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# NEW DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

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OF THE UNDERWORLD

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OR WORSE

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OTHERS

DEATH  
LIES  
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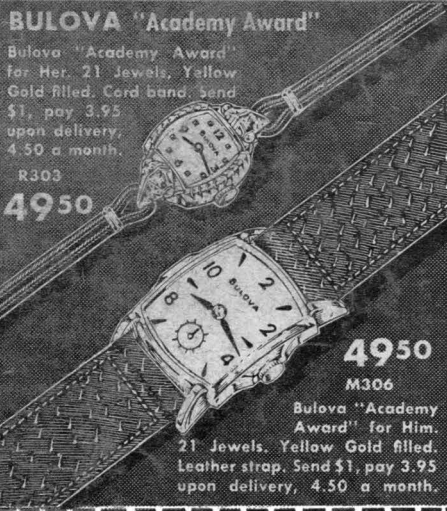
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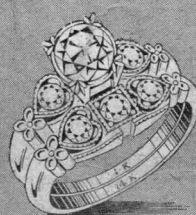
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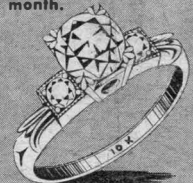
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# NEW DETECTIVE

BEST IN CRIME FICTION 25c

MAGAZINE

Vol. 15

Contents for November, 1950

No. 3

## FOUR BIG NOVELS

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The timid little salesman of eternity gagged at killing—yet killed for a gag!
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His best girl thought Cantrell was out of this world—and did her best to send him there!
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She had to find a little white stone of death—the one thing that could save her from the chair!

*Copyright 1942 by Popular Publications Inc. as "The Death Stone."*

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The unseen killer of the mountain issued a challenge—who dies there?
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In the half world of mortal terror a man may perish—yet live to pay the price of murder!

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**Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.**

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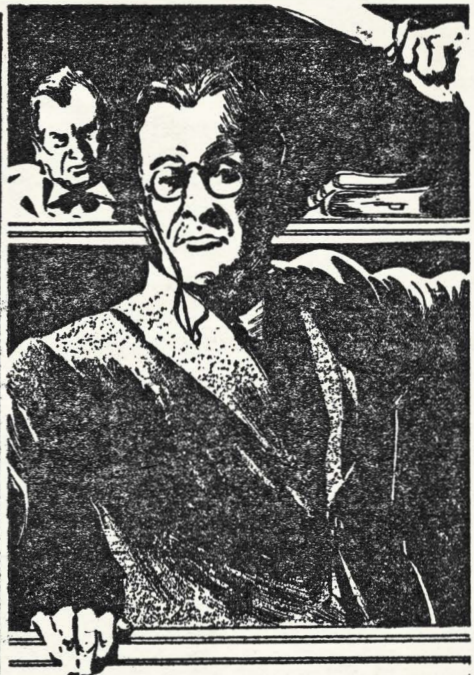
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 Address.....  
 City..... State.....  
 Please attach letter stating age, occupation, employer's name and address, and the name and address of at least one business man as reference. Men in service, also please give home address.



# THE WITNESS CHAIR

**H**ELLO again, all you little bloodhounds! It's been a long, long crime—oops!—time. Letters have been coming in, some newly inspired, others delving into musty archives—more than we have room for in this issue. Some of you've been helpful, even when you've hung one on the chin we periodically extend for readers to swing at, and all of you have been appreciated, even those whose missiles are ruled out by space limitations. One of the rewards of this particular job is hearing from the boss—the guy or gal who lays his two bits on the line for, we hope, a constantly improving *ND*.

We're particularly flattered by letters such as the following.

*(Continued on page 8)*



You Can't Beat **Carhartt's** for Quality Fit!

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Chart** shows how to  
find the North Star

**9. MORSE CODE**  
engraved on the back

You'll be the envy of all your friends when you wear this sensational 9-way wonder — the amazing, patented new TELZALL SUN WATCH. It's the only watch of its kind in the world. This tickless time piece tells the sun time... nothing to go out of order.

The gracefully designed case of gleaming jeweler's bronze with durable red plastic 8" measuring strap looks like an expensive watch on your wrist. The weather forecaster and the magnifying and fire-starting glass are secretly concealed inside the case.

You'll marvel at the other fascinating features of this wonderful new invention. It may even save your life—with the Morse Code permanently engraved on the back, a glow-in-the-dark compass, signalling mirror, all right on your wrist in case of emergency! What fun, too, being able to predict the weather at a glance, measure objects, write with the world's smallest ball point pen, and locate the North Star and other constellations. Don't delay — rush your order today to be sure of prompt delivery.

**SEND NO MONEY** Wear the 9-in-1 Telzall Sun Watch on your wrist. See how perfectly it operates. If you don't agree it's worth many dollars more than the small cost, simply return within 10 days for full refund of purchase price.

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Enterprises, Inc.

Amazing Value  
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Gentlemen: Rush  9-in-1 Telzall Sun Watches described above — on your no-risk 10-day money-back guarantee order. On delivery I will pay postmen only \$1.98 each plus C.O.D. postage, with the understanding that if I am not completely satisfied I may return within 10 days for full refund of purchase price.

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(please print)

Address.....

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

I enclose \$1.98 for each — send the Telzall 9-in-1 Sun Watch all postage charges prepaid — on money-back guarantee.



# "You ought to get a medal!"

says!

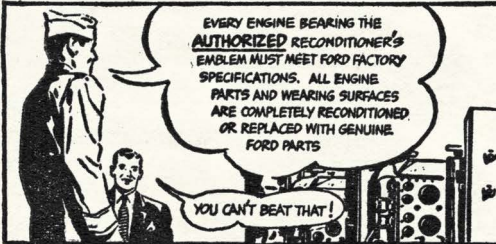
"NOT ME, FRED COMES BACK. THE FORD-AUTHORIZED RECONDITIONER SHOULD GET IT."



I STOPPED TO TELL MY MECHANIC FRIEND, FRED, HOW FRISKY MY FORD IS SINCE I GOT MY RECONDITIONED ENGINE.

SEE THAT EMBLEM? THAT'S WHY YOUR FORD'S GOT SO MUCH PEP. IT'LL STAY THAT WAY TOO, FOR THOUSANDS OF MILES TO COME!

THEN THAT'S THE THING TO LOOK FOR WHEN YOU'RE BUYING A RECONDITIONED ENGINE!



EVERY ENGINE BEARING THE AUTHORIZED RECONDITIONER'S EMBLEM MUST MEET FORD FACTORY SPECIFICATIONS. ALL ENGINE PARTS AND WEARING SURFACES ARE COMPLETELY RECONDITIONED OR REPLACED WITH GENUINE FORD PARTS

YOU CAN'T BEAT THAT!



ENGINE ACCESSORIES GET EXPERT ATTENTION, TOO. HERE'S A DISTRIBUTOR BEING TIMED WITH SPECIAL PRECISION EQUIPMENT

HE SHOWED ME A PILE OF OTHER PHOTOS TAKEN AT A FORD-AUTHORIZED RECONDITIONER'S AND, BROTHER...THEY HAVE SOME EQUIPMENT!

NOW DO YOU SEE WHY YOU SHOULD GIVE YOUR MEDAL TO THE FORD-AUTHORIZED RECONDITIONER?



I SURE DO AND I'M SPREADING THE NEWS TO EVERYONE. I KNOW WHO OWNS A HIGH-MILEAGE FORD

**AUTHORIZED RECONDITIONED FORD ENGINES AND ENGINE ACCESSORIES**

LOOK FOR THE AUTHORIZED RECONDITIONER'S EMBLEM ON THE RECONDITIONED FORD ENGINE YOU BUY

## New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 6)

Dear Ed:

Isn't it about time, with war clouds gathering on the horizon, for up-to-the-minute magazines—I could mention one which boasts the word N&W in its title—to start marshaling home front opinion and awareness against the meanest enemy the G.I. of the last conflagration met—the two-bit racketeer of the domestic variety?

Remember "Dr. Phillips," of early forties fame, who, without any medical training other than that gleaned as a prison medical orderly while serving time for various felonies—the list is as long as your arm—stole a perfectly bona fide doctor's credentials and, while everybody's attention was fixed to the various fighting fronts, set himself up as a much-needed surgeon. The fact that he performed several operations with considerable skill and without adding to the world's casualty list is hardly an alleviating circumstance. The fact remains that he was able to capitalize illegally on the wartime shortage of medical men—and might have caused untold suffering to his unsuspecting victims and their families.

This case, moreover, is not unique. I seem to remember reading, quite some time ago, of a similar instance—where an accepted "surgeon" proved to be a former inmate of an insane asylum, with no more training with cutting tools than had been provided by his former trade as a carpenter!

It's no use saying there ought to be a law, for there are several. Giving instances such as this publicity seems to be indicated.

Liked your last issue. Winters' *Call Me Killer* was a refreshing change from the complicated psychological murder yarns we get today—a straight story of a sensible, hard-fisted cop, with considerable emotional pull. Rogers's *Night Before Murder* was tops. His always are.

Sincerely  
Bill Fleming  
Schenectady, N. Y.

Gentlemen

That recent million dollar armed robbery in Boston caused quite a stir. But some 1300 years earlier an even greater armed robbery took place and the event was kept a state secret for more than a century.

In 658 in Constantinople during the reign of the Emperor Constans, eighteen men wearing the uniforms and arms of Imperial Guards made their way into the Imperial Treasury, killed the thirty guards on duty, and made off with 1,730,000 pieces of gold which they loaded on three wagons.

Tho the entire empire was searched

(Continued on page 10)



# Build a Fine Business—FULL or SPARE TIME!

**START RIGHT! DON'T INVEST A CENT FOR**  
**BIG MONEY**  
 WITH FAST SELLING  
**MASON JACKETS and COATS**

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**CASH PAY EVERY DAY WITH THIS DIRECT-FACTORY LINE!** Start your big business backed by this 47-year-old, million-dollar company. Make money from the first hour, taking orders for fast-selling, customer-satisfying outdoor garments! You just walk in, take your order, collect liberal advance profit, and go on to the next eager customer! You get **FREE SELLING OUTFIT**—everything you need to start cashing in on your first call.

**The Garments Men WANT . . . and WILL BUY!**



Smooth, gleaming, satin-twill defies winter blasts! Big, luxurious fur collar. **WATER CAN'T HURT IT!** Just ZIP-OFF Laskin Lamb collar for warm weather, makes two coats out of one! Easy to put collar on, take it off, with smooth-acting zipper.

**WITH NYLON!\***

Sturdy, handsome 33" long coat almost "wear-out proof" because it is 1/5 **NYLON!** Warm, snug intercell quilted lining, knitted wrist bands, keep you warm on coldest days!

**GENUINE HORSEHIDE LEATHER!**

(At left) Sturdy, sensible, long-wearing. Genuine Horsehide Leather coats and jackets a "natural" for quick sales to outdoor workers—make big money on orders from Telephone men, Lu ber workers, etc.



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You Just Say: "Feel that cushion!" and orders roll in! Everybody buys shoes—everybody wants the soothing foot-comfort of Exclusive Velvet-eez Air Cushion insoles—a cradle of tiny air bubbles from heel to toe! Tested Ten-second Demonstrator makes selling easy, famous Good Housekeeping Seal on Velvet-eez shoes helps you build confidence—clinich sales!



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You get Tested Selling Plans, sure-fire dope on What to Say, What to Do, to cash in right away! Big National Advertising program makes you and your Personal Fitting Service **KNOWN TO MILLIONS!**

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**RUSH** me your **FREE Selling Outfit**, so I can get started selling your popular, wanted jacket and coats. Include **Ten-Second Velvet-eez Air Cushion Insole Demonstrator**, unique Zipper shoes, big line of shoe styles for men and women. Send everything **FREE** and **PREPAID**.

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Address .....

City & State .....

**MASON SHOE MFG. CO.**  
 Dept. M-687  
**Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin**



(Continued from page 8)

for years, not a single one of the thieves was ever discovered. Historians believe it was an "inside job." In modern purchasing power each of these gold coins was worth a little better than seven dollars.

The raid so reduced the government's financial position that national bankruptcy would have resulted had the people learned of it. The theft was kept secret within a very small group of high officials and even the officers searching for the thieves and gold had no idea the loot came from the treasury which was so slow in paying them their wages.

Ben Gastiglione  
Newark, N. J.

Dear Editor:

Since the various researches of your readers into the growth and development of our penal system seem to have gone well with your readers, I'm submitting a bit of interesting lore I came across in the course of casual reading the other day.

The early history of our country contains several instances of people being tarred and feathered for offenses against the community or for entertaining currently unpopular sympathies.

Tarring and feathering goes back to England, where it seems to have been first practiced about 1200, during the reign of Richard I. This punishment was generally reserved for first offenders whose crime was of a moderate nature: petty thieves, common scolds, bullies.

Tarring and feathering was also the punishment of those who spoke ill, but not so ill as to be worthy of a charge of treason, against their betters. Beginning about 1500 many English communities adopted this mode of punishment for flirts, and members of the clergy who forgot their calling.

Keep giving us the NEWest and the old.

Yours,  
Joe Waterman  
Denver, Col.

Dear Editor:

Here's one for your files—if you don't mind going back far enough. Calling all G-gals!

King Behanzin of Dahomey who ruled in the last years of the nineteenth century employed an Amazonian police force to check crime in his domain. These tall women, who also doubled as the king's personal body-guard and as his shock troops in war, were armed with extra large swords. They lived on a meat diet entirely; even their beverages were meat soups.

In groups of ten or twenty they roved the country visiting each village in turn. If a crime had been committed they hunted down the criminal, tried him and executed with their great sabers. They had a secret system of communication by which they could alert patrols throughout the kingdom within a few hours and close the borders to escape. They never let up. One man they hunted for eight years and then found him hidden in a cave in a deserted territory. He was tried, found guilty, and executed on the spot.

Donn Mahoney  
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Unfortunately, that's all for now. Thanks once again to all of you whose letters were squeezed out. Maybe we'll get to them next time around. In the meantime, keep mailing them in! We're learning something new all the time.

The Editors

**M**EDIEVAL English criminals were organized in elaborate thief-guilds, and a man would specialize in some one form of robbery. Cheating stable men were known as Daisy Kickers, and stuck to their own line of roguery. Macs stole nothing but watches, and Academy Buz-Nappers picked pockets only in churches. Drag-sneaks stole from coaches, and snoozers preyed on hotel guests. Star-glazers made their living by cutting glass from shop windows, while Snow-gatherers specialized in stealing linen from clotheslines. Bluey-hunters did nothing but rip lead from roofs, and Skinners restricted their activities to waylaying travelers and "skinning" them of their clothes!

—Morton Henniger





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*With murder—or worse—in his little black bag he roamed the underworld—the timid little salesman of eternity who gagged at killing—yet killed for a gag!*

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A NOVEL BY  
**John D.  
Mac Donald**

CHAPTER ONE

The Wrong Corpse

**I**T HAPPENED just like this, and I want to state with the utmost emphasis that I was minding my own business. Except when I find it necessary to exert my rather unique gift of salesmanship, I am by nature shy and retiring.





*Brenda said, "Drop that, you naughty boy!"*

I have been employed for some time by the Idle Hour Novelties Company. Mr. Max Idelhour, my employer, trusts me with the introduction of new products to our distributor areas.

At the time this trouble started I was on my way west to our distributor area

seven, which includes Pacific City and some fifty miles of coast line. I was traveling on the Red Chieftain, a train which I usually find to be very comfortable and suited to my purposes. I spent considerable time en route studying my 'gag' book. Mr. Max Idelhour has frequently



criticised me on the basis that I seem to lack a sense of humor. He seems to feel that a person in my position—introducing novelties to the trade—should be somewhat of a jokester. Thus I have been attempting to remedy this deficiency by copying down what show people, I believe, call 'bits of business.'

I was fondly assuming that this trip would be a success. I was positive that our Mr. Darben would be entranced with the Wiggly, a glittering and life-like cockroach animated by a small and efficient rubber band motor. Indeed, I believed that our new Super-Dribble Glass would please him. It is based on a new principle. Instead of the fluid in the glass merely dripping through holes onto the user's necktie, the entire bottom of the glass is false and activated by a concealed spring, so that once the glass is tipped up the bottom slide. up sharply, thrusting the entire contents of the glass into the user's face with considerable force. But the third item I was introducing seemed to have sure-fire possibilities for the small-fry trade. It is a very lifelike reproduction of the Army Colt .45 automatic pistol. When the trigger is pulled it fires eight of our loudest caps in rapid succession, makes a very lifelike reproduction of the sound of a fire siren, and gives off a sharp odor of cordite.

As usual I had a compartment. On the night before our arrival in Pacific City a most peculiar thing happened. Had I known then what I now know, I would most certainly have denied that peculiar man's request. He was a most unwholesome type.

Just as I was about to retire, he tapped at my door. I admitted him. He said, "Jack, I wonder'f you'd do a guy a favor."

"My name," I said, "is not Jack. It is Omar Dudley."

"Omar, you look like a nice guy." I thanked him for that comment. He was

weaving a bit more than the motion of the train should have caused. He gave off a distinct odor of hard spirits. As I feel a salesman should keep his wits about him, I seldom drink. When I do, I prefer a white mint frappe after a good dinner.

"I saw you come in this compartment, Omar." Though he kept smiling, he seemed to be under considerable strain. "Some people I don't want to meet up with have got hold of my compartment number, Omar. Maybe they'll be piling on the train at the next stop to wake me up, and I'm a fella needs his sleep. Now if they can't find me, I'll be all set. I'm dead for sleep. So I wonder'f you'd do a guy a favor and trade compartments."

"People who awaken other people are most inconsiderate," I said.

"They sure are," he agreed, "and here's twenty bucks for your trouble."

"My good man, I do not want to accept money for a little favor like this."

"As I said before, you are a nice guy, Omar."

He seemed to be the type that it is easier to humor than it is to get rid of, so we traded compartments with what seemed to me to be unseemly stealth. He brought his single bag to my compartment and I took my bag and my box containing our three new items to his compartment. When it was done, he seemed overcome with enormous relief.

Nothing would do but I had to accompany him to the club car for a nightcap. His compartment was near mine and the club car was four cars toward the head of the train.

I sat beside him in the club car and ordered a ginger ale. He had an offensive laugh. He was in gay spirits until suddenly two other men entered the club car. They seemed to be of the same type as my new friend, who had told me his name was Smith. As soon as they entered he became exceptionally nervous. He licked his lips repeatedly.



When he departed, he was most rude. He did not pause to say goodnight. He merely bounded up and scurried back the way we had come. The two men followed him quickly and quietly.

Without giving the matter any more thought, I retired to my compartment.

I awakened in the morning when the train had already stopped under its long shed in the yards of Pacific City. I whistled as I shaved at the compartment sink, because I was in high good spirits. Our Mr. Darben would expect me to address a meeting of all salesmen, and I was well prepared for the task.

There was a tap on the door and I reached over and unlatched it. Two rather frail looking young men came in. They both wore lurid examples of the more distasteful California style shirts.

"Yes?" I said politely.

They sat side by side on my unmake berth and one of them supplied cigarettes

for both. "Take your time," said the slightly more sallow one.

"I certainly shall, my good man. But I am slightly confused as to your purpose."

"You expected an escort, didn't you?" the other one said.

I said, "When my employment has taken me to other areas, an escort has not been considered necessary."

"This is hotter than you might think," the sallower one said.

"Really? I thought Pacific City was quite cool this time of year."

They both slapped their legs and guffawed. I blushed with pleasure.

THEY WATCHED me finish dressing. I put my toilet articles in, my suitcase and fastened the straps. The sallower one said, "I didn't notice no artillery."

It took me a moment to figure out what

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he meant. And then I was intensely disappointed. There had been a leak somewhere. Our Zing-Bang Pistol was to have been a complete surprise.

I tapped the box, and sighed deeply. "It's in there, gentlemen. I'm sorry you know about it."

They both stared at me. "Know about it! What you think we're playing out here? Marbles, maybe?"

"The turnover on marbles has been so disappointing that we've dropped the line," I informed them.

Again they both dissolved into helpless laughter.

"Geez, you're killin' me," the one with goldfish on his shirt said.

"Shall we go?" I asked.

They stood up.

One of them was kind enough to take my bag. I carried the package, of course. They accompanied me out through the station. One action struck me as quite peculiar. Just as we were about to go into the station proper, the goldfish one touched my arm and held me back while the other walked into the station, took a long look around, then turned and motioned to us.

"Can't be too careful," the goldfish one said.

I saw at once what he meant. Our strongest competitor in that area is the E-Z Fun Company. Though I have long know that any company which got its start through itching powder would probably stoop to any deviltry, I had not heretofore realized that they would employ actual violence in order to wrest from us our newest developments.

"Would they try anything right here in the station?" I asked.

"Brother, there's enough at stake so they'd pot you right off the governor's lap."

I can only say that this did not astonish me too much, because I realized that this was our major California sales area

—and in our business we have found that the residents of California, more than those of any other state, are willing to pay huge sums merely to disconcert and humiliate their fellow citizens. In one year alone we sold seventy-three thousand six hundred and forty rubber cocktail pickles in California.

They employed the same caution when they reached the street, and then they hustled me over into a long, dark blue sedan already occupied by a uniformed driver. The motor was running and the car slid ahead as the door closed.

The goldfish one rapped his knuckles on the window nearest him. "You can relax now," he said. It seemed an odd superstition, rapping on glass, but I ignored it.

"Any excitement out your way?" the other little man asked.

The only thing that seemed apropos was my recent survey of retail outfits instigated by Mr. Max Idelhaur.

"I personally eliminated eleven dealers," I said with quiet pride.

His jaw sagged and his eyes protruded a bit. I revised my estimate of him. Doubtless he was one of the dealers rather than one of our Mr. Darben's salesmen.

"Holy Moses!" he said. "Eleven! I didn't see it in the papers."

Doubtless he was referring to the trade papers. "We have ways of avoiding undue publicity," I said. He nodded sagely.

"I wish we had that kind of control out here," he said.

I then noticed that we were going in almost the exact opposite direction from our Mr. Darben's offices. Then I realized that it was quite early. Doubtless we were going to his home. This surprised me a bit, as I have always felt that Mr. Darben does not particularly care for me. I frequently criticize his expense accounts.

We rode in silence and at last turned into a winding street called Jacaranda Drive. The chauffeur turned into a drive-



way and blew his horn in front of a massive wrought-iron gate. I made a mental note to remove the expense item of this trip from Mr. Darben's next expense account. A man came running to the gate on the inside. He stared out at us, then activated the gate with some sort of a pushbutton. We could not see the house itself until we were inside the gate, and then it quite took my breath away. Our Mr. Darben was certainly doing very well indeed. I decided to caution him about going in debt. It was a huge structure of grey stone, redwood and plate glass. Beyond one corner I could see the end of a swimming pool, with bright mattresses laid out on the edge of it.

The car stopped and the goldfish one said, "Now we're really all right."

When he got out and took my bag out, I said, "Now look here! I am planning on residing in a hotel."

"Wait'll you hear the pitch," he said, "then decide."

I shrugged. I followed them to a side door, my package under my arm. We went into a hallway and then out onto a very pleasant little terrace with several tables. It overlooked the pool.

The chauffeur had come in. He rubbed his hands together. "I'll tell 'em in the kitchen what you want."

"That's very nice of you. Orange juice, toast and coffee, please."

"Coming up. He ought to be down in a half hour or so. Want a paper?"

"Yes, thank you." A fresh copy of the *Pacific City Courier* was given to me and I was left alone on the terrace. The morning breeze was fresh and quite comfortably cool. Soon a young man in a white coat brought my breakfast. He seemed to be some sort of an Oriental.

I inspected the breakfast most carefully. Our representatives have a somewhat annoying habit of trying to catch a man from the home office with some of his own merchandise. The butter was not

our hard yellow rubber special which has sold so well, nor did I find one of our green plastic Wiggli-Worms in the orange juice.

As I buttered my second piece of toast, a young woman came out through the wide doors and approached my table. I would hesitate to call her a lady. Her long yellow hair was not carefully combed, and there were remnants of yesterday's lipstick on her slightly over-heavy lips. She had an extremely sulky expression. But the thing which dismayed me most was her attire. She wore some sort of a wrapper, I believe they are called.

"He told me to come down and entertain you," she said somewhat bitterly.

I naturally held a chair for her.

"Soong!" she yelled, so loudly that I jumped. The Oriental put in his appearance. "Coffee, Soong. Black and lots of it," she demanded. When he left she pressed her palms against her temples and sighed. "Will I never learn?" she said. Then she looked at me steadily. Her eyes were so level and so frankly searching that I felt myself blush. "Do you know your business?" she asked. "You certainly don't look it."

"I think you should know," I said with dignity, "that I am well thought of in many quarters."

"Maybe I haven't seen everything," she said obtusely.

"Have you known Mr. Darben long?" I asked politely. This woman certainly bore no resemblance to Mrs. Darben, a short, heavily-constructed person who quotes Browning.

"I don't know any Darben," she said.

It did not take my agile mind long to recover from the surprise. I surmised that they were giving me what is called 'the buildup'. Evidently this was a rather topheavy 'gag', precisely the sort of thing you would expect from our Mr. Darben, a man of rather meager resources.



**A**S I WAS about to play along with her in an attempt to turn the tables on them, a strange man came out onto the terrace. He wore a pale yellow terrycloth robe and his brown feet were bare. I must say that he was a most handsome man. Though his hair was white, he seemed to be in the very flush of health. I was prepared to like him at once, yet when he stared at me I noticed that his eyes had an uncanny coldness about them. They were of that grey shade that icicles get in a soft coal region.

I stood up and reached my hand out to him. He came toward me to take my hand, saying, "Glad you made it okay." Just as he was about to take my hand I lifted it out of his reach, closing my fingers and pointing my thumb back over my right shoulder. It is one of those 'bits of business' that seem to be essential when one is out on the road selling our line.

He went white with fury and I beamed at him, because it is one of the tenets of our trade that a successful 'gag' always leaves the subject enormously angry. The woman at the table made a strangling sound. Then the stranger proved that he was no gentleman. Barely glancing at her, he backhanded her across the mouth. The blow was sufficient to split her lip and knock her over backwards. She scrambled to her feet and moved away from the white-haired man, obviously afraid of a second punishing blow.

It was the first time I have ever seen a woman brutally struck. Though she seemed to be a rather sordid type, she was still a woman. One might say almost too obviously a woman.

"That, sir," I said, stepping toward him, "was the act of a dastard."

"What did you say?" he asked me in a curiously small voice.

"The act of a coward and a bully!"

I detest violence, but in this case it was obvious that someone had to take a firm

hand. I am a veteran of three years of boxing lessons at the YMCA. I went up onto my toes and put my left fist out and danced around him in a deadly circle, my right hand coiled to strike. He turned and faced me as I circled him, utter amazement on his face. But he was sufficiently wise not to raise his hands. I imagine that he realized I could not hit a man who made no attempt to protect himself.

Then he threw his head back and laughed. He laughed until the tears squeezed out of his eyes and he sank weakly into the nearest chair. He was too far gone for several moments to talk.

"Okay, okay," he gasped, "they told me you were a handy man with a boffo, but I didn't know how good you really were. Sit down and finish your coffee."

I sat down, rather puzzled. "Just who are you, sir?"

"Hell, you can drop the gag now. I asked for you especially. You are Jumpy, aren't you?"

I considered the quivering condition of my hands, a residue of anger. "I certainly am," I said.

The woman was still dabbing at her mouth with a napkin. She had cautiously resumed her chair at our table. "Take a walk, Brenda," he told her. She got up without a word and went into the house.

Just as he leaned toward me to speak, the chauffeur appeared in the doorway and said, "Boss, phone."

"Be right back, Jumpy," he said.

I picked up the paper again to try to quiet my nerves. And then I saw the box on the bottom of page one. It was labeled *Special Release*. My mouth went dry as a buried bone as I read it.

#### MYSTERY SHROUDS DEATH OF SALESMAN

At midnight last night the mangled body of Mr. Omar Dudley, Sales Manager of the Idle Hour Novelties Company, was found beside the right of way of the Middle Pacific Railroad just outside the village of Two-pence, Nevada, where the deceased had fallen

or been thrown from the crack streamliner the Red Chieftain. Phone contact with the conductor of the train after the discovery of the body resulted in positive identification when it was found that Mr. Dudley's compartment was the only one unoccupied. A telephone call to Mr. Dudley's employer in the east disclosed that Mr. Dudley was on a sales trip to Pacific City. Though it is not yet official, it is believed that Mr. Dudley was dead of stab wounds before he was dropped under the wheels. Every attempt was made not to alarm other passengers on the train, but the news that it was not suicide or accidental death came too late to enable the police to hold other occupants of the crack streamliner.

It is a proven fact that all successful salesman achieve their positions through an ability to think on their toes, as it were. Thoughts raced through my mind with unbelievable speed, and it was no time at all before I realized that my odd reception in Pacific City was due to the fact that I was believed to be the man who had called himself Smith and who, in tallness and slimness at least, bore a superficial resemblance to myself. Along with that decision, I also deduced that Smith had attempted to have me killed in his place. Had not the two men found him in the club car. . . . I shuddered.

I thought of the killing on the train and shuddered again. I hastily folded the paper as the white-haired man returned to sit with me. He was now fully dressed.

"Now, look," he said in a confidential tone.

I am afraid," I said, "that you must listen to me first. I am not your man. I am only . . ."

He looked beyond me and nodded. I turned around and saw the chauffeur standing not twenty feet away. He held a pistol in his hand and there was a bulky thing on the end of the muzzle which I took to be a silencer.

The words I was about to speak froze in my throat.

The white-haired man said softly, "Now get this, Jumpy, and get it very

straight. We're not fools out here. We know that there's a damn good chance that the other side got to you and greased you. We don't trust you any further than Brenda can throw that swimming pool. We asked Nicky for a good man for a special job and we requested you on account of your reputation. I'm going to tell you the job you're going to do and you're going to go through with it exactly the way I suggest. If you make one move we don't like—just one move—I'm going to have George there give you a spinal with that little toy he's got. It's something George enjoys doing. Any out-of-line move you make will be evidence to me that you're either trying to cross us on your own or Nicky is playing along with the other side. Now get on your feet and keep your back to George."

Much to my astonishment, my trembling legs obeyed the command.

"How much did Nicky tell you?" he demanded.

My legs had worked, but my voice wouldn't. I felt as though somebody had me by the throat. I felt the corners of my mouth lift. It was an instinctive grimace.

"Put your hands up and stop grinning at me," he roared.

I couldn't lift my arms. They hung by my sides like sacks of sand. I couldn't change the expression of my face.

"I'm boss out here," he said in a low dangerous voice, "Put those hands up and stop grinning or I'm going to tell George to shoot. One . . . two . . ."

I had heard that expression 'paralyzed by fright' but I had never believed that it was anything but the most gross exaggeration. With a respectable anatomical chart at hand I could have pointed to the precise vertebrae that would be separated by George's bullet.

"Hell, you *must* be all right," the white-haired man said. "I always heard



you've got your share of nerve. Sit down and have some coffee."

I sat down with an astonishing jolt that made my teeth click sharply. I reached for the coffee cup. My hand was oily with perspiration. My index finger slid through the handle on the cup. I lifted the cup to my lips and it chattered against my front teeth. The white-haired man looked at me sharply. Then he grinned.

"Say, that's a good act!"

A salesman is resourceful. I put the cup down. But I couldn't get my finger out of the handle. I tried to do so in an inconspicuous manner. The cup chattered against the saucer. I steadied the cup with my other hand and managed to pull my finger free.

"You can stop clowning," the white-haired man said. "How much did Nicky tell you?"

"Nothing," I answered truthfully.

Just then the little man with the shirt with the goldfish came out onto the porch. "Good morning, Mr. Artigan," he said politely to the white-haired man.

"Sit down, Fish. You met Jumpy Anderson didn't you?"

Fish sat down with a hurt expression. "Boss, I went with Artie and George and got him off the train, remember?" Fish shook his narrow little head sadly and clucked at me. "Boss, he smeared eleven guys lately and he don't worry none. He carries his rod around in a box under his arm. Are you sure he ain't nuts?"

## CHAPTER TWO

### Bloody Business

**M**Y FUTURE course of action was clear to me. I would have to humor these most peculiar people until such time as I could place myself in the hands of the law. In the meantime I was miserable about what Martha, the

girl I shall marry someday, would be thinking. There is no nonsense in our relationship. We maintain a joint savings account and each month we deposit a stated amount from our mutual earnings. When the figure reaches the goal we have set, we shall marry. In the interim years Martha says that it is her duty to keep herself from being so attractive that I shall get overly impatient. Thus she dresses very plainly, uses no makeup and permits me to kiss her only on the cheek—though her cheek, I must admit, is quite interestingly warm and soft, that is for such a tall, thin girl.

She would undoubtedly be taking the day off from her work, prostrate with grief. It was my duty to escape from these odd people as soon as possible.

"Now then, Anderson," Mr. Artigan said, addressing me, "let's fill you in on the gaudy details. This is a semi-political pitch. We have had a sap on the string for some time, grooming him for the job of Mayor of Pacific City. The campaigns have already started and one month from today comes elections. This pigeon of ours is named Walter F. Dermody. He looks honest and reliable, which is what we want, but as soon as he's in, he'll start putting our people in the appointive slots, and before you know it, we'll be raiding the joints, dumping the old-time collection of crumbums and taking over the city, which, I might add, is a three million a year jackpot at the very least. It is much cleaner way of taking over a town than by going around shooting the people who already own the profitable concessions."

I had to think very fast to decipher the meaning behind his crudities of expression. "I see," I said.

"You don't see yet. We thought this Wally Dermody was clean as a whistle—until a few weeks ago. We found that he had been what the books call a bit indiscreet. There were some letters. To his



girl. We are very disappointed in Wally Dermody because it looked as though he would make us a fine mayor. The girl's name is Prissy Thorpe, and she is highly annoyed because it seems Wally cut her as soon as we tapped him for the Mayor's office. The letters she has are pretty emotional, from what Wally tells me. In few words, they are documents which do us no good printed in the paper. In fact, they amount to a kiss of death for our candidate."

"I see," I said.

"Not yet you don't see, Anderson. This Prissy is a smart dish. She's stashed the letters in the Harbor National Bank in a safety deposit box. She's sitting in an apartment on West Osceola with her hands crossed, waiting to see who comes through with the high bid for those letters, my organization or Russ Pardo's boys."

The last name—Russ Pardo—rang a bell. On one trip while in the company

of our Mr. Darben I had heard Mr. Pardo mentioned as being a hoodlum type and so-called boss of Pacific City. Obviously Mr. Artigan intended to contest his position through a clever political manipulation.

"Have you made a bid?" I asked weakly.

"No point in that. Pardo is in. He's got his hands on more cash than we can round up. But I have been able to stall her from making a deal with Pardo. If we can get the letters, we'll burn them, and our boy is in and, little by little, Pardo and his crowd will be eased out. If he gets them, you can bet they'll be spread all over Pacific City and Wally Dermody will be one dead political duck. It's too late to try to build up another candidate. We've got to sink or swim with Dermody, damn his peanut-sized brain."

"I see," I said.



*oh-oh, Dry Scalp!*

"SAM'S nice, but he'd be a lot nicer if he did something about that Dry Scalp! His hair is dull and unruly—and he has loose dandruff, too! I've got just the ticket for him—'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"



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"I wish, Anderson, you'd stop saying that. Now, here's the program. We've been back-checking on Prissy Thorpe. Thorpe isn't her right name. It was originally Kelly. We tried to get an angle on her folks and a big plum drops right in our lap. She's got a kid sister still going by the name of Kelly right here in town. She's a carhop at a place called the Turk Drive-in, four miles out Route 80. The first little job for you, Anderson, is to snatch the kid sister and bring her here. Because it's a federal rap, we had to get out-of-town talent."

I found myself almost incapable of words. "I'm to abduct a young woman?"

"None of that stuff," Fish said sharply. "You just grab her and bring her here."

Artigan gave Fish a look of deep contempt. "Never mind him. I might as well give you the whole plan. We've got to figure on what to do if this Prissy Thorpe-Kelly doesn't care what happens to her kid sister. This you'll love. If Prissy won't listen, then you're going to shoot a hole in Wally's head. We've got to a guy on Homicide. All we have to do is tip him and he'll spout to the press that it is obviously the work of Russ Pardo. With Wally dead, those letters won't do Pardo any good. You can't smear a dead guy. We'll be all ready to run in another pigeon named Francis A. Towner, who will immediately start screaming that Wally was a martyr to good government and the way the people can show their feeling about such gunman tactics is to elect him by a landslide vote. But we'd rather have it work out the first way, because I'm not too sure of this Francis A. Towner. He's a lawyer and he's a little smarter than Wally. He may be tough to handle once he gets in office and we've got nothing special on him to use against him. The stinker may get in and try to make a deal with Pardo."

"When shall I—ah—snatch the dam-

sel?" I asked, attempting to speak in the vernacular.

"That better be tonight," Artigan said, "Fish'll get a road map and spot the place on it for you. Georgie'll drive."

"I prefer to work alone," I said.

He stabbed me in the chest with his finger, leaning across the table. "You'll work like I say. You're getting enough for it, remember."

I smiled at him. "Well, I suppose I'm at liberty for the rest of the day, Mr. Artigan?"

"That's right. You can use the pool and play records. Any bets you want to get down, see George. The liquor isn't locked up, but don't get stinko. Stay away from the gate and away from the phone."

"A movie relaxes me," I said.

"Oh, Nicky told you, did he? Brenda can run the projector. I got a nice file of stuff. I'll tell her you want some movies."

Brenda came out and sat meekly at a table some distance away. Soong brought her some coffee. Artigan stood up. "I got to go in to the office. Fish, George, Artie and Brenda'll be around all day."

Two men I hadn't seen before appeared in the doorway. They looked at me coldly. Artigan left with them and I heard the car start up on the other side of the house.

**I**T DID NOT take me long to find that I was a virtual prisoner in the house. Once I almost made it to the phone before George appeared like magic, leaning against a door frame, cleaning his fingernails. I found the record library but it did not contain any DeBussy, a type of music I find exceptionally restful.

Fish brought a map, properly marked, and spread it on a table for me. He pointed with a pencil. "Here we are. And there is where she works. She's on tonight. I checked. You're the boss, Jumpy."

To allay his suspicions I marked out a route, directly to the Turk Drive-in, then extending beyond it and zig-zagging back through narrow streets.

Fish nodded. "That's good. It'll look like we took her the other way. Now how about plates on the car? It's rigged so they can be switched from the inside. There's a lever on the dash."

"Have we Florida plates in stock?"

"Sure thing. Yeah, that should be okay. Then we switch back to the regular ones. Now for the girl, you think chloroform or ropes and a gag or what?"

I swallowed a faint feeling of nausea. "We won't need any of that, Fish. I'll handle that matter personally."

He bobbed his head. "You know, Jumpy, it sure is a treat to me to see how cool you boys operate."

"If the planning is adequate," I told him, thinking of the sales manual I had written back in what had begun to feel some other existence, "nothing can go awry."

"Can go what?"

"Awry. Askew."

"Sure, sure." He bobbed his head.

I am ashamed to admit that such adulation made me feel larger than life size. It is pleasant, I found, to be considered to be a desperado, a devil of a fellow.

I yawned. "I believe I'll take a nap to digest my lunch, Mr. Fish."

He showed me to a bedroom and closed the door gently. I went at once to the windows. I could see over the high wall and out into the street. Some children played there. A car went by slowly. So near and yet so far. I sat disconsolately on the bed. I lay down and tried to devise a plan. I shut my eyes to facilitate the thought processes. When I opened them again it was dark outside and somebody was knocking on the door.

Soong beamed at me and said, "Chow, boss."

After dashing cold water on my face

I went down. The evening meal was spread buffet style on the big table in the dining room. Some sort of a party seemed to be in progress. There were several girls and many trays of cocktails. A lot of them turned and looked at me as I came down the stairway. Brenda wore a pale blue frock and she seemed to be quite over her sullen attitude of the morning. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes danced. The other girls seemed to be of rather the same type. All too vivid, with their red, red lips and their shining eyes and their bold dresses.

Mr. Artigan came immediately to me. "Little party," he said in a low voice. "It'll make a good cover in case of trouble. Know what I mean?"

"I trust there won't be any trouble," I said.

He took a cocktail glass full of a pale amber fluid from Soong's tray and thrust it into my hand. Sleeping during the daytime always makes me exceptionally thirsty. Even the sight of a small pearl onion in the bottom of the glass did not deter me. A good salesman thinks of his customers and never eats onions in any form.

I drained the glass in three swallows. Just as I replaced it on Soong's tray the ingredient it had contained caught me by the throat. I gave a strangled gasp, I am sure, and something seemed to be bounding up and down in my stomach, emitting flame and sparks. It was instinctive to attempt to cool off the fire. Before I realized what I was going, I had grasped a second glass and done likewise with it. Too late, I realized my mistake.

Artigan whistled softly and said, "That's a hell of a way to drink Martinis."

"The only way," I said firmly. "More people should realize that."

It is apparently true that alcohol has a remarkable effect on the inhibitions. The room and the party swirled into a sort of



warm, smoky haze, and I was but intermittently conscious of my actions. At one point I went to my suitcase and brought out one of our standard items of the Idle Hour line, a lapel flower with blub attached. I have never cared particularly for the item, but it seemed an excellent idea to fill the bulb with Martini and wander through the group, aiming it at every handy face. I picked one stranger who took exception to my little game. I squirted him and he growled, "Cut that!" I smiled and gave it to him again. He balled his fists and took a step toward me, his nose practically against mine, and said, "You do that once more, tall and revoltin', and I'm gonna—" I couldn't hit him in the face with the stream, so I had to give it to him in the neck.

He actually seemed about to hit me when Mr. Artigan came quickly up and whispered something into the man's ear. His whole attitude changed. He gave me a wide, glassy smile. "That's a pretty good gag, is what I was trying to say," he said in a slightly shaky voice.

I squirted him with what was left in the bulb and he laughed uproariously.

I was finishing a large plate of cold ham and potato salad when Artigan tapped me on the shoulder and said, "The car's ready. Time to go."

The warm haze slid away from me as though it had never existed. I dropped down into that pit of bottomless despair which I have since learned is a Martini depression.

It was Arty who caught me at the door and handed me my box. "You don't want to forget this, do you?" he asked, grinning.

"Of course not. Thank you very much."

The motor was running. George was at the wheel. Fish was in back. Fish seemed highly nervous. I got in with Fish. The gates opened and the car slid forward.

"How fast, Jumpy?" George asked politely.

"As fast as you can make it," I said quickly, hoping that a prowler car would solve my dilemma.

"Sure thing," George said gayly, turning out onto the main road. For the next six minutes I had my eyes open only at intervals. Each time I opened them I would see the massive car leaping for a tiny gap in the thundering traffic and I would be forced to shut them again.

He turned into a gaily lighted drive-in. The amplified music of a juke box yammered across the wide parking area.

"Already?" I said timorously.

"Four city miles in six minutes," George said proudly. "Wait'll I get you on the open road some time. This'll do a hundred twenty-seven."

"Better unwrap that box," Fish suggested.

It could do no harm, and it might possibly do some good. I unwrapped the box. In the light inside the car the big gun looked deadly enough. I slid it under my belt and pulled my coat across it.

"That's a tough size cannon to use," Fish said with respect.

"It's all in becoming accustomed to it."

"Sure, sure."

A girl approached our car. I wondered how the poor thing must feel being forced to parade in front of all the munching hundreds of people in nothing but those little shorts with the military stripe down the sides and the skimpy halter.

"What'll it be, boys?" she inquired in a brassy voice.

"Say, do you come with the box lunch?" George asked.

"Sonny, you can't afford our box lunch, so you'll never find out, will you?"

Fish jabbed me hard with his elbow. I leaned forward, wet my lips, and said, "Would it be too much to ask to have Miss Kelly wait on this car?"

The girl seemed annoyed. The dollar I held out to her wiped away her expression. "Kelly coming up," she said and

strutted off. Martha would have disapproved.

"What'll we do when she shows?" Fish asked, "Just yank her in and roar out of here?"

"First," I said, "I believe I'd like to have her bring me a chocolate milk shake. I left the house before I had a chance to get dessert."

"You slay me," Fish said.

**T**HE KELLY GIRL approached the car. Her uniform was as skimpy as the one on the previous girl, but she wore it with what seemed a trace of self-consciousness. Her hair glistened dark red in the floodlights and her face had a most cute, snub-nosed impudent look. A magazine illustrator would have painted her as a kid sister type.

"They tell me I have friends here," she said in a warm and throaty voice, peering in at us. "Do I know you?"

"You were recommended to us as providing excellent service, Miss Kelly," I said, "For me, a chocolate milk shake."

"Anna beer," said Fish.

"Anna beer," said George.

She went away. "Nice item," George said. I said nothing. Out of the corner of my eyes I had detected a prowler car parked not far away. I hoped that neither George nor Fish would see it.

We were silent for a moment. I made my plan. I said, "When we've finished, we'll give her a ten dollar bill. She'll take

away the tray and bring back our change. I'll be waiting outside the car for her. I shall push her in, climb in myself, and away we will go."

"Sounds okay to me," George said.

For the next ten minutes, until I could safely get out of the car, I was almost frantic for fear the officers of the law would finish their repast and drive away. As she left with the tray and the ten dollar bill, I opened the door and got out. As casually as I dared I walked away from the blue sedan, directly toward the police car.

A beefy officer licked grease from his fingers and stared at me as I bent to talk in the window.

"Officer, I wish to report that those men in that car are planning to help me kidnap our waitress, the little girl with the red hair."

He winked at me. "Mac, you got damn fine taste. I'll say that."

"You don't understand, Officer! I'm turning myself in!"

"That's damn white of you, Mac." He reached out and pinched my cheek with his big fingers. "Gee, you're a cutie," he said. "Maybe she'll go for you."

"Hey, Red," he shouted. I turned and saw the girl stop and then come over toward us.

"Hello, Dave," she said.

"Red, this taxpayer here wants a recommendation from the law. How do you like that? Mac, you ever been in jail?"

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"Of course not!" I said hotly, "I'm trying to tell you—"

"I'll handle this. You shut up. Red, look him over. He looks harmless to me. And he has got a new angle. You go off pretty soon, don't you?"

"I should be off right now," Red said, moving around me so that she could look into my face in the light. "You are kinda cute, but I don't know you."

"Mac meet Red. Red meet Mac," Dave said. "Now you're all palsy. Red, Mac wants a date. You busy tonight?"

She had a dimple when she smiled. "I guess when the law recommends a guy."

The girl had taken the tray off the other side of the prowler car. The prowler car backed out. Dave leaned out the window and said, "Don't ever say we cops ain't on cupid's ball team, Mac. Have a good time, Red."

She handed me my change from the ten. She looked a little shy. "I won't be long, Mac." She turned and hurried off.

There was nothing to do but head back to the car. George and Fish looked at me. Their faces were white. "Just what the hell do you think—" Fish started.

"Kindly cease being so loquacious," I said firmly. "Why do things the hard way? I asked the officer to introduce me to the girl. He was glad to do it. I asked her for a date. She's in changing to her street clothes."

"You asked the cop to introduce you?" Fish asked weakly.

"Of course!"

"Brother!" George said softly.

"Mr. Fish, you will kindly sit up in front with George. I desire to be left alone here in back with the young lady."

"Anything you say, Jumpy," he murmured obediently. He got up in front.

My mind was racing, but I could find no solution, no adequate way to warn her. The police had left too quickly. My cheek still hurt where the oaf had pinched me.

In far too little time she came hurrying

out to the car. She was very cute in a green dress with a wide white belt, a brown coat over her arm. I got out to hold the door for her, more than half tempted to grab her wrist and run for it. But there was too great a distance to run. A shot at me might find her by accident. I could not ask her to take such a serious risk.

I handed her in and climbed in after her. "That wasn't much of an introduction, Mac," she said, with laughter in her voice. "Gee, I'm crazy to date a stranger like this. I guess there has to be a first time."

"My name isn't Mac," I said. "It's . . . Omar."

Fish turned around. "No wonder they call you Jumpy. Omar! What a handle! Don't I get a knockdown too?"

"My name really is Pat," she said. "Pat Kelly. Isn't that an awful name?"

"I rather like it. Pat, meet Fish and George."

"Hiya," said Fish.

"Hiya," said George.

"Where are we going, men?" Pat asked. There was a nervous note in her voice. I could see that she was not exactly impressed favorably by my companions. I did not find it within my power to blame her.

"To a very nice buffet supper," I said, as comfortingly as I could.

She seemed quite composed as we drove to Mr. Artigan's house. The gates shut behind the car. I took her up the steps and into the hallway. The party had disappeared as though it had never existed. Artigan stood, rubbing his hands and beaming at her. "Nice work, Jumpy," he said.

"He did it smooth," Fish said. "He just dated her. Boy, a smooth worker."

Pat stared at Artigan, at Brenda's ravaged face, at the two cold-eyed men who had accompanied Artigan to work that morning. She looked at Fish, then at

George. Last of all she looked at me, fright in her eyes. She was white to the lips and she backed toward the door. Fish slid around her and closed the door.

"Relax, honey," Artigan said softly.

"Who . . . who are you people?"

"Friends, I hope. We want to be your friends. I had you brought here for a reason. I sent those three men out to get you and bring you here, Miss Kelly."

Pat turned her blue eyes on me again and gave me a look of such ineffable contempt that I could almost feel my soul shrivel. "I've never been wronger about anyone," she said.

"We're quite prepared to be unpleasant if we must," Mr. Artigan said.

The color came back into Pat's face. "Stop talking like a cut-rate script, whoever you are. What do you want of me?"

Artigan flushed. "Don't give me too much mouth. I'll tell you why we want you. You have a sister named Prissy Thorpe. Prissy has something we want. This seems like a good way to get it from her."

Pat looked puzzled for a moment. And then she laughed. "That's good! That's really good! Pris is going to be all overcome by sisterly love, eh? This is going to be worth it for the laughs, if nothing else."

Artigan turned to Brenda. "Give her Dolly's old room. Lock her in. Help her, Anderson."

I tried to grasp Pat's arm as we went up the stairs. She pulled away from me. "Dandy date this is," she said.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Escape to Nowhere

**D**OLLY'S old room was large. It had a connecting bath. The windows had steel frames and very tiny sections that opened. Pat took cigarettes from her white purse, lit one, in-

haled and blew the smoke out of her nose. She looked very like a small, infuriated dragon. "You're the world's prize stinker," she said to me. "If you'd had any guts you'd have done it open and above-board—just yanked me into the car. But no, you have to sell me a bill of goods. I'm going to live to see you sitting in a gas chamber, Omar. That's what they hand out for this little game, or didn't you know?"

She was still talking as we closed the door and as Brenda locked it. I casually took the key out of her hand. "She's my responsibility," I said.

Brenda leered at me. "Come around when you want your face bandaged, sweetie."

When I went back down Artigan was waiting for me. He took me into his study and asked me to sit down. He took a rather characterless abstraction in a grey frame off the wall and set it on the desk chair. His body masked the dial of the small safe. He swung the round door open, took something out, clunked it shut again and replaced the picture.

He tossed the two thick packets over to me. They landed on the corner of the desk in the muted glow of the desk lamp. They were packets of currency, each wrapped in a wide brown paper band on which had been written \$5000, followed by the initials of a teller.

"That's for tonight. If it works out you get the balance. If it doesn't, we'll double that after the Dermody job. Not bad for a few day's work, eh?"

"All hundreds," I said. It sounded like somebody else's voice.

"You can have it in yards if you want," he said, "but I don't like 'em myself. Too many records of the serial numbers."

"No, no. This is fine," I said hastily. I picked them up and put them in the inside pocket of my suit coat. They made a large bulge.

"Fish told me how you worked it



out, Anderson. Sort of risky, wasn't it?"

I tried to laugh. It came out sounding like somebody breaking phonograph records. "Always attempt the unexpected," I said.

"All this is pretty important to me, Anderson. I own the Artigan Construction Company. Everything was fine up to two years ago. I was getting the Pacific City paving jobs, sewers, everything. Then the Pardo outfit got greedy and formed their own company. A dummy outfit. K and D Construction. Now they've got the City Engineer writing the bid specifications in such a way that K and D is the only outfit qualified to submit a bid. I tried to raise hell with the City Attorney, but he's one of Pardo's boys too."

All this was an astounding revelation to me. As so many other citizens, I had assumed that the criminal elements merely bribed police officials in order to continue their nefarious machinations. Now I was learning that chicanery extended through all departments of city government.

"But, hell," he said, "this is small time stuff compared with Nicky's operations. I'm probably boring you. Come on. We'll go pay a call on Prissy."

"But . . . but . . ."

He grinned at me and scooped the phone of his desk. He leaned back in the chair after dialing, the phone wedged between his jaw and shoulder to keep his hands free while he took a cigarette from his case and lit it.

"Miss Thorpe? Bob Artigan. Yeah. That's right. We want to make an offer. Check. If you've closed out with our friend, it might mean coming out on the short end of the stick. For you, that is. No, I'm not threatening you at all. All right to come over? Just the two of us. Myself and a friend. . . . That would be a little silly, wouldn't it? See you in fifteen minutes."

He hung up. "Let's roll, Anderson. Better stash the currency in your room. I'll be out in the car."

I went up to my room. With the odd people loose in that house, it hardly seemed safe to put such a quantity of currency in my suitcase or in the dresser. I went into the small private bath and looked around. I lifted the top off the back of the toilet and examined the float. As I had hoped, it was of the type constructed of two hemispherical shells screwed together. I believe I have mentioned that I have a mechanical turn of mind. Using a towel to prevent my hands from slipping, I quickly unscrewed the float, crimped the packets of bills and inserted them inside, and screwed the float back together. I flushed the toilet and watched the float. Even with the money it retained sufficient buoyancy to function in a normal manner.

GEORGE WAS again at the wheel of the big blue sedan. Mr. Artigan gave him the number of the apartment house on West Osceola. In spite of my apprehension at the course of events, I must admit that I found a certain pleasure in sitting back in that comfortable seat while George wheeled the big car through traffic, much like a shark cruising through a school of lesser fish. The tires purred on the slick asphalt. I wondered with a certain dismay whether this experience would give me a leaning toward a higher standard of living. If so, and if the leaning proved irresistible, the mutual savings account that Martha and I maintain would increase more slowly. I thought of her, beside me, on our brisk Sunday morning walks when the weather is pleasant. She carries our binoculars and I carry the notebook in which we record the bird life which we observe. Later in the day we usually transcribe the brief notes into our bird diary. As I thought of that I

suddenly realized, for the first time, that there is something exceedingly birdlike about Martha, with her small pointed nose and the quick movements of her head. Not the small, plump varieties, but something related to the genus stork or crane.

The car pulled up and stopped before a most modern looking apartment house. The doorway, beyond the trim rows of shrubbery rather garishly spotlighted, was a huge sheet of plate glass with a wide aluminum push-bar. The male clerk at the inner desk had long eyelashes and a chirping voice. He phoned up to Miss Thorpe and told us we could take the elevator up to the sixth floor, Apartment 6C.

As we stepped off the elevator, a self-service variety, sliding the door shut behind us, I saw a tall girl standing in the hall beside an open door, looking at us with a markedly insolent expression. She was of the type I have often observed in my infrequent visits to places of commercial entertainment. I understand that the pageboy coiffeur is out of fashion, but this young lady continued to wear it. Her hair was like freshly-melted silver, and the bangs in front curled down, almost touching jet black eyebrows. She wore a silver evening gown with what I suppose would be called a daring neckline.

She stood without a word of greeting. As we came close to her I saw that each forward step seemed to add a certain increment of age to her appearance.

"Who is he?" she said, pointing at me. Her voice had what I believe is most commonly called a whisky burr.

"Out-of-town talent," Artigan said.

She shrugged and walked ahead of us into her apartment. The dress fitted quite closely. I began to understand what had happened to Mr. Dermody.

She was a remarkably poor hostess. She sat down, leaving it up to us to close the apartment door and sit or stand as we chose. There was a half glass of

dark liquor on the table beside her chair. The room can only be described as littered. Apparently she had no talent for housekeeping.

"Make your play and watch the big wheel," she said.

"How high have they gone?" Artigan asked, sitting down and crossing his legs.

"One hundred and twenty-five thousand round, fat, happy little soldiers," she said, wrapping her lips deliciously around each syllable.

"A nice fee for a bunch of innocent letters," Artigan said.

"They mean a lot," she replied.

"We'll give you ten thousand for your time and trouble," Artigan said.

Her eyes narrowed and her long fingernails rattled out a fast tempo on the table top. "Anything I like," she said, "it's a good laugh. Walk over here and use a feather on the bottom of my foot, Bobby."

"I've got a house guest," Artigan said smugly.

"How happy for you! Faint light dawns far in the back of my dim, commercial little mind."

"A scrappy little redhead named Kelly, Pris."

The fingers stopped drumming. Prissy Thorpe shut her eyes. The room was very silent. Her heavy lips were compressed. When she opened her eyes again, they looked almost sleepy. "Just adding the pros and the cons, Bobby. I remember the girl. A sister of mine, I believe. It won't work, Bobby. To the rest of my mealy little family, I'm one dead chicken. The feeling is mutual. I'm a tired girl. I want to retire. The South of France will be nice. Pardo's payoff will last me for as long as I want to live—conservatively estimated at another ten years. Good years. Kiss the redhead on the forehead for me and tell her it couldn't happen to a nicer gal."

"Now, Pris. Use your head. You wouldn't want me to send her on one of



Dickie's entertainment tours through South America, would you?"

"It's more subtle than mailing me one of her ears, I suppose, and just as ineffective."

"You're a cold dish, Pris," Artigan said in a tired voice.

She nodded. Her smile was exceptionally ugly. "Once in a lifetime a girl like me gets her hands on a cold deck. When she does, she knows how to deal. You're sitting there with two little pair, Bobby, and I've got aces full of kings. This is a money game. Talk in Pardo's language and talk loud enough, and I'll fold my hand."

Artigan stood up. "Thanks for the chat. Those boys are probably getting tired of standing in the bathroom."

"You wouldn't want a girl to take chances, would you?"

She still sat there, the glass tilted to her lips, her eyes crinkled with amusement as we left.

On the way down in the elevator I said, without thinking, "I find it hard to believe that such people really exist."

He gave me an odd look. "I'd think being around Nicky would give you some fast lessons. Everybody knows he was the one rubbed out his two brothers."

"Of course, of course," I said faintly.

Back at the house we said goodnight at the foot of the stairs. I went up and shut myself in my room and sat on the edge of the bed with my face in my hands. From time to time I shivered, though the room was anything but cold. After a time I turned off the lights and sat, fully-clothed, in the dark. A long time later I heard somebody go down the hall and I heard the door shut. I pulled off my shoes. I opened my door silently. The key to Pat's room was chill in the palm of my hand. A light came up the stairwell. I tiptoed to where I could look over. Artie sat down there in the hall in his shirtsleeves, reading a comic book.

The most serious problem was how to enter Miss Kelly's room without unduly alarming her. I stood by her door for a long time, listening. I could hear no sound inside. Guiding the key noiselessly into the lock was a long, nerve-wracking process. The bolt slid over with a tiny click. I turned the knob, one millimeter at a time, and pushed the door open. A crack of lesser darkness widened between the door and the frame. I was afraid that the pounding of my heart would be audible all the way across the room. I gave my attention to closing and locking the door on the inside with the same stealth. To keep us from being disturbed, I left the key in the lock.

After standing for a long time with my back to the door, I was able to make her out. The poor frightened child had gone to sleep atop the spread. Five feet from the bed I stepped on a board which creaked. She stirred and made a sleepy sound in her throat. When at last I stood over her, I could see her quite distinctly.

With my hand in readiness, I whispered, "Pat! Pat!"

## CHAPTER FOUR

### You Kill Me!

I SAW THE gleam of her eyes as the lids shot up and I heard the harsh intake of breath. Before it could be expelled in a scream, I clamped my hand over her mouth. I imagine it was very like falling onto a live panther. I began to understand why she had felt relatively safe with a stranger. She had an amazing variety of muscles, all of them in excellent tone. She also seemed to be equipped with eight hands, all of them ending in claws, six knees which thumped me with sickening rapidity, while all the time she grunted and made muffled sounds and tried to sink her teeth into the palm of my hand. I protected my

face by burrowing it into her neck and whispering as loud as I dared, "Please don't fight. I want to talk to you."

Suddenly she lay quite still. I thought it was a ruse. Without removing my hand from her mouth I whispered, "I'm a prisoner in this house, too. I want to help you. I've got to talk to you. Please don't scream when I take my hand away."

I cautiously took my hand away. As I removed my face from its protected position, a hard little fist came out of nowhere and hit my jaw just under the ear. I sat abruptly on the floor beside the bed. Her face appeared above me. "If you want to talk, talk from there," she whispered.

The ringing in my ears slowly subsided. Organizing my thoughts in a coherent pattern, I recounted in detail all that had happened to me, starting with the stranger's request for a change of compartments. What I could not understand were the odd sounds that came from her at intervals during my recountal. It was absurd to think that a girl in her dire situation could giggle, thus it had to be sobs of panic.

I finished and she said, "You went over to Dave and tried to tell him that you were going to kidnap me?"

"Exactly."

Again she made that odd, muffled sound. I said, "And I do not believe that your sister is a very nice sort of person, Patricia."

She was silent for a moment. "Did I hurt you, Omar?"

"My face feels as though . . . considerable areas of it are missing."

We went into the bathroom. She shut the door and turned on the light. She clucked with sympathy as she saw my face. I sat on the edge of the tub while she washed the gouges. There was cotton and adhesive tape in the cabinet. She put small bandages over the more serious wounds. She stood and looked at me for

a moment. The impudent eyes went soft, suddenly. She put her hands on my shoulders and leaned over and kissed me full on the lips. It was a most odd sensation. I tried to cling to my loyalty to Martha, but in spite of my attempts at immobility I found that I was on my feet and my arms were wrapped around her small frame with a curious tightness.

She murmured, "Omar, you're kind of cute and silly."

My guilty conscience forced me to thrust her away. I said firmly, "This is hardly the time to go into character analysis. Tomorrow I shall be expected to shoot Mr. Dermody."

That sobered her. "But you can't!"

"That is the cause of the problem, Patricia."

We turned out the light and went back in and sat side by side on the bed, and I found that her fingers were tightly linked with mine. It was strangely pleasurable.

"What will they do with me?" she demanded.

"Since you are of no further use to him, Patricia, I shall suggest to him that it may be possible to force you to sign a release wherein you state that you came here of your own free will and left when you were ready. If it works, you will be released, and I suggest that you then hasten to the police and convince them that it would be wise to . . . ah . . . raid the joint."

"Gee, you're cute," she sighed, resting her head on my shoulder.

"Must you keep saying that?"

She seemed to radiate an air of intense vitality. Accustomed as I am to Martha's quiet ways, I found her aura most disturbing. In fact, after I had returned to my own room, the memory of her parting kiss kept me tossing with an odd restlessness.

Mr. Artigan, bristling with excitement and determination, joined me at breakfast. I said, "As to Miss Kelly, Mr. Artigan,



I feel it would be possible to work out—”

“Skip her, Anderson. What happened to your face?”

“Dull razor,” I said.

“We haven’t got any time to waste. Right now Dermody is in the City Hall on some business. We’ll get him as he comes down the steps. Rather, you will. Artie’s gone out to grab a car. He ought to be back any minute. Artie’ll drive for you. He’s better on a getaway than George is. George’ll be along to cover you just in case. George’ll have the rest of the dough with him. As soon as the job is done they’ll hand it over and drop you at the bus station. You’ll have time to take the first bus out before they clamp the lid on the town. That means I won’t be seeing you again, Anderson. Give my regards to Nicky. Better run up and get your bag. I think Artie’s out there now.”

“But Miss Kelly—”

“Skip that. That’s our problem. There won’t be any trouble about her. I can promise you that.”

I had no time to think, they hurried me so. Artie had stolen a small green sedan. George and my suitcase were in back. I had placed the box of our new items in the suitcase with the sole exception of the Zing-Bang pistol, which was tucked into my belt. I sat beside Artie. He seemed awfully nervous, but George, in the back seat, minus his chauffeur’s uniform, was humming happily, checking the load in his silenced pistol.

Artie drove fast and expertly, but without breaking any traffic laws. I had a difficult time swallowing a lump that kept coming up into my throat. They parked across from the wide marble steps of the City Hall. A small man standing on the corner made a furtive gesture with his hand and scurried away.

“Good,” said Artie, “He’s still in there.”

“Artigan says do it this way,” George said in his silky voice, “Get over there on

the other side like you were waiting for a bus. Dermody’s wearing grey slacks and a white sport jacket, a tan straw hat with a green and grey ribbon. He’s tall and heavy. When we spot him, we’ll roll the car forward a few feet. You keep watching us. We’ll be covering you every minute, baby. This would be a hell of a time to cross Artigan, believe me. Walk along the sidewalk and time it so you get him when he’s halfway down the steps. Empty that cannon of yours into his fat belly and then sprint for that corner down there. We’ll be going around the corner with the door open just as you get there. Pile in fast and we’ll dump you at the Greyhound Station in four minutes. There’s a bus to L.A. leaving at nine ten. You ought to make it okay.”

I WALKED woodenly across the street. It seemed that all colors were intensified. The sun shone brightly and it was a very poor day for dying. All the women were beautiful and the air smelled sweet, even impregnated as it was with gasoline fumes.

Sweat ran in streams down my ribs. In too brief a time the green sedan moved forward. I turned slowly and saw the man they had described coming out of the City Hall. He was smiling and chatting with another man of much the same type. No policeman had appeared to resolve my dilemma. My mind had ceased to function. All I could think of was the deadly weapon in George’s capable hand. I walked slowly along the sunlit sidewalk, stopped and turned, looking up the wide marble steps. Mr. Dermody glanced at me. I gave him what I guess must have been a painfully shy smile as I took our new product out. I pointed it at him. The man with Dermody gave a little yelp and scrambled back up the steps. Dermody stared at what I must admit is a most vicious looking weapon, his face slowly going grey.

The spring was wound tight, I knew. I pressed the trigger. I must admit that at that moment I felt a certain disgust with our new product. You might say that the brisk snapping of our loudest variety of caps was somewhat anticlimatic, and the built-in siren of which I was so proud sounded merely like a tin whistle. The entire eight caps exploded, however.

Mr. Dermody's eyes rolled back up into his head and he pitched forward down the steps. I was frozen with horror as I saw his head hit the steps, heard the sickening crack it made. The straw hat rolled down to my feet. Women screamed and men yelled hoarsely. A victim of real panic, I ran for the corner. The car was there, moving slowly, the door open, as George had promised.

I piled in, much too frightened to do anything except gasp for air. George reached over from the back seat and twisted our new product out of my slippery hand. He examined it and said a number of very bad words.

"Bus station ahead," Artie said.

"Skip it," George growled, "We're taking this screwball back to the house."

George and I dropped off as Artie sped on to dispose of the stolen car. George prodded me roughly in the small of the back with the gun he held as we went up the drive to the side door.

Artigan stood at the foot of the stairs and his eyes widened as I came in, winc-

ing each time George's gun jabbed me.

"Just what the hell is this?" Artigan demanded.

George handed him the gun. "Ask this guy, boss. This is what he shot Dermody with."

Artigan examined the weapon with an intensely bewildered expression. I said, using a portion of my planned speech, "You will notice that the caps can be easily inserted by sliding the butt plate down. The spring is of the best quality steel available and guaranteed to—"

"Shut your face," Artigan said. The hall phone rang. He picked it up. He listened for a few minutes and then roared, "How the hell do I know?" He slammed the phone back on the cradle and rocked from side to side.

"That," he said, "was our friend from Homicide. Dermody's dead. Heart attack. They got twenty witnesses some screwball fires at him with a cap gun and he drops dead. He wants to know what he should do next."

My heart sank. I knew that despite what legal interpretation was made of the matter, I was ethically guilty of murder—murder in the first degree.

"Take this clown in my office and hold a gun on him, George. I'm going to take a chance and phone Nicky."

We had a long and uncomfortable wait in the office. George hummed softly. The slow minutes crept by. When Artigan

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came in he looked like a man who might drop any moment from weariness.

He stared at me. "All right. You're not Jumpy Anderson. You don't match the description. Just who the hell are you?"

"I am Omar Dudley, Sales Manager of the Idle Hour Novelties Company. I am afraid that your Mr. Anderson was killed in such a way that it was thought that I was killed. At least I experienced the rather extraordinary sensation of reading an account of my own death."

Artigan stared at me. He smiled, but there was something in that smile which had the same effect as a trickle of ice water down the spine. "I regret, Mr. Dudley, that you have become so well informed on our particular problems. You are a man of honor, I imagine."

"Of course."

"That makes it quite impossible for you to be released. Your honor would send you running to the law, wouldn't it?"

"Of course," I said.

"We saw no reason last night to keep you out of the Kelly girl's room. She was the dull razor, I imagine. I suppose you had a nice long chat with her."

"No," I said, too quickly and too loudly.

He still wore his smile. I wondered how I had ever managed to see him as a distinguished-looking man.

"I don't like to be crude, Mr. Dudley. I am going to have to keep you in this room under guard. We'll have the Kelly girl brought down and guarded here also. You can tell her, if you see fit, that your futures are pretty limited."

I could not get the dryness out of my mouth. "What do you mean?"

"Tonight we're going to take the two of you on a moonlight boat ride, complete with cinder blocks and wire."

"Isn't that a bit . . . extreme?"

"This is an extreme situation, Mr. Dudley."

He left and soon Patricia was thrust

forcibly into the room. She saw at once that I had been properly identified. George seemed quietly amused. He sat behind the desk with the gun on the blotter in front of him. Patricia and I were seated on straight chairs, some five feet apart, the chairs backed up against the wall some six feet from the desk. George had no objection to our talking with each other. I brought her up to date.

Contrary to what I had been led to believe, the condemned were not given a hearty meal. We were given no meal at all. Oddly enough it was this deliberate oversight which finally broke down the final barrier of disbelief in my mind. As I have mentioned, I am a mild man of even temper. Also, I am logical. Logic was difficult to achieve when I could look over and see the slender line of Patricia's throat, the stubborn little chin, the impudent nose. However, I managed. Logic said that if we were to die—and Artigan had no purpose in bluffing us—then any risk taken to avoid that dire end was justified. Also, following the same pattern, if Patricia were to be of maximum use to me, she should be informed of her fate-to-be. I told her. She turned as white as paper, then slowly the color came back. Her chin went up and her eyes narrowed. I managed to give her a long and solemn wink, hoping that it would infer to her that I intended to make some effort.

To test George's reactions I made a sudden movement. Even before I had completed it the ugly muzzle of the gun pointed at a spot between my eyes.

"Careful, baby," he whispered.

After considerable thought, I asked him if I might get a fresh handkerchief from my suitcase.

"Go ahead. But don't try anything."

**H**E WATCHED ME carefully and made me lift the suitcase up onto a chair where he could see more clearly. My box of samples was open. I

very casually took our new Super-Dribble Glass and set it on the edge of the desk. I palmed the Wiggly without any clear idea of how I would use it. Taking a fresh handkerchief I sat down.

After what seemed a suitable interval, I remarked that I was thirsty. Patricia said that she was thirsty also. George was inclined to ignore us. Patricia began to plead with him. The small bar was off to his left. He opened it, stuck glasses under the tap, then placed them on the edge of the desk. We drank, and I made myself drink noisily, a mannerism that I detested.

Opening the bar exposed the line of bottles. I saw George run his tongue along his lips. At last he reached out and took the glass that had come from my suitcase. As he did so, I slowly pulled my feet back under my chair, preparing to move with all the speed of which I was capable. He poured two fingers of whisky into the Super-Dribble, put in two ice cubes and filled it from the soda syphon.

As I was instrumental in suggesting the design and working with our technicians while they perfected it, I knew the precise angle which would activate the spring in the base.

George tilted the glass to his lips. He took two sips and then the glass reached the proper angle. The whisky and soda was hurled full into his face, forcing itself up his nose and flooding his eyes. As it did so, I lunged for the desk. His hand slapped for the gun, but his aim was bad. I had it first. I reversed it and in my haste I inadvertently pulled the trigger. The silencer was extremely effective. There was a tiny coughing sound and the slug removed the lobe of George's left ear before burying itself in the paneling behind him.

His hands went up as though they were tied to springs. He was still gasping and choking.

"Let's go, honey," Patricia said.

I backed to the door, keeping George

covered. I believe that is the correct expression. I found the knob behind me and opened the door. Much to my dismay, a hard object was prodded into my back and I recognized Brenda's voice as she said, "Drop that, you naughty boy."

My finger inadvertently convulsed on the trigger. The impact of the slug spun George in a half circle in the swivel chair. The gun slid out of my hand.

"Get back in there!" Brenda said.

George's back was to us, his chin on his chest. I wondered if he were dead. Oddly enough, I didn't seem to care. I put my hands over my head. The Wiggly was still in my left hand. With my hands in the air I wound it up.

Brenda went around the desk to take a look at George, the gun in her hand aimed in our general direction, her left hand resting on the desk top. I risked setting the Wiggly down on the desk top. It began to scuttle busily toward her hand.

She did not notice it until it actually touched her hand, its mechanical legs working busily, sliding on the smooth wood of the desk.

When she saw it she gave a strangled scream and fell back onto George.

It was then that Patricia proved that she had the true salesman's instinct for improvisation. She leaned across the desk and as Brenda came up, she swung that hard little fist the same way she had used it on me. But this time she had more elbow room and the light was better. Brenda stood for a fraction of a second, her eyes glazed and faintly crossed, and then she went down onto George again.

Patricia snatched up Brenda's gun and I took the one I had dropped on the floor. Soong met us in the hallway. He gave a high, thin cry and raced for the kitchen. We went down and out the door. The big blue sedan was there and I jumped behind the wheel. The key was in the ignition and the motor caught at once. As we streaked toward the big closed gate Pa-



tricia leaned out the window on her side, yelling, "Eeee-YAH-hoooo!"

The big gate offered only momentary resistance. The tires screamed on the street and I turned toward the shopping section.

Patricia stopped yelling long enough to give me advice. We decided against the police station due to the possibility of running into too many friends of Mr. Artigan. She said that as far as she knew, the Pacific City *Courier* was beholden to no one.

I made a slight mistake in judgment when I pulled up in front of the Courier building. The front bumper sheared off a city hydrant. The hard stream of water, as big around as a man's thigh, shot up through the motor and was deflected out through the grill in a series of fine, hard streams that reached pedestrians eighty feet away.

In the excitement we ran into the building and up the stairs to the news room on the third floor. In a remarkably short time we were closeted in a big office with the editor-in-chief.

In the extra that came out at six o'clock, our pictures appeared on the first page. It was all most confusing. All I wished to do was to clear myself of criminal intent. It was only incidental that, to quote the managing editor, my testimony should "smash Artigan, break the back of the Pardo mob and give the reform government its first chance in fifteen years."

They brought food up to us and we ate with enormous hunger. Every once in a while somebody would come in with more flash bulbs and take our pictures. It began to get very wearing. Our Mr. Darben managed to reach me by phone and inform me that he had contacted Mr. Max Idelhaur in the east and had given him the news. He stated that Mr. Idelhaur seemed most pleased over the publicity.

It was at that moment that I remembered the ten thousand dollars. A horrid

urge struck me with the force of a blow. If I should say nothing about that money . . . however that would not be honest. When for a few moments we were left alone, I told Patricia of my oversight, and of my intent to inform the authorities.

I had no idea that her blue eyes could get so hard. "You lunk, don't you think you ought to have a little payment for mental anguish? We can get in there and get the money."

"I would have to declare it on my income tax."

"Go ahead. Declare it. But if you tell these people, some cop is going to drag it home on a string to the wife and babies."

"How long do we have to stay here?"

"Until the whole crew is rounded up. So far, Artie is the only one missing. And George, bless his flinty little heart, is going to recover."

At that moment the door opened and a tall girl came in. She reminded me curiously of Martha. The same type.

She said, "You dear people, you! I must trouble you for material for a Sunday feature. Tell me all about your romance. When do you plan to be married?"

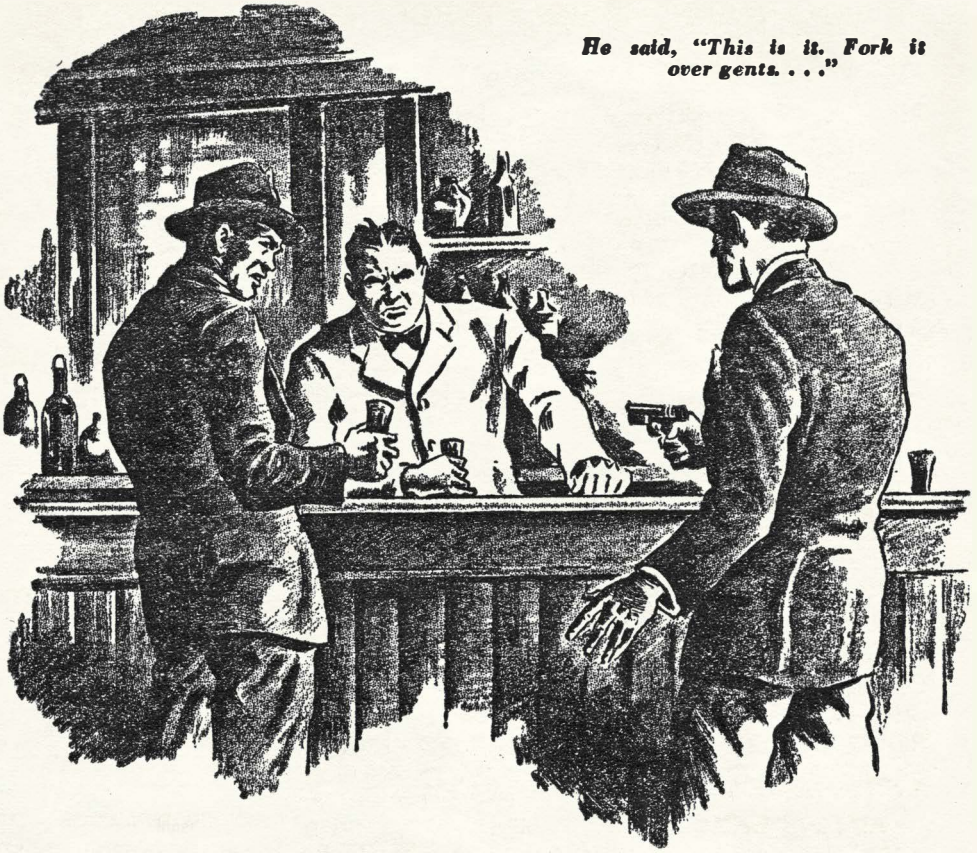
Patricia stood up. There was a glint in her eye. She said, "I must advise you that our romance, as you so inaccurately put it, is merely the product of a period of propinquity during which time we were in mortal danger, and as such should be discounted." It surprised me to find that she could speak so well and so clearly.

I stood up too. I thought of Martha. I thought of the bank account. I folded Patricia into my arms with a fervor that astounded me. Just before my lips met hers I murmured, "Cut the chatter, darlin'. Let's move onto the front burner."

From a great distance a very annoying voice kept saying, "Mr. Dudley! Wait! Mr. Dudley! Just a moment!"

A good salesman can ignore distractions.

*He said, "This is it. Fork it  
over gents. . . ."*



# Mind Over Mayhem

*If somebody threatened you with a bottle of  
scotch—and all you had to defend yourself  
with was a gun, would you ask—as did Sam—  
for a hole in the head?*

**T**HE OTHERS had straggled out one by one and I was the only remaining customer. The bartender drifted down and wiped the bar in front of me listlessly, and yawned.

"Why the hell don't you go home, Jerry?" he asked conversationally.

I put the tabloid I'd been glancing at

to one side and grinned at him. "Haven't got a home, Sam; just a hotel room with four walls and a bed and a chair or two and a couple hundred pocket books. I'd rather sit here and look at you."

He leaned on the bar before me and said, "You oughta get married, Jerry. Why don't you ask that girl . . . what was

● **By Mack Reynolds** ●



her name? The blonde, pretty little girl."  
"Frances."

"Yeah, that's right. Frances. Why don't you ask her to marry you?"

I twisted my glass on the bar, lifted it over to a new spot, twisted it again and then again, making small wet circles.

"I did," I said. "A couple of months ago I asked her, 'Why don't we get married, Frances?'"

"Well, what'd she say?" Sam asked, yawning again.

"She just laughed and said, 'Who'd have either of us, Jerry?'"

Sam snorted. "I've heard that one before."

"It's almost two o'clock. You can't expect me to be original this time of the night."

A guy came in and took a stool two down from me and Sam walked over to him.

"Only fifteen minutes to go," Sam said. "What'll it be?"

"Bourbon," the stranger told him. "You gents like to have one with me?"

Usually the guy who comes into a bar the last few minutes before closing has already been drinking pretty heavy; he's been put out of a place that shuts up early and he's looking for that last drink that's suddenly become so important. This guy was an exception; he was cold sober. About thirty, which makes him a few years younger than me and maybe twenty years younger than Sam, he was neatly dressed and had an air of sharpness that seemed out of place this time of night.

"Thanks," I told him. "I could use another beer."

Sam poured the stranger's whiskey, drew my beer and then got himself a glass of vermouth, which is the only stuff I've ever seen Sam drink.

Sam said, "*Prosit.*"

The stranger said, "*Skoal.*"

I said, "Here's how," and we all started working on our drinks.

I said something about the weather and they both agreed and everybody lapsed into silence. After a minute or two, the stranger started looking at the tabloid I'd discarded.

Finally he laughed and said, "Did you see this item about the old lady that socked some punk who was trying to hold up her liquor store? She slugged him with a bottle of Scotch."

Sam said, "Did it break the bottle? She would've saved money if she'd used something cheaper."

"Every once in a while you read something like that," I said. "That old doll must be a terror. I'd hate to be her old man."

The stranger finished off his drink and ordered another. Sam glanced up at the clock, saw we had time, and said this one was on him. I had another beer.

"The guy was an amateur," the stranger said. "If he'd had any sense, he wouldn't have tried anything on the old lady."

"Hell," I said, "How'd he know, when he pulled the gun on her, that she was going to haul off and conk him with a bottle? It was just one of life's little surprises."

"He should've sized her up before pulling the caper. If he'd taken his time, he could've seen she was the type that'd blow her top and start screaming, or throwing things or some such. Five minutes of analyzing her character and he would've seen he'd better go somewhere else."

"Maybe you're right," Sam said argumentatively, "but how would he go about analyzing her character in just the few minutes time he'd have? He couldn't hang around the store very long or it'd look suspicious and she'd be calling for the cops."

"You wouldn't need very long," the stranger told him. "You can size a person up in just a few minutes by the way they walk and talk and by their gestures—that sort of stuff."

I grinned. "Okay. Size me up. If you were analyzing my character, would you go ahead and stick me up or not?"

**H**E SMILED back. "Sure I would. You're the easy going type. Even if you had much money on you, and you probably never have, you wouldn't think it was worth taking a chance on getting yourself killed."

Sam grunted, "That sounds like Jerry, all right. How about me?"

The stranger flicked his hand almost disdainfully. "You're easy. I'd take a chance on you right off the bat. You'd be scared stiff at the first sight of a gun."

The old boy was irritated. "Where'd you get that idea?"

"It's the little things I watch," the stranger said. "Like the fact that you crook your little finger when you pick up your glass. A thing like that tells a lot."

Sam had been just about ready to take a sip from his vermouth. Sure enough, the little finger was crooked. It looked sort of ridiculous on the part of a big burly guy like Sam.

Sam snorted.

The easy-going smile left the stranger's face. He put his right hand in a pocket and brought out a snub-nosed revolver.

His voice was chilly now. "Let's try the experiment out," he said. "This is it. Fork it over, gents."

I said, "I'll be damned," and got my hands up in a hurry. "Take it easy, buddy—sometimes those things go off," I told him nervously.

He smiled a little, contemptuous smile at me and wagged the gun at Sam. "You too, big boy," he snapped. "Put 'em up."

Sam stood there, his two beefy red hands on the bar, and stared blankly at the gunman for a long moment. Finally he gave a deep sigh, and began to make his way around the end of the bar.

"Hold it," the stranger said sharply. "Get back to that cash register and—"

"In your hat," Sam said, coming toward him.

"Take it easy, Sam!" I warned him shrilly, expecting to hear the gun's roar at any split second.

But he kept advancing.

A muscle was twitching in the gunman's neck; his finger began to tighten on the trigger. "You're asking for it," he snarled.

"And over your ears," Sam said, and reached out suddenly and hit the guy sharply across the wrist with the edge of his hand. The gun dropped to the floor, and Sam stooped quickly and scooped it up with his left hand.

"Call a cop, Jerry," Sam told me softly, keeping the gunman covered. He made his way around the end of the bar again, and took his old place.

I went down to the other end of the room, where Sam has a pay phone booth, and shakily made the call.

By the time I came back I was boiling, I was so mad. "You conceited crackpot," I snapped at Sam. "Just because he said you'd be yellow in an emergency, you didn't have to show off like that."

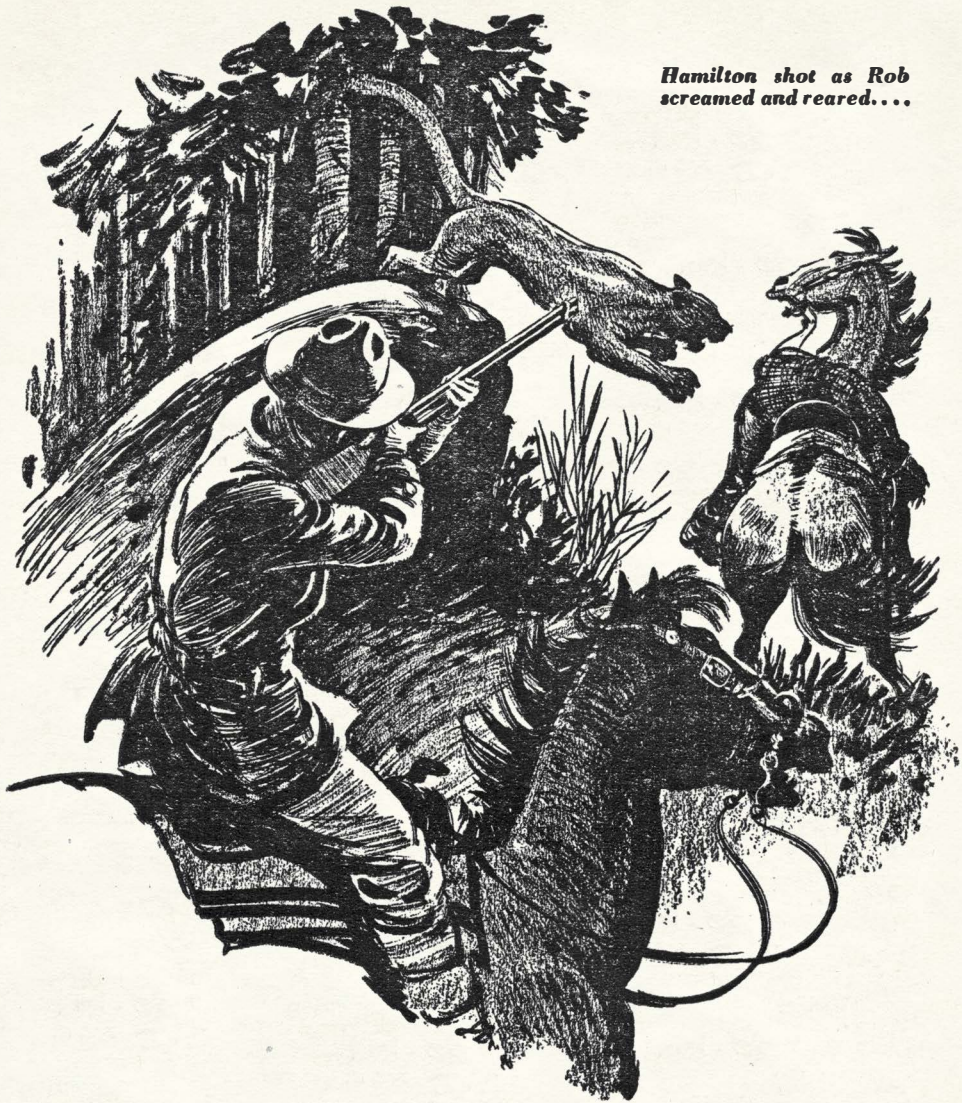
The gunman had slumped back onto a stool, perspiration standing out heavily on his forehead. He started to say something, but then shut up.

Sam shrugged. "There wasn't any danger of his shooting. Any guy with enough brains to figure out that character analysis stunt before pulling his stickups has too much sense to kill a man. He wouldn't want to risk a murder rap. As it is, he'll only get sent up for a year or so."

He picked up his vermouth glass and finished his drink. I noticed that he still crooked his little finger. He saw my eyes on it and grinned wryly. He held it out so that I could see a small white scar running along the knuckle.

"Piece of shell fragment creased it back during the first war. Haven't been able to bend that finger since," he said.





*Hamilton shot as Rob screamed and reared....*

# TERROR'S NIGHT

*To friend and enemy he issued one inexorable challenge—the unseen killer of terror mountain—“Who dies there?”*

**By I. R. Austin**

HAMILTON was just rinsing off his supper dishes when the bell on the wall jangled sharply. He counted the rings. Two short, one long; it was his station. In two strides he was across the cabin and had picked up the receiver.

“Tolmie Peak lookout,” he said.

"Longmire calling. That you, Hamilton?"

He laughed. "Now who else'd be up here on this forsaken peak?"

"Thought it might be Farrell. He oughta be there."

"He's not coming tonight, is he?"

"Yeah, with your supplies. He picked them up in Carbon River and was heading for Pete's to get the horses. We tried to get him at Pete's. Listen, Hamilton, there's a killer up there—"

"You're telling me," cut in Hamilton. "I've seen him!"

"Tonight?"

"No, but he's roaming these woods since Saturday."

"Who'n the hell—"

"The cat," said Hamilton. "A nice big black mountain cat. I haven't had my face outside the station after dark since I saw him."

"Not the cat, Hamilton. McCloney's up there."

Hamilton let out a low whistle. "When did he get out?"

"When—or how—we don't know. We just know he turned up in Carbon River tonight. Somebody called us. Said McCloney's been there all evening drinking and shooting off his mouth as how he's gunning for Farrell. Then somebody let out that Farrell's over there packing in your supplies tonight, and McCloney lit out faster'n rabbit—carrying a gun."

A cold shiver ran up Hamilton's spine. "What time did Farrell leave?"

"We don't know. Nobody answers at Pete's. Either they're both out loading the horses or maybe Pete's coming up with Farrell."

"McCloney's not the kind to jump two men. One unarmed man is more his game. You think I ought to start down?"

"No, with the cat loose and McCloney skunking around with a rifle, you'd better stick close to the station. We'll try Pete's again."

Hamilton hung the receiver up thoughtfully. He lifted his rifle from the hook where it hung on the wall, propped it carefully against the door. Then he snapped off the light that lit the second story cabin room which served as kitchen and bedroom, and peered out through the glass that completely circled the upper half of the lookout station.

The blackness made him dizzy. He could hardly make out the railing that ran around the outside catwalk. On a bright night he could see a good part of the trail that wound up the rocky climb from Eunice Lake. It was the only trail a horse could take that last mile up, but there were numerous foot trails, dangerous and slippery, but navigable if a man knew the territory. Tonight, when even the stars were hidden behind layers of grey, rolling clouds, a man could cover the whole distance from Eunice on the open switchbacks without the slightest fear of detection until he hit the open space at the top, that two hundred feet of rocky, shale-covered ground. It was on this area that Hamilton concentrated. Dark as it was, he counted on spotting any sign of movement. Ten minutes passed and the night was still quiet.

Hamilton stretched out on his cot. He would have liked to read, but he knew better than to turn the light on. A man outlined in yellow glass would make easy pickings for a rifle. McCloney might be hunting Farrell, but he certainly hadn't forgotten Hamilton's part in his arrest two years ago.

It had been Hamilton who had first stumbled upon the carcass of the buck, shot between the eyes, but it had been Farrell, veteran of the woods and familiar with the mountain terrain, who had been assigned to the job of tracking down the killer. Forty miles of woods and mountains is no place to go looking for a man who shoots between the eyes unless you know every inch of that territory,



know where a horse can climb, know which passes are clear of snow, know the destination of each of those winding switchbacks, the tricky mountain streams, know where you'll turn a corner and face a sheer drop, and most important, know the likely haunts of a lone hunter out for illegal game. But it hadn't taken him long to track down McCloney and his cabin, hidden away up almost to the foot of the Edmunds Glacier—the cabin which served as a cache for nearly a hundred skins, dried, tanned and ready to sell in Canada. The three day trip from the cabin back to Ranger's headquarters must have been tough. No one ever got the whole story. All they knew was that Farrell turned up in Longmire with a bullet still lodged in his right shoulder, grim but still captor.

Hamilton looked at his watch. Nine o'clock. If Farrell had picked up the supplies at the general store, six would have been the latest. Allow an hour to drive to Pete's, a half hour to load. An hour and a half was plenty of time to make the mountain trail of three miles to the lookout. Hamilton was getting fidgety lying there in the dark. Once he thought he heard something. He waited. It was quiet. He thought, *by this time they ought to be at least to Eunice*. He moved across the room and noiselessly slid back the bolt. Cautiously he stepped out onto the catwalk. The night was still.

Suddenly he gripped the railing and listened hard. He heard the echoes. One shot about a mile down, he estimated. It was hard to tell with the echoes still sounding. Why just one shot? Because Farrell wasn't carrying a gun?

**I**T TOOK Hamilton half a second to clear his mind, and another half to spin back into the cabin for his coat, gun, and flashlight. Halfway down the wooden steps he stopped, swung back up and reentered the cabin. He lifted the receiver from its hook and listened. The

line was dead. Hamilton's eyes narrowed and his lips were set. McCloney was not only out there shooting down a man in the dark, but he had made sure no help would get through to Longmire by phone. This time Hamilton took the steps three at a time. Rob was itching nervously around in his stall. Hamilton swung his saddle on the big horse and backed him out.

Rob knew the trail down even in pitch darkness. He picked his way warily, stepping over the loose stones and feeling his way close to the inside. Hamilton held his rifle in position with one hand, and with the other hand the flashlight, ready to break the darkness. He knew the horse would sense the cat before he was dangerously near. The light might keep the cat away if it surprised him. The woods were ominously still, as if all the gentler animals had cleared the stage for the black killer. It was only the cat that Hamilton was worried about. McCloney would probably beat it back to Carbon River and head for Canada.

There was a dankness about the woods. It smelled of decaying leaves and dirty snow. Even in late June there were still patches here and there dotting the mountainside with its dingy white. Hamilton sat stiffly, not daring to relax his watch for even a moment. Somewhere along the path or halfway down the side lay a dark, inert figure. He had to spot it. It might be anyplace between here and Eunice Lake.

The cat would smell blood. A wounded man made easy prey. Hamilton shivered at the picture in his mind. He had to find Farrell soon.

Suddenly Rob stopped. He shied to the right, dangerously near space. Hamilton could see nothing. He turned the light on and flashed it into the woods. There was the frightened whinny of another horse, and Rob answered. Then the fast, muffled beats of hoofs on leaves and a horse ap-

peared from the woods. Hamilton recognized the black mare. It was one of Pete's. Not a pack horse, but one of his best riders. She was breathing hard, but came to a stand when he grabbed her reins. Whatever had frightened her wasn't close now, or she wouldn't have stopped running. Probably the shot had set her off. He whipped the reins around in back and they started on.

Half a mile later the mare began to pull. They slowed, and Hamilton swung the light down to the right. It was a sheer drop. The path ahead was clear, and the woods revealed nothing but a hopeless tangle of underbrush. The mare was pulling hard on the reins, so he let her go and swung off Rob. There was something in the woods, but the mare went no further than the edge. She whinnied softly as Hamilton waded into the brush. Not far in, he saw a flattened piece of ground where something had lain. A trail of broken branches led further into the woods. Hamilton was jumpy. The forest seemed to be closing in. There was a crashing behind him. He whirled, and the flashlight shattered against a tree.

"Damn mare," he muttered. "This is a hell of a place to be without a light." There was no use looking further. He turned and began to feel his way back. He hadn't come in far, he estimated; a hundred yards maybe.

He was close to the horses when it hap-

pened. His foot came down on something soft. It rolled as he stepped harder. For a moment he stopped breathing and thinking, then he forced himself to reach down. He felt sick as he ran his hand over the body. It seemed to be one piece. The hand was warm.

"Farrell?"

The man moaned.

"Farrell, it's me, Hamilton. Can you talk?" He heard Farrell catch a breath. "Can I lift you? Where did he get you?"

The figure moaned again. The speech was thick.

"I can't hear you, Farrell. Where are you bleeding? I lost my light."

The wounded man was trying to say something. "Bro—broken," he whispered.

Hamilton quickly felt the leg. It seemed all right, but the body was bent at a strange angle from the hip.

"I heard a shot," said Hamilton.

"Ca—cat," the whisper died out and the form was again limp.

"The cat!" breathed Hamilton. Then it hadn't been McCloney shooting. The mare must have thrown Farrell a good thirty yards. *The shot?* he asked himself. *Farrell must have shot at the cat before the mare bolted.*

He had to get him out of there. But how, with a broken hip, he asked himself. What a tumble! It's a wonder his neck wasn't broken. He only hoped the shot had scared the cat to a safe distance.



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There was certainly no danger in the near vicinity now, or the mare wouldn't have come barging in after him. But Hamilton hadn't forgotten McCloney. He whistled for Rob. The big horse came sidling up and stood still while Hamilton lifted the limp figure onto the saddle.

There was no question of which way to go. Pete's was over two miles as compared to less than a mile back to the lookout, but there was nothing at the station to cope with a broken hip. Pete at least had a car. They had to go on.

Hamilton was nervous on the mare. He didn't like the way she skittered. She was a rider, not a mountain horse, and not used to the smell of wild animal or the tricky trails of the switchbacks. Rob was setting an easy pace, jogging along easily in the dark, his limp cargo rising and falling with the gait. Rob was as surefooted as a mountain goat, but still he took it slow. Minutes seemed like hours. It was only five minutes to Eunice, but to Hamilton it seemed endless till they rounded the last bend and came upon the little lake. It looked like a smooth, flat table in the dark. They skirted only a corner of the open section, but Hamilton didn't breathe until they were again into the woods. With only the cat to worry about, the woods seemed evil, but with the threat of McCloney again, their enfolding darkness seemed like a protecting cloak.

**J**UST EXACTLY when Hamilton became aware of the uneasiness of the horses, he wasn't sure. It was gradual. But now even Rob was acting strangely. Once he stopped and turned his black nose in towards the woods. He sniffed, then as if to warn Hamilton, he turned his head back and whinnied. There was no doubt in Hamilton's mind. The cat was near.

Hamilton raised his rifle, his finger locked over the trigger. The horses were

moving, but they snorted noisily. Hamilton kept his eyes glued to the shadowy wall of trees—waiting. His arm was steady, but the blood pounded in his throat.

It happened in a split second. A long form hurtling through the air ahead. Hamilton shot just as Rob screamed and reared. The cat fell back and Rob regained his footing. At first Hamilton thought he'd hit the horse. The cat was crouching now, ready to spring again. Hamilton fired once more. The mare bolted and he grabbed the pommel of the saddle and hung on.

They covered a mile in what seemed a few short minutes. Rob was no longer in sight. *He must be hurt*, thought Hamilton, or he'd never travel at that speed. The mare began to slow after another mile, because the pine needles had turned to rocks and leaves as the path neared the bottom. The great form of Rob was again visible picking his way over the logs on the marshy end of Mowich Lake. The light was on in Pete's cabin, and Hamilton breathed a prayer of relief.

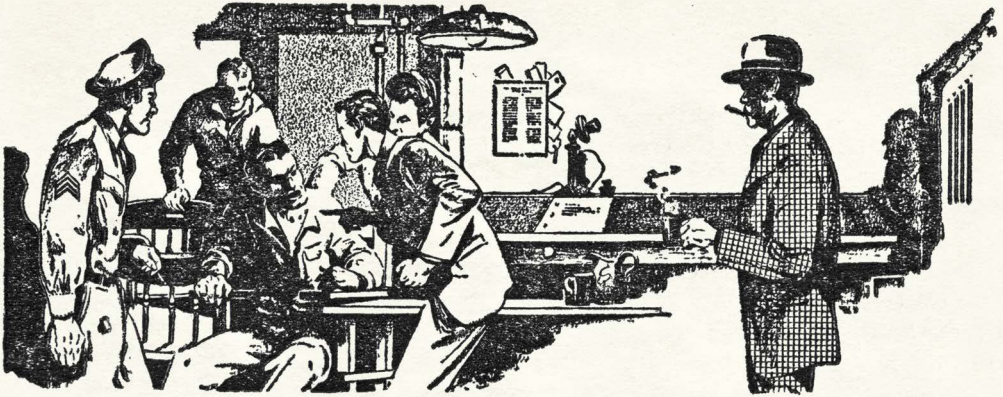
The door swung open as they came into the clearing. Pete stood outlined in the light, squinting at the arrivals. Hamilton tried to call their usual "Hallo," but his throat was too dry. He swung off the mare and came into the arc of light.

"What the hell happened, Hamilton?" asked Pete.

"It's Farrell," he answered. "Help me get him off."

"Farrell! You're out of your mind! Farrell's inside sleeping. We've spent the evening looking for this damn mare and my best saddle." Pete stepped off the porch and grabbed the reins of the big horse, swinging him around into the light. "Your line's dead. Been trying to call all—It's McCloney! Hamilton, you've got McCloney here!"

Hamilton sat down on the steps. He wanted to laugh, but no sound came forth.



# THE THIRD DEGREE

## By Hallack McCord

(Answers on page 89)

**W**HEN IT comes to criminals and crime investigation, do you know the difference between a donkey rider and a Dr. Bates? Or, put differently, how's your underworldology holding up? Below are twenty questions about detectives and crooks. If you can answer eighteen or more correctly, you rank as an expert. Answer sixteen or seventeen and you're still good. But answer only fourteen or less, and you're only fair. Incidentally, a "donkey rider" is a short change artist, and a "Dr. Bates" is a dangerous ex-con.

1. If a crook acquaintance of yours referred to one of his "schoolmates," what would he be talking about?

2. What is the meaning of the term, "police storm?"

3. If a convict referred to a "P.K.," is it likely he would be talking about a prison warden?

4. According to the underworld's way of thinking, what is a "Dolores?"

5. True or false? "Mitt glommer" is a term members of the underworld sometimes use in reference to a politician.

6. What antidote would you try on a person who had been given a large dose of prussic acid about an hour previously?

7. What well known drug is sometimes said to be derived from the "poppy of sleep?"

8. When a drug addict is subjected to the "reduction cure," what is done to him?

9. True or false? The underworld slang term, "lamous," means "harmless."

10. If an underworld character you were acquainted with told you he was going to visit a "kewpie," which of the following individuals would you think he was planning to call on? A baby? A blonde woman? A very fat man?

11. What are two meanings of the slang expression "in hock?"

12. If a crook friend told you he was "going to hit the hump," which one of the following things would you think he was planning to do? Attempt to escape from prison? Make an effort to borrow a large sum of money? Get married?

13. If an underworld stool pigeon sold you some "goulash," would you be inclined to think you'd been gypped?

14. True or false? A "fuzey" is an unskilled crook.

15. If a crook acquaintance told you he was heading for the "front room," where would you think he was going?

16. In the language of the underworld, what is an "eight wheeler?"

17. True or false? Generally speaking, it would be impossible for a crook, bent on disguising himself by plastic surgery, to have a protruding jaw shortened.

18. True or false? The amateur detective is more likely to spot a visible fingerprint than a latent one.

19. True or false? Attempts to identify a bullet as having been fired by a specific gun were not made more than twenty-five years ago.

20. True or false? A "doormatter" is a petit larceny thief.



# CORPSE IN WAITING

## CHAPTER ONE

### Kill to Go

**C**ANTRELL ducked into the gin mill, walked straight back to the phone booth. He could have hidden in the men's room, but if the girl had spotted him, she'd just wait till he came out. From the phone booth he could watch the front door. Three minutes later she marched in, white-faced and hard-heeled. She gave the bar one sweeping glance and headed for the phone booth. Cantrell

sighed and opened the door of the booth.

"Hi, Peggy," he said.

Of the two Shane girls, Peggy, with her red hair, creamy, satiny skin and blue eyes, was the more beautiful. Barbara had been black-haired, a Madonna of a girl. Barbara was dead. A bullet, a bare ounce of lead, had shattered her beauty forever.

Overnight, Peggy had changed into a hard-faced woman, looking years older, but her brother, Dave, was worse. Dave was half demented, a self-appointed avenger scourged with concentrated fury.



*A voice said furiously,  
"I'll shoot you—even if  
I have to do it in the  
back. . . ."*



*As a detective, his best girl thought Cantrell  
was out of this world—and did her best to  
send him there!*

## **By Larry Holden**



Peggy said shortly, "Where's Dave?"  
"Back in the hotel room," Cantrell's  
voice was quiet, soothing. "I gave him a

pill. He hasn't slept for three nights."

"What are you doing here in Newark?"

"I was following up a lead. On the  
dame that gave Van Wyk his alibi. She  
had a room on Mount Prospect Avenue."

Van Wyk had been Barbara's husband.  
He had stood trial for the murder, had



been acquitted. That is, the court had acquitted him—but the Shanes, brother and sister, had not and never would.

Peggy said, "Well?"

Cantrell touched her arm. "Look, Peg," he said persuasively, "why don't you and Dave let me handle this mess? Let's say Gracie Bonnel lied when she gave Van Wyk his alibi. Let's say Van Wyk wasn't ever near her that night. Now, if I can break her down, we can get a new trial on the basis of perjured testimony, and Van Wyk'll get the chair. That's what you want, isn't it? So why don't you two keep out of my hair and let me work it out?"

She listened, flinty-eyed, and when he finished, she thrust a newspaper under his nose with a shaking hand and said harshly, "Have you read the newspaper recently, mastermind?"

Cantrell looked down at the newspaper, up into her white, hate-pinchd face, then muttered, "Ah, hell! Come on, I'll buy you a drink."

He didn't have to look at the paper. He knew what was there. The pic was on page one with the caption—UNIDENTIFIED. And underneath it said, "Hit-and-run victim dies in St. Luke's Hospital without recovering consciousness." But the face was the soft, weak face of Gracie Bonnel, Van Wyk's alibi girl. It was impossible now to prove that she had lied, and Van Wyk was safe.

Safe—except for the half-crazed Dave Shane and the bitter fury of Peggy.

Peggy said accusingly, "He killed her, just as he killed Barbara for her money."

She always referred to Van Wyk as he. She never spoke of him by name, as if the very sound of those syllables would contaminate her.

Cantrell ordered two ryes at the bar, then said, "Could be. I mentioned that angle to the police last night. They looked into it. I went back this morning and talked to the chief of detectives, a tough

monkey and good cop named McNeil."

"Well? Well?"

Cantrell threw down his drink with a practiced flip of his wrist, then said slowly, "He gave Van Wyk a clean bill."

Peggy stared at him, then hissed, like a cat striking, "That's a lie!"

Cantrell misunderstood. "No," he said earnestly, "McNeil was leveling. He's not the kind of cop to cover for Van Wyk, or anybody. He was really convinced Van Wyk was in the clear and—"

The girl's hand licked out and the crack of her palm left a livid track across his cheek.

"You're the one who's covering for him!" she cried wildly. "How much did he pay you? Barbara left him a quarter of a million dollars. How big a slice are you cutting for yourself, Judas!"

He said reproachfully, "Peggy, you know better than that."

"You know where he is, don't you?"

Cantrell was silent. Van Wyk had disappeared immediately after the trial, but for the past ten days, Cantrell had known that Van Wyk and his brother, who was a lush, and his sister, had taken a cottage at Lake Powhatan, a summer resort.

Peggy said contemptuously, "I know you know, because I found out from the same place you did—the office boy of the lawyer who sends him his checks. You've known for nearly two weeks. Deny it!"

Cantrell did not deny it. "All right," he said, suddenly weary, "so now you know. What are you going to do, put a bullet in him, like Dave wants to? That'd be smart, wouldn't it? A cheap, quick trip to the electric chair."

"You knew and you kept it to yourself! Dave's paying you to find him, and you kept it to yourself!" Peggy cried witheringly. "How does it feel living with yourself, Judas? Do you go around patting yourself on the back, or do you just sit there admiring yourself in the mirror? How does it feel to be a louse?"

She laughed into his stricken face, a brassy, painful laugh, as if the hurt were deep inside her.

"No," she said. "I'm not going to shoot him. I'm going to do better than that. I'm going to make him wish he had never lived. He married Barbara for her money, you know. I was the one he really wanted. I was the one he loved, but I couldn't stand him. They're rotten, the whole clan of Van Wyk. I'm going back to him now, and I'm going to make him love me until he's out of his head with it. I'm going to marry him, and I'm going to make his life something that will make hell seem like an opium smoker's dream of paradise. He's going to suffer sixty seconds in every minute, sixty minutes every hour and twenty-four hours around the clock, until he puts a gun in his mouth and pulls the trigger. And I can do it! After he married Barbara, all I had to do was walk in the room and he'd turn veal white, and he'd get drunk and stay drunk for a week. I can do it!"

She laughed again, and it was half a sob. She knew what she was doing to Cantrell. Cantrell would never have touched the case if it hadn't been for her. The insurance companies were his clients, and he had never undertaken any private investigations. She and Cantrell were—had been—engaged to be married, and she had worn his ring proudly. Now she stripped it from her finger, then, with an oddly trembling gesture, laid it on the bar beside his empty glass.

"You're not to interfere with me," she said in a steely voice. "And I'm going to fix it so you don't. I'm going to the police myself. I'm going to tell them if Dave finds him, Dave'll kill him. I'll tell them that Dave is paying you to find him. So, if Dave does kill, that'll make you an accessory before the fact."

Cantrell said hoarsely, "For the love of God, Peg."

She went on woodenly, "You've been

wanting to keep Dave from finding Van. . . ." In actually speaking the name now, she seemed to be serving notice that she was in deadly earnest. "All right. That's your job from now on. You keep Dave away. I don't want Dave to hang for murder. I want Van to suffer, and I'm taking care of that myself. But if Dave *does* kill Van, believe me, you're going to hang with him, if I have to take the stand against you myself!"

She turned and, with her hand to her mouth, ran for the door. Cantrell, crying her name, lunged after her, became entangled in his bar stool and fell heavily. By the time he had picked himself up and sprinted out to the sidewalk, she had disappeared.

**D**AVE SHANE was still sleeping on the hotel bed when Cantrell strode into the room. Dave was a big man, six-two, rawboned, with a wiry thatch of harsh red hair. Even in repose, his angular face was forbidding, a face of raw violence.

Cantrell went straight to the closet, jerked out his suitcase and began throwing clothes into it. Dave sat up and stared at him.

"What's got into you?" he asked drowsily.

"Got another lead," said Cantrell without looking up.

"Leads, leads, nothing but leads," Dave grumbled. "If I'd known you were going to make it this tough, I'd of hired a bloodhound. Where we go this time?"

"This time it's solo."

"Come again?"

"This time you're staying put. I'll send you a telegram if anything turns up."

Dave lazily swung his legs over the edge of the bed and stood. "You been out in the sun too long?" he asked curiously.

Cantrell ignored him and walked over to the chest of drawers and began throwing shirts, underwear and socks into his



bag. Dave watched him with his hands on his hips. His suppressed violence was like an aura around him. You could almost smell it. He stood, hunched in poisoned, swelling silence as Cantrell swiftly stuffed his bag. He took a plunging step forward, and with a sweep of his arm knocked the bag from Cantrell's hand. Cantrell spun around and faced him, hot-eyed.

Dave said heavily, "Where you go, I go. Keep that straight. When you turn up that murdering brother-in-law of mine, I'm going to be right there on the spot."

Cantrell made a sharp, chopping motion with the side of his hand. "This time," he repeated evenly, "you're staying put."

Dave stared at him as if trying to puzzle it out. "Cut the horsing around, pal," he said, half angrily, half trying to laugh. "You're just going to make me sore and, hell, I don't want to get sore at you. Now be a good guy and tell me what's up."

Dave had a quarter of a million in the bank, but he looked, talked and acted like a stevedore. He was a throwback to the time when his family fought for blood and lived in trees. The Shanes were a tempestuous clan.

"I told you what was up," said Cantrell, as if deliberately goading the big man. "I'm going, and you're not. I'm tired of having you in my hair twenty-four hours of the day. You're a public menace, and you're going to get both of us in trouble. Is that plain enough?"

"Is this the cross, pal? Is this the kiss-off?"

"Act your age."

"I'll kill you, boy. And I mean that."

Cantrell knew he meant it, but he laughed. "You're not going to kill anybody," he jeered. "You might as well know it now. If anybody gets Van Wyk, it's going to be the state."

With a roar, Dave sprang at him. Cantrell stepped in and lanced a straight, hard right to the jaw. Dave's head snapped

back, but he kept coming. Backing up, Cantrell jolted him with a right and left to the sides of the head, then shot in another hard right to the jaw. Dave just grinned wolfishly and shuffled forward, pawing out with his big, bony hands like a wrestler. Rough and tumble was the kind of fighting he liked, get in close with everything working, butt, knee and gouge. Cantrell knew better than to let him get in that close, better than to let himself get cornered where Dave could work over him with those steely fingers. He bobbed and hooked an unexpected left to Dave's nose, but in skipping back he tripped over the bag on the floor and flailed wildly as he tried to regain his balance. Dave lunged and caught him around the middle. Bracing his legs, he laid the side of his head against Cantrell's chest and heaved. Cantrell desperately kept his legs and tried to bow his back, at the same time raining sharp blows to the side of Dave's head.

Dave grunted and tightened up another notch. His strength was tremendous, and the bow of Cantrell's back was gradually straightening. If he arched, Dave could break him like kindling. Dave was not entirely sane, had not been since Barbara's murder. Cantrell had committed himself and would not ask for mercy.

Dave tightened again and snarled, "I said I'd kill you—"

Despairingly, Cantrell chopped three times with the hard edge of his hand against the neck that corded against his chest, then staggered backward as Dave fell limply against him. They fell to the floor together. Cantrell rose slowly, panting. Dave lay still.

Cantrell felt as if he could flop on the bed and lie there forever, but painfully he gathered together his strewn clothes and stuffed them back into the bag again. There was a kind of misery in his eyes.

He wished he hadn't had to tangle with Dave, but the man wasn't in his right mind. He couldn't be reasoned with. Can-

trell had known from the beginning that Dave wouldn't let him out of that room alone, had known from the very first word Dave had uttered.

Well, he was getting out alone, but this wasn't the showdown. He had made an implacable enemy. He would now share the hate Dave bore for Van Wyk. Someone would die.

Cantrell closed his bag and left the room. Downstairs was his car, and he would be on his way to Lake Powhatan before Dave recovered consciousness. This was a job he was going to have to do alone.

Nobody was going to thank him.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Killer's Island

**T**HE ADDRESS he had was a vague one—Box 422, Lake Powhatan, Moburg, New Jersey.

Lake Powhatan was five miles in length, shaped something like a saxophone with the bell of the horn at Moburg's ear. Some of the summer cottages were as much as a mile back from the lake, into the hills. Nine months of the year Moburg was just a little farming town, but during June, July and August it burst at the seams with shrill characters in gaudy shorts, bras and sun glasses. Cantrell inched down Main Street behind a lumbering haywagon, and behind him was a canary yellow Cadillac convertible, loaded with kids singing to the music of a guitarist, who sat astraddle the hood.

The Old Moburg House was as jaunty as a grandfather with a new toupee. The lobby was bedecked with a dozen tubbed palms, borrowed from the undertaker, and the dining room was so hung with new festoons of varicolored crepe paper that it resembled a maypole. But most important of all, it was crowded. That was its freshest decoration.

The clerk, who spent nine months of the year hopping what bells there were to hop, selling newspapers, cigars, cigarettes and chewing gum, but mostly tending bar, smiled vaguely at Cantrell over the counter.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, fluffing the gardenia in his buttonhole, "but really, we've had every room reserved since May." He leaned over the counter and dropped his voice to its lowest confidential register, "But maybe I could tell you where to get a room, friend."

Cantrell blew the perspiration off his upper lip and growled, "What else did you think I wanted, a bed in it, too?"

The clerk chuckled. He could appreciate a joke. "But I'll probably have to make a few phone calls," he suggested.

Cantrell gave him a dry glance. He took a five dollar bill from his wallet and slid it under the register. "You'll probably need some nickels," he said.

The clerk deftly extracted the bill and said, "Right you are," and scribbled a name and address on the back of one of the hotel's business cards. Cantrell pocketed the card after glancing at it.

"I'm looking," he said casually, "for a friend of mine. Named Rolf Van Wyk. A big fella, blond, good looking, the fullback type."

The clerk frowned and looked as if he wished he hadn't sold Cantrell that address. "You'll find your friend," he said stiffly, "in the bar. If he's not in this bar, he's in the bar across the street, and if he's not there, he's in the bar at the Deer Head Inn on the Lake, and if he's not there, look under the closest tree, because he will have bought himself a bottle to take home, but didn't make it." Then he added sharply, "My mother doesn't allow lodgers to bring liquor into the house."

"Your moth—oh," Cantrell grinned and touched the pocket into which he had slipped the address the clerk had given him. "Don't worry, pal. I haven't touched



a drop since the day my grandmother got the DT's and thought she was a birdhouse. It took the whole fire department to get her out of the tree."

He tipped his hand from his forehead and strolled toward the bar, not particularly elated at having found a clue to Van Wyk so quickly. Finding him was not the problem. The problem was linking him with the hit-and-run killing of Gracie Bonnel before Peggy Shane got herself in trouble.

The doorway to the bar was guarded by a pair of potted palms that looked as if they'd seen every funeral since Daniel Boone. The bar itself was empty except for the professional drinkers, who knew that all else, including swimming, boating and blondes, was vanity. Van Wyk was at the farthest, dimmest end of the bar, his broad, heavy shoulders hunched over his glass. Cantrell had taken a half dozen steps toward him before he discovered that it was the wrong Van Wyk. It wasn't Rolf. It was Marty, his brother.

Cantrell slid up on the stool beside him and ordered a beer. He could use the beer, anyway. It had been a long, hot ride and, discouragingly, he had gotten a little lost in Morristown.

"Hi, Van," he said to the big man beside him.

Marty gave him a dull, glazed glance and mumbled, "Hi."

"Got a package here for your brother. He said to give it to you, but it's pretty heavy. I'll run it out in the car. Where's your cottage?"

Marty didn't say anything. Cantrell started to repeat his question when he discovered that Marty was studying him secretively from under his heavy eyelids. There was hostility there, and a belligerent urge, but Marty seemed to know he was too drunk at the minute to do anything about it.

"Nuts to you," he said heavily. "Beat it."

Cantrell shrugged. He lifted his glass of beer, murmured, "Happy days," and drained it thirstily. As he stepped off his stool, he slapped Marty on the shoulder and grinned, "Be seeing you, fella," and walked back past the two dead palms into the lobby.

He took a dollar bill from his pocket and looked around for a bellboy. One, a perky kid of seventeen, all freckles and grin, came shrieking through the lobby, calling for Mr. Kirtlebaum. Cantrell stopped him and tucked the bill between the first two buttons of his jacket.

"That big lush in there at the end of the bar," he said. "How often do you have to carry him out of here?"

The bellboy peeked into the bar and grinned. "That depends," he said. "In the afternoon, like now, he can usually make it under his own steam. But at night it's a different story. Sometimes his sister comes for him in the speedboat, other times I take him out myself, and they usually slip me a fin."

"Out where do you take him?"

"Bird Island. Say, make it two bucks and I'll give you a tip."

"If it's about the sister, Junior, forget it. Anything else?"

"Yeah," said the kid impudently, "if you see her, tell her Eddie's off at ten tonight." He jitterbugged off, screeching again for Mr. Kirtlebaum.

Cantrell picked up his bag, wondering why Van Wyk had tied up with his brother and sister again. After his marriage to Barbara, Van Wyk had closed the door on his disreputable family, but they had stood by him through the murder trial, and maybe it was gratitude that he had them with him again. Margo Van Wyk was a lovely dish, but she had never carried the daisy chain, and Marty couldn't stay away from a bottle long enough to take a breath of fresh air. Van Wyk's kink was that he had to have money, had to have cars, boats, clothes, the luxury

items that only a surfeit of money could buy. It was a wonderful family.

The hotel clerk's mother's name was Singer, and she looked like the mother of everything that had been born—ample, bosomy, smiling. The room was fifty dollars a week, and she was slightly apologetic as she told him and showed it to him.

"That's just during the season," she said, "and I think it's highway robbery, but I have to charge it because everybody else does, and I'd antagonize friends if I didn't, but you'll find it very comfortable, and don't pay any attention to what my son says. I always say a little nip now and then is very refreshing, and if you ask me, you look like you know when to stop."

**T**HE DOORBELL rang and she walked toward the door, smoothing down her apron. She looked back at Cantrell and smiled.

"Now if you feel like having a drink," she said indulgently, "you go right ahead, but keep the bottle out of sight when my son comes home."

Cantrell laughed and after she had gone he wished he did have a bottle, because the old dame sounded as if she didn't mind a nip herself now and then.

He emptied his bag on the bed and looked ruefully at the wrinkled heap of clothes. Everything had to be pressed except his shoes, socks and gun. He took the gun from the holster, checked the load and slipped it back into the leather again. At the knock on the door, he tossed the holster on the bed and crossed the room, stripping off his tie and opening his collar, which clung wetly to his neck.

The man at the door was short but very heavy, and though he was cleanly shaven his jowls were blue-black under glistening perspiration. More noticeably, however, he was wearing blue trousers, a light grey shirt, a gun strapped around

his waist and the gaudy gold badge that proclaimed him chief of police.

He looked up and said, "Cantrell?"

Cantrell said warmly, "That's right."

The chief held out his hand. "My name's McCarty," he said. "I'm supposed to be police chief around here. Nice room you got."

He strolled in, uninvited, looking sharply at the holstered gun on the bed. He picked it up and hefted it, nodding.

"Nice gun," he observed, dropping it back on the bed. "You're a private dick, they tell me."

"Who tells you?" asked Cantrell flatly.

"Oh, you know how it is," the chief waved his hand vaguely, taking in half the points of the compass. "You hear things, a little here, a little there. That's a cop's life for you, know what I mean? Sometimes it all adds up to minus nothing."

There was something familiar in the easy, experienced way that McCarty handled himself. Nothing overblown or pugnacious about him. He was a professional and sure of himself.

Cantrell said, "Local boy?" and walked over to the bed, picked up his gun and tossed it back into his bag.

"Yes," said the chief, eyeing him, "yes I am. But I did have nineteen or maybe it was twenty years on the force down in the city. Homicide. But I picked up a little tickle in my bronchial tubes, and the doc thought I could breathe easier up here."

He wasn't just making talk. He was telling Cantrell that he wasn't just a local yokel in a chief of police suit. Cantrell lit a cigarette and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Okay," he said. "what's on your mind?"

"Well, I'll tell you," the chief clasped his hands behind his back and rolled forward on his toes. "I hear you're interested



in one of our local residents. Van Wyk. In fact, I hear you're the boy who put McNeil, of the Newark force, on Van Wyk yesterday. Something involving the death of a girl named Gracie Bonnel. Am I reading it right?"

"Go on."

"That I will, that I will. As a favor to McNeil, I looked into it myself, and the night the Bonnel girl was hit, Van Wyk was at a dance in the Deer Head Inn with his sister."

"It couldn't have been his brother, could it?" Cantrell interrupted. "That Deer Head Inn deal sounds like Marty."

"That I'll grant you, son. But I happen to know both boys, know what I mean?"

"Yeah. You know both boys," said Cantrell irritably.

"And that's a fact. Rolf's the tall, dark, good-looking one. Marty's the souse and he's running to beef. Rolf was at the dance from ten till two and he's got maybe a half hundred witnesses to prove it. The Bonnel girl was hit just a little after midnight. Now, being we don't have any remote-controlled cars just yet, it looks as if that gives him a pretty clean bill."

"That could be a mistake."

"Sure I could. Anybody could be mistaken, even me. Even you. Especially you. And so—nothing personal, mind you—I just naturally can't have you running around bothering peaceful citizens. Leave Van Wyk alone. He's clean."

"If heaving him in the can for murder is going to bother him, I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to bother him."

"Just like that?" said the chief thoughtfully.

"Just like that."

"You're not going to make me get tough with you, are you, son?"

"That's up to you."

The chief's face hardened, then relaxed again. "Look," he said, "you're not going to make yourself anything but trouble. Forget Van Wyk. Go out and

swim on the beach. Hire yourself a boat and go fishing. Or stand on the street corner and whistle at the girls. Enjoy yourself. Have a good time. Or better still, go home. There's nothing here for you. Now what do you say?"

Cantrell laughed. "You're a card, Chief," he said. "You're a real cutup. I like it here. I'm going to stay."

The chief sighed. "Okay, boy," he said, "but you better have a million dollars worth of bail ready, and a lawyer on twenty-four hour duty, because the first complaint I get from Van Wyk, I'm going to throw you in the can, and as fast as you bail yourself out, I'm going to throw you in again, if only for spitting on the sidewalk. Some of the laws on the books here are almost three hundred years old, and take it from me, you can't as much as button your shirt left-handed without breaking a good half dozen of them. I think I'll take this with me."

He reached into the bag for Cantrell's gun. Cantrell angrily caught him by the wrist.

The chief said evenly, "Let go, boy, or I'll slap your ears down."

Cantrell tightened his grip and, with a wrench, lifted the chief's hand out of the bag. He closed the bag, lifted it and shoved it under the bed. The chief stood looking at his thick wrist as if he didn't quite believe it possible.

"Commando stuff," he grumbled. "That's the trouble with wars. You pick on a skinny little ribbon clerk, and the next thing you know, you're flat on your back. He'd been in the Marines or something. But you know, boy, if it wasn't for messing up Mrs. Singer's room here, I'd take you on regardless. Keep your gun—but don't try to wear it. I've only got four cops on my force, but they're all big, rough boys. Well," he plodded toward the door, "be seeing you in jail."

Cantrell said, "Wait a minute."

The chief turned, lifting his eyebrows.

"I'm not going to wear the gun," said Cantrell.

"Glad to hear it."

"But tell me who tipped you off that I was here?"

"You know better than that."

"No, wait. This is important. Was it a girl, a redhead, blue eyes, damn good looking? Beautiful, in fact."

The chief pursed his lips and murmured, "Maybe I got you wrong, Cantrell. I thought it was Van Wyk you were after."

"Was it the girl?"

The chief said, "Nope," and walked out.

Cantrell stared at the closed door long after the chief had gone, then he walked over to the window and watched the short, heavy man cross the street diagonally and enter the drug store on the corner. A round blue and white plaque on the window told passersby that there was a public telephone inside, and the chief had not looked as if he needed an aspirin.

Was he calling Van Wyk?

Cantrell found himself wondering how much McCarty made a year as police chief of Moburg, found himself wondering if, perhaps, McCarty wasn't supplementing his salary a little on the side. On Van Wyk's side, to be exact. It was McCarty who had given Van Wyk's alibi to McNeil down in Newark. How much was it worth?

As Cantrell stared thoughtfully down into the street, a truck, loaded with baskets of fresh string beans, crawled past the house, and behind it, honking furiously, was a black Packard roadster. Behind the wheel, fuming, sat Dave Shane, his bony face bleak and hard.

Cantrell grimaced and rubbed the knuckles of his right hand, for Dave's nose was swollen and red and there were two strips of adhesive high on his cheekbones.

Cantrell reached into his pocket for a

cigarette and watched the Packard inch toward the Old Moburg House. His lean face lengthened into hard planes as he scowled. This was something he had not expected. Now he had a wild man on his hands.

He turned, left the room and trotted down the stairs.

The hell with Dave.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Last Stop

HE WALKED down to the public dock at the lake. A large wooden sign announced that rowboats for hire were two dollars a day, and outboards were five dollars. Cantrell hired an outboard.

"Where's Bird Island, Admiral?" he asked the grey-haired character in charge of the boats.

The man looked at him and tittered, sucking noisily at his unlit cigar. "So you want to go to Bird Island?" he said finally.

"That's the idea, Commodore."

"Wouldn't, if I was you."

"Why not?"

"Dogs."

"I can take care of dogs."

The old man tittered. "Well," he said, "so be it. That's Bird Island down there, other end of the lake. Can't miss it." He pointed.

Cantrell said thanks and clambered into the boat. It was an ancient motor and he putt-putted along at about three miles an hour, but the water was so calm and clear, reflecting the high blue of the summer sky, that he felt a kind of peace and lazily lounged on one elbow, watching the other boats around him—the sailboats that seemed to stand motionless like snowy egrets, the plumed, roiling wake of the busy speedboats, the waterbug crawl of the rowboats, silent canoes that



still seemed to keep some of the stealth of their Indian origin. It took him almost an hour to reach the island.

He cut the motor and drifted close. Through the trees he could see a cool green and white house sitting in the lap of a cropped, rolling lawn. Three figures, two men and a woman, sat around a wrought iron table under a huge flowered umbrella. A radio was playing smooth Guy Lombardo music.

Cantrell's boat gently nosed aground about ten feet from shore, and two minutes later he fervently thanked his luck that it had, for out from the underbrush leaped a sleek, dangerous-looking Doberman. It stood at the edge of the water, head lowered, ears back, teeth bared, but not making a sound, staring directly at him. Cantrell hastily pushed the boat back into deeper water. He drifted, and the Doberman kept pace with him along the shore. There was a crackling of branches and two more Dobermans walked stiff-legged out to the beach. They watched him in absolute silence, but their menace was so obvious that only a fool would have ignored it. But the most disturbing thing was that they did not bark.

Cantrell stood up in the boat and pointed a finger at them. Immediately they scattered, crouching low and weaving, but not leaving the shoreline. Cantrell pursed his lips and whistled. These dogs had been trained to know that something pointed at them would probably be a gun. They were either army dogs or police-trained animals.

Now that he knew, Cantrell did not attempt to land again. He looked again toward the house, but the three persons under the umbrella had disappeared. He was practically certain that the girl had not been Peggy Shane, for her red hair would have been an unmistakable flame against the yellow of the umbrella.

Still watching the house, Cantrell pretended to tinker with the ancient motor,

yet keeping a good, safe twenty-five feet from the dogs. As he drifted by the private dock, to which was tied a twenty-five foot, gleaming launch, a girl came walking lightly down the shell path from the house. She stood at the edge of the dock and waved to him.

"Hello, there," she called.

Cantrell stared at her with more than casual interest. He had a dozen photographs of her, but he had never seen her in the flesh—and she was practically in the flesh, for her scrap of bathing suit covered police regulations and not a thousandth of an inch more. It was Margo Van Wyk.

In her photographs she had been really lovely in a sultry, wide-mouthed, heavy-lidded sort of way, but photographs are often deceiving. Cantrell expected to find, in reality, that she had a mouth like a torn pocket and the pouchy eyes of dissipation, for the stories told of her were strong. He was startled to see that she was slim and fresh as a nineteen-year-old—a dark-eyed blonde, like Marty.

He waved back and said, "Hi. Nice dogs you got there."

"Vicious brutes, you mean," her smile flashed. "Are you the detective? Come up and have a drink."

She watched with amusement as his jaw dropped. She laughed.

"It's not as mysterious as all that," she said. "Peggy Shane sent us a telegram, warning us." She laughed again. "Come on up and let's see how terrible you are."

She watched narrowly to see if he'd hesitate because of the dogs, which were now clustered at the end of the dock beside her, but Cantrell picked up one of the oars from the bottom of the boat and poled himself shoreward.

"Hold it, Sherlock," she cried hastily. "These brutes'll eat you alive. Some day I'm going to take an ax to all three of them." She turned to the dogs. "Kennel,"

she ordered in a piercing voice, "kennel!"

Sullenly, with a last hungry glance at Cantrell, they turned and trotted up the shell path toward the house.

"We didn't really want man-eaters around," explained Margo, "but we've been robbed three times, and the last time they made off with Rolf's speedboat. That made him pretty grim. Hence the menagerie. Hm, you do look pretty tough, at that."

She looked at him with frank appraisal as he leaped lithely from the boat to the dock. She pressed his forearm.

"And all steel," she murmured. "Not just lard, like Marty." She raised her eyes to his, and in a flicker all her resemblance to a fresh nineteen-year-old was gone.

He grinned. "You should be in the movies," he said. "You could make a million with eyes like that."

"That sounds trite. You can do better than that."

"Sure, but let's save it. Let it come as a surprise."

She took his arm and held it close to his side. "Come on, Cantrell," she drawled, "I'll buy you a drink. I'll buy you a whole flock of drinks."

She made him conscious of the warmth and softness of her every step of the way up to the house. Consciously, deliberately. She did not take him into the main house, but to a screened patio on the west side, shaded by lowering, blue-black spruce. It was as cool as a cave, and had draperies of violent, slashing colors, raw reds, yellows, greens. The furniture—a pair of chaise longues, a sofa, wide chairs—were functional in design, but with a subtle difference that changed them from the stark to the insinuatingly voluptuous.

She looked at Cantrell with her head to one side, her eyes bright, and murmured, "Like it? I designed it myself. It cost pots of money, but," deliberately, "Rolf has got pots and doesn't mind spending it."

Cantrell looked around with one eyebrow lifted. "What," he drawled, "no gilt mirrors, no red carpets, no—" He stopped and swung around.

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THE DOOR crashed open and Marty stood there, swaying in the doorway. His eyes were bloodshot and he looked generally terrible, but he was soberer than when Cantrell had last seen him in the bar of the Old Moburg House.

He didn't bother with Cantrell, but glowered at the girl. "Are you crazy?" he demanded harshly. "Don't you know who this is?" He swept his arm floppily at Cantrell.

Margo was coolly amused. "He's a detective," she said. "His name is Cantrell. What are you doing away from your bottle? Don't you feel just a little naked without it?"

He ignored the thrust. "He came up here for Rolf. Don't you realize that?"

"Of course I realize it, but I also realize that he's not going to wrap Rolf up in a paper bag and carry him off."

Marty shouted, "He's here to make trouble!"

"What trouble can he make?"

"Get him out of here!"

"Oh, go back to your bottle. You're noisy, disgusting and tiresome."

His face congested. He took a plunging step toward her and whipped his hand across her cheek, then turned and lunged out of the patio. Margo held her hand to her cheek and stared after him. She jerked up her chin and her eyes blazed. She turned back to Cantrell and fashioned a smile.

"You'd better go now," she said. "I think Marty's on the verge of the DT's again, and it won't be pleasant here. I'll have to take care of him."

"When can I see you again?"

She touched his cheek with a lingering hand and murmured, "Sweet. I'll meet you tonight at the Deer Head Inn. Around nine." Her hand slid around the back of his neck. "Tonight," she said, breathing heavily "Tonight, Cantrell." She turned and ran into the house after Marty.

Walking down the path to the dock alone, Cantrell paused to look at the house with automatic disgust. He saw the three Dobermans streaming silently around the end of the house, scattering the shell of the path with their thrusting paws. He leaped for the tree beside the path, caught the lowest branch with desperate fingers and pulled himself up with bare fractions of a second to spare. The dogs, growling, ranged around the base of the tree, looking up at him, jumping futilely for his dangling legs. Their teeth snapped together inches below his feet. They were not just watchdogs; they were killers.

When he bought them, Rolf Van Wyk had not been thinking just of protecting his property; he had been thinking of punishment and revenge. Dogs like that were more dangerous than a gun. One of them ranged back ten feet, ran at the tree and tried to climb it, whining, to get at Cantrell. He kicked at it, caught it on the side of the head, and it fell back, snarling.

Angrily, Cantrell twisted on his perch and looked toward the house. A man was standing at the front door with a black-thorn walking stick in his hand, leaning heavily on it, as if he needed its support—a tall, slim man, dark, a fashion-plate in sharkskin slacks, a camel's hair sport jacket and a wine-colored scarf tied in an Ascot around his neck and into the V of his jacket. From the way he stood, he seemed to find the dangerous scene below only of remote inertest. Then, slowly, he plodded down the path, carrying the walking stick, not like a cane, but a club.

And the closer he came, the less natty he looked. His expensive sport jacket was spotted down the lapels, his hair was disordered, and there was a bristly growth of beard on his narrow, aristocratic face. His thin nose was high-bridged, hooked and as cruel as a hawk's beak, but it was the color of putty.

Without glancing up at Cantrell, he

walked among the dogs, slashing at them with his walking stick, and each time he hit, it sounded as if he were hitting a sodden bass drum. The dogs whimpered and dodged.

"Kennel!" he said. "Kennel, dammit! Kennel!"

The dogs scurried up the path.

Cantrell looked down at him and said evenly, "I'm going to break your neck, setting those mutts on me."

Rolf Van Wyk seemed not to hear. "I want to talk to you," he said dully. "You're Cantrell, the city detective, aren't you?"

Cantrell dropped from the tree. Fury boiled inside him like hot oil, and though his fists were doubled into hard knots, something kept him from lashing at the tall, narrow man. Perhaps it was the rotting look of tragedy in the man's dark eyes.

He controlled his voice and said, "Talk to me about what?"

Van Wyk said remotely, "Peggy. I was to meet her at the station in Moburg. I didn't. You're in love with her, aren't you?"

"What the hell difference does that make?"

Van Wyk waved his hand vaguely. "I know all about Peggy. She was going to marry you. I know. Where is she now? Did she go back home? I want to see her."

"How come you know so much about her?" Cantrell asked belligerently.

"I wanted to marry her once myself. I—"

He turned his head and looked bleakly back toward the house, around which the three dogs had disappeared. "It didn't work out." There was poignant sadness in his faraway voice. "Where is she now? Why does she want to see me? She hates me, I know."

"With good reason, pal, with good reason."

FOR the first time, Van Wyk showed a flash of hot emotion. "What do you know about it?" he demanded angrily. "What does anybody know about it, except me? Even Peggy doesn't know. She thinks she knows, but she doesn't." But the heat burned out as quickly as it had flamed, and he went on in the same old dull voice, "I want to see her. I want to talk to her. It won't do any good, but I want to see her. Where is she?"

Cantrell said wonderingly, "Are you nuts?"

Van Wyk's eyes opened wide. He looked at Cantrell for a moment, then broke into a low, jarring laugh. "I've thought of that. I've asked myself," he whispered. "You do, you know, especially when that big hand of night comes down, reaches for you and squeezes you as you'd squeeze an orange to see the juice spurt through your fingers. But it's other things, other things, too. I can see that you won't tell me where Peggy is. But never mind. It's all right. I'm not angry. It was always something I had to work out for myself."

He turned and plunged down the path toward the dock in a ragged run. Cantrell stared after him, muttering uneasily, "Nuts. Absolutely nuts."

A few moments later, the gleaming mahogany speed launch roared out into the lake, spun on its stern, and thundered toward the public dock of Moburg at forty-five miles an hour, with Van Wyk crouched over the wheel like a jockey.

This time, returning, the sedate pace of the old outboard was an agony. A half mile from the dock, it gave a few thin, complaining sputters, then died, seemingly forever. Cantrell tugged at the starting rope until his eyes bulged, then finally looked into the gas tank. It was bone dry. He rowed the last half mile, watching the sun sink lower and lower behind the far trees. It was quite dark when he reached the dock. He tied up the boat hurriedly, looking around for Van Wyk's



mahogany launch. He had seen it tied there when he was out on the lake, but now it was gone.

He trudged dispiritedly back to his lodging house, stopping first in the liquor store to pick up a bottle of bourbon. There were no lights on in the house, and he felt his way up the stairs to his room. As he opened the door and stepped in, the darkness exploded in a brilliant sheet of searing light. With a groan, he tumbled into something that thrust him back and hit him again.

When he recovered consciousness, he was lying on the bed. The room swam slowly into focus and his eyes traveled hazily around the angle of the wall and ceiling until finally they came to rest on a bulky outline that loomed at the foot of the bed. A cigarette glowed redly, died and glowed again—and behind it was the gaunt face of Dave Shane.

Cantrell struggled dizzily to sit up. Dave smashed him back with the bony heel of his hand.

"All good things come to an end, champ," he said harshly, standing beside the bed now. "This is it. Didn't think I could find you, did you? But I did. Don't think I didn't know you and Peggy were working against me. I knew, all right. So after you went, I watched her. I watched her buy a train ticket to this whistle stop. Now it's just you and me, so make it easy for yourself, champ, and tell he—where is he?"

Consciousness was the moon, and Cantrell groped for it, mumbling.

Dave gritted, "Okay, champ," and dug down into him with both hands. Cantrell's arms and legs jerked spasmodically and a groan wrenched from behind his clenched teeth.

Dave lifted his hands slightly, and said softly, "Come on, champ, I can hurt you worse than that. Where is he?"

Cantrell tried to talk, tried to curse him out, but his tongue clattered in his mouth.

Dave swore and leaned into him again, hunching his shoulders as if to pour more strength into the brutal, bony fingers. Cantrell yelled, then bit his lip and feebly beat at Dave's face with pain-weakened fists.

There was a click and the room lights burst into incandescence, and a voice said furiously, "Get off him, Dave, or I'll shoot you, even if I have to do it in the back! I followed you because I thought you'd be up to something like this."

Dave jerked upright and said incredulously, "Peggy!"

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Answer in Blood

WITH the sudden cessation of pain, Cantrell felt as if he were drifting, disembodied. He could not move his physical arms or legs, but he seemed to be floating midway between the ceiling and the floor. He could see Peggy clearly as she stood with her back against the closed door, a heavy, black gun in her small hand, her face so white that it seemed flooded by the blue of her eyes. He could see Dave crouched dangerously on the edge of the bed, leaning toward her, his big hands held out, half clenched. All this Cantrell could see as sharply as if it were etched against a white background by floodlights. But he could not seem to move.

Peggy said wildly, "Get out of here, Dave. I'm not bluffing!"

"Sis!"

"Get out of here, get out of here!"

"Sis, listen! Sis! He knows where Van Wyk is, and I can make him tell. That's what we want, isn't it? Van Wyk. He killed Barbara, Peg. You haven't forgotten that, have you?" Dave's heavy voice was thick with pleading. "Barbara, your sister. Remember when we were kids, Peg? Barbara was always the gentle one.

You and I, we were the crazy Shanes, and when the old man made his million, we were worse. Who was it who got us out of our scrapes, Peg? Who was it who tried to take the blame when the old man would beat hell out of the pair of us for a lead penny? Who was it who slipped us a fin or a sawbuck when we were in disgrace and had our allowances cut off?" Curdled tears were running down Dave's face at the memory. "Who was it, even after we grew up, we always ran to when we were in something over our heads. It was Barbara. It was always Barbara. Then Van Wyk married her and gave her a bullet. She gave him a quarter of a million bucks, and he gave her a bullet. That was a fair exchange, wasn't it? Wasn't it, Peg?"

Under the powerful throb of his voice, Peggy's gun wavered, and it was only with desperate effort that she steadied it again.

"Get out of here!" she cried. "Get out of here. All you know how to do is stick your fist in somebody's face. You made Barbara's life a hell with the trouble you were always in with your fighting. Now that's she's dead, you love her. When she was alive, you were always making fun of her. Remember what you used to call her, Dave? Remember? Miss Milquetoast. She didn't love Van when she married him, but she married him, and one of the reasons was that she wanted to live a life of her own and get away from the messes you were always leaving on her doorstep

like something the cat dragged in and wouldn't eat. Don't talk to me about Barbara. And wipe those crocodile tears off your face. You make me sick!"

Dave's head jerked under the impact of her words. He was as rigid as if iron had replaced the blood in his veins, then very slowly his lips spread back from his teeth in a wolfish grin.

"Thank you, dear sister," he said with grating irony. "Thank you for showing me exactly where you stand. Get out of here? Sure, I'll get out of here. But take my advice. Pull that trigger now!"

Peggy screamed, "Get out, get out, get out!"

"Sure. Sure."

He rolled forward to his feet and swaggered toward the door. She circled away from him. He stood in the open doorway and looked contemptuously at her.

"If you call yourself a Shane," he said, "I'm changing my name to Hitler. So long, dear sister. I'll be seeing you. You, and the champ over there on the bed, and your mutual friend, Van Wyk." Grinning, he flipped the door shut with a reverberating slam.

Peggy sprang to the door and twisted the key, choking on the sobs she strove to stifle. She darted to the bed and her fingertips feathered over Cantrell's face.

"Did he hurt you?" she moaned. "Oh, darling, did he hurt you?"

Cantrell tried to raise a grin. "Jus'



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horsin' 'roun'," he said thickly. "Jussa li'l light exercise. . ."

She smiled tremulously.

He said, "Bottle—"

She understood. Her glance darted around the room and found the bourbon bottle on the floor against the chest of drawers, where it had rolled when Dave had slugged him. She snatched it up and poured a half tumbler with shaking hands. She lifted his head and held the glass to his lips. The first few swallows welled out over his chin, then the bite and strength of it made a small, hot glow in his stomach and gradually snaked out into his arms and legs. He looked up at her and gave her a genuine grin.

"Hi, Peg," he said.

As if the warmth in his voice had burned out something in her, the tenderness in her eyes turned to ashes. She pulled her arm from under his head and stood stiffly.

"I'm glad you're—all right again," she said jerkily. "I'm—going to marry Van. I saw him just a short while ago, and it's all settled. Leave us alone. You owe me something, and that's it. Leave us alone. You won't have to worry about Dave. We're going away tonight, alone, and he'll never find us. You could, I know, if you tried. But don't try. I couldn't stand it!"

She ran for the door. She fought for a moment with the key, then twisted out into the hallway and slammed the door.

Cantrell pushed himself up from the bed, crying, "Peggy, wait! You don't have to—"

**T**HE key grated in the lock, and he heard her swift footsteps beat down the stairs. He swung his legs over the edge of the bed and fell to his knees. Dave's taloning fingers had hurt him more deeply than he had realized. There was no strength in his legs. He gritted his teeth and reached for the bottle on the night table beside the bed.

But it wasn't the rush of liquor that gave him strength. The raw sting of the bourbon left him only gasping. A surge of emotion thrust up from a dark, unsuspected part of him. He pushed himself to his feet, stood wavering for a moment, then hurtled against the door. The room spun as the jar shook him, but he went back three feet and lunged at it again. He lost count of the times he hit it with his shoulder, but the wood of the panel splintered and he reached through the opening to turn the key she had forgotten to take out of the lock. He staggered out into the hall, found the handrail of the stairs. He took the first step, but on the second, his foot tangled in a tear in the carpet and he plunged head first into the stairwell.

He came to with his head cradled in the ample lap of Mrs. Singer.

"My goodness, Mr. Cantrell," she cried in relief, half laughing, half crying, "I thought you were dead! Here, drink this."

It was bourbon and he pushed it away.

"But it's good for you," she said. "See?" She tossed it down with a practiced flip of her wrist, burped and covered her mouth with a genteel hand. "See?"

"I don't want the damn stuff," he said more roughly than he intended. "What time is it?"

"Quarter to ten. I just came home from the movies."

Quarter to ten. He'd been out for more than an hour! He sprang to his feet, wavered for a moment, then through sheer force of will, forced back the nausea that threatened to engulf him.

"Where can I get a speedboat?" he asked evenly.

She looked aghast. "At this hour of night?"

"Where can I get a speedboat? It's important!"

"Well," she said doubtfully, "my son had one tied up at the dock. But that's only to give the vacationers speedboat rides during the day. He charges two

dollars, and I think it's a crime because—"

"Listen, honeybun," Cantrell interrupted, "you've got a key to it, haven't you?"

"Y-yes."

"Give it to me. Give it to me and I'll buy you a whole case of bourbon exactly like the bourbon you've been drinking there, and I'll never say a word to your son about it. He doesn't let you have your little nip now and then, does he? He disapproves." Cantrell dug her in the ribs with his elbow. "But what's wrong with a little drink for your stomach's sake? Nothing. That's what. Nothing. Give me the key to his boat, sweetheart, and I'll put a full case of bourbon under your bed where he'll never find it."

Her glance wavered. "I shouldn't," she stammered. She looked full at him. "Make it rye," she said.

As Cantrell walked out of the house with his gun holstered under his arm and the key to the boat in his pocket, a tall young cop, with the shoulders of a Notre Dame guard, loomed up out of the shadows of the maple tree before the walk, reached out a heavy hand and clamped it on Cantrell's shoulder.

"Now just a minute there," he began easily.

Cantrell ducked under the arm and came up inside, slugging savagely for the big jaw that hung above him. His fists spat against it three times, and the big cop went down on his back, floundering in the dust of the gutter. Cantrell sprinted down the street toward the public dock. A police whistle splintered the silence of the somnolent night.

It was a lucky thing that Cantrell had been on the public dock earlier that day, for then he had seen the gaudy red and white, twenty-foot speedboat tied at the end, lettered along the side—SPEEDBOAT RIDE \$2.00. He leaped into the boat, turned the key in the ignition and pressed the starter button, pumping the gas lever on

the steering wheel. The big motor roared, and from the sound of it, Cantrell judged it to be about a hundred and thirty horse, a little big for the size of the boat, but terrifically fast.

From the twinkle of town lights up the hill, he heard the banshee wail of a police siren swooping down toward the dock. He eased the speedboat out into the lake, pointed it in the brittle path of the moon over the waters toward Bird Island and opened it wide. The nose surged up toward the sky and he had to grab the wheel against the backward fling as the boat shot out under him.

It was a fast boat and the noise of the motor was like a lion proclaiming his prowess. It seemed to plane on the last two inches of bottom, flung across the water, standing on the screw alone, weightless, pursued by furies. He was on top of the island before he knew it, and had to make a wide, plumed sweep to keep from ramming. He cut the motor but still hit the beach hard enough to send him sprawling on his hands over the windshield. He leaped out into a foot of water and splashed to shore. The shell walk gleamed straight ahead before him. He sprinted up it, swerving violently once to avoid the bloody body of one of the Dobermans. He stopped and bent over it. It's skull had been crushed, but even so it was a beautiful dog, even in death. A few feet farther he came upon the body of a second Doberman with its neck broken, and twenty feet up the path, the still body of Dave Shane with the body of the third Doberman viced in his knuckly hands.

CANTRELL knelt down beside him, running his fingers down the corded forearm to the wrist. Dave's face was a shawl of blood, hiding the features. There were tooth slashes on his arms and his trousers were in ribbons, but Cantrell's finger pads found a slow beat of pulse in the wrist—slow, steady, strong.



He rose slowly, wiping the sweat from his forehead with the palm of his hand. Dave was still Peggy's brother. He had never borne Dave any great affection, but he had liked him in the days when Dave was not a madman, but merely a reckless, open-handed roughneck.

The avenue of maples did not shade him, for the moon was in the west, and he stood out like a silver man against the shadows, gleaming. A shot stabbed the night. He weaved and a hysterical burst of shots orangely tongued the darkness. He made a shallow dive into the shadows, jerking loose his gun as he rolled over and over under the spreading branches. He crouched, waiting. Every night sound was stilled. The tree toads had stopped piping, the big bulls in the lake were holding their breath, and even the little owls were waiting it out.

Another shot came probingly out of the darkness, and Cantrell fired instantly into the flash. There was a heavy sound in the rhododendrons around the screened patio, then absolute, breathless silence again.

Cantrell did not investigate. Crouching low, he ran along the border of maples, his gun clutched sweatily in his hand. There was a light, a subdued amber light, in the main room of the house off the voluptuous patio, partially screened by the leafy rhododendrons.

Cantrell squirmed through them, raised himself to the window edge. The room was large, dominated by a huge fieldstone fireplace. On the hearth stood four large pigskin bags, bulging with what had been packed inside them, and standing stiffly around this pyramid were Peggy Shane, Van Wyk and Margo.

Van Wyk's narrow face was raised to the light and the hollows of tragedy seemed carved out of his cheeks. His spade chin jerked up and he said something, which was lost to Cantrell, because the windows were closed.

Trembling just a little, Cantrell lifted

his gun, for he knew what was coming. Peggy stood, proud in her despair, beside the heap of luggage, unaware of the bullet that was marked for her. Van Wyk spoke again and gestured sharply at Peggy, his arrogant, thin nose held high, his lips thin and incisive. Margo stood with her head bowed, scourged by the lash of his voice, her arms submissively behind her. Van Wyk pointed at her and, face pale, scourged her again, accenting his words with thrusts of his forefinger. Sweat gleamed on his face. Peggy turned to him and flung out her arm and said something, as if pleading with him to moderate his tone. He chopped impatiently with his hand, flinging off her plea, then lowered his head, looking at Margo, thrust out his lower jaw, wrinkling his nose, wolflike, as he spoke again.

Margo winced, and every word made her wince again. She threw up her stark and despairing face and swung out her arm, as if to plead. . . .

Cantrell sucked in his breath and fired. He fired again, and a third time. The first shot caught Margo in the shoulder and spun her around, flinging her to the floor, but desperately she clawed after the gun she had dropped; his second shot ploughed splinters in the floor, and his third shot hit the shining, nicked gun on the cylinder and threw it into the fireplace.

He slashed the window with the barrel of his gun, clearing the frame of glass, and leaped wild-eyed into the room, pointing his gun at Van Wyk, who stared down at his moaning sister, then covered his eyes.

Outside, siren moaning to a stop, the police boat sidled into the dock.

Peggy looked at Cantrell, took a tottering step toward him, said pleadingly, "Darling—" and fell.

CHIEF McCARTY, stocky and swart, dominated the living room. Van Wyk, crushed, sat dully in the lounge chair beside the fireplace. Peggy clung to Cantrell

on the sofa, every now and again touching his arm, or his hand, as if to reassure herself that he was real; Dave Shane, his face unrecognizably bandaged, stood in the doorway with subdued docility.

Cantrell, in a low voice, was finishing his talk.

"When he," a gesture at Van Wyk, "married Barbara Shane, he cut himself away from them, Margo and Marty. He was ashamed of them, yet he felt a responsibility toward them. He wasn't a bad guy, if you want to look at it that way. But to their way of thinking, he left them without a cent. They needed money. Marty to drink and Margo because she had to surround herself with luxury. They—Marty and Margo—killed Barbara Shane, so that their brother would take them in again and shower them with money. They killed the Bonnel girl because they knew she was weak. Rolf had been with her during the killing of Barbara, but they were afraid that, under pressure, she might develop an uncertainty, so they killed her. And they were about to kill Peggy, here, because they knew they would be cast off again, that Van Wyk would repudiate them. Peggy could

not stand their rottenness, and they knew it. If Van Wyk married her, it would be the end of easy living for them."

Dave spoke up beggily from the doorway, "Kids—you, champ; you, Peg. Listen to me. I'm a reformed character. No more trouble, honest. I promise, no more fights, and that's cross my heart. All I want is that you name your first kid after me—Dave. I got a quarter of a million bucks in the bank, and it's all his. I don't want it. I don't need it. I can make my own way. I'm sorry for everything I did. I was wrong. I apologize. If you want me to grovel, I'll grovel, dammit. But it'll never happen again, I promise!"

Chief McCarty growled, "Shut up and do it in private. Don't you have any decency?" He glowered at Cantrell, and thrust out a jabbing forefinger, "And don't you think you're in the clear. There's a few points I want cleared up—"

Dave started down the room, snarling, "You want some points cleared up, do you! That's fine. That's just ducky. Well now, you just listen to me, sweetheart—"

He caught himself and looked at Cantrell and Peggy on the sofa.

"Ah, hell!" he said.



## SIX OR NOTHING GUY

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Desperate, embattled, he crouched for that six-or-nothing down—the T-an'-T kid of a venegance-riden squad, whose cleats thundered one final question: "Which stripe are we gonna cross—the yellow down your backs . . . or that last white line!"

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# KILL ME ONCE AGAIN

•  
By Bryce  
Walton



*"You really think you  
have the guts to shoot  
me?"*

*"Too dumb to live—too yellow to die . . ." his victim's last words pursued him as he fled into the strange half world of mortal terror—where a man may perish—yet live to pay the price of murder!*

HOWARD BARLOW stared at the ceiling. It was yellow and old and spotted with grease. He could feel his heart grinding painfully, and inside of his head images kept stirring round and round, whirling faster and faster. He had too much imagination, that was it. Too much for a dumbhead. He could imagine how Daniel Yankovitch was feeling now in death row, waiting for the gas chamber.

That was no good, imagining that kind

of thing. Besides, the more he thought about it, the more vivid the image was, until now he could see Yankovitch sitting behind bars on a bare cot, sitting there waiting and waiting to die. He could feel the way Yankovitch was feeling.

It would be bad enough to be waiting for a room you couldn't get out of to be filled with gas if you really had killed somebody. But Yankovitch hadn't killed anybody.

No one knew that fact any better than Barlow did.

Barlow beat his fist against the crusted iron bedpost. He tried to swallow but something gagged in his throat. He had cut his hand, but he didn't feel anything though, not on the outside. Only on the inside did he feel anything. A cold charge of fear awakened his body slightly. He pictured Yankovitch sitting in a tiny room with no doors or windows in it, strapped in a chair maybe, waiting to die in the dark for something he'd never done, something he probably didn't even know anything about.

Barlow had been in this cheap room for a long time, with only a few sandwiches to eat, and more bourbon than he could remember. He couldn't stay here much longer. There was only one thing for him to do. He had to save Daniel Yankovitch, and there was only one way to do it.

He sank back on the bed and closed his eyes, and the sweat ran down his body onto the soaked, dirty sheets. He'd never intended to kill the assistant district attorney. That was the hellish part of it. He'd just gone there to tell Mardin how much he hated him and what he thought of him and maybe how much he would like to kill him, but he'd never intended to do it. . . .

BARLOW had stopped outside the French windows of the Mardins' big home in Beverly Hills and looked in. The windows were wide open and there were no screens. The place was a setup for any-

body who was interested, and Barlow happened to know there were no burglar alarms or traps or radar systems set up. And there was Bill Mardin sitting in there on a chaise lounge, reading something.

Hate flickered in Barlow's eyes as he hunched inside his soiled trenchcoat and looked at Mardin sitting there. Mardin was wearing a rich looking jacket of some kind. It was the color of dark wine, and the room was so big that the fireplace burning in it seemed a long, long way off in the darkness beyond where Mardin sat.

Barlow's feet didn't make any sound on the rich, soft lawn surrounding the mansion. On the other side of him a huge swimming pool was like green glass. He stepped forward, stopped. For a moment he thought he heard someone, but then he knew it was only his nerves. His nerves hadn't been much since they'd let him out of San Quentin. He'd been nursing the bottle and paying homage to the parole officer, and in between times he'd sat in bars somewhere and thought about a lot of things.

The place was sure wide open. Mardin had nerve. He had a lot of enemies, but there he sat, and anyone could walk right in there and blast him to hell, where he belonged. No one who had a job like Mardin's ought to live. No one who was a man would do what Mardin did. Mardin sent guys up because it was his job, and he didn't give a damn whether you were guilty or not, or how guilty you were if you were.

Barlow watched Mardin get up, stretch, yawn, walk to a big black desk and turn on a desk lamp and sit down and shuffle absently through papers. Then Barlow jumped in through the French windows and stood right there, up close to the desk. He was a gaunt figure standing there, his straw-colored hair awry, his face the color of milk, his black eyes like two pieces of charcoal.

Mardin looked up casually. "We usu-



ally use the door," he said softly. He was fat and sure of himself, and the desk lamp on his face left the rest of him obscure, so that his teeth and his blue eyes and his shiny, well-kept cheeks were like a picture spotted in a dim gallery.

"You're a dirty rotten louse," Barlow said.

"What else do you have to say, Barlow? I'm awfully busy. I have a lot to do."

"That's about all," Barlow said. His hands clenched and he could feel the sweat running in two separate streams down his face, like tears. The hate was burning in him, and he could feel the sensation he had felt before when he had shot that man, Cranston, at that beer brawl. A feeling as though he were teetering on the edge of a black pool.

"Then good night," Mardin said.

"I said that was about all," Barlow repeated. "What I'd like to do is kill you."

"A lot of people would like to do that to me, Barlow."

"Aren't you afraid maybe somebody will sometime?"

Mardin shrugged. "I wouldn't be where I am today if I was afraid of shadows." The light shone on his wine-red jacket. "Why worry about it? The percentages are with me. That's why I never take precautions like some cheap hood and have the place festooned with bodyguards loafing all over. You know why the percentages are with me, Barlow?"

"Why?"

"Because there are so few people who have the guts to kill anybody. It does take guts."

Barlow felt electric shocks running down his arms, tingling in his wrists. He had that funny ringing sensation in his head, the same as he always had when he'd been on the bottle too long. He wanted to lean against something. He stood there.

He said, "Listen, Mardin. You sent

me up to San Quentin for life, and I rotted in there for ten years, and finally when it was too late I got let out on good behavior. I rotted in there because a man can't stay alive in there for ten years. It finished me. I know it now and I've tried to get going again, but I can't. I can't do anything anymore. And you did it to me."

"You did it to yourself."

"You did it not because you had anything personal against me. Hell no! You just did it because it was your job. It helped pay for some of this beautiful stuff you're living in. I saw that pool out there. I guess that's it, when you finally got a pool."

"That's it all right, Barlow. It's a beautiful pool. I thought about you sometimes when I was swimming in it on hot days."

**B**ARLOW SHIVERED. His jowls darkened, his mouth pressed thin by the powerful clamp of his jaws. A trickle of sweat slid past his eye and outlined his white cheek.

"A good lawyer could have got me off, Mardin. You know that. I was all liquored up. And I didn't know what I was doing, and this guy was making passes at this girl. I told him to lay off and he pulled a knife on me. The girl dragged this gun out from behind the bar and shoved it at me, and the next thing I know this guy, Cranston, was on the floor, bleeding and dying. It was self defense. Back in Kansas I had trouble that way. But most of the time I was all right. Ten years in San Quentin is too long, and maybe I'll be going back one of these days, because now I can't make it out here. They're going to take me back. I know it! Mardin, I'd like to kill you!"

Mardin smiled. His lips were soft and wet and very red and curved like a woman's.

"Could you?"

"I want to kill you. I'd like nothing better than to blow you to hell!"

Barlow licked his lips slowly as the gun slid across the desk toward him, butt first. It was a big .45 automatic, its blue steel shining in the lamplight like the skin of a big wet snake.

"You really think you have the guts to shoot me, Barlow?"

Barlow couldn't say anything. He didn't look at Mardin's face, only at the gun sliding toward him slowly, stopping. It was only a couple of inches from his hand. The consciousness of sweat running down his face loosened a nervous flush along his back that prickled painfully.

He heard Mardin's soft chuckling laugh. "You're scared, Barlow. Guys like you don't have any real guts. You never did anything but loaf around unless you were liquored up, as you said yourself."

The gun blurred slightly and Barlow felt his knees going to rubber and he concentrated on standing there. His throat was dry, swelling, and he watched the glow of the lamp on the blue steel of the automatic with a dumb absorption.

"I'm all alone here," Mardin said softly, "except for a caretaker way over on the other side of the grounds, and it would take him some time to get over here. No servants here tonight, nobody at all. Just you and I. You could pick up the gun and kill me. If you had the guts."

Barlow's body was stiff all over. He was afraid to move. Only his lips parted slightly. "I've never had much brains," he said. "I've always been a damn Kansas dumbhead, that's been my trouble. I always worked somewhere and sometimes on Saturday night I got liquored up and had myself a time. Sometimes I got into a fight or something, but I never went out looking to hurt anybody. Why'd you make it so hard for me, Mardin?"

Mardin looked up through the lamplight a long time at Barlow's white, thin face. Slowly he shook his head. "If you

weren't so dumb, like you say, I'd explain it. But then I wouldn't have to, because if you weren't so dumb you wouldn't be here. There's a lot of swimming pools paved with guys like you, Barlow."

"Damn you! Don't say anymore!" Barlow whispered. "I'm leaving. I just come here to tell you to go to hell, that's all. I didn't come here to—"

Mardin laughed again. Then he said, "What are you afraid of? The gas chamber? You afraid of dying? Why, Barlow? What does a dumbhead like you have to bother about that for? This is real living." Mardin waved a fat hand around him. "All this and the pool. This is living, and you'll never have it. You've never lived and you never will, because you don't have the stuff it takes to live. You don't even have the stuff it takes to die decently. I deserve to get killed by you, don't I, Barlow? I've done you a real nasty turn, sure. And you stand there sweating because you want to kill me but don't have the guts, just because you're scared! You've always been scared. You're too dumb to live. And you're too scared to die!"

Barlow's body seemed to loosen all over and fell into a kind of crouch. Tiredness and torn nerves became alive and throbbed in his back, in the exhausted hamstrings of his thighs. His limbs twitched and he heard a sound trickle out of his lips, and was dumbly surprised to know he had made it.

He yelled. It wasn't a word. It was a sound, a harsh, prolonged animal roar of pain and rage and final humiliation. He felt the gun in his hand, felt it plunge forward and heard the wash of deafening sound beat back around him as he pulled the trigger. He squeezed it again and again. Mardin's face lost its expression and turned into clay. His hands flopped forward on the desk, then his head thudded down between his hands.

Barlow shivered as he stood there, and



the gun was lead in his hand, then he turned and ran crazily out across the damp rich lawn. He hesitated by the swimming pool. For a moment he saw it on a sunny afternoon, the girls lying there in their yellow and white suits, the contrast against smooth copper skins. Then he threw the gun into the water and kept on running.

**F**IRST HE had waited for them to pick him up, and that hadn't been so bad, not at first. But nobody picked him up. He reported to the parole officer and nobody said anything. And then it got real bad for Barlow. He saw the papers and he read them. Someone else had been arrested and was being tried for the murder of Bill Mardin.

Someone named Daniel Yankovitch, another dumb guy who had been prowling around the grounds to pull a burglary and had been trapped by the caretaker, who had heard the shots fired by Barlow. In trying desperately to escape, Daniel Yankovitch had fallen into the swimming pool. He hadn't been able to swim. Half drowned, he had been in no condition to try to escape when he was dragged out. He denied killing Mardin, anybody. He denied in the desperate, frantic way an innocent man would deny killing anybody. He acted like a crazy man.

He lay there in that cheap room at Fifth and Main Streets and stared at the yellow wallpaper, and finally he started seeing images roving around on it. He started seeing Yankovitch's face in it. It got so he didn't have to look at the papers at all except maybe to glance at the headlines. He could see Yankovitch's face in the wallpaper, screaming that he wasn't guilty, and finally he could hear his voice when he screamed.

It went on for a long time. He got to seeing the face and hearing the screams of innocence at night, and he couldn't sleep.

It reached the point where Barlow knew he would never sleep again, not unless he did the only thing he could do to keep Yankovitch from going to the gas chamber.

It had been a sensational murder. Not because of Yankovitch of course, because he wasn't anybody at all. But because of the community standing of Bill Mardin, the good solid citizen. One of the daily papers headlined something about the trial almost every day, and for a long time Barlow hadn't been able to read anything but the headlines, and even the headlines blurred much of the time.

But they told Barlow enough. The last big story had said that Yankovitch had been found guilty of first degree murder and was going to be taken care of by the state for it. And Barlow had seen the front page spread, the pictures, the last time he bothered to look. There was Yankovitch, a scrawny, beat-out guy with a balding head, his wrist chained up to the wrist of another prisoner for the one way ride up north.

There were more stories after that, but Barlow didn't look anymore. He knew the exact day and hour when Yankovitch was going to die in the gas chamber and he stayed there in the small room and thought about it.

He'd been there too long, thinking about it. Tomorrow night was the night when Yankovitch would die, and Barlow wouldn't be able to live after that either, he knew that now. He'd been liquored up good for a long time now, real good, but he hadn't been able to just lie back and let Yankovitch die.

Now he was moaning deliriously, shivering under his blanket. His face was white, and his thin red mouth had turned a leaden pink, and was pinched at the corners.

Then he sat up slowly and swung his shaking legs to the floor. Incidents, unpleasant fragments of his life, churned

turgidly in his brain like a pot of thick stew coming to a boil. He remembered childhood incidents. He'd been a soft-hearted dumbhead anyhow.

The room was filled with grey, damp shadow, and outside in the rainy night a neon sign blinked at him over the top of a dirty, gleaming tar-papered roof. He had the shakes real bad. It took him a long time to get into his clothes and it took him even longer to get over to the Lincoln Heights Police Station.

He told his name to a desk sergeant who in turn said his name was O'Brien. O'Brien was reading a magazine and he was sleepy. He looked up once, then down again and kept on reading. All Barlow could see was the top of the sergeant's blond head. He was a young guy, big in the shoulders with a heavy nose and thick lips. He had asked absently what Barlow wanted.

It had been building up a long time. He couldn't help it now when it came out of him all at once and he started to cry. It embarrassed him, but he went right ahead talking and crying, and it was funny, but he kept on talking about all kinds of things that didn't seem to have anything to do with what he really was here to tell.

The sergeant said, "Come on, fella! What do you want?"

Barlow got it out then. He told the sergeant. And the sergeant looked up. "What was that, fella?" he asked.

"I said I killed Bill Mardin. Daniel Yankovitch didn't kill him. I did!"

"You killed Bill Mardin, huh?" The sergeant turned and winked at a plain-clothes cop, or a detective probably, who sat at a nearby desk with his feet propped up on top of it. He had a long cigarette between his fingers. He was a small, lean man with a face the color of suntan oil, and eyes that had been looking at Barlow steadily with a dark, hard brightness.

"Hey, Dent. This guy killed Bill Mardin."

Dent didn't wink. He didn't say anything.

The sergeant said, "Dent, everybody around the City Hall's been making a big mistake. It was this guy who killed Mardin. He says so himself."

Dent didn't say anything. He just kept on looking at Barlow steadily.

"That's right!" Barlow said. "I killed him!"

"Sure you did," the sergeant said. "Why don't you go somewhere and sleep it off, fella? You're past the elephant and snake stage. Go on, get out of here."

"But I did kill him!" Barlow said. "I would've told you sooner. I wanted to. I couldn't, that's all. Now I'm telling you. If you'll take it down or something I'll tell you how I did it. I went out there—"

"You know, that's sure strange," the sergeant said. "But we proved that Daniel Yankovitch killed Bill Mardin. When did you kill him, Mr. Barlow? Before or after Yankovitch did?"

The sergeant put the magazine away and leaned back and yawned. His chest swelled and almost burst the tailor-made uniform. He had been to college and had played football and had all he wanted to eat all of his life. Dent seemed different. The sergeant's eyelashes were white and his eyes were lidded as he looked up at Barlow.

To keep from falling, Barlow leaned against the desk. "I tell you I did kill him! Honest to God I did it!"

"Sure you did it," grinned the sergeant. "You know, every time there's a murder you'd be surprised how many letters and phone calls and personal appearances there are—all because so many people did it. It's psychological."

"Listen—" Barlow whispered.

"We got a police psychiatrist here. You know what he says? He says everybody's got a guilt complex. Everybody thinks he's done something wrong sometime and ought to get punished for it. So every



time there's a murder, a lot of people always come around wanting to be punished." His voice sounded softer now. "Look, fella. It's okay. You been hitting the bottle too heavy and you need to sack in for a long time. If you'll just walk out of here and won't cause any trouble, it's okay."

Barlow yelled hoarsely. He grabbed the sergeant by the coat lapels and yelled in his face how he had killed Mardin. The sergeant flipped a heavy arm across and numbness ran up Barlow's arm and the sergeant stood up quickly.

Barlow flung himself across the desk. He scarcely felt the impact of the sergeant's fist, but it was something considerable and well placed. And Barlow woke up much later in the drunk tank where some peculiar character was rubbing his forehead and murmuring prayers for his salvation. Bums in various stages of drunkenness were sprawled all over.

The character with the long red beard and a burlap sack around him was still rubbing Barlow's forehead, but Barlow sat up. Pain exploded in his head and subsided to a dull, dizzy throbbing.

"You know why I get myself put in here all the time?" the bearded man said. "I'll tell you, son. So I can save souls. This is the place to do it, and I can save yours. You want your soul saved, don't you, son?"

Barlow pushed the beard aside and staggered across the tank to the bars. He yelled wildly at the guard, who told him to pipe down. Barlow turned around. "What time is it?" he whispered.

It was five in the morning.

**B**ARLOW sat down on an iron cot and stared at the concrete floor. He closed his eyes, but it didn't do any good. He could see the scrawny, balding Yankovitch in death row, waiting in a lonely cell to be taken away to the gas chamber.

He could feel the way Yankovitch felt. He wanted to scream. He put his hand over his mouth and rocked back and forth. He got up and stood there, staring wildly around at the faces and the bodies and at the bearded man.

"I killed Bill Mardin!" Barlow shouted. "I told the police, but they won't believe me! He's going to die tonight, for something I done! I've got to make them believe me!"

A few drunks laughed. Barlow yelled and there were more and louder laughs. It seemed to get louder and louder, and Barlow fell down on the floor and covered his ears. After a while he sat up and then went over to the bars and called to the guard.

The guard came back and looked at him with marked disinterest. "I want to talk to Sam Dent," Barlow said.

"Why?"

"About a case he's working on. He told me to see him this morning." He didn't know why he'd said that, except that somehow he had an idea Dent might help him. Dent hadn't winked, nor said anything one way or the other.

The guard nodded. "I'll tell Dent. I'm sure he'll be overjoyed at the invitation, Mr. Barlow. However, Dent happens to be off duty right now, and he won't be back until this afternoon."

"But couldn't you phone him? It's a matter of life or death!"

The guard nodded. "I know, Mr. Barlow. You killed Bill Mardin. It's hell, isn't it, sitting around waiting for an innocent guy to die for a murder you did? It's really hell. Everytime I've had to do it I've had it rough; it's damn near driven me crazy."

Barlow stumbled back away from the bars and sat down. He lay down then and shut his eyes, tight. In the darkness he saw Yankovitch sitting in a little square box of a room, waiting to die.

"Listen, Yankovitch," Barlow whis-

pered "I'm doing everything I can. I'm trying to tell them the truth. I'll get it across to them before they kill you. Honest I will, Yankovitch. Listen, you got to believe me! I'm doing everything I can!"

He decided after a while to take it easy and be quiet. Maybe that way they would let him out sometime during the day, because the tanks were overcrowded. If he were outside maybe he could do something, at least he'd have a lot better chance of doing something.

Finally they did let him out. It was raining outside, and he walked around a while until he was soaked to the skin. Finally he looked up Dent's name in the directory and dialed the number.

It was five-thirty. Yankovitch didn't have very long. It probably seemed so much shorter than it really was, to him.

A woman answered the phone, and Barlow asked to speak to Mr. Dent. He waited for a hundred years while Dent was being called to the phone. The inside of the phone booth was like a damp oven, and the smell of his wet clothes and hair was a fog around him.

He heard Dent's voice. It was a very calm voice, like his face.

"Mr. Dent. This is Howard Barlow. Now wait a minute. I haven't been drinking. Don't hang up on me, please. I haven't touched a drop today. I'm sober. You got to believe I'm sober, Dent!"

"You're sober," Dent said.

Barlow tried to keep the trembling out of his voice. He had a tough time keeping a hold on the receiver. "Dent, I've got to talk to you. You can think I'm crazy or anything else, but just give me a chance. Don't tell anyone else. Just you and me. Yankovitch is going to die at midnight, and I've got to stop it. If you'll listen to me, I can prove I killed Mardin. I can tell you how I did it and everything."

"All right," Dent said after a brief pause.

Barlow sighed. "Do you want me to come out there to your place?"

"No. Where you calling from?"

Barlow told him. Dent said to meet him at a restaurant a block away.

"Hurry up," Barlow said. "We don't have much time."

DENT ordered coffee and they took it over to a small table by the big, rain-washed front window. When Barlow lifted the cup, he spilled coffee over the table. He sat the cup down and mopped at the coffee with a napkin and tipped over the sugar bowl. He didn't try to clean up the sugar. Dent looked at him without much of an expression on his face. He wasn't big and meaty like Mardin had been, or the sergeant, Barlow thought. *That's what we got in common. He hasn't had it so easy either.*

Barlow told him how it was. And he went on talking, trying to keep his voice from getting too high and Dent sat there listening closely, without nodding or saying anything.

After Barlow finished, Dent smudged his cigarette out. "You say you shot Mardin with his own automatic? That Mardin gave you the automatic and told you to kill him with it?"

"No. He dared me, see?" Barlow slowly licked his lips, and nodded again. "Lord help me if he didn't! That's what happened. I know it sounds crazy, but why would I cook up a crazy story like that? He kept digging me and digging and digging and then he handed me the gun and kept telling me how I didn't have the guts to kill him, and something happened to me. I grabbed up the gun and shot him. Hell—I emptied it into him!"

"And then you threw the automatic into the swimming pool?"

"Yes, yes, that's right, Dent!"

Dent got up. "I'm sorry, Barlow. Maybe you dug up too crazy a story."



"You don't believe me either?"

"Where you staying?" Dent asked.

Barlow didn't look up. He kept on staring at the blurred images of people walking past the rain-washed glass. His gaunt features hung even more slack now, his mouth open, his lower lip drooping. He was breathing with a regular panting rhythm.

When the detective repeated the question, Barlow told him where he stayed, the hotel and the room number. The small room, the one with the greasy yellow wallpaper on the ceiling. It was a room he wasn't ever going back to, but he didn't tell the detective that.

"It's crazy, but maybe I'll inquire a little about it," Dent said. "I'll contact you at your room if something happens to turn up."

"Sure." Barlow knew Dent was kidding, that this was a brushoff. And now Barlow knew nobody would ever believe the truth, no matter what he did. Yankovitch was going to die at midnight and there wasn't a thing Barlow could do about it.

There was only something Barlow could do about Barlow. But that was all.

He watched Dent walk through the revolving doors and saw his figure blur through the glass. After that for a while he didn't see anything. He got up and cast off into the stream of hurrying pedestrian traffic and it caught him up and whirled him along.

He didn't know where the stream was going, and for a while he didn't care. Some guys were rich enough and powerful enough that they could do something in a place like this, pull wires, pay off somebody. But none of them had a name that sounded anything like Howard Barlow.

He gasped as though he were very tired as he was jostled along, taking deep, useless breaths of the wet, sullen air and shambling forward, stumbling now and

then on nothing, bumping into people.

HE WALKED for a long time and he saw a clock in a jewelry store window, and it was eleven-thirty. The bright light from the window lanced like splinters into the tender flesh of his eyeballs, danced about the base of his brain in reddened, choleric circles. He stumbled away from the window and drifted down Fifth Street, away from Main.

By the time he reached the high concrete jump-off where the big red Pacific Electric car ran down below, he felt so dizzy on his feet he had to lean on the wet rail, and his hands seemed to have the spongy, powerless sensation of a man awakening in the morning, unable to grasp anything.

He heard the clackity-clackity-clackity hum of the big car bearing toward him, the beam of yellow light swinging around, brushing him, sweeping around and ahead, and the car rushing past in a burst of streaming steel. He sighed hoarsely as the rush of wind seemed to suck him down.

He stood there for two hundred years, and a man came by and Barlow asked him what time it was, and the man said it was five minutes to twelve.

Barlow didn't have to close his eyes. He could see Yankovitch now, his image glowing up there in the somber gray that was closing down all around him. He was in that little box of a room now. Just Daniel Yankovitch, all alone. What kind of a room was it? Barlow didn't know, but he could imagine how it was. Very small maybe, and no sound at all in it, and there Yankovitch sat all alone.

Everyone had to die sometime, but no one was supposed to die that way. Not so alone.

Barlow leaned over the rail as the Pacific Electric car swung in fast from the other way on the nearer track. The rain was like a grey curtain, and he could see the rails shining down there.

He climbed through.

The detective hollered, "Hey!" He rushed out of the rain and grabbed Barlow by the collar just as he jumped. He dragged him back through the rails, screaming and kicking.

DENT TOOK the automatic out of his coat pocket as he talked to Doctor Summers.

"You say Barlow's really insane now," Dent said. "What's the matter with him?"

The doctor shrugged. "A form of schizophrenia, escape from reality. There's a form of catatonia involved also. He just refuses to want to live."

"Has he said anything?"

"A few times. We gave him a shot of amytal. He told us not to worry about him—that he was dead."

"Dead!"

"Yes. He said he died two nights ago at midnight, when Daniel Yankovitch died."

"Is there a chance of curing him?"

"Maybe. Insulin shock. And maybe the right words, if they could penetrate, might do it, be just as great a shock. He really hears, but his mind won't let him recognize the fact that he hears, you see."

Dent rubbed his fingers over the automatic. His voice was very low. "He's got to be cured, Doc. And I'm going to do everything I can to see that he is cured. If it takes money, I'll see that you get the money too. I consider it a personal responsibility. I'll stay with it until he comes out of it if it takes the rest of my life. Can I see him now?"

Doctor Summers nodded. "Go on in. But I doubt if he'll even recognize that anybody's there."

Dent went in and stood by Barlow's bed. Barlow lay there, looking up at the ceiling. His gaunt face was the color of chalk and there was no expression on it at all.

Dent held out the automatic. "I'm sorry as hell, Barlow," he whispered. "They drained the pool and the caretaker found the automatic, and I got it from him. I called your place and I got over there but you weren't there. Lucky I had that other dick tail you after you left the restaurant."

Barlow didn't say anything. Under the sheet his body was deathly still.

"Barlow. Don't pretend you don't hear me. You hear me all right. You told it straight the way you saw it and now I know how it was."

He moved the blue steel across Barlow's eyes. "You got to listen to me. Don't pretend you don't hear me. We had all the evidence in the world against Yankovitch. He killed Mardin all right. You hear that? He killed Mardin! He confessed just before he went to the gas chamber. He killed him because Mardin sent his brother to another state execution a year ago. It was a revenge killing!"

Barlow's eyes didn't move. He stared at the ceiling.

Dent swallowed hard. "Barlow, listen to this. You got to get this. You got to understand what I'm saying! This Mardin was a real funny guy. I'm just beginning to realize what a funny duck he really was. You know why he handed you this automatic and goaded you into firing it? Get this—Yankovitch was hiding outside those french windows, and he heard the whole thing. Right after you emptied this gun at Mardin, Yankovitch came in and put six slugs into him.

"But, Barlow, listen to me! Listen to me! The gun Mardin handed you was loaded with blanks! You hear me? It was loaded with blanks! It was a gag. It was Mardin's idea of a real funny gag!"

And when he looked down at Barlow's face this time, there were tears in Barlow's eyes.

Behind him, Dent heard the doctor say softly, "I guess he'll come out of it now. He heard you."



A NOVEL

By  
**Day Keene**

# DEATH



*McClarnen took a quick step toward the stove plant and a machine gun slug slapped him around. . . .*

*McClarnen dreamed of making a killing—then chose himself as the corpse!*

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# LIES DREAMING

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Grave for Two

**J**OHNNY McCLARNEN laid the pencil on the kitchen table. Then he picked it up and chewed one end of it. He wasn't a certified accountant. He was an armored truck guard. His job was to carry money, not to count it. But figures didn't lie. The guy in the bar had been right. As closely as he could calculate, May was bleeding his paycheck

of a big, fat fifteen dollars every week.

A big, homely, freckled-faced youth, with a mop of unruly red hair, McClarnen returned May's itemized budget and special checking account book to their spot back of the flour container and got a bottle of cold beer from the ice box.

*Damn that wise guy in the bar!* He wished he hadn't dropped into Kelly's. He wished the guy hadn't popped off. What he hadn't known hadn't hurt him. Now, even if May could explain, there



would always be a small doubt in his mind.

Carrying the beer with him, he walked on into the bedroom and sat on the edge of their bed. He and May had been married for six months. He loved her. He couldn't imagine not being married to May. But it wasn't fair of May to do what she was doing. If May wanted money for some purpose, all she had to do was confide in him. He was, after all, her husband.

"Ha," the wise guy in Kelly's had jeered. "There's a little thief in every dame, and marriage seems to bring it out. Look at the dames in this bar. You don't think they're single, do you? Naw. You know better. They're spending some guy's hard-earned dough. Some drink it up. Some play the ponies. Most of them have another guy they like. A guy they're fattening up with their husband's paycheck. Then at twenty minutes of six they hurry home to put a gob of delicatessen potato salad and cold salami on the table so they can tell Johnny what a hard day they've had and isn't it awful now the prices they charge for meat."

McClarnen sipped at his beer. The wise guy had the name Johnny. But he hadn't singled him out. He was just talking generally. Or was he? The small veins in McClarnen's temples began to throb. Maybe the guy knew something he didn't. Maybe he was trying to tip him.

Fluffing a pillow, McClarnen leaned back against the headboard of the bed and itemized what he knew about May. It wasn't much. He knew she was twenty-three and it had been love at first sight for both of them. She'd been working as a billing clerk in the First National Bank. He'd insisted she quit her job when they married. May had protested, but she'd quit. He hadn't probed into her past. It hadn't mattered. He had a few secrets of his own he hadn't offered as a topic of conversation. What had happened before

they met didn't count. It was now and the future that were important.

McClarnen lighted a cigarette. Then, though, there was the matter of children. He wanted a family. May claimed she did. But every time he mentioned the subject May cried and suggested that perhaps they'd better wait a year or two before taking on the added responsibility of a child. And it wasn't that May didn't love him. There were ways a man could tell. She waited on him hand and foot. You'd think the sun wouldn't rise if he didn't enjoy his breakfast. His cigarette suddenly bitter, the big youth snuffed it out.

"That's the hell of it," the wise guy in Kelly's had scoffed. "Along with being thieves, most dames are born actresses."

McClarnen returned the empty beer bottle to the kitchen and sat down in a chair to wait. It was twenty minutes of six when he heard May's key in the front door.

The blonde girl, her arms laden with small packages, came in with a breathless rush and squealed in dismay when she saw him. "Oh, Johnny. You're home. You've been home all afternoon. They've changed your afternoon off." Spilling her packages on the table, she lifted her lips to be kissed.

McClarnen kissed her, ashamed of the thoughts he'd been thinking. May wasn't a dame. She was his wife. She loved him. Her breath was sweet. She hadn't come from any barroom. Still, there was the matter of the fifteen dollars. "From Thursdays to Tuesdays," he said. He made the question casual. "Where you been?"

May slipped out of his arms and took off her coat. Her back was to him when she spoke. "A movie. Why?"

McClarnen wished she hadn't hesitated. "I just wondered," he lied.

May busied herself about the kitchen, setting the table, opening packages. "You don't mind a pick-up supper, just for

once, do you, Johnny? I meant to have baked spareribs, but for some reason the time got away from me."

She was talking too fast, too brightly. She smiled too much. There was no doubt about it. May was hiding something. McClarnen lighted another cigarette. "No. Not for once. What's for supper?"

"Potato salad and cold cuts," May smiled. "With a nice big piece of cheesecake for desert."

McClarnen ate, but it was an effort to swallow. With every bite he took he could hear the wise guy in Kelly's sounding off.

**A**FTER supper he picked up his hat and it was May's turn to ask where he was going. "Just down to Kelly's," he told her. "I want to see a guy about a dog."

May reacted as if he had slapped her. "Oh," she said. "I see. Well, have a good time."

It was the closest to a quarrel that they had come. It wasn't until the downstairs door had clicked behind him that he remembered this was the night of the Policeman's Ball and they had tickets to it and May had spent the weekend making over an old evening dress. He turned to go back to the flat again, then thought, *The hell with it.*

He wanted to talk to the guy in Kelly's, learn if by any chance the wiseacre did know something about May and had been singling him out.

To reach Kelly's he had to pass the Bijou. Mason, the manager, was standing on the walk inspecting the marquee. Mason wanted to know how tricks were. McClarnen said they were fine and led the subject around to May.

"Why, no," Mason said. "We haven't been honored with Mrs. McClarnen's patronage for some time, Johnny. I see her go by here almost every afternoon, though."

McClarnen walked on, trying to tell himself it didn't mean a thing. The Bijou wasn't the only movie in town. May could have gone to any of a dozen others. But had she?

The man for whom he was looking was no longer supporting the wood in Kelly's. Kelly only vaguely remembered him. The saloon keeper was more loquacious on the subject of wives. "Yeah. We get a lot of 'em," he told Johnny. "Every afternoon a half dozen dames I know are married spend their afternoons in here. You're lucky you married a nice sweet kid like May."

"Yeah. Sure," Johnny agreed with him. "Let's have a double rye, Kelly."

He seldom drank to excess. It was one of the reasons why Fariday Armored Truck Service paid him eighty-seven dollars and fifty cents a week. Two beers were usually his limit. Tonight he drank nothing but rye. It was midnight when McClarnen left Kelly's, and there wasn't quite enough walk.

May was in bed but awake. She sat up as Johnny switched on the bed lamp but said nothing. Her eyes were red from crying. With her straw-colored hair in twin pigtails, she looked like a frightened little girl caught in a jam pot. *She should be frightened*, McClarnen thought. She was in a jam, a bad one. He wanted to slap her, hurt her, mark her, hurt her as he had been hurt. He sat on the edge of the bed and debated accusing her openly of two-timing him and decided with drunken gravity it would be much more satisfactory to catch her at it. The thought of another man kissing May's parted lips turned the whiskey sour in his stomach. McClarnen fought a desire to be sick.

*I'll kill them both*, he thought. *That's just what I'll do. I'll catch them together and shoot them dead.*

Meanwhile, though, May must have no reason to believe he knew that she



was two-timing him. Unknotting his tie, he asked with drunken subtlety. "About that movie thish afternoon. What show didja go to?"

May clutched the covers. "The Bijou," she gasped. "Why, Johnny?"

His fingers trembling with anger, McClarnen bent and unlaced his shoes to keep from slapping her lying lips. "I—just wondered," he dismissed the subject. . . .

**T**HE MORNING matched McClarnen's mood. It was grey and looked like rain. His throbbing head echoed the occasional distance rumble in the sky. Flagle, the barn boss, was tacking a notice on the bulletin board in the squad room when he reported for duty. From force of habit McClarnen joined the group of uniformed guards and drivers around the board.

Hep Hooper, his driver said, "Not bad, eh? Two thousand bucks cold cash for every guy you kill trying to stick up a truck. That affair in Boston must have thrown the fear of the Lord into the big shots."

Jack Shane, the third man of their three man crew, said soberly, "I could use two thousand bucks."

"Who couldn't?" Hooper snorted. "That would mean college for my boy. Say. Did I tell you guys what the kid said yesterday morning?"

"Yeah," McClarnen said sourly.

Flagle held up his hand for silence. "You guys can read," he said. "You know as much about it as I do. Almost. I did hear one of the big shots say they had a tip some of the same heist mob who pulled the million dollar job in Boston had moved into town. That's why they've upped the ante. Instead of one grand you get two grand for any hood you kill during an attempt to heist your truck or any of the dough you're carrying. But get this. And get it straight. There's another side

to the story. If any of you crews let your trucks get knocked over, if you lose as much as a dime, don't bother to come back. You're fired."

Shrugging, McClarnen walked on into the machine-gun-guarded vault to check out his first load. He didn't give a damn about his job. He couldn't even use two thousand dollars. Yesterday it might have meant something. Yesterday two thousand dollars would have meant the down payment on the G.I. house May was always talking about. And an electric stove and a refrigerator and a hot water heater. Today it didn't mean a thing. May didn't love him any more. May was sneaking out afternoons and meeting some other guy.

What was it the wise guy in Kelly's had said, "Along with being thieves, most dames are born actresses."

And May had had the nerve to come into his arms last night and try to kiss his suspicions away. Johnny's cheeks burned at the thought. The nerve of the dirty, pretty little witch.

"What's the matter, Johnny?" Shane asked. "Why so sober this morning?"

McClarnen told him the truth. "I don't feel good. My head aches."

"Virus X, probably," Hooper offered.

"Yeah. Probably," McClarnen agreed.

For the first time since he'd held down the job the money sacks felt heavy. There were a lot of sacks. Beside the small stuff consigned to currency exchanges he checked in six payrolls and a transfer of one hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars from the State Trust to the Pioneer National Bank. When he slammed the steel door on himself and Shane and gave Hooper the go-ahead the truck was carrying over two hundred and eighty-two thousand dollars.

Shane performed the morning ritual of checking his gun as the truck rolled out of the garage. "Two thousand bucks," he repeated. "Gee. That sounds good,

doesn't it? I could pay up Jen's hospital bill and maybe send her down to Warm Springs if I had that much dough." He peered through the slit in the steel. "Come on, you stickup guys."

McClarnen's mood continued sour. The close confinement in the armored truck and the heavy jolting over the holes in the pavement failed to help his aching head. "There's only one catch to that," he squelched Shane's enthusiasm. "With as much heat on as there is, any mob with guts enough to try to knock over an armored truck are going to be doing some shooting, too. And what in hell good would two thousand bucks do a dead man?"

Hep Hooper called through the heavily-barred window back of the driver's seat, "Don't be such a pig, Johnny. Think of all the fun your widow could have with two grand."

"Nuts to my widow," Johnny said shortly.

He stood on the walk with his hands on the butts of the guns on his thighs, looking up and down the walk and into all the overlooking windows and doorways, while Shane unloaded the Art-Craft payroll. Then, leaving Hooper inside the money compartment to guard the truck, he followed Shane into the plant and got a receipt for the money.

Out on the street again, the process was reversed. He and Shane guarded the truck while Hooper unbolted the door, climbed out of the money compartment, and resumed his place back of the wheel. Each move was timed and planned, and always the same. The danger point, of course, was when the door to the money compartment was still open, and he and Jack Shane were still on the walk. That, McClarnen thought, would be the time for a mob to strike. But preferably on a Friday. What with the payroll for the stove works and the pickups from the car barn and the cab garage, there was a half

hour during the Friday tour when McClarnen had seen the truck carrying close to three-quarters of a million dollars.

It was a few minutes after noon when they returned to the garage. After checking in his pickups, McClarnen went straight to Flagle. "I feel like hell," he told the barn boss. "How's for putting another man on Number One this afternoon?"

Flagle liked him and was sympathetic. "Sure. Sure thing, Johnny. You do look kinda peaked at that. I noticed it this morning." He repeated what Hooper had said. "Maybe you've picked up this Virus X that's floating around."

"Yeah," McClarnen agreed.

He changed from uniform to street clothes in the locker room but kept one of his guns. It bulged in his hip pocket. He had no shoulder holster. He compromised by thrusting it under his belt. It began to drizzle again. In the doorway of the barn, turning up the collar of his topcoat to meet the turned down snap brim of his hat, McClarnen thought, *This ought to be a good test. If May meets the guy this afternoon, she really loves him.*

Not that it made any difference. May could be in love. She could be merely amusing herself. McClarnen's hurt pride formed a lump in his throat. Either way he meant to kill them both. No dame ever lived who could do that to him.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Lady, Be Dead

ONE O'CLOCK found him in the dingy hallway of the apartment building across the street from the one in which he and May lived. He stood looking up at their windows through the glass door. It wasn't much of a building. The neighborhood was old and so was the apartment. The rooms were small and dark. The plaster was patched and



cracked. Two garbage cans filled to overflowing stood on the walk beside the front stoop. The street was narrow and heavily traveled by truck traffic. Small wonder May was always talking about raising enough dough to pay down on a G.I. house. McClarnen made a mental correction. No wonder May *had* always talked about a little house in the suburbs with maybe a fenced-in green yard. May hadn't talked about a house for some time now. The corners of McClarnen's lips turned down. He felt the butt of the gun at his waist.

He'd just reached his lookout in time. The door of the building across the way opened and May came out on the stoop wearing her white transparent rain cape and hood. McClarnen's hands were hot. The large veins in his temples throbbed. If only May wasn't so pretty. If only she didn't look so sweet.

The blonde girl looked carefully up, then down the street. Then, certain she wasn't observed, she hurried north, the unheard tap of her high heels driving nails into McClarnen's heart. He allowed her to get a half block ahead of him, then followed on his own side of the street. Passing the Bijou, May looked up at the marquee. Even at the distance McClarnen could see her lips moving. She was probably memorizing the titles of the double feature in case she was late again tonight.

*The witch. The pretty little witch.*

She passed 2nd Avenue and then Grand Boulevard, still headed north. McClarnen was grateful for one thing. The neighbors didn't know his shame. They wouldn't know until they read it in the papers. May was smart as well as pretty, at least smart enough to do her running around out of her own neighborhood.

The cheaper saloons and bars and taverns lay behind her now. Up here in the Northeast Section they called them grills. McClarnen walked on doggedly, ignoring

the rain. Bars, saloons, or a grill, May was in a hell of a hurry to get to the guy she was meeting. In the forty-two hundred block she slowed her pace a trifle. There were two grills in the block, the Wedgewood on the east side of the street, the Plantation on the west. He and May had eaten and danced at the Wedgewood a few times. She was headed, McClarnen decided, for the Wedgewood. Her tastes were expensive. No wonder she had to bleed his pay check of fifteen bucks every week. He stopped under the lowered awning of the Plantation to give May time to get inside. Fighting an almost overpowering impulse to be sick, he watched May enter the Wedgewood. *May couldn't do this to him.* As he stood, wavering, undecided as to his next move, it was decided for him. May came out of the grill almost immediately, accompanied by a dark-complected, middle-aged, well-dressed man. A second man, his right hand in his coat pocket, walked out of the grill behind them and stood in the doorway of the Wedgewood, watching while the dark-complected man, smiling and obviously pleased to see May, unlocked and opened the smaller door that led to the spacious and reputedly beautifully furnished living quarters over the swank restaurant.

His hand on the butt of his gun, McClarnen had never felt so baffled. May wasn't fooling around with any punk. She had set her sights high. The dark-complected man was Bud Schaeffer, the owner of the Wedgewood and a minor power in local gambling. The second man was Joe Diamond, his bodyguard.

As McClarnen watched, Schaeffer bowed May into the hall and the heavy door closed solidly behind them. Joe Diamond walked back into the grill. There was nothing, no one on the walk, nothing but the pelt and patter of the rain. A moment later he caught a glimpse of May's white rain cape as it passed an

upper window. Then that too was gone.

McClarnen's ears burned as he felt the butt of his gun with a wet hand. So May was spending her afternoons at the Bijou, eh? He knew now where the fifteen dollars a week had gone. May hadn't spent it feeding drinks to any boyfriend. The owner of the Wedgewood had plenty of whiskey of his own. May had spent the money to make herself even more attractive. And the hell of it was that Schaeffer was relatively safe from him. He couldn't catch May and Schaeffer together. Either the restaurant owner and gambler or his bodyguard would blast him down before he could kick open the door to the upstairs living quarters.

"The dog," McClarnen said aloud.

"The dirty dog," a feminine voice echoed.

McClarnen turned to look at the speaker. A slightly older but even more beautiful girl than May was staring sullen-eyed at the window at the windows across the street. "The dog. The dirty dog," she repeated. Seeing McClarnen staring at her, she added, "You wouldn't happen to know the little blonde witch who just went upstairs with Bud Schaeffer, would you?"

"Yeah," Johnny said. "She's my wife."

The girl was red-haired and green-eyed, expensively dressed, with a lush figure that equaled or bettered May's. "Oh," she said. "I see. A brother chump, eh? We redheads don't seem to be doing so good, do we, fellow?"

"You know Schaeffer?" McClarnen asked.

"Know him?" the girl scoffed. "I used to be his girl until that damn blonde scab came along." She checked her vehemence. "I'm sorry. I forgot she was your wife."

McClarnen looked back at the windows. "I wish I could."

"You wish you could what?"

"Forget she was my wife."

The red-haired girl appraised him for a

long moment and, seemingly, liked what she saw. She moved a step closer on the rain swept walk. Her perfume was as expensive as her clothes, and subtle. "Well, why not?" she asked. "We aren't doing ourselves any good standing here in the rain glowering across the street." She laid a jeweled hand on his arm. Her green eyes narrowed. A husk came into her voice. "Why don't we go somewhere and buy ourselves a drink?"

McClarnen looked across the street, then back at the red-haired girl, and some of his feeling of futility left him. Keyed-up as he was, her presence and perfume were intoxicating. *To hell with May*, he thought. The red-haired girl was class with a capital C. What was sauce for the goose was just as much fun for the gander. "Sure. Why not?" he agreed. "I could use a drink about now. What's your name?"

Her fingers tightened on his arm. "Just call me Doris," she smiled.

HER APARTMENT, a few blocks away, was as lush and as expensive as her clothes. Sipping at his fifth straight shot of fifteen-year-old bonded rye, McClarnen studied it with approval. It was the type of apartment in which he'd like to live. This was the type of whiskey he wished he could afford. And there was no doubt about it. In the short time he had known her, Doris had already become a pleasant fever in his blood. She was everything May was, and more. She was all knowing, all understanding. She knew how to treat a man. A man could have a hell of a good time, all the time if he was married to a girl like Doris. More, she would be true to a man she really loved. She'd said so in as many words.

Sitting on the overstuffed sofa beside him, changed into a pastel green sheer-silk hostess gown that clung to her, the red-haired girl snuggled her fingers into



McClarnen's palm and wrinkled her pretty snub nose at the rain-smearred window. She, too, was a little drunk. "To hell with the rain. To hell with Bud Schaeffer. To hell with your wife. To hell with everything but us." She smuggled even closer to him. "Maybe the whole thing was a blessing in disguise. I can't begin to tell you how glad I am I met you, Johnny."

McClarnen squeezed her fingers. "I'm glad I met you, Doris." He wished he could rid himself of his guilt complex and really let himself go. He didn't owe May a thing. It was May who had started this. Still, there it was. He had promised to love, honor, and cherish May as long as they both should live.

"You're too sober," Doris complained, and poured them both another drink.

After that things became confused. Nothing much happened, except McClarnen remembered it was midnight when he got home and cursing May because she cried. It was like a woman to try and shift the blame. He even considered having the whole thing out with her, but fell asleep before he could give voice to his thoughts.

Thursday was a long grey nightmare. He wished his afternoon off hadn't been changed. He didn't dare take a drink during working hours but he could feel the need down to his toes. It rained again and his face was as grey as the day. Hep Hooper was certain he had flu. Even Flagle noticed his condition and suggested he take a week off, but McClarnen resisted the suggestion fiercely. In his new world of upset emotional and moral values, his job with Fariday Armored Trunks, Inc., was the only solid rock of fact that he had left. It seemed almost impossible that forty-eight short hours could so upset a man's life. He felt shamed and somehow empty, as if something fine and beautiful had gone out of his life forever. He blamed the

feeling on May. All of this was her fault.

After changing his clothes at the barn he went to see Doris. She took one look at his face and poured him two double drinks. The red-haired girl's cheeks were wet with tears.

She told him, "Bud knows you were here yesterday. And he stormed in like a madman this morning."

McClarnen hit the ceiling. "He should be sore?"

Doris sniffled. "Well, he is. And he knows who you are. And he threatened to shoot you, too. He's a dirty dog in the manger, that's what he is."

McClarnen repeated, "He should be sore."

Doris lowered her eyes. "Oh, if we could only go away somewhere together, Johnny. If we could only get out of this whole mess—"

She refilled their glasses.

McClarnen sipped his considering her statement. Bud Schaeffer was tough. Bud Schaeffer was bad. Bud Schaeffer had a lot of drag in town. He didn't want to be shot for something that May had started. There was no doubt that Doris was lovely. She probably would be good for him. They probably would be happy. At least for a while. But there was one unsurmountable problem. "Yeah, sure," he agreed. "Our going away together sounds very lovely."

He gulped his drink nervously. Doris told him. "I've been thinking about that, Johnny. If we had a lot of money we could go to Mexico, or even South America, couldn't we?"

"Yeah. Sure," McClarnen agreed. "Or China. Or South Africa." He made certain she understood. "But I wasn't kidding you yesterday, Doris. All I've got is my job."

Doris said, "Let's have just one more little drink first. You won't believe it, Johnny. But I have the most marvelous plan."

"What sort of a plan?"

"Well, I have a brother named Bill. And Bill has two good friends who aren't afraid of a damn thing, up to and including the law."

Her voice now petting him, now nagging, now accusing, now insistent, purred on until the poison in it numbed all his senses except the roaring in his ears. Then, thinking of all people, about May, McClarnen leaned his head forward and passed out.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### The Big Heist

THERE WAS no rain today, but the grass was greener for it. The trees in the park were budding. The sun was a brassy ball climbing in a blue sky tired of weeping. Hep Hooper was filled with the latest cute things his four-year-old had said. Even Jack Shane was more optimistic about his wife's eventual recovery from the attack of polio that had kept her bedridden for months.

"I figure," he told McClarnen, "if I cut out smoking and noon lunches that will save seventy cents a day. That's three dollars and fifty cents a week. In fifty weeks that's one hundred and seventy-five dollars. I can buy the braces that Jen needs for that and still send her to Warm Springs for three weeks or more. You see, it won't cost her anything there. It's just the transportation that I have to raise."

The heat in the money compartment of the truck was stifling. Every time Hep hit a bump, McClarnen thought the top of his head would come off. He almost wished it would. This thing was mad, fantastic. He'd dreamed the night just past. Or had he? Doris' voice rose over the hum of the motor.

*Mexico, even South America. I have*

*a brother named Bill. . . Bill has two good friends . . . and to, and including, the law. . . I could meet you in Acapulco. . . From there we'll take a steamer to Lima.*

McClarnen sighed. "And our cut of three-quarters of a million dollars."

"You say something, Johnny?" Shane asked.

McClarnen shook his head and wished he hadn't. It felt like his brains were rattling. The three nights of heavy drinking plus the emotional strain must have shriveled them in his skull. He looked at the back of Hep Hooper's head, then looked at Shane. Even if he was the type of man who could do what Doris had outlined, he couldn't endanger the lives of two men on whom so many other lives depended. And no matter what Doris had promised, there was bound to be some shooting.

The big youth buried his aching head in his hands. He'd been a fool, an awful fool. Leaving Doris out of the question entirely, May doing what she had done didn't give him the right to betray a trust for his own personal gain.

Shane sympathized, "Ya still feel bad, eh?"

"Yeah," McClarnen said shortly. Doris' voice, flat and cold now, beat at his aching head.

*We'll be waiting in front of the stove works. When you reach in to get the payroll, Bill will throw down on you with a sub-machine gun. Only a fool would argue with a machine gun. You put up your hands. The other two guards will take their cue from you. We'll load the money in the car that I'll be driving. The whole thing won't take two minutes. So you're suspected. So what? They can't prove a thing.*

McClarnen looked at Shane. "What do you know about Bud Schaeffer?"

Shane shook his head. "Not a damn thing." He beamed and was off on his favorite subject. "Yes. I do at that. Re-

member me telling you the other day that polio victims are often smarter than folks who never have it? Well, Bud Schaeffer's girl is proof of that."

"His girl?"

"Yeah," Shane enthused. "A kid about fifteen, I should say. You know, on account of her mother being dead, Schaeffer fixed up those living quarters over the Wedgewood. Well, anyway, Ann, that's her name, was going to graduate from high school next June in the same class with my Betty. But on account of she got polio, bad, last Fall she couldn't go to school no more so Schaeffer hires a private tutor for her. And what happens? Just last night at supper Betty tells me that their section teacher told them that on account of Ann had done so good at home they're going to give her a special diploma in June, a year ahead of the class she would have graduated with."

"Oh," McClarnen said softly. "I see."

He thought he did. He thought he was beginning to see a lot of things. If he was right, a clever bunch of sharpers had made a heel as well as a fool of him.

They dropped off the sack for the Acme Currency Exchange and picked up the cab and car barn money.

As Shane slammed and bolted the door at the car barn, he grinned, "Boy. Now we're really loaded. How much you figure we got aboard, Johnny?"

McClarnen told him, tight-lipped, "Pushing three quarters of a million dollars."

Sweat beaded his forehead and his cheeks and the palms of his hands. If what now seemed like a distorted nightmare was fact, he had four short city blocks in which to make up mind as to what he was going to do. If he kept his part of the bargain, if he put up his hands and allowed the truck to be looted, Doris would probably keep her bargain with him. Even if it had all been a part of the come-on, the red-haired vixen really liked him.

There were ways a man could tell. Her song and dance about having been Bud Schaeffer's girl was just that, a song and dance. In the light of what he now knew, McClarnen doubted if the restaurant owner even knew the girl. Her waiting in front of the Plantation had been timed and staged. Doris had fished for a sucker. She'd got one. But if everything went well, Doris would keep her word. She would meet him in Acapulco. On the other hand, if he didn't go through with his part of the agreement he was in no condition to attempt to stop the heist. All he would do would be to get Hep Hooper and Jack Shane killed. McClarnen looked at his big hands. They were shaking so badly he doubted if he could hit a man with a shotgun. He certainly couldn't with the brace of useless revolvers strapped to his thigh. His coordination and reflexes were shot. Either way Doris won. Delilah had done her work well.

A block passed, two blocks, three. Hep was slowing now to pull up in front of the stove works. He had to make up his mind, right now. McClarnen considered calling to Hep to keep on going, but that wouldn't solve a thing. The order would have to be explained.

**S**TANDING up, McClarnen wiped his sweaty palms on the seat of his trousers and looked out through the barred window back of the driver's seat. It hadn't been a nightmare. It was real. They were on a business street with cars parked bumper to bumper against the curbs except in the no parking zones. Sitting back of the wheel of a big car in the first parking space away from the no parking zone in front of the stove works, Doris was smoking a cigarette and eyeing the approaching armored truck over the top of a newspaper. McClarnen tried to spot her possible partners, and failed. Then he recognized the wise guy who had sounded off in Kelly's. The hood



was pushing a street-cleaning cart and wearing a white street department uniform.

McClarnen's ears burned. His own evil mind had done it all. So May was hiding out a few dollars. She probably had a good reason.

The wise guy's circular white-wing cart probably held the machine gun. He tried to spot the other two men, and couldn't. They could be any of the dozens of passersby. Wiping his sweaty palms again, McClarnen made his decision.

"Pull up so you block that Caddy, Hep. Mash it into the curb if you can and still leave our door free. Then you guys stay in the truck and do whatever seems best to you. I'm taking in the payroll alone."

Hep gasped, "For the Lord's sake, why?"

"Because we're going to be stuck up."

Shane got to his feet. "How the hell do you know, Johnny?"

The words sour in his mouth, McClarnen told him the truth. "Because I vaguely remember helping plan it last night. But as of now, I'm backing out. Block the Caddy. Block it good, Hep."

There was a sound of crumpling steel as the heavy truck came to a stop. "You fool. You idiot!" Doris cursed. "Back that truck away from my car!"

The red-haired girl stopped cursing as Johnny McClarnen opened the door of the truck and stepped out on the walk with a money sack in hand. Then she cursed again, softly, as he turned and slammed the door.

Two of the pretended passersby stopped and cleared a space with their guns. The wise guy lifted a machine gun from his street-cleaner's cart. But their timing had been thrown off by the slammed door. Two more guards were supposed to be on the walk and the door of the money compartment left open. Then Doris broke the silence.

"Okay. Take them, boys," she said.

One of the men in the cleared space on the walk flipped a warning shot at the truck then attempted to tear the money sacks out of McClarnen's hands. Then Hep Hooper and Jack Shane and the wise guy opened up at the same time. McClarnen took a quick step toward the stove plant and a machine gun slug slapped him around and another pushed him face down on the pavement. As from a great distance he heard Doris scream, "Kill him! And then let's get out of here!"

A bucketing of shots drowned out her screams. Then everything was silence. McClarnen came to, still face down on the walk, still clinging to the sacks. Doris and the wise guy were gone but the other two would-be heist artists formed islands of solid flesh rising out of small seas of blood. The usual crowd of morbid curious had gathered. Squatted down on the walk beside him, a portly uniformed patrolman was trying to pull the money sacks out of his hands.

"It's okay, fellow," the patrolman pleaded. "Come on. Let me or one of your partners have the sacks."

His mouth dry and seemingly filled with bloody cotton, McClarnen continued to cling to the sacks until Jack Shane kneeled beside him.

"Okay?" McClarnen asked him.

"Okay," Shane replied. "You can let go, Johnny. We didn't lose a dime."

Hep, still excited, squatted on the other side of the big youth on the walk. "Not a dime, Johnny. Neither me nor Hep was even winged and we got two of them."

McClarnen released the money sacks to Shane. "Fine," he said. "Fine. That ought to send Jen to Warm Springs and Hep's kid to college." He looked up at Shane. "Now take the payroll inside and get a receipt."

By the time Shane had returned, an ambulance had arrived. "To hell with it," Johnny said. "I'm still responsible for the truck. I started out with it. I'm tak-

ing it back to the company garage now.”

**T**HE TELLING took a long time. The police surgeon interefered for one thing. There were a lot of people to be told and descriptions to be given to numerous detectives.

The police decided, finally, they had no charge against him. The company big shots left the company decision up to Flagle. The barn boss waited until almost sunset. Then he walked into the small hospital room in the barn where McClarnen was attempting to dress and go home over the nurse's protest.

“Let him go,” Flagle told the nurse. “You can't kill his kind.” When she had gone, the barn boss leaned against a sterilizer and rendered his decision. “Sixty days suspension without pay, Johnny. And if you get mixed up with a redhead or a bottle again, so help me, I'll kill you. You think I want to hold down this job all my life? Now get on home to your wife. She's been burning up my wire every fifteen minutes.”

McClarnen wet his lips. “You told her?”

The barn boss shook his head. “No. That's up to you. You're twenty-seven. You're old enough to know that anyone who dances has to pay the fiddler. Now go on. Get out of here.” He added a trifle less gruffly. “And, take care of that shoulder, boy.”

The street lamps were lit and pouring golden pools into the street for the neighborhood children to play in when the cab let Johnny off at his door.

May heard his step in the hall and opened the door. When she saw him she tried to smile. Then she saw his bandaged chest.

“Oh, Johnny. You've been hurt!”

The big youth nodded. “A little. But I'm going to be all right.”

He walked on into the flat and into the kitchen and sat down at the table. It was

decorated as for a kid's party with pink and blue paper streamers. There was a big cake in the center with six candles on it. “What's the cake for?” he asked.

May took his hat and his coat. “Why, they're ours, Johnny. We've been married six months tonight.”

May sat on the floor beside him. She was trying hard not to cry and failing. “And I'm sorry if I made you mad at me, Johnny. I did lie to you the night before last. I didn't go to the Bijou.”

McClarnen ran the fingers of his good hand through her hair. “Yeah. I know. You've been tutoring Bud Schaeffer's kid so she could get through high school. And her flat on her back from polio.”

May nodded, bright-eyed. “For almost four months. You didn't want me to work. And that wasn't work, really Johnny. Ann's a swell little kid. And Mr. Schaeffer's been just grand. He paid me a dollar an hour. And when he heard that Ann was going to graduate this June he insisted on giving me a fifty dollar bonus.” Her eyes sparkled. “And that's my present to us, Johnny. The three hundred and twenty dollars I've made tutoring, plus the fifty dollar bonus, plus the fifteen dollars I've been sneaking out of your pay every week, gives us six hundred and ten dollars. Enough to pay down on a G.I. house.”

McClarnen got up abruptly and walked through the small flat to the dark front windows. That was like May. He should have known. He still had to tell her about Doris and the holdup, and the sixty day suspension without pay. But May would understand.

May tagged along behind him, worried. “It's all right? You aren't mad, are you, Johnny?”

His eyes moist, McClarnen looked down at the yellow pools on the grimy street on which their children would never play. “No. I'm not mad,” he said. “I think it's swell.”



## Answers to THE THIRD DEGREE

(Questions on page 45)

1. If your crook acquaintance referred to one of his "schoolmates," he would be talking about a fellow convict.

2. The term "police storm" is applied to the third degree.

3. Yes. If a convict referred to the "P.K." it is likely he would be talking about the warden or "principal keeper."

4. A "Dolores" is a very attractive girl.

5. True. "Mitt glommer" is an underworld term often applied to politicians. The expression, of course, means "handshaker."

6. It would probably be useless to try any antidote on a person who had been poisoned with a large dose of prussic acid about an hour before. By all rights he should be dead.

7. Opium is the drug derived from the so-called "poppy of sleep."

8. When a drug addict is given the "reduction cure," he is simply given reduced amounts of the drug periodically, until off it entirely.

9. True. The underworld slang term, "lamous," means harmless.

10. If an underworld character told you he was going to visit a "kewpie," he would mean he was planning to call on a baby.

11. The slang term, "in hock," means in jail or pawned.

12. If a crook told you he was going to "hit the hump," this would mean he intended to attempt a prison break.

13. If an underworld stool pigeon sold you some "goulash," you would be gypped. Goulash is false information.

14. False. A "fuzey" is a zealous policeman—not an unskilled crook.

15. If a crook acquaintance told you he was heading for the front room, he would mean he was seeking out the gang's limousine.

16. An "eight wheeler" is a crook who specializes in robbing freight cars.

17. False. It is possible to shorten certain protruding jaws through the means of plastic surgery.

18. True. The typical amateur detective is more likely to spot a visible fingerprint than he is a latent one.

19. False. Efforts to match a bullet with the gun from which it was fired were carried on over a hundred years ago.

20. True. A "doormatter" is a petit larceny thief.



# STRANGE TRAILS

## MURDER--WITHOUT TRACE

SHORTLY BEFORE WORLD WAR II FLARED OVER EUROPE, THE SMALL CIRCUS OWNED BY MME. COLEA, WITH HER HUSBAND, VLADIMIR AS RING-MASTER, WAS PLAYING NEAR BUCHAREST, RUMANIA. BUSINESS WAS GOOD, AND WITH THE ARRIVAL OF TWO LIONS, SHOULD HAVE BECOME EVEN BETTER.

THE GOLEA'S MARITAL SITUATION, HOWEVER, WAS NOT HAPPY. VLADIMIR, WHO HAD JOINED THE CIRCUS AS A ROUSTABOUT, WAS YOUNG AND HANDSOME. HIS WIFE, WHO HAD RUN THE CIRCUS SHREWDLY SINCE THE DEATH OF HER FATHER, WAS NEARLY TWICE HIS AGE. RECENTLY VLADIMIR HAD SHOWN INTEREST IN A PRETTY TRAPEZE ARTISTE. MME. GOLEA DIDN'T LIKE IT.



THE DAY THE NEW LIONS ARRIVED, GOLEA SUPERVISED THEIR UNLOADING AND SAID HE WOULD ATTEND TO THEIR FEEDING HIMSELF, AFTER THE EVENING PERFORMANCE. WHEN THE CIRCUS HAD SETTLED DOWN FOR THE NIGHT, HE AND HIS WIFE CARRIED A BASKET OF MEAT TO THE LION'S CAGE.



AS THEY STOOD THERE WATCHING THE GREAT BEASTS, HALF STARVED FROM THEIR LONG RIDE, VLADIMIR SUDDENLY RAISED THE MEAT HOOK AND BROUGHT IT DOWN WITH STUNNING FORCE ON HIS WIFE'S HEAD.



# to MURDER by LEE



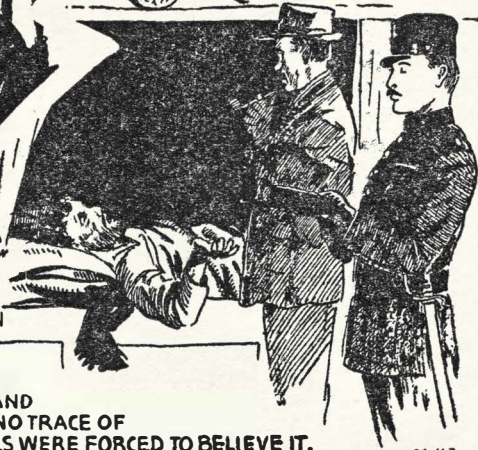
UNLATCHING THE DOOR AND PRODDING THE LIONS AWAY, HE THRUST HE RINSIDE. THE TAWNY MONSTERS FELL SAVAGELY UPON THE INERT FORM AND GOLEA TURNED AWAY WHILE THEY MADE THEIR TERRIBLE MEAL. THEN HE FISHED THE GARMENTS OUT WITH THE HOOK AND DESTROYED THEM.

NEXT DAY, GOLEA LET IT BE KNOWN HIS WIFE HAD RECEIVED A WIRE THAT SHE HAD INHERITED A LARGE ESTATE IN FRANCE AND HAD GONE TO CLAIM IT, LEAVING HIM IN CHARGE. LATER, WHEN NO QUESTIONS WERE RAISED, HE SAID SHE HAD DECIDED TO REMAIN IN FRANCE.



SUSPICIOUS, HOWEVER, AT HIS NOW MORE ARDENT ATTENTIONS TO THE PRETTY ARTISTE, TWO PERFORMERS WENT TO THE POLICE. DETECTIVES QUESTIONED VLADIMIR, BUT HE PRODUCED LETTERS AND PAPERS OF AUTHORIZATION WITH HIS WIFE'S SIGNATURE, AND THEY OFFERED PROFUSE APOLOGIES.

SEVERAL MONTHS LATER, IN A LOWLAND TOWN, GOLEA CONTRACTED TYPHOID. HE RAPIDLY GREW WORSE AND IN HIS DELIRIUM BEGAN MOANING, "POLICE! GET THE POLICE!" A DETECTIVE WAS CALLED IN THE HOPE OF QUIETING HIM, AND JUST BEFORE HE DIED GOLEA BABBLED A FULL CONFESSION OF HIS GHASTLY AND TO THAT MOMENT PERFECT CRIME.



INVESTIGATION REVEALED THE LETTERS AND PAPERS WERE FORGERIES, AND WHEN NO TRACE OF MME. GOLEA COULD BE FOUND, OFFICIALS WERE FORCED TO BELIEVE IT.

34-167



*Emeline's distrust showed again as she urged she needed no one to stay the night with her. . . .*



# ASK A BODY

●

*Most terrifying Christmas story ever told is that of the lovely little slaybelle—whom a jury convinced that there was no reason she couldn't get away with murder!*

●

**By  
H. Hassell Gross**

**P**OLLY Houseman Bodine—"Pretty Polly," agitated journalists of the last century called her—was simply a gal who saw no reason not to commit murder. She came close to proving her point, too. "An attractive woman," she announced at the conclusion of her third trial, "is usually the object of a jury's sympathy."

The remark merited the tallest headlines ever used on the old *Police Gazette*. "This twice-convicted murderess," edi-



torials shrieked, "has the effrontery, the unparalleled shamelessness, to boast the most shameful reasons for her acquittal!" Long after Polly disappeared from the shops and bars of lower Manhattan, and when even Staten Island, the scene of her double murder, had almost forgotten her, indignant reporters continued to refer to her as "this undoubted murderer," "the Sister Slayer," and "the Christmas Eve Killer." Libel laws were less stringent in those days.

On Christmas Eve of 1844, the lights in the windows of Polly Bodine's sister-in-law, Emeline Houseman, went dark at ten-thirty. All that night snow thickened in the walks and on the door ledges in the little village of Granite City on Staten Island, across the bay from New York. When daylight of the 25th came, no smoke showed from Emeline's chimney. Nor was any sign of life noticed from the house during the whole of Christmas Day. Neighbors, and especially the elder Mrs. Houseman, Polly's mother, simply thought that Emeline must be visiting for the day. Then, at nine-thirty in the evening, a couple of late home-comers spotted a tongue of fire behind the closed shutters of Emeline's bedroom window. Their outcries brought almost the whole community to the house.

The bed was situated so that only the lower half of the wooden portion could be seen, but the entire mattress seemed to be aflame. The front door was locked and the back door resisted entrance. Finally a log was brought from the wood-yard to serve as a battering arm. The concerted rush of four men carried it through the door and propelled them into the hall. Smoke and the smell of kerosene filled the place, but the fire itself was confined to the bed on which Emeline and her little daughter lay. The mattress from the spare bed in the opposite corner was used to smother the flames; and then the men stood back.

The stiffened bodies of the woman and child would have spoken of murder even if there had been no cord sunk into the flesh of Emeline's neck, no gaping wound in the little girl's head. Parts of a black silk handkerchief, charred away to the knot, bound the dead woman's wrists and knees.

The newspapers made much of that handkerchief. It was a woman's, of sheer chiffon, a delicate handmade edging crocheted into the rolled hem. To a later judge and jury it announced that Polly Bodine set the death scene. No other woman of Emeline's modest acquaintance possessed such a handkerchief. But in spite of all the references to an object so clearly pointing to her, no mention of Pretty Polly appeared in the news columns on the first day. On the next, however, a discreet reporter hinted that the victim's sister-in-law was separated from her husband, Andrew Bodine, and with reason.

Anybody who studies Polly's career never fails to wonder why she chose not to kill Andrew. He gave her motive and opportunity to spare. The bottle kept him semi-conscious from the date of their marriage on Polly's fifteenth birthday to her thirtieth year—at which time he suddenly roused enough to charge his wife with misconduct and disappear. Students of her character, so full of the will to slay, suggest that only motherly love for their son, Albert, preserved Andrew's life. If so, it was a pity, for Albert was a truth-telling lad and as such did his level best to get his mother convicted by New York state and hanged.

When Albert was seventeen and Papa Andrew had been three years in the void, Polly tenderly placed the boy as clerk in Apothecary John Waite's Canal Street shop in New York City. His salary included bed and board for himself and Polly in the living quarters behind the store. Polly's residence there was some-

what irregular but the proven fact is that she stayed at Waite's on the night of Saturday, December 23rd.

The next afternoon, Christmas Eve, she togged herself out in a voluminous coat and three red shawls, highly becoming to her brunette complexion, and left the place. Waite first testified that she meant to spend the night at her mother's house in Granite City on Staten Island; then he stated that she was bound for Mrs. Strang's on Eighth Street in New York. Albert was not so truthful. He swore, and stuck to it in the face of two murder convictions and a third trial, that Polly's destination on Christmas Eve was Emeline Houseman's in Granite City to spend the night.

A neighbor of Emeline, Miss Matilda Rourke, also placed Polly at the former's house on Christmas Eve. "She came in at five o'clock," Matilda testified, "just as I was leaving and a full half-hour before she was expected. For Mrs. Houseman had not finished hiding the silver spoons and her gold watch and the little girl was still wearing the coral beads and clasp."

The hint of motive is here and more than a suggestion that neither Emeline nor Matilda welcomed the guest in a trusting spirit.

Emeline locked away the trinkets before Matilda left, but: "Polly saw through the door where she put them and said, 'Brother George had no business to go to Virginia for the oyster business and leave Emeline alone for a month with valuables in the house.'" Emeline's distrust showed itself again as she urged that she needed nobody to stay the night with her.

**P**OLLY ignored the hint and proceeded with a rather garrulous discussion of George's absence and the financial arrangements incidental to it. Suddenly, turning to Miss Rourke, she pronounced these words: "He sold the schooner before he left and realized over

a thousand. Emmy, no doubt, has the sum in safekeeping."

The remark was greeted with silence. "Mrs. Houseman said nothing," Matilda Rourke afterward testified, "and I said nothing either; for her to have spoken would only have meant another's death instead of her own!" Matilda was reading after the event; on that Sunday, she took her leave like a good but non-interfering neighbor and walked home, noticing at three doors down the Christmas wreath on the elder Mrs. Houseman's door. She wondered a little that Polly was spending the holiday eve with Emeline instead of her own mother. . . .

Less than fifteen hours later, the bodies were discovered. A neighbor who had helped break into the house and had seen the death-freighted bed, walked up to Emeline's mother-in-law where she stood with some other women at the edge of the frightened crowd.

"Where's your daughter Polly?" he asked.

The old woman stared. "Are they hurt? Why don't they bring them out?" she asked.

He led her back in the direction of her own house. "You must notify George at once—"

"He's on his way; he wrote he'd be here the 27th or 28th."

"And Polly—is Polly at home to help you?"

Again the mother was silent in answer to a question about Polly. She began to cry. "The fire smothered them!" Her neighbor corrected her in gentle tones: "No; but they are dead—murdered in their sleep."

"In their sleep?" she cried wonderingly. "But they would not be abed so early."

And then old Mrs. Houseman remembered—the thing that would finally convince her that her own daughter was a murderess. She was back in the morning



of that day, suddenly awakening in the chill before dawn.

A series of low knockings on her window, a whispered call repeated: "Mother! Let me in! Mother! Open the door!" She scurried on bare feet to the front room; paused an instant with her hand on the wooden draw-bar. "Polly?" The whisper came at her through the keyhole: "Let me in!"

She flung open the shutter. The figure rushed past her out of the moonlight shining on fallen snow into the covering darkness of the room. *Angry*, she thought. *Probably another quarrel with Emeline. Rushing in here before daybreak. . . . Well, the girl has had a miserable life.*

She was an old woman, her toes curling from the cold, and she wanted her warm bed more than a scene with Polly. She dropped the bar back in place, turned and plodded to her bed.

When the old woman woke again at half-past seven there was no sign of Polly in the house except the kitchen fire and some ashes, like burned cloth, on the hearth. Nor did Polly appear again that day nor the next, though a neighbor carried the news of the shocking double murder to Waite's shop in New York. In answer to her mother's summons, Polly replied that she would come to help with the funeral arrangements when she could.

On Wednesday, the 27th, George Houseman arrived in New York on the Norfolk packet, *The Cheatah*, and went at once to the ferry slip in downtown New York. A neighbor from Granite City had come to meet him and break the news. The two men went aboard the Staten Island ferry at 1:30 P.M., and seated themselves in a corner of the upstairs cabin. In a few moments, a woman's laughter was heard on the stairs; George looked up and saw Polly come into the cabin with a stout gentleman who kept his arm about her waist while they walked up and down. On coming face to face with George

and his companion, the stout gentleman slunk downstairs; and then, with tears brimming over the full lower lids of her brown eyes, Polly fell upon Brother George's neck.

"Oh, how terrible, how dreadful," she wept, as loudly as she had laughed. "Dreadful—and for it to happen on Christmas Eve, too!"

Certain suspicions as to the holiday had already gotten abroad. George and his neighbor exchanged a look. Suddenly, George got up and hurried outside to the deck. Polly made to follow him but, slowly turning, discovered an expression on the face of his friend that must have put a chill down her back.

Worse chills were to come. Truthful Albert, who had made the crossing on the same boat but on the lower deck, spoke up the minute George mentioned Polly's strange assumption that the murders had occurred on Christmas Eve. "Well, that's impossible," he said, "as mother ought to know, for she spent that night with Aunt Emeline."

There was a silence, during which Mrs. Houseman turned her gaze fully on Polly. The younger woman flushed. Then, Mrs. Houseman rose and walked from the kitchen to the front room where the flower-banked coffins rested side by side in front of the hearth.

George followed her. Mrs. Houseman hid her face against the mantelpiece. "I let her into this house at six o'clock Monday morning. George, the trinkets are missing. . . ." She lifted her head and forced the words out: "The money you left with Emeline has been in this house for safekeeping for the last three weeks."

He started. "Did Polly know that?"

"No." She fell against George as she fainted.

Those four, Albert, George, Polly and the terrified old woman, spent the night without sleeping. The next day, Thursday, they attended the inquest.

GEORGE stated that nothing was missing from the house except eight silver spoons, a silver sugar tongs, his wife's gold watch and a set of corals strung for beads. The thousand dollars he had left with his wife, and which no doubt had furnished the motive for the slaying, he had secretly handed to his mother for safekeeping.

Policeman Starret swore that no stranger could have entered the house. The front door was locked on the inside and a wooden bar and iron bolt protected the back door.

Pretty Polly denied visiting her sister-in-law on Christmas Eve. "Mother and Miss Rourke are mistaken. I stayed at Mrs. Strang's in New York." Albert leaned forward and seemed about to speak, but Mrs. Houseman restrained him.

"I do not think my brother remembers the trinkets very well. A man cannot be expected to take much notice of such trifles. The beads were not coral but glass, and the sugar tongs were made of brass."

The coroner's verdict of willful murder strengthened Mrs. Houseman's fear and George's suspicions. The family spent the afternoon behind closed doors, while neighbors kept watch in the front room. At about two o'clock, George remarked that he meant to post the thousand dollars as a reward for the capture of the killer. He asked his mother to fetch it from under her mattress.

Polly sprang up and ran ahead of the old woman into the bedroom. A look of terror on her face, Mrs. Houseman fled backward from the door. It was George who faced Polly with the roll of bills in her hand. She was babbling hysterically. "So much money . . . and in this house! Don't let it out of the family, George!"

Mrs. Houseman fainted again. She lay on the floor while George took the money away from his sister. "Why did you lie about the trinkets, Polly?"

She laughed then. "Poor George! Who'd believe you could remember!"

"Mother remembers if I don't," he told her stolidly. She turned away, biting her lip. Perhaps she saw herself rushing in through the dark door, past her sleepy mother. And all the time that money had been here . . .

An hour later, she sent Albert back to New York. In his pocket was a letter addressed to Waite.

The next day, immediately after the double funeral, George visited the station house to post the reward. He returned to his mother's accompanied by police.

"Mrs. Bodine," a policeman said, "you say you spent the night of the 24th at Mrs. Strang's house. Mrs. Strang denies this. You were seen at Mrs. Emeline Houseman's by Miss Rourke at five on the afternoon of the 24th. Your mother let you in the house here at six on Christmas morning. Between seven and eight o'clock you were seen boarding the ferry for New York."

"A mistake has been made," Polly kept repeating. "People are confused."

The relentless questions continued. "Where were you on the night of the 25th when Mrs. Emeline Houseman's bedroom was fired with intent to destroy the dead bodies? At Mrs. Strang's again? Mrs. Strang does not remember that visit either."

Until Polly suddenly asked, "Was I seen on the ferry the morning of the twenty-sixth too?"

"You were, madam. You boarded it bound for New York between six and seven, although the boat does not start until eight."

She must have been surprised when they left her at last. She was alone in the front room where the two coffins had rested.

They missed her at supertime and searched the house, finding her coat hanging in the closet of her room. It per-



sueded them that she had not gone far. At bedtime, she was still missing; but it was not unusual for her to go away for the whole night without a word. They locked the house and went to bed and to sleep.

Waite roused them at nine the next morning, and George Houseman accompanied him to the police station to report Polly's disappearance. Waite kept babbling that Polly was at Mrs. Strang's and knew nothing of the trinkets. He was arrested and searched that afternoon. Polly's letter, dated on the Thursday, was found in his pocket.

"I now find I must admit what I was frightened to tell," she began. "Help me by saying that Albert met me at the ferry on Christmas morning and that I visited with him all day; and started out Tuesday to visit Emeline, but met George on the ferry, when he told me of the accident." Her postscript, "Hide the things I left where they cannot be found," sent officers hurrying to Manhattan.

The ferry captain informed them that this morning, as on the 25th and 26th, Polly had come aboard at seven o'clock. It was therefore certain that she had

spend the night on the island. But where—without a coat or even a shawl to protect her from the winter wind?

Between six and seven in the evening they arrived at the apothecary's shop. Only Albert was present. His mother, he said, had stayed in the back rooms all day, and had only just left. One of the officers put his hand inside the covers of Waite's bed. The sheets were still warm.

**B**Y NOON of the following day, Albert had told all he knew. Far from remaining on Waite's premises all during Christmas Day, Polly had left the shop three separate times for periods extending over an hour each; then, at four o'clock, five and one-half hours before the fire was discovered, she went out again and did not return until the morning of the 26th.

Meanwhile, a Mr. Coddington from Granite City happened to see a feverish, exhausted woman walking up and down on Spring Street near Hudson, in downtown New York. He persuaded her to accompany him into a warm restaurant. She was wearing one of Waite's extra coats, but was blue from cold. She had

Nobody but Manny Moon could crack a safe and kiss a blonde and thereby topple a gambling czar's throne. And nobody but Manny Moon was going to cash in on the payoff—of a . . .

## FIVE O'CLOCK SHROUD

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not eaten or slept since the afternoon of the preceding day, she said. "I have walked all over the city, from Harlem and back." She began to cry. "Do they want me to go to jail? I'll do whatever you say." Mr. Coddington drove her to the Tombs and stood by while she handed herself over to the authorities.

The next day the police unearthed all of poor Emeline's trinkets but the coral beads the little girl was wearing when Aunt Polly appeared so unexpectedly on Christmas Eve. A woman answering to Polly's description and giving her name as Henderson had pawned Emeline's gold watch on December 25th for \$25 at A. Adolphus' shop, 332 Williams Street, New York City. On the same date a woman using the same name pawned the remainder of the trinkets at John Levy's, 32 East Broadway, and at Davis' and Hart's in Chatham Street.

When Polly went to trial in Richmond County, June 24th, 1844, her lawyers asked for a change of venue on the ground of local prejudice. The request was denied and the trial continued, with Albert as the star witness for the prosecution. The question was: when had Emeline and her little daughter died, on Christmas Eve or early morning of Christmas Day; or after eight A.M. of the 25th or during the evening of the same date, shortly before the fires started? If the latter, then Polly had a chance to prove her innocence. She tried hard, swearing that she had slept at Waite's on the night of the 25th and had only been prevented from saying so at first because she didn't want Albert to know it. Albert promptly took the stand to testify that he slept in Waite's bed on Christmas night and that Polly was certainly somewhere else.

The jury retired for thirteen hours, then sent word that they were eleven to one for conviction and could not reach a decision. An impatient judge sent back a message that they were to hurry; the

result was a twelve man vote for Polly's guilt. The judge sentenced her to hang.

When her attorneys briefed the Supreme Court on their earlier request for a change of venue, Polly got a new trial—this time in New York City in the summer of 1845. The hardened city jury brought in an unanimous vote of guilty.

Again the defendant's attorney protested to the Supreme Court, and the second conviction was rendered void. Polly was moving farther north; the third trial opened in Poughkeepsie, New York, in April of 1846. Polly was probably getting a little tiresome by the time, in addition to costing the state a lot of money. At any rate, when defense suddenly produced three new witnesses who somewhat vaguely remembered seeing glimpses of a woman they took to be Emeline Houseman on her porch during the afternoon of Christmas Day, the state threw in its hand. It remained for a reporter to wonder why, if Emeline was alive on Christmas Day, she had not missed the trinkets which Polly was even then pawning. The point was, that Pretty Polly was free to boast that a jury had found no reason why she shouldn't kill.

She soon learned, though, that neighbors and relatives are guided by a different logic. Apothecary Waite suddenly found a reason for closing his premises to her. Albert went to live with his uncle George on Staten Island. The death of the elder Mrs. Houseman during the last trial stuck in Albert's mind and he was fond of repeating that "Mother killed her as sure as if she'd done it when she opened the door for her and she'd known she had the thousand dollars." Involved as the grammar is, Albert's meaning is as clear as his honesty.

Polly herself faded into limbo. Her record from soon after the final trial is as mysterious as the secret of where she spent the two famous nights of December 25th and 29th.



# Solving Cipher Secrets



Founded in 1924

Article No. 852

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. 5343—Letter Perfect. By \*Sara. Beginners, start with one-letter-word R as "a," and with four-letter EXRE (--a-) as "that." Next, phrases ET EXK (t- th-) and FE FA; etc. FE FA AYZZTAKB EXRE "\*E" FO EXK ZXSRAK "ET NFE ET R \*E," RUUYBKA ET EXK \*E AVYRSK TS ESH-AVYRSK YAKB PH GRSZKOEKSA, LTFOKSA, DKGXROFGA, KEG.

No. 5344—Fit for the Fight. By Helcrypt. Identify sequence of starred words. Or use PYS, PY and BY, all representing common short words, in unlocking PVVOCVOBPET. BY TATOM UCYDHBUE FCKT PVVOCVOBPET VPEOBCEBU VLOPFT BF UCBYTS. PY PVE FHCNPY FXBEPZHT DCO \*RCOHS \*RPO \*ELOTT KBNLE ZT: "XV PYS PECK!"

No. 5345—Island City. By †Mrs. I. M. Watts. ECI and pattern ECSE provide entry. Also note AG and \*AGNASG. Follow up with \*VYSGAVC and \*IGBRAVC VSARUMV. \*OSXU \*CHIVU, \*VYSGAVC TUM "KUGI FIX," VU-OSRRIN TMUD DSGX \*AGNASG VFIRIEUGV TUHGN AG ECSE YSME UT \*TRUMANS, LSV CSKAEHSRRX DAVYMUGUHGAIN "\*FIX \*LIVE" KX ISMRX \*IGBRAVC VSARUMV. ECI GSDI VEHOFL

No. 5346—A Heap Asleep. By °LeRoy A. Guidry. Three-letter HBU, joining longer words, also after comma, will unlock the phrase PNB PGCLKHBU. ABCDB EF \*GHDHJJHBK HK "\*GCLKN CO PGN \*KLB," \*GHQNHAAHQH, QHSTNKP ABCDB UCSVHBP XCQYHBC, GHK



YSH PNS HSNH CO PNB KZLHSN VJQNK HBU PDNBPF-VJQN  
YJSYLJP, HBU JK CXNS PNB PGCLKHBU ONNP GJTG.

No. 5347—A Cry in the Night. By †Sourdough. Identify EYN through use as connective. Substitute in UPNNAY, with UPYUAS coming next. Follow with OY SROU, UOTY, etc.

LEVZGEVN BAESRAV-FVXFASU REKA LEOSR OY SROU  
UOTY: "BRAY VXXUSAVU DVXB HASBAAY UPYUAS EYN  
ZONYOTRS, BESDR XPS LXV UPNNAY BAESRAV DREYTA!"

No. 5348—A Trio of Triads. By Emil Lowe. Observe TRY occurring in all words in first group; etc. TRY will help with ATRYZ and ANLLNR.

KDUPP EPUXPE BXKD ANLLNR ANRRPAKXFPE GNU AHOPE:  
ATRYZ, ORYPUEKTRY, TRY TRYXUNR; ENHTAP, HTEENE,  
THEN VTHENLXRP; RNRSHOEEPY, EOUSHOE, SHOE SHOED.

No. 5349—Sanguinary Symbol. By †Florence Mack. Start with affixes VF-, -VFR, and -NVZFO. Then complete first two words, BVNM BVFEZBO.

BVNM BVFEZBO SVKKZKVFR \*APON \*OVEA OLU-HVFA,  
KADHAXNVFR BZKHE HZFRVFR DZK YAPXA, SPQAONVX  
\*GFVNAE \*FPNVZFO OAXKANPKVPN TGVHEVFR PYYAPKO  
XZSYHANA. VFXGTPNZK DZK HZDNU VEAPHO.

No. 5350—Page from History. By †Sally Fischer. Note AS in connection with endings -ASZ and -KADSY. Substitute in SBKADSY and BSOAVSK, and fill in missing letters.

\*XSVVY PDHSLVL \*XVXFRAV, THANK KVXFNV \*FKBR.  
EDS PAUYK UVODULVL KUAHXFRY DP DNLVYK BSOAVSK  
OAMANACVL SBKADSY. FVUAYRVL AS RAFFDFDKBXHY  
YKUHZZNV, LVAPAVL TQ BLXAÜASZ ODHSKUQXVS.

No. 5351—Avian Comment. By °Isotope. Try to find "qu" in this pangrammatic crypt. Identify finals -T, -Y, and -TY, noting high frequencies, etc. Next, YNTRT and NHUTY.

DIMTRUST MUYUGY PAHGIRT GTSSTH. OKYGUN JEBUSK  
AIGSURTY WUNGIHT, ECMANEGTY ZIUUVAGUN LTJEMUAH.  
CINQ, TRGTHURX YNTRT, NHUTY "ZIENQ!" FUYT LUHC!

No. 5352—Smoke Screen. By Zadig. As usual, fans, this final crypt is offered without clues. Asterisks in cryptograms indicate capitalization.

GZVTT LXET HUPATSTVXGTB FTXVKPJ AEDKPJ NXHRTGB  
BPXRT-SXPHT COUP YCBD BGVTTG, ATXET HULT-UP  
BHVTXLB BZVKEED, OKHROUHRTG NUBGETB SKBGVXHGT  
UPEUURTV, STAGED EKAGB YKEEAUES. GTXL FUVR!

OUR welcoming committee extends the glad hand to these new fans, whose names will doubtless appear often from now on in our cipher column: Dora L. Ralph, Edillon, Lee Tolen, Mad Midget. And the following old-timers once more join up with our current cryptofans after time out for more than a year: Alchemurg, score 64 in July, 1949, and †Canco, with 163 answers to her credit in May, 1949. \*Lee A. Miller, veteran Inner Circler, writes in that he is now seventy-three years old, and that he "became interested in SCS through selling the magazine in his drug store 'way back in 1924!" Says he, "Lots of fun! Eh, what?" Yes, \*Lee, ciphers are great! And that word "weasy" you ask about, in \*LeRoy A. Guidry's No. 5316, really is in unabridged Webster. Some swell ciphers, fans, in this issue! Look, for example, at this classical key-phrase "special" by \*Ty Roe!

No. X-5354. Lest We Forget! By \*Ty Roe.

"HR RRER RGORWR ERYTWDR  
DRND DRRYR ERNE YRNWW ATD  
RNDR EGRE GA DNGA; DRND  
DRGY ANDGTA, IAERE \*OTE  
YRNWW RNDR N ARH EGEDR  
TF FERRETH."—\*WGAVTWA.

In the key to this type of cipher, a 26-letter sentence or phrase is written under the 26 letters of the natural alphabet, the first letter of the phrase acting as symbol for letter "a," the second for "b," and so on. A given symbol may sometimes signify any one of several different letters, or may even represent itself, and thus some odd combinations are liable to occur in the cipher. For example, using the key SHALL NOT PERISH FROM THE EARTH, where S stands for "a," H for "b," etc., the word "shy" would be enciphered as TTT. Solution by word comparison, as in ordinary crypts, here becomes more difficult. In No. X-5354, try short words N, DRND, DRRYR, etc., as a starter. Asterisks indicate capitalization, and punctuation follows that of the plain text, as in our regular cryptograms. See next issue for full explanation.

Now some hints for beginners, using \*Sara's No. 5343. Short words may often be identified by comparison, noting lengths, letters in common, etc. Any letter, even if only tentatively identified, should be written under its symbol throughout the cryptogram. When assumptions are found to be in error, filled-in letters may be erased and new ones tried, until positive results follow. Words thus partly deciphered provide clues to additional letters, words, etc. And the process is continued until the entire message is revealed. Clues given with No. 5343 mention "a" as a good guess for singleton R, especially upon comparing with EXRE (--a-), first and last letters alike, which thus suggests "that," giving two new tentative values, "t" for symbol E, and "h" for X. Substituting these new letters throughout, phrase FE FA (-t --), noting common initial F, follows as "it is;" and so on. Answer to †Rebbina's No. X-5342 in last issue, is \$30.00. Keep your answers and contributions coming, fans! For answers see next issue.

No. 5353—Cryptic Division. By †Jayemen. Note 3-symbol sequence shown by left-hand letters in subtractions. Then get S in first subtraction. Key is numbered: 012345 6789.

S O M E ) W O N D E R S ( W A N  
N R W O Y  
W S M N R  
W E A D O  
N E E E S  
R N N O N  
A Y D R

### ANSWERS FOR LAST ISSUE

5331—"The notion that the way to find a gas leak is with a lighted match is an exploded theory," says Chicago paper. Some still won't believe this!

5332—Ezra, chapter seven, verse twenty-one, lacks only "j." Excerpt: "Even I Axtaxerxes the king, do make a decree, that whatsoever Ezra shall require of you, it be done speedily."

5333—"To increase our debts," said Robert Morris, "while the prospects of paying them diminishes, does not consist with my ideas of integrity."

5334—In solving cipher secrets, helpful hints are nearly always to be found in the headlines for each problem, plus those given in the preamble.

5335—Science recognizes only three primary human emotions: love, fear, hate. All other feelings are regarded as modifications of these three.

5336—Two presidents, Hayes, and Cleveland in first term, won office with electoral vote majority, though Tilden and Harrison, their respective opponents, both polled popular vote majorities.

5337—Civic body, up in arms, holds trunk meet, faces committee publicity head, shoulders obligation, ribs community chest drive, hands mayor joint report, legs for fact action. Hip, hip, hurrah!

5338—"Heavy hydrogen," double-weight hydrogen isotope deuterium, compounded with oxygen, forms "heavy water," which would empower projected "hell bomb," horrific plutonium sparked superbomb!

5339—Words with consonants only but using "y" for vocalization: my, pyx, hymn, myth, lynx, xyst, slyly, xylyl, myrrhy, syzygy, gypsy, and rhythm.

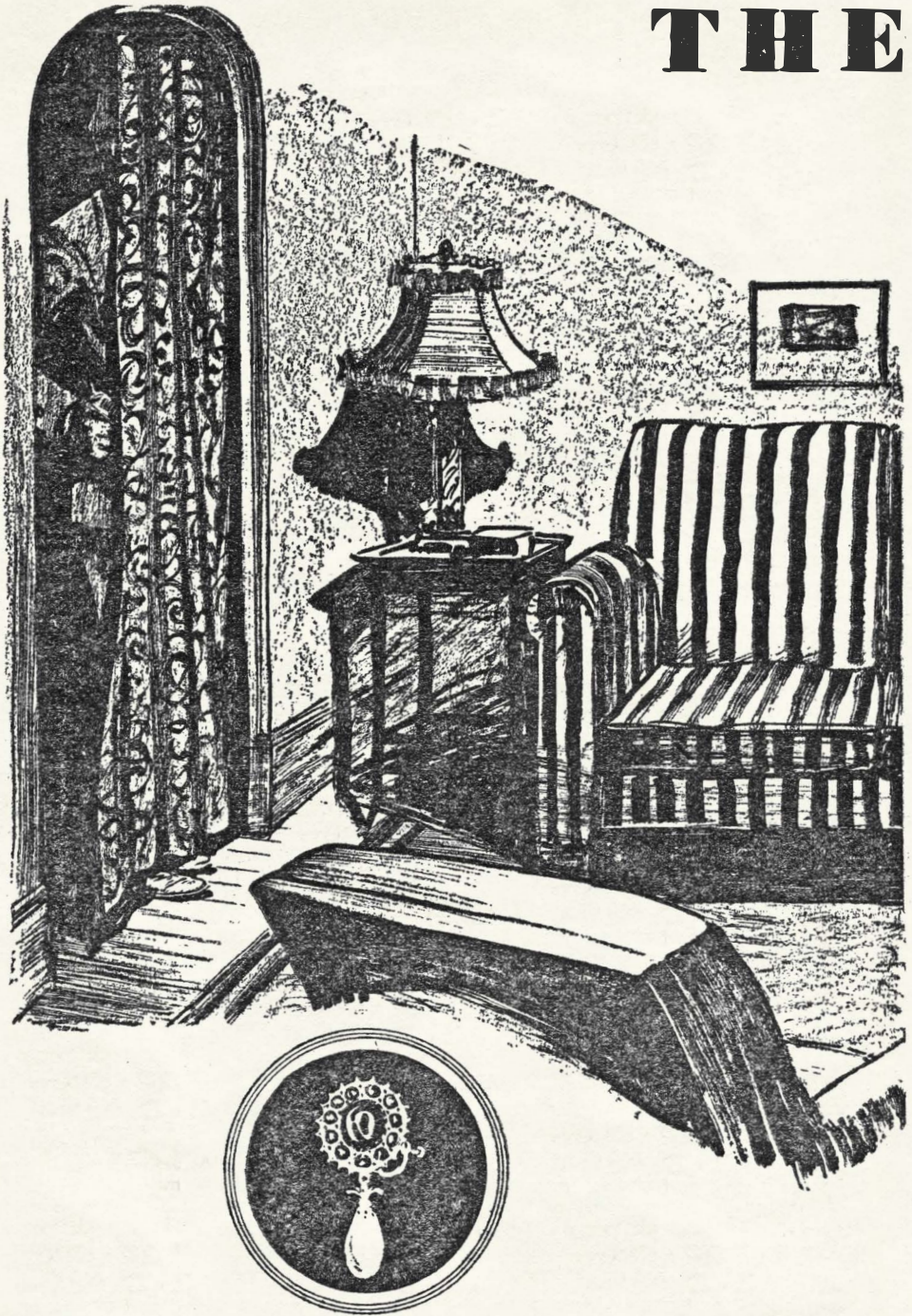
5340—Butler, using spyglass through peephole, sees master unlock safe, learns combination, secretly takes cash, jewels. Perfect job? Sleuth finds hideout, numbers scribbled upon wall. Caught!

5341—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  
P O S T M A R K E D

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.



# THE



*Hunted, alone, she went out on her dreadful mission—to find a little white stone of death—the one thing that could save her from the chair!*



# BLOOD STONE

A Novel by Cornell Woolrich

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*It could have been a discarded shoe, but then it wouldn't have moved. . . .*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Deadly Letter

**T**HE LATCHKEY jammed, and I had to stand there shaking as if I had St. Vitus dance before I could get it to work right. My wrists shook, my arms shook, my shoulders shook, try-

ing to force it around. And above all else, my heart shook with the terror.

I was shaking so it even made the empty milk bottle standing outside the door sing out. I'd accidentally touched it with the tip of my shoe, I guess. The day maid had a note for the milkman curled up in the neck of it, in the shape

of a little funnel. I moved back quickly.

I took the key out, drew a deep breath, and tried again. This time the door opened like pie. There hadn't been anything the matter with the key; I'd been holding it upside down, that was all. I sidled in, eased the door silently closed again behind me—and Mrs. James Shaw was home.

The hall clock chimed four times. They say you can only die once, but I died four times, once for each chime-stroke. Not that I wasn't supposed to be out. I could have even rung the doorbell, and saved myself all that wrestling with the key. But I couldn't face anyone, not even Jimmy, just then. Even if he'd just said, "Have a good time at the night club with the Perrys?" Even if he'd just looked at me, I would have broken down and tried to crawl into his lapel. I needed to be alone, I needed time to pull myself together.

He'd left the light on for me in the hall. He was still up, working away in the library on his income tax report. He had the door closed, but I could tell by the light shining out under the sill of it. He always waited until the last minute, like most taxpayers do, and then he had to sit up all night to beat the deadline on it. That was why he'd had to miss the party and send me out with the Perrys alone.

It was just a coincidence, but I could thank my lucky stars he'd had to finish it tonight.

That was just about the only thing in the whole mess there was to be thankful for. That at least there wouldn't be any trouble between Jimmy and me.

I tiptoed down the hall toward our bedroom, slipped in, closed the door behind me. I gave it the lights and took a couple of deep body-sobs that had been ganged up in me for the past three-quarters of an hour or more.

The glass showed me a golden wreck staggering across the room toward it. All

glittery on the outside: gold-sheath dress, diamonds everywhere there was room to hang them, around my neck, around my wrists, swinging from my ears. Not so glittery on the inside: plenty scared.

I sat down in front of the glass, held my head with both hands for a minute. I could have used a shot of cognac right then, but it would have meant to go out of the room for it, and I might have run head-on into Jimmy out there, taking a bracer himself between exemption lies. So I let it go.

When I got my second wind, the first thing I did was open my gold evening pouch and take out—what I had in it. The style runs to big evening bags this season, and that was a good thing for me. I'd needed a lot of room tonight. The letters made a bulky packet. And the little gun I'd taken along, just to be on the safe side, that took up room, too. The ten thousand dollars in cash didn't take up any room, because I hadn't brought that back with me, I'd swapped that for the letters.

That gives you the whole story. Well, maybe not quite, so in fairness to myself I'd better run over it just once. His name was Carpenter. The letters had been written to him five years ago, three years before I even knew there was a Jimmy Shaw in the world. I should have been safe enough. But he'd made use of a trick to bring them up to date. It was a clever trick. I granted him that.

Here's what he'd done. At the time I'd originally written them, we'd both been at the same seaside resort hotel, only on different floors. I'd had them delivered to him personally by bellboys and what-not, not sent through the mail. In other words he'd received the envelopes sealed and addressed to him in my handwriting, but unstamped and undated by any post office cancellation.

He must have been a careful letter opener, the kind that just makes a neat

slit down the side instead of tearing them ragged. He'd pasted over the slits with strips of thin wax paper, put a brand new stamp on each one, added his present street and city address beneath the name and then sent them back through the mail a second time—to himself. One at a time, over a period of weeks, careful to match the mailing date with the original date inside at the top of the note paper. Get the idea?

Each one had come back to him with this year's date postmarked on the outside, to match the five-year-old date on the inside. I hadn't bothered inserting the year, just the day of the week and the month. He'd had the devil's own luck with those cancellations, too. Not one of them had blurred or smudged; the "1950" stood out clear as a diamond. Then, when he'd gotten them back, he'd peeled off the wax paper.

In other words, he'd turned a lot of gushy but harmless mash notes written to him by a young girl into a batch of deadly, dangerous, incriminating letters written to him by a respectable and socially prominent young married woman with a wealthy husband. And he'd done it by simply sticking stamps on them. What an investment! At an expenditure of three cents a head, he'd gotten back one thousand dollars on each one. There had been ten that were usable; the others either had been signed with my full family name or had things in them that dated them as from that summer.

**Y**OU'D THINK a corny setup like that, which they don't even use in the movies any more, wouldn't go over. I should have refused to pay off, gone straight to Jimmy about it. But it's so easy to be brave until you're face to face with something like that. He'd had me over a barrel. His technique had been beautifully simple and direct. He'd first called me three or four days ago. He'd

said, "Remember me? Well, I need ten thousand dollars."

I'd hung up.

He'd called right back again before I could even move away from the phone. "You didn't let me finish what I was saying. I have some letters that you wrote to me. I thought maybe that you'd prefer to have them back than to have them lying around loose."

I'd hung up again.

He'd called back late that same night, after midnight. Luckily I answered, and not Jimmy. "I'm giving you one more chance. One of them's in the mail already, enclosed in an envelope addressed to your husband. He'll get one every morning, until they're all used up. And the price for the rest'll go up a thousand, each time I send one out. I'm sending the first one to your house and tipping you off ahead of time, so you'll still have a chance to sidetrack it before he sees it. After that, they'll go to his club, where you can't get your hands on them. Think it over. Call me tomorrow at eleven, and let me know what you've decided." And he gave me his number.

I sneaked the letter off the mail tray before Jimmy saw it. I read it over. It should have been written on asbestos. "All night I lie awake and dream of you . . . I'd follow you to the ends of the earth. . . ."

I saw what he'd done. How could I prove I'd written them in 1945 and not 1950? My handwriting hadn't changed. Note paper doesn't show any particular age, especially the deckled gray kind I'd used then and was still using now, with just a crest instead of a monogram. The tables turned. I could hardly wait for eleven to come. I hung around the phone all morning.

When he answered, all I said, breathlessly, was, "That'll be all right. Just tell me where and when."

Tonight had been when. and the flat



I'd just come from had been where. And ten thousand dollars out of my own private checking account had been how much.

At least I'd gotten them all back and it was over. Or is blackmail ever over with? Is it a game that you can ever beat?

There was a fireplace in our bedroom, and I burned the letters in there, one by one; contents and envelopes and spiked cancellations. When the last of them was gone in smoke, I felt a lot better. For about three and a half minutes.

I started to strip off the sparkle, and I opened the little embossed leather case I kept it all in. It was divided into compartments for each variety. The bracelets went into one, the rings into another, and so on. I came to the one for the earrings last. I took the right one off first and pitched it in. Then I reached for the left, and just got air and the bare lobe of my ear. No left earring.

For a minute I sat there without moving, and my face got white and my heart got chilly. Then I jumped up and shook out my dress, and looked all around on the floor. I was just stalling. I knew where I must have dropped it, but I didn't want to let on to myself.

I knew it hadn't been at the club with the Perrys, and I knew it hadn't been in the first taxi, going over to the Other Place. I'd given a sort of shudder just before he opened the door for me, and happened to touch both earrings with my hands. And I knew it hadn't been in the second taxi, from there home, either.

There was only one time I'd moved violently or agitatedly all evening long, and that was over there, when he'd tried to chuck me under the chin after he'd counted over the money, and I'd reared my head back. It must have been right then that it had come off. The catch had been defective anyway; I'd had no business wearing it.

I had to have it back. Jimmy was taking them down with him tomorrow, to have them repaired. I could tell him I'd lost one of them, but that would uncover my movements. And there was an even more important reason why I had to get it back. If I left it with *him*, the whole thing would start over again as soon as he'd run through the ten thousand I'd just given him. He'd simply use it to bleed me some more. It was an easily recognizable piece of jewelry, made specially for me.

I went over to the door and listened first, to make sure Jimmy was still safely in the library. Not a sound, so it looked as if he was. Then I picked up the extension phone we had in the bedroom and dialed the number of Carpenter's place that he'd given me last night, along with his final ultimatum.

Suppose he denied having found it? Suppose he was far-seeing enough to already figure on it coming in handy as a future pledge? I couldn't add anything to the ten thousand, not until next month. My account was down to bedrock. He had to give it back to me!

I kept signaling, and he didn't answer. I knew he must be there. I'd just come from there myself. He might light out the first thing in the morning, but there was no need for him to leave at this ungodly hour of the night. If I was going to sic the police on him, I would have done it before the transaction was concluded, not after. Even if he was asleep, it surely ought to wake him up, the way it was buzzing away at his end.

I hung up, tried it over. No more luck than the first time. It was the right number. I'd used it to notify him of my capitulation. I shook the thing, I squeezed it, I prayed to it. I had to give up finally. I couldn't just sit there listening to it all night. I was good and scared now.

I had to have that earring, even if it meant going all the way back there in person, at this hour. And there was no

place under the sun or the moon I wouldn't have rather returned to than there: a cage of wild lions, a pit of rattlesnakes, a leprosarium.

I took the gun with me once more. I didn't think Carpenter could really be cowed by such a midget, but it made me feel a little less defenseless. I unlocked the door and sidled down the hall. If I could only get out without bumping into Jimmy, then when I came back the second time he would think it was the first time. That I'd stayed late with the Perrys at the club or something.

The light was gone from under the library door! He must have finished and gone out for a walk to clear his head, after battling with those tax blanks all night. That was all to the good, provided I didn't run into him outside just as I was leaving. The milk bottle with its paper funnel was still on lonesome duty.

I made it. I was dying to ask the night liftman, when he brought me down, "Did Mr. Shaw go out just a little while ago?" I forced myself not to. It sounded too underhanded.

I gave the cab driver the address, and slumped back on the seat with a sigh of relief.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Payoff in Blood

**W**HEN I got out in front of the sinister looking place I told the driver to wait for me. I looked up the front of it, and I saw just the one lighted window—his. He was up there, and he was still awake. Maybe he'd stepped out for just a minute at the time I'd rung.

I said to the driver, "Have you got a watch on you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, I want you to do something for me. Time me. If I haven't come out in

ten minutes, step over and ring the bell. The one that says 'Carpenter' on it." I smiled insincerely. "Just to remind me. I don't want to stay too long, and I have a bad habit of losing track of the time whenever I go anyplace."

"Yes, ma'am. Ten minutes."

I went in. The entrance door was supposed to work on a spring lock, but somebody had forgotten to close it, so I passed right through without waiting and started the long climb that I'd already made once before. The place was a walkup. I wanted to give him as little advance notice of what had brought me back as possible; my best chance of recovering the ornament without any further strings being attached to it was to catch him off guard, before his crooked mind had been able to go to work on this new situation.

I knocked quietly when I finally got up to the top. It was the only flat on that floor; an extra story must have been added when the building had been converted to multiple tenancy.

He didn't move, didn't make a sound. I'd expected that. Live dangerously, and a knock on the door can make you freeze. I could visualize him standing at bay somewhere in there, holding his breath.

I knocked again. I inclined my head to the seam, said in a guarded voice, "Let me in. It's me again." I couldn't bring myself to use his name. As far as I was concerned he didn't deserve one, only a number. I had sense enough not to use my own.

He still didn't stir. I wrangled the knob in growing impatience, and the door fell inertly back before me.

I ventured in after it, expecting to find him sighting a gun at me. That was the usual trick they pulled, wasn't it? He wasn't in the main room, he must be in the little darkened bed-alcove. Had lain down in there and forgotten to put the light out in here.

I didn't go in there. There was just

a slim chance—a very slim one—that he hadn't found the earring himself yet, that it was still lying around out here unnoticed, and that I might be able to pick it up on my own hook and slip out again without having to accost him. I doubted it very much; it would have been too good to be true. But I started to look just the same.

First I looked all over the sofa where I'd sat riffling through the letters. Then I got down on all fours, gold dress and all, and started to explore the floor, around and under and alongside it. It was a decrepit, topheavy thing and threw a big shadow behind it from the ceiling light.

My groping hand crept around the corner of it, and nestled into somebody else's, in a macabre gesture of a hand-clasp. I whipped it back with a bleat of abysmal terror and sprang away, and at the same time I heard a sharp intake of breath.

I stepped around and look down, and he was lying there. The position of the bulky sofa had hidden him from me until now. Did I say just now he deserved a number? He'd gotten one. And it was up.

One arm was flung out along the floor—the one that I'd just touched. He was lying on his back, and his jacket had fallen open. You could see where he'd been shot; it showed on the white of his shirt. It must have gone into his heart; the hole in the fabric had the bloodied encrustation that surrounded it were around that region. The gun he hadn't had time to use had fallen uselessly over to one side.

My first impulse, of course, was to turn and race out. I fought it down. *Find that earring first*, I reasoned with myself. *You've got to get it back!* It was more vital to recover it than ever. It wasn't just a case of keeping my presence here from Jimmy's knowledge now, it was

a case of keeping it from the police! What was blackmail compared to being dragged into a murder case—and all the avalanches of notoriety that would ensue?

I found myself doing something I wouldn't have believed I had the nerve to do: bending down over him and going through all his pockets. He didn't have it on him. He didn't have the ten thousand cash any more, either, but I didn't care about that; it wasn't identifiable.

I crouched there, suddenly motionless. My hand had just then accidentally, as might have been expected, fleetingly contacted his in the course of my search. The brief touch was repellent, yes, but that wasn't what made me freeze rigid like that, stare unseeingly along the floor before me. It was this: the touch of his clammy skin was already cool, far cooler than my own. My sketchy knowledge of such matters was sufficient to tell me that meant he'd been dead some little time, at least half an hour or an hour. The point was, he'd certainly been dead by the time I'd come into the room just now.

And belatedly, like a sort of long-delayed and not at all funny mental double take, I was just remembering that I'd heard a sharp intake of breath at the moment I'd jolted back and given my own strangled little cry of discovery just now.

If he was dead, he hadn't made the sound. And you can't cry out and still draw in your breath, so I hadn't either.

Not a muscle moved. Just my optic nerves. My eyes traveled over the floor to the arched, doorless entrance to the dark sleeping alcove, and the musty green hanging, bunched together, that hung down on one side of it. It hung perfectly motionless, just as everything else in the place was perfectly motionless—including myself and the dead man on the floor. But it hung just short of the floor—oh, not more than a couple of inches. And I could see the toe of a single shoe stand-



ing there, in the gap. Perfectly motionless, deceptively motionless. If I'd been standing full height I wouldn't have been able to see it; the bottom of the drape would have overhung it. It was only because I was down low on the floor as I was, that my line of vision was able to reach it.

It could have been a discarded shoe of Carpenter's dropped to the floor in there and happening to land upright. Even though it was pointing straight toward me, as if to match an unseen pair of eyes somewhere high over it, looking out through an unsuspected rent in the drape. It could have been, but then it wouldn't have moved.

As if the direction of my eyes had power to lend it motion it shifted stealthily back and was gone.

**T**HERE WAS only one coherent thought in the fireworks display of panic going off inside my head: *Don't scream. Don't move. Someone in there has been watching you ever since you came in. He may let you go, if you don't let on you've spotted him. Work yourself over toward the door, and then break out fast.*

I straightened up. The earring was forgotten, everything else was forgotten. I just wanted out. My feet took a surreptitious step under the cover of the gold dress. Then another. Then a third. Like in that kid's game, where they're not supposed to catch you moving. I was half way over to it now. But even if the maneuvering of my feet couldn't be detected, the position of my body in the room kept changing. That was enough to give me away.

About one more step now. I was just starting to raise my hand unnoticeably in front of me, to tear at the knob and fling myself out, when I heard a click behind me. The sort of a click that a trip-hammer makes when it goes back. My

eyes went around in spite of myself. The drape was out of the way and a man had taken its place. He was holding a gun at about belt-buckle level.

Even if I hadn't met him across a gun—and across a man he'd already killed—the mere sight of him would have thrown a jolt into me. His expression was the epitome of viciousness. You didn't have to wonder if he'd shoot, you only had to wonder when he would. His face was a mirror: it showed me my own imminent death about to take place. He hadn't had to step out and show himself, he could have let me get away without seeing who he was. The mere fact that he had stepped out showed I wasn't going to be permitted to get away alive.

You could hear his breath rasp against his imperfectly shaved upper lip, like something frictioning sandpaper. That was all you could hear in the place, that little sound. You couldn't hear my breath at all; my heart had blown a fuse.

Suddenly he made a move and I thought for a minute the bullet had found me. But he'd only hitched his head at me, ordering me to come closer.

I couldn't; my feet wouldn't have done it even if I'd wanted them to. "No, don't," I moaned sickly.

"You're not getting out of here to pin this on me," he slurred. His lips parted and white showed through. But it wasn't a grin, it was just a baring of teeth. "I want the dough he was coming into tonight, see? I got a line on that, never mind how. Now come on, where it is?"

"I have—" I panted. I couldn't go ahead. I pointed to the still form lying between us on the floor.

Did you ever hear a hungry hyena howl against the moon? That was the inflection of his voice. "Come a-a-a-ahn, what'd you do with it?" Then his jaws snapped shut—still like a hyena's on a hunk of food. "All right, I don't have to ask for it. I can just reach for it!"

But he didn't mean with his fingers, he meant with a bullet. "You've seen me up here now. That's your tough luck." And he said again what he had in the beginning: "You're not pinning this on me."

The gun twitched warningly, getting ready to recoil against the flat hollow of his indrawn stomach, and this was my last minute.

Then instead of going *bam!* it went *gra-a-a-ack!* Like those little flat paddles on sticks that kids swing around to make noise with. And instead of coming from in front of him, it came from behind him, up on the wall of the bed-alcove somewhere. My knees dipped to let me down, and then stiffened and went on holding me up some more.

It startled the two of us alike. But I was able to recover quicker, because I knew instantly what it was and he didn't. It threw him for a complete loss. It was as to cause, and yet it was so close by, one of those sounds that are so indefinite so harshly menacing. It was simply that taxidriver downstairs reminding me my ten minutes was up.

He swung first to one side, then to the other, then all the way around, half-crouched, and the gun went off me completely. I pulled at the doorknob, whisked out, and went down the stairs like a gold streak.

He came out after me just as I reached the first turn. There was a window there and it was open a little both at the top and bottom, in order to ventilate the stairs and halls during the night. He shot down the stairs at me, on a descending line of fire, just as I flashed around the turn and got out of it. It didn't hit me, but it should have hit the window and shattered it or it should have hit the plaster of the wall and ploughed into it. It didn't hit anywhere.

Later, long afterwards, it came back to me that it must have, through some freak

of downward slanting, neatly gone out through that slender inches-wide lower opening without hitting anything. I didn't think of that then. I didn't think of anything then except getting down the rest of those stairs and out to the street.

He didn't fire after me a second time. He couldn't aim at me from where he was anymore. The underside of the stairs over me protected me now. His only chance of hitting me would have been to run down after me and overtake me on the same section of stairs. He still could have done that if he'd tried. Any man is quicker than any woman, particularly a woman in rhumba clogs. But he was afraid of whoever it was that he imagined to be coming up from below, and he was afraid of rousing the house.

I heard his feet go scuffling up the other way, higher still toward the roof.

The entryway was empty when I got down to it. The hackman must have gone right back to his machine after dutifully giving me the summons I'd asked for. He'd even missed hearing the shot. I could tell that by the cheerful matter-of-factness of his opening remark when I streaked out and burrowed into the back of his machine. "Well, I sure brought you down fast, didn't I, lady?" he asked.

"T-take me back uptown," I said.

The guardian milk bottle was still standing there for years on end.

I let myself in and crept down the hall toward the bedroom. I opened the door and stopped short with my hand on the light-switch. Jimmy had come back, and was in there ahead of me, asleep already. I could hear the soft purr of his snoring in the darkness. He evidently hadn't been surprised by my continued absence. He must have thought I was still at the night club with the Perrys. His breathing was so rhythmic, so regular, it almost sounded studied.

I crawled into my own bed in the dark and just lay there. I hadn't got the earring

back. That was almost a minor matter by now. I kept seeing that face before me, viciously contorted, mirroring death to come. As sure as anything he was going to track me down, find me and kill me. My life was forfeit to a murderer's self-preservation. I was the only one who knew he had been up there. I was the only one who knew who had killed Carpenter. He had to get rid of me.

Somewhere, sometime, when I least expected it, death was going to strike out at me. I was on borrowed time.

He would surely get me, unless—I got him first.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Trail to Murder

THE LIEUTENANT'S name was Weill, I think. I wasn't sure. I wasn't sure of anything, only that I was striking first, protecting my own life in the only way I knew how.

"I am asking that this interview be treated in strictest confidence."

He looked at me patronizingly; I suppose he thought I was going to accuse someone of poisoning someone else's pet pekingese. "You can rely on us," he said.

"I am here to offer you a proposition. I am in a position to give you information which I think you will find not only timely but exceedingly helpful. In return for this, you must not use my name in any shape, form or manner. It means the destruction of my happiness if you do, and I won't risk it. Who I am, who told you this, must not appear on any of your documents or reports or files."

He was still very condescending. "That's a tall order. Are you sure it's something we'd be interested in?"

"You're a lieutenant of the Homicide Squad? I'm very sure, Lieutenant."

He gave me a more alert look. "Very well, I accept your terms."

"You do. Yes, but how do I know it won't pass beyond your control? It's a matter that you will have to take others into your confidence about."

"Nothing passes beyond my control in this division if I don't care to have it do so. If, as you say, others have to be taken into my confidence, I can either pledge them as you are pledging me, or keep you altogether anonymous, as 'Mrs. X.' or 'an unknown woman.' Does that satisfy you? I give you my word as a police officer."

I wasn't altogether sure of that, I didn't know enough about them. "I also want your word of honor as a man."

He eyed me with increased respect. "That," he admitted, "is a whole lot more dependable. I give you both." And he took my hand and wrung it once.

I didn't hold back anything, didn't try to cover myself in any way. I told him about the letters, about Carpenter's contacting me, about my first visit there and the payment of the ten thousand cash. ". . . I also took a gun, to make sure the situation wouldn't pass beyond my control. Here it is. You can examine it if you want to make sure it wasn't I who did it." I passed it to him.

He weighed it in his hand, smiled a little. "I don't think it'll be necessary to do that. The slug of a forty-five was taken out of Carpenter's body. This would be the grandson of a forty-five." He fiddled with it, looked up. "Incidentally, did you know it wasn't loaded?"

He could tell by the look on my face I hadn't until then.

He fiddled some more with it. "In any case, it would have been quite a feat to fire it. Where did you get it?"

"Paris, before the war."

"Well, you were badly gypped. Most of the mechanism is missing. It's practically a dummy. All you bought is a lot of artistic pearl nacre and gilt metal in the outward shape of a gun."



I went into the second part of my story, the really pertinent part. If I hadn't known it was that already, the change in his attitude would have told me. He forgot his role of putting a featherbrained society woman at ease, became a police-lieutenant with just an important witness before him. "You'd know this man if you saw him again?" he said sharply.

"All night I saw his face before me."

"You say he held a gun trained on you, before this interruption saved your life. Did you get a good look at it?"

"Quite good." I shuddered.

"Have you a good eye for proportions, for taking in measurements at a glance?"

"Fairly."

He opened a desk drawer, took out a revolver. "This weapon is empty, so don't be nervous. Of course, you were frightened, so maybe it's not fair, but— This is a forty-five here. I am going to hold it just about as you say he held it. Now. Is it the same size as the one he held?"

"No, his seemed heavier, larger."

"But this is a forty-five. Look at it again. Now what do you say?"

I cocked my head. "No. I may be mistaken, but somehow the one he held seemed to be a larger, heavier gun."

He replaced it, looked around in the drawer, finally took out another. "How about this one, then? This is far bigger than a forty-five. This is as big as they come."

I nodded my head affirmatively without a moment's hesitation. "Yes. That's the same size as the one he held."

He put it back in the drawer. "You're a reliable witness. The first gun was a thirty-eight. The *second* was the forty-five." He got up. "I am going to ask you to try and pick him out for us."

**T**HEY WERE all so villainous looking. And yet none of them could approach him in viciousness. Maybe that was because I'd seen him in the

flesh, in full dimension, and not just flat on paper, in black and white. There were two photos of each one, in profile and fullface. I ignored the profiles, concentrated on the fullfaces. That was the way he'd been turned toward me during those few awful moments up there the night of the murder.

I didn't really think I was going to find him. There were so many of them. Looking through this gallery of rogues, you wondered if there could be any honest, law-abiding people left in the world. I even turned to Weill, after the first half hour or so, and asked, "Do you really think you've got him in here?"

"We won't know that for sure until after you're through."

Once I nearly thought I saw him, but when I stopped short and looked more closely at that particular subject, recognition faded. It was just a superficial resemblance.

"Rest your eyes for a minute whenever you feel like it," Weill said solicitously.

They felt infected by looking at so much depravity. I opened them again and went ahead.

Suddenly I got up from the chair. I put my forefinger on the photograph, but not for his benefit yet, simply for my own, to hang onto it. I closed my eyes and held them that way for a moment. Then when I had his face good and clear, burning clear, I opened them. I let them travel down the line of my arm, all the way down to the end of my finger, and the face on the police photograph blended into the one glowing in my mind, without any changes of outline.

Then I turned to Weill. "This is the face of the man I saw up there," I said.

He said again what he'd said before, up in his office. "You're a good, dependable witness. I liked the way you did that just then." He bent forward above my shoulder and read from the data accompanying

the photos. "That's Sonny-Boy Nelson. He's already wanted for murder, three times over. We've wanted him for a long time past."

Back in his office, he finally noticed the change that had come over me since that last remark or his. "What is it, Mrs. Shaw? You seem troubled."

I gestured shakily. "Well, after all, Lieutenant, why did I come here? To assure my own safety, to protect my life. This man saw me up there, just as I saw him. He knows I'm the only one who knows he was up there. He's going to try to kill me. He's surely going to try, so that I won't be able to tell that to anyone."

"Now if he's already been wanted for three murders, and you haven't gotten him so far, my identification makes no difference; you'll simply want him for four murders now, but that doesn't mean you'll get him any quicker than before. And meanwhile, what's to become of me? I'll be living in danger from one minute to the next."

"I'll detail someone to—"

I quickly warded that off with a gesture.

"No, you can't. How could such a thing escape Jim—my husband's notice? He's bound to ask questions, wonder what it's all about. The whole thing would be bound to come out in the end. And that's the very thing I tried to avoid by coming here to you unasked, entirely of my own accord."

He stared at me incredulously. "You mean, given a choice between risking your life in a very real sense, and having your husband learn of your *innocent* involvement in this whole affair, you'd rather take chances on your life?"

"Much rather," I told him very decisively.

I had been afraid not to pay the ten thousand. Now, because I had paid it, I was afraid to have it come out that I had. I was afraid he would think there

must have been something to cover up after all, if I had been so anxious and willing to pay it.

"You're an unusual person," Weill let me know.

"No. I'm not. Happiness is a soap-bubble. Once it's been pricked, just try and get it back together again! This Sonny-Boy Nelson's bullets can miss me. But my bubble can never be repaired again, once it's burst. Even if it means just a stray thought passing through my husband's mind five years from now. 'Where there's smoke there's fire.' I won't take that chance, I won't risk it. Nothing else in life matters to me." I got up and went toward the door.

Then I saw that he had more to say, so I stopped and looked back.

"Well, if you're willing to take the risk that you are, spread out thin, over days and weeks, how about taking an even greater risk, but all at one time? Getting it over with then and there?"

I answered that by coming away from the door, returning to his desk, and re-seating myself acquiescently.

"You said, a little while ago, that your coming here had done no good; that we'd only want him for one additional murder now but still without knowing where to find him. But you're mistaken. If you're willing to cooperate, run the risk that I just spoke of, we will know where to find him. Which is more than we ever knew before."

I saw what he meant. I shook a little, but I lit a cigarette. The cigarette of cooperation.

"Tell me," he said "are there any out-of-the-way places you're in the habit of going to by yourself, entirely unaccompanied by your husband or friends or anyone else? I mean, without departing from your normal routine or habits of life?"

I thought for a moment. "Yes," I said, "there are."

## CHAPTER FOUR

## The Trap Is Set

**J**IMMY didn't mind my doing private charity work, going around to a few handpicked cases I happened to know of and doing what I could for them, but he didn't like the parts of town it took me into at times. Above all, he didn't like the idea of my going alone into some of these places. He'd warned me again and again to take someone with me.

I made the rounds only about once a month, anyway. I wasn't a professional welfare worker. I never had more than half a dozen at a time on my list.

Like this old Mrs. Scalento, living alone and too proud to apply to the city for help. She wouldn't have been eligible anyway; she could make enough to support herself when she was well. But right now she was laid up with arthritis or something, and needed tiding over.

I got out of the car outside the tunnel-like black entrance of the rookery she lived in. They never had any lights on the stairs there, but I'd brought a little pocket-flash along in my bag for just that purpose.

I sent the taxi off. I usually stayed up there a considerable time with her, and it was cheaper to get another one when I came out again.

I groped my way down the long Stygian bore that led back to where I knew the stairs to be—from my memory of past visits alone.

Did you ever have a feeling of someone being near you, without seeing anything, without hearing anything move? Animals have that faculty of detection, I know, but that's through their sense of scent. Scent wasn't involved in this. Just some sort of a pulsing that told of another presence reached me. To one side of the battered staircase.

I got the flash out and it shot a little

white pill of light up the stairs in front of me before I'd even realized I'd nudged the little control-lever on. It must have been obvious which direction I was going to turn it in next, by the way it shook and slopped around in my hand.

The voice was so quiet. So reassuringly quiet. It seemed to come from right beside me, my very elbow almost. "Don't turn the light this way, Mrs. Shaw."

Mrs. Shaw. So then I knew what it was.

"Weill's man. Don't be frightened, Mrs. Shaw. We're covering every one of these places you've showed up at tonight. Just act as you would at any other time."

I went on up the stairs, after I'd gotten my breath back and my heartbeat had slowed a little, thinking resentfully, *The fool! The other one himself couldn't have frightened me any worse!*

That was what I thought.

I knocked when I got up to her door, and then let myself in without further ado. I had to; the old lady didn't have the use of her legs.

She was sitting there, propped up in bed, the way I usually found her. She didn't seem glad to see me. Her face always lit up as though I were a visiting angel when I came in, and she'd start to bless me in Italian. Tonight she just stared at me with an intentness that almost seemed to have hostility in it.

She had just this one large, barren room, and then a black hole of a kitchen, without any window at all, leading off from it. I closed the door after me. "Well, how are we tonight?" I greeted her.

She gave an impatient swerve of her head away from me, almost as though she resented my coming in on her, as though I were unwelcome. I pretended not to notice the unmistakable surliness—not to mention ingratitude—of the reception I was getting.

(Please turn to page 116)



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\*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.

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SAVE 2c — STICK COUPON ON PENNY POSTCARD

(Continued from page 114)

The air of the room was stagnant, murky; none of these people were great believers in ventilation. "Don't you think it would be a good idea to let a little fresh air in here?" I suggested. I crossed to the window and raised it slightly from the bottom. She glared at me. \*

"How's your plant getting along?" I asked her, crouching slightly to peer out at it. I'd sent her over a potted geranium, to cheer her up. She kept it out there on the window ledge.

A look of almost ferocious vindictiveness passed over her face, as I straightened up and turned away. "You no got to worry about it; iss all ri'," she let me know in husky defiance. It was the first remark she'd uttered since I came in.

I tried to win her over. "Have you been using that electric heater? Does it take any of the stiffness out, make you feel any better?"

She said gruffly, "Lotsa bett'. Lotsa bett'."

She had folded her arms across her chest now in a sort of stubborn sulkiness, and she kept jabbing one hand surreptitiously out from underneath the opposite arm. Not toward me, but more—toward the door.

I said finally, in a low, confidential voice, "What're you trying to tell me?"

**H**ER FACE flashed around toward me. She bared her almost toothless mouth in a grin that held frightened supplication in it. "I no tella you noth'. What you hear me say? Do I tella you anything?"

"I'll do my own telling," a new voice said.

Someone had come out of the kitchen and was standing right behind my chair. Its back had been turned that way.

I rocketed to my feet, chest going up and down like a bellows. A hand slipped around from behind me and riveted itself

to my wrist, steely and implacable. The chair crashed over, discarded.

"Remember me?" was all he said.

The old lady, as if released from a spell, began to jabber now that it was too late, "*Signora!* This man he come here early tonight, he say he know you make visit every time on firsta month, he'ssa going to wait for you. I no can make him go 'way—"

He chopped the gun butt around horizontally at her forehead, without letting go of me, and she flopped back stunned on the pillow. I never saw anything more brutal in my life.

He gave it a little dextrous flip, then, that brought his grip back to the left. "Now let's take up where we left off the other night, you and me."

I saw he was going to let me have the bullet then and there. He swung me around toward him by my arm, and brought the gun up against my side. He wasn't taking any chances this time.

He'd maneuvered me out away from the bed—I suppose so there'd be room enough for me to fall. But that had unnoticeably changed our respective positions now. He was between me and the door. His back was to it, and I was toward it. But I couldn't see it, or anything else, just then. I never even heard it open.

"Drop that gun, Nelson, you're covered three ways!"

• There was an awful moment of suspended motion, when nothing seemed to happen. Then the gun loosened, skidded down my side and hit the floor.

A man's head and shoulders showed up, one at each side of him, and there was a third one overlapping a little behind him.

They said to me, "You must have seen him the minute you got in, to tip us off so quickly—"

"No, I didn't. I didn't see him until just a minute ago."

"Then how did you manage to—"



## The Blood Stone

"I knew he was here the minute I stepped through the door. I could tell by the frozen expression of her face and eyes she was under some kind of restraint or compulsion. And the air was close with stale cigarette smoke. He'd smoked one or two too many, back there, while he was waiting for me to show up. I knew she never used them herself. But it was too late to back out through the door again, once I'd shown myself; he could have shot me down from where he was. So I stepped over to the window under the excuse of getting some air into the room, and gave that potted plant she kept on it a soundless little nudge off into space."

The man in charge said, "Hold him up here for a couple of minutes, to give Mrs. X a chance to make her getaway from the neighborhood first, before anyone spots her. You see that she gets home safely, Dillon."

"Will she be all right?" I asked, indicating Mrs. Scalento.

"She'll be all right, we'll look after her."

"Poor Mrs. Scalento," I said, going down the stairs with the man delegated to accompany me, "I'll have to buy her another plant."

**T**HE FORMAL identification was brief, and, as far as I was concerned, of about the same degree of comfort as the extraction of a live tooth without anesthesia. Why they had to have it I don't know, since, according to my bargain with Weill, my own identity was to remain unrevealed. It took place in Weill's office, with a heavy guard at the door, to keep pryers—even interdepartmental pryers—at a distance.

"Bring him in."

I didn't raise my eyes from the floor until the scuff of unwilling shoe leather dragged against its will had stopped short.

"Mrs. X. Is this the man you saw in the



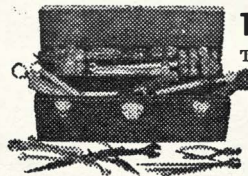
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**New Detective Magazine**

living quarters of one John Carpenter, at  
two-ten East forty-ninth, at about four-  
thirty A.M. on the fifteenth day of April?"

My voice rang out like a bell. "That is  
the same man."

"Did he have a weapon in his hand?"

"He had a weapon in his hand."

"Stand up, please, and repeat that un-  
der oath."

I stood up. They thrust a Bible toward  
me and I placed my right hand on it as if  
we had been in a courtroom. I repeated  
after the man swearing me in: "... the  
whole truth, and nothing but the truth."  
Then I said: "I solemnly swear that I  
saw this man, with a weapon in his hand,  
in the living-quarters of John Carpenter,  
two-ten East forty-ninth Street, at about  
four-thirty A.M., April 15th."

Nelson's fatigue-cracked voice shattered  
the brief silence. "You can't pin this on  
me! I didn't do it, d'ya hear?"

"No, and you didn't kill Little Patsy  
O'Connor either, did you? Or Schindel?  
Or Duke Biddermen, in a car right outside  
his own front door? Take him out!"

"She's framing me! She done it her-  
self, and then she made a deal with you,  
to switch it to me!"

They dragged him out, still mouthing  
imprecations. The closing of the door  
toned them down, but you could still hear  
them dying away along the corridor out-  
side.

We'll turned back to me and let his  
fingertips touch my gloved hand reassur-  
ingly for a moment, maybe because he saw  
that it was vibrating slightly, as an after-  
effect of the scene of violence that had just  
taken place. "That's all. That finishes  
your participation in the affair. You just  
go home and forget about it."

I could carry out the first part of the  
injunction all right; I had my doubts  
about the second.

"But you had a stenographic transcrip-  
tion made of my identification of him just

## The Blood Stone

now, I noticed," I said a bit uneasily.

"Yes, and I'm also having depositions made out to be signed by those two witnesses I had in the room, regarding what took place here. In other words I'm preparing affidavits of your affidavit, so that it doesn't have to hang suspended in mid-air. But that needn't alarm you. I have the okay of the D.A.'s office on getting around it in this way in your case."

"But in the courtroom, won't he—won't his lawyer, demand that you produce me?"

"Let him. The D.A.'s office is taking that into account, in preparing its procedure. I'm prepared to take the stand in your place, as your proxy, if necessary. And police lieutenant or not, I don't think I'd make the kind of a witness whose testimony is to be lightly disregarded."

He seemed to have taken care of every contingency; I felt a whole lot better.

He shook my hand. "I keep my bargains. You're out of it to stay. All knowledge of you ends with us."

He said to the detective standing outside the door, "Take this lady to the special departmental car you'll find waiting for her outside. Go along in it with her and keep everyone at a distance. Take her to the side entrance of the Kay Department Store."

That was the biggest one in the city. I went in, walked through it on the bias without stopping to buy anything, got into a taxi a moment later at the main entrance, and had myself driven home.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### A Choice of Corpses

**T**HE WHOLE town had been talking about it for several weeks past, so I wasn't surprised when it finally penetrated even to Jimmy's insulated consciousness. I was only surprised that it

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## New Detective Magazine

hadn't long before then. But the news of the world, for Jimmy, was only the quotations that trickled out on a ticker tape.

Carpenter's metier of preying on respectable and socially prominent women, which had been uncovered during the course of it, and which the defense was as willing "but for different reasons" to play up as the prosecution, was what gave it the distinction of being above just another underworld killing, I suppose. Anyway, half of the men around town kept whispering that it was the next guy's wife, and the other half looked kind of thoughtful, as though they were doing some mental checking up.

He'd been reading about it one night—that was toward the end, after it had been going on for several weeks—and he started discussing it with me.

I twiddled my thimble-size coffee-cup around disinterestedly, looked down at it. "Do you think there really is such a woman?" I asked idly. "Or are he and his lawyer just making it up, howling for her to try to distract attention?"

He grimaced undecidedly, didn't answer right away. But Jimmy is not the type who is with opinions for long; that's why he is as successful as he is. It came on slowly; I could almost see it forming before my very eyes. First he just chewed his lip in cogitation. Then he nodded abstractedly. Then he gave it words. "Yes, I dunno why, but—I have a feeling they're telling the truth, as mealy-mouthed as they are. I wouldn't be surprised if there *was* some woman up there that same night. The prosecution doesn't deny it, I notice; they just clam up each time. That's what makes me half-inclined to believe—"

They hadn't made use of any of the backstops Weill had prepared, up to this point, so there was still room for legitimate doubt: the affidavits on *my* affidavit; nor had Weill taken the stand to pinchhit for me. Maybe they were saving them for



## The Blood Stone

a bang-up finish, or maybe they weren't going to ring them in at all, had found they didn't really need them. My chief contribution had been to point out Sonny-Boy Nelson to them, and help them trap him, and that could be safely left out of it without damaging their case any. Otherwise, what could I add? Only circumstantial strengthening to what was already an overwhelmingly strong circumstantial case. They'd even found someone who had seen him—Nelson—run out of the house next door, gun still unsheathed, and the door of Carpenter's apartment and the two roof-doors had been found yawning wide open.

But there was one thing I couldn't get straight in my own mind. I mentioned it aloud to him—although very carefully. "But why do *they*—Nelson and his lawyer—keep harping on this woman? What do they expect to get out of that? I should think it would be the other way around, that it would harm them."

He shrugged. "Evidently they've figured out some way in which they think she can help them. They must have something up their sleeves. I wouldn't know. I can't figure out what goes on in the crooked minds of shady lawyers and their clients." He pitched the paper disgustedly aside, as though the subject didn't interest him any more. He delivered himself of a concluding postscript.

"Anyway, if there is such a woman—and most likely there is—she's a fool. She should have gone to her own husband, whoever she is, and taken him into her confidence, before she got in that deep."

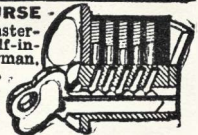
*How easy to say*, I thought poignantly. "Maybe she was afraid to," I mentioned. "Afraid he wouldn't believe her or would misunderstand—"

He gave me a scornful look, as he got up, as though he thought I was a fool myself, to make a remark like that. "The right kind of a husband," he said, saunter-

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## New Detective Magazine

ing out to the next room, "understands everything, forgives everything. He takes care of things for her. And above all, he doesn't speak of it."

*Ah, yes, I thought, in theory, on paper, how well that works out. But in real life, just try it and see what Cain it would raise!*

He only spoke of it once again, after that. "I see he got the chair."

"Who?" I asked. I'd known since nine that morning, when the paper came.

"That fellow, what's his name, Baby-Face—No, Sonny-Boy Nelson."

"He did?" I said, in polite echo.

He pretended to snap the light-switch of my room, to hurry me up.

It put me in mind, somehow, of a switch being thrown in a death chamber.

**T**HE MAID came in and said, "There's a man at the door to see you, madam."

Something about it frightened me even before I knew of anything to be frightened about. I started up from the chair. "Who is he? What does he want?"

I saw her staring at me curiously, as if wondering what made me so jittery about such a trivial announcement. I tried to cover it up with a pass of my hand.

"Send him in here."

I knew him by sight right away. I couldn't help wondering, though, how I'd known it was going to be something like this ahead of time. I went over and closed the door. He had sense enough to wait until I had.

"I'm from Weill's office—"

I didn't let him get any further. "He shouldn't have sent you over here like this! I thought he said I was through! What does he want now?"

"Sonny-Boy Nelson is being taken up to the Death House on the three o'clock train. He's pleading for a last chance to talk to you before he goes."



## The Blood Stone

"Then even he knows who I am! Is that how Weill keeps his bargains?"

"No, he doesn't know your name or anything like that. He just knows that you saw him up there, and it was through you we captured him."

"Can I reach Weill at his office? Get him for me."

"Yes ma'am. The only reason he sent me over instead of calling you himself is he thought somebody else might intercept or overhear the call—here he is, now."

"Weill? What about this?" I asked.

"No, don't go near him, Mrs. X. There's nothing to be gained by it. You're not under any obligation to him."

"Well, then why did you send someone over here to let me know about it?"

"Simply to give you your choice in the matter, to let you know he's been asking for you. But you're free to do as you please about it. If you want my opinion, there's no need for you to see him any further. He's been tried and sentenced. There's nothing you can do for him."

"But he evidently thinks there is, or he wouldn't be asking for me. And if I refuse, I suppose he'll go up there cursing me—"

"Well, let him. They all curse someone, and never the right one—themselves. Put him out of your mind. No use being sensitive about these matters."

But he was used to dealing in them; I wasn't.

"Would there be any risk?"

"Of identification? No, none whatever. I'll see to that personally. But as I said before, if you want my honest opinion, I don't see any necessity—"

I went anyway. Maybe because I'm a woman. Curiosity, you know. I mean, I wanted to hear what he wanted. I had to, for my own satisfaction and peace of mind. Remember, I wasn't thirsting for his blood. My purpose in going to the police in the first place hadn't been to secure

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## New Detective Magazine

his death. It had been to secure my own life. That had been accomplished from the moment he had been apprehended; he didn't have to be executed to advance my safety any further than it was already.

I didn't think there was anything I could do for him. Weill didn't. But he did. Why shouldn't I at least hear what he thought it was?

I wore such a heavy veil I could hardly see through it myself. Not for Nelson's own sake, he'd already seen my face as plainly as anyone could that night up at Carpenter's, but in order to avoid all risk going and coming from the place. Weill's man went with me as far as the prison building; Weill took over there himself and escorted me into the cell. They didn't keep me outside at the mesh barrier through which prisoners usually communicate with friends and relatives. They took me right into the cell itself, so my presence would be less likely to attract attention.

He reared up hopefully. He looked shadowed already by what was to come. I guess they do. I'd never seen one before.

He said, "How do I know if she's the right one?"

I raised the veil and left it up.

"Yeah," he said, nodding grimly. "Yeah." He turned to Weill. "Why can't Scalzena be here?"

Weill reached to take me by the arm. "No, no lawyers or anybody else. Say what you want and be quick about it, or she leaves with me right now."

He looked at me, this time. "I want to see you alone."

"He thinks I've got you intimidated," Weill said to me caustically. He looked at me for the answer.

"All right," I said quietly.

"I'll be right outside here," he promised, "so don't be worried." He stepped out.

It's hard, I suppose, to make a plea,

## The Blood Stone

when your whole life has to go into it. "Look," he began awkwardly. "I dunno who you are, but you can save me. You're the only one."

"I can? Why do you call on me? I never said you killed Carpenter."

"I know, I know. But listen to me, will you? Carpenter was killed with a slug from a forty-five. Remember, they brought that out at my trial?"

"I wasn't at your trial."

He rushed on without stopping to listen. "I got a forty-five, yes. They caught me with one on me. But they never proved that the slug they dug out of him was fired from my gun!"

"The papers said they couldn't, from what I recall. That it had gone through, or at least into, a thin cigarette case in Carpenter's pocket. That it wasn't the bullet that had pierced his heart, actually, but a fragment of the case, driven into it by the bullet. That the bullet itself had been flattened out, the markings had been destroyed by the case, so that they couldn't check it by—whatever they call that scientific method of theirs, ballistics or something. Again, why do you call on me? I didn't say you fired at him."

"No, but you didn't say I fired at you. And that's what can save me, that's my only chance!"

"I don't under—"

HE DIDN'T actually reach out and shake me, but he made the motions with his hands. "Don't you see? Don't you see? I didn't have a chance to use my gun at all when they caught up with me; they got me without firing a shot. It was still packed the way it was that night up at Carpenter's when they took it from me. Only one bullet out of it, five still in it. That proves I only fired one shot that night. That shot at you on the stairs. I only thought of that now, after it was too late. If you'll only *tell* them

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## New Detective Magazine

that I fired after you out on the stairs, with only one bullet gone that'll prove it couldn't have been my shot that went into Carpenter! If you'll only tell them!"

"Whether she does or doesn't, that's not worth a tinker's dam!" Weill's voice suddenly grated in at us from outside the cell-opening. He must have been standing there a little to one side, taking in the whole conversation. He came in again, motioned curtly to me. "Go home, Mrs. X. Go home and forget the whole business! He could have reloaded that gun sixty times over between the time Carpenter was killed and the time we got him!"

"But the people in the building only heard the one shot!" Nelson shrilled.

"Because only one was fired on the outside, where they could hear it; the other one was fired inside Carpenter's flat, where they couldn't. That's no good to you at all!" He took me by the arm, politely but authoritatively. "Come on, Mrs. X. Don't waste any more of your time in here. What a nerve this bird has! He tried to kill you with that very shot he's speaking of; now he's trying to turn that very shot around and use it to his advantage, with your help!"

Back in his office he said to me, "So he got under your skin with that, didn't he? I can tell that by looking at you. That's what he wanted to do."

"But he did fire at me on the stairs," I murmured.

"Then why didn't we come across the bullet imbedded somewhere along them?"

"It may have gone out through the slit of an open window. I passed one, I remember—"

He fanned a hand at me, as if the whole suggestion were ridiculous. "Did you ever deny that he fired at you?"

"No."

"Were you ever even given a chance to say whether or not he had?"

"No."

## The Blood Stone

"Then go home and forget about it. I wouldn't let you destroy your home for that rat if I could. His dirty hide's been quadruply forfeited to the State. The whole thing's splitting hairs, in a way, isn't it? They can't execute him, up there where he's going, more than once for one murder. We already had him down on the books for three others.

"If he'd happened to be acquitted of this particular one he was tried for just now, d'ya suppose that would have meant he would have been let go? Not on your life! He would have simply been tried over again for one of the others, and sentenced to death anyway."

**T**HE EXECUTION NOTICE was tiny, and tucked away so far back within the paper you would have missed it a dozen times over unless you happened to be specifically looking for it.

Well, he was gone now. What was the good of wondering if I could have saved him?

And I couldn't have saved him, I saw that now. My evidence wouldn't have been enough to get him off. On the contrary, it might have had quite the reverse effect: even added strength to the case against him. For if he had been willing to shoot me down to keep it from being known that he had been there, didn't that argue that he had far more than just trespassing to cover up? That he had a previous murder to cover up, in fact?

I would only have blackened my whole future, and he still would have been electrocuted tonight.

I went ahead dressing for the evening.

No, no earrings. I didn't have to be told that there was only one earring left. My heart knew that by heart. I picked it up, and there was something the matter with my eyes. There was still another one lying in the box!

Jimmy was dressed, waiting for me out-

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side in the other room. I came out to him, box and all; very white. Like a statue.

"Who put this left earring back? I thought I'd lost it."

He looked at it puzzledly himself for a moment. Then I saw his face clear. "Oh, I remember now. Why, I put it back myself. You were out at the time."

I swallowed. "I haven't opened the case since that night I was out with the Perrys."

I could see him trying to think back. "Well, that must have been the time. Whatever night it was, I remember I'd stayed up all night doing my income tax. Then I went out to stretch my legs, get a little fresh air, and just as I got back I ran into the milkman, he was standing there by our door, all excited about something. He came running to me.

"Mr. Shaw," he said, "look what I just found inside the empty bottle at your door. There was a note curled up in the neck of it, funnel-shaped, you know, and that caught it and held it."

"Then when I went to our room with it, I saw that you hadn't come back yet, you were still out. So I put it back in the box and went to sleep. You must have lost it right on your way out, as you left the door."

He stopped and glanced at me. "You've got the funniest look on your face. What're you thinking about?"

"Oh, nothing."

**I WAS LYING** awake later thinking about it; living the whole thing through all over again. I remembered now how I'd had to shake my key, trying to get it in the door, the first time I'd come back. That was what had loosened it, made it drop off. And I remembered now, I'd even heard the funny little plink of glass it had made going in the bottle-mouth. Only at the time I thought it was the tip of my shoe had grazed it. If I'd

## The Blood Stone

only taken the trouble to bend down and look!

Well, that milkman was an honest man, that was about the only consolation I could derive from the whole thing.

I looked across the room and I saw by the radium clock-dial that the night was nearly gone, and it was about his usual time for covering his route and making a delivery at the door. On an impulse I got up, put something over me, took two ten-dollar bills out of the bureau, and went out to our front door.

I was just in time.

"Bill, here's something for you, for finding that earring of mine, that time." I tried to tuck it into his hand. He wouldn't open it.

"What earring, Mrs. Shaw?"

"You know, the one that had dropped into the empty milk-bottle out here at the door. My diamond earring."

He was an honest man, all right. "No ma'am, I never found any diamond earring of yours. I never found any diamond earring of anybody's. I'd sure remember it if I had."

I managed to utter, "Good night, Bill," and I closed the door rather quickly.

The distance from there to our bedroom wasn't so great. It took me a long time to cover it, though.

I stood looking at Jimmy. His hand was sticking out over the edge of the mattress, the way a person's sometimes does when he is asleep. I reached down and put my own over it and gently clasped it, in a sort of wordless pact, but not strongly enough to disturb him.

Something that he'd once said came back to me. "The right kind of a husband understands everything, forgives everything. He takes care of things for her. And above all, he doesn't speak of it."

And Weill had told me they'd already wanted Sonny Boy Nelson for three other killings; were looking for him anyway.

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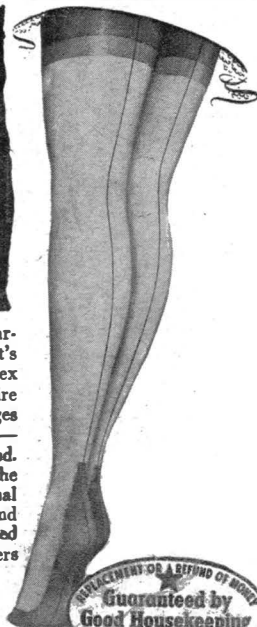
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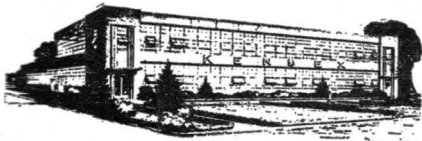
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