, for years. Handled a lot of messy stuff—divorce, anything where there was a dishonest buck. A very wrong guy."

"I know," nodded Jerry grimly. "We have them down south, too."

Brand sent two men to explore the rooftops in the block. Then, he stood aside and gave the photographer and the medical boys their innings with the body. The police weren't having any luck getting anyone in the crowd to admit they were present when Kip was shot.

"It looks like you'll be my star witness," chuckled Brand.

"I'm afraid I won't be much help," said Phelan. "I wasn't paying attention to what was going on, until after it happened. My wife was with me, and I—"

"What did you do with her?"

"Sent her back to the hotel in a cab. I'd just as soon keep her out of this."

"I don't blame you," said Brand.

"If I thought she'd seen something . . ." Jerry began.

"Forget it," shrugged Ted.

They watched a couple of ambulance attendants load Kip's body on a stretcher and carry it to their wagon. The crowd

still hung on as though they expected Brand to perform a miracle, solve the crime before their eyes. The homicide inspector ignored them.

His men came back from their check of the roofs, reported negative.

Ted said, "How about it, Jerry? Can I give you a lift to your hotel?"

He had a passenger.

JERRY PHELAN kept his big Irish mouth shut until he and Ted Brand were in the police car driving away from Chinatown. What bothered him was something you don't discuss in front of a lot of people. You don't discuss it at all, unless you're looking for trouble.

Jerry wasn't, but he had to say it anyway. "Look, Ted," he remarked. "I realize this isn't my funeral, but aren't you giving the whole business kind of a brush-off? I know you said Kip was no good. Probably San Francisco is a better place with him dead. But . . ."

"But. Kip was murdered." Ted nodded, seemed to embrace the wheel as he swung them around onto Stockton Street. He didn't look or sound as sore as Jerry expected him to be. "You're right," he acknowledged. "I am taking this killing too easy. If your bride could do without you for about an hour, I'd like to show you why."

"Maris will be all right," Jerry said. "I told her to wait at the hotel until she hears from me."

"Okay, Pappy, you're in." Ted Brand grinned, changing his course for the Hall of Justice. "And I don't mind telling you I'm glad you are. Maybe you can throw me an idea, after you see what we're up against. Frankly, I'm running a little short of originality. Also, there's a chance you may recognize someone you saw in the crowd when Kip was shot—might just ring a bell."

Ted Brand's office at the Hall of Justice was almost as beat up as the blindfolded

lady herself. There was a desk. A couple of tired chairs leaned against the wall; the window dozed under a dusty green shade. Brand waved a hand at it grandly, chuckled. "Mine. All mine. Have a seat, pal."

Jerry did, listened while Ted was next door in the squad room telling somebody to pick up a party named Wagner.

Ted returned to the office; sat down behind the desk, shoving his hat to the back of his head. He opened a drawer, took out a cigar, offered one to Jerry, was turned down. "I forgot for a minute, you're a bridegroom." Ted smirked. He lit the cigar, cocked a leg on the open drawer.

"While we're waiting," he said, "I'll brief you on what this is all about. I'm having a man named Wagner brought in here. Willie Wagner. I don't suppose you've heard of him, in your end of the state."

Jerry shook his head. "Offhand, I can't say the name means anything to me."

"You're lucky." Ted nodded. "Willie's a local boy. South of the Slot—that's Market Street. He grew up down there—ran with a gang of kids, got in a few scrapes, did a little time. Strictly a punk, until he hit his stride about two years ago.

"All of a sudden, he's a big operator, with a bankroll; buys or muscles into a couple of gambling hells on the Peninsula. Trades in Cadillac convertibles as fast as he can smash their fenders, which is pretty rapid. Dresses like Alan Ladd—but you'll see that for yourself.

"A lot of people wonder where Willie found his stake, what started him off as a big shot. The most ambitious thing he'd ever done, up to then, was try to knock over a liquor store—and all he got was a slug in his shoulder. The proprietor was a little faster on the draw than Willie. Naturally, the Federals have been curious about Willie's source of income, too."

"They would be." Jerry nodded, fishing a cigarette out of a package. "Did they have any luck?"

"Not enough to prosecute." explained Ted. "But they figure there's a connection between Willie's crashing the upper income brackets and a small flood of phony birth certificates loose in the State. Every Mexican farm laborer north of the Tehachapi has one of these things; and lately, the local Chinese have been turning up with this paper. Willie's a cagey boy, and they haven't been able to hang it on him yet. Of course, I'm not involved—until Chu Lin Sam is knocked off the other night in a Chinatown alley. That was his funeral you were watching this morning, by the way.

"Chu's murder was a professional job," Ted went on. "A couple of .38 slugs where they'd do him no good at all. No witnesses, no evidence; and, as far as I was concerned, no progress. There was some wild talk in the press about a tong slaying—but, hell, there hasn't been any tong warfare around here since Chinamen started going for butch haircuts. I was drawing a big, beautiful blank.

"Then, a friend of mine with the FBI told me about Willie Wagner and the birth-certificate racket. He said the Bureau had information that Chu had been cutting in on Willie's territory. He thought I ought to talk to the boy, see what he had to say for himself. Incidentally, in the course of all this, my friend mentioned the name of a private detective whom the Bureau was watching as Chu's probable leg man."

"Al Kip," guessed Jerry.

"Right," bobbed Ted Brand. "We've been trying for the last two days to locate him for questioning. He wasn't at his office, or his apartment. None of his friends had any idea where he might be."

"His enemies seem to have had better information," observed Jerry wryly.

"Yeah," agreed Ted. "But to get back to Willie Wagner, we picked him up. Of course, he had an alibi for his time when Chu was being torpedooed. And, naturally, he knows nothing at all about the birth-

certificate business. It was all news to him."

Jerry Phelan dragged thoughtfully on his cigarette. "In other words," he said, "you've got everything but the stuff to make an arrest. My heart bleeds for you, pal. I have a file-drawer full of the same grief, in my office. So what are we doing now?"

Ted Brand shrugged heavily, made a futile movement of his hands on the top of the desk. "I'll waltz Willie around again," he replied. "Probably get my toes stepped on some more," he added. "But it's all we can do. Somebody set Kip up on that corner for the kill, and I don't think I'm pressing my luck to bet it was Willie. Anyway, I'm going to annoy that joker every time there's a pocket picked in this town. Sooner or later, I'll catch him off base and sock it to him. It'll be a pleasure. You'll see what I mean when he gets here."

WILLIE WAGNER walked into Brand's office as though he were taking possession. He set up in Jerry Phelan's book as an insolent punk, before he opened his mouth. He was a tall, strong kid: heavy-shouldered, about twenty-two or twenty-three years old. He had a lot of blond hair, greased to keep it off his ears. There was a wave in front, which looked suspiciously handmade. His features were even, sharp, his eyes too close-set. His mouth was thin, with a built-in sneer. He was wearing a dazzling blue plaid, double-breasted suit cut very extreme, full and loose everywhere except at the cuffs of the pants. He had on pearl-gray suede oxfords.

As he strolled into the office, he said, "What am I supposed to have done this time—what's the growl?"

Jerry Phelan watched Brand wave the punk to a chair beside his desk. The inspector said, "Sit down, Willie. I want to talk to you. Where have you been this morning?"

The young hood snorted. "In bed. I'm a late sleeper. Ask your dicks. They had to wait for me to dress."

"I suppose you have a crowd of witnesses to prove you didn't leave your apartment?" countered Brand.

"Not a crowd," leered Wagner. "But there's a witness—if you want to make something of it. Now, how about answering my question? Why am I here?"

"Ever know a man named Kip, Willie?" asked Brand. "Al Kip—a private eye?"

"Never heard of him. What'd he do?"

"Stopped a bullet, Willie."

"Look—" Wagner shifted his weight so he was leaning his elbow on Brand's desk, looking straight at the inspector. "Look, aren't you overworking that Willie routine? I told you, my name is Bill. And I don't know a guy named Kip. I don't associate with cops, which goes for private cops too."

Jerry Phelan sat in a corner of the office and listened to Brand haggle with Wagner. The patter was too familiar. He'd been in Brand's position so many damn times, trying to sweat the truth out of a smart punk who knew all the answers or thought he did. Wagner was the kind of boy who made a cop long for the good old days of police work when a rubber hose and basement room were standard procedure.

Brand finally sighed and gave up. He said, "Okay, Willie. You're through. For now."

"What's this 'for now'?" smirked Wagner, getting to his feet. "You mean I got to look forward to having you in my hair some more?"

"Any time I'm in the mood," snapped Brand angrily.

"Why ride me?" whined Willie. "Isn't there anyone else in town you hate?"

"I don't hate you, Willie." Brand smiled thinly, shaking his head. "I love you. I love you so much I want to arrange for you to enjoy the fireless cooker over at Quentin. Now get out, punk!"

When Willie was gone, Ted went to the window of his office and threw it open all the way; turned back to Jerry Phelan, shrugged. "What do you do with a joker like that in Los Angeles?"

Jerry rose with a bleak smile. "Buy him a ticket to San Francisco," he said. "I don't know how you're gonna break the guy down. I agree with you, he's probably guilty as hell. He was too pat, too fast with that alibi. But I'm glad I don't have to crack it."

Ted Brand went to his desk and picked up his hat. "I'll drive you to the hotel, now," he said.

* * *

Jerry Phelan was standing in front of the bank of elevators in his hotel, when the bellhop romped briskly up to him, said, "Mr. Phelan?"

Jerry nodded.

"Mr. Phelan, the room clerk would like to speak to you, sir."

Just then, the big bronze elevator door banged open. Jerry told the operator, "I'll catch you later." He went to the desk, said, "I understand you want to see me. I'm Phelan, Jerry Phelan."

The clerk had his hands full of mail. He put it down. He looked as though he'd been cast for his job—very little hair, or chin; white skin, and glassy eyes. He came over to Jerry, said, "I'm afraid I have some bad news for you, Mr. Phelan. Your . . . your wife . . . we had a call from Harbor Emergency Hospital awhile ago. . . . Mrs. Phelan is—"

That's all Jerry heard. He sprinted across the lobby, smashed through the big swinging door with a lusty straight-arm; landed in the street, running. He didn't wait for the doorman to call a cab out of the line. He wrenched open the door of the first cab he came to, shouted, "Harbor Emergency Hospital, and let's see you flop this heap!"

The cabbie got the idea.

Perched on the edge of the leather seat, trying to lift them over some of the traffic jerks who wouldn't get out of the way, Jerry had time to wish he'd heard the desk clerk out. All he knew now was that Maris had been hurt. He didn't know how bad; he wouldn't know, until they got to the hospital. If he'd only waited another second—the clerk was trying to tell him. . . .

Maybe it wasn't serious. The cab he'd put her in might have had a small hassel with another car, and she was just shaken up a little. He prayed that was all, his hands knotted into fists on his knees. He strained forward with the hack every time the driver found a clear bit of street where he could bear down.

The cabbie swung in a U-turn in front of the hospital, on Sacramento Street, and Jerry shoved five dollars through the sliding panel, lunged out of the cab as soon as the driver had opened his door. He slid to a stop at the information desk, panting. "I'm Jerry Phelan. I understand my wife is—"

The woman behind the desk said, "Mrs. Phelan is in Room 105, sir. Right down the corridor," she added, pointing.

The room wasn't far. There were a couple of men at the door, one of them an officer. He stopped Jerry. "Wait a minute," he said. "Who are you?"

Jerry told him. The cop nodded, "Okay, you can go in."

Jerry stepped into the room, let the swinging door fan shut behind him. It was dark, the shades drawn. A small room, white walls; a high hospital bed nearly filled it. Jerry was dimly aware that a nurse was beside the bed, as he stood there trying to adjust his eyes to the change of light—see Maris.

He moved closer to her. There was no strength, no feeling in his legs at all. He seemed to drift across the room like a clothes-dummy on wheels that had been given a gentle shove.

He looked down at Maris's head against the pillow.

"Maris—baby. . . ."

He was talking to himself. Her eyes were closed. He had one terrible minute; he thought she was dead.

"She's asleep, Mr. Phelan," the nurse said quietly. "The doctor gave her a sedative."

Jerry nodded, without looking at the woman. He could see now. His eyes had become used to the light—the no-light—in the room.

One side of Maris's jaw was swollen, discolored. There was a large bruise on her forehead, over her eyes. Her upper lip was puffed out, obviously cut underneath.

"What . . . what happened to her?" Jerry asked, his voice tortured, raw.

"I think you'd better talk to the officer outside," the nurse replied primly. "He can tell you."

Jerry lifted his eyes from Maris's face, looked at the nurse. "Is she bad?" he asked. "I mean—will she be all right?"

"You'll have to speak to Dr. Miller about that," the nurse hedged. "He's on the floor, right now. He attended her when she was brought in."

"But you can answer yes or no," insisted Jerry. "Are there any broken bones . . . I mean, surely, you can. . . ."

"Your wife is in no immediate danger, Mr. Phelan," the woman replied, her tone professional, cold. "For any further information, you will have to ask Dr. Miller."

"All right," sighed Jerry. "Where'll I find him?"

"You can ask at the desk. They'll know where he is."

"There's nothing like efficiency, is there?" mumbled Jerry angrily. He stormed out of the little room, into the hall.

"Do you know where I can find Dr. Miller?" he asked the officer.

As he spoke, a man in a white surgical

jacket and pants whispered up in a cloud of starch, said, "I'm Dr. Miller."

"Fine," Jerry nodded. "I'm Mr. Phelan. That's my wife in there. I'm trying to find out how bad she's hurt."

"Yes, of course," Miller declared sympathetically. "And I'm glad I can tell you there's nothing seriously wrong with your wife. She's had a very rough time, was in considerable pain when she arrived; but I couldn't find any broken bones, or concussion—at least, no symptoms of concussion. However, I gave her a sedative to ease her pain, let her sleep. I think she'll be all right."

Jerry rocked back against the wall weakly. "Thank you, Doctor. It's a load off my mind."

Dr. Miller smiled. "Not at all. You have every right to be concerned. I meant to be on hand when you arrived. Sorry I wasn't." He tipped his head apologetically and went on down the hall.

Jerry looked at the officer, said, "The nurse inside tells me you know how it happened."

"This man here can tell you about that," the cop answered gruffly. "He brought her in."

For the first time, Jerry noticed the other man was holding a hackie cap. It had a yellow cover. He remembered he'd put Maris in a Yellow Cab.

He asked, "Are you the guy I told to take my wife to the hotel?"

The driver nodded mutely.

"Okay, let's have it," snapped Jerry.

THE driver turned his hat nervously in his hands, recited his story as though this weren't the first time he'd been over it.

"I backed around and went up the hill on Post Street, turned on Powell. North."

"Why north?" Jerry wanted to know. "Were you taking my wife for a tour of the city? I told you to drive her to the hotel."

"I know," the man said. "But I didn't

want to get fouled up in that funeral procession any more. I was going to take her down Union to Stockton and through the tunnel. I got as far as Union, then this car forced us into an alley."

"What car?"

"I don't know. There was a car, a car following us. The first I saw it, he tramped me into an alley on Union Street."

"Yeah? Go on."

"Well, it's a dead end. I'm stuck. Two guys come up with heaters, guns—one of 'em tells me to sit tight, the other one opens the door, goes for your wife."

"What'd'ya mean, goes for her!"

"He's . . . he's after her camera. He grabs it. She tries to hold onto the straps. She lets out a big yell. Next, this guy is screaming, too. She's bit him. With that, he starts clubbing her with his gun. It's all over in a second, they're gone. I couldn't do anything."

"Yeah. Yeah. They took the camera with them?"

The cabbie nodded. "As soon as they were gone, I drove your wife here, to the hospital," he added.

"Would you be able to identify those guys, if you saw them again?" Jerry asked.

"Uh-uh. They had their faces covered with handkerchiefs."

"You'd know their general build, though—what they were wearing," the cop put in.

"Oh, sure," the driver answered. "They were both sort of chunky-built guys. One of them was a little taller than the other. He was wearing a tweed suit, brown—and I think his buddy had on a gray flannel."

"You say my wife bit the one she was fighting with?" Jerry wanted to know.

"Right. And she must have really sunk her teeth in his hand, from the way he was swearing. I saw blood on it."

"What kind of a car were they driving?"

"A blue Ford coupé. This year's."

"He didn't get the license number," the cop cut in to explain.

"Why not?" snapped Jerry.

The driver hunched his shoulders. "They told me, if I moved, they'd let me have it. I wasn't going to stick my head out the window and look at any license plate."

Jerry saw Ted Brand coming toward him down the corridor. Brand moved as though he were very tired, his expression set, grim. He shot his hand out to Jerry.

"I just heard about this," he said. "Terribly sorry."

Jerry said, "Thanks. I think everything's going to be all right, Ted. The doctor says Maris will be good as new in a few days. It's a hell of an experience for her, though. Great little souvenir for her to take home from our honeymoon."

"If there's anything I can do, Jerry. . . ." Ted offered.

Phelan eyed his friend thoughtfully for several seconds. "Maybe there is," he said. "One small favor. Come in here and I'll tell you about it." He drew Ted Brand by the arm to a door marked, *Men's*.

He made sure they were alone, said, "You can let me use your gun and shoulder rig. The Phelan family has a vendetta to square."

"What do you mean?" asked Ted. "All I heard was that your wife had been hurt and was here at the hospital. When you say vendetta, it sounds like there's something personal about her injury."

"There is, pal. Plenty personal," Jerry assured him. He told Brand what the cab driver had had to say about being forced into a blind alley, how Maris was worked over by two hoods after her camera. "It all figures, Ted," he added. "Remember, you were satisfied Kip had been killed because he was connected with old man Chu's death. Someone must have wanted Kip in that spot, where he could be picked off at a time when the gunfire would be covered by the sound of ceremonial firecrackers at Chu's funeral. We know Kip didn't just come out of hiding for a last look at his old business associate being trundled down Grant Avenue.

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New Detective Magazine

"Someone maneuvered him there. To that exact spot. He was in the crowd with Kip when the funeral procession passed; saw Maris taking pictures of the whole thing, knew he'd show up in them.

"So he sent a couple of boys to take care of the camera. Does this sound like anyone you know?"

"Willie Wagner." Ted nodded, starting to take off his suit coat to get at the buckles of the shoulder clip.

"Yeah," agreed Jerry. "He had his alibi planted; but it wouldn't do him much good if there were some snapshots kicking around, which showed him on the same corner where Kip was killed, seconds before Kip got it.

"There were probably fifty or sixty people on that corner at the time. So, only a guy who was pretty certain he'd be suspected of engineering Kip's death—and had gone to the trouble to lay out an alibi for himself ahead of time—would be sensitive to having his picture snapped."

Ted handed the harness to Jerry, watched him adjust the leathers to fit his chest. He said, "Maybe I ought to go along."

Jerry shook his head. "No. That'd make it official. You'd have to handle Willie with kid gloves. I don't—and, to be honest, I don't want to. It'll be a pleasure to hammer the truth out of him."

"You'll be outnumbered," Ted reminded.

Jerry hefted Ted's .38, broke it, checked the magazine; snapped it together and dropped it in the holster. "I know," he said. "And I plan to cut those odds down, starting with the first guy I meet who's got my wife's teeth marks in his hand. All I want is Willie's home address. I'll take it from there."

Ted gave him a number on Hyde Street as they were walking out of the hospital together. "That gun of mine has a fast action, Jerry," he added.

"Good," Phelan nodded, signaling a

(Continued on page 106)

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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 104)

passing cab. "I will want it to be fast."

WILLIE WAGNER had definitely risen about as high as he could get, in San Francisco. He lived in a penthouse on one of the taller humps of Russian Hill. The building and Willie had a lot in common. The building, too, traded on a glittering, expensive sneer made out of a lot of chrome stripping and glass brick.

Jerry walked into the lobby, faced a blonde who was as phony as Willie's birth certificates. Her hair was done in tight curls. Jerry thought she probably got them that way by playing one of those Hindu flutes in the morning. Her eyes were white-blue, like an ice-cube in a Tom Collins.

She'd started to say no, when he told her he wanted to talk to Wagner on the house phone. He gave her a fast look and she changed her mind, put through the connection on the switchboard.

He picked up the receiver of the house phone, turned his back to her as he spoke.

"Willie," he said. "this is the police. I'm coming up; so if there's anything you don't want me to see, get her out of sight."

"I'm gonna start chargin' you cops admission," Wagner growled.

Jerry went to the elevator and rode fourteen stories to the penthouse. Wagner met him at the door. He was wearing a gaudy, Chinese blue silk robe which came about halfway to his knees. He had his hands wadded into fists, jammed in the pockets; eyed Jerry suspiciously, then twisted his mouth in something like a smile.

"I know you," he said. "You're the cop who was in Brand's office this morning."

Jerry walked past him into the apartment. "That's right," he said. "I didn't have the pleasure of meeting you, formally. I thought we ought to do something about that, Willie."

"Okay," Wagner cackled, patting his

(Continued on page 108)



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This is a novel which tells how a person becomes a criminal. It's the story of a girl named Jessie Meadowbrook, who loved wisely and too well. Some people in town tried to cover for Jessie, but more of them tried to punish her. The incident mushroomed, threatening to expose the local gambling business and ruin a mayor. Some of the best people in town were involved. So they ran Jessie out of town. It was hard to tell afterward who was to blame for what happened, but it was Jessie who went to jail for murder.

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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 106)

thick, blond hair in place. "My name's Wagner. Mister Wagner. Knock off that Willie, it'll be all right with me."

"All right, Mr. Wagner. My name's Jerry Phelan Lieutenant, Los Angeles police."

"L.A." Wagner grinned. "I didn't know you were from L.A. You just said, police. I'm flattered, Lieutenant. You come all the way to San Francisco to talk to me?"

Jerry shook his head. "That developed after I got here, Willie."

Wagner's lean face hardened. "There you go on Willie again. I can see you've been talking to Brand. It's his idea of a big gag, calling me Willie. It's also his idea anything that happens in San Francisco, he can't explain, is my fault. I wish I was as big a wheel as he thinks."

"You are a big wheel, though?"

"I get by, Lieutenant—make a buck here and there." He smirked, taking in the custom-built, modern furnishings of his living room with a sweep of his hand.

Jerry said, "In coming up fast, you had to step on some people who weren't moving quick enough to get out of your way. People like old man Chu, and Al Kip."

Wagner leered. "I know who writes your material, Lieutenant. A certain cop named Brand, huh? It don't make any more sense comin' from you than it does from him. So, if that's the only reason you're up here, you can—"

"I had something else in mind, Willie," explained Jerry, cutting in. "I thought it was about time somebody gave you the beating of your life."

Willie stiffened, his face coloring, all except the thin line of his mouth. It was white. "D'you think you're man enough?"

Jerry unbuttoned his suit coat.

That did it. Three punks sauntered into the room and lined up behind their boss. Two of them were about of a size—built

Not My Funeral

blocky, close to the ground. One, just a little taller than the other. The third punk was almost as tall as Wagner. He had a slightly bent horn, and wore a pencil-line mustache. Jerry noticed that the hood in the middle, one of the shorter ones, was wearing a band-aid on his left hand.

The tall, lean hood rasped, "Shall we handle this guy?"

Wagner shook his head. "No. Brand knows he's up here. So we'll be very courteous to Lieutenant Phelan. Why don't one of you boys make him a drink?"

The little guy with the bandaged hand jumped to do something about Wagner's suggestion. He opened a large liquor cabinet, asked Jerry, "What'll it be?"

Jerry said, "Scotch and water," let the punk bring him the drink; made him put it in his hand. This brought him close to Jerry—where there was no question of Jerry's missing when he threw the highball in the man's face.

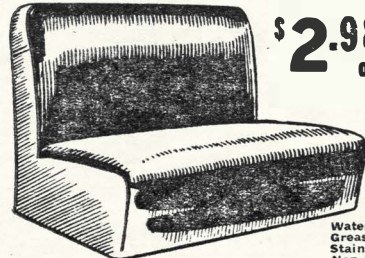
The hood had been accommodating about building Jerry's drink dark, and the whiskey blinded him for a minute—long enough for Jerry to grab that bandaged hand, rip the band-aid off it. He found exactly what he'd expected. A crescent-shaped tear in the skin, surrounded by a dark, yellowish-green bruise. Maris's mark.

Jerry had a flash impression of the other two boys going for their guns; Wagner diving over a big, square-cut, modern davenport to take cover. Jerry had Brand's gun out and talking, even as he was disarming the guy who had slugged Maris. Brand had been right. The gun fired fast. It also was deadly at that range. Jerry dropped the lean guy with his first shot.

The other one was blasting away. Jerry heard the slugs hit his shield. The man groaned, began to topple. Jerry grabbed him, held him up until he'd silenced the rest of Wagner's army. Then, he let him drop; stepped over him, going toward Wagner.

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New Detective Magazine

The boss hood hadn't stopped when he got on the other side of the davenport. Jerry caught him, just as he was about to crawl out of the room on his hands and knees.

"Hold it," Jerry told him; and Wagner froze, looking up at him, panting like a scared dog. If Jerry had said the word, he would have rolled over and pawed the air with his hind leg.

Jerry said, "I told you I came up here to give you the beating of your life, Wagner. I won't disappoint you. Get on your feet."

Wagner did as he was told: stood there, hands half raised, his shoulders hunched forward. Waiting.

"There's too much loose artillery in here," Jerry said. "So I think we'll move our hassel out in the hall." He waved his gun at Willie, said, "March."

Before they got to the door, someone was trying to beat it down. Jerry recognized Brand's voice, shouting, "Open up! This is the police."

Jerry sighed. "Do what the man says, Willie. It looks like you go to the gas chamber with that beautiful face unmarked."

JERRY PHELAN and Ted Brand came out of the Hall of Justice together, walking slowly toward Ted's car. They were two weary characters. Jerry thought he probably smelled bad. He'd smoked too many cigarettes; his mouth tasted like he'd been snubbing them out on his tongue.

Ted crawled under the wheel, and Jerry flopped in beside him. Ted said, "How about a drink?"

Jerry said, "I'll even buy. In fact, I've got an idea. While you were finishing up with Willie, I called the hospital, and Maris is conscious. The doctor said a drink wouldn't hurt her. Suppose we stop by a liquor store, pick up a couple of bottles of

Not My Funeral

champagne—take them over and drink them with her? I think she'd like that."

"Good deal," nodded Ted, punching the starter button. "I know a place where they keep champagne on ice all the time. But you're wrong about one thing. Ted is buying. It isn't every day a friend comes along to take a guy like Willie off my hands."

"It was a pleasure," Jerry commented wryly. "My only regret is, you loused up my idea about working Willie over. I'd really been looking forward to that."

"I'm sorry, pal," Ted replied. "When I heard all the gunplay, I thought you were on the receiving end. So, naturally, I wanted to be in there taking my share."

"The important point is, we lowered the boom on Willie," said Jerry. "Maybe we both made some bad guesses, like me thinking the best place for Maris after the shooting was in a cab headed back to our hotel. Maybe Willie is even telling the truth when he claims his meeting with Al Kip on that corner was Kip's own idea—and Kip was trying to blackmail him, had picked that spot for the payoff because he thought he'd be safe in a crowd. It doesn't matter a hell of a lot. Not now."

"Now, there's only one item bothering me. . . ."

Ted was threading the black sedan through the financial-district, dinner-hour traffic; had only a fast glance he could spare Jerry. "What's that?"

"Well," Phelan replied with a grim smile, "I'm due back in Los Angeles, Monday. Day after tomorrow. Which means I bring my little bride home with two of the largest shiners in the State of California. Her mother will meet us at the plane. How would you suggest I explain wha' happened?"

"I'll give you a letter, explaining everything," Ted said, grinning.

"Thanks, Inspector." Jerry nodded. "I knew I could depend on you!" ■ ■ ■

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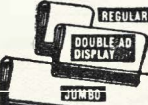
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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 93)

"Now," said Johnny, "I'll tell you what really happened."

"We're listening, Mr. Harkness."

"When Dennis Carter was shot, he groaned, fell, and whispered something. I had a suspicion he knew who wanted to kill him and he tried to say so before he died . . . and the film of the sound track was the only evidence. . . ."

"That's pretty fishy. Why didn't you give it to the police?"

"I knew it would never get to the police; it would be destroyed. By Mr. Ritterly. After all, I was on the lot without permission and he could get me out of the way easily, then expose the film before the police came, and ruin it. . . ."

"Mr. Ritterly warned you might say something like this."

"Let me finish, damn it! Harry gave me the film of the sound track."

"That makes him an accessory, if you're indicted! Go on!"

"I went, fast, to my shop. It's on the outskirts of town because of zoning regulations and film fire and safety rules. I knew Ritterly would be coming after me and I developed the film. I ran it off. The whisper said, 'Ritterly shot me. I blackmailed him. Check . . . fingerprints. He had record as convict . . .' That's all."

"It was so low I had to amplify it. Then I heard a squeal of brakes outside. It was Ritterly. He looked around, making sure nobody was in sight in the deserted area. I knew what he would do, and when he came in five minutes later he held a gun on me, found the sound track, then burned it. Of course he had to make sure I had no copies so he searched me, then took me outside and burned the shop down."

Ritterly got up, looking scornfully distinguished. "Pretty neat," he said. "Now there's no film of the sound track as evidence against you. So you can claim anything. . . ."

The Crimson Track

"Yes, there is," said Johnny softly.

Johnny touched his necktie. "Here," he said.

A hundred pair of eyes stared at Johnny's necktie. It was a simple gray necktie, its only design a thin, jagged, wavering line moving up and down the clothing like lightning that has been turned vertical. There were six rows of it and it looked like a normally crazy necktie design.

"It's a sound track," said Johnny. "That's what sound looks like on sound film. Remember I said I had to take in sidelines to make a living? I can put any photo, from your negative, on handkerchiefs, blouses, almost any closely woven fabric. And I do it on neckties, too, on tightly woven nylon. The material is treated with a liquid photo emulsion, just like regular print paper in photography."

"But—"

"I have a line of blank ties. Girls like to have their pictures put on ties. Then they give the ties to their boy friends.

"The sound can be transferred back to film," said Johnny, his eyes on Ritterly, who was standing now, his face ashen. "I tried it."

"Stop him!"

Ritterly was racing for the door. But they got him. ■ ■ ■



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—Continued from Back Cover

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