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JAN.

# NEW DETECTIVE

MAGAZINE



OUTSTANDING  
CRIME NOVELS

DAY  
KEENE

•  
SHAD  
COLLINS

MANY  
OTHERS

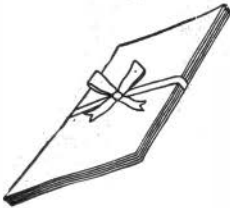
**COME DIE  
WITH ME!**

A TALE OF  
GRIPPING TERROR

by JOHN D.  
MAC DONALD



*For once they actually agree!*



**Hope and Crosby**, in the movies, seldom see eye to eye.

But there's one thing they really do agree on —they both think U.S. Savings Bonds make wonderful Christmas gifts!

**SAYS BOB:** "They're swell for *anybody* on your list. You couldn't pick a nicer, more sensible, more welcome present. Even Crosby knows that."

**SAYS BING:** "I hate to admit it, folks, but Hope is right. And remember this—you can buy Bonds at any bank or post office in the U. S. A."

**BOB AND BING (together):** "This Christmas, why not give the finest gift of all—U.S. Savings Bonds!"

**Give the finest gift of all ... U.S. SAVINGS BONDS**

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# LEAPING TARPON STARTS THINGS MOVING



THAT'S AN AWFUL LOT OF FISH FOR A GIRL TO HANDLE!

AND IT'S JUMPING MIGHTY CLOSE

JERRY CANNON AND HIS BROTHER KIP ARE RETURNING TO PORT FROM A LONG DAY OF TROLLING FOR SAILFISH IN THE GULF STREAM. WHEN . . .



HE'S LANDED IN THE BOAT! LET'S GET OVER THERE QUICK!



HE'S FOULED THE LINE AROUND YOUR MOTOR. WE'D BETTER TOW YOU IN



THAT'S OUR PIER

HOW'S MY FISH?

RESTING QUIETLY SHE'S A KNOCKOUT



PICTURES? TAKE KIP HERE, BUT LEAVE ME OUT. I LOOK LIKE "BLACKBEARD THE PIRATE"

WHY NOT CLEAN UP IN THE CLUBHOUSE WHILE I GET MY CAMERA



SAY, THIS BLADE'S A MONEY! I'VE NEVER ENJOYED A QUICKER, SMOOTHER SHAVE

LOTS OF OUR MEMBERS USE THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE REALLY KEEN



NEXT TIME YOU AND HELEN WANT TO GO TARPON FISHING, MY BOAT'S AT YOUR DISPOSAL

THAT'S A BARGAIN!

H-M-M-TALL, DARK AND HANDSOME!



MEN, THIN GILLETTES HAND OUT SHAVES THAT ARE CLEAN, COMFORTABLE AND GOOD-LOOKING. AMONG ALL LOW-PRICED BLADES, THEY'RE THE KEENEST AND LONGEST LASTING. THIN GILLETTES ARE MADE TO FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY, TOO. THAT MEANS YOU ARE PROTECTED AGAINST SCRAPING AND IRRITATION. ALWAYS ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES

4 for 10¢



# NEW DETECTIVE

ALL STORIES NEW—  
NO REPRINTS 25¢

MAGAZINE

Vol. 11

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## THE BEST IN CRIME FICTION

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## THE WITNESS CHAIR

**N**OBODY SAW the man climb slowly up the hill. Nobody knows exactly what was in his mind, either, but he was a big man, well-dressed, wearing gold-rimmed spectacles behind which his eyes shone strangely, one slightly larger than the other. His teeth were white and some of them were gold-filled, and altogether he looked like a prosperous and very respectable businessman.

All around him was green growth, rugged Oregon country, trees that made lumber and work and profit for those who chose to exploit them; beyond were farms and ranches and people who had once looked up to the man on the hill as being more successful than they, who later had grown to hate and fear him and had locked their doors against him.

Perhaps he hated them, too, now.

His oddly assorted eyes gleamed with the wild frustration of the hunted. They had found out, quite by accident, what he had so earnestly tried to conceal—namely, that behind his magnetically strange eyes lurked a keen-minded monster. . . .

In Belleville, Indiana, a pastor of the gospel lay weakly on his bed, attended by solicitous neighbors and members of his flock. He had been shot twice—once through the chest, the bullet narrowly missing his heart, once through the arm—

and was bleeding from a dozen gashes about the body. In the next room his wife lay dead, a .32 caliber bullet through her brain. He had known her since childhood, had married her, and they had been ideally happy until this night, when two armed men had entered the parsonage. One of them had shot the pastor's wife, and he had grappled with them. The gunman had shot him twice, while his companion wielded a razor. The two had escaped before help could arrive.

A posse was formed, every indignant, able-bodied male in Belleville taking part in the search. The posse returned empty-handed. For some reason, there were no readable tracks in the snow. The pastor then tentatively identified one of the local youths as his possible assailant, but the young man turned out to have a fool-proof alibi. Rewards totaling between two and three thousand dollars were then posted for the killers.

This attracted outside talent. A retired police captain set to work, his mind free of preconceptions and local prejudices. He found the pastor guilty of straying from the paths of virtue and—what was more important—discovered the pastor's blood-rusted razor and the murder gun still hidden about the parsonage. He decided the two

*(Continued on page 85)*

# Come DIE WITH ME!

**By John D.  
MacDonald**

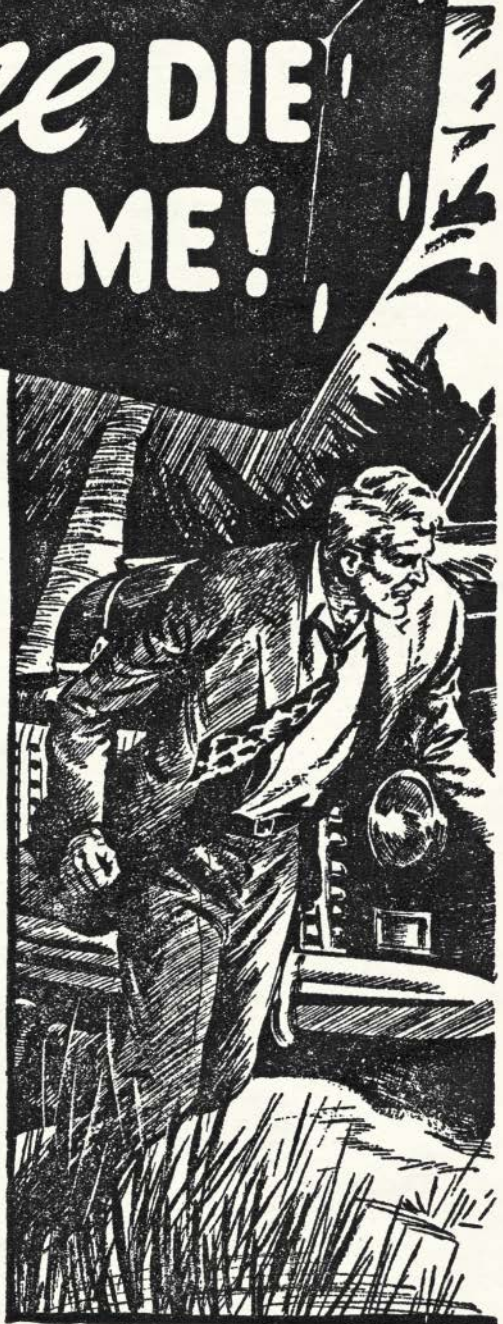
## CHAPTER ONE

### Death on the House

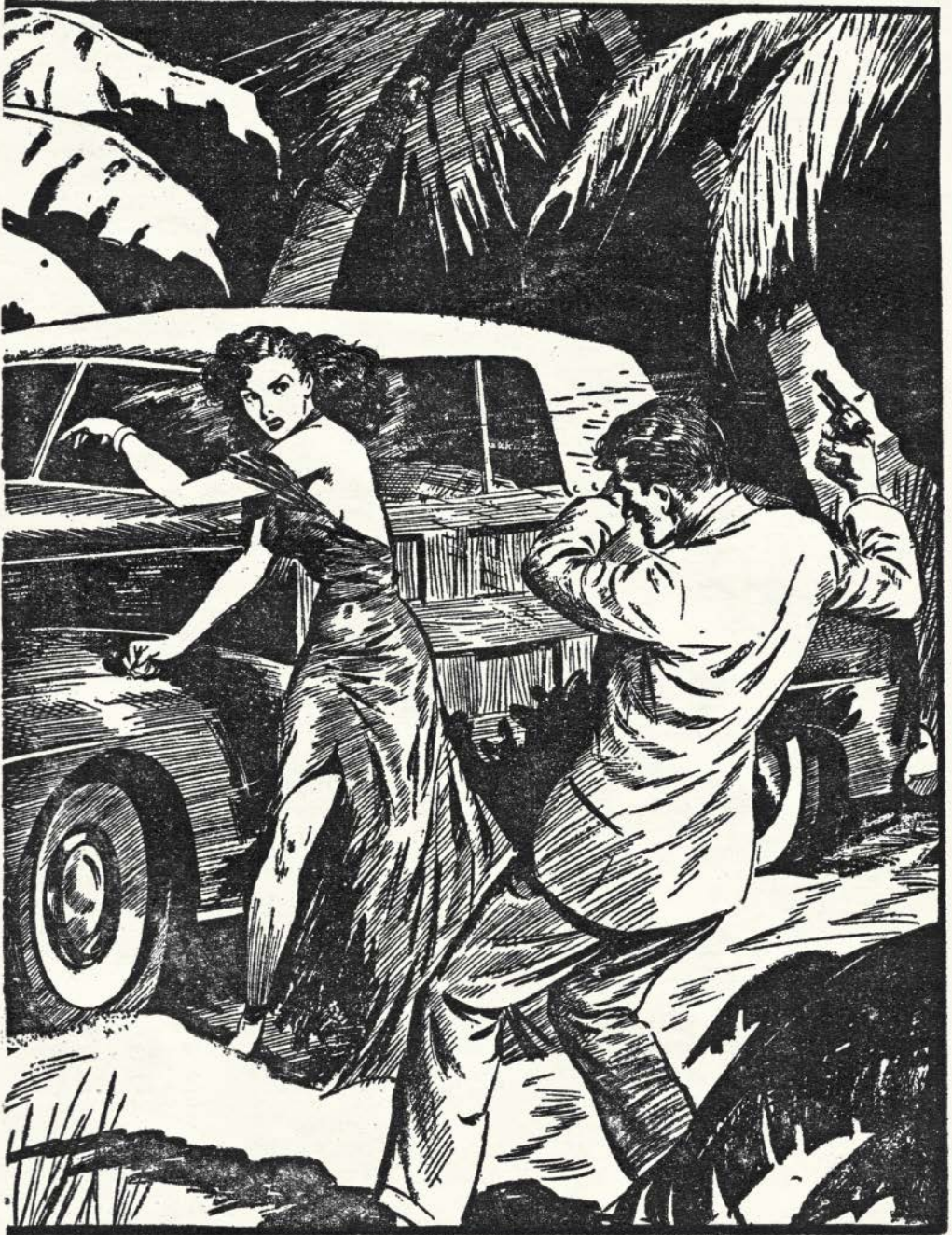
**T**HE SUNLIGHT was still a white glare in the late afternoon and the sidewalk was hot through my thin shoes as I hurried from the taxi across to the entrance of the Tarana Club. I hurried because of the heat and also because I felt conspicuous in the long black dinner dress.

Inside the club it was night, a velvet night, broken with the soft flare of indirect lighting, decorations in silver and light blue and midnight blue. The check room was opposite the entrance, the bar on the right, the dining room and dance floor on the left. The girl wasn't in the check room yet. I paused before I walked on into the bar, feeling the familiar smart of tears at the corners of my eyes. Tears are funny. You can be hurt and go away from people and shut yourself in a cheap furnished room. You can cry in the early evening when you

*As I turned, I flung the  
sand full in his face.*



*“They killed you, my Johnny, and I’m still crying in my heart. But it doesn’t show . . . because my hate has made me strong. You see, I’m going to kill them, Johnny. Rest quietly, my love. . . .”*



hear the car doors chunk shut, the motors start. When you know that two people are going out for the evening and maybe the man will take his hand off the wheel when they stop for a light and reach over and give the woman's hand a quick squeeze—friendship and love. The way Johnny used to do. And will never do again.

You can cry in the middle of the night when you hear someone's radio, one of your tunes, yours and Johnny's, and there are people dancing. A man's arm is holding a woman tightly and he tries to sing in her ear and she says, "You sound like a rusty gate," the way you used to say to Johnny. And will never say again.

You can cry in the grey dawn when all over the wide city the sick things, and the hurt things are at the lowest ebb. Oh, it's remarkably easy to cry, especially at night. You feel the pillow under your damp cheek and the tears keep coming and you smell the cheap varnish on the furniture and the passing cars paint quick bands of light across the vile wallpaper.

And you stay in the room for months and whenever you look in the mirror you see your face, grey and lined under the harsh bulb, and you think there isn't a tear left in you, that you are wrung out, that there are no more tears. Until you start to cry again.

Then one day you know that it is going to hurt for the rest of your life and there is only one thing to do about it. Put on a brave smear of lipstick, lift your chin and go out into the world. Go out with the one idea of killing.

They killed Johnny, didn't they?

Then, when you begin to get close, when your breath comes quick with the thought of vengeance so near, those same old tears creep up and betray you.

I blinked the tears out of my eyes and walked into the bar. It was long, black, shining. It stretched the full length of the room. Opposite it were low chairs and small tables. No cheap booths in the Tarana Club. The Tarana Club is too profitable. And they don't make the profit at the bar.

I slid up onto one of the chrome and ebony stools and ordered a daiquiri from the politely smiling bartender. I examined the one couple in the room. I could see their reflection in the backbar mirror. Harmless. A puffy little man in grey tweeds with white hair sitting with a sleek young

woman who was inevitably a blonde.

I sipped my drink, looking at my own reflection and wondering if I could play my part, if I looked right. The long months in the room had left me with shadowed hollows under my eyes. For the first time in my life, I looked faintly gaunt. Johnny used to give me a lengthy recital of my real and imagined charms. I'm tall, slim, with brown hair that has reddish glints right after it's washed. I've always considered my face a shade too wide, but I have nice eyes. Average nose, average mouth, also a shade too wide. As far as build is concerned, I'm whistled at as often as the next gal, but that brings back the tears because I ask myself, what good are these things about me which Johnny found attractive if there is no Johnny around to love me? If Johnny is a stretch of green grass and a small granite marker with rough corners that have bruised my hands.

*Sleep gently, my love.*

I had just ordered the second drink when a small man came in from the back of the room, probably from the men's room. He was tanned and swarthy, with a blue sport coat and a foulard muffler in a small pattern. He was quite drunk.

I watched him in the mirror. He stopped ten feet from me and burlesqued great shock and amazement. He slid up onto the stool at my right and rested his elbow on the bar. He said, "George, I'm buying the lady eighty or ninety of what she's drinking, and one for you if you introduce us."

The smiling George walked over, smiling only with his lips, trying to read my face. I looked down at my drink.

The swarthy one said, "Come on, honey! Smile at me." A personality kid. He put a moist hand on my shoulder.

I said to George, the bartender, "Take this thing off me."

He must have pushed a concealed button. A large man came through a door beyond the bar and walked swiftly around the bar. The hand was gone from my shoulder and he walked the little man to the front door. I got a good profile look at him as he passed in back of me. He looked as if in another few years they'd let him wear a leather helmet with curved horns on it and carry a battleaxe. He looked too bright to be bright. I heard the little man protesting, heard the soft voice of the bouncer and then the clos-



ing of the front door. I felt momentarily sorry for the little man in the blue coat, out in the dregs of the cruel sunshine, nursing the bitter end of intoxication, feeling it slip away from him when he needed it the most. Sure, I tried the bottle cure. It didn't help. Johnny was in the bottom of every glass, smiling up at me.

The blonde brute came back and stopped by me. He said, in a silky voice, "A drink on the house to make up for the incident?"

I sighed and said, "Do they have even a bigger bouncer to throw you out?"

I grant that he flushed a little. He said carefully, "I don't have the same type of interest that the little man had. I am trying to make noises like a host."

"In that case," I said, "let me buy you one. You did a very quiet job and I appreciate it."

He looked, a bit nervously I thought, back toward the door through which he had come and then slipped up onto the stool on my left. He smiled down at me. "I'll have one with you. Thanks. But on the house."

I was given a fresh daiquiri and he took just enough rye to faintly color a tall glass of soda. We sipped in silence. I decided to leave the light conversation department up to him. He said, "I haven't seen you in here before."

I said, "I haven't been in here before. I've never been in Florida before. I'm a solitary, aging, unemployed schoolteacher from Detroit. I'm leading a riotous existence. I can drive a car, figure skate and hem stitch. I'm not expecting to meet anyone here. I'm going to have dinner out here in the bar by myself and after dinner I'm going to find my way into your ultra casino and gamble. When I'm a thousand ahead, I'm going to quit and go back to Detroit."

He gulped over his drink and wiped his lips on a blazing white handkerchief. He said, "Is that the way schoolteachers in Detroit talk?"

"One of them."

"Good luck. After dinner go through that door beyond the bar, the one I came out of and go up the stairs. Knock and give them a chance to look at you before they open the door. And stay away from the dice. The house is having a good run."

He finished his drink, smiled and left. I said to George, "Is he a paid assassin, or does he own a piece of the house?"

"Oh, no, Miss! Willis is just one of the bouncers. Mr. Tarana owns the place."

I mustered up as much surprise as I could manage over information that I already knew. I said, "I thought Tarana was one of those manufactured names. Like Timco."

He smiled as he swabbed his way down the bar, the leaden careful smile of the professional bartender. I turned back to my drink and to the business of looking at myself in the mirror. The room was beginning to fill up.

I watched them as they came in. The gilded damosels and the gallant swains, elderly and usually lascivious. A fine Florida picture, or New York, or Calcutta, or Vienna. The aging men of substance who have managed, somehow, to claw their way to a secure niche near the top of the financial ladder, and then attempt to recapture a bit of what they have lost from the brittle flesh and ancient knowing smiles of the young anglegirls. Youth in a basket—signed, sealed and delivered, they hope, for the price of cocktails, dinner, and backing a few gambling losses. Because the girls always lose. Funny how they always lose.

The dark and secret part of my mind was remembering the night before. It was the conversation of the night before that had steered me to the Tarana Club. You see, three days before I had stood in a corridor outside the emergency room of the hospital and talked to the nurse who had seen Johnny die. . . . It was hard for her to remember. I said to her, "Please try to remember. He was tall and had kind of copper colored hair and he died here about six months ago." She didn't know how it hurt to say that word. I remembered something else and said, "When he was in college he had some kind of a silly bug tattooed on his upper arm, his right arm, near the shoulder."

"Say! I remember the guy! But you had me confused, talking about an automobile accident. That guy wasn't killed in any automobile accident . . . unless they got new cars that can stand a guy up against a wall and slug him in the face until they fracture his skull and then punch him in the body until he's got stomach hemorrhages."

The hall darkened then, and she managed to hold me up until she could get me to a chair. I sat with the bite of the smelling

salts in my nostrils, trying to smile up at her, trying to reassure her.

I couldn't tell her the truth. I couldn't tell her that my husband had been shipped home in a box and that enough of the damage to him had been so skilfully repaired that the most I could get was, "Well, Mrs. Morten, automobile accidents do some funny things. It almost looks as if he'd been hit a lot of times, and you don't get that in an automobile accident. But the wire from the police down there said it had been an automobile accident."

Poor Johnny, starting off so gay and bright, waving for the last time out the car window as he drove off down our street.

REGRET INFORM YOU JOHN MORTEN KILLED YESTERAY AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT. INSTRUCT.  
CHIEF POLICE,  
CROWN PALMS, FLORIDA.

Ten words for my Johnny. Ten little words.

I should have gone right down there, but maybe they knew that a wife can't make a trip after she gets a wire like that. I couldn't.

So I lived for months in that one cheap room that smelled of dried tears and all the time I could hear Mr. Fenton's voice saying, "It almost looks as if he'd been hit a lot of times." I wondered about the car too. Carl Stafford, Johnny's lawyer, handled that. I got the money for it. Almost as much as we had paid. Carl arranged to have it sold in Florida. When I asked about the money, he said that the car wasn't damaged. They made a mistake there. They should have damaged the car.

So I fought my way up out of living death and went to Florida. Carol Ann Morten goes to Florida. Vacationland. To find out how they killed Johnny . . . and I ended up sagging against the wall in a hospital corridor while a little nurse with buck teeth told me.

**L**IEUTENANT KANDER had investigated Johnny's death. I found that out by going through old copies of the *Crown Palm News*. Johnny rated a big spread. One inch hidden away on the bottom of page four.

John Morten, of Syracuse, New York, engineer, was injured last night in an auto-

mobile accident three miles from the city on Beach Road. He died two hours later in Crown Palms Memorial Hospital. There were no other injured. The accident was investigated by Lieutenant Shane Kander of the Traffic Department.

I had three stories ready for Shane Kander, each one dependent on my first impression of him. I asked for him and stood waiting until he shuffled out and leaned against the desk. He was young, sallow, slack, with thick hairy wrists and an infuriating habit of picking at his under teeth with a blunt thumb nail. He merited the first prepared story.

I said, "Lieutenant Kander, I'm Carol Ann Burnes from Detroit and I promised my Aunt Helen, Helen Kander, that is, that while I was down here I'd see if I could find any of her relatives left down here."

He had the shallow, tepid eyes of the native Floridian. He ran them slowly from my ankles up to my throat and back on down. He smiled. "That's right nice of you, Miss Burnes, but I don't know as I got any kinfolks that far north. Might have. Kander ain't such an ordinary name. No relation to Eddie Cantor." He laughed.

I smiled at him and gave him the business with my eyelashes. "Maybe we could go someplace and check up on it, Lieutenant—compare notes, you might say."

He glanced at his watch and pushed himself away from the desk. "Let's do that little thing," he said, grinning broadly. "Wait'll I get my coat."

By the time we had it pretty well established that he and my Aunt Helen weren't related, we had both had four drinks and we were good friends.

He called the Headquarters and told them that if his wife called, he was working on a case. He called his wife and told her he was working on a case. He took me to dinner and afterward we went back to my tourist court, to my three room cabin with knotty pine paneling and crimson draperies. He helped me get the ice out of the tray and when I mixed the drinks, I gave him a healthy shot, possibly three and a half ounces.

We sat on the big couch with the bowl of ice and the bottles on a low table in front of us, the lights off, the wide doors opened out to the little stone patio and to the smell of the sea which came up from the beach. Johnny and I should have been sitting there.

I had to let him kiss me once in a while. His breath was stale, his lips hard and he dug his fingers painfully into my back. But I ignored the queasy feeling in my stomach . . . because he talked. As he drank, he talked about himself. To him, it was the world's most interesting subject. And I was the world's most avid listener. I listened with my nails digging into my palms, carefully inserting the proper questions, the proper exclamations.

When I thought the time was right, I said, "You know, Shane, I've always wondered about police work, about those times when say somebody is murdered and they were in the way of somebody powerful in town and it was up to the police to make it look like an accident."

He was silent and I had the horrid fear that I had gone too far. He chuckled and I relaxed a little. "Hell, Carol, that ain't so rare as you might think. Now maybe it's different up north, but down here you got a resort situation. You know what I mean? People, they come down here so as to have a good time. Also, down here you got a lot of gambling and gambling makes for bad blood and anger and sooner or later somebody always gets themselves killed. Now, that would look right bad to the rest of the country if all the time we got these here murders, like the fella says. So what happens? They get kind of heshed over, you might say. Then maybe we got a drowning or a car accident or something like that."

"Now, Shane, that's easy enough for you to say, but what about the other people in the group? Don't they make a fuss?"

"They certainly do, and then say it happens in February and if they want to make a big stink we say it's going on the court calendar in August and they all got to stay in the state, being as how they might be considered material witnesses. They get to thinking how hot it gets down here and how their business will go to hell if they have to stay down here for six months and then they sort of give up the idea."

"I suppose when somebody is down here all alone and something happens to them, it's easy."

"Sure is."

I moved closer to him and said, "Gosh, this is exciting, hearing the real inside story! Tell me about of these cases, Shane."

He got interested in kissing me again, but in a few minutes I pulled away and said that I wanted another drink. I made him one too. His speech was slurring and when he talked and tried to pick at his lower teeth at the same time, I could hardly understand him. I made him a healthy drink.

He told me three cases before he said, ". . . and then there was a fella from New York State. Down here all alone. Engineer fella on some kind of work. This was maybe seven, eight months ago. Or maybe not that long. I forget. Some kid phones in and says there's a man in the ditch out on Beach Road a couple of miles out. Willis and I, he's a big blonde guy, we drive out and get there same time as the ambulance. I ride back in the ambulance with him, case he comes to and says something. He's beat up something terrible. He comes to and mumbles something I have to bend over him to catch. Something about Tarana Club. He dies in the hospital. I turn in my report and Willis, he signs it too, and next day Chief Whitlaw, he calls me in and he says, 'Shane, you ought to know better than try to put Tarana Club in your report. That poor fella was obviously hit by a hit and run driver.' I say, 'Now Chief, you know better'n that. This fella was out at the Tarana Club and he got in their hair out there and they beat him up and took him down the road a piece.' The chief, he says. "That's what you think, Shane, but there's a hell of a difference between what you think and what you can prove. I think you better take that out of your report, and if you don't want to, why maybe you'd be happier pickin' oranges or selling hot dogs on the beach."

"What the hell could I do? I wrote the report over, but this Willis, he pulls a fast one. He wants to hit up the chief for fifty bucks to sign the new copy, and he didn't even hear the fella talk. I did. The chief turns him down and a month later this Willis gets bounced off the force. Know where he's working? Down at the Tarana Club."

"Who owns the place, Shane? Important man?"

"Man named T. F. Farana. He makes a lot of dough out of that place. Mostly out of the gambling upstairs."

I couldn't get any more out of him. He didn't have any more. He tried to fumble at

me again, but he was getting so drunk that it was no trouble fending him off. He leaned back on the couch and began to snore. I switched the lights on and looked at him. His slack mouth hung open and there were white spots on his gums. I went in and scrubbed my teeth until my arm hurt. I pulled his feet up onto the couch and pushed him over so that he was on his side. I washed the glasses, turned out the lights and locked myself in my bedroom. When I got up at ten, he was gone. So were my cigarettes.

BEFORE the last small table in the bar was gone, I moved over to it and asked the waiter for a menu. It was quarter to seven. I paid three fifty for one lamb chop, a few scraps of salad, about twenty green peas and coffee. But it was served with flourishes.

Afterward I sat at the small table and drank brandies. It was part of the plan to get tight. But not too tight. I had to drink myself to the point where the casual observer would suspect that I had had too much to drink, without my having to act the part. But I couldn't afford to drink past the point of judgment. I had to be a lush on the outside and cold inside. The scheme had to work. It had to work.

At a quarter after nine, having seen quite a few others go through the door Willis had indicated, I picked up my purse and followed. The stairs began ten feet inside the doorway. Steep. A brightly lighted landing at the top, faced by a door with a square of opaque glass in it. I imagined that it was two-way glass.

After a few seconds it was opened by a very pretty man. His eyebrows met above his slim nose. His hair was parted in the middle, with a suggestion of wave on either side. His smile was careful, casual. Hard brown hands with thick knuckles.

*My darling, did you stand with your arms held tightly, watching with fear those hard brown knuckles, that careful smile Did he shuffle toward you, my dearest, tensed and ready, licking those pretty lips? Did he hurt you?*

I smiled back at the pretty man as I walked by him. I was in a narrow hallway, on a thick rug. The futuristic murals were vaguely indecent. Another man, stocky, blonde, with a red pebbly face sat behind a

high desk. There was a small safe behind him, set into the wall and neat stacks of white, red and blue chips on the desk in front of him. A small sign, gold leaf on black glass, said: WHITE—5, RED—25, BLUE—100.

I smiled at him, opened my purse, took out the slim roll of bills and pushed them across the desk. "Three hundred red and eight hundred blue."

*That's the last of it, Johnny. The house is gone and the car is gone and all our things are gone. That's all there is. Eleven hundred dollars, Johnny. Remember how we watched the money grow? How we saved for the house? Remember the bronze of the dancing girl that we bought together at the auction? I got eight dollars for that, Johnny.*

Twenty chips, each stamped with an intricate T. I held them tightly in one hand. Eleven hundred dollars.

The room beyond the narrow hall was large. Possibly thirty by sixty. At a small table against the wall, a golden girl sat watching the dealer take cards from a black box. One by one. She watched and she was deathly still. She didn't seem to feel the hand of the grey-haired man on her shoulder. She knew of nothing in this world except the faces of the cards, quickly turned.

An idle croupier stood at the end of the vacant dice table, bored and waiting. There was a low hum of voices around the roulette table, the clatter of the ball, striking the slots, rebounding, settling at last, the chant of the croupier—color and number. I looked at the customers, the white jackets of the men, the bare shoulders of the women, the movements that were a shade too casual, too controlled, betrayed by the brightness of eye, the quickness of breath.

The roulette table was low, surrounded with wooden chairs upholstered in leather. Nearly all of them were occupied. I slipped into one, and saw the quick flash of appraisal in the eye of the croupier. He was a pasty little man with thinning blonde hair, an impassive face and quick hands. The glance he gave me took in the value of chips I held in my hand, the cost of my clothes, the brand of my lipstick and my probable background. I reached out and put a blue chip on number twenty-eight.

*You were twenty-eight, Johnny. An end-*

*less and perpetual twenty-eight. Did you sit at this table? Did your hand rest on the wooden arm of this chair? Were you nervous, Johnny?*

The rake pulled in the blue chip and I put another on the same number. After the spin of the wheel, it too was gone.

*Only nine hundred left, Johnny. Foolish, silly Carol is down to her last nine hundred dollars in this wide and unfriendly world.*

I didn't watch the wheel. I heard the gasp from the others and looked up to see the tall stack of blue chips. I moved the stack over to black. An even money bet except for the ought and double ought. The house percentage.

He spun the wheel again. Black. I said, "Let it ride."

Red. He scooped in the pile and I heard the sigh of commiseration from those near me.

*For a little while, Johnny, I had over seven thousand dollars. That wouldn't be right. That wouldn't be the way I planned it.*

Again I played number twenty-eight until the blue chips were gone, all raked in by that quick hand. I stacked the red chips, four at a time, on number twenty-eight until they too were gone. All gone. I got up quickly and went out to the desk. Red face looked at me as I took the check book from my purse. It was a blue book with my name, my maiden name, Carol Ann Burnes, written in gold on the bottom right corner of the cover.

"May I cash a check?"

"For how much, please?"

"Oh, fifteen hundred."

"I'll have to ask you to get Mr. Tarana's approval. Just a moment, please." He pushed a button on the inside edge of the desk. A small bulb, green like a Christmas tree light glowed briefly. He said, "Please go through the game room and the door to the left on the far side. Don't knock. It will be unlocked by the time you get there."

The door opened into a small office. It closed silently behind me. The walls were a dark blue fabric, hung with several oval mirrors in white carved frames. The desk was ornate, dead white. In the center of the desk was a huge chess set, the squares green and white, the tall carved chessmen red and white.

*You always beat me at that game, John-*

*ny. My defense was never quite good enough against your open attack, against the mad, slashing attack that you started with the first move. Did you see this set, Johnny? Did you look at the tall pieces and think of our cheap set before they took you away?*

He was big behind the desk, a fat white man with white hair, dressed in a white suit. I had the instant impression of John L. Lewis after a powerful bleach. But where Lewis' face is massive and powerful, this face was soft. These eyes were wide, bland and blue. The pale jowls hung over the collar on either side, and under the beaked nose was a small, pursed, red button of a mouth. A silly little mouth. I felt the brandy and I wanted to laugh at that silly mouth.

"Sit down, please," he said in a thin, reedy voice, a soft little snarling voice. "I need one more minute to complete the move of the defense."

I looked at the set. "Advance the queen's bishop's pawn."

He looked up quickly. The wide blue eyes were soft. "Ah, you play! So few women do play. But that is an amateur's move, an obvious move. You see, this is a defense against a most subtle opponent—myself. It would fail. The proper move is to place this bishop here, like so. Then, in the inevitable sacrifice, the position will be improved. Now . . . you wish to cash a check?"

"If you please. My luck has been foul. Fifteen hundred."

He leaned back and stared at me. I saw him looking at the dress. "An original?"

"A few years ago."

"I like it. One seldom sees a proper dress these days, especially in black."

*Remember, Johnny, you liked the dress. Remember the first night I wore it? Remember what you said, Johnny? And I told you when you talked like that it made me feel like a wanton?*

"Thank you. You're very kind. Now, about the check . . ."

He smiled, turning the corners of the small red mouth up. "Anxious to get back to the play? I'm sorry I delayed you. You see, my dear, you had five cocktails before dinner and four brandies afterward. Our drinks are generous. I had to talk to you for a few moments to make certain that

you weren't being rash. You see, you've lost eleven hundred dollars already. You're quite sure you wish to cash the check?"

"Yes, I'm quite certain. Do you wish to see any identification?"

He waved a plump white hand and said, "There's no need of it. You are apparently quite sober inside, though your pretty face is flushed. I like you, my child. Make out your check."

I held the book on my knee and scribbled the check. He took it when I passed it across the desk to him and initialed the bottom corner of it. He handed it to me and, for a moment, I saw something in the bland blue eyes besides quiet amusement. It was a look of appraisal, the look of a professional buyer inspecting merchandise. It was as though he were something other than human, something of an obscene and calculating calm sitting back in the recesses of the gross body, looking out at me through the bland eyes. I forced a smile as I took the check.

The man with the pebbled red face cashed it without a word and I took the fifteen blue chips back to the roulette table. There was no chair empty. I waited until bets were going down, reached over the shoulder of a man in the uniform of a Marine officer and put five blue chips on the black.

The wheel spun. Black. "Let it ride." A thousand on the black. Black again. Let it ride. Suddenly there were forty blue chips. I said, "Wait!" and the croupier paused before making the practised gesture of setting the wheel in motion, the ball circling in the opposite direction. "Move them all to red, please." Not the slightest elevation of his pale eyebrow.

*Johnny, I've got to lose! Think of all the times I wanted to win and I couldn't and now I want to lose and I can't. Would you be laughing, Johnny, if you were standing beside me, watching your poor lonely Carol trying to lose?*

Spin again . . . and the clatter of the ball . . . Red! Yes, madame, you have eight thousand here. All on the black? Yes, madame. You win again, madame. Sixteen thousand and the other play on the table slackened as they watched me, as they ate my face with their shining eyes, trying to devour some of the luck. The room seemed to spin in great slow turns and the

blonde impassive face of the croupier was in front of me.

He swept the blue chips away and replaced them with sixteen gold chips. One thousand each.

Put them all on number twenty-eight. The eyebrow moved upward one millimeter. All, madame? But should you win, the bank could not pay, madame. It would be a half million dollars. You insist? One moment, please.

Suddenly he was there, beyond the chairs on the far side of the table, the white suit bulging with his fat, looking oddly like an invalid who shouldn't be standing. His minute red mouth was pursed and his blue eyes were smiling.

I glanced away from him, glanced at the metallic face of a brunette across the table, her hair silhouetted against the immense white front of his suit. She had bitten quite through her underlip and a drop of crimson blood rolled slowly down her white chin.

Two dozen still, painted faces looking at the spinning wheel. Sixteen gold chips piled on number twenty-eight. Silence except for the hum of the wheel. The ball clatters. Stops. Number nine, madame. The sixteen golden chips are gone.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Checkmate

I CAUGHT UP with him as he got to the door of his office, hearing behind me as I ran the excited babble of voices, the notes of hysteria.

He turned with the touch of my hand on his thick arm. "A bold play, Miss Burnes."

"I must talk to you."

"I'm afraid I would rather not cash another check for you tonight. Perhaps tomorrow night."

"It's not that, Mr. Tarana. It's about the check you already cashed."

He stood very still for several seconds, then held the door for me. I sat in the same chair, Victorian, a carved white frame with deep blue upholstery that matched the walls. As he lumbered heavily around the desk, I was suddenly horrified to realize that I still had fourteen blue chips held tightly in my hand. I slipped them into my purse before his head turned and he sank into his oversized desk chair with a sigh. I noticed that the chess game was

nearly over. A king, a pawn and a rook against a king, a bishop and two pawns.

He was looking at me. I said, "The check's no good. I have no bank account. And no way to pay you."

"You interest me, Miss Burnes. I have cashed bad checks before, in small amounts, but I've never found out so quickly. Your reactions are a variation from the norm. I dote on variations. Tell me a little about yourself. You're from Detroit?"

"Yes."

"Let me see, now. When you cross the Ambassador Bridge from Windsor, you come out . . ."

"Not far from Grand Boulevard West. The highway across the bridge splits into Twentieth and Twenty-first Streets on the Detroit side. The highway crosses over Twenty-second Street. It's a bit confusing. I lived way out Gratiot Avenue." I congratulated myself on having the good sense to pick a city with which I was familiar. I lived in Detroit when I was small.

"You told one of my men that you are a schoolteacher from Detroit. I understand that they frown on schoolteachers who pass bad checks."

"Probably they would, but you see, they've already frowned on me. The principal of my school called me into his office several months ago. He was . . . a bit amorous. When I was defending myself, he somehow fell over his desk chair and fractured his skull. It was all hushed up . . . but they thought it best that I resign. He was a very well connected gentleman."

"But how about your parents, Miss Burnes? Or your fiance? They wouldn't care to be forced to make this check good, would they?"

"If I had either parents or a fiance, I doubt whether I would have passed a bad check, Mr. Tarana."

He giggled. There is no other word for it. It turned his wide eyes into blue slits. He said, "This is very interesting. What do you expect to do?"

This was the critical point. This was the part I had practiced as I walked through the hot, littered streets of Crown Palms. I looked at the floor for a few seconds and then looked quickly at him. I shrugged. "I really don't know, and I don't care. Maybe I could be of some use to you. I came down here thinking that possibly I could win

some money gambling. I thought that if I lost, I might try to see how far out into the ocean I can swim. That seems a bit dramatic now. I have no interests, no desires and no future. Maybe you'd like to have one of your men beat me up, just as an object lesson to the other female gamblers in Crown Palms?"

"And how do you think you could be of any use to me?"

"Maybe I could urge some of the better heeled clients to stake me to the wheel. With my luck, you should make a fortune. Give me drinks and meals on the house and deduct ten percent of my losses from that fifteen hundred. When it's paid off, I'll be on my own. Oh, I forgot. I'll need fifty a week besides. Forty for rent on my cabin and ten for incidentals."

He stared at me for a long minute. Then he said, as though speaking to himself, "Looks and brains and spunk. And completely naive! My dear, I'm going to hire you on your terms, but not for any of the reasons you've given. I'm still not satisfied with your motivation. Something doesn't ring true. And I want you around until I know all the answers about you."

"Why did you call me naive?"

"Because the door behind you is locked. And there is another door to this room, all very melodramatic. I'm a cinema fan of long standing, my dear. I could be very cheery with you and say something about no hard feelings and pay it when and if you can. Then, I'd ring for a drink on the house."

I said, "You sound like chapter nine of a ninety-eight cent mystery."

"And you sound like a little girl whistling bravely as she walks by the cemetery. Just a moment and I'll make you official, Miss Burnes. I think it would be simpler to call you Carol. And you may call me Mr. Tarana. Ah . . . finish out this game with me, will you please? Take white. The advantage is there. I want to see if you play well enough to afford any amusement."

I pulled my chair over and studied the board. I was mated in five moves. He smiled and said, "I'm awfully afraid you aren't adequate in that line, Carol."

I apologized. He pushed a button, held his thick white thumb on it in a long ring. Then he pushed another. I heard the lock click on the door. Willis walked in without

knocking. He looked very sleek and very smug.

"This, Willis, is a new employee. Carol Burnes. Show her around. Her hours are five until closing. She signs for drinks and food. She reports tomorrow at five with . . . a bit more makeup. Make it clear to Golden, Walker, Traub and Engler that she is to be treated as a guest of the club. Let them key the others. Tell Traub we want a close check on the losses of anyone who may stake Miss Burnes to any of the games. Understand?"

"That we have a new hostess, our only hostess, to wheedle cash from the marks."

"Crudely, yes."

*Johnny, your Carol is broke and she's working again. How do you like that, Johnny? Be patient, my darling. Just for a little while. Just until I can find out who did it to you. Sleep quietly, my dearest.*

"Oh, and Willis. Tell Golden to put her on at fifty a week." He looked down at the board and began to set the pieces up with his thick white hands, slowly and carefully. Willis held the door and I walked out ahead of him.

He said, in a very low tone, "Of all the cheap little hustlers! And I thought you were legitimate. I bought you a drink on the house. So now you're in the percentage business. Ducky!"

I smiled sweetly up at him and said, "Mr. Willis, you're a nice, large clean-looking young man and I don't want any trouble with you. You play your angles and I'll play mine."

He turned away and I followed him. In a few minutes I had them placed. Traub was the stocky one with the rough red face behind the cash desk. Golden was the pretty dark one at the door, the one with the hard brown fists. They both heard the news and nodded at me with a mild show of interest. I wore my best smile.

Willis said, "We'll have to see Engler and Walker tomorrow. They're busy tonight. Come on downstairs and I'll let the bar and the dining room know."

I stood around looking like a guest who was waiting for a small service to be performed, while Willis pointed me out to the help.

When he was through, I said, "Why don't you complete the good deed by driving me home?"

He glanced quickly up at the ceiling as though he thought Mr. Tarana could see down through the floor. The small orchestra was doing odd things with a samba. He said, "This once, but from here on in, you arrange your own. I imagine lots of the customers will be delighted to take you home."

I felt the scorn in his words. "They always have been," I said blithely.

He wheeled the car around in front and I climbed in. He didn't bother to open the door for me. It was a convertible with one of those station wagon bodies. He said a curt, "Where to?" and I told him.

After a half mile I said, "This is a nice car. Tarana must pay better than the police department."

His head jerked around. "This is Tarana's car, darling, and I thought you were a stranger in town."

"I am, but you've got cop written all over you, Junior." Somehow I had to score off him, make a dent in his smug complacency.

"That's a bit odd, Miss Burnes. I was a cop for six months. I don't think it shows."

"You don't?" I said, in a tone of voice that implied that I didn't care what he might happen to think.

When we were nearly back to my place, he said, "I was wrong about you, too, Miss Burnes. I thought you had lady written all over you."

"Just drive the car. Skip the insults."

"Can you be insulted, Miss Burnes? My dear Miss Burnes. Maybe you thought I'd have enough time to give you so that I could come into your place with you. Maybe this is a typical play by the ladylike Miss Burnes."

With a full arm swing, I slapped him across the mouth. He threw his head back and laughed. I huddled in the corner of the seat near the door. When he was through laughing, I said, "I'm taking the job to pay off fifteen hundred dollars, Mr. Willis. I happened to give Mr. Tarana a bad check."

He glanced at me quickly and slowed the car. "In that case," he said, in a much softer voice, "I would pack my bags and I would run just as far from this town as I could get. And never come back."

I tried to sneer, but it wasn't convincing because the deadly seriousness of his voice



had impressed me. "Is this Mr. Tarana such a fiend? I thought he was quite nice."

He mumbled something that I couldn't catch, and he wouldn't repeat it. He slid to a stop in front of my door, reached across me and unlatched the door handle. "Good night, Miss Burnes. Sweet dreams."

I stood in my doorway and watched the twin red tail lights disappear down the road. He was the only one I could be certain of, the only one who hadn't been out there when they. . . .

I turned and fumbled blindly with the key. I switched on the lights. Shane Kander sat on my couch smiling at me. His underlip hung away from his stained teeth and his faded blue eyes shone with appreciation.

"That's a pretty dress, Carol."

"How did you get in here?"

"Had to take a course once in unlocking doors. First time I ever had to use it."

"What do you want?"

"Now, honey, I don't want you getting yourself all upset like that. We were real good friends last night. Sorry I had to pass out on you that way, but maybe tonight I won't pass out."

"Get out of here!"

"Now that's no way to talk to an old friend, Carol. I think I'll just stay right here."

I started to say that I would call a policeman and then realized how ridiculous that would sound. As I stood wondering what to do about him, he got up quickly, and stepped toward me. I put both hands in front of me and he took my purse. I tried to snatch it back but he pushed me away.

"Now, Carol, you just aren't acting sensible. You try to get rough and I'll just have to bust you one. I won't mark you up none, honey."

He sat back on the couch and opened the purse. He dipped his hand in and said, "Just to make sure you don't carry no concealed weapons, Carol honey. Say, what's this?" He pulled out a few of the blue chips. "What do you know? And a hundred bucks apiece! Let's see. Six, nine, eleven . . . fourteen! Fourteen hundred bucks. Takes me a long time to make that much."

I walked over and sat on a chair facing him. I said, "Okay, Kander. Suppose you tell me what it is you've got on your mind."

He looked over at the wall and said, "Now she wants to know." He glanced back at me and he wasn't smiling. "Carol, baby, I woke up in the cold grey dawn and I had a head with buzzers in it. I walked over and tried the knob on the bedroom door and it was sure enough locked. So I went home and did some thinking before I could get to sleep. Seems like my memory was a little bad but the more I thought, the more I began to wonder. That yarn you give me about your aunt being named Kander, that seemed sort of funny. I tried to figure out why you'd make up something like that. Then I remembered your asking a lot of questions about murder and stuff. And you know, I sort of remembered that you asked a lot of questions about one special case. Just to make sure, I wandered over to the offices of the *Crown Palm News* this morning, and sure enough, a girl that answers your description was in there a few days ago. I found the news article that mentioned my name and it was about the same case that you were asking me. Fella by the name of John Morten.

"So I did a little more thinking, and I came here just after dark and let myself in and took a chance on turning the lights on. Went through your stuff. Found out you bought all your shoes, dresses, coats and stuff in Syracuse, New York. Long way for a Detroit gal to go for her clothes, you know. So I finished off what was left of the bottle, cut the lights and set here waiting for you to come home so we could talk. Heard the car and ducked over to the window. Tarana's car and it sure looked like Willis driving it. I got a leetle bitty idea maybe Tarana'd be awful interested in the way you've been sticking your nose into things."

I looked at him steadily. I said, "Shane, you're a smart boy, but you're on the wrong track. I bought my clothes in Syracuse because I stopped over there and my bags were stolen in the station. I had enough drinks in me so that I don't remember what we talked about. I looked in the back files of the newspaper because a friend of mine was married down here six months ago, or at least she says she was, and I was trying to find the legal notice. I'm working for Mr. Tarana and I don't care for your Mr. Willis. And I always lock my bedroom door. Now get out!"

"Cool kid, ain't you?" he said. He sat for several seconds, bouncing the chips up and down in his right hand, picking at his teeth with his soiled left thumb. He stood up, dropped the chips into his coat pocket and took his hat from the floor lamp where he had hung it. "You know, honey, I think I'll just cash these little old chips in tomorrow. If you got any objection, you just tell Mr. Tarana about it and he'll probably stop me. And then we two can have a nice talk."

I stood up and he walked to the door. He opened it and turned. "After I cash in the chips, I think I'll tell him anyway. Maybe it'll get me a nice job like Willis's got."

**H**E WAS GONE. I cursed my stupidity in not losing the rest of the chips, in walking out with them. I had tried to play the part of the rash gambler who has gone broke. If Tarana found out in any way that I had walked out with fourteen hundred dollars worth of chips. . . . I gasped aloud. He had known exactly how much I had lost in cash. Whether or not he knew that I walked out with the chips would depend on whether he got his information from Traub behind the desk or the croupier behind the wheel. I relaxed a little. It had to be Traub. With the number of bets on the table at one time, the croupier couldn't hope to keep track of how much any one person lost. And Traub had no way of knowing that I hadn't lost the works, the entire fifteen hundred.

The real danger was Kander. Somehow I had to stop him. But how? After my shower, I stretched out on the bed and tried to think it out. I had to find a way to stop Kander the following night before he could cash his chips, leave and phone the information to Tarana. I knew Kander's evil vindictive soul. He'd call Tarana, not because he hated me, or liked Tarana—but merely because that bedroom door had been locked.

I couldn't fall asleep until I had thought of a course of action and rehearsed it a dozen times. Just before I fell asleep, in that strange bright land between sleeping and waking, I saw Johnny, as I do every night. He was walking toward me and he had his hands outstretched, his arms open. But instead of his usual look of love, he seemed to be trying to tell me something.

He seemed to be desperately afraid. . . .

Willis was in the bar when I got there. He took me back into the kitchen and introduced me to Engler and Walker. They were eating. They didn't stand, until Willis told them that it was Tarana's orders that I be treated as a guest of the club. Then they stood briefly and smirked at Willis. Engler was a deep chested man of middle age with the hard athletic body of an American Indian. His cheekbones were high and thick and his face showed nothing of what he was thinking. He looked quick and brutal. Walker was a tall, thin, stooped man with veins that stood out on his temples and on the backs of his hands. They both wore gleaming white suits, but the collar of Walker's shirt was ragged and soiled. His fingernails were caked with black dirt.

I was glad to get out of the kitchen. Something about their quick, scornful glances made me nervous, made me feel as though there was something I had forgotten to do.

As soon as we left the kitchen, I said, "I've got to see Mr. Tarana right away."

"Go on up. You can walk. Wait a minute!" He grabbed my wrist and swung me around so that I faced him. He looked down into my eyes and said, through his teeth, "You wouldn't be going to tell him that I advised you to get the hell out, would you? I spoke out of turn."

"You're hurting my arm." He let go. "I wouldn't tell him that, Mr. Willis. I know how you meant it and I appreciate it."

I ran up the stairs and knocked. Traub let me in. "I want to see Mr. Tarana?"

He walked over and pushed the button. The red light glowed. He said, "Wait." He was counting chips, throwing out those with nicks out of the edges. He made no attempt to smile. When the green light flashed, I went on through the game room and pushed open the door to his office.

He was behind his desk, inspecting a typed page covered with figures. He glanced up at me and smiled. "Sit down, my dear, do sit down. I'm weary of these figures." He leaned back and clasped his pudgy white hands over his thick stomach. "And now you're a part of our organization, Carol. What's on your mind?"

I studied my fingernails for a few seconds. I said, "Mr. Tarana, I'm going to

tell you something just because I'm loyal to-anyone that I'm working for. But you've got to promise me that this man who came to talk to me was wrong about you and about this place."

"Why certainly, my dear girl! But you're not being very clear, you know."

"Last night when I got back to my place, there was a very unpleasant man waiting to see me. He told me that he was a police officer and that his name was Kander. Shane Kander. He said that he had received a tip over the phone about an hour before that I had been hired out here. He told me that if I played ball with him, I'd be sitting on easy street. He said that he wanted me to keep my eyes and ears open and see if I could get any facts on some sort of murder that he claims was committed out here—of a man named Martin or Mortin or something like that. He said that if I could get any proof, he could put the squeeze on you for some money. Then he said he'd split with me. I must have looked sort of funny, because he pulled some blue chips out of his pocket and said that if I didn't play ball, he'd turn these chips over to you and tell you that I had been picked up trying to peddle them downtown."

Tarana's little red mouth and his blue eyes were three circles of surprise. He said, "My dear, what a perfectly ghastly experience for you! I can assure you that Lieutenant Kander is a very foolish man. Very foolish. That's why he's still with the police. If he had any brains, he'd be working for me. Now suppose you run along and I'll attend to Lieutenant Kander."

I smiled at him and got up. I walked to the door and tried to push it open but it wouldn't budge. I turned and said, "You forgot the lock."

He chuckled amiably and said, "Why, so I did!" But he made no move to push the button. I turned about and he gradually stopped shaking. He cleared his throat and said, "Sit down again, my dear. Now suppose you tell me if you're related to John Morten."

I was just beginning to sit in the chair when he spoke my husband's name. My knees weakened and I sat very heavily. I stared at him and my mouth was open.

"My dear, don't look like an imbecile. I am a very cautious man. I make my little investigations. You were followed last

night, when Willis drove you home. Mr. Willis parked a little way from your cabin and then went up and looked through the windows. He saw Lieutenant Kander with some of my chips. He thought that sufficiently interesting to warrant bringing the Lieutenant back with him, even though the Lieutenant tried to object strenuously. Walker had his orders to search your place, but he very rightly thought he could do more for the cause by bringing Kander back here. Kander talked with only slight encouragement. This morning I checked his facts. He was right. This business gets more amusing every day."

I couldn't feel fright. There was nothing left for me to lose but my life and the satisfaction of avenging Johnny. I had been a blundering fool and lost my chance for vengeance. And probably my life. I felt my shoulders sag. It was disheartening—nothing more. I feared neither pain nor death. Until I looked into his eyes. On the surface was a mild look of gentle amusement. Underneath was relish, a certain obscene joy. I began to be afraid, of the unknown, of what must be hatching in his twisted mind. He had the righteous look of an elder with the Sunday collection plate.

"You might as well tell me, my dear," he crooned. "Otherwise there will be little pleasure in telling you what happened to this Mr. John Morten."

*I had to know, Johnny. I had to tell him. Don't blame me, my dearest.*

"John Morten was my husband."

He pursed the small red mouth again. "Too bad. He was a very rash young man. Very rash. His engineering education brought him to grief. He came here alone to make a few wagers. Apparently he had read up on the methods of rigging a roulette wheel. I use one of the best. Moveable side-walls between the numbers, controlled by the croupier. He doesn't touch it except in the case of very large bets. Then, at will, he can narrow the gates to all of the red, or black. Even or odd. When he called me yesterday, it was merely window dressing. You had no chance of winning. The ball wouldn't have fit into number twenty-eight, I believe it was. Your husband detected the arrangement, stopped the wheel in motion while a large bet was down, made by another person, and held the side walls narrowed with his fingers before the croupier

could touch the release. Most unfortunate. It lost me a good deal of business, as the wheel was crowded. I had to denounce a perfectly good croupier and pay off all bets on the table . . . and fire my croupier. Business has never been quite as good since. The fortunate man who benefited by your husband's rash action paid your husband ten percent of his winnings. Ten percent amounted to two thousand dollars. I gave orders, and when Morten left, he was intercepted quietly in the parking lot. My orders were for him to be damaged a bit and the two thousand taken. I'm afraid Walker and Golden overdid it. Walker is impetuous. They left him out on the highway, drove his car down to town and left it. Now you know, my dear."

I said the names over to myself. Walker and Golden. The thin man with the dirty fingernails and the pretty one at the door. Walker and Golden. The two that I had come fourteen hundred miles to kill. And, of course, Tarana.

He read it in my face and said, "An eye for an eye? I'm afraid not. Both of those gentlemen are very valuable to me. Very valuable."

I said, "So now you know that motivation you were talking about."

"Yes, and immediately you become less interesting. You are now in a category, my dear. A chapter in my memoirs. The Woman Who Wanted Revenge. Rather a prosaic motivation too, don't you think?"

"Not from where I sit. From where I sit you and your organization are as exciting and interesting as a running sore. I'd like to see you smashed like a fat white grub."

He smiled softly. "My dear, you are far too emotional. Life is like this game of chess. Everything balances. Nothing is ever lost or gained. I made a necessary move and eliminated a danger at a two thousand dollar profit. I also tied one of my trusted people a little more closely to me. Your brave, unpleasant words bore me a little. All the time you have been talking, I have been wondering about how to take care of you. You see, you are a bit of a problem, and the chapter in my memoirs has to have a suitable ending."

"How am I a problem?"

"Killing you is too easy, Carol, and you're too anxious. You see, I have to consider you in the worst possible light. I

have to imagine that you have written to powerful friends telling all that has transpired up until you came to work today. You must be gotten out of the picture in a very innocent fashion, one that won't point back to me in any way. You see, if they can grant me motive and opportunity, it might be a bit unpleasant. I have nothing to fear from the local authorities but someone from outside might be brought in. I must guard against that."

He was so definitely pleased with the sticky little problem that it made my stomach turn. He laid one fat hand, palm up, on the desk and scratched at it with the nails of his other hand. It made a soft whispering noise. I noticed for the first time that his office had no windows. I looked around the room to see if there was anything I could use as a weapon—anything sharp that I could tear at his throat with, anything heavy that I could swing against his skull before he could push any of the buttons.

A buzzer sounded in the office. He nudged at one of the buttons and I heard a lock click on the right side of the room, near his desk. I saw the outlines of the door just before it opened. It had no knob on the inside and it was covered with the same dark blue fabric as the walls.

It opened and Engler, tanned and impassive, stood in the doorway. He glanced at me first and then looked at Tarana.

"Did it go off properly?" Tarana snapped.

Engler jerked a thumb toward me. "In front of her?"

"Certainly."

"Okay. We tied him with the soft cloth like you said and Harry Golden used the pump on him. We put two quarts of rye in him and waited for an hour like you said. We took him up in the brush by the culvert and dumped him on the tracks. Then Harry watched one end and I watched the other. Nobody came by before the train went through. I took a look and it got him okay. Then I phoned in like you said and told the desk sergeant that a drunk guy was wandering around the tracks. They'll check the alcohol content of the blood, and brother, it'll really be high."

Tarana leaned back and held onto the lapels of his white coat with both hands. "That was Kander," he told me.

I had a sudden sharp memory of Kander's hard lips on mine, of his pale, shallow eyes, his habit of picking at his lower teeth with his thumbnail. Dead like an animal on the shining rails, his dark blood soaking the ties, the severed head at the foot of the embankment, the eyes looking up at the sterile sky.

Engler said, "That's no way to kill a guy. Makes me sick when I remember how he looked."

"Killing you is too easy," Tarana said.



Tarana looked up at him quickly and the red lips were suddenly thin. "If you presume to question me, Engler, I shall advise the Nevada authorities of your whereabouts. They'll be interested."

Engler looked at the floor. He mumbled, "I wish you hadn't said that in front of the woman."

Tarana smiled. "Brighten up, my boy. She's the next job for you."

Engler looked startled. "Not no woman! Not me!"

"Yes, my boy. You! You and Golden and Traub."

Engler looked for a moment as though he would object again. But instead he looked down at the floor and said, "Just so

it isn't just me that's got to do it."

*Three of them, Johnny. Three of them just for your Carol. Three big brave men to give me a free ticket to join you, my dearest. Have you missed me? I'll be with you soon, darling.*

## CHAPTER THREE

### Death Is the Gambit

TARANA said, "Listen closely, Engler. When you leave here, take Mrs. Morten with you and lock her in the room. Go on over to the Teresa Tourist Court, Cabin E, and check Mrs. Morten out. Make certain she gives you the key first. Pack her things for her and bring them back here with you. Then take Golden off the door, and you and Golden take Willis down to the garage. Make up some excuse. Slug him, not too hard, tie him and gag him and put him in the luggage compartment of the convertible. Then come back here. I'll expect you in ninety minutes."

"Did you say Willis? I thought he . . ."

"Mr. Willis is a stool, my boy. I've given him enough rope. I'd let him go a bit longer, but I need him as window dressing for Mrs. Morten's untimely demise."

"Once a cop, always . . ."

"Stop philosophizing, Engler, and get to work."

Engler walked over to me. He said, "Come on, lady. You heard the man."

Nothing could possibly be gained by trying to resist. I stood up and walked to the door. I turned and said, "Nice knowing you, Mr. Tarana."

"Oh, we'll be seeing each other again, Mrs. Morten. A little later tonight. We can say good-by then."

As the door shut behind us, Engler took hold of my arm tightly. We went down steep stairs that ended in a hallway. He walked me down the hall and shoved a door open. I walked in. He pulled me back to the doorway and said, "Keys."

As I fished for them in my purse, I said, "You're crazy, Engler, to keep taking orders from him. He'll use you until you get in the way and then you'll go back to Nevada."

He said, "Keys," and held his hard hand out toward me. I handed them to him. He pulled the purse out of my hand, shoved me

back into the room and closed the door. I couldn't hear it lock. There was no knob on the inside. It was dark—a complete and absolute darkness without the least glimmer of light. I stood still in the room and listened. There was a distant humming. I walked cautiously toward it until I ran into a smooth wall. The noise was over my head. I reached up and touched the edge of a grill. Cool air was coming through the grill. I felt my way along the wall and completely circled the room until I was once again under the grill.

I could hear nothing but the faint hum and the sound of my own breathing. I knew that the room was soundproofed. I leaned against the wall and felt a strange excitement. It made my heart beat faster, my breath come faster. I was wearing nylons, and shoes with very high heels. I slipped the shoes off and then the nylons. I put the shoes back on and knotted the nylons together. On tiptoe, I worked one end of the crude rope through the grill and knotted it tightly. I yanked on it with all my weight until there was no more give to it. The knot was tight. I put the other end around my throat and tied a loose knot behind my neck, a crude form of ship knot that I could tighten by pulling the free end. It would both shorten the length from my throat to the grill and also tighten it around my neck.

*Just a little while now, Johnny. Wait for me patiently. All I have to do is straighten up, as tall as I can, pull hard on this loose end and then kick my shoes far away, Johnny. Remember how you liked me in these spike heels, Johnny? I'll be with you in just a little while.*

I put my back flat against the wall and stood on tiptoe, as high as I could get. I held the loose end of the crude rope and pulled hard. It tightened around my throat and I felt it draw me up, pulling my head to one side, the hard knot pressing hard under my ear. I kicked my shoes off, heard them clatter in the middle of the room.

I fought for breath. I pressed my bare toes against the floor, trying to push myself up so that I could get a little freedom to breathe. It was like slim fingers, fingers as hard as copper tight around my throat. I tried to keep my hands down at my sides, but of their own volition they swept up, clinging to the rope over my head. I

couldn't get enough air. I felt my eyes protruding, heard the strangled noises I was making. Horror in the pitch darkness. The room swam and I felt that my tongue was protruding from my mouth. The darkness was filled with clashing lights. My fingers clawed at the knot under my ear. Fingers of lead. Thick, blundering, weak fingers.

The knot was free and I fell heavily to the floor, stretched out with my forehead against the cool wood, sobbing and gasping, the blessed air filling my lungs.

*I couldn't do it, Johnny. I couldn't do it. But it won't be long, my darling. Wait just a little while. Just a little while.*

At last I was able to get up. I found my shoes, put them on over my bare feet, left the rope of nylon hanging from the grill, a silent witness to my lack of courage. I walked back and forth, back and forth, playing a silly game of counting my steps to the tune of an old, old song.

A center globe clicked on, filling the small room with blinding white light. I blinked against it, and when I could see, Golden stood in front of me, Walker slightly to one side. Golden said, "A very tasty little morsel. A shame to make it unuseable. Have a little drink, my lovely." He held out a shot glass half filled with amber fluid.

I didn't want it. I stepped back and Walker circled me. As I tried to turn, he wrapped both arms around me, pinning my arms to my side. He put one hand under my chin and tilted my head back against his shoulder, holding it rigid. I tried to kick at Golden, but he came at me from the side. I held my teeth shut tightly, but he pulled my lips apart and poured the drink between them. I was prepared to blow it out, but he clamped a hand over my mouth, his thumb and first finger holding my nose shut. When I began to feel as though my chest would burst, he released the pressure on my nose and I exhaled the pent up breath. Before I could inhale again, he clamped my nose shut and let off some of the pressure on my mouth. I was starved for air. My head was tilted back. The fluid he had fed me had gathered around the base of my tongue. I swallowed it and then took a deep breath. They released me.

Golden, the pretty boy with the fine nose and the dark eyebrows that met over it, said, "That wasn't so bad, was it?"

I still felt alert, awake. Golden turned to

Walker and said, "Suppose you run along, Bud. I'll watch her." He licked his pretty lips.

Walker said sullenly. "I'm staying. Two minutes, the boss says."

Suddenly my eyelids felt heavy and I yawned. They both looked silly. I started to giggle but had to stop to yawn again. I shut my eyes for a few seconds. It felt so good to have them shut.

Dimly, I heard someone say, "Catch her!" I was asleep before I could sense being caught. I went to sleep in the act of falling forward. . . .

I was back in Detroit and it was time for school. Somebody was calling me and I didn't want to get up. They said, "Carol! Carol! Wake up!"

I wasn't going to wake up. I tried to roll over, to cover my head with the pillow, but I couldn't move. I pulled harder and the effort began to wake me up. I resented waking up.

I opened my eyes. There was a white face leaning over me, a fat white hand shaking my shoulder. A familiar white face with small red lips and big, amiable blue eyes. I tried to get away from the hand. I looked wildly around the room. A bedroom. Plain buff plaster walls. Masculine. A tall bureau. Another bed with a silent figure on it, a man with yellow hair. I heard, in the background, the soft rumble of the sea. It was night and the bedroom was dimly lighted by a lamp on the table between the two beds, a cheap lamp with a maple base and a ship's wheel.

"Where am I?" I asked, fighting my way up out of the soft clasp of sleep.

"This is a rather isolated beach house, Mrs. Morten. It belongs to Mr. Willis who is slumbering on that bed there. It is quite out of sight of the highway. It seems that you and Mr. Willis formed a rather sudden liking for each other. After the club closed tonight, you went off with Willis in his car. Both of you were, I'm sorry to say, a bit intoxicated. Particularly Mr. Willis. I will be horrified when I hear that two bodies were found in the charred remains of Mr. Willis' beach house, in the bedroom. They will probably be able to trace the origin of the fire to a cigarette, smoked carelessly in bed. I will send appropriate flowers. There may be some suspicion, my dear, but they will find no trace

of any bonds. Both you and Mr. Willis are lashed to the beds with a plaited plastic which is quite highly inflammable. You know, I believe that from one of the upstairs windows in the club, I shall be able to see the red glow on the sky."

He walked out before I could say a word. He was back in a moment with a small bottle of colorless fluid and a white candle stub about two inches long. He walked between the beds and grunted as he stooped over. I heard the gurgling sound of liquid being poured, smelled the sharp odor of kerosene. He scratched a match and a moment later straightened up, shaking out the match. I could see the reflected flicker of the candle against the overhang of the spread on the other bed.

He smiled at me and said, "I would enjoy staying and discussing this matter with you while the flame burns down to the soaked rug, but it would really be rather foolish of me to indulge myself. I regret being a bit unkind about letting you remain conscious, but after all, my dear, you did call me some rather unfriendly names. I'm sure that you'll have company, though. You ought to have an hour to consider your sins and Willis should be awake before the hour is up. I hate to have to do this myself, you know, but my people were a bit squeamish about it. They're waiting for me out in the car."

He walked around the bed and stood in the doorway. By twisting my head at an awkward angle, I could just see him. The little red mouth was curled up at the corners. Sweat from the unaccustomed exertion put a sheen on his wide white forehead.

He added, "Don't try to fight once the fire starts, my dear. Try to breathe as much of the smoke as you can. In that way, you may be able to pass out before the flames reach you. Say goodbye to Willis for me . . . and a pleasant good evening to you, my dear. It was a disappointment to find that your motivation was prosaic . . . but you are providing me with a rather neat chapter ending, you know."

He was gone and I hadn't been able to say a word of protest. The fear of flame had knotted my throat and dried my mouth.

I heard the whine of a starter and then the roar of a motor. Gravel crunched under the tires and the motor noise receded into the distance. All I could hear was the sea

numbling softly, endlessly at the beach.

I licked my dried lips and screamed as loudly as I could. The harshness of the scream tore at my throat. I listened. The sea had absorbed the thin sound. I knew it was pointless because, had there been a chance of anyone hearing, I would have been gagged.

Willis groaned. I shouted his name but got no answer. After a few minutes he groaned again. His head turned and I saw his eyes open. He looked straight up at the ceiling. For long seconds he didn't move. At last, he yanked convulsively at the bonds. He was tied the same way I was. Spread eagled, each wrist and ankle looped to one of the bed posts. Strangely, the plastic was a brilliant red. A gay note of color. A joyous shade. I giggled and it turned into a sob when it reached my lips.

He looked at me. "What . . . what are you doing here?"

"The same as you. We're both awaiting a little toasting. We'll be browned on all sides." My voice was very hoarse.

"What do you mean? What's happened?"

I told him, watched his eyes grow wide, saw the shadow of fear creep across his face. He chewed at his lips.

"I should have left when you told me to," I said, "My husband was killed by Golden and Walker. Tarana told me tonight. He said that it wouldn't make any difference, my knowing now. He said that you're a stool."

"I'm a Federal agent," he said, "Treasury Department. I was trying to get dope on Tarana and joined the local force here, pretending to be a rookie cop who would play the angles so I could get inside Tarana's place."

We were both silent, realizing the uselessness of explaining to each other why we were there, watching the reflected light of the small candle.

"They killed John Morten, my husband," I said.

"Oh! I used that case to get in with Tarana. I'm sorry."

Suddenly he yanked at the bonds with all the force in his big body. Fear of death by burning must have turned him into a madman. But the plastic was as tough as steel, and there was no slack.

*If you can watch me from where you are,*

*Johnny, turn your eyes away. I'll be with you soon, my darling.*

He had stopped struggling. I said, "No use?"

"I don't know. That stuff cuts into my ankles and wrists. I can feel the blood where it cut me. I'll try again in a few seconds."

I pulled hard with both arms. There was absolutely no give to the plastic. The reflected candlelight flickered on the side of the other bed. There was no way of telling how close it had burned to the rug soaked in kerosene. I remembered how dangerously short the candle had seemed when I had a quick glance at it. I tried again. No use.

Willis yanked viciously at the plastic thongs. I looked over at him, saw the dull stain on his wrist where the flesh had been knifed by the plastic. I had an idea.

"Willis!" I said it sharply enough so that he stopped tugging.

"What?" I could hear his hoarse breathing.

"Can you touch the headboard with your hands?"

He tried. "Yeah."

"And can you get your toes against the posts at the bottom corners?"

"Sure. So what?"

"Willis," I said eagerly, "Don't you see? They tied you with the idea that you'd try to pull your way free. You can't. But the bed looks cheap. Maybe you can . . ."

"I get it! Push the head board or footboard away from the frame of the bed. Let the springs fall through. Pray for me, baby."

I watched, saw the muscles along his jaw tighten with the strain, heard the crackle of wood being forced apart, jumped at the sudden crash as the footboard tore free and the springs and mattress dropped at the foot of the bed. Since his ankles were still tied, the footboard fell over onto his legs. He lifted his body and slammed back down against the mattress. The headboard broke off and the springs and mattress were flat against the floor. He was free except that his legs were spread wide, ankles lashed to the posts of the footboard, as his wrists were tied to the posts of the headboard.

He sat up and looked down at the candle. I saw his face go grey. "There isn't time for me to work at this any longer. There's



only a quarter inch of that candle left. Any minute now . . ."

**I** WANTED TO SCREAM, but I shut my teeth hard and only a low moan sounded.

I watched him. He gave me a quick grin and said, "You were lucky on the wheel, they said."

From a sitting position, with the heavy headboard lashed to his wrists and the footboard to his feet, he threw himself off the bed directly onto the candle. It was about an eight inch drop, and I heard him gasp as the thongs bit into his wrists and ankles. I waited for the spurt of flame, the growing roar of the fire, his screams of pain.

Nothing happened. He said, "Smothered it, baby. Landed right on that candle and mashed it out before the kerosene caught."

I must have fainted. It seemed like seconds later that he was standing over me, the grotesque piece of the bed still tied to his wrists.

He said, "I bent over and got one hand close enough to my right ankle to get it untied, but I can't do any more. This may be tough, but I want you to see if you can untie one of my wrists with one hand. I'm going to kneel down here and see if I can get the knot close to your fingers."

There wasn't enough strength in my fingers to undo the knot that was hard as a rock. I kept at it until the sweat popped out on my forehead.

"Take a break, Mrs. Morten," he said.

"If you could get that knot close enough to my teeth, or if you could untie my wrist?"

"I can't untie you. Both my hands have gone numb. No feeling in the fingers at all.

Otherwise, I could get a knife from the kitchen. I guess you fainted a little while ago. I went out into the kitchen, but I couldn't pick one up and I couldn't get my head close enough to one to pick it up in my teeth."

He had to lie across me so as to bring one of the knots close to my teeth. In doing so, he accidentally hit me in the cheek with the bedpost, numbing half my face. He muttered apologies and I bit down on the plastic knot. The plastic was like hard rubber. I chewed at it until my jaw ached, stopped for a time and chewed again.

At last I felt something part under my teeth. He exclaimed as his hand came free. He got up off the bed, shook life into his numb hand and then untied his other wrist, threw the heavy fragment of the bed over onto the mattress. He stooped and untied his other ankle as I wondered at the difficulty he must have had dragging the footboard into the kitchen.

I was freed in a matter of minutes and I stood up too quickly. He caught me or I would have fallen. The room was filled with the sour reek of kerosene.

"The sign says no smoking, lady," he said.

"And what now?"

"Our friend will be looking for the light on the sky, you know. Can't disappoint the man, or he'll have his guard up."

"It's yours, isn't it?"

"Just rented, and probably well insured."

He crossed the room and fumbled in the bottom drawer of the bureau. Before he turned, I heard the metallic snap of the slide on an automatic. He shoved it into his jacket pocket. He looked at me in the light of the lamp between the beds. "You'd bet-



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ter stay here for a while, Mrs. Morter." "And have him or some of his men come back here? No thanks."

He had lost the Viking look that he had worn when I had first seen him. He was suddenly just a big, blonde, rumped young man with bloody wrists and a worried look.

"This might not work, you know."

"What might not work?"

He grinned at me. "You're going to have a lovely shiner, lovely."

"Your gentle touch. Don't change the subject. What are you going to do?"

"When I was in the kitchen, I took a look outside. Tarana was thorough. His convertible is parked just far enough away so that it won't get scorched . . ." I gasped. "Don't fret. It's empty. He just wanted to make certain that the police wouldn't wonder how we got out here."

I could see what he meant. With the car there, it was that much more obvious that we had driven out together.

"I'm going to see Mr. Tarana," Willis said.

I grabbed his arm, above his sore wrists. "Why? Why don't we just get out of here?"

Suddenly he looked a great deal older. "Mrs. Morten, I was out to pin his ears back on an income tax fraud. I was working to get access to his books. This thing suddenly got a lot bigger than income tax riddling. The chief of police is right in Tarana's pocket, but he's a timid type. If I can take Tarana in, with both our testimonies, he won't dare let him get away with it. And the people in Crown Palms hate Tarana. The chief knows that. As soon as I bring Tarana in, the chief will jump quickly onto the side of the angels. I think we've got enough on him."

"I'm coming."

"I'll leave you at a safe place."

"I'm coming. You listen to me. I spent a long, long time thinking how sweet it would be to kill the men who killed Johnny. At least let me see them taken in."

He sighed. "Okay, but if we end up right back out here, you've got yourself to blame."

"Why don't you get help from the police?"

"Without Tarana marching ahead of me, they'd laugh at me, Mrs. Morten."

"The name is Carol."

"And my name, fortunately, isn't Willis. It's Jack. Jack Cray."

"Can't you wait for help?"

"Before they could get here, Tarana would find out that no bodies were located in the ashes. He might fold up his tent and go to the islands. We can't take the chance."

At least he had said "we." I was in it with him.

I sat in the car and waited. He came out running, piled in behind the wheel and swung the car around in a wide arc, headed out toward the road. I glanced back and saw, through the windows, the dancing light of the flame, a flame like that of the candle, only larger, much larger.

Jack Cray's large hands were firm on the wheel, his eyes steady on the road unwinding in front of the car. The speedometer needle was wavering around seventy. Suddenly he took his foot off the accelerator and slammed on the brakes. The back end swung out and he wrestled it back under control, turned off down the sloping shoulder and cut the lights. I heard it then, too. The swelling sound of sirens. I looked back through the small rear window. The sky had a red glow. I shuddered as I thought of the minor inferno that would be devouring the furnishings of the small bedroom.

The fire truck, a pumper, with men clinging to the outside, screamed by. Jack Cray started the motor, gunned the car back up over the shoulder and continued at a slower pace toward Crown Palms. He said, "Had to get as far away as we could before the truck came. These boys are really sharp in this town."

Ahead, on the right, were the lights of the Tarana Club. He said, "Can't take a chance on driving past."

There was sand beyond the shoulder, the high loose sand, full of dried seaweed that you find above water level. He said, "Hold tight, Carol."

He put it in second and turned down across the shoulder, slammed the car into the sand, lurching and plunging. He drove it over the crest of the sand hill and half-way down the other side before the wheels sunk in as far as the hubs, stalling the motor. The lights of the club were out of sight. In front of us was a wide sweep of beach, phosphorescence flickering in white foam as the waves crashed against white sand.

Cray cursed softly as a man and a girl walked toward us.

He said, "Sit tight."

He climbed out and leaned against the side of the car, laughed drunkenly. The strange young man said, "Mister, you ought to know you can't drive through that stuff."

"Who's driving? I'm parking." He slurred his words.

"I'll help you get out, Mister. You got to let all the air out of your tires."

Cray laughed again and said, "I'm parking, I tell you. Can't a guy park with his girl?"

The stranger said, in a disgusted tone, "Come on, Agnes." He and his girl walked away, up the beach. Thunder growled in the distance. The night seemed suddenly very thick and warm.

I slid over under the wheel and got out beside Cray on his side. He said, "The club is about a hundred and fifty yards away. The only ones to worry about are Golden, Walker, Traub and Engler. And, of course, Tarana."

"Walker and Golden were the ones who . . ." My voice broke.

He held my arm tightly. "I know, Carol. Pretty boy and the old man."

"Golden and Engler, they killed Kander. Shane Kander."

I felt his grip tighten on my arm. "How?"

"Pumped liquor into him, tied him and left him on the train tracks. I guess when he passed out, they untied him before they put him on the tracks." I couldn't help shuddering.

"How do you know that?" he asked sharply. His hand was so tight on my arm that it hurt me.

"I heard Engler report to Tarana. And the Nevada police want Engler."

His grip relaxed. He said slowly, "That changes things, Carol. I don't think I have to go in there. We'll let the air out of these tires and get back on the road and get up to Daytona. You've got the additional dope we need. I don't have to take the chance of taking Tarana in. If what you say is true, we can bust Engler wide open and pick up Tarana before he can run and . . ."

I looked at him, startled. He was looking over his shoulder and slowly raising his hands. His face was expressionless.

A familiar voice behind me said, "You too, sugar. Turn around slow and back up against the car."

Walker! The one with the dirty hands and the corded neck. I couldn't turn. He said, "The boss had me wait and see if the fire got going right. I saw you two come out and I followed you down in the Buick."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Queen's Move

I STUMBLED in the thick sand as I tried to turn. I fell to my knees, my hands sinking deep into the sand. "Get up slow, lady."

I stood up, leaned against the side of the car. He had a small gun in his hand. It was aimed at a spot between us, ready to swing, at a moment's notice to cover Cray or myself. There was an acid taste in my mouth, and the warm breeze chilled me.

*Nothing goes right, Johnny. Was it that way with you too, darling? Did you have this same feeling of helplessness and hopelessness when they cornered you? Did you think of me, Johnny, as I'm thinking of you?*

My arms were rigid at my side, my palms moistening the sand that I held clenched in both fists.

"Turn slow, both of you and walk up that sand hill toward the road."

As I turned, I flung the sand full in his face.

He yelled hoarsely and lifted his free hand to his eyes. Jack Cray made one quick step and kicked the gun wrist, following it up with a short, heavy blow with his fist. Walker went over backwards. Cray gathered him up as he fought, feebly, swung him around against the car and hit him twice more. Walker stopped moving. Cray let go of him and he slid down the side of the car, turning so that his face rested in the sand. Cray was breathing heavily.

"I don't know how long he'll keep, Carol."

"Kill him!" Someone had said that. I realized that it was my own voice, tight and hysterical.

"Take it easy, Carol. Take it easy."

I didn't sob, but the tears ran down both cheeks.

He bent and yanked off Walker's belt and necktie. He said, "Walk out there in front

of the car and let me know if anybody heads this way."

I heard him grunt with the effort of pulling the knots tight. I looked back. He had Walker on his face, ankles strapped together, wrists tied with the necktie, and the loose end of the necktie through the belt on the ankles so that Walker's fingertips touched his heels. He opened the car door, tossed Walker in over the back of the seat so that he fell with a thud on the floor in back.

He tramped on Walker's gun with his heel, driving it down into the loose sand, scuffing the sand over it with the side of his foot. My eyes had gradually grown accustomed to the light, the faint light of the stars, and I could see that Cray's mouth was set in a thin, straight line.

"Come on," he said.

I followed him up the sand hill and saw, on the shoulder, the black shape of the Buick, the motor stilled, the parking lights on.

We stood beside it. He said, "The garage is in the back of the club, next to the kitchen. The doors slide back when you beep the horn at close range. This car'll make it easier for me to get inside. You wait here."

"Can't we do like you said, Jack? Can't we go away and get help?"

"Tarana will be expecting Walker in with a report on the fire. If he doesn't show, Tarana may be smart enough to leave before we can get back."

"I won't wait here."

"You will!" he ordered.

I yanked the door open, climbed in and sat very still. At last he walked around the car, got in on the other side and slid behind the wheel. "A break," he said, "I thought I'd have to go dig the keys out of Walker's pocket."

He started the motor. "Get in the back and keep down when I drive around the club and into the garage."

I knelt on the floor in back, my heart in my throat as I felt the car sway with the turn into the club drive. We dipped down, turned right again and slowed. Cray sounded the horn and I heard the doors slide back. The car moved forward again and Cray cut the motor. The doors slid shut. It was very quiet and dark. The air seemed too thick to breathe.

Heavy heels walked across the garage, toward the car. I heard Cray open the door, heard the voice of Engler say, "Joe, what took you so long? I was . . ." There was a muffled exclamation, a scrape of shoe leather against concrete and a quick heavy blow, a sound that could have been made by a cleaver striking a side of beef. Something heavy dropped onto the concrete. I slowly raised my head above the edge of the door. Cray stood looking down at something on the floor. I softly opened the door. Cray held his gun in his hand. Engler was on the floor. A small light bulb in a far corner over a workbench illuminated his figure. His mouth was open. Blood seeped from a deep groove over his temple. His head touched the perimeter of a puddle of oil.

Cray said softly, "He'll keep a long time. Get back in the car. I'm going upstairs."

"There's still three of them, Jack. Tarana, Traub and Golden."

The door to the kitchen was suddenly flung back and the bright light streamed into the garage, shining brightly on us, on the silent figure of Engler. Golden, the pretty one, stood in the doorway. He peered out at us, at the frozen tableau, the light behind him shining on his waved hair, silhouetting his hard brown hands.

One of those hands reached quickly behind the door frame, on the kitchen side, and there was suddenly a thick weapon in that hand, like a club. It must have been ready by the door to be available in case of an attempted robbery of the layout. With amazing quickness, he lifted the weapon toward his shoulder.

The gun in Cray's hand cracked loudly and the sound was immediately lost in a hollow, deafening boom as the weapon Golden was holding went off. Something hissed and snapped on the concrete floor, rebounding and tearing into the metal of the car. Cray fired again, went running toward the doorway. Golden dropped the weapon and bowed his head as though he were trying to look at his own belt buckle. He folded forward as his knees bent, and went over on his face down the two steps onto the floor of the garage. Cray went over his body and up into the brightly lit kitchen.

I looked down at Engler. The shotgun blast had hit him squarely in the head. I held onto a post in the garage as I was

violently sick, without warning. The car door was sieved with holes from the pellets that had missed Engier's head and ricocheted. Golden didn't stir. No one else appeared in the doorway. I walked over and picked up the sawed-off shotgun.

*Remember how stupid I was about that fourteen gauge you bought me, Johnny? Remember those crisp cold dawns in the duck blind and how you told me it was safer being a duck when it was my turn to shoot?*

The action was the same as the one Johnny had bought me a thousand years before. Automatic. There were two more shells in the thing. I worked the action and a live shell was ejected. I stuffed it back through the bottom of the gun, hearing the satisfying click. I gagged again as I stepped over the body of Golden. I went up the two steps, blinking in the white, ascetic light of the kitchen. The kitchen was deserted, hot food on the steam tables, pots bubbling on the hotel range, complete dinners growing cold on the serving racks.

Which way had he gone?

I walked to the swinging doors and looked out into the dining room. The tables were empty. There was food on many of the plates. I pushed through the swinging doors, my finger on the trigger of the gun. Ten feet inside the dining room I could see the check room in the entrance hall. A cluster of people were crowding around it, looking back into the dining room with nervous faces, holding their checks in tight fingers.

I have no idea what they thought. What they saw was a tall girl with a wide face and tight lips, as pale as death, her dress torn and dirty, an ugly gun cradled with the butt against her hip as she walked. They

suddenly stopped waiting for their coats and left, jamming up in the door and fighting to get out.

They were gone. I walked slowly. I heard the hum of the air conditioning, the chunk of car doors slamming shut in the parking lot, the roar of motors as they turned out of the drive on tires that screamed.

The check room girl stood rigid behind her counter, looking at me with a face like death itself. I swung the muzzle of the gun toward her and she dropped down out of sight as though she had dropped through a trap door. If I hadn't been so frightened, hysteria would have gotten me then.

The bar was empty. No customers. No bartender. No waiters. Half finished drinks stood along the edge of the bar. Other drinks were on the small tables. The door beyond the bar was ajar. I realized that I was walking on tiptoe as I crossed to the door. The cars were still roaring out of the parking lot.

The stairs were dark, the landing at the top brilliantly lighted as usual. I looked at the opaque glass and I could feel that someone was watching me through it.

*Somebody watched you through that glass, Johnny, as you walked up these stairs. It was probably Golden, Johnny. He's dead on his face on the chill concrete, Johnny.*

I lifted the shotgun and pulled the trigger. The glass exploded out of the door and the sound of the gun in the narrow hall hurt my ears. The ejected case clicked off the plaster wall beside me and bounded down the stairs.

I stepped to the door and looked through the place where the glass had been. The

# Edward Mann\*

**has switched to Calvert because  
Calvert makes a lighter highball**

\*of 1522 Kelton Ave., W. Los Angeles, Calif.

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table where Traub had sat was empty. The chips were piled neatly. The safe door was closed.

Holding the gun in my left hand, I reached down through the place where the glass had been and lifted the inside latch on the door. Fragments of glass still in the frame cut the soft underside of my arm. I felt the trickle of warm blood running down toward my wrist.

I bumped the door open with my knee. It swung slowly and banged against the wall. I walked in.

The game room was empty. There were no stacks of chips on the edge of the table. They left the drinks and they left the food, but they took the chips. They had time, in the midst of their fear, to take the chips with them.

The door to Tarana's office was shut.

I walked toward it. As I heard the sound behind me, I tried to turn, but I was too late. I caught a glimpse of Traub's pebbled red face before he spun me back, a hand rough on my shoulder. A gun barrel was jammed painfully into the small of my back. "Close to the door," he said softly, forcing me along.

When my face was inches from the door, he kicked it open. It slammed back violently. Jack Cray was spread against the other door. It was closed. His hands were high, his eyes almost shut. Tarana, his thick white bulk filling the desk chair, sat with a blued revolver in a soft pale hand, the muzzle pointed toward Cray.

The chess men, red and white, stood quietly on the green and white squares. A frozen battle. Force and energy temporarily stilled. The slanting bishops waiting, the deadly queen in repose.

**T**RAUB forced me closer to the desk. I heard him slam the office door. The gun still touched my back.

Tarana had given me one quick glance that was like a touch of cold, white fire. "You are less predictable than I had thought, Mrs. Morten. Good work, Traub. How about downstairs?"

"All gone, sir. Help as well as customers."

"Somebody will phone the police, Traub. We haven't much time. Where's Golden and Engler?"

I glanced at Cray. His face was blank.

The shotgun was still heavy in my left hand. Traub should have made me drop it outside the office. I remembered the months I had stayed in the cheap room in Syracuse. I remembered what Tarana had said about Johnny.

With the quick swing that Johnny had taught me, I lifted the gun to my shoulder. The muzzle was only four feet from Tarana, and pointed directly at the white mound of his belly.

His eyes widened momentarily, and then, as the expected blast didn't come, he looked sleepy. He turned back toward Cray. He said to Traub, "Knock it out of her hands."

"If he touches me, I pull the trigger," I said softly.

Tarana glanced back at me. His small red mouth was brilliant in the white face. He said quietly, "Shoot her, Traub."

"The jar of the shot hitting me will fire this, Mr. Tarana," I said. My voice was faint, weak. The room seemed to swim before my eyes, Tarana swooping far off and then returning, twice life size.

Cray didn't move. Traub said, "I can't shoot her."

Cray said, "There's nothing on you, Traub, and you'll get a light sentence if you give evidence."

"I can't do it. I can't shoot her," Traub said hopelessly.

Cray said, "Lay the gun down on the desk, Tarana. You turn it toward her and I'll jump you." He leaned slightly away from the door.

I said, "It's no good. I'm going to kill him, Johnny." I wasn't talking to anyone in the room. Or maybe he was in the room. "I'm going to kill him in just a few seconds and I want him to think how it's going to feel when the blast rips him open. I want him to spend the next few seconds thinking about it."

Cray said tightly, "No, Carol. No!"

I tightened my finger on the trigger. Tarana kept the revolver on Cray but his eyes turned toward me. I saw them flick down toward my finger and back to my face. I knew he had seen the increasing whiteness of my finger from the pressure on the trigger. He said, "Checkmate, or is it stalemate, my dear?"

His voice had its usual soft whining note, but it trembled slightly. I watched his underlip. It trembled too. In the distance

I heard the sirens. Not much time left.

I touched my cheek to the smooth stock, sighting along the top of the shining barrel. There was no point in sighting it. There was no chance of missing him.

*Remember, Johnny, when you said that it was too long a shot to try, when that one duck was flying down the lake, ignoring our decoys? And I tried it, saw the duck drop like a stone into the cold water. You paddled out in the old boat and got it while I waited. That was the first one I ever killed, Johnny, and if you remember, it was the last one. I let you kill the others; I didn't even like it when you shot them. They were so wild and free and then suddenly so dead in the corner of the blind, their feathers dulling, their quick eyes stilled. I don't want to kill anything, Johnny.*

The small red mouth pulled back against the teeth and I saw the sweat suddenly bead his high white forehead. The sirens were nearer. The words came tumbling out of him, high and shrill with hysteria, "No! Don't! I didn't mean to have him killed! You can't shoot me like this! Please! It wasn't my fault! I stayed right here in the office! I didn't want him killed, you understand? Don't do this thing!"

He had forgotten the gun in his hand as he read the message of death in my eyes. The gun he held sagged toward the desk, and Jack Cray jumped at Tarana. The gun was suddenly gone from my back and a shot cracked beside me. I saw something move at my left and I swung the short shotgun around hard, hitting Traub full across the mouth with the barrel. He staggered back and I hit him again, turned toward the desk. The chair in which Tarana had been sitting had gone over backwards and both Cray and Tarana were out of sight behind the desk. As I watched, Tarana slowly stood up, the revolver in his hand, his eyes wide. He saw that I had the shotgun pointed at him once more. He saw Traub on his back on the floor, moaning and stirring feebly. The sirens growled to a stop in front of the club. With a movement incredibly fast, he lifted the revolver and pulled the trigger. The muzzle slid slowly out from between his teeth and he turned as he fell. The hole in the back of his head was the size of a teacup, but not the color, not the color at all. I stood and laughed while the tears ran down my face, laughed

until my knees gave way and the deep blue rug came roaring up to meet me . . . .

They let me spend the long days and nights by the bedside of Jack Cray as he fought his way back to life. The slug that Traub had fired as Cray had jumped had hit him just under the armpit and perforated the right lung, been deflected by striking the inside of the rib basket and ricocheted down through his body, perforating the stomach and the large intestine. The force of his plunge had knocked Tarana off the chair, but Cray hadn't stirred after he had hit the floor.

When he was conscious again, many men came, from Washington and other places and stenographers took down page after page of testimony.

Both Traub and Walker pleaded guilty. Walker got life for murder, and Traub was given ten years, a relatively light sentence in return for his testimony. The testimony included the taking of two thousand dollars from Johnny. That was given back to me out of the cash found in Tarana's safe.

There had been a flash storm and the air that blew through the open hospital window was moist and fresh. I stood at the window, my back to the bed where Jack Cray, his face still the color of wet ashes, his cheekbones sharp enough to puncture the flesh of his face, watched me.

*It's over, Johnny. Your Carol helped get them, Johnny. Sleep gently, my love. It's over. It's over.*

"What are you going to do with yourself, Carol?"

I didn't turn. "I don't know." It was over.

"Let me help you, Carol. Wait until I'm well. I have leave due me. We can be married, Carol. I need you, my darling."

I looked out the window. His voice went on, soft, hoarse, sweet. He said the things that Johnny used to say.

*Oh, Johnny, I'm too sick and too weary to say no to him. He needs me and he wants me. It's nice to be wanted again, Johnny. Please let me say yes.*

The sun and the trees and the far blue sweep of ocean . . . they all said yes to me. They all urged me.

I turned and walked over to the bed and took his thin dry hand in both of mine and, as I bent to kiss his sick lips, there was the familiar sting of tears in my eyes.

But they were a different sort of tears.

# TIME TO KILL

By Coleman Meyer

*There's a sucker born every minute—one for each wise guy who dies!*



*He buried the gun deep in the sand...*

**B**ARRISH whistled contentedly as he maneuvered the convertible through the congestion of lower city traffic. He came to a halt at a red light, surveyed the walkers at the crossing with contemptuous good humor.

The light went yellow. The convertible anticipated the green with a surge of power, 32

lunged ahead. A tardy pedestrian scuttled for safety. Barrish laughed.

*Suckers*, he thought. *Suckers*, every one of them. *Just things that peopled every city to keep smart guys up in the chips.*

Before the next light, he cut sharply to the curb, ignored the squall of brakes behind and parked the convertible in a red



zone that held a fire hydrant. Barrish reached in the glove compartment, withdrew a large printed card that said **PRESS**, stuck it behind the windshield wiper. Then he got out, yawned and looked at his watch. The hands were straight up and he had a long time to kill. He walked idly to the red-fronted store on the corner.

The smoke shop was dim, uncustomered. The man in the cap raised his head at Barrish's entrance, looked beyond him at the convertible, then resumed his elbowed position on the counter and his study of the newspaper. Head down, without inflection, he said, "Hello, Benny."

"Roll of washers," Barrish said.

The man reached beneath the counter, produced a tightly-wrapped coin roll the size of nickels. He accepted the quarter Barrish tossed, resumed his elbowed position. Barrish broke the roll open by cracking it on the counter, carelessly tossed the smooth, weighted coin blanks in his coat pocket. "Any sleepers?" he asked.

The man silently reached below the counter again. "Threes," he said without interest and tossed a pair of dice on the surface. The dice showed treys as they stopped rolling.

Barrish pocketed the dice, turned and started toward the cigarette machine. "Hey! Not here!" the tired man protested. "I just sell the washers. You can't use 'em here." Barrish grinned slyly and continued toward the street. The man's voice caught him at the door. "That press card, Benny—you're gonna wear that gag out. The cop stopped by here the other day and wanted to know who was parked there." Barrish made a derisive sound, continued through the door.

At the corner he paused, lifted a newspaper from a metal rack that said: **DROP COIN HERE**. His hand reached in his coat pocket, inserted metal in the slot. It dropped with a proper sounding clink. He stuffed the folded paper in his pocket, walked idly up the street.

The poolroom was well patronized for the hour. Barrish walked casually to the cigarette machine, inserted coins. The machine refused one. He let it lie in the return slot, put in another and then turned, lazily stripping cellophane from the pack.

The eyeshaded man at the counter was making pencil marks on a large, square

sheet, tallying a twenty-six game as another man shook dice from a cup. He made a final mark on the string; the man with the dice slammed the cup down, said: "That's all, Charley," and walked out.

Barrish's hand came from his pocket. It was a long, supple hand and the man with the eye-shade could have been pardoned for not knowing that two dice were pinched between the middle and index finger. He picked up the leather box, said: "I'll shoot a game." The eyeshaded man grunted around his cold smoked cigar. "Three," Barrish said.

He rattled the cup close to his ear and then plunged the dice on the felt board, hard. Several bounced over the small board around the box, went on the floor. The eyeshaded man, muttering around his cigar, retrieved them.

Barrish accepted the dice, cupped his long fingers over the box and rolled again, hard. One cube bounced free of the board. Went over. "Keerist, Buddy!" the man said and stooped once more. Barrish's hand passed lightly and swiftly by his pocket, dropped two good dice in without sound.

At the tenth roll the eyeshaded man looked at Barrish coldly, made marks on the pad at the eleventh and twelfth roll. Then, as Barrish rolled the dice the final time, picked the leather box from his fingers, placed it on the counter behind him. "That's all, brother. How'll you have it? Merchandise or half off and cash?" Barrish said cash and sauntered out, followed by the baleful glare. He was whistling contentedly again as he plucked the press card from beneath the wiper and got in the convertible.

In some three hours Barrish was going to kill Dolph Aikens. But he wasn't thinking of that now. He was thinking of what a sucker he'd made of the guy with the eyeshade.

The convertible idled at a red light, caught the green a fractional second before it turned and lunged forward. A bus, right-turning wide for clearance, locked solid with a screech of air brakes. Standing passengers washed forward. The driver shouted something that was lost rearward as the convertible funneled toward the next traffic dam.

A three-wheeled motorcycle clattered

alongside. "Easy, Buddy, easy," the leather-faced motorcycle policeman mumbled.

Barrish stared contemptuously, first at the officer and then at the motorcycle. Then his glance took in the long stick with the chalk tip for car marking. It alternated between the stick and the officer's face as they idled for the signal. The motorcycle policeman's face flushed as Barrish's lips made the words although he did not utter them: "Go back to your hop-scotch. . . ." Then the light changed and he laughed as the motorcycle turned abruptly off to the curb.

Suckers, Barrish thought. Nothing but suckers. Even Sid, and Sid was supposed to be a smart operator. Barrish grinned to himself as he thought of Sid. Big bookie, a smart operator. And yet Barrish had talked him into two and a half grand for a lousy fifty-dollar chill job. These guys in the West were pushovers. Between hick cops and bookmakers with the hay still in their ears, this country was going to be lush pickings for a guy from five blocks east of George Washington Bridge.

**I**T WAS three o'clock when Barrish pulled up by the theatre. All of his enjoyable languor of the past few hours vanished. His thought processes fell into a familiar pattern as he eyed the parking space his plans called for. A small coupe was moored there. He checked the parking meter, saw it had fifty minutes to run. He set the convertible on a cruising path around the block.

Forty minutes later he was in the spot, the last space up to the red-curved theatre marquee where no hampering car could park in front. He extracted his key from the ignition lock, carefully snapped the button on the key holder to hold the key out. Then he unlocked the glove compartment, withdrew a gun that he transferred to the waistband of his trousers with a swift motion.

He got out leisurely. His hand sought his coat pocket, withdrew a coin and automatically inserted it in the parking meter even as his eyes were checking the street. His fingers twisted the handle over for a full sixty minutes. Then he strolled idly to the corner.

The showhouse was T-shaped, entrance and marquee on the main street, width of

balcony burgeoning out on both sides but inset back from the street. The north inset held a small confectionary, a tiny parking lot and, on the corner a small brick building with a huge sign that said: FLORIST. He turned the corner, slowed his pace to aimless walking.

Sid had fingered the shop for him three days before. "The florist is a front. The business is done upstairs in the back. Aikens runs a big book—too big. He leaves every day at four forty-five. . . ."

Barrish looked across the street, noticed with satisfaction the spire of the pile driver that showed above the wall surrounding the excavation where a new building was in progress. The pile driver whooshed and clanged rhythmically. He liked the sound. It had a place in his program.

He nodded to himself. Everything was in order. Then he turned and briskly went back to the theatre. "Loge seat," he said to the girl at the window. The doorman tore the ticket, returned half. Barrish walked through the ornate lobby, mounted the stairs. It was matinee time. The vast, carpeted hall was untenanted. He removed his hat, left it on one of the overstuffed chairs in the waiting area. Then he continued to the right, went down the stairs and out the north wing. The heavy plate-glass exit doors had handles on the inside only.

Barrish looked around. There was no one in sight. He produced a small, wedge-shaped rubber door stop, kicked it firmly against the right hand door to hold it open just far enough to get fingers on it. He lit a cigarette, waited inside. Two women, leaving, came down the hall. He nodded to himself as they chose the center door. Nobody ever walked to the right. After a while he checked his watch.

The time was now.

Outside, Barrish turned right, looked casually around. He melted into the cool darkness of the parking space behind the small corner building. It was a roofed-over extension of the florist shop, formed a garage for the long car within. It was dim.

At four forty-five, he moved deeper into the dimness of the semi-garage, settled just beyond the hood of the long car. His mind was professionally detached from murder. Rather, it brought a grin to his thin features as it ran complacently over the fine perfec-

tion of his work. Things were really simple if a guy used his noggin.

His hand rested on the hood of the car. The gun in it pointed at the back door of the building and the tiny, two-step iron landing. The door cracked light, rectangled and then shuttered out. His fingers tensed.

A man stood on the landing platform. Barrish's eyes were on him but his ears were tuned to the whoosh of the pile driver; his mind was counting to the clang. The pile driver whooshed. He called softly: "Dolph!" Then he squeezed the trigger.

Barrish clambered over the bumper of the car, inspected the crumpled form on the landing in cool appraisal. There was no need to shoot twice. He pocketed the gun, walked the two steps down the landing. Suddenly, at the cement, he grinned again, retraced his steps. Might as well give them something to puzzle over.

He leaned over, placed a coin in the limp hand, made it into a fist.

The plate-glass door showed no one in the theatre exit. His fingers pulled the door to him. He strolled leisurely up the hall. At the turn, a slight man in a wine-colored uniformed coat with gray sleeves raised an inquiring eyebrow. "Hat," said Barrish easily. "Seldom wear one and almost walked off without it." The man nodded as Barrish showed his ticket stub.

Barrish retrieved his hat, dawdled his way through the lobby to the front exit. He pushed open the door, stifled an exclamation and let it swing back hastily.

A three-wheeled police motorcycle was parked in the red zone directly in front of his car, the leather-faced motorcycle policeman in conversation with a man who was leaning on a rubber-tired cylindrical can about the size of a golf bag.

It couldn't be a parking ticket. He had nearly half an hour to run yet. He thought swiftly. A copper was bad.

Panic started to grip him. He fought down the impulse to return to the door. The candy stand was nearby and the girl might get curious. He walked to the room marked MEN, lit a cigarette, stared at his watch. It was grudgingly giving up the minutes. He paced back and forth. The minute hand gave up three numerals. Then five. He started for the door, returned abruptly to the sand-filled urn for cigarettes.

His fingers searched the sand, withdrew

a wire basket that made stub removal easy for the clean-up man. He buried the gun deep in the sand, replaced the wire trap, smoothed sand over carefully. Then he went to the front exit, checked the time again. There was two minutes remaining. Somewhere he thought he heard a siren, dismissed the thought hastily.

Barrish's fears flooded away in a tremendous wave of relief as he pushed the door aside. The motorcycle was gone. He took his first full breath in thirty minutes, walked jauntily to his car.

Heavy hands clamped him solidly on both sides, stopped him with his foot on the running board. "Okay, Mac," a voice breathed in his ear. "This is the law!"

The parking meter collector leaned his elbows on the rubber-tired, cylindrical money repository. "How about it, Ed?" he asked the leather-faced motorcycle patrolman. "Did they get the guy?"

"Yeah," the motorcycle man replied. "The inspectors were stashed out around the place and put the sleeve on him just as he was getting in his car."

"Whaddye suppose makes a guy pull a boot like that?" the collector asked deferentially. "You got a theory?"

The motorcycle policeman expanded in the warmth of superior knowledge. "Hot-shots," he answered scornfully, "are all alike. They are so busy playing smart they forget the little things. Take this guy for example; he had over a thousand bucks in his kick yet he was still beating twenty-six games and filching newspapers just to keep his hand in and prove to himself how smart he was. And it's always the little things that eight-bali 'em."

He scratched his five-o'clock shadow, then continued reflectively: "This hot-shot was from the East and he had to act big time and leave the stiff with a nickel doubled up in his fist. Only he was in a hurry and it wasn't a nickel—it was a slug. Aikens' girl, Aikens was the dead guy, came out back when she didn't hear the car start and she phoned the Hall. Homicide got right on the job and they were there when you called me over to tell me that you had a slugged parking meter. One slug would have been all right in either place. Two head a guy for the gas chamber. You see what I mean, Teddy? They always forget the simple little things. . . ."



## CHAPTER ONE

### Easy Money

**T**HE HOUSE was on lower Fifth, a big place with a canopy and a doorman who looked at me as if he wanted to tell me to use the tradesman's entrance. He was sweating through his nice blue uniform. I suppose they don't have a light-weight one for summer. I went in, across the thick carpet and over to the switchboard. The girl there was rasping her fingernails with one of those emery boards they use.

"Can you tell me if Jason Kent is in?"

*The play's the thing, Donovan believed, and you had to give a good performance—even though you were cast as the corpse!*

**By Shad  
Collins**



*When the lights came on I could  
see him, over by the desk . . .*

I asked her. "And if he is, what apartment has he?"

"Y'all want to see Mr. Kent?" she asked, holding her hand out and squinting at the nail to get the right perspective. Her voice was as thick as a Yazoo water. It was the summer when they were all talking like that.

"That was the idea," I said, patiently. "If you would be so kind."

"Who shall I say?"

"Donovan. Jack Donovan."

She plugged in and soon she was saying in that kind of careful voice they use for the inmates that a Mr. Jack Donovan was here and would Mr. Kent see him? Then she listened for a while, turned and gave me a look of appraisal like someone about to buy a horse and, before I could decide why, she was saying into the phone: "About six feet, red hair, blue eyes, maybe . . ." He must have cut her off there, because she turned and said "Apartment C, ninth floor," in her Scarlett O'Hara voice and went back to filing her nails.

A Filipino houseboy let me in and took me down the hall into a large room furnished with chairs in blonde wood, a lot of bookcases, and an elegant view of the Square. I sat in a chair and looked at the view. The bookcases I let alone. Then the Filipino brought me a drink and I turned my attention to that.

"Mister Kent will be in soon." The Filipino sang it to some accompaniment I couldn't hear and tiptoed out again. I sat there drinking the Scotch and wondering why Mister Kent was able to recognize me from the measly description of the switchboard girl. Or any description. I had never seen him in my life.

When he came in, though, I knew I was wrong. He was a tall guy, taller than me, rail thin, with hair that looked as if it might have been bleached to keep the gray out of it, and his face was that late collie type, the kind they have when they breed the nose slender and aristocratic so that it looks a little bit out of place on such a big frame. His eyebrows were a contradiction, though. They looked like the phony brows on some third-rate King Lear after he has been out in the storm. That was just about what he was now, although a few years earlier he had been quite a matinee idol.

"Mr. Donovan?" he asked, coming across

the room with his hand out friendly like.

"That's right," I said. His grip was cool and light and perfunctory. "How did you know me?"

He looked blank, so I went over some of it for him.

"When I came in downstairs," I said. "The switchboard girl described me for you before you decided it really was me and that I could come up. How did you recognize the description?"

"Oh that," he shrugged and smiled a little sourly. "I've been having a certain amount of trouble dodging a man who wants to see me. A former partner in the production of a play. It failed a year ago and this fellow has the idea that I owe him some money on it. I thought it might be he, so I asked the girl what my visitor looked like."

"Is that the job then? You think this guy might get tough with you and you want me to take him off you?"

He put back his head and laughed a short bell-ringing burst, like an opera singer.

"No," he said. "One doesn't anticipate any kind of trouble from a creature of that sort."

That's exactly the way he said it. I could imagine someone picking a caterpillar off a peach and distastefully dropping it underfoot. I got the idea that the whole business, the hiring of a private dick, me, was something distasteful and maybe boring, but that it didn't worry him too much. I just sat there and waited for the story. I get paid for that too. After a minute, he must have decided that I didn't have any more questions and got down to business.

"I sent you the letter asking you to come here, Mr. Donovan, because I have a task which must be handled in the greatest confidence and I did not want to air it in any way by taking it to one of the large investigating concerns."

He paused, got a cigarette out of a silver case and fitted it into a holder. A hell of a buildup that was, I thought, waiting while he lit it and inhaled with the gusto of a baby trying to swallow its milk bottle.

"You understand, Mr. Donovan, I had heard of you, and knew your, shall we say, capabilities. That you were a man of discretion. Thoroughly sound. Et cetera." He nodded solemnly. It sounded like the judge at a dog show and I wondered if he

were making some private joke out of it.

"Let's cut out all that crap and tell me what I'm here for," I said, and knew by his flash of anger that he had been serious about my capabilities and my discretion.

"Very well," he said. "I want you, as you say, to take a blackmailer off me."

"You were wrong about the big companies then," I said. "They've got all the equipment for it. Handling blackmail requires style. I'm the whole Donovan agency and I don't have style. None at all. You need an apparatus and a smart lawyer or two and dictaphones. Or else you hire a guy for a short job and he shoots the blackmailer in the head. I don't hire out on those jobs."

"You may be right," he said, depositing the cigarette ash carefully. "However, Mr. Donovan, you must allow me to be the judge. As you may or may not know, I am an actor of some importance on the stage. I am preparing for what I hope will be my most successful venture. In short, Mr. Donovan, I am going to Hollywood, and you know that in the highly moral atmosphere of the silver screen, one cannot allow the slightest hint of scandal to challenge one's good name. Caesar's wife, Mr. Donovan. Et cetra."

"It's a dame then," I said.

He nodded.

"Buy her off," I said. "Women blackmailers, nobody should try to handle."

"But she is not the blackmailer, Mr. Donovan. It is a case of some letters which she wrote to me and which are stolen. I've tried to buy them. After paying out a great deal of money, I have convinced myself that other tactics must be applied. I am willing to pay you your fee, whatever it is, plus several hundred dollars, if you are successful."

"How much is several hundred dollars?"

"Shall I say two hundred?"

"I'd like to hear you," I said. "Now let's start applying some tactics."

**W**E WENT around to see George Wayne, the blackmail guy, the next night. We rode up to his place in a cab at Jason Kent's expense, and all the way there I kept thinking I'd do better to get out and walk. It wasn't the kind of job I wanted at all. But I needed the money pretty bad.

"It's an awfully lousy gag," I said. "Suppose he doesn't fall for it? He can go and get his gun and give us a very bad time and be right in the clear. He could have us for breaking and entering, attempted robbery, barratry and piracy."

"Mr. Wayne is going to be so frightened he won't do anything but tremble," Kent said.

"Me too," I said. "I hope he doesn't notice."

"You don't sound like the conventional investigator, Mr. Donovan."

"I'm very unconventional," I said. "You sure he'll have that money and that the letters will be there?"

"I sent the money by messenger an hour ago. It's too late for him to bank it. The letters, I am sure, are in his safe. If not, he will have to get them for us."

"I hope he sees it that way."

"Are you worried?"

"Just scared," I said, and about that time we pulled up under another canopy and another doorman loped over to let us out.

Kent went across the lobby like he was out front to take a curtain call. I tagged along behind him and the elevator took us into its mechanical maw and spewed us out on the fifteenth floor. We went down the corridor and he pushed a buzzer. I kept back against the wall so that Mr. George Wayne, blackmailer, would not be able to see that there were two of us. In a couple of minutes there was a click and I knew that someone was looking through the eye port in the door.

"What do you want?" the guy asked. He had a whine in his voice. He didn't sound very tough. Maybe Kent was right that the guy was scared of his shadow and maybe our simple-minded scheme would work. Or maybe he just had sinus.

"I am not soliciting funds for charity, George," Kent said venomously. "Will you let me in?"

"You alone?"

"Did you think I would bring a police sergeant named Donovan?"

"Not so damn loud," the voice whined. "Come in then."

I went through right on Kent's heels and found myself looking at a guy of about fifty, a stooped-over guy with white hair who looked like he had been through the mill and who might have looked distin-

guished except for his eyes. They were colorless and about as expressive as those of a dead fish. He just stood there and gaped at me, and before he had a chance to speak, I ran my hands over him looking for a gun. He didn't have any. A very trusting kind of blackmailer.

"What's this . . . what's this?" he stut-tered.

"Retribution," Kent said rolling the "r" and giving it all he had. He sounded like the sheriff saving Little Nell from the villain. I made a pass at my lapel as if I had a buzzer.

"Mr. Kent wasn't kidding," I said. "I'm Donovan. There's a law in this state against blackmail. Did you know? They can put you away a long, long time for tricks like that."

He tried denying it. "Preposterous," he bleated. "Preposterous." He kept saying it over and over like it was the only word he knew. He looked like a man in shock.

"We want the money," I said. "The money Mr. Kent sent by messenger about an hour ago. You may not know it, but those bills were marked, and we have a transcript of your conversation with Mr. Kent a couple of days ago. We got you down like a rug on the floor."

I wasn't lying about the bills. We had marked several of them, but the stuff about the conversation was pure malarkey. He wasn't in a mood to argue, though.

"See here, George," Kent said impatiently. "It won't do you any good to gape and gasp like a gaffed fish. I can have you sent to prison and the key thrown away. However, I'm inclined to be lenient. Give me back the money and the letters and I am willing to call it quits. Mr. Donovan is a good friend and I have asked him to withhold official action. Do you understand? Now, George, the money and the letters."

Wayne made a kind of automatic pass at his pocket. I beat him to it and pulled out the wallet. I opened it, riffling the bills quickly, and tossed the thing to Kent. He calmly took out the money and went through it, turning to the light to see better. He gave the wallet back to Wayne and held out several hundred dollar notes.

"You will notice the markings, gentlemen," he said. We noticed them. "I have taken only what is mine," he said. "Now let us go into the library and get the let-

ters." He led the way and Wayne followed. The library was probably only a second bedroom which had been fitted up with a desk and a small safe and even a couple of bookcases. There was a clock on the desk and I noticed that it was almost 10:00 P.M.

"The safe, George," Kent said imperiously. He seemed to be getting a kick out of it. Wayne swung the safe door open, and Kent pushed him out of the way and dug into it. He came out with a double handful of letters and paper. "Now," he said. "If you will excuse me a moment . . ." and calmly sat down at the desk and started going through them.

"I'll finish you for this, Kent," Wayne said in a trembling voice. "You fool, I'll fix you for this for keeps now. You damned robber." It was a fine ethical speech for a blackmailer. Kent looked up absent-mindedly and waved his hand in a stagey gesture. He still had his gloves on and was as unruffled as if he were in his own apartment.

"Sticks and stones, George," he said soothingly. "Sticks and stones, et cetera."

Wayne turned blindly toward the door and I followed him back into the living room. "How can you . . ." he said. "How can you help him in a thing like this?"

"Duty," I said, hoping I made it sound like the stern daughter of the voice of God. He sat down on the chair and put his face in his hands and I sat down and got out a cigarette. It was hot in there. The apartment was surprisingly small and cheap looking. I'd have expected a good blackmail artist would have a fancier place.

After a while I heard the safe clang shut and Kent came out. He was almost purring. There were a number of letters in a rubber band in his hand. He waved the letters at Wayne.

"I have my property," he said. "I shall burn them tonight. And now, George, I think we will bid you good evening."

"I am going to see my lawyer in the morning," Wayne said. "I'm not going to let you do this to me."

"Excellent," Kent said. "See several lawyers. Meanwhile, I have the letters and evidence that you are a blackmailer. See several lawyers while you are about it, George." We took our loot and left.

We rode downtown in a cab. Kent was pleased and kept slapping his gloved hands



together like he was his own private claque.

"Perhaps you'd like to have a drink, Mr. Donovan," he said. "On a hot summer night, it is just the thing before going to bed."

"It's not my bed time," I said. "But I don't need any excuses to take a drink if I want one."

About an hour later we were still sitting at a sidewalk table at the Brevoort drinking Mexican beer which he liked and discussing the world and my relation to it, and the theory of the private agency. I kept waiting for him to break out my dough so I could get out of there. With that much money, there were still a lot of things I could do with the night. But he wanted to talk.

"An excellent evening's work," he said for the fourth time. Now that it was over, he seemed to be getting excited over it.

"If there's no kickback," I said. "Wayne behaved nice. But I hope he doesn't go to that lawyer. I don't like lawyers. And if he should ever find out who the hell I am, he could have my tail for impersonating a cop, piracy, robbery . . ."

"And barratry," he said. "Don't forget barratry. He won't find out. He hasn't got anything to go to a lawyer about."

"Fine," I said. "Fine." I finished my beer and we had another and kept on shooting it. Finally he picked up his gloves and said what time is it and it was ten forty-five.

"I have an appointment," he said. "It has been very pleasant working with you, Mr. Donovan. I hope I never have the occasion to require your services again."

"Just keep your nose clean," I said.

"That sounds familiar," he said, cocking his head, the fabulous eyebrows jacked up

like a proofreader's carets over his eyes. "Isn't that from Act Two, Scene Three, of *Hamlet*?"

"There's another bit of Shakespeare I do better," I said. "It goes: 'Get money in thy purse'."

"How clumsy of me," he said and whipped out his wallet.

He handed across a couple of C notes. I took them and looked at them and stuck them in my pocket.

"Those aren't marked," he said smiling.

I didn't know what to answer to that, so I just watched him while he turned away and went across the street. I was still following him with my eyes when he reached his apartment house on the other side. He turned and waved slightly and ducked inside. I finished my beer and got out of there with my two hundred dollars. It was the easiest money I had ever made. That's what I thought then.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Head in My Hand

WHEN I got the papers next morning, George Wayne was on the front page. There was a picture of him in his library. It was a good picture for the kind it was—very lifelike, as the saying goes. The only thing wrong with it was that when it was taken, Wayne had a knife in his back. It gave me an unhappy feeling, but I told myself that it was only one of the ills that blackmailers are heir to, so I went down to the office trying to think like an optimist. When I got there the phone was ringing. It was Kent. He had been reading the papers too, and he



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was upset; he even sounded excited. He wanted to know what I thought about it.

"I don't think anything, yet," I said. "The police fix the time of the murder at a little after ten. That leaves us out of it. Anyway, they don't know we were there."

"They may have fingerprints."

I knew they might. "Did you keep those gloves on all the time?" I asked him.

"Gloves? Why yes, I believe I did. And you?"

"I don't wear gloves," I said sourly. "But I don't think I touched anything."

"We're all right then?"

"I hope so," I said. "The place is probably full of prints anyway, old ones. You got any idea who might have done it?"

"Well," he said and I could almost feel him shrugging. "I suppose in a case like this, it might have been anybody. I mean, there must have been others who were being blackmailed."

"You know any of them?"

"Not one." He said it so promptly, I wondered if he were lying.

"Well, the best thing we can do is stay far, far away from there and let the cops handle it," I said.

At noon, when the papers came out, that looked like good advice. At that time the cops had definitely settled for ten-fifteen as the time the murder had been done. What made it definite was a clock which had been knocked from the desk when Wayne fell across it. It had got smashed at just ten-fifteen. So that left Kent and me out in the clear. We had been drinking Mexican beer at the Brevoort at ten-fifteen. The cops had decided that robbery was the motive for Wayne's murder and the case seemed washed up.

It turned out that Wayne was an exemplary citizen, that he had played around in the stock market at one time, had once owned a small string of ponies, had made a cleanup several years earlier backing a Broadway musical and that he was currently in business with one Joseph Maroni, apparently a sane and settled business man. It didn't say what the business was. It looked like the whole thing had blown over. I closed the office and took the day off.

By mid-afternoon everything was different. By then Wayne was supposed to be a boss gambler and they had turned up an estranged wife for him. Her picture was

there and she was pretty. They had Mr. Maroni, who was now revealed to be Mr. Beans Moran, a guy high in circles of the Bath Beach mob. They had an Ann Boothby, ex-Broadway star, who had sometimes been seen with Wayne and who, they hinted, might be a blackmail victim. They had one or two others connected with it, but they didn't have Kent. Last of all, they had the prints of one Jack Donovan, a "so-called" private detective.

When I read that, I called Kent and told him what I had to do. Then I went back to the office. They were there, waiting for me.

"For cripes sake," I said. "Are you guys the only ones left on the force? Every time they want me down at that crummy station, they send you. Can't they get somebody else for the job?"

The big guy looked hurt, grunted like a tired bear and shook his head sadly. The little one just grunted. "They want you," the big guy said. "They want you down there . . ." He waved his hand vaguely.

"The station, they want you at the station," the little guy said in a sudden burst of confidence. The big one grunted and nodded his head as if proud of the other.

"Come on along, Red," he said as if it were a personal invitation. "We'll take you down." I got into the police car and the big guy wedged himself under the wheel. He started the motor and then took off his cap and mopped his forehead, sighing. "Sure is hot," the little one said, right on cue. We went down to the station.

When I got down there, the lieutenant and Larson were all set for me. I had tangled with Larson before, and it hadn't been nice. He was a big porky guy with white hair and a pale face with a snowman's eyes. The lieutenant was one of those good-looking old men you might take for an ambassador.

"The tramp dick," Larson said. "Whose throat have you been cutting now?"

"I thought I had been putting chivs in peoples' backs. If you haven't got that straightened out, I'll go back to my office and wait till you get around to me."

"Sit down, Donovan," the lieutenant said. "We just want to ask a few questions. Smoke? Now, where were you at ten-fifteen last night?" It was just as casual and quick as that. I had expected them to

build up to it. I felt like laughing aloud.

"At ten-fifteen last night I was drinking Mexican beer at a place called the Brevoort on Fifth Avenue, with Jason Kent. Call him and check." I said it like I was reciting a poem and went on to the next stanza. "At a quarter after eleven, or a couple of minutes later, I left, crossed Washington Square, and proceeded to an establishment known as Carter's. I arrived there at approximately eleven-thirty and remained until they ran out of jazz. About two A.M. Ask the barkeep."

"Damn you, we just got your prints!" Larson yelled. Giving him the alibi was like spitting in an open wound.

"How many more prints have you got? Wayne had a lot of company." I was guessing about it, but I was right. Larson let that go and took another tack.

"According to the medical report, Wayne died between ten and eleven-thirty," he said. "You could have stopped off there on your way."

"I could have," I said. "But Wayne was killed at ten-fifteen."

"Was he?" the lieutenant asked.

"It's your story."

"All right," he said. "You went to Wayne's. Why?"

"I owed him some dough. Horses," I said, seeing Larson jump for it.

"You mean Wayne was a bookie?"

"Hell no. Don't the papers say he was running the racket? It was a private bet."

"You keep lousy company," Larson said.

"I can't always choose my companions," I said piously.

"Know if Wayne had any special enemies?"

"I do not."

After a little more of that, they decided it just wasn't their day and let me go. I went back down to the office and sat down and tried to think. I wasn't comfortable, being in the middle of it like that. As long as they stuck to ten-fifteen as the time of the murder, I was all right. That ten-fifteen looked very scientific and exact in the papers, but I figured if the cops couldn't find somebody to fit it, maybe they would get to thinking they could change the time to fit somebody.

I called Kent and told him what had happened and that he was still out of it and on his own. He made grateful sounds over

the wire. I hung up and after a while the phone rang. It was a woman who said she was Mrs. Wayne and that she had talked to the police about me and that since they had decided I wasn't the murderer, maybe, since I had known Wayne, I would take a job for her on the case. If so, would I come around and see her tonight.

SINCE I was back on the case again, I decided I'd better find out something about Wayne and his crowd. I went over to Broadway and looked up a small-time gambler I knew. Ben wasn't the guy who fixed the series that year. He wasn't the kind of guy who could fix a game of marbles in a vacant lot. As a gambler he just didn't have it, but if he had started writing a gossip column he would have made Sam Pepys sound like a harmless, gossipy old woman. Or else he would have got killed right off the bat. He did get killed, later on, for passing on some dope that nobody wanted remembered, but when I saw him that day he looked healthy enough, except maybe a little hungry. I bought him a steak and had a beer and we talked. After a while I got the conversation around to Wayne.

"Wayne's old lady is going to like this," he said in his thin screeching voice. "She won't be in mourning very long."

"How's that?" I asked. "I knew they were separated, but I didn't know she had any beef with him."

"Wants to get a divorce," he said chewing. "She's set to take on somebody else. But Wayne don't want to let her go. Didn't, that is. Now she don't need the divorce and she gets all Wayne's jack besides. Some people is lucky."

"Did Wayne have real dough?"

"I don't know. Three, four years ago he had some good horses. I don't know if he had any left. Bellaire—you remember that nag?—he bust a leg after that one year he had. That year, though, he sure made a lot of dough that year. Some of it mine, goddamn. Every time I bet on him, he loses. He don't have no luck for me."

"Wayne might have lost the dough by this time. Especially if he gambled."

"Playing the market is gambling, isn't it? He played. I don't think he lost, though. There was a story Wayne had a hook-up with a mob, but I don't think so."

"What about this Moran or Maroni?"

"Business, Red, strictly business. Maroni has got some dough to invest, so he puts it in a show. Some big sure-thing musical. Wayne handles it for him because Maroni's name ain't so fragrant. Even that Italian moniker he takes don't change the smell. I hear Wayne made a killing in one of them things too, last year. He's somebody's silent partner, I hear, and makes a fortune. Then I hear it the other way: he loses a hundred grand."

"Maybe both," I said. "It changes fast in that racket."

"I hear Wayne was a wolf," I said, having heard nothing of the kind.

He shook his head. "He got around a little. He wasn't shy. There was a story about this Boothby dame, but I don't think she ever went for him. There was Anny Cary. Remember her? She used to know him until she met Tony Fanta. When he got deported, she went along. That's love," he said.

"Love or Tony's money," I said. "You think maybe Wayne could have lost some of Maroni's money? Maybe got playing with it like it was his own, or maybe a bad investment? That money you say he lost on a production . . ."

"I don't know if he lost it. If he did, I don't know if it was his or Maroni's. I ain't going to try to find out, Red. I don't think you better try to find out either. Jeez, Donovan, that would give Maroni a nice reason to knock Wayne off."

"Not so good," I said. "He wouldn't get his money back."

"You think Wayne's the only one he's doing business through? All he's got to do is let the word get around that Maroni is easy, that it's safe to take his dough, and then where is he? What gambler can do business like that if he's a big gambler? Uh-uh. Wayne would have to pay one way or another and I don't want to talk about it."

"You got sense, Ben," a voice said. "You got more sense than your red-headed friend."

I had seen them when I came into the place, a couple of big slick-looking articles. They were dressed like stock brokers and as soon as that one spoke, I knew they were and that Maroni or Moran or whoever he was really had the power and the glory.

When the mobsters begin to look like United Nations representatives, you know they are hooked up with something big and hard.

"I've got sense, too," I said. "My friend and I were talking about the Wayne killing and Moran's name just happened to come up."

"Was that how it was?" the one in the bow tie said. "See, that's how it was, Bill. Red's a good guy, Bill. Take it easy. The name just came up."

"It came up too often," Bill said. "Stay out of this, Joe. I ought to cool this monkey."

"Easy now," Joe said. "Red's O.K. Take it easy."

"I'll send him out of here with his teeth in his pocket."

"Easy, for cripes sake."

It was the damndest routine. It went on like that with Bill getting madder and Joe getting nicer by the second.

"You just want to talk fight, or you want to do something about it?" I asked.

Bill shut up and stared at me uncertainly. Then he turned to Joe. "He's been yakin' me," he whined. "Take the lug off me."

Then it was Joe's turn to get cute. "Maybe the boss should see him," he said.

"Swell," I said. "That's just the guy I want to see." I got up, watching poor little Ben who was sitting there with his mouth open. He was scared. He was going to have a hard time digesting that steak.

We found Maroni in his uptown office—the back of a bar on Broadway. It was a big bar and a good one, with a prizefighter's name on it, but it really belonged to Maroni. He was sitting behind a desk in a handsome cheerful office, looking like an executive. I had never seen him before, but he wasn't what I expected. For one thing he didn't look like either an Irishman or an Italian. Maybe Moran was just another phony name like Maroni. He was blond and thin and he wore gold-rimmed glasses and he was middle-aged. That told me something. If you ever notice, the big wheels among crooks are usually young punks, plenty tough and not shy with the gun but without many brains, or else they are old soft-looking guys who have plenty of the grey stuff, but who probably couldn't kill a fly without having one of their hoods there with a tommygun. You either get to the top by shooting your way in, and you have

to be young and foolish for that, in which case you get dumped, yourself, very soon. Or else you work your way up by outliving everybody else. Maroni was an exception, and exceptions are always nasty people. He looked like a college professor, with his blond hair and eye glasses.

"Hello, Mr. Moran," I said.

"Maroni." he said. "Maroni. Did I want to see you?" His voice was a little too sweet, like maybe he could sing soprano.

"We brought him in, boss," Joe said. "He was makin' free with your name, so we brought him in. He's a lousy private eye."

Maroni sighed a little tiredly. "If you're going to start bringing in every citizen who takes my name in vain, you won't have time for anything else. I suppose you have a name?"

"Donovan," I said. "I wanted to come anyway." I set myself and came out with it flatfooted as if I weren't scared as a rookie. "I wanted to ask you a question. When your boys came along, I was wondering if maybe this guy Wayne who got killed last night had lost any of your dough for you."

He smoothed back his blond hair. "Wayne did not lose any money for me," he said. "Does that answer your question?"

"I don't know," I said. "I was thinking that if he had, it would give you a good reason for having him dumped."

"You talk yourself into a tight corner," he said. "If I had killed Wayne, what do you think I'd do next?"

"Probably nothing," I said, trying to sound as if I believed it. "You couldn't afford to do anything to me here. Since I can't tie you to the murder, it wouldn't be worth dropping me into the river. You've probably got six alibis for the time Wayne

was killed. You wouldn't do anything."

"One alibi," he said. "Only one. I was at my house on Long Island all day yesterday. But you don't reason well, Donovan. I could be annoyed at you. I could be very much annoyed."

I hoped he wasn't. The way he said it made it sound like he was considering dropping me into a cement mixer. He picked up the paper knife on his desk and held it delicately between his forefingers.

"Whom are you working for, Donovan?" he asked softly. "Henry?"

"Henry who?" I asked.

"We mustn't have secrets between us, Donovan."

"All right," I said. "I'm working for a lady. Now guess who."

That interested him. He put the paper knife down and looked at it for a moment.

"I wouldn't have to guess," he said, matter-of-factly. "I could have it taken out of you."

He looked at me without any venom at all and I could feel the marrow in my bones going down to freezing point. He could make it an awfully tight corner if he wanted to. I concentrated on looking hard at the bridge of his nose while the bones inside me were running through me as cold as the freeze solution pipes in an ice plant. Then he shrugged and dropped his eyes.

"I think that will be all," he said. "Show Mr. Donovan out, will you?" He went back to reading his mail.

We went out the back way and into an alley. "You shouldn't annoy the boss," Bill said in a hurt tone. "He's just a nosey damn Hoople," Joe said. "I got a good mind to belt him around a couple."

"Take it easy," Bill said. "He didn't



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mean bad." They had got their parts mixed, I guess. Joe was playing the tough one this time.

"If you'll just give me back the gun you took off me when we went in, I'll stop annoying you girls," I said. Their act didn't amuse me any more. They just sounded like a couple of dumb hoods, not even tough.

"Sure," Bill said. "We didn't mean nothing by takin' it."

He handed across the flat .38 automatic and I stuck it in my shoulder holster. While I had my right arm under my coat like that, Joe put his arms around me from behind, holding me so I couldn't move and Bill hit me as hard as he could where the breast bone ends. It was like putting in a knife. It paralyzed me. I couldn't breathe. I started to jackknife, but Joe held me straight and Bill hit me again in the same place and then twice lower down on the belly, hammering away methodically as if he were punching a bag.

When Joe let go, I dropped onto the dirty brick of the alley.

Bill kicked me once, his toe glancing off my ribs.

"Don't kick him, Bill," Joe said. He was back in character again. "He ain't a bad guy."

"I'll kill the lousy tramp," Bill said. "If he comes nosin' around any more, I'll drop him."

He stood back and dusted his hands neatly.

"Take it easy," Joe said. Then they went in through the door and I could hear the bolt click inside. I was still trying to breathe with my insides full of broken glass. I was biting the air like a dog. Finally I was able to get a lungful and just when I should have felt better, my stomach turned over and I started to vomit. When I got done with that I got to my hands and knees and finally to my feet and staggered down the alley.

At the end of it, there was a big fancy car with a little crest on the door and the letters PM in delicate script under it. A chauffeur was polishing the shiny door of Mr. Peter Maroni's Cad. He glanced at me and then went back to his work. Maybe he was used to seeing his bosses' visitors come staggering out of that alley carrying their heads in their hands.

## CHAPTER THREE

### "You Need A Lawyer—"

I WENT into the nearest bar and had a couple of quick ones and pretty soon I began to feel almost human again. I thought about Moran-Maroni and wondered if the beating was a delicate way of telling me to lay off or if it was just a free one on Joe and Bill. I decided to do what I could to check Maroni's alibi so I called his Long Island place and a rusty-voiced character who claimed he was the butler said Mr. Maroni had been at home yesterday. It didn't really prove anything. I called up Ben after that and asked him about Henry.

"Henry who?" he asked just as I had. I told him how it had come up.

"Must be Ray Henry," he said. "That's the guy Mrs. Wayne wants to marry."

"Look," I said. "Do you know if Maroni was in town last night?"

"I saw him in the afternoon," he said. "Look, Red, you gotta lay off Maroni. Or anyway, don't bring me in on it. I want to live long and do well."

"All right," I said. "But here's one for you. Can you dig up any stuff on that money Wayne was supposed to have lost? If it was Maroni's dough, then we got a nice motive. And I already know that half of his alibi is phony."

"How do you know?"

"You just told me."

"I won't swear to a damn thing," he said. Then: "How much is in it?"

"Maybe a couple of hundred," I said. "It depends on how good it is."

"Where'll I see you?"

"I'm going around to see Mrs. Wayne. After that, I'll be at home. You could call me at either place. Okay?"

He said it was okay, and hung up. I had a couple more drinks and began to get hungry and ordered some supper. When I got it, I couldn't eat it, and after a while I gave up and went out of there. I started walking up toward the Fulton Theatre. I wanted to see this Boothby woman before I went around to Mrs. Wayne.

The billboards at the front of the theatre told me that they were playing something about a murder in a burlesque theatre. I didn't see any corpses in the picture, but there were a lot of chorines wearing feathers

and in the middle of them was a larger picture of a big blonde. She was wearing a winning smile and a couple of patches of what looked like black tape. Under the picture was her name. I figured I wouldn't have any trouble recognizing Miss Boothby in that costume. I went down the alley of the theatre and through the stage door, convincing the civil war veteran who was guarding it that I had legitimate business, and got the directions to her dressing room. Someone said, "Come in" when I knocked.

She was there in front of the dressing table, all eight feet of her, just as blonde as she was in the picture. She didn't have the winning smile when she saw me. She was putting a duco job on her lips and she gave me a long cold stare, sinking it in like a banderilla. I told her who I was and it didn't move her.

"I'm working on the Wayne murder," I said.

"I only know what I read in the papers," she said. "You'll find the door behind you, Mr. Donovan. Will you walk out or be thrown out?"

I got a chair and sat down. "There is a story about you and Wayne," I said. "You were supposed to be hooked up with him once."

I don't know what she had expected me to ask, but it wasn't that. She relaxed, went back to her makeup and forgot about having me thrown out. "If you really want a collection of those stories, Donovan, you will probably find that, at one time or another, I am supposed to have been the mistress of every second man in town. That's hardly possible, is it?"

"Not even if you were twins," I admitted. She sounded as if she were telling the truth, but that is only an ability which everyone achieves from perpetual lying.

"The newspapers say you were seen with Wayne—frequently is the way they put it."

"I was in a play which he helped back a couple of years ago. Naturally I was seen with him now and then."

"Did Wayne make money out of the play?"

"I suppose so. It was a success, of course. Wayne only had a piece of it. He was a kind of silent partner."

I thought that over for a while. "Was that because he was using Maroni's money?"

She got hostile again. "I don't know whose money it was," she said. "I thought it was his own. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to get into my costume."

"Go right ahead," I told her.

"Will you get out, damn you, or shall I have you thrown out?"

"Let's talk about blackmail first," I said.

"What about it?"

"The papers say Wayne was taking you for something."

Again I got the feeling that the tension had been broken. She got up and went around behind a screen and started to change. "The papers," she said, "are only the most readily available source of misinformation."

"You know Kent?" I asked. She nodded.

"Wayne was bleeding him," I said.

"With Kent's reputation, that would be hard. What did Wayne have him for? Murder?"

"He was going to Hollywood. He couldn't afford bad publicity."

"That ham?" She burst into a genuine laugh, a clear girlish peal like a handful of bell notes. While she was in the middle of it, I gave her the full clip. "Wayne had those letters of yours," I said. "But Kent has them now. I think you'd better talk to me about them." That cancelled the laughter and she was scared, enough so I knew I had been right, that Wayne had been blackmailing her. After the fear came cunning.

"You're lying," she said.

I shook my head. "Kent has them," I said again.

"Then he must have killed Wayne," she said. "He'd have to kill him to get them."

"Uh-uh," I said. "Kent and I got the letters from Wayne. But we didn't kill him. In fact, we were drinking beer at the time the police say he was killed, so Kent is out. But it doesn't leave you out."

"Don't be a fool," she said. "I didn't leave the theatre until almost eleven."

"All right," I said. "But the letters give you a lovely motive. Better make sure that alibi holds." I got up and put on my hat.

"Wait," she said. She came out from behind the fence like a stripper on a runway. "What do you want? I'll buy the letters."

"Fine," I sneered. "What'll you give besides money? I'm not peddling the damn

things. I think you had better see Kent."

"Damn him, why didn't he destroy them instead of letting Wayne get his hands on them?"

"You'd better ask him. When did this little entente between you and Kent break up?"

"About three years ago. Look, Red," she put her hand on my arm and started plucking my sleeve. "Could you get the letters if Kent still has them? Steal them or buy them. I'd pay you for it."

"You've got the wrong department. I'm a dick, not a crook."

"Please," she said. "I've got to have those letters. I can't let this story get around. It'd kill me. I've got to stop it. Get those letters and you can write your own check." She ran her hand along my arm and turned on all her personal lights and that was plenty. I kept trying to look over her head, which is hard to do with someone as tall as you are.

"I got my own troubles," I said. "I'm working for someone else. Kent probably destroyed the letters already."

"Keep me out of it," she said, almost pleading. "Keep me out of it."

"You better figure a way to keep out of it yourself." I walked through the cloud of her perfume and went out, a little bit groggy but still an honest man.

**I** DUG UP one of the stage hands and had a little talk with him before I went out and down the alley. At the mouth of the alley, just as in a recurring dream, was Mr. Maroni's big limousine. The chauffeur had done a swell job of polishing it, but now he was sitting behind the wheel with a cigarette in his mouth and a comic book in his hands. He had the dome light on to read by and he didn't give me a tumble. I thought it was funny, his being there. A couple of blocks farther on I discovered I was being tailed and it wasn't funny any longer. I went into a bar and had a drink. When my shadow came in, I got a good look at him. He looked as much like a cop as a crook.

After a while I went into the men's room and sat down on a lounging chair and waited. It was ten minutes before he got worried enough to wonder if maybe I had slipped out some way. When he came back in there I stepped out and let him have the

flat of the gun while he had his back turned. Then I put him on the stool, leaned him against the partition so he wouldn't fall, closed the door on him and went out. I was going to be late for my appointment.

On the way over I tried to unravel what I thought I knew. As far as Maroni was concerned, there was nothing but a rumor that he had been in deals with Wayne and that Wayne might have taken him in some way. He had an alibi which was phony—Ben had seen him in town although the guy had claimed he had been at home all day. I liked Maroni for the job, but they couldn't touch him on what I had.

The Boothby woman had seemed out of it until I had talked with the stage hand. There was a hole at the end of the second act and the beginning of the third when she wasn't on stage. It would be cutting it pretty close, but she would have had time to make it down to Wayne's, put the knife into him and get back—if she had hurried, which, if she had done it, she probably would. I couldn't figure those letters. Her reputation was the kind where another story wouldn't hurt it, and if she had been getting away with it all those years, it wouldn't do her career any harm. Just the same, she was desperate to get those letters and to keep the story of her affair with Kent a secret. She even wanted to throw him to the lions. And where did Maroni fit into it? He wouldn't give his fancy car to some thug to tail me with. He might as well give him a fire engine. Or maybe Maroni just loved the theatre and had come down for the show. I was still batting them around without much success when I got to Mrs. Wayne's place.

It was at Twenty-first on the East Side, an unpretentious looking house. The apartment was small but nicely furnished and so was Mrs. Wayne. She was a very small woman, almost tiny, slender and perfectly formed. She looked as if she might be Spanish or Italian. When she smiled she looked like a kid of seventeen; the flash of white teeth was sudden and joyful and dramatic against the olive skin and the black straight hair.

"Mr. Donovan?" she asked, with a trace of accent. "Won't you come in?"

I walked into the small living room, surprised to find Kent there. With him was another man, slender with iron grey hair



and tired eyes. He was about medium height and slightly stooped. Mrs. Wayne introduced him as Ray Henry. The hand he gave me to shake was cool and impersonal, but strong.

"Are you in this, too?" I asked him. "The cops been to see you?"

He nodded his head wearily. "I just left them," he said. "They seem to think I might have had a good reason for killing Wayne."

"Didn't you?"

He nodded. "I had reason enough," he said. "Both Connie and I. I . . ." he flushed slightly. "I have a certain professional and social status and Wayne was threatening to turn any divorce proceedings which Connie might start into a three-ring circus. Oh, I had reason enough to want him dead. However, I didn't kill him. The police, I hope, are convincing themselves of that."

"How are they convincing themselves?" I asked. "You got an alibi?"

"Part of one. I was at my club most of the evening. However, it's the kind of place where people drift in and out. The police are being very stuffy on that subject. They point out that it would have been quite easy for me to have left for a half hour or so without its being noticed."

"Cops can be like that," I said. I turned to Mrs. Wayne. She was sitting on a hassock in front of the imitation fireplace looking more like a kid than ever. "How about you?" I asked. "You got ten witnesses to prove you were here all evening?"

She shook her head soberly, looking at me out of black eyes that seemed as big as two-bit pieces. "I have one witness," she said. "At eleven o'clock, or maybe a couple of minutes after, I went downstairs for a paper. I saw the man across the hall. The police have talked with him. But . . ." She shrugged her shoulders.

"But they want to know if you were here at ten-fifteen," I finished for her. "And since you were here alone, you can't prove it. That it?" She nodded. "Were you here at ten-fifteen?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, nodding her head vigorously. "I was here," she repeated. The big black eyes looked at me piteously, then broke and wavered. My God, I thought, even if she's telling the truth, she's certainly doing a lousy job of it.

"Well," I said. "The burden of proof is on the cops. If you can't prove you were here, at least they can't prove you weren't. Meanwhile, we might turn up something that will take them off you."

"You have some . . . angles?" Kent asked. It was the first time he had spoken and he picked up the word between his gloved fingers and dropped it on the carpet in front of us like a piece of lint from his jacket.

"A couple," I said.

"Ah," he said, leaning forward with his mouth open and his shaggy eyebrows cocked like foxy grandpa. When I didn't specify, he cancelled the attitude of attention and leaned back. "Mr. Donovan is very capable," he informed the others. "I recommended you to Constanca," he said looking at me.

"Fine," I said. "But since Mrs. Wayne is my client, how about the two of you going around the corner for a drink and letting me talk to her?"

Kent put the tent poles under his eyebrows again. "As a good friend of Constanca," he said, "I merely felt I might be of some assistance." He thumped on the floor twice with his cane and stood up. As if on cue, the phone rang. Kent picked it up and said "Mrs. Wayne's apartment" and then recoiled from the chatter that came over the wire.

"Do you know a Mr. Ben Johnson or Jensen and if so do you wish to speak to him?" he asked, turning to me.

"Jensen," I said, "and I do."

"Extraordinary voice," Kent said, shaking his head in wonderment. "Like a car skidding in loose gravel."

It did sound like that, but what Ben had to say was sweet music. He was almost hysterical with it. "You know that business about Wayne losing some of Maroni's dough? You were hot, all right. Wayne took him for it. Invested it and lost it on some show he was backing without Maroni knowing. I got it straight. I don't know what show, but I'll get that for you."

"Swell," I said. "Get that and I'll see you get a bonus."

"That ain't all," he said. "There's a woman angle that's even hotter. I got to check on that. Jeez, Red, I got this cracked for you, I think. We can put Maroni in town at the time of the killing. Look, I

gotta see you. I picked up a tail tonight, but I lost him. I don't like that, Red."

"Yeah," I said. "I had one too. You better get over to your flop and let me come and see you there. I don't want you picked up before you give me this. Where do you live?"

He gave it to me and I wrote it in my little book. "Ashmore Hotel, Room 647. That right?" I asked.

"Right," he said. "Get over here fast, Red. I want to wind this up. I don't like being in this business with Maroni wandering around loose."

"He won't be for long," I said. "I'll be there as soon as I can."

I hung up. "Looks like things are breaking," I told Mrs. Wayne. "I just got some information on Maroni. You know of any deal where your husband lost a lot of jack backing a play?"

"I don't know of any," she said. "We were separated over a year."

"Well, Ben's got it for me."

The other two started to leave. "Can't Ray stay here?" she asked.

I shrugged my shoulders. "Okay, if you want him."

Kent went on out, and just as I started to ask her about Wayne's personal life, he stuck his head back in, wagged his eyebrows and said he wanted to speak to me. I went out in the hall.

"Donovan," he said, leaning his fence-rail frame against the wall. "Perhaps you think I came over here this evening out of morbid curiosity. As a matter of fact, I wanted to speak to you. Constanica is really in trouble. I went to the bother of checking her alibi myself after she told me. The elevator operator over at Wayne's apartment house says he saw her there at around eleven last night."

"For God's sake," I said. "She was seen here at eleven."

"Wayne's place is only a few blocks away. If she took a cab—you see? There wouldn't be more than a couple of minutes difference, either way."

"But Wayne wasn't killed at eleven."

"I'm not saying she killed him. However, if she did, she could very well have remained there from ten-fifteen until around eleven."

"Do the police know this?"

"Of course I said nothing to them."

"They'll get to it. Either the elevator guy will remember what you asked him or the cop swill get to it while they're turning up the stones. God damn it, why did you have to play detective? You're in it now yourself."

"I was attempting to help Constanica," he said, looking noble.

"For God's sake, go home and sleep it off," I said disgustedly.

Henry was pouring a drink when I came back into the room and she was curled up on the lounge, looking very pretty and innocent. Well, I thought, if they stick her for it, at least the jury will go easy, once they get a look at her.

"Look," I said. "There were a lot of things I wanted to ask you, but there isn't time. Kent just told me the elevator operator at Wayne's place saw you there last night and remembered you. The cops will be around any time now, tonight or tomorrow or the next day, but they'll be here."

She started to cry softly to herself, rocking herself in her arms in the big lounge. She looked so pretty and miserable it hurt me to go on, but I had to.

"You need a lawyer more than you need me," I said. "At least now. Henry here can get one for you and then you better get a story ready for the police. I'll see what Ben has got for me. If it's enough, I'll give it to the cops and maybe they'll take the heat off you. But you've got to figure on being pulled in. Get a story and stick to it, or don't say anything. Okay?"

"I didn't," she said. "I didn't kill him."

"So much the better," I said. "Just stick to that."

I got my hat and took off down the stairs without waiting for the elevator. I went up the street and flagged a cab at the corner. In the first block on our way uptown, a police car whipped past us and turned into Twenty-first Street. If that was the Black Maria come around for Connie Wayne, the cops were certainly breathing down my neck.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Blood of the Lamb

THE Ashmore was a small hotel off Broadway in the Forties, a low-class flop house where unsuccessful bookies and successful thugs hung out. I

got the elevator up to the floor I wanted and started down a twisting, badly lighted corridor which stank of cigarette smoke and disinfectant. The whole place seemed to be whispering; there was a continual, quiet murmur of voices in the air. I turned a corner, went past a drunk who was trying to get his key in the door and got to Ben's room. I knocked and waited. Across the corridor a party was going on. The racket of a radio sounded deafening after the quiet of the rest of the corridor. Inside the room a woman laughed, her voice going up the scale and ending in a little hysterical shriek, like the voice of a jungle bird. She broke off and there was the racket of the radio and then she started it again. I rapped loudly on the door and when no answer came, I took hold of the knob. It turned easily and the door swung inward, opening into a dark room and a dark, unpleasant smell.

I put my hand around the door jamb and found the light switch. When the lights came on I could see him, over by the desk. I closed the door and put the bolt on and went over to him. He was lying on his face and there was a great gout of blood at the back of his head, oozing out of a small hole over what the doc would call the medulla oblongata, and I knew there wasn't anything I could do about him. Beside him was a thin blanket. There was a hole burned through it. The killer had used it to muffle the shot. Everything in the room seemed to be the way he had left it. There was a dust coat over everything, which said nothing had been disturbed. I went through the shallow drawers in the YMCA desk, but there was nothing there. Nothing in the chest of drawers but some clothing. Beside

the little guy's dead hand was a little black-covered notebook. I left that until last and went through it quickly. There were a few notations on bets, the names of several horses and the races they were running in; there was the inevitable Jane, GR 3-2201, the phone numbers of a few other women and of maybe a dozen men. Whoever had killed Ben hadn't thought the notebook worth keeping. I stuck it in my pocket, anyway.

With my handkerchief I went over all the surfaces I might have touched. When I thought I had got everything, I turned out the light and slipped the bolt. Then I shut it again, turned on the light, picked up the blanket and put it over him. I don't know what I did that for. He'd never be cold again.

Out in the hall the radio was louder and the woman was still laughing mechanically in five-second bursts. Even without the blanket the shot probably wouldn't have been heard. After the acrid odor of burnt powder, the corridor smell was clean and fresh. Down the hall the drunk was still trying to circumvent the lock on his door. I passed him with my hat pulled down, hoping he hadn't noticed me when I went by him the first time. When I got outside, I walked down a few blocks and went into a bar.

I was under the gun now. It wasn't just that when the cops got to Ben they would come nosing around. Whatever it was that Ben had had was gone. If it was as hot as he had sounded, it might have cracked the case. Now I had to start over.

Whoever killed him had done a nice clean job. Neatness and dispatch. A professional job. That added up to fit my personal



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prejudices. It was the kind of job Joe or Bill or both of them might do. Except for the gun. The wound said it was a .25 or .32, and usually the pros like a heavy gun. But Ben had been shadowed. Maybe they had decided that I hadn't told the whole truth when I saw Maroni in the afternoon and decided to go to Ben to see what I had been curious about. Maybe they liked small guns. I got out the little notebook and went through it more slowly. I knew I was going to have to start calling some of those names. All of them probably. I didn't know where to begin. Among them, maybe, there was somebody Ben had seen that afternoon, someone from whom he might have been able to get information.

I checked through them and it was only when I got to the last name that I noticed that a page had been torn out. It had had two words on it. The indentations of the pencil were still on the following page. I got out my own pencil and tried to follow the markings, shading them lightly with the pencil and checking the markings against the light. When I did get it done, it didn't make sense. I had the words JOEL FLORIDA and that was just another name to me. There was no evidence that a phone number or address had been put down. It could have been a horse for all I knew. It teased me. It was a name you should be able to remember, like Montana. I kept thinking that I knew it from someplace. I beat it around for a while and gave up and started making the phone calls. It took almost a half hour and all of my change.

When I finished I was pretty disgusted. Most of the people I called either denied knowing Ben or didn't want to know me. I turned up a McAdams person who had talked to Ben that afternoon. McAdams and some others had had a poker game the night before and Maroni had sat in on it until twelve. Ben had been asking about it. No, he didn't know if Wayne had lost any money for Maroni. I got the impression he wouldn't say if he did know. None of the people I called knew of a Joel Florida or if they did, they wouldn't admit it. So I was left with one thing: that Maroni had lost one alibi and got another. He hadn't been in his palace on Long Island last night, but I still had to crack the alibi of the poker game if I wanted to put him in a spot where he was eligible for the murder, and the

poker game, after I made a few more calls, sounded like the McCoy.

By that time it was eleven and I decided to see the Boothby woman again. The business of the money Wayne was supposed to have lost in a production gamble was beginning to drive me crazy. Ben had been sure of it when he called, but nobody else seemed to have any ideas about it. I figured an old trouser like Boothby should know, although she had denied it, and by that time I was almost prepared to beat it out of her. I didn't see her, though. When I got there, the last of the audience was trickling out. I went down the alley. There was a little clump of stagedoor johnnies waiting for the ladies of the chorus. We all stood around trying not to look at each other while a few girls came out and were snatched up. After a while, Boothby came out looking like six feet of libido even in her street clothes. She didn't give any of the boys a tumble. She went past them like a Cunard liner under full steam going past a fleet of scurvy little tugs. I mean she went down that alley like a homing pigeon. I followed her with my eyes. At the other end there was a big limousine. I couldn't see it, but I knew there was a little crest on the door and the letters PM in a delicate script. Mr. Maroni's chauffeur put up his comic book, hopped out and opened the door for her and she sailed off in the fancy wagon. Like Cleopatra's barge, it burned on the waters, filling the alley with the delicious smell of the exhaust. It gave me to think, as the French have it. Boothby and Maroni. Now I had another puzzle to put together, and I didn't think I had all the parts.

It was about midnight when I got home. I went straight into the bedroom and dumped my coat on the chair and started the shower running. Then I went out into the darkened living room and got a bottle of liquor and brought it in and put it on the dresser. I dropped off my shoulder holster, got out of the rest of my clothes, had my drink, got into the shower and felt good for the first time that day. After a while I even sang a little, I felt that good. But when I got out and dried myself I didn't feel good at all.

I don't know what started it. It began by being a kind of uneasiness, a feeling that something was wrong. I couldn't tie it to anything. Then it got to be something more

than uneasiness and I knew I was scared, like a kid in a dark house who doesn't know what he is scared of. And this house wasn't dark. The light in the bedroom was still on and my clothes were still on the floor and everything was in its place, except my heart, which was in my throat. But there was something else wrong, and it took me a full minute before I got it. My shoulder holster wasn't in the middle of the bed where I had left it. Whoever had taken it was probably in the living room, standing in the dark with his gun out. I started to whistle and clattered around in the bath to give myself time to think. It must have sounded lousy—the whistling, I mean—because I felt as if I had a mouthful of sand. All I could think of was that I was naked. Somehow it seemed a lot worse to be shot naked than with my clothes on.

I knew I had to do something, so I came out of the bath still whistling and cut the lights. Then in the dark I pushed down the bed so the springs groaned and then I got down on the floor and started to crawl into the living room. I had a gun there in the desk and I was pretty sure I was going to need it to get out of this. At the door of the living room I paused. I was afraid I might meet him in it as he was coming through to put a clip into the bed. I didn't hear anything, so I inched my way through, still crawling. I was almost to the desk when I heard a little rustle of movement. It sounded as if it were in the bedroom. I strained my ears but there was nothing except the sound of the street noises and the ticking of a clock. I went forward a couple of more feet, holding myself back from making a rush for the desk in the dark. I heard the sound again. It seemed to be close by now and I couldn't wait. I started to rise and reach for the desk. Something came out of the dark at me. I put up my hand, but there was nothing there. Something flared like a match just behind my eyes and I went down into the darkness.

The lights were on when I came to and they hurt my eyes. I had a headache big enough to fit three men. I put my hand up to the source and it came away covered with blood. I staggered into the bath for a look and the dying gladiator gazed back at me from the mirror. It was a fine looking job. I didn't blame him for thinking he had finished me. An inch or so farther

down and the job would have been done. I put a towel around my head and looked around. The drawers of the desk and the dresser were all pulled out and dumped, but nothing seemed to be missing. My gun was on the couch in the living room. It was supposed to look like a robbery job, I guess. In that case, it wasn't smart of him to have left the gun there. I got to thinking who might have come around to tamp up on me that way, and I found I could think of a lot of people.

I started making some calls and after the fifth, I thought I had it—the missing piece of that puzzle.

I PUT IT TOGETHER the next day. The papers had the story of Ben's murder. They put it down to unpaid gambling debts and let it go at that. They didn't connect it with Wayne's murder at all. On the latter, there was a story of the arrest of Mrs. Wayne, but that murder was small potatoes now, with the series in the news. In one of the columns there was a note on Kent, who was supposed to be producing another play to be ready when the season opened. There was also a little squib on Maroni. Seeing it made me think newspapers were good for something after all, and when I had had breakfast I took off for the Forty-second Street Library.

An hour later I got the story I wanted. Maroni had taken a fall about five years ago. He had done two out of five. Three years and one month ago, he had gotten out of prison. Three years ago, Boothby had said, she broke off with Kent. I began to see why she was so interested in those letters and why she didn't want it known that she had been Kent's lady love at one time. It gave her a swell reason for knocking off Wayne, all right. But I didn't see how she could have got to Ben.

The newspapers gave me something else. They gave me Joel Florida. Joel was his name, and Florida, I guessed, was where he was. He was a producer of drama, also, or had been a couple of seasons ago. I went out of there, tried calling him and found I had guessed right. He was in Florida where he now had a night club, experience having taught that it was a better gamble than Broadway shows. I wrote a long telegram to him, asked him to wire a reply collect, and took off for City Hall, where I bribed a sleepy clerk to let me check some records.

When I got through with that I felt so good I went out for a drink. I knew I had it now. I knew who my murderer was. All I had to do was to prove it. Finally I called up the D.A.'s office and talked to an assistant I knew a little. I gave him some of what I had and he agreed to my proposals. I had nothing to do then but go home and sleep until that evening.

They were all down at one of the D.A.'s offices when I got there, all but Mrs. Wayne. We waited for a while in very uncomfortable silence and then arson brought her in.

"I called you all here for some questions on the murder of Wayne," the D.A.'s assistant told them. "Mr. Donovan has turned up some information which I think is relevant and I wanted to go over it with you." He gave me a little nod and I got up.

"It's pretty hard to know just where to begin," I said. "This has been the kind of circus where everybody had a good reason for knocking off Wayne. And almost everybody had the opportunity. Take Maroni. He had an excellent motive. Wayne gambled about a hundred thousand dollars of Maroni's money and lost it. That's a lot of motive."

"I don't think you can prove that, Donovan," Maroni said quietly. He smoothed his blonde hair and stared at me through the gold-rimmed glasses as tranquil as if he had been in church.

"I can prove it, all right," I said. "I know just where Wayne lost the money. I know he worked as a front for you and I know he was personally broke. So it had to be your dough. Maroni has an alibi," I said, turning to the rest of them. "In fact, he has two alibis. He got a second one after I asked him about the first and he decided it wouldn't hold up. He said he was at home on Long Island, but he was seen in town. So he got a new alibi—an all-night poker session this time. I checked on that as much as I could. I don't think it can be broken. I think he invented the Long Island alibi because that put him out of town and then went back to the other because the first wouldn't hold water."

Maroni was looking at me differently now. He wasn't tranquil any more. He was puzzled.

"The question is: Does he have an alibi for the murder of Ben Ward?"

"How does that come into it?" Larson asked. "Where does Ward fit in?"

"Ben was killed by the same person who killed Wayne," I said. "Ben was working for me. Nearly everyone here knew it. He was killed because he knew something that the killer didn't want known. It was a stupid thing to do, because I found it out anyway, but this killer is only half smart. Like that business of setting back the clock."

I felt the stir go all around the room. Arson was gaping at me.

"What about the clock?" he asked quickly.

"It was planted like that," I said. "The killer set it back and then smashed it in order to set the time of the killing. The medical examiner could only tell within about an hour when the killing was done. Usually that's enough. In this case, the leeway of an hour was enough for the murderer. He set the clock at ten-fifteen. That means the murder was not done at that time and was probably done later. At ten-fifteen the murderer was some place where he had company, someone to give him an alibi."

"That's your story," Larson said. "How about Mrs. Wayne? She was there. You don't need any fancy explanations about clocks to fit her for the job."

"Has Mrs. Wayne admitted being at her husband's apartment?"

"She doesn't have to admit it. We have a witness."

"You might as well admit it, Mrs. Wayne," I said. "They do have a witness." She started crying then, quietly, the way she had of doing it.

"Look here, Jack," the D.A.'s assistant said. "This is very irregular. You're supposed to be helping Mrs. Wayne. . . ." He ended by sputtering. The lawyer in him was shocked at my throwing her to the lions, even though it seemed to present him a nice case.

"Maybe it's irregular. I wouldn't do it if I didn't know she was innocent. You were at your husband's apartment last night, Mrs. Wayne?"

"I went to ask him again for a divorce," she said, sobbing.

"You left about eleven o'clock, right? You came down in the elevator like an honest woman, because when you left, your

husband was still alive. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"I can't see where that leaves you, Jack," the assistant said. "All we have is Mrs. Wayne's word for this, and the damaging admission that she was up there."

"That's all you have so far," I said. "Plus a fine motive for Mrs. Wayne—and for Henry. It isn't enough, though. Let's go on. While I was looking at the people in the case and the reasons they might have for killing Wayne, I didn't stop at Maroni. I came next to Miss Boothby. She had a good reason too. Wayne had some letters of hers."

She gave me a kind of agonized look and Maroni straightened up and got interested all of a sudden.

"I don't like to go into this, but I have to," I said. "As Mr. Kent would say: People in glass houses. Et cetera. Or if you make your bed, lie in it. Mr. Kent was in this, too. He hired me to help him take the letters away from Wayne. We got them. The main thing about the letters was that they tied Kent and Miss Boothby together. They had broken off about three years ago. Just at the time Maroni got out of jail."

Maroni came out of his chair like a wild-cat with turpentine under its tail. He didn't look like a professor now at all.

"That's the reason she was so anxious to hide the whole business," I said. "She was afraid Maroni would find out, and since

she is Maroni's wife—I checked the records on this—Maroni wouldn't like it and might get very nasty about it. So she had a wonderful reason for wanting Wayne out. She also has a break in the middle of the show she is doing so that she could have left the theatre for a long enough time to do the killing if she hurried, and if it were done at ten-fifteen."

"I think we want to talk to Miss Boothby right away," Larson said.

"There's still one other person," I said. "Kent."

"Ah . . . really Donovan," Kent said. "You know we got the letters from Wayne. I no longer had a motive for killing him."

"That's what I thought," I said. "And that's why you had to have the letters first. Then you were washed in the blood of the lamb. After that you were just an innocent bystander. Only it wasn't that way. Wayne had got the letters from you some way, and he was using them on you, all right. But for something else. A year ago you backed a play with a guy named R. T. Joel. You didn't have enough to swing it between you, so you borrowed from Wayne. He saw a chance to make a quick buck, which he wouldn't have to account for to Maroni, so he went in. But the play flopped. Maroni was due to find out about the dough, so Wayne had to put on the squeeze. He used the letters. Once Maroni saw them, he would give you an awfully bad time. There



## BURY ME NOT

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was another thing, too. You are backing another play now, and if the story is right, you're just as short of money as before. If Wayne peddled his story of how you took him for his hundred thousand—that's the amount Joel says you got from Wayne—then nobody would go in with you. So you had a couple of good reasons for killing him. Another thing, Wayne acted like an irate citizen when we got the letters. He threatened to ruin you. That doesn't sound like a blackmailer."

"See here," Kent said. "There is still the fact that at ten-fifteen I was several blocks away from Wayne's place."

"At ten-fifteen you were with me," I said. "But at ten forty-five you left. You could have gone to Wayne's place, getting there about the time Mrs. Wayne left, killed him, set the clock back, and the next morning there you were with no visible motive and what looked like a good alibi."

"I think you will find the alibi still good, Donovan," Kent said. He arched his eyebrows like a couple of moths getting ready to take off. "If I may say so, all this is mere supposition."

"Take it another way, then," I said. "By elimination, and without leaving out Ben's murder. Maroni has an alibi for Wayne's killing. He doesn't have an alibi for Ben's murder and he even had a tail on Ben, so it's possible he might have done that one. Miss Boothby could have killed Wayne only if it had been done at around ten-fifteen or ten-thirty—that's the time covered by the break in her show, allowing for a little travel time. But we know from Mrs. Wayne that Wayne was alive then. That lets Boothby out there. You'll say that is supposition, but we'll come back to it. Miss Boothby could have got Ben, but since she didn't know he was working for me, she would have no reason, and that lets her out again. All the rest of you did know Ben was working for me. Mrs. Wayne couldn't have shot him. The cops had her. And Henry was down trying to bail her out when Ben was shot. That leaves Kent again, the only one who had motive and opportunity in both killings."

"There isn't a solid fact in your whole case," Kent said. "Tissue of coincidence to uphold a lie."

"That much coincidence would confound the law of probability," the assistant D.A.

said. "I think we will look into this now."

"If you think it's a coincidence," I said, "here are a couple more. Someone did a bad job of trying to kill me the other night just after I came from Ben's place. I made some calls afterward. The only people in this case who were neither home nor in jail were Kent and Miss Boothby. I think she was with Maroni, although neither would admit it, since they were still keeping their marriage secret. Anyway, since she didn't know of Ben or any possible information he might have given me, she had no reason to gun for me. Kent did."

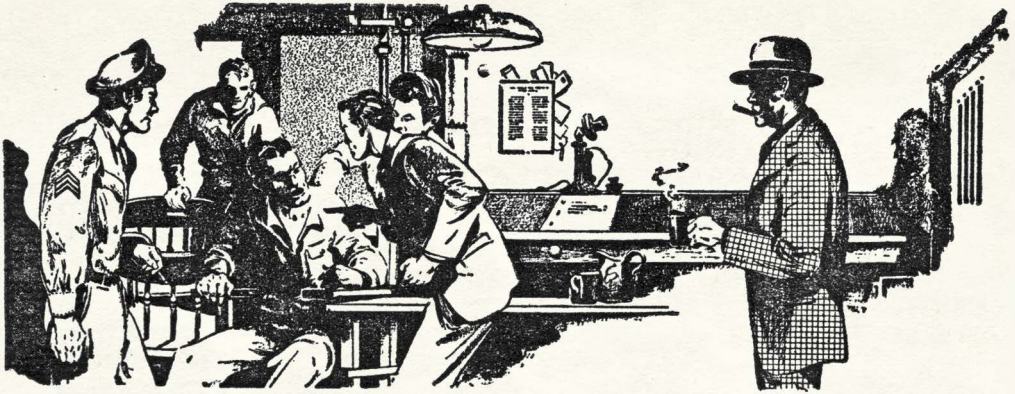
"Here's another coincidence, Kent. At this moment the police are either going through your apartment or have been there already. In that case, the gun you used on Ben will be down at the ballistics department for a test. And if that isn't enough, we have those gloves you're always wearing. A test will show if you've been handling any guns recently. That'll be coincidence, too, but it'll be enough to put you on that over-heated ottoman upstate."

I had to put it to him like that, as hard as I could. I had to get him to drop a few stitches. I knew he had done the murders and I gambled on his having kept the gun, but there were no cops up there. They wouldn't have gone on my say-so. But the gloves were the important thing and he knew it.

"You do very well with everything but the last act, Donovan," Kent said. "You were wrong about the gun. I have it here." And then he had it in his gloved hand. "Now I want all of you to sit very still for one minute. If you come through that door, I shall certainly have to shoot."

He backed to the door, went out and Larson and I went after him. We didn't go fast enough. We saw him go into the subway fifty yards ahead of us and that was the last I saw of him for eighteen months. By that time he could have come back and beaten the case. The other people were scattered all over; there was a new D.A.; the newspapers had forgotten, and all that was left of Wayne and Ben were a few notes yellowing slowly in the files. But at that time he couldn't come back because by then he was lying on his back in the city morgue in Jacksonville, Florida, many long miles away, and the police were looking for his murderer.





# THE THIRD DEGREE

## By Hallack McCord

**W**HEN it comes to criminal investigation and a knowledge of crime, how do you rate? Are you as smart as a homicide detective, or are you in the rookie cop class?

1. Many detectives in fiction stories are prone to perform minute investigations of cigar and cigarette ashes. In real life, does the examination of such ashes generally reveal anything that is of much interest?

2. True or false? Even a well-rinsed piece of cloth can, when chemically analyzed, be made to show up traces of blood.

3. True or false? It is impossible to photograph blood stains.

4. As a scientific detective, what would you do if you suspected some blood had been absorbed into a specific plot of earth?

5. Detectives sometimes have difficulty in telling the difference between human hair and vegetable fibre. By means of chemical analysis is it generally possible to distinguish between the two?

6. What is the meaning of the term "shocking power" as it is used in ballistics?

7. If a convict acquaintance of yours told you he had been "kangarooed," would you think: He felt he had been unjustly sent to prison—had been manhandled in a "kangaroo court"—had had his pocket picked—had been swindled?

8. If an underworld acquaintance of yours told you he was going to "sell a pup," you would know he was planning to: Dispose of his dog? Squeal on a friend of his? Swindle someone? Break out of jail?

9. What is the meaning of the underworld slang term "soft heel"?

10. In crook slang, "stiff" means: Negotiable securities? Policeman? Stupid criminal? Arsonist?

11. If a gambler friend of yours told you he was looking for a "floater," you would believe he was seeking: A corpse which had been thrown into a river? A gambling game which moves its headquarters frequently so as to dodge the police? A crook who is addicted to alcohol. A man engaged in selling fake or worthless jewelry?

12. According to the ballistical definition, what is the meaning of the term, "trajectory"?

13. How might a crook use carbon paper in order to forge a signature?

14. True or false? "Interruptions" in a piece of writing are often a clue to possible forgery.

15. In the language of the handwriting expert, what is a "retoucher"?

16. True or false? The expert fire investigator should realize that animals are a frequent cause of fires.

17. True or false? To "stem in" means to drill a hole in the door of a safe.

18. True or false? In crook slang, "pull a leather" means to "steal a car."

19. What is the meaning of the underworld slang term, "noise"?

20. If an underworld acquaintance received a "bush parole," had he just escaped from prison, been pardoned by the governor, been made a trusty, was scheduled to be executed?

(Answers on page 91)

***“Run away, copper. Into drink . . . into crime . . . into the river. But you’ll never be able to run fast or far enough to get away from a dead man’s eyes—the innocent man you sent to the chair!”***



# EYES IN THE NIGHT

By Day Keene

## CHAPTER ONE

Suicide Call

**B**IG JIM McELROY decided to kill himself early one evening in December. After considerable deliberation he decided the sluggish, ice-filmed river would be his best bet. He would have preferred to use a gun. Time was when he could have had his choice of several dozen. He had pawned the last of his once valued collection six months before.

He was cold. He was hungry. He had the shakes. He had taken all he could. He couldn't stand the eyes another night. No one would miss him. No one would care

### A Tale of Terror

*He sat on a plain  
kitchen chair, and  
the accusing ring  
of faces drew  
closer...*



but Jane and even she would forget him in time. She might even marry Harvey. The world would be a better place with him out of it.

The wind was out of the north, driving an icy sleet before it that, falling, froze as soon as it came in contact with the streets and walks and outer clothing of the few pedestrians abroad.

A big man, six-feet-two and built proportionately, McElroy leaned against the tile front of the shoddy bar out of which he had just been bodily ejected, oblivious to the weather. Both his flesh and his once expensive suit and topcoat hung on him like rags. His clothes were little more than rags, threadbare, spotted, wrinkled by countless nights of sodden slumber in flophouses, doorways, gutters. A hank of white hair, that had been black ten months before, escaped the battered confines of a hat a self-respecting ragman would not have picked out of an ash can. This was bottom. This was as far as he could get.

If only he had a gun. A gun shot wound was a man's death, clean and swift and final. The river was for women, but if it was the best he could do he would have to use it.

As he stood, coming to his decision, a West Madison Street panhandler who had reaped a holiday windfall looked at the big man curiously as he shuffled by him into the warmth of the bar. "Who's the big guy holding up the building?" he asked the barman. "His face looks kinda familiar."

"That's Big Jim McElroy," the barman told him. "You know, that lieutenant of detectives who sent the innocent bank teller to the chair last year—was his name Hanlon?"

The panhandler nursed his drink to savor the warmth as long as he could. "Oh. That's McElroy, eh?" He chuckled. "You mean, former lieutenant of detectives."

The barman made a half-hearted swipe at a spilled puddle of beer with a filthy bar-rag. "Yeah. I just had to give him the heave-ho out of here. He gives me the screaming meemies. He spends twenty cents for a drink and keeps looking over his shoulder all the time, afraid of the eyes he claims is all the time staring at him."

"What eyes?"

The barman shrugged. "The dead guy's, I suppose. You know, his conscience like. I don't see no eyes. Him and me are all

alone in here. Not another soul around."

Outside the bar, McElroy forced his feet into motion. There was no time like the present. He might as well get it over with. This was what he should have done at first. This was what he would have done if it hadn't been for Jane.

"You mustn't take it so hard," she had pleaded. "You made an honest mistake. All of the blame isn't yours. A jury found him guilty and a judge sentenced him to die."

On evidence he had uncovered. How foolish he had been at first. He had dared to hope that by selling his car and turning the proceeds, with his savings, over to Hanlon's widow he might salve his conscience. It hadn't. Nor had resigning his commission helped. He had been so certain that Hanlon was guilty he had practically forced him to confess. Now, asleep or awake, drunk or sober, Hanlon's reproachful eyes followed his every move.

Stumbling toward the river less than three blocks away, he closed his eyes against the driving sleet and could see Matt Harvey's face, white and strained, as he brought in the blood splattered confession.

"My God, Jim. You've sent the wrong man to the chair. Hanlon didn't kill Baker. According to this, he wasn't anywhere near the bank. Baker was killed by a punk named Marston. He just blew out his brains in a room over at the Chalmer House, leaving this signed confession clearing Hanlon and five grand of the loot."

And there it was. For the "good of the department" the official hush had been clamped on at once but somehow the story had leaked out. An innocent man had been sent to the chair for a crime another man had committed. The newspapers played up the story. Hanlon's charges of police brutality were recalled and headlined. Eager for a scapegoat, the department had accepted McElroy's resignation without protest. He was known as an ambitious man. It was strongly hinted, among other things, that he had manufactured evidence.

McElroy told the story, "That wasn't true. Sure. I hit him a couple of times to make him confess. But I didn't manufacture any evidence. I thought he was guilty."

He still didn't see how Hanlon could be innocent. But his evidence had been circumstantial and Matt Harvey, stepping into his shoes, had been able to prove an equally air-

tight case against Marston, an even better case. Matt had a confession and five of the fifty-odd thousand dollars that had been stolen from the bank. The rest of the money had never been found, although, until his theory and life had been blasted, McElroy had been certain that Hanlon's widow had cached it.

He stumbled on, eager to get it over with. There would be no reproachful eyes in the river. He could feel the eyes now, mocking, scornful, filled with hate. Halted by a traffic light, he looked furtively over his shoulder. There were few pedestrians and fewer cars on the street. No one seemed to be paying the least attention to him. The eyes, he felt, weren't human. They were the eyes of a dead man come back to haunt him, haunt him for this awful thing that he had done.

*Yes, your Honor. I would like to say something. So the jury has found me guilty on manufactured evidence and police brutality. But that doesn't change the fact that I'm innocent of this crime. I didn't kill Mr. Baker. I've never killed anyone.*

"Not guilty, your honor" . . . "I was framed" . . . "The police beat a confession out of me" . . . words, so many words in most cases, a sucker for a reprieve or a commutation of sentence. But in Hanlon's case, they had been true.

McElroy crossed with the changing light, cursed as he saw that the bridge was open and floodlighted. Great showers of sparks filled the night. A crew of well-bundled workmen, their faces grotesque in their protective masks, were welding something on the middle span.

He stood a moment fingering the icy guard chain that kept him from the water. He needed dark and solitude for what he intended to do. He wanted no alarm to be sounded prematurely. He would have to wait until they were finished or go to another bridge.

He turned back to the cross-street, shuffled south two blocks and cut back to the river again. Here all was night and silence and wind-driven sleet. He leaned on the bridge rail looking down. For all its thin sheath of ice, the river looked dark and soft and peaceful.

*Goodbye, Jane. What might have been doesn't count. So long, Matt. Thanks a lot for all you've tried to do for me. Good*

*morning, God. So help me, I didn't do it on purpose. I thought that he was guilty.*

**B**IG JIM McELROY laid his hat on the bridge and filled it with the contents of his pockets so there would be no doubt as what had happened to him on the off chance his body wasn't found. The last two letters from Jane, his empty wallet containing his driver's license and former credentials, his disgraced shield that he couldn't bring himself to turn in. Then, knees tensed for the sudden spring, he gripped the rail with both hands only to freeze into an assumed attitude of nonchalance as a big car traveling fast, coming from the direction he himself had come, roared out on the bridge. He would have to wait until it passed.

It didn't. It stopped with a squeal of brakes when it came opposite to him. Matt Harvey and Larry Kay leaped out of the broad back seat of the squad car to grasp him firmly by the arms.

Kay was especially indignant. "What the hell are you trying to do, Jim?" he demanded. "Will you snap out of this? If Matt hadn't had a hunch you might pull something like this, you'd have been in the drink by now."

McElroy said nothing. There seemed to be nothing he could say. Harvey picked the hat from the bridge and put its contents back in the big man's pockets. "We've been keeping an eye on you all afternoon," he said conversationally. "So you want to drink yourself to death, okay. That is your own business, Jim. But nix on anything like this. It wouldn't be fair to Jane." He returned McElroy's hat to his head and led him, as he might lead a child, to the car. "Now I'm going to get you a hotel room. I'll even get you a bottle if you want one. But you pull a Dutch on me and, I mean it, Jim, I'll find you in hell and haunt you. I promised Jane I'd keep an eye on you . . . and I mean to."

Kay added, "What's more, you pull another stunt like this and we'll pinch you and send you down to the psycho ward. Pull yourself together, Jim. You aren't the first cop in the world to make a bull and you can't help Hanlon any by knocking yourself off." His hand slipped into his pocket and returned with a wallet. "You broke? You need some dough?"

Squeezed into the familiar back seat in the familiar big car between the two men who meant only to be friendly, the reaction was too much for McElroy. Hot tears filled his eyes. Perhaps he could whip this thing, return to a normal life. If only it weren't for the eyes.

A half hour later, settled in a cheap but clean and warm hotel room, he gave Matt his promise he would try to see it through and the other man patted his shoulder.

"Now you're talking like yourself, Jim." He indicated the bottle on the table. "Take a hot bath, a couple of stiff slugs, and crawl into bed. I'll send some clean clothes around. Jane wants to see you in the morning at her apartment. You got her about nuts. Promise me you'll go?"

McElroy promised and his former assistant paused with one hand on the door knob. As big a man as McElroy, usually suave and cynical, he seemed embarrassed. "You know me, Jim. You know I'm not much on poetry or any of that culture stuff but I ran across a couple of lines the other night by a lad named Service that might do you some good. He says—

*"It's easy to cry that you're beaten—  
and die;*

*It's easy to crawlfish and crawl;  
But to fight and to fight when hope's  
out of sight—*

*Why that's the best game of them all!  
And though you come out of each  
gruelling bout*

*All broken and beaten and scarred,  
Just have one more try—it's dead easy  
to die,*

*It's the keeping on living that's  
hard."*

Kay nodded, "That's good stuff, Jim," and closed the door silently behind them.

Long after they had gone, McElroy sat on the edge of the bed staring at the door. He couldn't let Matt and Larry and the rest of the boys down. He couldn't let Jane down. He couldn't take the coward's way out. He would have to face this thing. He was glad now that they had gotten to him in time. Perhaps there was some solution to this thing. There *had* to be. He would start all over in the morning, make something of the shattered ruins of his life.

The bottle of whiskey unopened, he was

lying still fully clothed on the bed at midnight staring at the ceiling, making plans, when the phone rang. The voice sounded distorted and distant as though the connection were bad or his caller was speaking through a wine glass.

"This is a friend and a tip," his midnight caller informed him. "I am speaking to Lieutenant James McElroy, former lieutenant James McElroy?"

McElroy said he was.

"Then get out to the widow Hanlon's place as fast as you can make it," the other man informed him. "You've been taken for a ride. You didn't send an innocent man to the chair. Hanlon was guilty as hell. Him and Marston pulled the stickup together. And Hanlon's widow is in a tight and ready to tell you all about it."

The receiver clicked into the cradle at the far end of the line.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Widow Hanlon

THE TWO rode in the back seat of the cab, McElroy and Hope. *Hanlon was guilty as hell. He hadn't sent an innocent man to the chair.*

He considered stopping off and phoning Jane, then decided he'd better wait until he had confirmed the story. Some of his elation left him. It could be a practical joke. He was nervous and jumpy by the time they reached the address, a small bungalow on the southwest side. Attempting to extract one of the thin sheaf of bills Larry had insisted on loaning him from his wallet, he dropped the wallet on the sleet covered parkway and had to stoop to recover it.

"Afraid your wife's going to give you hell, eh?" the cab driver observed. "Boy. You look like you've been sleeping in the gutter."

"I have," McElroy said curtly.

The driver shrugged, accepted his fare, and drove away. It was a quiet residential district of modest bungalows and small apartment buildings. Most of the houses were steeped in sleep but here and there a permature holiday candle gleamed in a lighted front window. There was one in the Hanlon window, a garish three-candle affair with what appeared to be miniature choir boys clustered around its base. Even

out at the curb McElroy could hear the blare of the radio. He waded the unshoveled, slush-filled walk to the porch. He had been here before, many times, while working on the Hanlon case.

The widow's name was Beth. A tall, statuesque blonde with a gin husk in her voice, she claimed to have been a model. She had cursed him to his face in the courtroom when Hanlon had been convicted. She had taken the money he had offered her later as her just due.

"You burned him, copper," she had spat at him. "You're damned right I'll take your money. I'm only sorry it's not more."

He pressed the bell, heard no responding tinkle or chime, and rapped smartly on the door. It was unlocked and swung open under his hand. Hesitant to enter unannounced, he stood in the open doorway looking into a small entrance hall and called, "Mrs. Hanlon."

There was no response. His voice couldn't compete with the blare of the radio. He walked on into the hall and looked into the living room.

There was no one in the living room but it had been occupied recently. A half-emptied bottle and a filled highball glass stood on a small coffee table. The ginger ale in the highball was still effervescing. A cigarette, its butt heavily loaded with lipstick, was burning on the edge of the table. Automatically McElroy picked it up, laid it on an ash tray, then turned down the volume of the radio blaring in his ear.

"Mrs. Hanlon!"

The name echoed through the empty room and suddenly the small hairs on the back of McElroy's neck began to tingle.

*The eyes were at him again.* They were watching. He could feel them hot on his face. He fought an impulse to bolt. He had to talk to Mrs. Hanlon. This couldn't be a practical joke on the part of one of the dead man's friends. The truth was too important. Too much depended on it.

He tried to locate the eyes, as he had tried a hundred times before . . . and couldn't. All his old fear and remorse and despair returned. Hanlon's widow was ribbing him. This was just another of her means of getting even.

He resisted an impulse to cry aloud. His nerves were shot. He couldn't take any more. He had been a fool to hope. In an

attempt to steady himself, he picked the bottle from the table and drank directly from the neck. The whiskey was good, and aged, but it might have been so much water.

He returned the bottle to the table and looked down the short hall that, as he recalled, led to the kitchen. The swinging door at the far end was closed but he could hear running water. Then someone closed an icebox door. There were no cubes in the highball glass. Mrs. Hanlon was getting ice cubes.

He called again, "Mrs. Hanlon!"

The water was turned off but no one answered. Wetting his lips with his tongue, McElroy walked down the short hall and pushed open the swinging door.

The widow Hanlon was in the kitchen. She was the first thing he saw. Dressed in a canary yellow negligee that revealed more of her ample form than it concealed, she was sitting in a kitchen chair facing the door, a lighted cigarette dangling from the fingers of the arm that hung down to the floor.

But it hadn't been the widow Hanlon who had run the water or closed the icebox door. She was dead, or dying, her eyes bulging from her purpled face, a sash cord looped around her neck and embedded deeply in her flesh.

His senses blunted by his months of sordid drinking to blot out the man that he had been, McElroy neither heard nor sensed the blow. It was delivered with a partly-filled whiskey bottle and landed on the small bone just back of his left ear. Out on his feet, he staggered three steps forward and, his legs giving way, collapsed with his head in the lap of the dead woman.

There was a sour bitter taste in his mouth when he came to and a reek of perfume in his nostrils. His cheek felt like it was cradled in silk. It was. His cheek was resting against a fold of the canary yellow negligee. Then above the perfume he smelled whiskey. The kitchen reeked with it, there was shattered glass all over the floor.

Somewhere a phone was ringing and the radio was blaring again. Still half-conscious, he thought bitterly, *I came to clear myself and walked right smack into murder.*

Now there would always be doubt. Now he would never know. He got to his feet unsteadily and stared down at the dead blonde. Life had been extinct for minutes. She had probably been dead when he had

walked into the kitchen. The cigarette still smoked between her fingers but it had been wedged high in the web and was held there by the spittle on the butt.

It should tell him something. It did. There was no lipstick on it. The killer had expected him to walk in and had stuck it where it was as an additional flag for his attention. Moreover, the killer had been a man.

Still weaving slightly from the blow, he walked into the living room to find the ringing phone. This was a homicide. It would have to be reported. Not to Lieutenant McElroy, he thought bitterly, but to Lieutenant Matt Harvey, his successor. He was immediately ashamed of the thought. Matt hadn't wanted the job. Matt had been good to him. Only tonight he had saved him from the river.

He reached for the ringing phone, froze as a voice called from the open doorway, "Hold it just a minute, chum. Who are you? And where did you get that blood on your face?"

McElroy turned slowly.

To his relief, the man in the door was unformed.

"I'm Carter out at the Sixty-third Street Station," the officer introduced himself. "And we just got a flash on the two-way that some of the neighbors reported they heard a woman screaming at this address." He came a little way into the hall. "What's the idea, chum? You and your wife pitching one?"

"She's not my wife," McElroy told the patrolman.

It was the wrong thing to say. "Oh, I see," Carter said. "One of those things, eh?" Without removing his eyes from McElroy, he turned his head slightly and called to his partner waiting in the prowl car at the curb. "You'd better come on in, Charlie. I think maybe we've got something here."

"You've got a murder," McElroy told him. "Mrs. Hanlon is dead, out there in the kitchen." He indicated the now silent phone. "I was about to call homicide."

The prowl car officer's smile was tight. "Yeah. Sure. I'll just bet you were, chum. Watch him, Charlie," he ordered his partner as the other officer loomed up in the doorway behind him. "He says there's a dead dame in the kitchen." . . .

THE RING OF FACES was familiar but McElroy wasn't accustomed to being in the center of the circle. He sat on a plain kitchen chair while the equally once familiar routine went on.

The body had been photographed and removed. Fingerprint men were busy photographing, dusting, scrutinizing. He couldn't see them from where he sat but McElroy knew that the windows of the bungalows on either side and across both the street and alley were lighted as plainclothes men questioned their occupants as to suspicious looking strangers whom they might have seen lurking around the Hanlon bungalow.

Both Matt and Larry looked tired and somehow a little sad. Both men were supposed to be off duty but both had been informed and both had driven to the scene because he was involved. McElroy felt a small glow of pride. He might have lost everything he once had held important. But he hadn't lost Matt and Larry's friendship.

Fatigue and strain lines etching deep furrows in his forehead and his cheeks, Lieutenant Harvey said quietly. "Now let's go over that again, Jim. Slowly. We left you in a room at the Crescent Hotel at nine o'clock. You lay there drinking until midnight. Then . . ."

McElroy interrupted him to say, "I didn't even take one drink. I just lay there thinking things over, mulling over what you fellows had said and realizing what a sap I'd been to act as I had been."

Harvey said, "I see. But it was about midnight when your phone rang?"

"Yes. I'd say it was around midnight." "You didn't recognize the voice?"

"No. I did not. It sounded like the lad was either disguising his voice or maybe talking through a wine glass."

Lieutenant Harvey nodded at a police stenographer who sat with his pencil poised over his notebook, then turned back to McElroy. "Now give us that conversation again, Jim. As near verbatim as you can."

"He said," McElroy said earnestly, "'Get out to the widow Hanlon's place as fast as you can make it. You've been taken for a ride. You didn't send an innocent man to the chair. Hanlon was guilty as hell. He and Marston pulled that stickup together. And Hanlon's widow is in a tight and ready to tell you all about it.'"

Kay snuffed out his cigarette. "He didn't



say what kind of a tight spot she was in?"

"No. He did not."

"And when you reached here the radio was blaring but Mrs. Hanlon didn't answer the bell or your rapping on the door, so you walked right in."

The trend of the questioning was beginning to bother McElroy slightly. So did Kay's tone. He had heard it too many times before not to recognize it. It was a certain coldness that crept into the sergeant's voice when he doubted the veracity of a questioned suspect. "No. I didn't walk right in," he corrected Kay crisply. "I stood in the hallway and called, 'Mrs. Hanlon'. I called her two or three times, thinking she had just stepped into one of the other rooms because of the lighted cigarette and the fact the ginger ale in her highball was still bubbling. I was positive of it when I heard water running in the kitchen and heard someone slam the icebox door."

"Proving someone besides yourself was in the house."

"Proving someone besides myself was in the house."

"So you walked out into the kitchen and there she was, dead in a chair with a sash cord tied around her throat."

"That's right."

"Then someone hit you from behind with a whiskey bottle and knocked you out."

McElroy repeated, "That's right."

Kay looked at Lieutenant Harvey then, passing his palm over his chin, walked over to question one of the plainclothes men who had been talking to the neighbors. "Any luck?"

The plainclothes man shook his head. "So far we haven't even been able to find the family that reported the screaming although the neighbors on both sides say the radio has been going full blast since shortly after midnight." He indicated McElroy with his nod. "Three or four of them seen him drive up in a cab around twelve fifteen." He amended his statement. "At least someone who answers McElroy's description."

"But they only saw the one man?"

"No one mentioned seeing two."

Sweat began to bead on McElroy's forehead. The boys were trying to be fair. They were bending over backwards to give him every break. But they only had his word that there had been someone else in the house, that Mrs. Hanlon had been dead

when he had walked into the kitchen. Any other man caught in such a position would have been hustled down to the squad room by now. Any fool could hit himself in the head with a bottle and claim that he had been slugged.

He looked at Harvey. "There *was* someone else in the house, Matt."

"I'm certain there was," the lieutenant said quietly.

But his tone didn't match his words. He seemed to be on the brink of something but wasn't exactly certain just how to proceed.

Then McElroy realized with a sick sinking feeling in his stomach just what the other man was thinking. If he could make his story about the phone call stick, if he could make them believe there was someone else in the house and that someone had killed Mrs. Hanlon to keep her from verifying the information he had received over the phone, he would have wiped out the past ten months. He would be a hero, not a heel. He would have proven, at least by implication, that Hanlon was guilty of murder, that he hadn't sent an innocent man to the chair. Once the story broke in the newspapers, his reinstatement was almost certain to follow. It was the type of a whitewash that a desperate former lieutenant of homicide who had just been snatched from self-destruction and urged to fight on might possibly conceive in a mind unsettled by ten months of heavy drinking.

"No. It's not what you're thinking, Matt," McElroy pleaded with his former subordinate. "That phone call is on the level. And I didn't," it was difficult to get the word out, "strangle Mrs. Hanlon."

"You didn't lay a hand on her?"

"I did not."

"You didn't have a struggle of any kind?"

"No. I swear it. She was dead when I walked in this kitchen."

There was silence for several moments. Then Harvey asked Sergeant Kay to see if he could find a hand mirror in the bedroom. Kay found one and handed it to him. He, in turn, handed it to McElroy. "For Jane's sake, I've gone out on several long limbs for you, Jim," Lieutenant Harvey said. "But I am afraid I can't crawl out on this one. If you hoped to get away with that fairy tale you just told, you shouldn't have let her mark you."

Breathing heavily, McElroy said, "She

didn't mark me. It wasn't Mrs. Hanlon who knocked me out with that whiskey bottle."

"Look at your face," Harvey ordered.

The mirror suddenly so heavy his hand could hardly support it, McElroy raised the glass and studied his reflection. It was small wonder that doubt had crept into Larry Kay's voice. He had known there was a smear on his cheek. He had thought it was blood from the wound on his head. It wasn't. There were five deep scratches on his right cheek that could only have been caused by one object—the long, sharp, nails of a woman. Moreover, he had no doubt, the residue one of the tech squad men had scraped from under the dead blonde's nails would prove to have come from the wound.

He thought of the river and laughed. He had been a fool to think of taking his own life. Now the State would do it for him. In a few months, five or six at the most, he would be shaking hands with Hanlon.

He handed the mirror back to Lieutenant Harvey. Unless he was mad, and he didn't believe he was, he knew he hadn't killed Mrs. Hanlon. That brought a new factor into the picture. Someone hated his intestines, hated him badly enough to make certain he was legally electrocuted.

"Still say you didn't kill her, Jim?"

"I swear it."

### CHAPTER THREE

L52893742B

**T**HE WHISKEY BOTTLE and the highball glass still stood on the low coffee table, both liberally sprinkled with a greyish powder. The cigarette had burned itself to an ash. McElroy stared at it thoughtfully as Larry Kay tried to give him good advice. Harvey wound up a few details in the kitchen.

"You were a screwball to try it," Kay said frankly. "If any one man should know you can't get away with murder, you ought to be that man. But now you are in the jam, take my advice, Jim, and plead insanity. God knows you've been through enough in the last ten months to drive anyone crazy."

McElroy wondered what Larry would say if he claimed he had been framed. Probably, "Horse feathers". You heard the word "frame" from the time you broke in as a rookie until the day you checked out on

your pension. The prisons and jails were filled with "innocent" men. According to three-fourths of the inmates, even those caught in the act of murder, robbery, or assault, all of them had been framed.

The thought of prison suddenly nauseated him. Dying wasn't so hard. All men had to die. It was waiting to die, knowing the exact day your time was up, that was unbearable.

Kay walked him out on the porch. "I suppose I should put cuffs on you," he said sourly. "But I will be damned if I will. We've been friends too long. I wish you hadn't done it, Jim."

McElroy's eyes flicked out to the curb and the big Cadillac parked in between two small radio cars. He wanted time to think. He wouldn't have time down at the Bureau. He hadn't seen anything yet. He knew. Both Larry and Matt had handled him with kid gloves. But once he was down at the Bureau and booked and the State's Attorney's office had been cut in, the real questioning would begin:

"Why did you kill her, McElroy? . . . Don't give me that. What was the money angle? . . . What did she have that you wanted? . . . Talk, damn you, talk. You're not a cop anymore. You're just a dirty killer. . ."

"Believe it, or not—I was framed."

How they would laugh at that. How he, himself, would have laughed in the old days. He suddenly wanted a drink. He needed to see Jane. He had to know who had framed him.

"My shoe lace is untied," he mumbled. He stooped as if to tie it, seized Kay around the knees and dumped him over the low balustrade. He fell into a tangle of sleet covered bushes in the triangle where the porch made juncture with the house. Then Jim was racing for the curb and the familiar car, Sergeant Kay's voice raised in alarm behind him.

"Get him one of you guys! McElroy's making a break."

The driver of the squad car was inside the kitchen with Harvey. So was one of the radio car men. But the other driver was back of his wheel. He popped out like a jack-in-the-box and made the mistake of trying to cross the slippery lawn and intercept him instead of shooting.

McElroy crossed to meet him, straight-

armed him out of his way and zig-zagged on toward the squad car. Sergeant Kay was on his feet now and shooting. But he wasn't shooting to kill. McElroy had figured on that. Kay knew he was unarmed. Lead kicked up slush at his feet, whined off the metal of the car as he wrenched the door open.

"Stop, you damn fool!" the big sergeant swore.

McElroy kicked over the starter instead. Then a new voice joined and quelled the clamor.

"Stop!"

That was Matt. He would have to shoot to kill to protect his new gold badge. McElroy meshed the car into gear and jumped it from the curb, tearing off the rear left fender of the radio car parked in front of it. It made such a clatter the bucket of the guns behind him were drowned out but the bullet-proof window glass on the right side began to star.

Matt was shooting to kill.

Then he was in the clear, the fender shaken loose from the bumper of the larger car and the night-cleared street open before him. He pushed the gas to the floor-board and kicked the siren open wide. It felt good to be back of a wheel again. He didn't know where he was going. He didn't much care.

He felt no great excitement, only a growing curiosity. Who in the name of time hated his intestines badly enough to frame him for murder? He wasn't worth framing any more. He wasn't a lieutenant of detectives. He was nothing but a broken, rum-soaked derelict who only a few short hours before had attempted to take his own life.

The more he thought about it, the more it piqued his curiosity. There *had* been a phone call. His caller *had* advised him that Hanlon had been guilty and his widow ready to talk. But no one had known he was at the Crescent Hotel with the exception of Larry and Matt and the members of his old squad. None of them had reason to wish him ill. Matt and Larry had saved his life. Matt had his old job. He would probably have Jane before long. But they had been friendly rivals for years. And even if Matt had had reason to hate him, both he and Larry were out. If they had wanted to see him dead, all they would have had to do was allow him to jump in the river.

He ran his mind down the list of names

of men he had arrested and convicted. There were men among them who hated and had threatened him. But their mentality didn't run to murder frames. They did their dirty work with clubs and knives and guns. This was something special. Someone had some particular reason for wanting to see him sent to the chair.

If only he had a few hours in which to work, a few of the thousands of hours he had wasted feeling sorry for himself. This was somehow tied up with Hanlon and the robbery of the Corn Exchange. That much at least was certain. Whether Hanlon or Marston had robbed the bank, Hanlon's widow had known too much and someone had made certain that she wouldn't talk. Forty-five thousand dollars of the loot had never been recovered and forty-five thousand dollars was ample motive for murder in any man's town.

His mind felt clearer than it had felt in months. He felt more like himself. But he hadn't a chance. He knew it. The air was crackling now. Prowl and radio and riot cars were closing in from all sides. He kicked off the siren and listened to the crisp, incisive orders pouring over the radio—

Stop Headquarters Car No. 1 . . . stop  
H. Q. Car No. 1 . . . code 34 . . . code 34 . . .  
When last seen it was headed south on Engle. . . . Car 26 blockade the corner of 63rd and Halsted. . . . Car 52 call your station. . . .  
Calling all cars . . . stop H. Q. Car No. 1.  
Code 34. . . . Car 221 blockade. . . .

Slackening his speed slightly, he swung west for five blocks then turned back the way he had come. He hadn't a chance.

**T**HEN he thought of the river and laughed. If he could reach West Madison undetected and uncurbed, he might be able to give them a run for their money. He might even be able to find out who was back of the frame and why. Driving with one hand he reached behind the seat, took a sub-machine from the rack, changed his mind and replaced it. He didn't want anyone to be hurt. He had no grudge against any of the boys. If another police car tried to curb him, its driver would merely be obeying orders. The radio still crackled—

Stop H. Q. Car No. 1 . . . code 34. . . .

He reached the inner Belt Line unde-

ected by avoiding strategic corners and boulevards he knew would be blockaded or patrolled. Then he took to little used side streets, courts, and alleys in the warehouse district. He could see from two blocks away, by the leaping sparks, that the crew on the bridge was still working. That meant the span was open.

The next few minutes would tell the tale. A prowler spotted him and its siren began to wail. Now, almost on top of the warning red lanterns and the chain, he opened the door beside the wheel, gunned the motor and leaped, rolling as he struck the pavement on his side, protecting his head in his arms. Over the great roaring in his ears as the impact with the pavement drove all the breath from his body, he heard a wrench of metal as the huge chain pulled loose from its mooring, then a great grinding-of steel on steel as the housing of the big squad car caught on the steel lip of the ramp. Then there was a tremendous splash accompanied by excited shouts.

By the time he got stiffly to his feet, his left arm dangling, the usual crowd had begun to form. Seemingly all eyes were on the car. No one had seen him leap. The prowler car, its siren silent now, was parked on the very edge of the ramp in a spreading smear of oil, both officers staring down into the river.

McElroy took a few steps. Nothing seemed to be broken but his arm. So far, so good. He could stand a little pain. Making a sling for it with his tie and his handkerchief, he limped away before other police cars should arrive. It would be hours before grappling hooks could raise the car, full morning if divers were necessary. And for the length of the time it took until they discovered his body was not in the car, he was conveniently dead. He doubted that even Matt Harvey would suspect the subterfuge. He had tried to fling himself into the river once tonight for far less cause.

The Crescent Hotel was north of the Loop and some twelve or fourteen blocks distant from where he was. He debated hailing a cab and decided against it. He was to wish he had. Instead, he plodded on through the murky warehouse districts, flattening himself against walls or ducking into areaways whenever he spotted what might be a police car.

The night had grown colder. The sleet

turned to a gritty snow that needled his face and formed a ridge of icy granules where the collar of his torn topcoat gaped away from his neck. Two blocks from his destination he had to pause for breath, and, panting in the doorway of a shade-drawn but still open tavern, he watched a police car, traveling fast, weave down the icy street and turn west on two wheels in a skid that burned an inch of rubber from the tires. Tired, battered, in pain as he was, he had to grin. He was certainly giving the boys hell.

Rested, he limped on. He wanted to talk to the clerk of the Crescent. He wanted to know if the call had come from an outside or an inside line. He wanted to know who had been in the lobby when Larry and Matt had brought him in. It was a slim starting point but he had to start somewhere. He wouldn't be "dead" for long.

The Crescent fronted on Clark Street but the boiler room entrance was off the alley. A startled colored fireman looked up as he descended the stairs. "Where you think you're going, Mister?" he demanded. "If you want to warm up a bit, all right. But you can't sleep in here."

McElroy fumbled his wallet from his pocket and gave him a dollar bill. "It's okay, chum," he grinned wryly. "I've just been on a binge, that's all. And I want to get up to my room and clean up if I can without anyone seeing me."

Still dubious, the fireman demanded to see his key. Glad he hadn't dropped it at the desk on his way out, McElroy showed it to him and, grinning now, the fireman unlocked the door leading to the fire stairs. "You sure been having you one," he sympathized. He looked at the nail marks on McElroy's cheek. "Man, oh, man. Your face reminds me of a girl I had in Memphis."

The fire stairs smelled musty. McElroy climbed them to the lobby floor and cracking the door open, surveyed the lobby. The swinging door in front was still slightly agitating as from someone going out but there was no one in the lobby. Opening the fire door wider he could see the top of the clerk's white head as he sat at the switchboard.

Leaving the safety of the well, he crossed the hall and slipped through the gate to come up behind the switchboard. "Don't be

frightened at my looks, Pop," he forewarned the old man. "And this isn't a stick-up. I'm a guest at the hotel and all I want is some information."

The old man made no sign he heard him and McElroy rounded the switchboard. The old man might have the information that he wanted. He undoubtedly did. But he would never tell anyone about it. His face was purple. His eyes were bulging from his head. The same type of cord that had been used to strangle Mrs. Hanlon was drawn in a tight noose around his neck. McElroy felt for a pulse. There was none. The unknown killer had struck again—successfully, just minutes, seconds before his arrival.

This, too, would be pinned on him when it was discovered that he was not in the river.

A smart prosecutor would inform the jury. . . .

"This man's only hope of making you believe his fantastic story is to convince you that this mythical phone call did exist. To that end he also murdered an aged hotel clerk who could have testified that the alleged phone call existed only in his drink rotted mind."

It wasn't a pleasing prospect. McElroy had some idea now of what a trapped and hunted man felt. Every break had gone against him.

He turned to go, stopped as a speck of color in the aged clerk's fragile fingers caught his eye.

It was a torn portion of a bill with the numeral 50 in one corner. But it was the serial number that interested him the most.—L52893742. . . . He thought the last letter was a B. It was. Every movement of his body racking his arm with pain, he extracted a much handled slip of paper from his wallet and checked the number against it. His memory hadn't failed him. He had looked at those figures too often to forget them. L52893742B was one of an issue of fifty dollar bills that had been stolen from the Corn Exchange Bank in the stickup that had cost three men their lives, one during the course of the holdup, one in the electric chair for his murder, and one via the suicide route.

More, the torn bill was a part of the forty-five thousand dollars that had never been recovered.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## Sanctuary

BACK out on Clark Street again, McElroy found that the wind had dropped and a change had occurred in the heavens. The night was cold but no longer bitter. The icy, gritty granules had turned to huge soft white drops of snow that were quickly carpeting the sidewalks and the streets. The snow plows would be busy before morning.

He stood a moment, weaving in the doorway of the hotel, debating going directly to the Bureau and giving himself up. He couldn't fight this thing alone. The State Attorney's office wouldn't believe him but Larry or Matt might and they were in the saddle; they had the facilities to investigate.

There was more than a change in the storm. Something had changed in him. Then he realized what it was. He no longer felt the eyes. They no longer stared out of the dark, bitter, cynical, reproaching him. Maybe Hanlon had been guilty after all. He touched his wallet through his coat. There might be a thumb or a fingerprint on the torn fragment of the bill that had been torn from the dead clerk's fingers. The thing to do was to give it to Matt and ask him to have a fingerprint man examine it.

But first he wanted to see Jane. He walked east toward the lake as swiftly as the pain in his broken left arm would allow him.

A crack of light showed under her door. A slim brunette in her middle twenties, she opened the door almost immediately he had rapped. She was dressed, as for the street.

"Jim!" she gasped. "You're supposed to be dead!"

"Not quite, Jane," he told her wearily. He closed the door and stood with his back to it.

Tears came into her eyes as she looked at his arm. "You are hurt. But, oh, thank God, Jim, you weren't in that car."

Then she was in his one sound arm, sobbing. The pain was intense but exquisite. Jane still loved him. She still cared what happened to him. They had been fools to throw their lives away. Holding her close to him, McElroy wondered what they had ever found to quarrel about.

"I didn't do it, Jane," he told her. "Hanlon was guilty as hell and his partner is

killing fast in an attempt to cover up his tracks. How much of the story do you know?"

She told him that Matt had phoned her, saying Jim was out of his mind, that he had murdered the widow Hanlon and in attempting to make a break had stolen a squad car and had driven it off the open West Madison Street bridge.

McElroy digested the information, told her, "There is another dead man by now." He started to tell her about the clerk and the eyes that no longer bothered him, then pain and fatigue, coupled with the warmth of the apartment, caused him to faint for the first time in his life.

When consciousness returned, he was lying on the couch and Jane had somehow removed his coat and shirt and was working with his arm. A registered nurse, she knew her business. There was a blinding flash of pain, a dull click, and a second wave of blackness engulfed him. She was splinting his arm with splints broken from the tiny washboard she used for her laundry when he came to again.

"Feel better?" she smiled at him.

He said it did. She got a bottle and a glass and offered him a drink. "No," he told her. "From here on in, I'll make it on my own."

She returned the bottle to the cupboard, sat down on the couch beside him and kissed him. "But who is back of all this, Jim?"

He said he didn't know. He didn't. All he really knew was that he was back where he belonged and that, if possible, he intended to remain there. He smiled wryly. Silly thought. He was wanted for one murder and when the clerk's body was discovered, another death would be added to his score.

Jane wanted to know, "But what are we going to do?"

He repeated that he didn't know.

She told him, "Matt should be here any minute. I made him promise to pick me up and take me to the bridge. I wanted to be there when. . . ." Tears filled her eyes again and she was unable to continue.

He patted her shoulder awkwardly. For the first time in his life, he resented Matt. He wanted to be alone with Jane. He wanted time to think. More, he suddenly didn't trust anyone but the slim girl beside him, the girl who had been his wife and whom

Matt wanted to marry. It had been the three of them from the time they had been kids out in the old Humboldt Park district.

He tried to express his feelings and did so, crudely. "I . . . I'm sorry about everything, Jane."

She knew what he meant and kissed him. "Forget it. We'll start all over if we ever get out of this mess. You want Matt to know that you're here or not?" Her eyes flicked to the snow-sodden suit and top coat on a chair.

"No," McElroy suddenly decided. "There is no use involving Matt. Like he told me out at the Hanlon place, on account of feeling the way that he does about you, he has crawled out on some long limbs for me and there is no use his risking his shield to give me a few hours of freedom. But I do want time to think."

She picked the sodden clothes from the chair, piled them on a closet floor, then busied herself putting away the gauze and tape and remnants of the tiny washboard. Then she helped him to his feet. "You move on into the bedroom. I'll cry my eyes out at the bridge. He'll never know from me that you aren't in that car."

The phone rang as she spoke.

"That was Matt," she reported. "They have a crane and grappling hooks at the bridge and he's on his way to pick me up." She wet her lips, continued. "He also reminded me that he loved me and now that you have proven yourself to be a complete heel and a louse he hoped my 'memories' of you wouldn't keep me from marrying him. He said he wanted an answer one way or another this morning."

They looked at each other.

THE STATEMENT didn't sound like Matt but then he was tense and under fire. He had allowed a prisoner to escape. His job, his shield, were endangered.

Jane took a fur coat from the closet. "I'll wait for him down in the foyer."

"No," McElroy told her slowly. "Let him call for you up here." He was snatching at straws now and he knew it. "I'll be out of sight in the bedroom."

"And you'll be here when I get back?"

McElroy kissed her, hard. "I'll be here when you get back," he promised.

She went back to the living room to wait.

She hadn't long. Through the cracked bedroom door, Harvey looked older and greyer than McElroy had realized he was. It wasn't nice for a man to feel, at least partially, responsible for the death of a friend.

"Jim went mad just before the end, Jane," Harvey told the girl. "It's the only way that I can explain it. I saved him from the river once tonight but I wish to God I hadn't. If I hadn't bucked him up and gotten him a room, he never would have thought of that insane scheme to clear himself. Mrs. Hanlon would still be alive."

His hands caressed the sleeve of the girl's fur coat.

She said, "Please, Matt."

"You can't go on loving him forever," he continued. "I'm almost positive that he's in the river." His voice turned bitter. "But even if by some miracle he managed to escape from the car, the Hanlon woman's death isn't the only charge we have against him. Before taking his own rotten life, he killed a poor old clerk over at the Crescent Hotel in a last mad attempt to make his story of the phone call stand up."

He pulled her to him and kissed her. "I love you. I'm crazy about you, Jane. I always have been."

Unresisting, she allowed him to kiss her, then slipped out of his arms crying softly. "Please, Matt. Not now. You promised to take me to the bridge so I would be there when. . . ." She broke off sobbing, as if unable to continue.

"You are a fool to cry about him, Jane," Harvey told her. "He isn't worth one of your tears." Sweeping the apartment with his eyes, he opened the door and helped her out into the hall.

It was quiet in the apartment when they had gone. Waiting a moment to make certain Harvey hadn't been suspicious and intended to return, McElroy walked to the front window and, standing well back of the curtains, watched the friend who had his old job help his former wife into the car parked in front of the apartment marquee.

When the car had gone, he tuned the radio to the police band. The air way was normal again. H.Q. Car No. 1 had been located. He listened for five or ten minutes, then turned off the radio and walked back into the bedroom.

Jane had still kept his clothes. He chose a warm tweed suit, a gray flannel shirt and

a purple knitted tie that had been a favorite of Jane's. There was nothing he could do for his face but wash and shave it. He shaved with the small razor Jane preferred to use instead of a depilatory. It was awkward with only one hand but he felt better when he had finished.

Satisfied with his appearance, he transferred his wallet and his useless badge to the pockets of the dry suit and chose one of two top coats in the closet. A lieutenant of homicide lived well. He hadn't realized how well.

Jane's pearl handled .25 caliber automatic was still in its plush nest in the bed table drawer. It looked like a toy in his palm but it would serve. A weapon didn't need to leave a wound as deep as a well nor so wide as a church door. Properly placed, a lead slug as big as a pea would turn the trick. He hoped he would have to use it.

His preparations complete, he sat down at the phone and dialed a number without hesitation. This would be the big gamble. He might slip up and find himself in the chair toward which he was being pushed, or he might roll a natural. But whichever way the dice fell it would seem that the stake was well worth the gamble.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### McElroy Closes the Eyes

THE APARTMENT was large, much larger than Jane's and far more luxuriously furnished. McElroy hadn't been in it for ten months. The first thing he did was to turn on the radio. It was already tuned to the police band.

Then he looked, half-heartedly, for the money. He didn't expect he would find it. He didn't. But he did find a full and complete file of news clippings relating to the Baker-Hanlon-Marston case. There was a picture of Matt holding Marston's confession. There was a picture of himself walking out of Central Bureau right after he had resigned his commission. There were numerous pictures of the deceased Mrs. Hanlon, most of them showing her scantily clad. Some were news cuts. More were glossy professional prints obviously taken during her modeling days. McElroy put them back in the drawer where he found them, feeling slightly like an adolescent boy caught looking at French postal cards. You lived and

learned. You never really knew anyone.

There was a portable bar in one corner, well-stocked with expensive liquors. He looked at the clock on the bar. It was a few minutes after five but night was still complete. These were the longest nights and shortest days. It wouldn't be light until well after six.

He settled himself in a chair to wait. The grappling hooks had the squad car now, at least so the police announcer told the network of tuned-in police cars. Now they were hoisting it from the water. At five-thirty-six he announced that McElroy's body wasn't in the car and while there was a strong possibility the current had swept it down river, on the off chance that it hadn't, the search for him was on again. . . .

Lieutenant Harvey now figures he may have jumped from the car just before it plunged over the ramp. . . . Car 32 resume your tour . . . Car 221 call your station. . . . Calling Car 66 . . . Calling Car 66. Code 34. Make an investigation at 421 North Clark. . . .

McElroy smiled sourly. Code 34 was murder and 421 North Clark was the address of the Crescent Hotel. The dead clerk's body had finally been discovered, undoubtedly by some early rising guest. In a few more minutes, the search for him would be intensified, if that was possible.

An hour grew into two; two hours became three and McElroy was beginning to grow uneasy, when a key was finally inserted in the lock of the living room door.

His hat and overcoat spotted with clinging snow he had been unable to brush off in the hall, Matt Harvey looked even older and greyer than he had looked in Jane's apartment. He stood a moment leaning one hand wearily against the jamb then closed the door behind him.

"The son-of-a-bee," he swore without heat. "The dirty son-of-a-bee."

McElroy waited until the other man's arms were bound by the overcoat he was removing, then asked softly, "You wouldn't by any chance be referring to me, would you, Lieutenant Harvey?"

The other man looked up startled, repeating Jane's reaction, "You're dead!"

"No," McElroy shook his head. "You only wish I were dead. And you aren't even quite certain you wish that. There is still the dead clerk to explain and the time

element doesn't jibe. I didn't have time to kill him *before* I drove into the river. And if I *am* in the river, I couldn't have killed him. That's the trouble with murder, Matt. If your timetable happens to go sour, you are left out on a longer limb than those you claim you crawled out on for me."

Recovering his composure slightly, Harvey finished removing his coat, his eyes never leaving the small pearl handled gun in his former superior's hand. "Stop talking like the insane man that you are, Jim. And put that toy away."

McElroy informed him soberly. "Shed your hardware, Matt. Then before I call the Bureau, let's you and I sit down and have a little talk about a dead blonde named Beth, a phony confession you beat out of a hood named Marston before you put his own gun to his head in room 216 of the Chalmers House . . . and a little matter of forty-five thousand stolen dollars."

His face livid, Harvey swore, "The hell with you." His right hand streaked toward his coat lapel only to stop halfway there and slap at his thigh instead. A "pop" comparable to an opened champagne bottle issued from the mouth of the toy McElroy held in his hand.

"That," McElroy grinned, "is the hell of these ladies' purse guns. You never know where they are going to shoot. Who knows? I might pull the trigger again and accidentally shoot you right between the eyes."

"No," Harvey gasped. He sat on the arm of a chair clutching his thigh with both hands. "You're crazy, Jim."

"Like a fox," McElroy said coldly. "You wanted dough. You got it. You wanted my job and you got it. But I will be damned if you are going to get Jane."

Harvey repeated. "You're crazy. Why, I saved your life last night."

"You mean," McElroy corrected him, "that you fattened up a goose. I admit I don't know the details, but as I see it, the widow Hanlon was threatening to squawk. Maybe you weren't paying her enough attention. Maybe you were paying her too much. I wouldn't know. But I was the boy you picked to comb her out of your hair. It was you, disguising your voice, who made that phone call to the Crescent Hotel. Then you clipped out and murdered the blonde. You knew how my story would



sound to a jury. You played it smart."

Harvey licked at dry lips but said nothing.

McElroy continued, "It was you I heard in the kitchen. It was you who ran the water and closed the icebox door. Then, leaving the dead blonde in my lap, you sneaked out the back way, walked a block or so to where you had parked your car and drove like hell for here, knowing that even if you were off duty, the Department would inform you and expect you to take charge. Maybe you weren't even here when the first call was made. What difference did that make? You were the head of homicide. You were above suspicion."

Harvey snarled, "You know so much. Prove it."

McElroy shook his head. "There is a lot I can't prove, like their not being Hanlon's, but your eyes filled with hate, watching me everywhere I went. I really saw them for the first time in Jane's apartment a couple of hours ago. You've sucked around for what I could do for you but you've hated me ever since we were kids."

Harvey's laugh was bitter. "I'd like to see you prove that in court."

"I couldn't," McElroy admitted, "any more than I can prove Beth Hanlon came to you with a proposition. As I see it, she had cached the money her husband had stolen but she didn't dare to spend it, not knowing just how hot it was. Hating me as you did you concocted a fairly clever scheme. You were next in line for my job. With me disgraced and out of the way, you would not only step into my shoes but would have full access to my files. You could destroy the lists of serial numbers of the stolen money, substitute a phony list and send out a circular to all concerned that a mistake had been made. That took the heat off the money. And by making a bum and a heel out of me you brought in a four-horse parley. You got a big cut of the dough. You earned the gratitude of a red hot blonde mama. You got my job, and a possible chance to marry Jane." He concluded. "But Beth Hanlon played for keeps and when you tried to toss her into the discard because you thought you were making time with Jane, she threatened to yell 'copper'!"

Harvey repeated, "You can't prove it."

McElroy stood up. "No. But by check-

ing with the Corn Exchange, I can prove the present list of the stolen money serial numbers is a phony."

"Damn you!" Harvey swore. He got up from the arm of the chair and began to circle the room, his right hand poised over his coat lapel, ignoring his wounded thigh.

That suited McElroy. He circled with him. "What's more," he said, "I can prove the fifty dollar bill you gave the clerk at the Crescent Hotel to shut his mouth, and later, after I'd made my break, snatched back out of his fingers because you were afraid he *wouldn't* keep his mouth shut, was stolen money. You made a bad mistake there, Matt. You left a part of the bill in his fingers. And I have both that part of the bill and the original list in my pocket."

Harvey's hand still hovered over the butt of his gun. "All right, damn you," he swore. "It happened about as you say. But you'll never crow about it."

His hand slid under his lapel and McElroy nailed it there with another report of the tiny gun. Then he opened the front door. Sergeant Kay, with the rest of the squad behind him, was standing in the hall. McElroy handed him the .25. "Accurate little things, aren't they, Larry? You heard?"

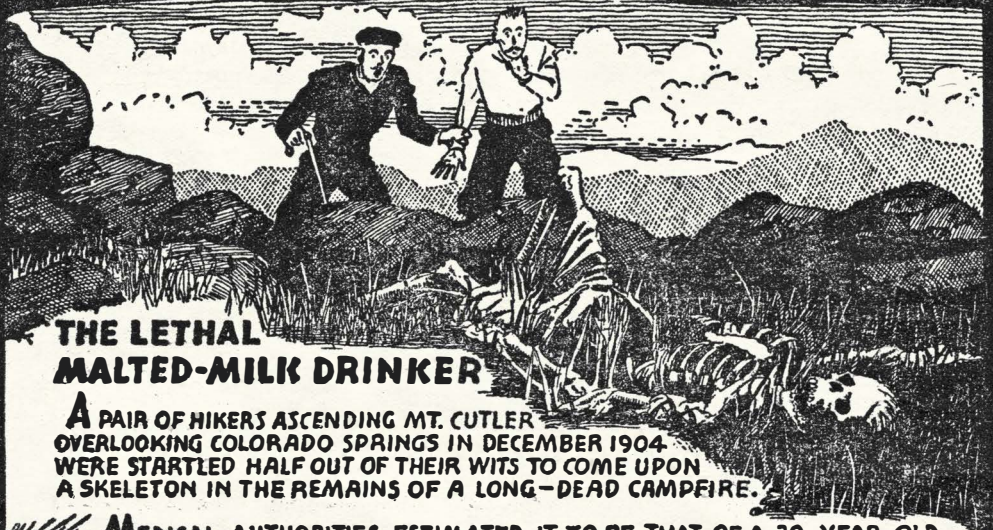
"We heard," Kay said grimly. "But I damn near didn't come. I thought it was a gag when my wife told me you had phoned and offered to surrender if I'd bring a couple of the boys and pick you up at Matt Harvey's apartment fifteen minutes after he parted from me. In fact I tried to call Matt."

Grinning, McElroy pointed to the receiver he had lifted from the phone. "I figured you might try that. And I wanted our little meeting to be a surprise to Matt."

Kay nodded one of his men into the apartment. "Get his gun. I don't want to even touch the louse." He weighed the small gun McElroy had given him on his palm. "And one of you had better call a doctor, I suppose." He turned back to McElroy, his right hand extended. "Look, Jim. . ."

"Forget it," McElroy grinned. "You can tell me all about it later. I'll come down to the Bureau in, say, two hours. Among other things, I want to talk to the brass. I want my job back if I can get it. But right now," his grin widened, "well, right now . . . I have a date with a Jane."

# STRANGE TRAILS



## THE LETHAL MALTED-MILK DRINKER

A PAIR OF HIKERS ASCENDING MT. CUTLER OVERLOOKING COLORADO SPRINGS IN DECEMBER 1904 WERE STARTLED HALF OUT OF THEIR WITS TO COME UPON A SKELETON IN THE REMAINS OF A LONG-DEAD CAMPFIRE.

MEDICAL AUTHORITIES ESTIMATED IT TO BE THAT OF A 30-YEAR-OLD WOMAN, KILLED SOME MONTHS BEFORE, PRESUMABLY BY A HAMMER BLOW.

SINCE HIS MISSING-PERSONS FILE SHOWED NO SUCH LADY, POLICE CHIEF W. S. REYNOLDS ASSUMED THE VICTIM A TOURIST AND CAUSED HER DENTAL CHART TO BE SENT TO ALL POLICE DEPARTMENTS.

A SYRACUSE DENTIST IDENTIFIED IT AS BELONGING TO MRS. BESSIE BOUTON, A LOCAL HOUSEWIFE WHO HAD ELOPED--TOGETHER WITH JEWELRY AND VALUABLES--WITH ONE MILTON ANDREWS, A TALL

GLOOMY-FACED MAN ADDICTED TO MALTED-MILK SHAKES IN LARGE QUANTITIES, POSING AS AN ENGLISH SPORTSMAN.

BACKTRACKING ON MALTED-MILK-DRINKING MR. ANDREWS, REYNOLDS FOUND HIM IN REALITY A PROFESSIONAL GAMBLER IMPLICATED, AMONG OTHER DEVILTRY, IN THE MURDER AND ROBBERY OF A CONNECTICUT JEWELER.

ADDING THIS FURTHER DESCRIPTION TO HIS POLICE FLYERS--STRESSING STRONGLY THE MALTED-MILK HABIT CAUSED BY A CHRONIC STOMACH DISORDER--THE CHIEF TRAILED HIS MAN BACK ACROSS THE COUNTRY.



83-120

# ... to MURDER by LEE

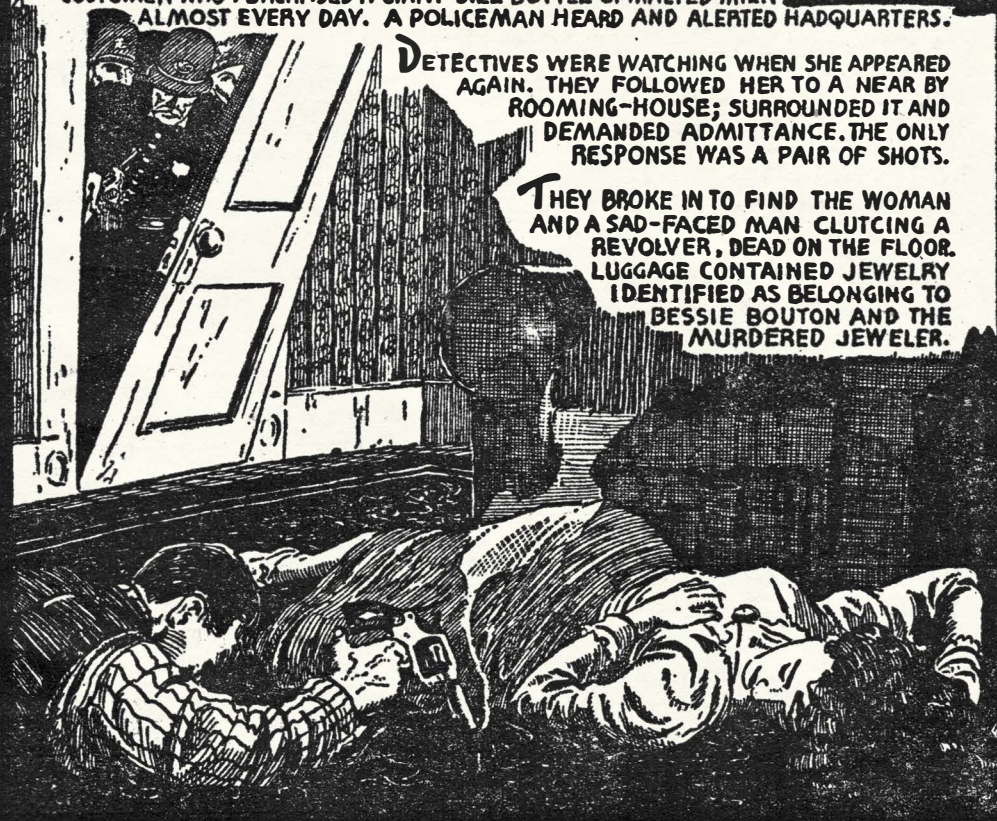
LATE THE FOLLOWING YEAR AN AUSTRALIAN JOCKEY NAMED ELLIS REPORTED TO BERKELEY, CAL., POLICE THAT HE HAD BEEN BEATEN WITH A HAMMER AND ROBBED BY A SAD-FACED "SPORTS MAN," WHO PRACTICALLY LIVED ON MALTED MILK.

POLICE COMBED THE STATE FOR THE HOMICIDAL MALTED-MILK DRINKER.

FINALLY A SAN FRANCISCO GROCER HAPPENED TO REMARK ABOUT A WOMAN CUSTOMER WHO PURCHASED A GIANT-SIZE BOTTLE OF MALTED MILK ALMOST EVERY DAY. A POLICEMAN HEARD AND ALERTED HEADQUARTERS.

DETECTIVES WERE WATCHING WHEN SHE APPEARED AGAIN. THEY FOLLOWED HER TO A NEAR BY ROOMING-HOUSE; SURROUNDED IT AND DEMANDED ADMITTANCE. THE ONLY RESPONSE WAS A PAIR OF SHOTS.

THEY BROKE IN TO FIND THE WOMAN AND A SAD-FACED MAN CLUTCHING A REVOLVER, DEAD ON THE FLOOR. LUGGAGE CONTAINED JEWELRY IDENTIFIED AS BELONGING TO BESSIE BOUTON AND THE MURDERED JEWELER.



**By  
Zeta  
Rothschild**

*The amazing true story of  
the lady with the come-  
hither eyes, who made  
her last conquest—  
Death!*



*The garment belonged  
to her daughter, Mrs.  
Holt told police.*

# **THE CASE OF THE FLIGHTY CADAVER**

**N**O ONE had given the shabby trunk with the three-inch strap around its middle a second look when the porter dropped it on the counter of the check room at London's Charing Cross Station.

Nor had the attendant hesitated to give a check for the trunk to the good looking young man who accompanied the porter, as was customary.

Not even when, half an hour later, a boot-black who worked outside the station brought in a small wad of yellow paper which turned out to be the check ticket for

the shabby trunk, did the chief attendant suspect there was anything unusual about that piece of baggage.

Four days later, however, on May 10th, when a peculiar odor began to permeate the check room and the attendants were going round with a slightly greenish cast to their usual florid complexions, suspicion was aroused that something was wrong.

Before long it was decided the offensive smell was coming from the shabby trunk. And no one needed three guesses as to what was causing it.

An inspector from Bow Street pried open the trunk. One look was enough for him. He slammed down the lid, put in a telephone call and soon made arrangements to have the trunk taken to the police station.

Here, in the presence of a half dozen officials, the trunk was unpacked. A knobby bundle in brown wrapping paper, opened, gave up the head of a woman, tightly wrapped in a dingy, dirty yellow duster. The features were small and regular, her hair and eyes dark brown.

Underneath the head was the torso, in the same brown paper. The arms and legs, similarly wrapped, had been jammed into the sides.

The body was nude, but the murderer had tucked in here and there odds and ends of clothing, even including the woman's leather pocketbook. It was empty of cash or papers; only three sticks of chewing gum remained. A pair of worn patent leather pumps gave up no clue. But a pair of grey knitted bloomers had a small white piece sewed on them and printed on this tab in red ink was "P. Holt" and the number 447.

On two other pieces, a chemise and a shirt, was another number, 581, but this was in black ink.

These were laundry marks, undoubtedly. Scotland Yard which keeps revised lists of laundry symbols and the concerns that use them, soon located the laundry involved. It was in Shepherds Bush, a section of London, and both those numbers belonged to an esteemed patron, Mrs. John Holt of South Kensington.

Detective Inspector Steel left immediately for a call on Mrs. Holt, the marked articles, neatly wrapped, under his arm.

The knickers belonged to her daughter,

said Mrs. Holt. They should have been in her bureau drawer then. But evidently some one had, to put it simply, borrowed them.

The other pieces probably belonged to one of the maids. The laundry used one number for the family, another for the household staff, the former in red ink, the latter in black.

But to which of the maids who had passed through their house during the last eighteen months those garments belonged, Mrs. Holt had no idea.

Inspector Steel had more than the average supply of patience and persistence. He described the corpse to Mrs. Holt. Did it remind her of any one of them? Mrs. Holt gave the names of four maids and that of the agency which had supplied them.

Three of the maids were soon located. The fourth, a Mrs. Roles, was waiting to hear from them. The agency gave Detective Steel her address.

Mrs. Roles wasn't there. The friend with whom she shared a room invited the detective to come in.

"I haven't seen Minnie for almost a week," said Mary Askey. "I thought she had a place and wondered why she didn't let me know."

Steel described a blue jumper found in the trunk, also a black skirt with tucks. When he mentioned a small hat with a green quill, Mary Askey burst into tears.

"That's Minnie Bonati," she sobbed. "I'm sure it's her."

Minnie Bonati had used the name Roles when working as a cook. She had a husband, and though she was on good terms with him, she had several boy friends as well, her friend said.

In fact, Scotland Yard was to find that this case had too many men, all likely suspects, waiting to be checked on.

One favorite was a butcher. Since the body had been rather skillfully cut up, the detectives thought they were getting somewhere. But the butcher had left London a week before Minnie's death and his new employer in Manchester backed up his alibi of being there.

While one group of detectives continued the search for Minnie Bonati's masculine companions, another group was trying to trace back the trail of the trunk.

The local papers carried a detailed de-

scription of the trunk along with photographs. On the second day after the discovery of the corpse, an elderly man accompanied by a pretty young girl arrived at the police station. His name was Ward and he owned a second hand store in Brixton where, in the first week of May—he was not sure of the day—he had sold a black leather trunk with brown corners to a young man, a stranger to him.

The corpse-laden trunk had had several identifying features. On one side in white paint were the initials "I.F.A." and on the handle had been a piece of cardboard attached by a string, on which was printed the name "F. Austin."

To their disappointment, the second-hand dealer said the initials and even the tag had been on the trunk when he sold it. The man had left them there to confuse the police.

The dealer could give only a vague description of this man—about thirty, dark hair, a short mustache, good complexion and a medium build.

"Did he send for a taxi? Or an express company?" asked a detective.

"He shoved it out himself and dragged it along," spoke up the young girl.

Now, through the newspapers, readers were asked if they had seen a black leather trunk on May 6th or any previous day. Especially were the police interested in locating the taxi that had brought it to the Charing Cross Station.

Edward Sharpington, a taxi driver, presented himself at headquarters within twenty-four hours.

"I took two fellows to Westminster Police Station May 6th. Just as they paid their fare, a man on the sidewalk asked me to take him to Charing Cross. He had a trunk right beside him."

Sharpington had hoisted the trunk on the back of his cab. He had noticed nothing peculiar about it or the man. Arriving at the station, the man had called a porter, paid his fare and left.

The taxi driver did not know from which house on that block, called Rochester Row, the man with the trunk had come.

Interest finally centered on one building of four stories in the center of the block. On the ground floor was a store. The next two floors were occupied by a solicitor who had rented out two rooms to a transfer

agent, J. Robinson. And the fourth, one large room, was let to societies for meetings and dances.

A medium-sized black trunk had been seen in a hall there but those who recalled it disagreed as to whether it had been on the second or third floor. Everyone thought it belonged to one of the groups which used the top floor and that it was packed with books.

**J**OHAN ROBINSON, the transfer agent, had given up his rooms the second week in May, the detectives soon learned. He had only moved in on March 22nd, and had paid two months' rent. Before the third installment was due, the owner of the property had received a brief note saying that business had been too poor to warrant keeping his office. And he had moved out.

Although the rooms were given a thorough going over, the detectives found nothing to warrant suspicion. However, they wanted to talk with Robinson.

The landlord had the name of the bank on which Robinson's checks had been drawn. The account was closed, detectives learned, but fortunately the bank was able to give them Robinson's home address.

Robinson had moved from it the second week in May. The landlady said, "He was looking for cheaper quarters, he told me."

The room had been unoccupied since Robinson had left. And under the landlady's watchful eyes, the detectives went over it inch by inch.

They only found a card from the post office saying that the telegram addressed to Mrs. Robinson, Greystone Hotel, Hammer-smith, could not be delivered as no one by that name was registered there.

The next move was a visit to the Grey-stone Hotel. There the detectives located a woman, named Robinson, who worked as a chambermaid.

(The telegram had been handed to a bar-maid, employed only a few days, who had told the messenger boy she knew no one by the name of Robinson. Instead of verifying with the desk clerk, the boy had returned with his message to the post office.)

Mrs. Robinson admitted immediately that John Robinson was her husband. "I don't know where he's living," she said, "but I'm going to meet him tomorrow night

outside the Elephant and Castle at nine o'clock. If you want to, come along."

John Robinson, a dapper good looking young man, about thirty-five, showed no dismay or even embarrassment when he met the detectives. And he agreed amiably to accompany them to Scotland Yard for a chat.

Robinson said he had never seen a black trunk in the halls on any floor. Nor did he know any woman by the name of Bonati. The trunk had been checked at Charing Cross on the 6th of May and discovered on the 10th; the autopsy had brought out that the woman had been dead about six days. Robinson was now asked to account for his movements on May 4th.

His typist had left him that morning—that would help him fix the day, began Robinson. After a noonday snack, he had stopped in a nearby pub, met a bandsman there and brought him back to his rooms. They had finished a half dozen bottles of beer by four-thirty. Then the two had gone out; he didn't know where the bandsman went, but he went to his lodgings, brushed up and then went to a club he visited regularly to play billiards.

This alibi was soon checked. Robinson had apparently spent an uneventful day.

He was asked to make one more test. The owner of the second hand store, and the taxi driver, had both seen the man with the trunk. Both happened to be ill in their respective homes at the time. Would Robinson give these men an opportunity to look at him?

"Certainly," answered Robinson.

Both Ward and Sharpington stared at Robinson as he took off his hat so they could get a better look at him and walked up and down in front of them.

In turn, both men shook their heads. This wasn't the man.

Minnie Bonati had had more boy friends than any one woman had a right to. Roles admitted he wasn't Minnie's husband, only a temporary companion. One Bonati, a waiter, was the dead woman's legal mate. But it had been so long since he had seen his wife, he couldn't remember the date.

The tag with the name "F. Austin" had seemed a possible tie-up with the murderer if he had been so careless as to overlook this link. And blood pressures mounted at Scotland Yard when word came that a man of

this name had been located at Hastings. But in a short time this F. Austin convinced the police he had never heard of Mrs. Bonati or had ever owned a black leather trunk.

Clues that seemed promising continued to come in. A man very much resembling the buyer of the trunk had purchased a three inch wide strap at a place not far from where Mrs. Bonati had lived. But he turned out to be an honest workingman with the strap still in his possession.

Another phone call told of a mysterious box seen in a shed in South London. Could this have been the trunk later used to house the body? But there turned out to be no possible connection between this box and the mystery.

Two weeks had passed. London newspapers had given valuable space daily to the story of the black trunk and its gruesome contents. And still Scotland Yard had failed to find the murderer!

The inspectors felt there must have been something they had overlooked. Back they went to go over once more the articles taken from the trunk. One of them picked up the dirty duster in which the head had been wrapped. It looked just what it was, a duster long used and discarded. But its odd yellow tinge puzzled him.

Without saying a word to his colleagues, the inspector took the duster to a nearby wash bowl and gave it a good washing. The color remained. But when the dirt had been removed, several faded letters appeared at one end of the duster. And under a strong light these letters could be easily read, "Greystone Hotel".

The inspector returned to the hotel. He showed the yellow duster to one woman after another. Finally a barmaid spoke up. "That's mine," she said. "I washed out a blouse that lost much of its dye." It was yellow. Right afterwards, she had washed the duster and there had been enough dye in the water to tinge the duster."

She had hung the duster on a door knob of her room. Some one must have taken it. Her roommate was Mrs. Robinson.

Back to the rooms Robinson had occupied as a transfer agent. This time the inspector, now joined by two others, covered that room inch by inch. They found no tell-tale blood stains, however. But in the waste basket, long emptied, they found a match

*(Continued on page 129)*

# THE WRATH OF UMANTAH

*Maybe he sensed  
Johnny's movement  
because he turned  
suddenly, saw him  
raise the anchor...*



**By Ray  
Cummings**

***Every man has his symbol of faith, his talisman against  
Death—but when a man is evil, the vengeance of his  
Fathers is swift!***

**J**OHNNY GRANT sat in the stern of the long, slim Siwash canoe, paddling with powerful, rhythmic strokes. The shining lake water rippled under the bow; it slid from the blade of the paddle with drops like molten silver. Overhead, the full moon was a great round glowing disc. Its pale light made the lake shimmer, tipped the giant forest trees with a white edging, made the ragged wild cliffs of the

shoreline inky black in their hollows. And it glowed on all the rising terraces of the foothills, out and up into the dim purple distance where, against the stars, the white-crowned summit of Mt. Sir Donald stood like a mighty giant rod, surveying his realm beneath him.

In Johnny Grant there was something that always responded to the silence of forested mountains, rippling, silvered wa-



ter, the feel of the quivering canoe under him and the paddle in his hand. Something in his blood. He sat a little straighter, and as the exultation swept him, his strokes were faster. He was a slim, powerful youth, twenty-three now. He was coming home tonight from the Bantok Casino, ten miles across the lake, where he had taken a girl to the Saturday night dance. The Canadian Pacific came through near Bantok. Now, in August, quite a few people came over to the lakeside settlement.

Because he had been to the dance tonight, Johnny Grant was clad in white flannel trousers, white shirt and a blue serge jacket. He had discarded the jacket, rolled up his sleeves, opened his shirt at the throat. You could breathe better that way. Even in August it was cold out here on the lake, with the Rockies of British Columbia crowding close and the cold air sliding down from the snowy reaches of Mt. Sir Donald. But there were beads of sweat on Johnny Grant's forehead. Inside, he felt exultant, warm. To be afraid was foolish. He had tossed it away now. Tonight he'd have it out with old Elias Perkins and settle it. . . .

Young Grant's city clothes belied him. His black hair was straight and coarse; his swarthy face was broad, and with the slightly flattened nose of his Siwash Indian mother. He was a half-breed. He thought of it now with contempt. His father had been nothing but what you would call a squaw man. No guts. A white man living up there in that little Indian village all those years. But Johnny would be different. What he wanted, he'd go after and get. . . .

Then as he pondered what he was planning to do tonight, if it happened that old man Perkins became an adversary, Johnny's mind suddenly went back to his dead mother. He remembered her as a gentle little woman who had been brought up by the missionaries in Uclulet. If his mother could have known what he was thinking she would have shuddered: "Thou shalt not kill." Johnny thrust the thought away. Some things you had to do. If you didn't, you went down. The Indians all over the Western World had been like that. . . .

It was midnight now, and Johnny had reached the eastern shoreline. Rocky Point, a little tree-shrouded headland of the

shore, jutting out here. Beyond it, in a rocky little cove, was old man Perkins' boathouse, with his summer camp back in the trees behind it. Elias Perkins, who was seventy-five now, was an odd character. Forty years ago he had been a trapper and prospector. He had established the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, and it had prospered through the years so that now Perkins was retired. In the winters he lived at the hotel in Banff; but in the summers, still with the love of the lonely forests in his blood, he lived here in the rustic lodge he had built on the wild eastern shore of Lake St. Anne.

Urged by the thrust of Johnny's silent powerful strokes, the canoe rounded Rocky Point. It was a gaudy little craft; there was nothing like it here on St. Anne. Johnny had brought it from the north, from the Siwash village up near Prince Rupert where he was born. Its wooden prow had an overhanging headpiece—a Siwash gargoyle image, painted a vivid green, yellow and red. And Johnny himself had carved a little image of his own and mounted it at the canoe's rounded stern. It was a replica of the Siwash god, Umantah.

As he rounded Sandy Point, Johnny reached behind him and patted the small wooden image.

"You better stand right with me tonight, Umantah," he murmured. His thick lips were faintly smiling. "I'm liable to need you, little feller."

Umantah would understand. He'd be right on the job. In Johnny Grant's memories of his boyhood, back there with his mother and father in the northern village, sometimes Umantah seemed more clear than anything else. He could remember how his father had fashioned a big statue of Umantah and mounted it at the very top of his mother's totem pole, which stood outside their lodge. They had used the totem of his mother's family, because a white man has no totem. The Chief hadn't liked that very much, but Johnny's father had done it anyway. And he put Umantah at the top of it—so the family would always have good luck. Johnny could remember himself at six or seven years old, standing awed and just a little frightened, at the bottom of the big totem pole as he stared up at Umantah. The god of luck.

Umantah was a grinning little fellow,

with bulging green cheeks and red pop-eyes. His mouth was open; his teeth were like fangs. He frightened Johnny, in those days. But Johnny's father had said, "Maybe it's just Siwash bunk, kid . . . but your mother swears by him. So we better believe in him, Johnny."

Umantah maybe hadn't done very well by Johnny's father. Johnny could remember that day when the Canadian police had come and taken his father away and his mother had cried. And pretty soon after that his father was convicted of something and was never coming back. He didn't come back, for he had gotten sick in jail and died of pneumonia. Johnny could remember how the old Chief had come and taken Umantah off his mother's totem. And he had glared at the staring little Johnny.

"In you there is bad blood," the old Chief had said. "Not worthy of Siwash. Of you the Siwash are ashamed, for you surely will come to a bad end, and disgrace the Siwash heritage which is in you."

**I**N HIS CANOE now as he rounded Rocky Point, Johnny Grant's hand behind him caressed the little grinning image of Umantah, and he was smiling with faint irony. The old Chief wasn't here to rip Umantah off the canoe and take him away. The old Chief was still living. Some day, soon maybe, when Johnny was rich and a man of importance, he'd go back up there to the village where he was born. He'd go at potlatch time, which was like Christmas when everybody gave everybody else a present . . . and he'd take the Chief something really swell, to show him how wrong he'd been. . . .

As he came past Rocky Point, the little boathouse of old Elias Perkins was white in the moonlight against the shadows of the big fir trees on the shore behind it. Johnny was within a hundred feet of it as he rounded the spit of the Point. The old man was there, seated on the front platform. Evidently he was waiting for Johnny, and passing the time with his rod and reel, casting out a shining lure hoping that, in the moonlight, one of the big mountain trout might take it. He made a cast, began reeling slowly in to troll his lure, and his hand went up with a greeting to Johnny.

Then Johnny swept the canoe skilfully up to the front of the boathouse platform.

"Hello, Johnny," the old man greeted.

"Hello, sir," Johnny said.

Somehow he had never wanted to call the old man grandfather. It seemed stupid. Perkins' son, now dead, had adopted Johnny, up in the Siwash village when Johnny, at twelve, was an orphan there and the Chief was glad to get rid of him. The wealthy Perkins family had put Johnny through school, up to a couple of years of college in Vancouver. Now Johnny was stock clerk with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, in Vancouver, and spending his vacation here with old Perkins.

"Have a good time, Johnny?"

"Yes sir," Johnny said. "Very nice, thanks."

There was a sudden constraint between them. From the canoe stern Johnny gazed up into the rugged, seamed face of the old man a few feet above him. Perkins was grinning as he held his rod, and reeled in his line, but there was something queer in his look. Johnny had sensed it this afternoon.

"You . . . you're up late," Johnny said. "Waiting for me?"

"Yes," Perkins said. His smile faded. "I thought we'd have a talk . . . plain talk . . . down here."

"Plain talk?" Johnny asked. He hadn't been wrong! Perkins had something he wanted to get off his chest, and he was a plain spoken old fellow. He wouldn't mince words once he got started.

"Up at the house," the old man said, "we might get into an argument and wake them up. Down here it's okay. Nobody to hear."

Up at the house, a couple of hundred feet away in the thick firs, Johnson and his wife who worked for Perkins, would be asleep by now. So would Jake Carson probably. Jake was a trapper for the fur company who was staying here a few days.

No one would see or hear what went on down here at the boathouse now! The thought sent a vague chill through Johnny. But he'd stand up to whatever came, and if the worst came to the worst, he knew how he would handle it.

"An argument?" Johnny echoed as he stared up from the canoe. "Why should we

Have an argument? I don't understand."

"When my son died, you got wished on me," old Perkins said bluntly. "I didn't especially want you—I guess you knew that."

"I did," Johnny said.

The old man sure wanted to begin with a fight! Something had touched him off. Johnny tensed, with his thoughts whirling. Take it easy now! Find out what he knew. And most of all, find out if Jake Carson knew it. Or anybody else down at the company. . . .

"I always thought you had a crooked look," the old man said. "And as it panned out, I was right."

Now it was coming! Johnny had laid his paddle aside and fastened the canoe. He leaped from it, up to the little dock. Perkins was calmly reeling in his line, and he didn't even bother to look at Johnny.

"Well," Johnny said, "I guess you want to fight. So let's have it. What's on your mind?"

"Quite a bit," Perkins said. "When I went down to Vancouver last week, it just happened I took time to look over our stock of skins. I guess maybe I'm runnin' the company sort of lax. Matter of fact, in the summer time, though you're only stock clerk, you're pretty much in charge, Johnny."

"And I don't get paid extra, keep that in mind," Johnny retorted.

Perkins ignored it. "Anyways, I took a look at your stock records, an' our purchases an' sales . . . an' the whole thing doesn't jibe up, Johnny."

"Jibe up?" Johnny said. He stood beside the old man, staring down, and now Perkins turned and returned the stare.

"Somethin's wrong," Perkins said. "So I came back here an' gave myself a while gettin' used to the idea that right under my nose I've got a crook . . ."

*Easy now! Give him time to tell it all! Hold steady. Don't get too excited. Find out everything!*

"A crook?" Johnny said. "Are you accusing me of . . ."

"Sure I am," Perkins said calmly. "Have I got the proof? No, I haven't, but I'm gonna get it! When the auditors come, next week . . ."

Auditors! It was worse than Johnny had thought! They'd find out how many

of the silver fox pelts were missing this summer! Valuable skins which Johnny had sold on the side.

"An' you used to go to Seattle quite a bit," Perkins was saying. "That wouldn't be smuggling stolen furs over the border, or would it? An' I heard that you had a stock brokerage account there. Where would you get the money to gamble in stocks, Johnny? It's all pretty puzzlin', but I'm gonna get to the bottom of it. I'm . . ."

"Why you . . . you damned . . ." The hot blood of his anger and fear rose so suddenly in Johnny Green that it blurred his thoughts.

"Sure," the old man said. "Make out you're angry. Why not? Put up a good bluff—I'm not expectin' you to admit anything."

"You . . . you've told people about this?" Johnny said. "You've told Jake Carson . . . and the people at the plant . . . an' you're all wrong! Just a damn liar!"

"Not spread it around yet. Why should I, Johnny? Won't be easy, exactly, lettin' people know my adopted grandson has been fleecing me. Makes a sucker out of me. But it'll come. It has to. Because you . . ."

"You cursed liar!" The moonlit scene was swimming around Johnny Green. *The little anchor there, behind the old man's chair! That would do it! . . . A thing that had to be done! . . . It was so obvious now. . . .*

PERKINS finished. "Because you're goin' to jail, just like your father, an' maybe you'll die there too an' good riddance."

Again the old man stopped the methodical reeling in of his line, and he turned around and stared at Johnny with a wry smile.

"I'm mad all through me, Johnny."

*"You're mad? Hah! You damned old buzzard . . ." Don't let him see you stooping now! Get the little anchor! That'll do it! One blow. . . .*

"Sure I'm mad, Johnny. I'm talkin' calm, but they don't get any madder. Thought you were pretty slick, didn't you? Just an old man gettin' on toward eighty to deal with! That's what makes me maddest . . ."

The little iron rowboat anchor was close behind the old man's chair. He didn't s e

Johnny swiftly stooping for it. He was standing up now, jerking at his rod. "The damned thing . . . it's . . ."

Then maybe he sensed Johnny's movement, because he turned sidewise. "Why . . . why Johnny . . ."

It was just a gasp, and then the anchor hit his head, and he fell, twisting around, falling sidewise. The anchor crashed to the dock flooring. But it wasn't enough! He wasn't dead! He was writhing there in the moonlight, a thin little man in trousers and shirt and a grey sweater. His head was down on the flooring, with a red stain spreading in his scraggly white hair. Not dead! And as he tried to lift his head, suddenly he screamed—an eerie piercing cry that echoed out over the silent water and up through the silent, dark fir trees. . . .

A new burst of terror went through the panting Johnny. That scream in the night silence of the lake and forest would wake up the people at the house. They'd find that the old man was gone from the house; they'd come running down here . . . *Finish him up now! Quick!* Again Johnny seized the anchor. It crashed down, solidly this time, the sound of it hitting Perkins' head was horrible. Then Johnny turned away from the gruesome dead thing . . . *Get out of here now! Get away before they come!* . . .

The only thought in his mind was to pretend he hadn't yet arrived from across the lake! The old man would be found dead, killed by some wandering Indian or some trapper. Who could ever prove differently? With a leap Johnny was down into his canoe, cast off its rope, seized the paddle and violently shoved himself out from the little dock. The full moon was under a passing cloud. It was darker now. Only about a hundred feet and he could get around the wooded spit of Rocky Point which would hide him from view.

With the strength of terrified desperation, Johnny Green paddled for the Point. The paddle seemed almost to bend with the power of his swift strokes. He hugged the shore of the cove. If only he wouldn't be seen! Now, in the silence, he could hear shouts from the house back in the woods.

"Mr. Perkins! Mr. Perkins . . . are you down there?" That was Jake Carson. They had discovered by now that the old man wasn't in the house. But you couldn't see

the boathouse nor the lake, from the house. . . .

Then Johnny rounded the Point, and headed down along its other shore. The boathouse was out of sight now. The thick trees and underbrush of the Point hid the little cove completely. Johnny eased up, letting the canoe drift along as he sat, panting, recovering his breath and his wits. He was safe now. He'd wait here a while, and then quietly paddle back around the Point. On his way back home from the dance over at the Casino. That's all he had to say. . . .

In the silence now he could still hear the voices of Jake Carson, and Johnson and his wife. They seemed to be running down to the boathouse. Then there was silence. Now they had discovered the murder, and their lower tones weren't audible. . . .

The lurking Johnny Grant, in his canoe behind the wood promontory, could picture it. Now they would be running back up to the house. Then they'd be phoning over to Bantok, and the Bantok police would come in a motorboat probably. But long before that, Johnny would have arrived home with his canoe, and he would be the one, shocked and excited, who would greet them. . . .

Five minutes may have passed. In the dim silence of the placid, darkened lake, it seemed to Johnny it might be five minutes. He had turned his canoe, and was slowly paddling back. In a moment he would round the Point. And of course he would have heard the scream. He'd call out, excited, worried. . . .

What was this? The night silence suddenly yielded a little thumping sound! The sound of oarlocks! It was coming through the trees of the Point, from the cove. A rowboat coming out from the Perkins' boathouse! It was evidently close to the shore of the Point.

"Keep goin', Johnson!" That was Jake Carson's voice. And then Johnson's: "You still got it?"

"Damn sure have."

*Got what? Why were they coming out in the rowboat?*

"Seems to head right around the Point!"

"Damned queer. Am I goin' too fast?"

"No. Keep goin'."

The voices were getting louder. It was only about fifty feet here across the jutting

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murderous intruders were figments of the pastor's brain.

In October, 1895, Reverend William Hinshaw was duly convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment at the State Prison at Jeffersonville, for the murder of Thurza Hinshaw, his childhood sweetheart and ever loving wife. . . .

Perhaps the man on the Oregon hillside mused about this celebrated case as he stood there and remembered. The reward for his own capture had been a mere \$1,000—for, not one, but several murders. But then, he had been a good business man: he had always killed strictly for cash. Take the case of Jesse Udaily, the job that had finally been his downfall. The year was 1901.

He'd been seen burying Jesse's body right here, after shooting the ranchhand and lifting his two-year savings, savings he'd advised Jesse to make. . . .

The man on the lonely Oregon hillside had not always followed the same pattern. There was the case of Hugh Johnson, the timber buyer. A timber buyer has ready access to great sums of money. It is relatively easy, if you have the kind of eyes and personality that enable you to look after other people's business, to get a timber buyer to an out-of-the-way place for the purposes of extermination.

Hugh Johnson went up the Coquille River with the man on the hillside, to look at some logging tracts.

He never returned.

From where he stood, the man on the hillside could see Coquille River and remember. . . .

There was plenty of excitement at the mayor's mansion at Charlottesville, Virginia. Middle-aged, shiny-pated Mayor Samuel McCue was babbling hysterically, his clothing torn and blood-spattered. He didn't look like it was Sunday and he didn't act like it was Sunday.

Yet it was Sunday, and he had just returned from church. At home he had surprised a husky intruder and, after a terrific battle, had managed to drive the other away and call for help. But he had been too late. Upstairs in a bathtub of scalding water, lay his wife, the top of her head torn off by a shotgun blast.

The outraged city offered \$1,000 reward

for the apprehension of the culprit. To this, the grief-stricken mayor added an equal amount. This kind of sugar attracted some pretty smart flies to the scene, and the helpful mayor pointed out the escape route of his attacker through a rear window—and also named his favorite suspect—a man of humble calling, for whose wife he had for some time entertained a very sympathetic feeling.

The troublesome husband's testimony gave a new direction to the entire investigation—and fingerprints, murder weapon and re-examination of the murder scene broke down the mayor's story, clinched the case.

In February, 1905, Mayor Samuel McCue of Charlottesville, Virginia, was hanged for wife-murder.

Of the above killers everyone had heard. Few people knew of the man on the hillside. Yet the man on the Oregon hillside was a successful murderer. His only motive for killing was money, and more money, and he had never been caught. His victims had ranged from Pennsylvania to Texas. For years, authorities had been picking up stray corpses credited to him. He had never been a mayor or a minister or socially prominent. His origins were obscure, and he had been a household appliance salesman by trade, successful at it and well-liked, too.

What had brought him to this Oregon country, the scene of his near-capture, where they had once almost seen him burying Jesse Udailey, no one knew. What went through his once greedy, monstrous mind as he stood there is also pure conjecture. No one knew he was there. No one saw him take the gun from his coat pocket.

And no one heard the shot as he put the gun to his temple and fired. . . .

It was years before they found his bleached skeleton, lying beside a fallen log, its fingers still curled about the pistol grip. From the date of the gold coins found imbedded in the ground where his pockets must once have rotted, they put the date at later than 1907. From his gold teeth they identified him as M. D. Landis, one of the most desperately sought multiple killers of the turn of the century—the Oregon Ogre—the monster who "got away" with murder.

# FIND THE BODY!

By Joseph  
Fulling  
Fishman



●

*The corpse who attended his own funeral—and heard what his friends really thought of him!*

●

*He had himself insured for a considerable sum, making his wife beneficiary.*

SOMETIMES, particularly in life insurance frauds, the police can't find the corpse or any part of it for the simple reason that, as a rather illiterate detective once explained to me in discussing a case, "they ain't no corpse to find."

A curious instance of this kind was brought to light by a shoemaker named Fritz Schiller, who lived in a small village in Germany.

Schiller was a scientific freak. He had the uncanny ability of putting himself at will into a state resembling catalepsy, during which his breathing seemed to stop and the blood to recede from the surface of his body exactly like the state of a dead man. Physicians from Berlin came to talk with and examine him. None of them, however, could explain just how Schiller could

"play dead" one moment, and restore himself to life the next. They admitted they had never seen anything like it.

Finally Schiller, a shiftless, lazy man who had been snagged in various petty offenses, decided to make a financial killing with the strange ability with which nature had endowed him. He and his wife moved to a town in Austria. Here he told no one of the phenomenon concerning himself which had puzzled the Berlin doctors.

He had himself insured for a considerable sum, making his wife the beneficiary. He waited a few months and then got in touch with a local doctor who wasn't averse to turning a few dishonest pennies. He agreed to attend Schiller when the latter thought it was about time for him to become "sick" and "die." When the latter took to his bed, his wife saw to it that all the neighbors were informed, and that some of them came to see the supposedly ailing man.

They also arranged for the neighbors to see the "remains" before the coffin was finally closed. The doctor gave the usual certificate of death and the wife went into mourning, refusing to be comforted by the same sympathetic neighbors who, if any trouble developed, could say they had actually observed the dead man in his casket.

Now, in his new home in Austria, Schiller had no more been able to keep out of trouble that he had in his former abode in Germany. He had been repeatedly arrested and sentenced to short terms in jail for various petty pilferings.

Out of his coffin, and concealed in his home, he began to wonder what people would say about him after his death. The more he pondered it, the more curious he became. Finally he decided to find out.

So he shaved off his luxuriant crop of whiskers and his Kaiser Wilhelm turned-up and waxed moustache. Then, with the help of his wife—who wasn't at all keen about what her husband intended to do, but was afraid to oppose him—he dyed his hair, tinted the skin of his hands and face, and went into the little parlor where the funeral services were held so he could mourn for himself!

The preacher who had been engaged to preach the funeral oration, however, was no mealy-mouthed hypocrite. He told the

truth, even about the dead. Schiller found the expression, "Listeners never hear anything good of themselves," confirmed.

For the minister announced that he would be only too glad to speak well of the deceased if there were anything good to say. Unfortunately, however, there wasn't, because as most people knew, this particular corpse had been, in life, a petty scoundrel who fished around the edges of the criminal pond and didn't have courage enough to commit any really big offenses. All that he could hope for, the orator finished, was that the Lord would be merciful and overlook some of his transgressions.

It was probably one of the few times in history when a man listened to his own burial service. And it was quite an ordeal for Schiller to go through. He wanted to answer back, to defend himself from the barbs the preacher was hurling at his supposedly dead and defenseless body. But he remembered, in time, that this wasn't the proper way for a corpse to behave. There were certain polite conventions concerning the conduct of corpses which had to be observed.

After the services, the more or less mournful procession wound its way to the cemetery. Here, after another short service, those who had followed the hearse left for their respective homes.

Then the grave diggers, lowering the coffin into the ground, were startled by a rattling sound apparently coming from inside of it. They had worked for years around the dead and they weren't at all afraid of ghosts or goblins. None of them, however, had ever heard a body rattle. Their spines began to tingle and a disagreeable tightness began to assail the roots of their hair. They hurried over to the office of the cemetery superintendent to inform him of the strange goings on.

The latter had the coffin opened. It disclosed that an extraordinary change had taken place. The cadaver, in the space of a few hours, had changed into a mass of dirt and stones!

The police got on the job. They soon located the now clean-shaven Schiller—waiting for his wife to collect the insurance so that he could go to another part of the world and live in peace without working.

Both the "corpse" and his wife got a long term in the penitentiary.



# Solving Cipher Secrets



Founded in 1924

Article No. 835

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. 5139—Pleasant Reflections. By Rebbina. Guess the one-letter word for symbol O used alone. Substitute this letter in UONN and UONNBN, EUONNBN and OUNS, and fill in.

O ESSP-USSYDLE UONN HOL COMB O USK SG GAL XDKC  
 O ESSP USSYDLE-EUONN. ZUBLKV SG "ESSP USSYDLE,"  
 UONNBN, DL ESSP USSYDLE-EUONNBN! ESSP-USSYDLE  
 UONNBN OUNS USSY ESSP DL ESSP-USSYDLE EUONNBN!

No. 5140—Play on the Links. By \*Volund. Try a common four-letter word for UXFU, first and last letters alike. Next, the phrase TU TH. Thus to HFEHFSB.

\*ABCDEFDG \*HBKLMN KLEON PBDG RBOO CB KFOOBN  
 \*HFEHFSB \*NFG, HTMKB TU TH RBOO VMLRM CG FOO  
 UXFU HFEHFSB TH YDBOG "SDLEMN XLS"!

No. 5141—A Rival Arrives. By †Sara. Our contributor offers a crypt on a new arrival in her family. "Despite all my added work," she writes, "I still reserve time for your department!" For entry note E, EPP, NO, OY, BOYS, ONB, etc.

BOYS DF LNKH-FYEH-NPZ TNS BET HYXYSRPF ETUYZ  
 ONB OY PAUYZ OAT SYB GEGF GHNROYH, OY HYDEHUYZ,  
 HEROYH ZATVKTRYZPF: "NO, EPP HAVOR. GKR  
 ADEVASY, OY TRAPP ZHASUT LHND E GNRRPY!"

No. 5142—Winter Sport. By †Alphamega. For a starter, get FRO and FRUF. Next, UD and SD, following up with UFFUEDOX, DEDOFV-SDO, and so on.

FRO KWOUFONF TOUNAWOX NHOOX.FRUF RUN OLOW GOOD  
 UFFUEDOX SLOW FRO KWSADX GV UD ADUNNENFOX RATUD  
 GSXV EN DEDOFV-SDO TEPON HOW RSAW-SD NBEN!



No. 5143—Hot ice. By †W. E. S. "Since I was in the Air Corps in rather remote spots," writes †W. E. S., "I hadn't a chance to see the mag till now. Glad to be back!" Use ending -NLP to unlock last two words.

HYFENF USNAAHYV URFKXRC XRYR ARODGY URCNVR  
HUCKSTER ARYK ORYZHVNL P FKS V COHFR, CTOOKCRVSG  
OYKVTFRV TOKL D HSENLP RBNCENLP HEKXNF XKENKL!

No. 5144—Comparative Cost. By Vedette. Identify first word ZYXXYXV through pattern, duly noting two-letter word YX. Next in line, XPEYUX.

ZYXXYXV \*ZUTSR \*ZPT \*YY OUXNLKHR PGGTUFYKPEHSD  
NHCHX-HYVBEBN UJ EBH HXEYTH ZHPSEB UJ EBH XPEYUX,  
OUNEYXV EZYOH PN KPXD SYCHN PN EBH JYTNE \*ZUTSR  
\*ZPT PXR XHPTSD EZHXED EYKHN PN KLOB YX ZHPSEB.

No. 5145—Dreadful Dozen. By Londoner. Word twelve, LGMSBKKGSV, may be approached through its ending -GSV, noting that it follows a double. Try vowel spotting, noting doubles.

JUCY JBOYSMBU: ROBSMYU, KYUPHUD, ZGVBCD,  
XNUVYUD, OBUJYSD, UNZZYUD, ZHUVOBUD, BURNS,  
BRRBHOF, LGMSBKKGSV, CBSROBHVTFYU, CHUMYU.

No. 5146—Present Arms! By Mrs. Captain Kidd. Try for endings -LTH and -LTHOJ, observing that J occurs but twice, both times as a final. Then tackle QUOLBBOUE.

QUERYLOUS QUZABJ QUPZLOE QVAEF-YKK. QUOZQYVE  
QUTLHFBUS QUZA, QVALEUE QZGI QZBBUVE QVL SHUPYVI,  
QUOLBBOUE QVZLT. QUZBUT QVABU QUHE QUEUUGFLTHOJ.  
QUOYDUS QUEBYPE QZON, QUGYNUE QOAEFLTH QVLSU.

No. 5147—Curtailing Retailing. By Scorpio. Ending -EUK (frequencies 12-15-4), used three times, will help with \*KLAU \*LEGAL, which can also be developed through the double and repeats.

PVTA SVDBSEREAP PRESS AUHVLD A DASACLBR AF \*KLAU  
\*LEGAL \*VLFEBUDA, UBTAF BHRAL \*YZVTEUK RVYU,  
HEUEUK PVSEDERVLP, XAFFSALP, NBYOALP, RLBUEPAUR  
GAUFVLP; XLVRADREUK RVYUPHVSO, SVDBS TALDNBURP.

No. 5148—The Gentleman Pays! By †The Ponder Bare. Spot your own clues, fans, in this final cipher! Asterisks in cryptograms indicate capitalization.

ONCYGULK SUFZENP SCUPNGDX ECAP, EDUCRN KLOTPCL;  
RHFZRL SLRPFQLG RZBHPZFZR PFSDOOF HFZON. HUFZG  
ADPNLU! KLVP JZDUPLU ODBL DOOFZKPR GZL. ONDUELGL!

WITH this issue of *New Detective Magazine*, cryptofans, your cipher department begins its twenty-fourth year! Up to this time, 834 installments of the department have been published, presenting a grand total of 5,138 problems and their solutions, comprising 4,067 of our regular cryptograms, 396 ciphers of other types, 573 cryptic divisions, 47 other cryptarithms, and 55 miscellaneous puzzles! To this vast assortment of expertly constructed problems, your solutions, as submitted up to last issue, promise to run close to the 900,000 mark! Exact figures on this will be given as soon as available, together with further data on your individual accomplishments.

In this connection, for information of newcomers, all answers submitted are duly recorded, and total scores are listed in our *Solvers' Club* for each issue of the magazine. Solvers who have accumulated 100, 500, or 1,000 answers are enrolled as members of our †*Hundred Club*, \**Five Hundred Club*, or †*Inner Circle Club*, and their names or cryptonyms are distinguished by a dagger, star, or degree sign, respectively whenever published. There are no other formalities to joining up. Every mail shows old readers returning to the fold, after absence in the armed services, or time out for other reasons. Welcome back, fans! And thanks a million for your loyal support and continued interest in the department! Keep your ciphers and solutions coming. Let's make 1948 a bumper year for "SCS"!

No. X-5150—Broken Pole Puzzle. By Johnny B.

A telegraph pole which is thirty-six feet high, is twelve feet from a fence which is five feet high, all on level ground. The pole breaks, the broken ends remaining in contact, and the top part falls directly over the fence, just touching the top of the fence, with the end of the pole just touching the level ground beyond the fence. *How far up on the pole did the break occur?*

Johnny B. presents a real teaser in his Broken Pole problem, No. X-5150. Two right-angled triangles are involved, and all measurements are in whole numbers. Can you locate the break? In No. X-5138, Arithmetical Enigma, by Floyd E. Coss, in last issue, the ten-letter keyword METHODOICAL, numbered from 0 up to 9, unlocked the multiplication, while the four words of which it is composed, (1) MET, (2) HOD, (3) I, and (4) CAL., took care of the enigma. Did you get it?

Now some hints for beginners on how to solve a cryptogram, using Rebbina's No. 5139 as lesson material, and following out the clues there given. Trying one-letter word "a" for symbol O, and substituting, as directed, would give UONN (-a--), UONNBN (-a----), EUONNBN (--a----), and OUNS (a---), for a starter. Running through the alphabet for a likely double to fit NN, and noting also sequence NNBN, would lead to "ss" and "sses," also "dd" and "dded," as strong probabilities. But only the first of these would work in UONNBN (-asses) and EUONNBN (--asses), which would thus follow as "lasses" and "glasses," further checking with OUNS (als-) as "also." New letters, as soon as found, are substituted throughout the entire crypt, leading to the discovery of additional new letters

and words. Thus, ESSP (goo-) is evidently "good"; etc. The rest of the message follows in a similar manner. Answers to all of the current crypts will appear in the next issue!

No. 5149—Cryptic Division. By Novice III. Second multiplication shows value of symbol O. Zero can be found by elimination. The keyword is numbered thus: 01234 56789.

T U N ) P A T P O H ( A O S  
P P A N

O U I O  
T U N

S E S H  
U I N E

A E A

### ANSWERS FOR LAST ISSUE

5127—Are you not intending to summarize and print, as of yore, our monthly record of achievement in deciphering cryptograms? I am sure that all the fans would like to see their solving totals!

5128—See how easily I can solve a puzzle when I first locate letter "e" by its high frequency! One-letter words "a" and "I"—also help.

5129—After drilling large hole in his mother's new refrigerator, skeptical son jubilantly reports: "The light does go out when the door closes!"

5130—Roman numeral I equals number one; V counts five; X, ten; L, fifty; C, one hundred; D, five hundred; and M, one thousand. "Next year"—is written thus: MCMXLVIII.

5131—Some medieval medical prescription ingredients: unicorn's horn, eunuch's fat, crushed sow bugs, viper's flesh, incinerated toads, moss scraped from hanged criminal's skull, powdered mummy.

5132—Unightly spite-fence obscures view from mansion windows. Laird of manor ponders revenge. Builds fence six feet higher on own property!

5133—"Pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs," compact sentence encompassing entire alphabet, provides popular keyboard exercise for typists.

5134—Sojourning Esquimaux could not understand Americanisms. "That's schmaltz," slang for "sarcasm," sorely puzzled Arctic visitors.

5135—Taken from recent news extract: Elderly eccentric millionaire recluse, missing several weeks, leaves behind queer junk-crammed mansion. Dazed police remove miscellaneous debris.

5136—Phantom forms flit through spectral night. Aard-varks adagio, jaguars jitterbug, lynxes Lindy-Hop, raccoons rhumba, tapirs tango, wolves waltz. Masqueraders make merry!

5137—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  
B L U E K N I G H T

All answers to current ciphers will be duly credited in our *Cipher Solvers' Club*. Address: M. E. Ohaver, *New Detective Magazine*, Fictioneers, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.



## Answers to THE THIRD DEGREE

(Questions on page 57)

1. In real life, the examination of cigar and cigarette ashes seldom reveals anything of much importance.

2. True. Even though a blood-splashed piece of cloth be carefully rinsed by the murderer, chemical treatment can often cause blood traces to be revealed in it.

3. False. It is definitely possible to photograph blood stains.

4. As a scientific detective you would dig up the suspected earth, place it in a clean glass container, and take the earth to the police laboratory for analysis.

5. Yes. By means of chemical analysis it is generally possible to distinguish between human hair and vegetable fibre.

6. Ballistically speaking, "shocking power" refers to the force of a projectile delivered on impact.

7. If your convict acquaintance told you he had been "kangarooed," you would know he felt he had been unjustly sent to prison.

8. On the other hand, if your underworld acquaintance told you he was planning to "sell a pup," you would know he was planning to swindle someone.

9. The underworld slang term, "soft heel," means "detective."

10. In crook slanguage, "stiff" means negotiable securities. The term is also sometimes used in reference to corpses and drunks.

11. If your gambler friend told you he was looking for a "floater," you would know he was seeking a gambling game

which was frequently moved about in order to dodge the police.

12. According to the ballistical definition, "trajectory" refers to the curve which a projectile describes in flight.

13. The crook would place the carbon paper under the signature he desired to forge. He would then trace the signature so that the carbon paper would register it on another sheet of paper. This done, he would retrace the carbon paper signature with pen and ink.

14. True. "Interruptions" in a piece of writing are often a clue to forgery. The forger, when copying a piece of writing, will usually frequently interrupt himself to observe his work. These "interruptions" are often distinguishable to the handwriting expert.

15. In the slanguage of the handwriting expert, a "retoucher" is a person who writes and then "touches up" his own writing.

16. False. Animals, because they fear fire, are seldom the cause of a fire. When they are, it is purely accidental.

17. True. To "stem in" means to drill a hole in the door of a safe.

18. False. In crook slanguage, "to pull leather" means to pick a pocket.

19. The underworld slang term, "noise," means "dynamite" or is used in reference to other explosives.

20. If an underworld acquaintance told you he had received a "bush parole," you would know he had just escaped from prison.

# BURIED IN BOND



*The girl lifted the cradle  
phone slowly, trying to  
catch my eye . . .*

## By John Lawrence

*A man without a country . . . a girl without a chance . . . a night when Death wore many faces and the clock struck—  
trackless murder!*

### CHAPTER ONE

#### I Give You—Death!

**T**HE FIRST THING he did when he came out of the death house was to put on his turban. His head, of course, had been shaved in patches. He had the turban in a paper bag. He stood there in the floodlighted, walled-in prison courtyard and wound the green silk expertly, fastening it finally with a lustreless



pale green glass pin. His short, shining face was like dark cinnamon, his black-browed hot dark eyes scuttling around through the curtain of falling snow.

As the knot of photographers and reporters converged on him, I stood well back, with my hands up my back. The white-haired warden watched from the shadow of the half-opened door while the flashbulbs popped and the Press operated. I drew no attention except sullen stares from the two city detectives who were waiting nearby to be escorts—Higgins, the stringbean Albino and Vokes, a stocky, black-eyed thug.

Not till the news folks had finished and were drifting over in a body toward the warden, did I move in. I strolled over slowly into the headlights of the long blue Cadillac that was waiting, and intercepted him.

"Hello, Stinky."

He pushed up his chin, pulled down the lapels of his black overcoat and jerked his green-and-gold silk tie.

"My name is Desar," his organ-like voice informed me harshly. "*Mr. Desar* to you."

"Desar it is," I agreed promptly. "Whatever you say."

"To *you*, whoever you are, I say—good morning," he said stiffly, opened the tonneau door and plumped himself down inside.

I used the opposite door and eased in unhurriedly beside him, sat down on a small, hard lump. I nodded to the two sour-eyed detectives and they climbed in with tight faces beside the driver. How they loved taking cues from *me*. I reached forward and slid the intervening partition closed. Working for a corporation the size of Paramount Liability has, once in a while, some advantages.

I found the small hard lump under my behind—a tin box half full of aspirin—and fiddled with it.

Desar—that's as good a name as any—glared hotly.

"If you will be good enough to leave my vehicle, I will ask the chauffeur to start," he said.

"I imagine he'll start—" we were both jerked back against the cushions as the driver let in gears—"anyway."

He whipped his head round furiously as if to confirm that we were actually mov-

ing, then showed small, white teeth at me. "What is the meaning of this?"

I fired a cigarette while we negotiated the guards at the gates. "I represent Paramount Liability. How are you fixed for cash?"

"Cash? I assure you—I am perfectly all right."

"*That's* probably no lie. But you couldn't use a little more?"

He blinked several times. "You wish to give me cash?"

"Not exactly I. Not exactly give. Paramount. Pay for a little information."

"What information?"

"You're kidding, of course."

"I repeat: what information?"

"You tell me, old horse. You've been fencing here for twelve years plus. To my knowledge, you've turned over diamonds, emeralds, automobiles, nylon in carloads, hot bonds, rare coins and stamps and damned near everything stealable and expensive. We've probably paid claims on twenty scores that you've touched. We'd like to get back anything possible."

"You need your head read. Do you think I hold anything . . . ?"

"Hardly. But you probably know where certain things are—or at least where they went when they left you."

"I . . ."

"Since you're departing our fair country for good and all, you might as well pick up any extra odd dollar going. There's no point in playing cozy with your customers now. You'll never see any of them again."

He rode in silence for five minutes. Then he said: "So you think I'm a lousy stool-pigeon."

"Let's not talk like a B picture. Do you want to do business?"

"No. I do not."

I nodded and leaned back. "Fair enough. I've put it to you anyway."

We rode another five minutes, till we came up onto the Parkway. Then he whined: "What's that you got there? Is that aspirin? My head's been splitting for the last four days, ever since they . . . could you let me have . . . ?"

"What? Oh, yeah, sure," I gave him a couple. "The water is your problem."

"Don't need it." He put his head back, gulped them in one swallow, dry.

I let a little more mileage pass and asked:

"How did you get out of this murder rap?"

"Get out of it? How did I get into it? The jury must have been bribed in the first place—maybe by your damned insurance companies or maybe by that D. A. It was plain self-defense, like I said from the first. Big Pete came into my establishment for the purpose of robbing me. I scuffled with him and the gun went off."

"He'd been coming to your swami joint every day for a week."

"That doesn't alter the facts."

I shrugged. "Oh, well, the reviewing court believed you, apparently."

"What else could they believe? American justice! Just because all you clowns couldn't nail me for anything—oh, brother! And when they do throw out the conviction, they fix it so as to deport me. I am getting one raw deal."

I couldn't truthfully disagree with him. We rode in side-by-side silence. He made as if to speak twice—once when we were in Yonkers and once as we left Harlem—but nothing came of it.

I gave up hope as we headed west on 42nd Street, toward the French Line piers. I hadn't really had much. The swarthy little grifter probably had enough salted away to buy his native Syria—or else he was broke. That is one thing you can never tell about a thief. My boss had thought he might be broke. I hadn't thought so. Evidently I was right.

There was the usual small crowd standing around in the falling snow on the dock, as we bumped down through the gates onto the wooden planking. The pier was also floodlighted. We came to a halt. Four blue-clad Immigration officials marched in a body from the sheds as we climbed out of the blue Cadillac. The *Ile de Malta*, looming black and gold through the snowflakes, was loading in the slip in front of us.

I said, "Well, so long, Stinky. Send us a picture postcard," but his hot little eyes were roaming around the dock and he paid me no mind.

A girl with perfect legs in beige silk, lizard shoes, and wearing a tan, slim-waisted gabardine dress and short beige fur bolero came gracefully out of the crowd behind him. She wore owlish amber-rimmed glasses, but somehow they didn't

count. Her face was smooth, lightly tanned, young, almost pale, her red lips wide and moist. Her full pear-shaped breasts thrust against her bodice and she moved behind them with a velvet, erect grace. Her hair, in a long, curled-under bob behind her smooth throat was only slightly darker than her dress. She came over and took up one of the unseeing little man's dark hands in both of her gloved ones.

She took on a devoted expression and talked softly and earnestly into this face as he turned. I was not particularly curious about what she was pressing into his hand. I saw the flash of paper. Possibly a small cash offering from the faithful? I had heard that Desar made even *that*—his Park Avenue-apartment-crystal-ball-soul-clinic-swami front—pay off.

Presently she backed away again into the crowd, while the Immigration officials traded papers with our Mutt and Jeff escort. I followed her with covetous eyes as she stepped through the edge of the crowd. She joined a silver-haired, slight old man, whose parchment-pink face and bright blue eyes managed to reflect bewilderment, resentment, and self-consciousness, all at one time.

She tucked her hand under this one's arm, turned him around, led him off toward the gate, patting his hand soothingly. I watched his dark blue sugar-loaf hat bobbing above his dark tubular overcoat, till the snow-curtain hid them. For two pins I would have followed.

Desar—might as well continue to call him that—was ripping a piece of paper into confetti when I looked again. His brown eyes were hotter than ever and the edges of his teeth showed through his mulberry mouth. His eyes centered me finally and he tightened his lips.

He jerked his head. I went back over and he said through set teeth: "You've a gumshoe working for you. Name of Sapphire Joe."

"Our best man. But the name's Joe Saphir."

"Little guy—supposed to be the smallest Big Ten football player ever, some years back—brown eyes, natty dresser—sucker for women."

"Sucker! Who said that?" Well, never mind. What about him?"

"How soon could you get him here?"

"Are you kidding?" I handed him a card. He looked startled. "You?" He ran hot eyes over me. "You don't look like no football player."

"Boola Boola. That any better?"

"Well, I guess . . . Are you willing to pay off on something—even if your own company didn't insure it?"

This I had to hear. "Why not?"

"How much for me?"

"What's the story?"

"The papers called it the Helsingfors Casket. Shipped from Finland to some Finn here—heisted nine years ago."

"Oh, yeah. Some chemicals or something."

"Chemicals, yes. But the casket was jewelled—worth sixty thousand by itself. Midland Insurance paid off. They'd give an easy twenty to get it back."

"Gs?"

"Absolutely. The chemicals should be still there, too. And they must be worth something."

"I'll give you twenty-five per cent of what I—of what we get."

"Twenty-five! Why, you chiselling . . ." He swallowed quickly, his burning eyes swivelling to the knot of officials, then back again as the knot began to stir and break up. "All right. But you'll keep me covered? There's no telling when some of these gunsels will be coming across the pond again, and—"

"I'll keep you covered, of course."

"Then go this afternoon to 143a East Forty-second Street. Wear a plain yellow tie. I don't know the name of the scatter, but it's just down a piece from Grand Central. Don't show before four o'clock or you'll scare the trick off. You can pick off the casket there."

"Eh? Who's got the thing? How do I—"

"They're at that address."

"I know, but how—"

The body of officials pulled themselves together and moved on us. "Make it fast. Who do I contact? Who'd you pass it to? Who . . . ?"

"I don't go that far. You wear the yellow tie. Go there and you'll get it. Send me my cut," he finished hastily, as we were surrounded.

Higgins' pale yellow eyes and Vokes' shiny black ones were sour on mine.

"Scram, vulture," Higgins said quietly.

I gave them a slow bow and salute, and wandered away a few feet, damning their untimely briskness. The little fence interested me strangely, but I needed just two more minutes with him. I didn't get them, couldn't devise a way to get them, before they marched him off.

I HESITATED, just inside the gate, and watched the little parade disappear into the pier sheds. Presently, they reappeared down the line, going up the slanting gangplank.

I would have liked to peek aboard—even if only to see how they had reconverted the old tub for peacetime use, but I lacked the necessary papers, and that was that.

I don't know whether it was good or bad that I *couldn't* make it.

Desar—not that I knew this then, you understand; I didn't get it till a full hour later—Desar, with his flanking escort augmented by baggage-toting stewards—reached the top of the gangplank. He strutted over to the purser's office. His cabin, it developed, was on the boat deck, forward.

The whole procession turned and moved up the companionway to the hall above, made a right-angled turn and started toward the bow of the ship in single file.

At an ice-water faucet, Desar stopped and drew himself a paper cup of water, became aware of the absurd string of men behind him. He scowled blackly and snarled: "Is it necessary for you carrion-eaters to accompany me to my very bedroom?"

He tossed down the paper cup of water, turned on his heel—and put out his hand to steady himself against the wall.

Something like a terrific kick seemed to hit him in the stomach and he half-jack-knifed over, a terrific shuddering literally shaking his teeth like castanets. He stumbled, fell against the walnut-panelled wall. A greenish foam bubbled and frothed up out of his lips; he dropped to his knees. A half dozen people yelled. He put his forehead down on the green carpet, writhed, twisted, a horrible gagging coming from his choked throat. He fell over sideways heavily, his knees jerking spasmodically; he threshed out wildly, flopped like a hooked salmon, arched backwards as though his



spine were a bowstring. The sharp, harsh odor of strong tobacco filled the little hall as he went slowly limp, and was dead.

As I say, I knew nothing of this little scene at the time. I rode down to Goody's in the Village. The thought of twenty thousand dollars to be plucked like a ripe orange called for some bracing.

After my second tonic, a girl had come in and climbed onto the stool next but one to mine and was conferring with Goody. I came alive quickly as I saw the short beige stockings and shoes. The profile of her body in the clinging dress would have made a mummy come alive.

She turned her head as she drew off her gloves. A little startled look came on her face as she met my direct gaze before I could cover it, and she looked away.

Almost immediately, she looked back, a tiny line in her smooth forehead, and her spectacles centered me.

She took them down again suddenly.

"Pardon me," her voice was soft and child-like. "But weren't you—aren't you a friend of the swami's?"

I put as much charm and sparkle into my smile as I could muster. "Yeah, I've known him for several years."

Eyes wide, she scrambled down from her stool. She hastily worried up onto the stool beside me. A wave of her perfume and warmth finished me off.

"Isn't it terrible," she was half-whisper-

ing, "what they are all doing to him?"

"What? Oh, yeah, yeah. Certainly is."

"You aren't a policeman, are you?"

"I'm no policeman, I assure you."

"But—but you *are* a student of his? Aren't you?"

I gave her a small grin. "Nobody ever tried harder to be."

Goody brought a short green drink and set it in front of her. She fumbled with her purse. I said, "Mine, Goody," and he backed away, beaming.

The girl said, "Oh, thank you," confusedly, and gave me a small, shy smile.

"Not at all, Miss . . .?"

"My—my friends call me Linda."

I did what I'd been itching to do—put my hands up to take off her glasses. "Let me see you without these."

I lifted them off and looked at a pair of hidden, shadowed cobalt blue eyes. There was softness—and urgent hunger in them. I found my breath restricted.

She gasped a little, made a little shy smile and guided my hands to replace them. "Why, Mr. . . ."

I had to clear my throat to tell her my name. I caught one of her hands—the left one. "Linda—listen. You don't know me and I don't know you, but—"

I suddenly looked down, turned her hand back upwards. The solitaire on her third finger couldn't have cost less than a thousand dollars. "You got a boy friend?"



## WHEN THE DEAD RETURN . . . .

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It took her nearly a minute before she said, "He's very kind and good to me. He'll make me very happy."

Inspiration dawned.

"It wasn't that old relic—that grey-haired man who was with you at the pier?"

She nodded without looking up.

"But, Gentle Annie, he's old enough—when are you getting married?"

"I—not for a while."

"Is he very rich?"

"I—yes, he's rich. He's a really fine man. He's been wonderful to me. I—" her eyes flew to the clock. "He—he's just down at the barber's. He ought to be here any minute for me."

"Give him a miss," I urged. "We'll find another spot like this. Then we can get lunch somewhere. I've got to know more about you."

She hesitated. "Oh, I couldn't do that. I . . ." Her eyes were shy, and yet glowing. "Oh, I *am* crazy." She put the two fingers to her lips and thought. Her eyes kept shutting sideways to mine. "It would be fun, but—"

She suddenly took her fingers down. "Are you going to be here for a little while? Say ten minutes or so?"

"I will if you say so."

"I—perhaps I could meet him and say I was going to the off— Oh, I don't know. I shouldn't."

"You go on and do that," I urged. "I'll wait right here."

She looked at me shyly. "I kind of would like to get to know you, I don't know why. But you mustn't think I'm the kind of girl—"

"Of course not. You're just a damned lovely kid with some spirit."

"All—all right. I'll try. I'll have to go out with him. If I *can* get back, it'll be less than fifteen minutes. If it's more you'll know I couldn't. Will . . . I see you some other time?" she ended falteringly.

"You'll see me today in fifteen minutes." I pressed my luck.

She jumped down, hurried to the phone booth in the rear corner.

Goody emerged from retirement and mopped the counter in front of me. "I wish you wouldn't drool on my counter like that. San Quentin quail."

"My eye. She's twenty-three or four by my calculations. Who is she?"

"Never saw her in my life."

THE front door opened and Daddy came in, rather tentatively, his mild blue eyes looking around concernedly. He seemed dubious that the place really was open. My presence decided him and he consulted his watch, compared it with the clock, finally sat gingerly on a stool.

He was an immaculate old party with a scrubbed, clean look. His forehead was high and he had a crisp head of almost pure white hair. His bright blue eyes had the friendly, bashful look of a dachshund puppy's, but there was breeding and intelligence in his smooth, regular features and mobile mouth.

He ordered a Vichy when Goody braced him. Goody blinked several times, finally squirted out a glass of soda and charged him a quarter.

The old boy sat there for nearly four minutes, tapping the edge of the bar with chamois gloved hands and thinking to himself before he got up courage to start jerking his unhappy eyes my way. Finally he stood up and made a little bow. "I beg your pardon, young man but could you tell me—"

The booth slid open and the girl came tripping gracefully out. The old man said, "Ah," softly, and his old eyes kindled. "No need to bother you, sir," to me, quickly, and "There you are, my dear." It was much less fatuous than it sounds.

I kept my eyes on the bar mirror till his back was safely to me, then turned casually sideways. Her little gloved hand behind her wigwagged a bit, and I was content.

Goody hadn't missed it. His bushy eyebrows shoved against his hair and he looked at me incredulously. "You scored?"

"Don't be vulgar," I adjured him. "It so happens that Miss Linda and I—"

I jerked round at the radio.

". . . *Ile de Malta*," the radio said. "The dead man, known to police as Shrinke Lefkovine, alias Desar. . . ."

Then I learned what had happened at the French Line pier after I'd left.

The mid-afternoon radio commentator elaborated on the story, to fill up what must have been a dull stretch in the early morning news, but he had nothing more to add, really.

I sat there maybe four minutes after he had signed off, before I put a ten-pound finger in my vest pocket. I felt the little tin box.

I became aware of Goody's curious stare. I shook my head wonderingly. "Well, whaddayou know? I saw that joker just this morning."

"Yeah?"

"Draw me a beer, chum. With a double rye for a chaser."

I went into the washroom.

I broke open one aspirin tablet—including the fat black capsule that was imbedded in it. Black-brown liquid spurted out on my fingers and harsh tobacco smell filled the room. I hastily dumped it in a bowl, flushed it away and held my fingers underneath a tap for three minutes.

Two more clients had appeared at the bar by the time I climbed back onto my stool. I drank my booze slowly, one eye subconsciously on the clock, plenty of consternation boiling under my skull.

Don't ask me why it hadn't hit me at once, but until the clock showed twenty minutes since the girl's departure, I didn't link her in with Desar. Then I did—and my forehead was maroon.

*She* had brought Desar a note to the pier. Desar had read it, torn it up in anger. That note had decided him to pass *me* the information about the casket.

I stood up quickly, thumbed Goody over and handed him money. "You're sure you don't know who that girl was?"

"Sure I'm sure." He cackled, "Stood you up, hey? I didn't think your technique was that hot . . ."

I went out into the swirling darkness. Large snowflakes were drifting down, shifting, eddying. Neon lights in store fronts glowed redly on a bustling crowd hurrying to work.

I turned south to squeeze my way down toward Eighth Street. Almost immediately, the crowd seemed to get unusually thick right around me. Someone poked me in the right kidney so urgently that it bore me over against the store fronts. I stopped, tried to turn round.

"Don't turn your head, sport," I heard a quiet voice behind my left ear, and the poke in my other side became a steady jab. "Just keep moving."

A quick whisper went across my back,

from the side where the jab was; it was so soft that I knew it was not meant for me to hear, and it put a cold wind in my stomach.

"*Why not right here?*"

"*No, you fool. Wait a minute.*"

**T**HE quiet voice went on in my ear: "Keep moving, friend." It was soft and a little smug. "Very wise. We are going across toward the women's prison there at the next corner," and as I unconsciously lagged, owing to the all-of-a-sudden realization that I was not facing mere conversation: "That is to say—two of us are. If you wish, you are at liberty to lie down and bleed."

I have leaned against considerable guns in my time. Most of them are strictly from laughs. This one wasn't. It was fixing to fire. Through error or not, it was fixing to fire.

I said, "Boys, don't panic. You've made a mistake somewhere. Who do you think I am, anyway?" I was painfully careful not to move my stiffened-out arms. I laced my worried brain plenty.

"We know who you are, old chap, never fear," the spokesman assured me. "Just don't worry about anything."

A thin hope dredged up out of my mental clamor. I lagged as much as I dared, crawled my eyes up to the clock in the fire tower a half block away. It was twenty-six minutes after eight. "You've sure as hell made a mistake, whatever you think. Let's talk this over," I said quickly. "I guess it's a gag, eh? A joke on some friend or something?"

"*Aw, fer God's sake, let's . . .*" the ghostly whisper cut across my back again. I didn't hear any answer.

A little sweat trickled down into my collar.

"Your faces are going to be awfully red," I assured them. "There isn't a single reason why you want me. Or—hell—is there?"

It *had* to take at least three more minutes for us to reach the corner. I did tricks with my pace, pretending to slither a little, to stumble. "Look—why not talk this over? If I've got anything you want, I'm no Boy Scout. Tell me what you want. I can go along with a gag," I babbled as we progressed down the block.

The man behind the gun finally said in a vicious, exasperated voice: "Shut up or I'll fog you—and cut stalling."

But it was all right by then. The traffic turned against us just as we reached the corner, and we had to stand there long enough for the rest of my three minutes to be more than swallowed.

The light changed. We started across.

The little traffic pool at Eighth Street and Sixth Avenue is sort of a muddle. Although the lanes were open most of the way across, a steady string of cars coming down Sixth Avenue were still swinging to the right up Eighth. That left us one extra lane of traffic, for which we had to wait when we were almost to the other side. We came to a momentary halt in the slush.

I held my breath. The clock in the fire tower boomed once.

Sharp on the dot, the little platoon of bluecoats came marching around the corner of the women's prison—the morning traffic shift proceeding to their posts.

The whistle shrilled behind us for another change of traffic. I heard a blurted, bitter curse behind me. In the instant that cars were moving in all directions around us, I took a long breath and went forward onto my toes.

The lad behind me choked, "You . . .!" and I dived on my belly.

I dived straight across the wheels of an oncoming car, with maybe a foot to spare, wriggling, squirming, while I yelled at the top of my lungs, "Harry!" at the lieutenant in charge of the bluecoats.

The shot sounded more like a *thump* than a *crack*, owing to the snow-muffling, but there was *crack* to it too. A finger of white hot pain poked into the flesh just above my hip bone—and then I was surrounded by wildly skidding, screeching automobiles.

I was half numb on my right side. I floundered, slithered as I tried to get up, got to my knees. I could see the group of bluecoats, goggling at me from the curb, but, although one or two were sort of leaning out towards me, there was no urgency to their movements.

Even as I clawed myself up on some cursing motorist's mudguard, grabbing for the gun inside my coat and reversing to try to spot my would-be murderers, it dawned on me that only I realized that

there had been a shot. The boys had certainly been handed a made-to-order time and place for their gunplay.

They were gone as though they had never been there. Snowstorm and darkness had whisked them away in the seconds it took me to get to my feet. Through the falling curtain of flakes I knew that there were people beyond and that they were moving. Further identification was impossible. My friends' getaway was clean.

Across the hood of a car, Lieutenant Harry Burch called fretfully at me: "What the hell's the matter with you? What are you doing?"

I turned stiffly, smiled a sickly grin. "I—uh—sorry, Harry. Forget it. I faw down."

He gave me a disgusted rasp of the throat, turned and walked away. I said, "Sorry, sorry," to the motorists between me and the curb as I made my way with downcast eyes to a taxicab. I could feel warm liquid trickling down my leg and I was a little upset in the stomach.

I stumbled into the hack and it took me up to Doc Eiseman's on West 34th Street.

I was a little light-headed as I paid off the cab and crossed the sidewalk, pressing my arm against the handkerchief I had inserted into the hole in my side.

A couple of jolts of the Doc's good brandy cleared me up, after he had dressed the jagged wound, told me in one breath that it was nothing, in the next that I would have to lie abed for two days, and in the third that he would be bound, of course, to report the whole thing immediately.

I gave him a fishy stare on that last, laid a five-dollar bill on the side of his operating table and buttoned up my coat. I knew of two instances of gunmen he had treated after a fracas without troubling the police, and he knew that I knew. The belligerent look went off his greasy little face and was replaced by an oily, knowing grin.

"Only spoofing," he muttered. "You're a good kid."

"I think you're pretty, too," I told him, and went out with nothing more than a noticeable burning in my right side and a couple of unnoticeable holes in my clothes.

And, of course, the knowledge that somebody wanted me to be a dead corpse.

I am not an obstinate man. I didn't make with the oath of vengeance, just because these hatchetmen had jumped me.

I won't say that administering a good solid kick where it would hurt wouldn't have charmed me, but it didn't cause me to beat my breast and pant. Mainly, it put solid reality into the twenty thousand dollar deal that Desar had pushed at me. This pair were not the type to kill socially. This spelled real coin of the realm.

But how had they known that I was onto the thing—that Desar had sung to me? And how to locate me so quickly?

I did a slow, gruelling burn—that finally got fiery. The Popsy! The girl who had sugared me up so expertly—or, now that I looked back sickly, *was* it so expertly? Who had coolly pumped me until she was satisfied that I was a danger, then gone and phoned, and then pinned me down till her chums could arrive—while she walked off with her doddering old stooge!

My face was magenta. I don't flatter myself that I'm any master wolf, but I *had* thought I was doing pretty good with that little bundle. I don't really fancy a particular girl very often. But I had really conjured up a yen for her. Damn it, I still had it!

I ground my teeth, cleared my head.

I flagged another cab and drove back to the French Line pier. I had no further doubt as to my program; at any rate I was going to spike whatever racket these folks were juggling and I was going to be paid handsomely for it. I was going to put my hands on the little lady and—well, there were more ways than one of dealing with the little lady.

At least, I told myself obstinately, there must be more than one. I could only think of one at the moment.

I managed to get through the gate, onto the pier. There didn't seem to be any excitement or any crowd around, except the usual workmen. I saw a uniformed patrolman by the foot of the gangplank, and that was all.

I returned to the spot where Desar had scattered his bits of torn-up note, but I could have saved myself the trouble. I could find no more than three microscopic bits.

The snow, the wind, and people's wet shoes, had dissipated the rest. The bits I had were useless.

The blue Cadillac that had brought us down here from the prison was, of course,

long gone. From a pay phone a block away, I made cautious inquiries and found it belonged to the Immigration Department, and spent most of its days parked inside of, or outside of, their garage down on Church Street.

Anybody, obviously, could have got to it and planted the aspirin—something anybody, would pick up, and use some time. An open window, and . . .

I didn't even bother to go down and check, it was so obvious flat.

I was very careful not to think about the yellow-eyed Higgins and the squat Vokes—the two sleuths who had ridden in from Sing Sing with us. It was too uncomfortable.

At nine o'clock, when the noon editions of the papers came out, I continued not to think of them. The opposition newspaper, *Gazette*, had gleefully pounced down on the story.

A stranger might well conclude that the D. A., and the police, had murdered Desar in baffled fury because of the failure of their persecution of the little brown man with the turban.

That meant that every local sleuth would be running around on hot bricks. It was one crime that the local Law *had* to solve—or at least, had to fasten onto somebody, and quickly.

*If* they spotted the aspirin in Desar's stomach, and *if* they began to wonder where it came from, and *if* Higgins and/or Vokes *had* happened to be peeking into the rear-view mirror when I had handed the tablets to Desar . . .

I ate—I don't know what—and got back to my one-room-and-bath on Lexington around ten o'clock.

The switchboard laddie in my lobby reported that the phone had been ringing continuously for me for the past three hours, that I was to call the District Attorney's office the moment I came in.

I told him: "All right. Call him for me in about fifteen minutes, Johnny," and went up and got into some unventilated clothes.

I walked up and down my room maybe ten times, thinking.

"On second thought," I told him, as I passed him again going out, "phone the D. A. now and tell him I'm mushing my way down to his office."

I STOPPED on the way down, bought a yellow tie and stuffed it into my pocket.

Kleeb had an oblong, wooden face, very blond kinky hair and superior blue eyes. He resembled a hat advertisement. He sat in a green-shaded island of light in his walnut-panelled, thick-carpeted office behind his notoriously clean, shining desk and eyed me as though I were nothing out of the ordinary.

I came in rather quickly, conveying eagerness. My first glance advised me that neither Higgins nor Vokes were in the room and I could then breathe again.

"Sorry about this," I told him. "I just heard what had happened when I got home."

Ledoux, Kleeb's butter-ball deputy, put his fat olive face down into the cone of light and whispered in Kleeb's ear. Then he straightened and worried his miserable, wax-plastered black moustache and his black eyes sparkled at me.

"What can you tell us," Kleeb said smoothly, "about the death of this Syrian?"

The room was large, and the area of light around the desk so limited that I had not caught sight of Fungus, my bald-headed little boss, over by the wall. Light glinted from his sloping bare pate and pulled my eye over. His face was starch-white, his grape-blue eyes almost popped out; he looked like a man being strangled, and he was wringing his hands, sweating. In other words, he was his normal self. I gave him a bright nod.

"Very little, I'm sorry," I told Kleeb. "I suppose Mr. Fonck here has told you why I was with Desar."

"In a way," Kleeb's voice had a booming, political-rally undertone. "When you were—ah—not to be found, we contacted Mr. Fonck. But I should prefer to hear it first hand."

I shrugged. "We knew that Desar had handled a lot of expensive loot. We—that is, I—" as I saw Fonck shrivel—"thought he might know something about some of the pieces on which we've paid claims over the past few years—"

"What pieces?"

"We had nothing specific in mind. Just anything I could get out of him."

"Oh, come now."

"That's the way it was. Frankly, he was

too sharp for us. We've never been able to connect him with any specific item."

"I see. And so what items did *he* choose to speak to you about?"

"Not any, Mr. Kleeb. It was just a long chance that he might, and I tried. It didn't work. I asked him—and he stood me off."

Kleeb pressed: "And so you had only those few words—perhaps a sentence or two—with Desar."

"On the contrary. I barbered with him quite a bit—trying to persuade him. But that's the substance of it."

"He gave you no information. He clammed up."

"He did indeed."

He leaned a little forward and clasped his hands. "You are willing to sign a sworn statement to that effect?"

I looked surprised. "Quite willing. Why?"

"We will ask the questions." His chin came almost down to his interlaced hands. "It has been suggested, my friend, that Desar *did* whisper something in your ear—some extremely valuable information that might put its possessor in the way of a fortune."

"What?" I laughed. "Well, this is good. Who dreamed that up?"

"Now, there's no need for you to be alarmed," Kleeb said smoothly.

"Alarmed? I assure you, I'm not a damned bit alarmed. Just a little surprised—but not too much. I came down here thinking you wanted my help. It didn't occur to me that some bright boy would try to fit me in as a suspect."

"Why *do* you consider yourself a suspect?" Ledoux shot quickly.

"Stop kidding. I don't. But it becomes apparent now what you birds are straining at. I milked Desar of this secret. It was important enough so I could get rich off it. So I knocked him off to make sure I kept it exclusively?"

"You find that not a sound explanation of his death?"

"With me in it, no. Without me, it's not bad." Brother, it wasn't bad. "But it also dawns on me that maybe what I think—what I know—doesn't interest you much. Perhaps I'd better stop talking and hire a lawyer?"

Kleeb wasn't quite thick enough to wear that one. He said sourly: "Desar gave you

no information of any kind? You're sure?"

"I've told you that."

"Even when he called you over to him on the pier—after your young lady had whispered to him?"

"My young lady? I didn't even see—oh. That one with the glasses. Good Lord—I never saw her in my life before. Who is she?"

They exchanged quick glances. Kleeb went on: "So you deny knowing this girl?"

"Of course. Who is she?" I couldn't quite figure how I'd gotten aboard this dizzy toboggan—nor how to get off.

He ignored the question. "What did Desar have to say to you on the pier?"

I shrugged again. "He had some idea that he was going to be transported in irons in a dungeon, or something. He hadn't been deported before and he was worried."

"And you reassured him."

"Uh-huh."

Kleeb looked up quickly at his deputy. "You wanted to ask him . . .?"

Ledoux swayed into the light. "We're not entirely clear how you happened to ride in his car with Desar." Before I could answer, he added, "From *inside* the prison grounds."

"That's easy. The warden is an old acquaintance of mine. I dropped in to see him."

"Warden Phineas gave you permission?"

"Hell, no. Nobody did. After I was through with the warden, I was standing around. I wanted to talk to Desar. He got into this car. So I did, too." I could hear Fonck's breath of relief.

There was a silence. Kleeb pounded the desk softly with the back of his fist.

"Did you see Desar eat or drink anything while he was under your observation?"

"Eat? No."

"You're quite sure?"

I scowled. "I'm sure—sure, I mean, that if he did, I didn't observe it."

"But he could have."

"I suppose he could have sneaked something."

They again exchanged fraternity-brother glances.

"But you didn't offer him anything?"

"I didn't have anything to offer him."

He drummed on the desk, looked thin-eyed at his fingernails, suddenly and unexpectedly rose smoothly to his feet.

"Very well. That will be all for the present. I need hardly warn you . . ."

"Not to leave town. No. You can find me when you want me."

For the life of me, as Fonck and I rode down, unspeaking in the elevator, I couldn't tell how I had made out. It was a touchy matter of just how wily Kleeb was. I *could* have underestimated him. Certainly, if he were just making wild guesses, he was doing some nice scoring.

But two things I knew I could now count on. That he was definitely in the market for my skin, if it could be arranged. And that I had positively nailed myself to the statement that Desar had disclosed nothing to me. I still couldn't see how I could have avoided it—without throwing my hand in completely. And I didn't dare come clean—not with the boys ravening for an arrest—*any* arrest.

My only comfort was that only one living person could ever nail me on the lie—myself. I could trust myself not to do it.

Of course, if I told somebody else, then there would be two people who could scuttle me.

Maybe that's why, for once, I stood off even Fungus—all right, Fonck, if you want to be formal.

Or maybe it did have something to do with the fabulous—to me—sum of twenty thousand dollars. I don't know.

Fonck scampered along with me, until the snow had laid a solid barrage between us and the Criminal Courts Building, and then shot in a hoarse stage whisper: "Great headwork, Joey boy—great—not mentioning Paramount's arranging that ride and all."

He pattered along another half block, then shot a furtive look over his shoulder and put his hand on my arm.

"Look, Joey—what *did* you get from Desar?"

I stopped dead and gave him a fishy look. His face was sweat-beaded, and he was puffing. "Listen, Joey, I've been like a father to you for these twelve years. But I've been in the business for twenty. I know the temptations you boys . . . Look—I'm supposed to go out to the country this

week-end. I won't go. You know old Papa Fonck. He'll stand by you through thick or thin. We'll work out your problem together. Now just tell me the whole story—"

"You, too, eh? This is just peachy," I said finally. "Well, the biggest favor you could do me, you old goat, is to go out of town."

His dew-lapped face contorted and he opened his mouth, but I gave him only my indignant, retreating back to talk to.

Another wild guesser! Everybody was doing it—and being altogether too damned accurate. Everybody was but me.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Bullet Bait

**I** SLOWED when I was sure I had shaken him off, turned into a doorway and sucked a cigarette. My watch said twenty minutes to one when I finally flagged down a cab.

I rode to Wall Street and walked to the Midland Insurance Building. Then—time or no time wasted—I stood on the street for another ten minutes, debating painfully with myself. Pee-Wee Stevenson, Midland's head adjuster, was a fairly good friend of mine. The question was—would he talk? I finally convinced myself that he wouldn't—and I had to have *some* sharp-cut information from someone.

It suddenly occurred to me that it was Saturday afternoon—Wall Street is never so deserted as then—and I groaned, hastened across the street. If Pee-Wee were not at his office—

He was, and he was virtually all alone on the nineteenth floor of the modern skyscraper. It was just as well, for there were no pukka private offices on the adjusters' floor—only eight foot or three-foot partitions dividing up the cubicles of the wage slaves.

I found Pee-Wee surrounded by the eight foot ones, in gaudy purple-striped shirt sleeves, his feet on a linoleum-topped desk, puffing at an upside-down pipe. He turned a wary eye at me, fluttered his long womanish lashes rapidly. "Hello, compounder of felonies. Sit down, I'm afraid."

I sat.

"What's about this Helsingfors Casket—

nine or ten years ago—stolen from some Finn?"

A ghostly grin twisted his moist little olive face. "Why?"

"Might tie in with a story I heard."

His eyes regarded me thinly.

I shrugged. "Well, I assumed you'd like to get it back, and what I heard is incomprehensible to me. Of course if it means nothing to you, I won't waste both our time."

"Oh, we'd like to get it back, all right. I never was quite satisfied with that dicker. No use asking you what you've heard, I suppose?"

"No."

"That means you'd like to hold us up for something for getting it back."

"Don't rope me so fast," I complained. "I don't have the foggiest notion of how to get it back—yet. But if I *should*—well, yes, I would like to know how much blood I can afford in the process."

He gave me a peering look that I didn't altogether like, put his hands behind his head and said: "It was a gilded wooden casket, jewelled a bit, half a dozen small rubies, a few small emeralds, about the size of—well, you could put a football in it comfortably if it were empty. Only it wasn't empty. It was padded, filled with cotton wool or the like, to make a shallow bed for four small vials of chemicals.

"It was being shipped from some hospital in Finland to a certain Svengard here. He was attached to the Finnish embassy. It was landed okay, and delivered to the house in the East Sixties where this Svengard lived—and the joint was robbed within five minutes of its arrival."

"How?"

"There was an inside plant—a furnace man, who'd only worked a few days there—not that we ever caught him or anybody else for the caper—but his references turned out forged. He let in two more hoods through a cellar door in the back yard and they just took over."

"Which cost you how much?"

"Twelve thousand dollars."

"What? I heard it was five times that."

"Nonsense. I, myself, think it was a holdup at that price. Our representative in Finland pulled a boob on it, you ask me, but—well, we paid off."

"What kind of drugs were in the box?"



"Anti-biotics, if that means anything to you. Some Finns had been experimenting in a small way and thought they'd discovered a new kind of cure for T.B. and one thing and another. Only the experimenting was costly as all get out, and they couldn't keep it up with their limited dough. So they sent it over to this joker, to pass on to some rich American outfit who could afford to press on with it. At least that's the story."

"You don't believe it?"

"Well, it could be."

"If you did get it back, how do you recover?"

"As it happens, that's not too hard. We paid the claim, but between the time of the heist and the time our check came through, this Svensgaard had got tossed in the brig for doing chores for the Nazis. Our money went in hock with the bank and it's still there. If we produced the casket and the original contents, we could yank back our check, at least until this Finn gets out of pokey."

"So. Then about all it'd be worth to you to get it back is eight or ten grand."

"That I don't know. Wait here." He got up, wandered out of his pen, and vanished down a hall.

After ten minutes he came back and said "Four."

I damned the little Syrian as I subwaysed back uptown. If the slippery, conniving rat hadn't hopped me up, bemused me with this twenty grand gag—well, even four thousand is a lot of money to me, but considering the giddy tangle that this had slithered me into—

Paper crackled in my pocket—the wrappings of my yellow tie. It smartened me up, cut short my might-have-beening. There wasn't any question of my going in any direction but forward, now. And the time was about here for me to latch onto that casket and find out—

Find out what? Bleakly, I had to face the fact that it might get me exactly nowhere. And, with the law-hounds yapping at my heels, and myself riding the dangerously thin ice of a lying story to the D.A., I could see no possible way of extricating myself, *except* by clearing up the killing—apart from any other important consideration.

There was, though, this much about the

casket: Evidently the girl and her two gunmen friends wanted it. If I had it, there was a chance that they would come for it. I would have some grasp on the boiling.

I was plenty uncomfortable as I finally climbed up onto Forty-second Street and started to reconnoitre.

It took only minutes to find that my number—143a—was a movie house.

That didn't make me comfortable. I stood obliquely across the street and wondered what the hell? Was I supposed to brace the manager, or the ticket-seller, or some patron—what? Or—the gnawing little worry crawled on me—had the rotten little greaseball actually just given me a fast needle?

I squirmed to go over and nose around the theater, but it was barely three-thirty and he had been emphatic about warning me against premature appearance, lest I scare the deal—whatever it was—away.

Then, through the sifting white, I saw Al Luftus, a big, good-natured slob with windmill ears, head into the front of the theater. He was friendly toward me, or should be. I had saved him five years on an embezzlement frameup in a candy store some time back. Now, I seemed to recall hearing that he was selling maple syrup by mail.

Watching him, I realized that he wasn't actually entering the theater, but had angled over to a narrow side door at one side of the lobby. My eyes went upwards as this door opened, swallowed him, and swung shut. I realized that there were offices above the theater—three wooden stories of them.

Desar or no Desar, I had to play my own hand. I went over.

The door opened into a narrow, wooden stairwell, the stairs dirty and broken. I found a black-and-white directory in the gloom beside me. Al Luftus was on the third floor, the other two being wholly occupied respectively by a Steel Coil Company, and a typewriter-ribbon concern.

Both first and second floor doors indicated that they were closed for the week-end.

I opened the door into Al's shabby, huge, low-ceilinged barn and faced him far across a sea of cardboard cartons. He was bent over a desk in the front window, laboriously

scrawling. Piles of papers surrounded him.

He looked up, recognized me, jumped up, beaming. "Well, Allah be praised! I thought I was going to have to work. Have some maple syrup!"

He produced a bottle marked Haig and Haig and two glasses from his bottom drawer in the twinkling of an eye, set them before me, shoved papers aside, and palmed out the stopper.

"Start pouring, but quick!" he beamed, when I reached him. "And how the hell are you?"

"Never worse." I hooked a hip on his desk corner and put my heels on the window-sill, sloshed out a stern two ounces. I waited and we drank. "How!"

I asked him: "How would you like to give me a little aid and comfort?"

"You know you've just got to name it."

"What do you know about your neighbors—or fellow tenants?"

And that was the end of that.

If his windows hadn't been so grimed, I could have sat unmoving and looked down and across the street and seen the whole proceeding. Looking *down* through falling snow is easy, as any pilot will tell you—and I had a straight line of sight to the jewelry store opposite.

**T**HE thump-crack of the shot in the not-very-busy street below was vicious and unmistakable—at least to an old hand like me. My eyes jerked directly down and over—to the *very store in whose front I had been standing for protection moments ago.*

A little dove-gray man—hat, suit, gloves, even the handkerchief tied over his sharp little face—came scuttling out of the store, a gun in his hand.

He fired again. The shot sounded like a howitzer in the narrow mouth of the little shop and glass exploded inside. The scant street crowd went into a little merry-go-round of panic, left him an easy path to the curb.

By then I had the window open, cursing savagely. Al Luftus breathed over my shoulder: "Holy Cats! A stickup!"

I grabbed for my gun. The little gray man turned and dived toward the road, brandishing his gun, caroming into the squealing pedestrians, bounced and skid-

ded. He had a square dark object under his free arm. A blue Buick started away from the curb forty yards east, door hanging open.

I half swung away from the window—and then swung back again, as something half-consciously fixed my eye.

Sick rage burned me, as I realized what had gone wrong. The store across—the one in process of being held up—was *134a*. The building I was in was *143a*—a direct transposition of numbers. Whether Desar had bungled it, or I myself, didn't matter. It was bungled.

The little dove gray man burst and struggled through the last knot of frantic passers-by, sprang for the running board of the moving Buick and hauled himself in through the open door.

The car backfired as it tried to gulp down too much acceleration, then lifted, and shot forward. It sent a plume of steam into the snow curtain, hit the first corner—Lexington—whirled around it in a two-wheel skid and shot southwards, already being scolded by at least three prowl-car sirens.

I was standing motionless, the short hairs at the base of my neck crawling, my eyes glued to a man in a brown suit who was still standing near the front of the robbed shop.

He was only halfway turned toward me. He wore a wide-brimmed gray hat on his ragged jet-black hair. I knew the back of his neck as well as I knew my own brother's face.

He had been one of the knot of bystanders through which the fleeing bandit had plunged. He carried a portable typewriter case. He was Joe Couglar.

As the first screaming prowl car whipped around the corner, he started easing himself unhurriedly to the outer fringe of the now converging crowd, began stolidly picking his way toward Third Avenue. From above, his gray hat was conspicuous because he seemed the only person *not* swarming back *toward* the store.

I said, "Excuse me, Al."

It was all-of-a-sudden crystal clear why Desar had wanted specifically to pass his information to *me*. As I ran down the stairs, I wondered grimly why I hadn't considered *that* angle before.

Once Paramount had had an investiga-

tor named Johnny Duren, a big, loose-jointed southern boy, more fun than a bag of monkeys to live with, and as dependable as the mint, in a squeeze. Two suspicious characters entered a jewelry store in the Bronx in '42. The jeweler had flashed an alarm.

Johnny Durden had answered the alarm for the company, walked in with his hands in his pockets, and died with his hands in his pockets. Joe Couglar had deliberately and unhesitatingly pumped four bullets into his chest and belly before he got one foot over the doorsill. With Johnny's dying statement as practically the only evidence, I had got myself deferred long enough to flush Joe Couglar. But I couldn't wait for the trial and the rat got away with a ten-year plaster—meaning four, in actual time served. He had been paroled just two weeks ago.

I could feel the vein on my forehead standing out when I ran out onto the street. Desar had played crafty—if his hope was making trouble for Joe Couglar. You could search the country without finding anybody who ached to make trouble for Joe Couglar like I did.

I half-trotted to the corner around which he had finally vanished, and saw no sign of him. That didn't disturb me unduly. I flagged a cab, was driven to Max's Rathouse, on 83rd, in Yorkville.

I had stood with one heel hooked on the crank of the rolled-up awning that served Max's for half an hour. I was studying my little red address book, when a cab slid into the identical place I had been dropped, and a man in a brown suit descended.

He was empty-handed now. He tossed a cigarette butt into a trash can on the corner, and came towards me.

His eyes were two shining bits of coal under thin black eyebrows, his dark face high-cheek-boned with deep harsh lines from behind his nostrils to thin red lips. His jaw was like a ship's bow and his sloping shoulders would have done for a stevedor's. He walked without swinging his arms, his meaty walnut hands hanging a little in front of him.

I put my little red book away as he reached me and thumbed out the gun from inside my coat. "Hello, Joe."

"Well, hello," he said vaguely. Then his eyes jumped—and were instantly veiled

and muddy. His forehead made a harsh V. "I remember you," he said in a voice like peach velvet.

"I didn't have time to send my regards with your pals this morning, Joe. The dialogue was all on their side. So I thought I'd drop round."

"Is this a pinch?"

"It may turn out to be—after we converse somewhat."

"Converse? Where?"

"Oh, we'll find a place."

He stood like a rock, knuckles towards me. "What's the beef?"

"We'll start with the heist just now on 42nd. Come on, let's go taxi-riding."

He leaned his heavy chest against my gun as I prodded him and showed his uneven brown teeth. "Going to kill me, little man?"

"Don't tempt me. Then I'd have nobody to fry for killing Desar. But I *will* crease a knee for you."

Still looking me straight in the eye, he raised his voice slightly and rattled off a string of unintelligible gibberish.

I struck out.

First off, it was a couple of seconds before I realized that he was talking some foreign language that I didn't even understand.

Secondly, even when I got that through my thick head, it was an instant before realization clogged that he was talking to someone inside the Rathaus.

Thirdly, in the moment that I jerked my head round at the dark open doorway, he cocked his thin lips and split the hush with a piercing whistle.

And I didn't actually *see* the girl inside anyway, I don't think. She was fading away as I looked, and all I had was a vague flash of her swirling short fur coat and gabardine skirt, the flash from her amber-rimmed spectacles before she had melted from sight.

The prowler car's siren moaned, even as I swayed toward the door. With fantastic luck, Joe's whistle had caught a precinct car almost opposite, and they were round in a swooping U-turn before I could cog.

Two pistol-brandishing harness bulls dived out, and I was caught flatfooted with my gun stuck out there for all the world to see. To have moved another inch

door-ward would bring on a lead shower.

Joe yelled, "Help! Help!"

I snarled, "Toomey—Melcher," as they piled up. "It's me—hold this guy. I'm after his pal," and I took a chance on a dive inside then.

The dim, green-hung grotto was empty except for Maxie—a roly-poly little nearly bald man with moon-shaped spectacles and eyes like pale green grapes. He was reading a Racing Form at the bar and was apparently only vaguely aware of doings outside his door.

I snapped, "Where'd she go?" even as I moved swiftly on the door at the rear marked LADIES.

If you knew nothing about Maxie, you would have assessed him as genial. He blinked at me curiously. "Where'd who . . . ? Hey, you can't go in there!"

"No?" I was in.

Cold wind blew in through a window so narrow that I couldn't have gotten through it in ten minutes if at all. I jumped over and stuck my head out.

An angle-of the building stuck its elbow right into my face. The dirty snow was trampled under the window by plenty of footsteps.

Maxie was looking anxiously at me over half-moons as I came pounding out. "Hey, now wait. You look kind of excited. Are you seeing things or something?"

Toomey's glittering cap badge and egg-shaped face poked in the doorway. "Hey—come on, Paramount! What the hell's the score here?"

I jammed my gun hands back in my pockets and did plenty of burn. I rejoined the two patrolmen and Couglar. Couglar's black eyes had a cynical glint.

"What's he done?" Toomey said, "Make it fast. We're out on an alarm. . . ."

"Yeah. Down to 42nd Street, probably—a slum joint heist? This one and a couple more did it. He was standing outside with an empty typewriter case. The hoods that did the actual heisting passed the loot to him and then made noise to pull the chase away—the old cannon mob routine. Couglar here calmly walked away with the plunder while everybody else took out after. . . ."

"Well, where's the stuff?"

"Where is it, Joe?"

He eyed me insolently. "In your brain, you ask me. Don't count me in on this pipe

dream. All I know is I was coming in here for a beer and he outs with his rod. He tried to force me into a cab, and I seen your heap and whistled."

Toomey looked dubious and unhappy. "Be your age," I growled. "He's Joe Couglar—just out on parole on a manslaughter rap. I was going to bring him in to the precinct myself."

"Yes, you were," Couglar's voice snarled. "He didn't say nothing about no precincts. He said he wanted to take me somewhere and ask me some questions. Since I don't know no answers—and since he's had his knife out for me for years, I wasn't anxious to go—and get my brains beat out, probably."

Toomey spat angrily. "What the hell is all this? You got something on him or not?"

I tasted salt. "Get him into your brig. Before I do take a gun butt to him."

"But on what? I don't see nothing. . . ."

Fortunately some intelligence came to me before I boomed all over the place. I put a quick hand around Couglar's buttocks and closed on his hip. Bulky metal could be only a gun and I hauled it out with relief.

"Guys on parole don't tote these toys," I told Toomey.

That made the thick-head happy. "Yeah. Let's go. We can all squeeze in the heap. . . ."

"I've still got a lead on this pup's accomplices," I said. "You hold him at the precinct while I chase this down."

I didn't give the doubt on his dough face any chance to form. I stepped quickly back inside the barroom, and, from inside, left only an eye around the door jamb, till the trio had climbed in and driven off.

I went over and said to Maxie: "A beer."

He drew me a pseudo-Pilsener in silence.

I said, "How's business, Maxie?"

"Good." He tried to return to his Racing Form.

"Who was the girl, Maxie?"

He stared dully over his half-moons.

"Come on, come on—the girl with a build and the yellow-rimmed glasses. She was at the door."

"If there was a girl there, I didn't notice her."

"A friend of your brother's, eh?" I said

quietly. "Look, Maxie. Joe's never made anything but trouble for you. His being loose means he'll be using you from now on. Pretty soon you'll find yourself rapped—but *he's* the guy who holds the profits.

"Play with him and you're a sucker. On the other hand, it never hurts to have a friend or two—like a big insurance company. . . ."

"I got a friend or two," Max said dully; "Over to the precinct," and plumped his folded arms down on his newspaper.

I said, "Well, you know what you're doing," and went out.

I rode back down to take a look at the jewelry shop. Brilliant light blazed within and there were a dozen cops around. I hung back, could see the greasy, voluble little proprietor moaning. The shot had hurt nobody, had shattered a cut-glass sandwich tray.

Nobody had to tell me that *my* eye-witness testimony would be tissue paper in a court. The kind of lip that Couglar would employ would convince a jury in no time that I would perjure my soul to hang Couglar. And that cannon mob stunt of sidestepping the loot would be nearly impossible to prove.

I didn't make myself known, just hung around till I picked up what information there was—which was little. The getaway car had eluded the pursuers, it seemed, long enough for the two thugs to leave it vacant and fingerprintless on an East River wharf. It was, naturally, a stolen chariot.

**F**OR WHAT IT WAS WORTH, I got one break. A phone call to our office informed me that we *did* insure Isaacson, the jeweler, but I didn't go in anyway. It gave me, however, a sort of reason for moving around in this picture—a legitimate one, I mean, which Kleeb couldn't very well quarrel about if he *should* crop up. Whether it would cover *all* the moving I was doing was another thing.

I couldn't see going down to the precinct with my hands still empty, and yet time seemed to be racing away. And it was the casket I wanted—not Joe Couglar's person. Not at the moment, anyway. Or at any rate not in the presence of others.

I had two lines—the girl, or the loot. A half dozen phone calls got me nowhere on trying to get a line on the girl. Whatever

tie-up Joe had with her, my wires couldn't tag her, didn't even know of any girl recently seen with Joe.

Nor could I find where Joe was living. That surprised me. I tried another half hour's phoning, but people who should know didn't—didn't even know he was out of the pen. I didn't like the angle much, anyway—didn't believe that Joe would have ditched the loot at his own diggings—but in the end I was driven to it.

The afternoon ran away on me before I finally called the parole officer, who informed me that Joe's address was the Y. M. C. A. on Thirty-third Street.

Naturally, I knew he wouldn't actually be living there—nor dumping loot there. But I had to start somewhere—and quick.

It was dark again, with no let-up in the snowstorm, by the time I entered the lobby, shaking white flakes off my hat. The clerk at the desk gave me a toothy counter-leaper smile when I approached, and then a cold haughty visage when I told him what I wanted. He tapped a pencil against his large teeth and was unable to see his way clear to admitting me to Joe's room, but he would phone one of the directors. . . .

I told him never mind and went out. I noticed a one-cab cab stand at the corner and, on the off chance that Joe Couglar was not the walking type when other means of locomotion were available, I woke the sleeping monkey-faced hackie.

I drew a folded five-dollar bill through my fingers.

"How good is your memory?" I asked. "And do you hack around here all the time?"

"Good. Yeah."

I described Joe Couglar. "Ever see him?"

His eyes were on the five—and I was back in the game. "Maybe."

"The fin says you can't take me a place you took him in the past two days."

"Get in, Mr. Rockefeller." He snipped the five neatly.

When we had eeled our way up through the early afternoon traffic to Central Park West, he drove four blocks north and coasted.

"There," he said, "down that street—third house from the corner. Do you want. . . ?"

"Drift past the corner and let me off."

You're not in any doubt about this, are you?"

"Not any."

It was a standard type of brownstone affair, converted into meagre apartments, with a garbage can spilling over in the open, down-a-step entrance. It had a shallow, open vestibule with the unusual attraction—for its type of place—of brass letter boxes.

Joe Couglar's name was on none of them, but of the twelve boxes, only two showed male names alone, and one box was blank.

The vestibule door was unlocked and I went down and then up the curving, green-carpeted narrow stairs that practically filled the building's hall.

On the first floor, the non-listee apartment stood wide open with painters' trestles and cloths shrouding the interior.

On the second floor—one of the two lone male listings—a business card tacked to a door read, in my flashlight's beam: *Joseph Allison, Interpretive Dancing.*

I climbed up onto the fourth floor just as a door toward the front of the hall whined open. The caramel-haired girl with the amber glasses and the long-legged beautiful body came hurrying out.

I said, "Good evening. Looks like snow, doesn't it?"

She peered, reaching inside for an elusive light switch. I strolled into the fan of light and she seemed to sag a little. The glow from behind seemed to make her delicate face shine, and her hair had silvery glints.

Her head went down, and her voice was soft: "Oh! I—I'm terribly sorry. I just couldn't get back in time to—to meet you. But—" She brightened and gave me a shy smile. "I'm awfully glad you're here. I—I was afraid that—well, that I might not see you ever again."

I was speechless.

She backed into the apartment, eyes dark hollows on my face. I finally found my tongue. "I bet you were. Unfortunately the gunmen you set me up for boomed it." I stepped over the threshold, kicked the door closed, and with the hand that wasn't on my gun, found a chain behind me and slotted it.

"Gun—gunmen?" she half whispered, "that I . . . ?" A little ghostly smile crooked her lips. "Oh, you're joking."

"No, precious," I said grimly, "I'm not

joking. And I'm all dry behind the ears now. Where are they? Or rather—where is the loot that Joe just tucked away?"

"Loot—? Joe—?" Her eyes searched my face wonderingly. "Oh—I—you must explain." Her hand went to my sleeve and she shook it daintily. "Please—what did you mean when you said I set you up . . . You didn't mean anything, did you?"

I licked my lips. "Precious, I *could* lose my temper. This morning, you had me chewing woodwork to get at you."

The worried lines in her forehead smoothed instantly. "Did I? Did I really?"

"Right up till the moment I stepped outside and in between those guns that you'd phoned for. And that you'd pinned me down to wait for."

Her eyes were round, incredulous. "Guns! You think that I . . . Oh, I *swear* . . . Oh, tell me exactly what happened—please!"

"I have, damn it! Your gunmen friends closed in on me before I was ten feet out the door of Goody's. I slid clear of them, but that's another story."

"But why—why do you think that I—that they were people I had anything to do with?"

"Cut it out. They were Joe Couglar's partners. You know. Joe. The joker that just rattled off all those instructions to you in Spanish or German, or something, down in the Rathaus. Or did you never hear of him, either?"

Her eyes were wide, staring. "Joe did—did that to you? Oh! I didn't know." Her head went down and she clasped her small hands, went slowly over and sat on a wicker sofa, pulling her feet up under her. She stared at nothing with unhappy concentration.

That gave me a chance to take in the tiny living room, obviously a furnished apartment, cheaply furnished in wicker, with two Nutting landscapes against the pale-green walls. Three closed suitcases stood on the hearth before the small fireplace.

I thumbed the bags. "Joe's?"

"Yes." She said it almost absently. She put one hand down and patted the sofa beside her gently. "Please come here." She did not look at me.

I finally eased a hip onto the sofa beside her, and dropped my free arm on the wicker back. "And?"

"I swear I didn't know." She spoke slowly, a little desperately. "I did call Joe from that bar. I had arranged to. I had to. When I happened to mention you were there, he—he said he wanted to see you. He asked me to arrange that you wouldn't leave till he could come and have a word with you. But I—how could I possibly know that he was—that he would try—oh, I swear I wouldn't have helped him harm you, not for anything."

"Well, that's just dandy. You're in love with me, of course."

She rolled her head slowly against the back of the couch and her glasses were miraculously in her hand. Her shadowed, secret blue eyes looked up into mine.

"No," she said softly. "I don't think I am—" She lifted her head unhurriedly and carried it over onto my forearm. Her long lashes made shadows on her pale cheeks. "But I want you to kiss me. A lot. You make me want to find out—oh, I don't know." She closed her eyes and strained a little upwards.

I kissed her. Her lips were slack, wet, flaming.

**I** STAGGERED upright, my eyes on the closed door in the back wall. She didn't move, lay with her head where I had dumped it, her eyes sombre. Her warm, pointed breasts rose and fell quickly.

"What now?" I croaked. "You've got *this* place loaded with your gunmen friends, too?" Two paces took me to the door and I jerked it open. I was looking into a small, mission-maple bedroom—bed, bureau and telephone table. A postage-stamp kitchenette and a small bathroom opened off the bedroom. The rooms were all obviously empty.

I went back and looked down at her. The blood was congested in my forehead and something in my stomach quivered like a plucked violin. "What's this all about, baby? Trying to make me dizzy is all right, and you're not doing bad. But Joe and his pals wanted to kill me this morning. They may be still looking for me. And the District Attorney has a hand just an inch behind my neck, likely to grab me for murder any minute. I want light. To begin with, I want that casket."

Her head came up quickly, and she stared. "Casket?"

"The one that Joe just heisted from that jewelry store. The Finnish job that seems to be the core of this whole damn thing. The one Desar told Joe about, and then got his mouth stopped because of."

"I—but I never heard of it!"

"I bet you didn't. How do you come to be thick with Joe?"

"He came up to me in a restaurant a couple of weeks ago. He—he was so pleasant and he seemed to know my employer. He asked me to go out with him and to—to give his regards to Mr. Watrous. . . ."

"You work for a guy named Watrous?"

She threw me a side-eye, dubious glance. "Ye-es."

It was a second before I comprehended the hesitation. "Wait a minute. This Watrous—he wouldn't be the old party you were with at the pier?"

She nodded slowly, eyes again on the carpet.

"Well, well. Rich employer - fiance. Grifter boy friend. Grifter works on secretary to make contact with rich old man. He *did* get you to introduce him?"

"Joe led me to believe he already knew—knew Mr. Watrous."

"And?"

"I—I see now that maybe he didn't. Mr. Watrous talked to him for ten or fifteen minutes, but nothing came of it."

"How do you mean came of it?"

"He wouldn't give Joe a job. That's why I took him in."

"A job?" I blew breath through my nose. "I suppose you didn't know Joe was a professional thief and gunman, just out of the jug on parole after killing my best friend?"

"Oh, no! He told me it was—was for something else, that he'd been unjustly sent to prison—"

"And you believed that? Yes, you did."

"But I did! I did!"

"What did you think Joe wanted you to wait around the Rathaus this afternoon for?"

"I—I didn't know."

"I do. You were to be his alibi, if I hadn't cropped up. You were to say you were with him *all* afternoon, in case it was necessary."

"Oh, no, I never would have! Oh, what do you think I am?"

"The nimblest little liar I've seen."

She stood up, put her arms behind her, a hand inside each elbow. There was a faint flush on her cheeks. "Then what's the use of asking me questions, if I'm really such a liar?"

"You can't lie all the time. Maybe some of the truthful bits will help me."

"Do you think my kiss was a lie?"

"Yes. No. I don't know. What did Joe gibber to you down by the Rathaus when he was being taken in?"

"He—just to get everything packed up here and ready."

"Ready for what?"

"I don't know."

"What other little chores have you done for Joe? Did you take a box of aspirin and plant it in a car down on Church Street?"

"Aspirin! No. Whatever has aspirin—"

"What about that note you passed Desar on the dock?"

"Note? I passed. . . ?"

"Ye Gods! I was ten yards away. Sit down. Lying's no good on this one."

She sat, obediently, clasped her hands and stared at them. "Oh, I don't want to lie! You've got me so frightened I don't know what I'm saying."

"Yeah, you look frightened, you do."

Her voice was still soft. "I know I don't seem so. I never do. But I am, I am."

"Tell me the truth and you won't have to be."

Her eyes jumped up. "How do I know that? You hate Joe. You think I'm—I'm Joe's girl. How do I know what you'll do with me?"

"Concentrate on what I'll do if you don't play ball."

"I want to! I want to help you—if I can. I—I know I've gotten into a terrible mess."

"Let's get back to the note."

Her head went down. "Yes, I—I did do that for Joe."

"What was in the note?"

"Joe didn't tell—"

"What was in the note?"

She winced, said softly: "Just: *'Impossible secure necessary in advance. Must have code words. Bearer can be trusted.'*"

"And what did Desar say to that?"

"He just cursed and swore and—and told me to go away."

It was like coins dropping in slots. Desar had expected to be paid something before

Joe got the casket. It looked as though Joe had promised to make it. I put my hand to my yellow tie. Desar had been untrusting enough to hold out this little trick pending the payment—and Joe had been unable to raise the cash. I suddenly wondered. . . .

"Listen—and answer carefully," I said. "When Joe wanted to contact your employer, and when the old man apparently turned him down, did Joe suggest that you and he clip your boss for a little something?"

"Good Lord, no. Oh, what are you driving at? What connection have all these things? Aspirin, and—and Joe, and his wanting to get to know Mr. Watrous, and this casket you say he stole?"

"I'd give a lot to know, exactly. What's your guess?"

"Oh, I think you are mad. I think it's what I said—you and Joe hate each other. You're making all this up, just to try and harm each other."

I grunted. "I'm not making it up, though I'm going to get that bastard before I'm through. And I don't think he's making it up to get me squeezed. It just happens that way. Where was Joe planning to go with all these suitcases?"

"Oh, I don't know. I don't know. Really."

"What's in them?"

"Just his clothes and—and things."

"No boxes or parcels—say half the size of a portable typewriter case?"

"No, no, I don't think so. But you'd better look."

She stood beside me, nursing an elbow, while I spent five minutes plunging my hands through the bags. There were no false bottoms. There was nothing to interest me.

I stood up and dried my forehead.

The few possible places of concealment in the place, I covered in a few moments. Nothing turned up, of course.

HER eyes went wider when I asked: "Is that phone in there working?" but she nodded.

"Yes. Shall—shall I put his things back in the bags?"

"I suppose so."

I went in and held a hand on the phone. I didn't want to do it.

I did it. I phoned the D. A.'s office.



Kleeb was out, but Ledoux's purring little voice came on the wire.

"There's a bird named Joe Couglar in the 60th St. precinct jug," I told him. "Sullivan Law. I want a chance to talk to him alone."

"I hear you do."

"You can put us in a room together and guard the room."

"Why, all right."

"You mean you'll arrange it?"

"Certainly." It was then I heard the click of the trace going in. "When will you be here? I'll have him brought to this office and you can—"

"Half an hour," I said, and hung up hastily.

Much, much too smooth, I thought bitterly. The oily little pup was probably even now trying to master mind some too-slick scheme to pull the chain on me. I should have my head read for even contacting him.

And yet—how else to get to Joe? I knew without asking that the precinct cops wouldn't let me near him—not after the story Joe was springing. And it was sharply clear that Joe had the key to all this shambles. If Ledoux would only go mad for once and play ball with me . . .

I glanced at my watch, quickly consulted the phone book and dialled again. If Ledoux were on the level, he had had time to phone the precinct. That much I could check on, anyway.

I got Stevens, the desk sergeant and after vainly trying to explain at the top of my lungs—he was stone deaf—he got Toomey for me.

"Has the D. A. called, in the last two or three minutes, to have Couglar taken downtown?" I asked.

"Downtown? No, he ain't."

"Well, he's going to, or said he was. He—"

"He can stuff it. Mr. Couglar ain't with us no more."

"What!"

"He was sprung on a writ an hour after we brought him in. You wouldn't know nothing about that, would you?"

"How could he be sprung? There's no court in session Saturday afternoon."

"Judge Eisling held a special session and heabased his corpus the hell out of here."

"How much bail? Who put it up? Who swung enough weight to get a judge—?"

"Now how the hell should I know?" he said wearily and hung up.

I depressed the hook, dialled the Legal Club. Judge Eisling was not there, but I might try the Talamagundi Club.

A minute later the judge's crackly little voice came over the wire from the Talamagundi Club: "What? Yes, I did. An old friend prevailed on me to help the boy, and he also put up the necessary bail. Mr. William Watrous, of the Stoneman Foundation."

"What? You mean—well, thanks."

"Incidentally," the judge said puzzledly. "Mr. Watrous is here having a drink with me now. If there is anything—"

"He is? Look, judge—my company will appreciate it very much if you'll see that he remains there for a few minutes, till I can get there. It's most important."

I hung up and jumped for the door. "So you even euhred your boss to bail your boy friend out—that's what the gibberish. . . ." I told the empty room.

After a minute I went over and pounded my head against the wall three times. Some plaster inside the wallpaper fell down to the baseboard.

No cabs were in sight when I sailed out—nor girls. I plowed toward Columbus grinding my teeth, head bent against the snow.

I was two-thirds the way to the corner when the headlamps of the black delivery van swung round the corner ahead, flashing across my face.

That didn't attract my attention very much.

The sudden blasting roar of a powerful gun inside the van, just as its front bumper came abreast, did.

I damned near wrenched my back. I flung myself in a long, roundhouse curve behind a flight of white steps, digging—practically searching myself—for my gun, safely buttoned away inside my coat. I juggled it out and banged away one blind shot.

A second blast roared inside the van, and a third. I drew a bead as the folding doors at the back flew open, pumped twice.

A man dived out on his head. The van roared, leaped forward. The man went somersaulting, slamming, sliding headlong,

rolled over and over and finally banged to rest against the curbing under a street lamp obliquely across from me, forty yards away, as the van pounded up and away around the corner of Central Park West.

With the giddy realization that the people inside hadn't even known I was alive—hadn't been shooting at *me*—I ran across to the motionless, sprawled, bleeding figure.

I was ten feet away when I kicked his gray, welt-edged felt hat.

I was five feet when I recognized his brown suit, his ragged black hair.

I went down to one knee beside Joe Couglar—that is, beside Joe Couglar minus a sizable chunk of the left side of his head. Blood and brains were leaking out into the snow, staining it brightly.

A blued steel revolver lay within reaching distance of his clawed hand, but he would never reach it, or anything else. His eyeballs protruded out onto his cheekbones and they had already the glazing sheen of lead through the black mask of powder burns. This is what a high-powered bullet does when fired pointblank into the head.

I felt his pulse. His wrist was already starting to cool and there was no more pulse than there was in the dirty snow under him.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### The Web of the Lost

**W**INDOWS were banging open and dark, peeping figures appearing in doorways. So far, no one had ventured onto the sidewalk.

It was a miracle that the whole police force didn't swoop down on me while I raced through his empty pockets. With the murder weapon at my feet, and the little feud between Joe and myself settled once and for all, I was all wrapped up.

I knew, even as I straightened, and jerked my coat collar high, that there was no power in the world could save my bacon if I were taken where I was. In fact, it was highly dubious if there were any power that could save me if I were taken *anywhere*, from now on.

I turned and ran for the corner, feigning a slight limp and huddling my right shoulder down, in the feeble hope that somehow

my description might get fogged up in the minds of the people who were going to be telling it to the police in a matter of minutes.

I reached the corner and turned it, was immediately the sober, clean cut young man and walking briskly for the exercise. My wounded side was raising hell.

Prowl cars started giving tongue just as I climbed into a cab parked down a side street and said casually, "Talamagundi Club, please, bud."

I caught physical and mental—what I could—breath on the way down. I could do nothing about my side, except try to jockey the stickum on the dressing back into place. The thought of taking fifteen or twenty minutes to have it redressed—now—brought chilly sweat out all over my body.

The snow seemed to have increased in thickness by the time I pulled up in front of the exclusive Fifth Avenue club.

Puce furniture and vast crystal chandeliers made the brownish marble of the lobby vaguely sad. *My rival*, I thought grimly, as the old man came marching out to meet me, erect as a yardstick, making the most of his five feet seven. He wore a double-breasted blue suit and he put his short, clean hands in his coat pockets as he faced me. His bright blue eyes were a little strained.

"Sorry to trouble you, Mr. Watrous," I said, "but about this man Couglar—?"

"Yes, yes," he said wearily. "What about him?"

"Would you mind telling us why you took the trouble to bail him out?"

He frowned. "And just why am I required—"

"Our information is that you did it as a favor to your secretary. That she phoned you almost the minute Couglar was arrested and asked you to get him out."

His white eyebrows drew down. "What makes you think that?"

"Frankly, she told me so."

His eyes combed mine. "Where is my secretary now?"

"That's another thing I hoped you'd tell me. A half hour ago, she was packing Joe Couglar's duffle, so he could jump town. And, incidentally, his bail."

"What?"

"You knew what he was of course?"

"In a manner of speaking. I knew he'd been convicted—"

"But you did her the favor anyway—because of your personal interest in her?"

"Now, see here . . .!"

"I don't like this any better than you do, Mr. Watrous, but other people than I will be asking these questions. It's puzzling to find a man of your position aiding a person like Couglar *because* of your girl's interest in him. It would seem more logical if you were against him."

He eyed me sharply, then his sensitive face sagged.

"Apparently you haven't got all the story," he said dully. "The man Couglar, as you call him, is really my secretary's brother. He went to prison under a false name to spare his family."

I stared. "You know this to be a fact, Mr. Watrous?"

"Miss Macon told me so—which is ample for me."

"You've known her long?"

"Several months. But I knew her uncle in Alpena years ago. After he died, she was without relatives and came to New York. I gave her employment."

"Of course. A remarkably charming girl. I understood that you are engaged?"

The pink under his parchment skin deepened. "Your interest in her seems unusually deep."

"It's not from choice. But things have to be cleared up: She gets a known criminal out of jail in a remarkable manner. She was concerned with this man Desar—the Syrian who was poisoned this morning. . . ."

"Fiddlesticks. She merely patronized him to have her fortune told. A young and foolish girl impressed by his mumbo-jumbo. . . ."

"She handed him a note from Joe Couglar."

"She did nothing of the sort. I was there myself. She gave him a small sum of money in the belief that he was quite destitute."

"I was there, too, Mr. Watrous. I *saw* the note after you'd left. It concerned certain loot."

He stared hollowly. His voice was a little husky. "Impossible!"

"How did she happen to be in position to act so quickly on Joe's behalf? The way

we see it, she was waiting for him at a certain place while he committed a holdup. I'm trying to be as careful and diplomatic as possible, Mr. Watrous, but it does seem that your trust in her might be a little misplaced."

Fright was dawning in the back of his eyes. "But—but why?" You intimate that she and her brother—"

"Joe Couglar isn't her brother. I've known him for many years, and I give you my word."

"Then why would she—"

"Let me ask you this: If Joe and your secretary disappeared together tonight, where would you stand?"

"Stand? Why, I . . . I . . ."

"I mean financially. Is there any chance that they rooked *you* for something? I know what Joe stole today and it's worth a certain amount. I can't see how it's enough for them to run away on. Apart from losing whatever you put up for Joe's bail, can they have tricked you out of cash or something?"

"Tricked? My God, she wouldn't have to trick me! She has the keys and combinations of every strong box I have. She could have helped herself any time. . . ."

"To how much? Do you keep large amounts of cash?"

"I don't know what you call large. As you know, I operate the main trust account for the Stoneman Foundation. Most of the securities are in safe deposit boxes, of course. It is only the current transactions—securities bought and sold within a day or two—that are sometimes in my office overnight."

"How much is there now—over this week-end?"

"Why—why, I'm not sure, but I don't think there's anything."

"What? There must be!"

"No, no—I think not." His forehead shone and his blue eyes strained with concentration. "No, I've cleared no sales or purchases this week. Oh—there might be one bond—a thousand dollar bond. But nothing else."

An olive-uniformed "boy" with a ragged white moustache appeared at his shoulder. "Telephone, Mr. Watrous, in the lounge, sir."

"Eh? All right, all right," he flung a hunted face over his shoulder, and then to

me: "Please wait—I'll be right back. Don't leave."

I waited.

After five minutes, I began to fidget, after ten, to sweat. I looked round for the octogenarian boy, beckoned him over.

"Please see if Mr. Watrous is still on the phone—and tell him I'm still waiting."

He shuffled off, was gone four minutes and came back to announce: "Mr. Watrous left the club ten minutes ago, sir."

**H**E LEANED FORWARD to give me the benefit of his foul breath and a face-distorting wink. "It was his lady friend, I think, sir."

"Yeah? Which way'd he go out?"

"The side door—there, round that pillar, sir. Thank you. . . ."

I strode across the lobby, out the small revolving door at the side. Another pensioner flunkey was beating white-gloved hands together and pluming breath into the falling snow.

"Did you see Mr. Watrous come out just now?"

"Yes, sir, sure did. He took a cab."

"Where to? Did you hear where he was going?"

"Downtown, sir. Just downtown. He told the driver 'Drive downtown'."

"You don't happen to know where he lives?"

"Lives? Lives? Why, he lives right here—in this club."

A phone book in a corner drug store confirmed my vague conception that the sprawling mass of hospitals and laboratories of the Stoneman Foundation was in the East hundreds—uptown. Nevertheless I dialled its number grimly.

"Mr. Watrous?" a disdainful female told me. "No, he is trust officer—has only to do with our investments—*nothing* with the actual Foundation."

"Where are his offices?"

"Oh, I should imagine in Wall Street."

I used the phone book again.

I stood with my hand on the door of a cab outside so long that the driver poked his head out plaintively. "Brother—what's gonna be? You wanna go some place?"

"Yeah. Take me down to Wall Street."

"Wall Street! This time o' night? What you want to go there for?"

"It's a fair question. I don't know."

He was looking at me out of the corners of his eyes as I paid off on the corner of Broad.

I think he thought I was crazy.

So did I, later, as I stood on the deserted, dark street, staring across at the deserted, dark Transamerica Bank Bldg.

There were actually one or two lighted windows—high up around the thirtieth floor, but the third floor was solid black. There was light in the lobby, of course, and by stooping, I could see the uniformed watchman moving around occasionally.

I was desperate enough now to try *even* the faint hope of locating the girl's home—now that I knew her full name. There were phone booths in the lobby of the building opposite.

I started across the street—and light flickered behind the windows of the ~~third~~ floor—I thought.

I finally stopped standing like a *chump* in the middle of the street and brought up against the plate glass doors of the building.

At the moment, I couldn't see the watchman. I tried the revolving door gently, and it revolved. I tried it less gently, and I was in the lobby. No watchman was in sight. Then I heard the elevator mechanism humming, and made the foot of the marble stairs, jumped around the little stand that held the open visitor's register, and faded up to the second floor.

Light from the lobby did no more than make faint sifted glow on the second floor, and by the time I catfooted up to the third, it was a thin gray twilight.

Double doors of ground glass near the front of the building read: *William Watrous Associates*. Other ground-glass doors were blank.

Motionless before the double doors, I let four minutes go by.

Nothing happened, no sound, no light.

I tried the knob with infinite patience, took another full two minutes to ascertain that it *would* turn, and moved a hairline away from the jamb. I switched the knob carefully to my left hand, took my gun from my coat pocket, went in with the door, jumped instantly a long stride to the right and went down to my hunkers.

The door closed slowly on its air stop.

Presently I knew someone was breathing in the room with me.

WHILE I held my breath to locate the lurker, I slowly eased my flat palm flashlight out of my pocket. I laid it carefully on the floor beside my foot, aiming it about where I thought my pal would be.

I flicked the catch, jumped aside again, leaving the finger of light shining along the floor—at lizard shoes and beige-stockinged legs.

I saw that much before the room's lights blazed on.

It was a large airy room with maybe twenty bare, flat-topped desks in rows. Two sides of the room were solid windows. The cream plaster wall at my right was broken by: a stationery closet, open, a dark, arched entrance, presumably a hallway to the rest of the suite, a bevelled-door Frisch and Hunter vault with combination lock, half open, and a plain green door, closed. The girl stood pressed against the side of the arched hallway mouth, one hand on the light switch inside the room, the other holding a chunky little automatic.

I got slowly to my feet. Her spectacles were no longer in evidence and her blue eyes were almost black. She gave a little moan and the nose of her gun wobbled a little.

"We meet in the darndest places," I said, as I ran a curious eye over the two black patent-leather suitcases beside the vault door. "Now, let's see—what were we saying?"

I ignored her gun, strolled over toward the suitcases. "Oh, yes—I was about to ask you if you were going away somewhere."

Her eyes were odd and glassy and kept away from mine.

"I picked up a little information that might alter your plans if you were," I said. "Your boy friend is dead."

I had a sharp eye cocked to see how she took it.

It didn't move her an iota.

"I know," she said, as though *anybody* knew that much.

"The side of his head was shot off just after you left me—just about *where* you left me." I looked suddenly bright. "Maybe you did it?"

She shuddered, said dully. "You know I didn't. You know that I . . ."

"Was in love with Joe," I dug.

"Oh, no—It's not exactly that . . ."

"Were playing house with him, then." I made it as mean as I could, or it came out that way.

She didn't say anything, went on looking past my shoulder.

"Who killed him?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know."

"His partners? Joe popped himself into jail, where they'd naturally assume he was frozen till Monday. Then he played his ace—you—and popped out again, planning a swift getaway with *all* the loot. Only they caught wise and intercepted him and let him know what they thought of the double-cross. That it?"

For a second, I thought she was trying to do a shimmy dance. Her head drooped, and she wriggled.

Then a suede-gloved hand, holding a much larger automatic, poked through under her armpit and centered on my tie.

A voice chuckled behind her. "How you talk!" The girl was moved, stumbling a little, to one side, then held steady as a shield to the man whose brown edges I could see behind her. "Surely you don't think that poor old Joe and ourselves—all pals together—would behave *that* way. The gun—drop it please. I abhor violence in any form, but—thank you."

I would have shot it out with him a million times rather than fold, if I had half a chance. A chance, that is, to do more than pump lead into the girl while he blew me apart.

I had a plenty gaunt feeling, as I let my gun bounce into a wastebasket. This was it.

He came lithely out from behind her, taking and pocketing her gun in the process. He was a short, compact tailor's model in three shades of brown; his face the plump, unlined face of a boy, with yellow, shining eyes. He had very red lips, dark skin and his voice was a soft throb.

"Such a pity," he said as he moved quickly sideways toward the closed green door, "that you failed to understand the hint we dropped you this morning. Although there's no denying that *I* was at fault, for not allowing—" He palmed the doorknob and sent the green door inwards. "Oh, Roger!"

A sharp-faced little Latin was on hands and knees.

The inner room was a luxurious

mahogany-and-brown-leather office. Carbon tetrachloride stink came from the rag and bottle the Latin had in his hands and, presumably, from the wide, damp spot on the taupe carpet in front of his knees.

"Well, whaddayou know?" He abandoned his activities quickly and came to his feet. He, too, was in brown now, but no great effort was required to visualize him in dove gray.

He came out grinning a halfwit's grin. One of his coal-black eyes had a cast to it. "Here—catch. This was on the floor in there."

He flipped something tiny and metallic to the yellow-eyed man, who caught it in one suede palm, peered at it. It was a used brass shell, about a .32. "Well, well."

He pocketed it. "Roger, see if our friend here carries any extra weapons about his person." And when I had been expertly fanned, "Good. And now let us return to the office here where we were so cosy before this—ah—interruption. Roger, just douse those large lights, will you? I loathe waste in any form. *If you please, my dear.*"

The office was shining and clean, not a paper in sight on the vast desk, the bookcase, the glass-topped table or the smoking stand under the window. Indirect lighting gave it all a bluish tinge.

"If you will just be patient," he told me pleasantly. "we will get to you in a moment. You were about to tell us," he said to the girl, "where we might find Mr. Watrous at this point."

The girl's eyes met mine in a sidelong, shamed glance. She had lost her starch, but she had the same strange, half-withdrawn quality to her fear—if she felt fear—as she had had to other emotions. "I've told you I don't know. I thought he was at the club."

"And we thought he was here," the other said brightly, and to me: "Where did *you* think he was? Never mind. The point is that we were all wrong, and must make *new* guesses. Yours first, Miss Macon."

I hardly heard her, "But I have *no* idea." My gaze had suddenly come to rest on the high-backed swivel armchair behind the mahogany desk.

Or rather, on the scarred and scratched black portable-typewriter case that lay on the chair's upholstered seat.

A little scratchiness came into the yellow-

eyed man's voice. "Miss Macon, I abhor violence in any form. But we have *exactly*—" he consulted a wrist watch—"one hour and forty minutes in which to tidy up all the loose ends of our business—and be gone. We cannot go without—ah—saying farewell to Mr. Watrous."

She eyed them sombrely, and only her mouth moved: "What do you want him for?"

"Now, now, curiosity killed a cat, you know," he said archly.

The little Latin suddenly scowled, swore, jerked a pair of pliers from his hip pocket. "I'll make the witch sing," he snarled and snatched for one of her hands.

She jumped back to the wall, put both hands behind her. "No."

"I'll mash a coupla her fingernails, and she'll. . . ."

"Softly, Roger. I'm sure Miss Macon is reconsidering."

Her eyes were almost dazed. "All right. I'll—"

The telephone on the desk rang merrily. By then I had the bottle of cleaning fluid over on its side between my feet, and I thought I had the cork out. Either it was out or my awkward toeings had broken it off in the bottle's neck.

The smooth-faced gunman's yellow eyes were thick on the phone. "Outside," he clipped at Roger. "Get on another phone and trace. . . ." The Latin youth whipped the door open and was outside in a surprisingly quick move.

The yellow-eyed man's head cocked to one side, then he gestured with his pistol. "Answer it," he told the girl.

I got cigarettes and matches casually from my side pocket. His eyes and pistol flickered at me, but he didn't object.

I pretended absorbed concentration on the phone as I stuck a butt absently in my mouth. The girl lifted the cradle phone slowly, trying to catch my eyes.

"Hello," she said. Her eyes flickered just a little. "No. No, I'm sure you must have—"

The yellow-eyed grifter swore, leaped and snatched at her free hand, just as she managed to depress the bar of the phone, cutting off the connection.

He backhanded her savagely across the mouth, sent her staggering back against the wall.

"You little witch," he said softly. "Now I *will*—"

Outside, Roger's excited voice said, "Horton? Horton, New Jersey? What number in Horton. . . ?"

I had a whole row of paper matches torn out of the pack. I scratched them hard and dropped them.

I was sorry I could not include the girl, but I wanted to try what thin hope I had for my skin.

**F**LAME mushroomed around my feet with a *Powf!* I stumbled back in a little semi-circle, arms up in front of my face. "Holy Crow!"

The gunman's yellow eyes were blank with surprise for a second.

As I got my back close to the open door, I cried suddenly, "The package—the casket!" and he swore, jumped to snatch it up.

I was around the edge of the half-open door like a will-o-the-wisp, dived out into the gloom of the outer room before he could get his "*Roger—get him . . . !*" out.

I had a confused glance of the Latin youth sitting on a desk with his back to me phoning, almost doing a cartwheel as he tried to whip around towards me with his gun—and then I was inside the nice cool vault, yanking it closed with a clang and palming the bolt home solidly.

I held it home while I snatched for the light switch, got light, spotted a round black ebony ruler that just fitted the space between the end of the bolt and the steel rib on the door's surface. I jammed it in tight, just as they started to rattle the handle outside.

I watched the bolt smugly. There wasn't a sixteenth of an inch play. Just to make sure, I kept a hand on the ebony ruler, till they gave up.

A minute went by, two, three. I cocked my head. I could hear nothing, of course, except when they did something to the metal of the safe.

Then I heard the slight whirring metallic spin of the combination dial, and I breathed in relief. I had been afraid that they, too, might know about Frisch and Hunter safes.

Frisch and Hunter safes, in case you are not an insurance sleuth, incorporate a safety tripper *inside*. Distressed by the numbers of people who lock themselves inside cribs,

these splendid fellows had arranged a small lever attached to the tumbler mechanism inside the door which, when thrown, sets the whole arrangement back, and allows the control bar to slip down.

I sat on a pile of ledgers and lit my still dangling cigarette. My nerves, a little startled to find us still alive, were cutting up a little, but that soon stopped.

The eleven minutes that was all I could force myself to sweat out, seemed like an hour.

When I did open the door, though, even my toes weren't breathing.

Not till I had catfooted—the lights were all out, of course—to the little private office door, and found it open and deserted, did I dare believe they had gone. And then, immediately, began the worry as to how long they had gone.

I snapped on lights, ran around and retrieved my pistol from the wastebasket, my flash from the floor inside the front door.

The private office smelled of smoke and there was a wide scorched splotch on the taupe carpet. The typewriter case, of course, was gone and the office was bare again. That is—almost.

A glint of light drew my attention to the fountain pen *under* the desk—a mother-of-pearl affair that was, roughly, the color of the carpet.

I fished the thing out and read the red: *Milton J. Corbin* engraved on the side. I had a mind's-eye picture of the yellow-eyed type throwing his snappy camel's hair coat down to smother the fire, and this popping out unnoticed. . . .

A quick phone call confirmed what I had already gathered from the gunmen's efforts—that Mr. William Watrous was in Horton, New Jersey. It also told me where in Horton, New Jersey.

"Mr. Watrous' place is really just outside—or rather, just *above* the village," the rural operator told me. "We're in the valley. You have to drive right up to the top of the mountain above us, and his place is about a hundred yards along, after you reach the top."

I guess I was thinking forward too much, picturing in my mind the particular locality—Jersey's one nearby mountain—and didn't consider carefully as I dialed another number.

When I got an answer, I said, "Frank?

My old Buick. Can you have somebody bring it to the Washington Bridge?"

There was a blurted whisper, something like "*Holes in his head!*" then Frank's voice: "Steak? Sure. Steak. Yeah, honey, I'll bring a *steak out!*"

One half a brain should have told me to expect that. "I get it. A stake-out. The cops are there, eh?"

"Yeah." Then: "Wait a minute." He went away from the phone, then, a minute later, rattled in an undertone: "They's a dozen here—smelling' at your heap. Brother, you are H-O-T. You want a car?"

"Like my left lung."

"I got a gray Olds two-door you can have, but your own is out. Where you want it? Wash. . . .?"

"One-sixtieth and Broadway, and God bless you. Do you know what the score is, about these cops?"

"They ain't told me nothing—not even what they're here for. But they're talkin' murder—this Assyrian what was poisoned this morning. Somebody evidently seen you feed pills to him. You're gettin' careless in your old age."

"I guess. How quick can you get the Olds up?"

"Ten minutes. And it's insured with your lousy company. Whether or not you get it across the bridge is somethin' else. They may have that staked out for you, too."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Murder—for One

**F**ORTUNATELY, they didn't. Or if they did, it was a one-legged effort. As I plowed into the sifting snow on the Jersey side, I could see nobody that seemed to be looking for me.

Knowing Jersey was a help. I followed the highway only a short distance, and then turned off. By highway, it would be thirty-five miles to the foot of the mountain. By rattling and bumping over mud roads, straight through the foothills, I could cut fifteen off that. With this weather, there was no danger of mudding in.

And my way would bring me direct to the foot of the curving road cut into the face of the mountain. By highway, it would mean backtracking to be able to get on it.

Did I say road? It was—to me, anyway

—a dizzy, spiralling tightrope, clinging precariously to the face of the sheer bluff, a rise of a good eight hundred feet from the fir-sprinkled floor of the valley.

Personally, I could never figure any rhyme or reason to having a mountain here. It was not even exactly a mountain—rather a mammoth plateau—a gigantic square of stone, a thousand feet high and fifty-odd miles square, set right down in the corner of the State. Its sides were so sheer that it had been necessary to start cutting the winding road a mile up the east face, to make the grade not too stiff. By the time it had curled round the corner and continued up the south face, it was three hundred feet in the air.

The thought that I could be only a little bit behind, or a little ahead of, my gunmen pals, brought me no happiness as I flashed onto the narrow, climbing little lane. I am a sufferer from acrophobia—fear of heights, to you—and the sick, tight feeling in my stomach started before the lights of the village were twenty feet below me.

The snowfall seemed to be petering out, as I went up. I kept my gaze resolutely fixed upwards, at the nearly perpendicular cliff at my right—not downwards at the *positively* perpendicular drop into the pointed fir forest at my left.

I sweated and teeth-clenched for an eternity. There was white fencing along the outer edge of the road, but to my suffering eyes it looked as strong as tissue paper. And I suppose the driving surface really *was* a two-lane highway, when not banked with snow along the inner edge—and if judged by somebody other than me.

Actually, it took me less than ten minutes before I was up at the top.

Even the road, however, lost its nerve, just before it reached the crest. It winced away from the cliff-edge, curling sharply right, leaving a blunt little finger of cliff poking up, before it, and I, wriggled left again and shot up onto level ground once more.

I wiped the sweat from my forehead, pushed the Olds along the road that was almost squeezed out by trees on either side, for a hundred yards, and then I was there.

I almost missed the only sign that marked Watrous' gate—NO TRESPASSING. I swung hard left, just in time, doused my lights, dipped a little, coasted through trees.



My heart started tightening again as I cracked along the wandering driveway. There could not be much depth to this property before it reached the cliff edge again. . . .

A twinkle of light in the blackness ahead brought me back to the land of the living. I coasted into a thinned-out band of trees. Beyond it was a clearing and lights came from the windows of a long, shallow house. I wrenched the Olds left, bumped off the driveway, and came to rest, thinly screened, from the house by the circle of trees.

Nobody, as far as I could tell in the next four minutes, had heard me approach.

I eased out, slipped back on careful feet to the driveway, used my palm flash to examine the road surface.

One car had preceded me, recently enough so that the now powdering snow had barely dusted its tracks. The car had a very ugly and amateurish tire patch on a left hind wheel.

The tracks led me straight forward, passing the north end of the shallow house. Here, three concentric kidney-shaped red brick steps led up to a massive iron-bound log door—apparently the main entrance.

The tire tracks ran on. I only followed them a few yards more, enough so that I could squat down and vaguely make out the bulk of a garage in the trees some forty yards further back. Evidently the cliff edge bulged out here considerably more than I had suspected.

I backed up, till I was again looking at the flat front face of the house. I strained my ears, but no sound indicating that my presence had alarmed anybody materialized.

The house seemed constructed in the shape of two oblong blocks of logs, edges together, slightly offset. The lighted half, facing me, turned out—when I had Indian-toed my way delicately to a window—to be one enormous, duplex living room. The dark half, off to my left and set slightly back, was presumably the rest of the manor house.

I was peeking into a birch-panelled room with antlers and birch-bark-framed pictures on the walls, black bearskin rugs on the polished hardwood floor, pseudo-rustic chairs, sofa and tables scattered around.

A hum from the direction of the highway, real or imagined, jerked my head round. I slipped quickly along toward the

dark at the juncture of the two wings, passing two windows, then the squat, warm projection of a huge fireplace, then two more windows. I flattened myself against the projecting corner, took another side-eyed look inside the house.

I could see the reflection of dancing flames from the fireplace on a bearskin-covered sofa which faced it. Behind the sofa was a long, rustic refectory table. Brass fittings somewhere threw weird little sparkles of light on the beams high overhead. The room was brightly lighted, nevertheless, by electric fixtures imitating oil lamps, affixed to the walls.

A shadow moved inside and I hastily turned my neck back and forth till I focused the slice of interior that held the old man—Watrous.

For the third time in six hours, I eyed packed luggage—three russet-colored saddle leather suitcases, in mounting sizes. They stood on a writing table against the far wall, and the old man, his white hair gleaming, was pawing through the smallest one.

Even as I looked, he found what he was looking for, apparently, pressed the bag closed, and turned away with a revolver as big as a leg of lamb glinting blue and purple in the firelight. His short, sensitive face was set in white lines, and his blue eyes were hot and feverish.

He was alone in the room.

He seemed to start straight toward me—and then he stopped suddenly, eyes on the window farthest from me. He cocked his head, stood rigid.

There was no question about the sound coming from the highway now. It was more than a hum—it was a badly backfiring motor that had strained a little coming up the mountain road. Even as I pulled back into my corner, headlights arced away through the trees, and the sound of the spurting car turned into the driveway.

Lights and motor were cut—a little late, if caution had really been paramount. A few seconds later, I heard the soft crackling of snow-covered twigs, as this car was pulled off the driveway, somewhere back beyond my own.

Presently a little huddle of softly walking figures appeared on the road, coming toward me.

They were at the edge of the glow from

the house when they stopped. I squinted, sorted them out—the girl ahead, the camel-coated Corbin and the form-fitted Roger behind.

The snow had completely ceased now and even a whisper carried in the crisp, sharp air.

They put it to me in a nutshell.

"I'll take the case," Corbin told the Latin, "and the young lady and go in the front. You beat it round and ease in the back. Go through the rooms there. There's just a chance that he may try some monkey business, girl or no girl."

"I'll like that."

"Don't get too funny. It's better if he's alive to give the cops a laugh. We want to leave a clean story behind—not dodge readers the rest of our lives."

"I thought we had the insurance nose rigged for the fall. What harm would blasting the old goat do? Once he forks over?"

"Well, we'll see."

As they separated, I clucked disapprovingly, turned to get another quick look at the old man through the window, but I couldn't bring him in range.

The sharp-faced Latin angled obliquely across the snow, directly towards me. I pulled back, held my breath, hoping that he would not catch the gray shine of my Olds, half visible through the fringe of trees.

He didn't even look that way, came on, passed within eight yards of where I stood, vanished around the rear of the house.

Corbin gave him two minutes start. Then something in his hand sparkled; he murmured at the girl, and they moved in on the front door of the house. A second later, a bell tinkled somewhere far inside.

And at that minute I became aware of someone breathing, within a few yards of me, in the black spot by the outside of the fireplace.

I blinked, amazed, hastily shuffling question marks in my head.

He kept me not long in suspense. I identified him wonderingly by his white hair, as he darted at full speed away from the house, arcing rearward around to the woods. His feet seemed to float soundlessly over the snow. There must have been a solid pathway or court or something under the snow here.

His arcing, I divined, was to keep him out of the line of sight from the front door.

He reached the fringe of the woods at a point only a few feet from my car. In fact, he slipped hastily right to my car, seemed to be poking the upper part of his body through the open driver's window.

He wasn't there two seconds—and then he was running back in exactly the footprints he had made on his way over. It was not till he was back almost beside me that I woke up, and heard the slight jingling—



*He reached the fringe of the woods at a point only a few feet from my car.*

and realized he had nipped the keys of my car.

For one confused moment, I struggled with the thought that he *had* seen me arrive, *knew* I was here. . . .

Then it dawned—he had heard the others arrive, had spotted my car, and thought *my* car was theirs. . . .

The bell rang inside the house, insistently now.

I whispered, "Mr. Watrous!"

I got nowhere. I raised my whisper to a stager one: "Mr. Watrous!"

Flitting movement inside the house made me roll my eyes again to the window—and my mouth opened.

Watrous—or, at least, I told myself thickly, the exact double of the old man—was again inside the room, moving quickly toward the front door.

I got sense, took two long silent strides and was at the back of the fireplace myself. No one was there. Hastily, I ran exploratory hands over the brickwork, pressing, squeezing, pulling.

Then I found it. By grasping the sharp-angled corner of the brick chimney and pulling, a little oblong pseudo-door was revealed. I opened it far enough to put my head in, saw dull green cloth masking the other end of the four-foot passage into the living room.

From the end of the house by the front door, voices reached me.

The old man's startled voice said, "Linda! Who. . .?"

The yellow-eyed man's velvety voice said, "Just back up, Pop—and keep your hands away from your sides."

**I** SWUNG quickly back to the window. I could see the old man, hands shoulder high, backing away before the gun in the yellow-eyed Corbin's gloved hand. The girl, her delicate face a pale mask, backed over to the far wall, elbows tight to her sides, hands clasped.

The window muffled their voices, but not too much. The yellow-eyed man said grimly: "Well, Pop, we won't waste time asking why you ran out on us."

"My—my bail, the bond I'd put up for Couglar," the old man said in a hasty voice. "When I heard he was dead, I had to get it back."

The yellow-eyed man looked incredulously amused. "Wha-a-at? Well, I'll be damned. All right. There's no time to discuss *that*. Where's the cash?"

The little Latin, Roger, appeared suddenly from a door in the far end of the room, hefting a black automatic. Corbin looked up inquiringly.

"All clean, Milt. Nobody home."

"Fair enough. Keep a gun on these two."

He pocketed his own, let the typewriter case slip down from under his arm and, looking for a place to set it, chose the writing table against the far wall, already crowded with suitcases. He set it down, split it open, lifted out the square, paper-wrapped package and swung the case down to the floor.

He ripped the paper away, disclosed a wooden casket, shaped like a miniature pirate's chest. Jewels sparkled on its hinged lid as he threw it open. I stood on tiptoe and could see the red satin lining. Of the casket's depth of eighteen inches, the red satin quilting left available only a shallow cavity maybe five or six inches deep. There was nothing in the cavity.

"There you have it, Pop—it's all yours—with my compliments. Now—the money."

"You know I don't want it," the other blurted.

"You're getting it, nevertheless," There was a sudden edge to Corbin's voice. "Roger—fan Mr. Watrous. It seems that we may have to do a little work. . . ."

The Latin did his specialty, stepped away empty-handed. "Nothing, Milt. You want me to—uh—persuade him a little? Or the babe, maybe?"

Watrous' face was red, his jaw clenched. "That won't be necessary. I said I'd pay you off and I will. Every cent I could raise. But I want some assurance that this is the end, that you'll go away and not come back."

"Do you?" Corbin jerked a shining pair of handcuffs from his coat pocket. "Here—Roger—truss him up to that hook in the wall, and we'll put an end to this blabbering."

The old man's blue eyes jumped. "That won't help you any. I'm not fool enough to leave the money where you can get at it. And it isn't in this house. But I want to know that you'll keep your word, that you'll leave Miss Macon and myself—especially Miss Macon—alone, once you've received the cash."

Dull red was beginning to creep into the padded, boyish face of the yellow-eyed Corbin. "Well, you can have this assurance, you old goat—that unless I have that money in my hand in the next ten minutes, I'll make you wish you'd never been born. How

much have you already raised, anyway?" "One hundred and fifteen thousand dollars."

I was awed, but not Corbin.

"Why only that?" He scowled. "Joe said—"

"Couglar knew I couldn't raise more—in such a hurry. I told him that two weeks from today."

"Joe lost his guts in stir," Corbin said wearily, "and let this insurance creep panic him. All right. Get the one-fifteen up, pop, and we'll be about our business."

I made my play. I don't care for blind plays, but I was up against it.

I jumped for the corner of the brick chimney, swung myself inside, and stepped out onto a bearskin rug in the living room soundlessly, covering them.

Queerly, nobody seemed to notice me. They were all gathered around the little table, backs to me.

I saw a fleece-upholstered easy chair in the angle of the fireplace to my left, took a silent stride and sat down.

"...half a million face value, there," Corbin was saying.

The old man said fretfully, "I know. I know. I have acceded to your terrorism. It isn't necessary to labor it. I will get the money."

My mistake was not in underestimating these people, but in overestimating their coolness. At least that goes for Roger.

He suddenly caught sight of me. He behaved as though I were a ghost. His face went clay colored and a queer, puppy-like "Yowp!" came feebly from his mouth as his free hand flew up to it.

The streak of flame from his gun crisscrossed the one from mine. His shot smacked into the arm of my chair, jolted it back six inches, to bang the wall. My feet flew up and my aim was just disturbed enough to pin him to the wall by his throat, instead of breaking his shoulder.

**T**HE yellow-eyed Corbin whirled, knocking the jewelled casket to the floor, where it exploded, showering out documents. The girl slapped against the wall, whimpering. The old man, mouth open wide, scuttled for another armchair, near the front door, dived on it.

He babbled wildly: "I'll get the money! I'll get the money!"

I snarled: "*Stand still!*" at Corbin, and, to the wild old man: "You don't need the money now, Mr. Watrous! It's me—!"

The door whipped open, banged closed behind him as he dived out, the huge revolver in his hand.

The dead thug, Roger, crashed down to the floor in a shower of blood. The yellow-eyed man stood frozen, shoulders up around his ears. The girl's hands were over most of her face, right up to her shining eye-glasses.

I half-backed, half-ran to the door, yanked it open and bawled: "Mr. Watrous!"

I couldn't even hear him running. He must have sprinted like the wind. I swore, swayed, spotted the nickelled handcuffs that Corbin had left on the table, and the hook in the wall—presumably an antique, designed for supporting a chain lamp.

I jerked the gun. "Get over there!" and Corbin stumbled back to the wall, just under the hook.

I snatched up the handcuffs. "Get **your** hands high—stretch!" and his arms **went high**.

He might have made a fight of it as I jammed up against him and snapped the cuffs around the hook and on his wrists, but there were white rings to his eyes as he stared down at Roger, leaking his life out on the polished floor.

I jammed a hand in his camel's hair coat pocket, found his gun and tossed it to the shrinking girl. She straightened in panic, juggled, managed to catch it.

"Watch this clown till I corral your hysterical boy friend," I tossed at her.

I ran out. My palm flash showed only footprints coning *toward* the house from the direction of the roadway. I trotted a few yards to where a small, single pair led backwards, towards the garage. I yelled, "Mr. Watrous," twice.

Then suddenly I found the roadway did not go *only* straight back to the empty garage. It also curved sharply off at a **fork** and bent hard round to the right. In fact, it bent so sharply, that, in a matter of minutes, I was trotting straight back toward the highway, parallel to, and separated by a strip of woods from, the main driveway. I stopped and took a deep breath to yell—and a motor spluttered into life a hundred yards ahead of me, spluttered, roared, and went away from me.

I took a chance, plowed and battled on till I fell against a long, sleek, Black Buick two-door.

The roar of a raced automobile flashed by the driveway entrance, heading back toward the mountain top, as I piled under the Buick's wheel.

I couldn't hear it by the time I whirled the Buick, skidding, out onto the highway in pursuit.

I slowed down, wriggled an arm with my palm flash out the window—and spotted the tire track with the splattered patch.

I couldn't go fast, but it was easy to hold that track in sight. And I didn't have far to go. Just fifty yards along, it bent over to the left-hand edge of the road and vanished.

I was cursing the old maniac plenty when the road finally and suddenly expired into a snow-covered field. I had to hastily jerk my wheel to avoid running up on top of his parked car. I braked to a stop beside it.

His car was empty. I doused my lights, jumped out, listened. I had to take to palm-flash tracking again.

I broke out, finally, right at the foot of a little hill. The footprints led up the hill.

I breasted the rise, suddenly realized that I was on top of the little finger of stone which the highway, in its last gasping spurt to the mountain top.

White light suddenly bathed my little plateau ghostily. The racing headlights of another car were bouncing towards us.

The old man was across the plateau ahead of me, kneeling perilously near the sheer edge of the precipice, digging hastily at the foot of a monstrous boulder.

The oncoming headlights reached the brow of the road, dipped down to sickle around our little thumb. Reflected snow-glow spotted the car in a high light, momentarily, and I stared.

Somebody *else* had fiddled the ignition of my borrowed gray Olds.

I opened my mouth to shout—and the old man heaved to his feet, teetering the apparently precariously balanced boulder over the edge.

My mouth stayed open, as my lungs—like the rest of me—seized up.

There was a second of dead silence.

The boulder must have landed squarely on top of the car on the road below. There was a thunderous, metallic explosion, followed instantly by the screaming of

wrenched nails, and crackling of ripping wood. There was a hoarse, agony-wracked man's scream. That was the only human sound.

I found my voice and flicked my palm flash.

"Mr. Watrous!" I called.

It was a pity my wits were again a hair's-breadth behind. He cried out, a queer groaning sound, whirled on me and fire ripped from the gun in his hand.

I cursed and hastily dived down. He fired again, running toward me. I jerked up my gun. Then suddenly there was a thumping crash, and a muffled report.

It was a split second before I saw the sparks peeling away from his clothes where he lay ten yards from me on the snow.

He squirmed, groaned, wriggled, clutching his stomach while I got him down the hill and into his own car, but he was down to unconscious moaning by the time I had him back to the house.

I loaded him on my shoulder up the three kidney-shaped steps.

The iron-bound door at the top opened as I reached it and the girl stood in the opening, the gun loose in her hand.

"Your boss shot himself by accident," I advised her, and dumped him on the couch in front of the girl. "Call the nearest doctor—and quick!" and as she hesitated, "Go on—call him! Never mind about the rest!"

She ran to the phone. I pulled open the blood-soaked clothing around the old boy's solar plexus.

I looked round the room. A smeary pool of blood marked the spot where Roger *had* been lying. The handcuffs, with the key still in the lock, lay on the floor where the yellow-eyed Corbin *had* been standing.

"You let them go, eh?" I growled.

My eye was suddenly glued to the scattered heap of documents around the foot of the table.

They were bonds—bonds in denominations of five hundred dollars and one thousand dollars. There were Straus Mortgage 4s, D. & H. Railroad Mortgage 4½s, Empire State 3s—piles and piles of them, the finest gilt-edged names in Wall Street.

The first thought that jumped to my mind was *Hot!*—stolen securities. Then I saw that all the small bundles except the one I held, were neatly banded. The paper bands were brilliantly engraved with an eagle and

a red-and-black Swastika, and across the bottom, the immaculate script of the *Deutsches Reichsbank*.

I GUESS I squatted there three minutes, staring.

I got up slowly and looked at the girl. "Just where do you stand on *these*?"

Her eyes were a little frightened for once. "Oh, I don't—I don't. I swear I didn't understand what they were till—till tonight."

"Your boss—Watrous—bought some of them ten years ago from Desar? How many?"

"I—I think—I heard them say—two hundred thousand dollars worth."

"Shades of Dr. Schacht," I said, and went to the phone. I put in a call for Pee-wee Stevenson.

"Will you pay off on the casket without the bottles of chemicals?" I asked him.

"Well, hell. I don't know how the Alien Property guy would regard an empty casket—whether *he'd* pay—"

"He would. And it isn't empty."

"Eh?"

"The chemicals were just a gag. The casket was shipped to this Finn Nazi agent, loaded with forged bonds."

"*What?*"

"You heard me. The stuff that the Jerries were peddling here to raise funds just before we got into war. There's half-a-million of the sweetest jobs you ever saw. Desar, the little fence who was killed this morning, had them."

"Yeah? Hey—did you kill that guy?"

"Be funny. I didn't kill anybody. Desar was killed because he spilled out with the score on these bonds."

"Evidently he came into possession of them ten years ago, when the heist took place. He sold two hundred thousand of them then, thinking they were just hot paper."

"Then he found out what they really were, and tucked them away. He let them lie till two weeks ago, when he found he was being kicked out of the country. Then he decided to realize what he could out of them. He told Joe Couglar, who was just being paroled, how to lay hands on them and where he might sell them."

"Sell them? Where, for God's sake?"

"To the same guy who was already stuck with the *first* lot. *That* guy didn't know yet

that the stuff wasn't just hot paper. He'd bought it for a trust account, thinking it would cool out in a few years' time."

"What trust fund is this stuff in? Who is the sucker who bought—"

"We won't go into that now. But—do you pay on that casket, together with the bonds, or not?"

"It would seem so. Yeah, we'll pay—if your story holds up."

I hung up, turned and stared in wonder at the unconscious, fragile old man.

"He doesn't look so deadly, does he? He poisons Desar, shoots Joe Couglar, and now knocks off Joe's two partners. Wonder what he had in store for you and me, when the time came?"

Her head was down. She eyed me in silence from under her delicate eyebrows.

I felt my way: "Joe—having scraped acquaintance with you, and so got a contact with the old man—told him the score. The old man, faced with ruin and worse—must have nearly jumped out of his skin. Couldn't he have covered up by putting his own money in and taking the phony bonds out?"

She looked down at her clasped hands. "He—he didn't have it. He wasn't very rich and the stock market back in nineteen thirty-seven—that's why he *said* he considered buying those things in the first place."

"So. And now, when he figures the bonds are about due to be cooled out, he learns that they *never* will cool out. And in addition, Joe puts the bite on him for more. He must have gone nearly out of his nut. He knows Desar, on his way to the other side of the world, will always hold this information—can pull the chain on him *any* time. So he poisons Desar."

"Then Joe—and Joe's pals, the same. Joe gets into jail—gets *himself* into jail, I should say, in order, with your assistance and the old man's, to make a quick break out and double-cross his chums. He thought that one out fast when the opportunity arose—me—and sent you running to Watrous to put it into effect. Watrous can't say no."

"Joe is sprung. But it seems he's really got the twitch on account of me—which is smart of him—and he's determined to blow town. He goes to the old man's office to collect—even though he's cutting short the time Watrous had specified, and the old man has only raised half the money. They get into an argument—"

## Buried in Bond

I let it trail off, as the sardonic possibility hit me.

And I knew it must be so. "That must be it. The old boy has been feverishly cashing in everything he can. Maybe when this sudden call for bail came in, he had nothing but a phony—nothing but one of the forged bonds to put up! That covers his racing down to get the bond back the minute he hears Joe is dead. I'll bet a herring!

"So when Joe gives him the rush, and he realizes Joe is planning to blow town, he goes crazy all over again. If Joe goes and the bail is forfeit, they'll find it was a phony and the lid comes off the whole thing. Joe wouldn't be able to see his way clear to worrying about *that*. So the old boy shoots him."

"Joe!" she said in a startled whisper. "He shot Joe? But how could he? He was at the Talamagundi Club when Joe was killed."

"There was a copper-jacketed shell in the old man's private office. And Roger was busy cleaning up something from the carpet. I'll eat it if it wasn't blood. Somebody was shot in that office.

"On the other hand, Joe *was* alive when they blew his brains out and dumped him up north. That figures that the old man shot him in the head, but didn't quite kill him, in his office.

"Then, being only an amateur gunman, after all, he lost his nerve and yelled for help from Joe's friends, Corbin and Roger."

"But why would *they* help him, if he killed Joe?"

"Why not? He's the only market for the bonds they've got. If he gets rapped for murder, he isn't going to worry about the rest of it coming to light—and he isn't going to pay out a fortune to keep it from coming to light. Whereas, if they get him out from under, they've got even more over him. So they did just that.

"And in the end, he outfoxes them with that, with a little stone trap you don't know about—"

I broke off short, suddenly eyed her with new interest.

"Or maybe you did, at that. Come to think of it, maybe it was the old man you were going to run away with—not Joe. Maybe you unhooked Corbin when I had him strung up here, because you knew he'd

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run straight into that lovely deadfall. . . ."  
There was a sudden rattling cough from the old man on the couch.

**I** JUMPED over to his side. He seemed to shudder all over, tossed feebly—and then went slowly lax. His eyes came open and stared at the ceiling.

She gasped. "Is he. . . .?"  
"Yeah."

After a long minute, I said suddenly, "That cash. Wait a minute."  
It took me five minutes to discover that it was not in his car.

I came back in and faced her grimly. "I need that money, dear heart. With a hundred and fifteen thousand in cash, I can get my story believed. Without it, I don't know. It isn't in his car."

"I know." Her voice was placid. She took a cigarette from a box on the refectory table slowly. Her eyeglasses had vanished again. She stepped up to me, holding the cigarette to her lips, and I was looking into the hollow, shining hunger of her black-blue eyes. "Perhaps I can help you. But first, you must understand—that I knew nothing of what was going on."

"Didn't you? I wonder if you can make the D. A. swallow that?"

"I can, as long as you tell things properly. And, of course, it means something to you that I tell things properly."

"All right," I said after a minute. "I'll give you the best of it."

Her face was two inches from mine. Her perfume and the sweeping warmth of her body had my stomach quivering. "And besides—you don't want me being in any old jail for the next few days. Do you?" Her arms came up and her blazing hot, slack mouth pressed mine hard.

After a minute—or ten—she drew back.

I licked my lips. "All right, baby. You're clear. Now the money?"

She got it, from a shelf in the little fireplace passage—a brief case, crammed with banknotes.

"Look, baby," I croaked. "I'm just an old-fashioned guy. . . ."

"I love them," she whispered.

Well, hell—she *could* have been completely innocent. Probably was.

I mean of the felonious doings, you pinhead.



## The Case of the Flighty Cadaver

(Continued from page 79)

and a hairpin caught in a broken wedge near its base. Both match and hairpin were stained red.

Robinson was brought to Scotland Yard. He was told of the blood stained duster, the match stick and the hairpin. Robinson shrugged his shoulders. He had nothing to say. But he was detained. And the next morning he sent word to Inspector Cornish, in charge of the case, that he wanted to see him.

"I want to get it off my mind," began Robinson. "That woman died in my room but I didn't kill her."

He had picked her up on the street about four o'clock on May 4th. She had come up to his rooms and after drinking beer together she had dozed off.

He had sat down at his desk to write some letters.

The first thing he knew the woman was advancing toward him, a beer bottle in her outstretched hand. "Give me a pound and I'll go," she said. Robinson didn't have a pound or even half that amount. The woman was about to hit him on the head when he grabbed her arm. They fought and she fell on her face against the brick of the gas log fireplace.

He had left her there, thinking, when she came to, she would go of her own accord without any fuss. There would be no trace of the accident.

The next morning, when he returned to his office, she was still there. Then he learned she was dead.

On the 6th, he had bought the hunting knife with which he had cut up the body, then the trunk from Ward, and later had taken the taxi driven by Sharpington to Charing Cross Station.

It was a plausible story but the autopsy did not agree with it. The woman had been suffocated.

Her face on the carpet did not prevent enough air to get through in order to keep her alive. Some one had deliberately held a towel, or a pillow, over her face until she was dead.

And within the year John Robinson, who put too much faith in a trunk, went to the gallows, and the case of the flighty cadaver, whose last conquest was Death, was closed.

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**BERRY SCHOOL OF HORSEMANSHIP**  
Dept. 841 Pleasant Hill, Ohio

## New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 84)

shore of the narrow promontory. Suddenly Johnny realized that his canoe might be seen through the trees. So what? He was where he should be, coming from the Casino. He stopped paddling. He called, "That you, Carson? What's the matter?" "You? That you, Johnny?" Carson's voice sounded queer. Then the rowboat appeared just off the end of the Point—a little blob in the starlit dimness, but Johnny could see that the burly Johnson was rowing, and the rowboat was laboring, head down because Carson was leaning over the bow.

In his canoe Johnny stood up, waved his paddle. "Just getting back from the Casino. Thought I heard a yell."

*Why didn't they answer?* The rowboat kept coming forward; Carson kept hanging over its bow, with his hands moving down in the water. Then the rowboat was here.

What in Heaven's name was this? Carson had straightened; now he was stancing in the rowboat's bow. His shotgun was in his right hand. And Johnson had a shotgun too.

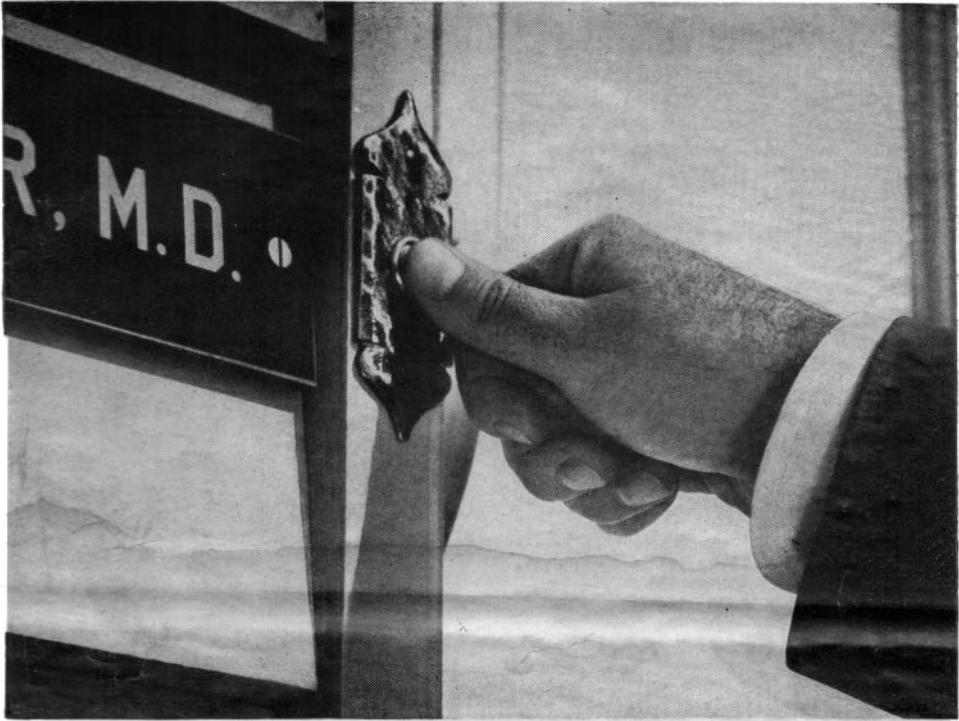
"Got him!" Carson said. He lifted his left hand, and there was a little streak along the water from his hand to the stern of Johnny's canoe. "See it there?" Carson said. "It's him! There sure ain't no argument on that!"

"Well I'll be damned fer a horn-toed lizzard!" Johnson said. "There it is!"

And Johnny saw it, and his horrified mind swept back. Old man Perkins had been reeling in his line. Then he had stood up, with his rod bending, and he had exclaimed with annoyance because his hook was caught.

"He fell on his rod," Carson was saying. "Rod was caught under him, but the reel was loose, so it paid out the line as you paddled away! That little Siwash god of yours, Johnny . . . maybe he does bring luck. But the kind o' luck he's bringin' you ain't so good!"

A little green cord of fishline, like a trail led out here from the dead man, and Carson had followed it! Numbly Johnny Grant stared at the stern of his canoe, where the fish-hook lure was caught in the gaping, fanged mouth of the grinnin' Umantah!



# YOUR FIRST MOVE AT THE FIRST SIGN OF CANCER

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cancer's danger signals. Watch for them in yourself, in your friends and in members of your family.

Remember—you can't *diagnose* cancer yourself, but you can *suspect* it. Be on the lookout. Check up on yourself from time to time.



1. Any sore that does not heal, particularly about the tongue, mouth or lips.
2. A painless lump or thickening, especially in the breast, lip or tongue.
3. Progressive change in the color or size of a wart, mole or birthmark.
4. Persistent indigestion.
5. Persistent hoarseness, unexplained cough, or difficulty in swallowing.
6. Bloody discharge from the nipple or irregular bleeding from any of the natural body openings.
7. Any change in the normal bowel habits.



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