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A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

POPULAR DETECTIVE

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Every Week

*No
Escape
FROM
MURDER*
*A Mystery Novel
By WAYLAND RICE*

O. B. MYERS
EDWARD RONNS
SAM MERWIN, JR.
ROBERT J. HOGAN

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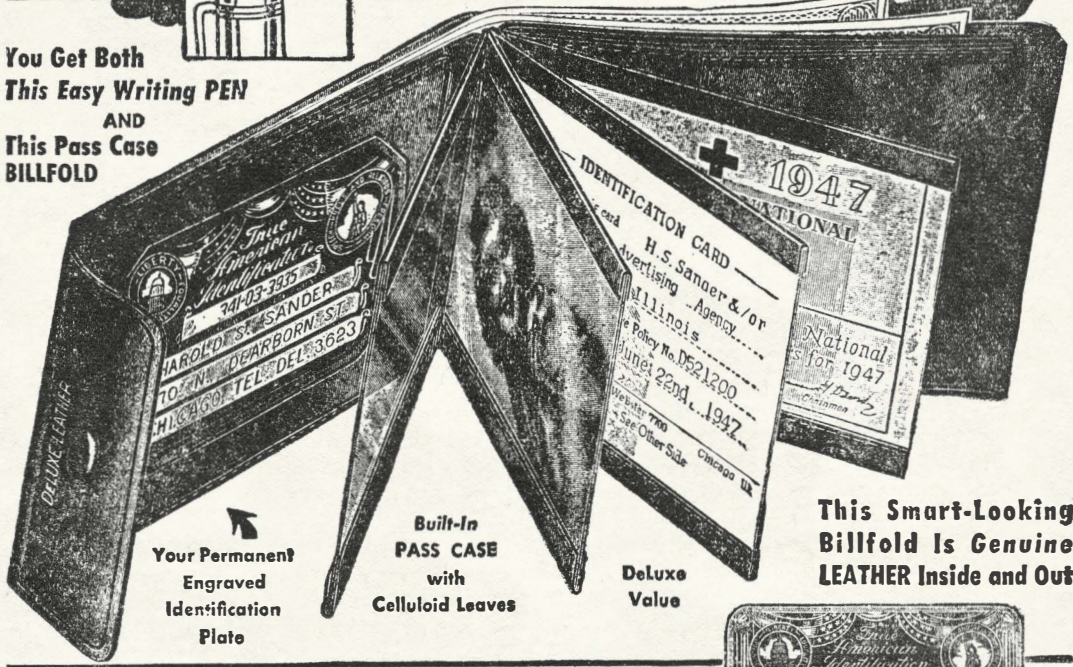
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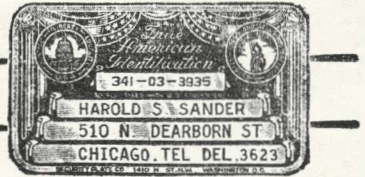
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POPULAR DETECTIVE

Vol. XXXIII, No. 3

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

November, 1947

COMPLETE MYSTERY NOVEL



No Escape from Murder

by *Wayland Rice*

When it involves his business partner and all his best friends, Bob Arnold finds that lethal crime can be just too personal—and also a bit too dangerous and disturbing for his comfort! 11

TWO COMPLETE NOVELETS

- THE CORPSE CAME ASHORE..... *Sam Merwin, Jr.* 48
Amy Brewster shakes some skeletons out of the family closet!
- TWICE MURDERED..... *Norman A. Daniels* 70
To protect his wife, Larry Langan must find an elusive killer!

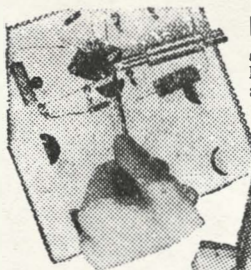
SHORT STORIES

- THE LOOT..... *Edward Ronns* 39
It's the chill breath of death that brings Henry Phelps to life
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In business, it's the life of trade—but not in the rackets!
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When a guard is wished on him this snooper has his hands full
- ONE, TWO, THREE—MURDER!..... *Robert J. Hogan* 93
A mad strangler goes right down the line with his evil crimes

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- OFFICIAL BUSINESS..... *The Editor* 6
A friendly department where our readers and the editor meet

POPULAR DETECTIVE, published every other month by Better Publications, Inc., at 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Subscription (12 issues), \$1.80; single copies, \$15. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter April 14, 1938, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1947, by Better Publications, Inc. In communicating with this magazine, please include your postal zone number, if any. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. Printed in the U.S.A.



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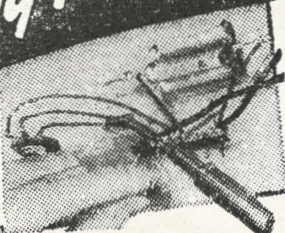
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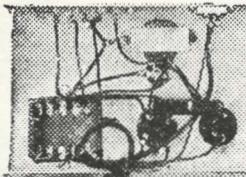
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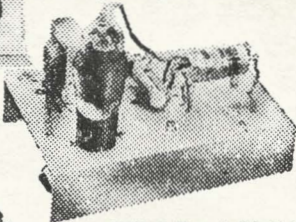
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A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

AS THE hero of our full-length novel in the forthcoming issue of **POPULAR DETECTIVE** so aptly puts it: "It takes a long time to grow used to your right leg ending in a stump below the knee." Our hero's name is Manville Moon, "private eye." The name of the yarn is:

THE JUAREZ KNIFE

by

RICHARD DEMING

At first glance, you might think the handicap of an "artificial leg of cork, aluminum and leather," was too much for a private dick to overcome. Mark you, we said his leg was gone—duly buried close by the Field Hospital, with full military honors. He still has his fists and the arms behind them. He knows how to use them too, as we shall find out!

The leg is off now, when the phone call comes. Up to the present time, Moon has never been able to afford the luxury of an office. He hops toward the instrument there in his bedroom.

"This is Alvin Christopher, Mr. Moon, Secretary to Mr. Lawrence Randall. Mr. Randall would like you to call at his office this afternoon," says the voice over the wire.

"Tell him not to hold his breath," Moon answers and hangs up. People who have their secretaries call up for them have always irritated Moon. Mr. Randall is apparently insistent and calls back. By this time, Moon has recovered his balance and strapped the recalcitrant leg on.

Word comes now that there will be a retainer of a thousand dollars and a special fee of another five hundred if the job can be done in a few days.

Promising to be at the required place at the necessary time, Moon looks through his files and comes upon the following:

Randall, Lawrence P., Attorney-at-Law. Indicted September 1936 for blackmail of Mrs. Whitney Forester, old widow. Case dismissed for lack of evi-

dence. Now front for Louis Bagnell, race track syndicate operator and manager of El Patio gambling casino.

It sounded interesting!

Hood Number One

Mr. Randall's offices were on the fourteenth floor of the University Building—1408 to be exact. On the way up there in the elevator, Moon notices in the same car with him, one Vance Caramand, Number One hood for Louis Bagnell. The gunsel however, goes in the opposite direction from the one necessary to take Moon to 1408.

Mr. Alvin Christopher, Randall's secretary, turns out to be a blond young man. Moon explains who he is. The secretary speaks into the intercom box. Moon hears a squeaky voice came out of the contraption:

"Ask him to wait until I see Miss Garson. She here yet?"

"No sir," answers Christopher.

"Send her in as soon as she arrives," the voice goes on. The secretary switches off the box and turns to Moon:

"You'll have to wait!" he says.

"You wait in my place!" Moon answers, fresh as you please. "I never learned how."

Ladies First

But Moon is destined not to open the door marked "Private" that leads into Randall's office—at least not for a few moments. The reason is a lady—and what a lady! "An aura of fire invisibly shimmered around her," Moon thought. Tough guy or not—ladies were still first. Yes, the secretary explains, the lady is Miss Joan Garson—society debutante. Moon actually sees her enter Randall's office.

Moon doesn't, however, see her come out. The detective gets tired waiting for Randall to "buzz" when his caller has left—left by the back entrance, Christopher explains. Moon becomes suspicious at last and rushes past the blond secretary. Yes, Mr. Lawrence

(Continued on page 8)

IMAGINE THEIR JOY

WHEN THEY FOUND THEY COULD PLAY

This easy as A.B.C. way!



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"I didn't dream I could actually learn to play without a teacher. Now, when I play for people they hardly believe that I learned to play so well in so short a time."
*H. C. S., Calif.

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*J.M., San Juan, P.R.



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*E. N. J., New York.

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*J. S., Okla.



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"I enjoyed taking this course and I get a lot of pleasure out of it. I have made much progress and have many invitations to play at parties. I owe you much for making this possible."
*K.U., N.Y.

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money in spare or full time. And thousands are playing for their own enjoyment and the entertainment of their friends.

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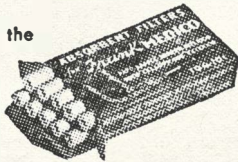
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OFFICIAL BUSINESS

(Continued from page 6)

P. Randall, attorney-at-law, is very seriously dead, with the shaft of a silver handled knife sticking incongruously from the center of his chest!

On the floor outside the door, Moon notices the stubs of three cigarettes. He picks them up and puts them in an envelope in his pocket. They are a Havana-made brand and known as El Toro. Rushing around to the elevator bank, Moon is just in time to see a car descend, bearing an overly-made-up-middle-aged woman. Who the deuce was that? Moon finds himself stopping all the elevators, one by one. No one seems to have taken down the breathless young lady he knows as Joan Garson.

The Case Was Too Pat

Suddenly it occurs to Moon that this whole thing was just TOO pat. He had enough experience as a private detective to know that there were just too many arrows pointing in the direction of Joan. For the simple reason that she MUST be the killer, he knew she couldn't be—not with a face like that. Not to mention her figure!

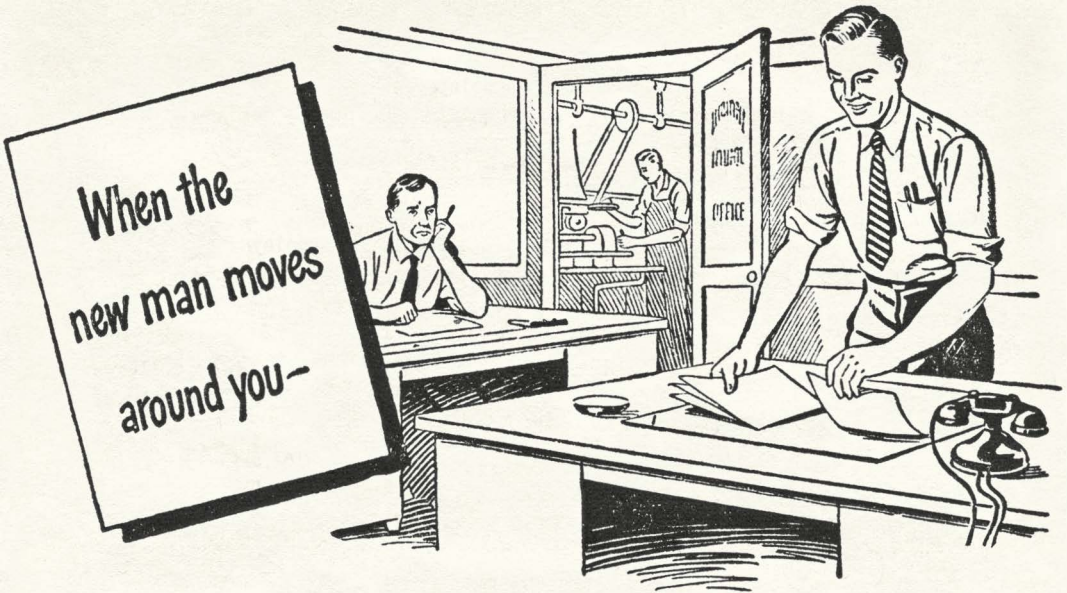
Back in Randall's office, Moon uncovers four checks for a thousand dollars each, made out to cash and signed by Judith Garson. That, the secretary explains, would be Joan's mother. Leaving Christopher to arrange for the arrival of the police, Moon figures Mrs. Judith Garson would be just the person for him to see. Perhaps Joan would be on her way home. Furthermore, who is paying him now and what is his connection with the case? Fifteen hundred dollars is not to be sneezed at.

When Moon rings the bell at 6101 Pershing, he expects the door to be opened by the butler. Instead, the overly-made-up middle-aged woman answers the bell. She invites Moon in. Shabby-gentility is all too palpable to the detective's keen eye. Yes, Joan is on her way home from the hairdressers. She should be on the Lindell bus. They were to have dinner at El Patio with their good friend Louis Bagnell. But when one has a twenty-three-year-old daughter—

Moon hears the shrill blast of the police siren and decides to throw his cards on the table.

"Listen Mrs. Garson," he says wildly. "The police are on their way here to arrest Joan for Randall's murder. I may be able to help

(Continued on page 110)



You remember the day Charlie Fisher started in Factory Office. You remember his early weeks when you "broke him in." Today he's clearing off the old desk and moving into a job ahead of yours. You've been ten years longer with the company and you can't understand it.

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GRAB MY HORSE'S TAIL!



TALKS CHEAP, BUT I'M CERTAINLY GRATEFUL . . .

FORGET IT, STRANGER. COME ON, LET'S HEAD FOR THE "LAZY U". YOU'LL NEVER MAKE TOWN ON FOOT



THAT YOU, BETH? SUPPER'S ABOUT READY.

OKAY, DAD. BETTER SET ANOTHER PLACE. WE HAVE COMPANY



HERE'S DRY DUDS AND A RAZOR, TOO

THANKS A LOT



WHAT AN EASY SHAVE! I EXPECTED TROUBLE WITH TWO DAYS' WHISKERS

THIN GILLETTES ALWAYS SKIM OFF WHISKERS QUICK AND EASY



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I HOPE HE DOES. HE'S HANDSOME



WHILE YOU'RE SHOPPING, I'LL WIRE MY FOLKS

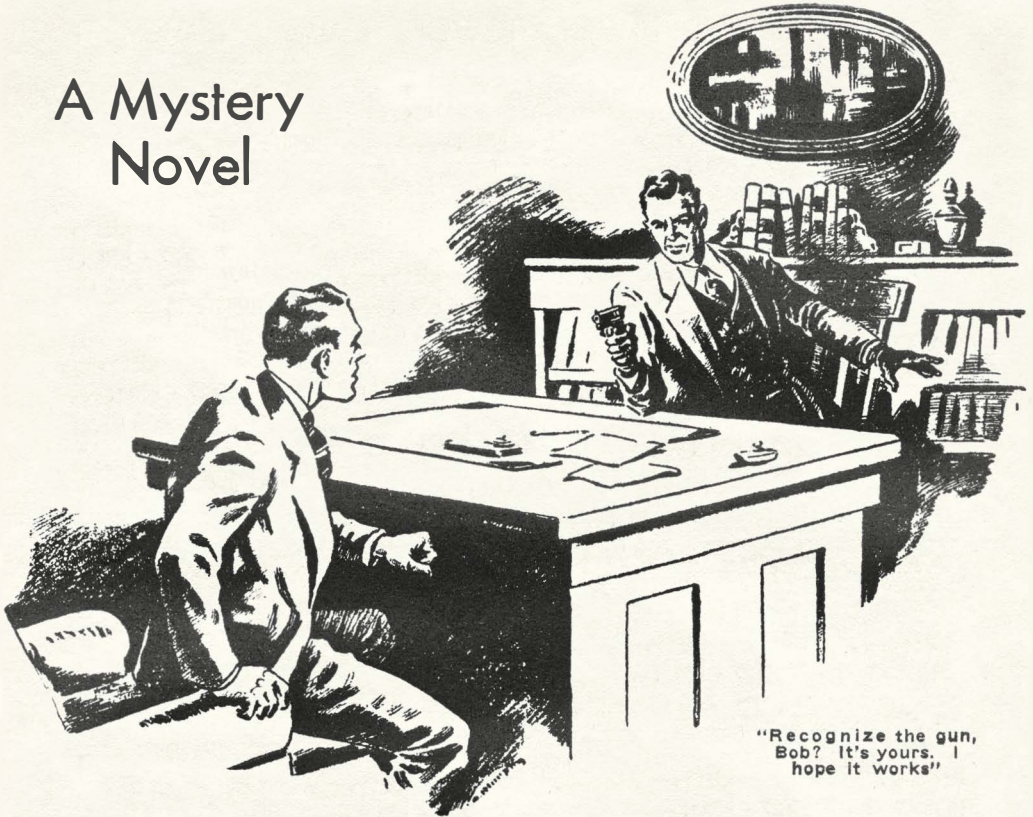
TELL THEM YOU DON'T KNOW WHEN YOU'LL BE BACK

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Bob? It's yours. I
hope it works"

NO ESCAPE FROM MURDER

By WAYLAND RICE

When it involves his business partner and all his best friends, Bob Arnold finds that lethal crime can be just too personal—and a bit too dangerous for his comfort!

CHAPTER I

Plan of the Desperate

THERE were five people around the table in the corner of the night club. Four men and a girl, at whom more than one favorable glance was being cast. She was tall, slender and fashionably gowned. Her eyes were a clear gray, her complexion flawless.

The room was tastefully decorated. The glasses were genuine crystal, the silver honest sterling. The palms were real and so were the other plants. The waiters were cat-footed, the headwaiters

properly servile. It was that kind of a place. So were the checks.

The girl, Louise Stewart, flipped a yellow aster under the nose of Bob Arnold.

"And he," she smiled, "is the man I intended to marry in about a week. The man I selected over all of you. Now he is going to let me down. Can you imagine?"

Bob Arnold grinned. "It's one of those things. My partner, Russ Lundigan, chiseled the firm out of a lot of cash. You know how it's done. We are given large checks and out of these we

finance radio programs, newspaper and magazine advertising contracts and keep a percentage. Lundigan simply kept mostly all of the last several checks we took in. I have to straighten out the mess."

"Must be embarrassing." Sonny Donahue wrinkled his nose. "Louise, you made a mistake. Bob isn't the man for you. A dope who lets his partner gyp him."

Louise laughed lightly. "He's still the man. And to deflate that terrific ego of yours, I didn't consider you more than two minutes, Sonny. You're a nice boy, but you're lazy. You'd have me playing third fiddle to your race horses and your polo games. No, thanks. I'm the kind who likes a fireside."

Hamilton Morton, lean, wearing nose glasses and hair plastered down hard enough to resemble a toupee, leaned forward eagerly. "Then you should have chosen me, Louise. I'm the home type. More so than Bob."

LOUISE winced. "Professor Ham Morton. Pathologist! A cutter-up of corpses. No thanks. You might seem to be content by the fire, but every time I detected an amorous gleam in your eyes, I'd be wondering if I was being regarded with a husband's fond gaze or the stare of an anatomist wondering how some tissue from my liver might look under a microscope."

They all laughed, including Professor Ham. There was no animosity here. Each man had sought Louise Stewart and, in the chase, become fast friends. The best man had won and they all knew it.

Pietro D'Angelo, short, beefy, with jet black hair that had needed cutting four months ago, reached for the bottle of wine and poured himself a glass, brimful. He raised it.

"I am desolate too, but what can we do about it? My friends, I shall give the bride and groom, if they ever do get married, one of my finest pieces of sculpting. And I have some fine ones. *Madre mia*. to think I would ever give anything away."

Bob said, "I'd hate to have you begin now, Pete. So no statue, please. Those atrocities would keep me awake nights. Well, boys, I'm grateful for this little party in Louise's and my honor. I came in last, but I won."

"The track was muddy and you wade well," Sonny Donahue grumbled. "There is something the matter with all the rest of us. Louise is right. I'm no good for her, or anybody. It's true, I'd probably follow the track seasons and forget her. Professor Ham doesn't go home more than once a week now. When he gets a cadaver on that dissecting bench of his, he stays in the lab for days on end. Who'd want to marry a guy in his profession, anyhow?"

"I resent that," Professor Ham chuckled.

Pietro D'Angelo put his glass down carefully. He was neatly in the bag, but for the next two drinks he'd be steady enough. After that, he wouldn't be so steady.

Pietro said, "What of me, eh? Am I that low you refuse to include me?"

Sonny Donahue's almost too handsome face broke into a broad smile. He waved a hand indolently, as he did everything else.

"Pete, you weren't even an also-ran. You didn't get into the race. Any girl who'd marry you would be an idiot. You're soaked in red wine. Sour wine. You're a flop as a sculptor. You ought to be digging ditches and wearing a red bandanna around your neck instead of that silken drape you call a tie."

If anyone else had said that, Pietro would have hurled the contents of his wine glass, and then the glass itself. Instead, he wagged his head.

"You should insult those slow-poke horses of yours the way you insult me. Then they would get so mad they'd win every race. But me, I am not offended. No! I consider the source and know it means nothing coming from you."

Louise put an end to the friendly bickering by arising. They all scrambled to their feet.

"Let me see," she mused. "I think poor Pete was abused the most. So I will dance with him. Especially since they are playing a rhumba and that's all Pete can do anyhow."

PETE bowed low, smirked at the others in triumph and led Louise to the dance floor. Sonny Donahue lit a cigarette.

"All kidding aside, Bob," he said, "we're tickled that you're the man. You're the only sane one among us. The only one who is apt to really go somewhere. Look, if you need cash to fix up



Louise leaped to her feet as Bob struck.
One blow was enough

Lundigan's defalcations."

"No," Bob said grimly. "Thanks just the same, Sonny. It's a large sum. Around two hundred thousand, I think, but I can raise it without borrowing from friends. The only bad feature is that it may take me two or three weeks to straighten out the business."

"This Russ Lundigan," Professor Ham said slowly and coldly, "should rest upon one of my dissecting tables. I would be interested to see what rotten substance is under his skull acting as a brain. I could cheerfully kill him."

"He's a skunk, Sonny exclaimed. "Now that you've tossed him out, Bob, I'll tell you what he did to me. Or tried to do. He took advantage of my friendship for you. He came to me and wanted me to rig a race. I threw him out and it was a pleasure. I hope he gets twenty years."

Bob shook his head slowly. "No, I won't turn him over to the police. Not unless he refuses to make any sort of restitution. He's been acting very odd these last four or five months. Sometimes I wonder if he really is afflicted mentally. Come on. Let's enjoy ourselves. That's what this party is for."

They ordered more drinks and another bottle of red wine for Pete. The waiter bowed, moved away from the table and brushed against a man who was advancing with the push of a battleship.

He was a big man in a loud splash of clothes. Brown shirt, yellow tie and a generous chunk of yellow silk serving as a pocket kerchief. His shoes were white and brown, his socks violently yellow. His face violently red.

He cuffed the waiter and sent him reeling. Then he continued advancing on the table.

"Lundigan," Bob said hoarsely. "Potted to the gills and all steamed up. This is trouble, boys."

Bob arose and faced the man who was so much bigger than himself. Lundigan shoved him back into the chair.

"I've been looking for you," he said ominously. "You crook! I just came from the office where I went over the books. You've cheated me out of thousands."

Lundigan's voice was a bellow and everyone in the club forgot the orchestra to listen. Even the dancers stopped.

"You're drunk," Bob said slowly. "Get out of here, Russ."

"Drunk, am I? Certainly I'm drunk. Who wouldn't get drunk when he found his partner had ruined him. We're both leaving—to go to the police. That's why I came and I hope you refuse to go. I'm praying you refuse to go."

Bob arose. He took Lundigan's arm, but the bigger man shook off the hold and swung a wild blow that missed by a yard. Bob stepped forward. He put one fist where it doubled Lundigan up and then he smacked him hard on the chin. Lundigan hit a table, knocked off the dishes and silver, but somehow retained his balance.

He didn't try to swing again. He just stood there, rubbing his jaw and smiling. Very suddenly, Bob realized this man wasn't drunk at all though he gave a good imitation of it. Lundigan's eyes were clear and malevolent. He turned and reeled away, staggering slightly.

Louis and Pete came back. Bob was properly humble.

"I'm sorry that had to happen here, Louise. I think we'd better go. Everyone in the place has their eyes on us."

Pete, Sonny Donahue and Professor Ham decided to remain on the theory that some of the stares would continue to be directed at them while Louise and Bob made their escape.

NEITHER wanted to take a cab. Louise's apartment was only a matter of ten blocks away. They walked toward it slowly.

Bob said, "The insufferable heel. Now I am going to the police. Or maybe a psychiatrist. Lundigan is off balance mentally, I think."

"He must be," Louise agreed. "To accuse you in public, when he is the guilty one. The truth is bound to come out."

"It has to. He forced the issue. In the morning I'll see the district attorney. Perhaps we can clear this up soon."

"I hope so, Bob. Please don't let it upset you. I didn't mind, really."

"But I did."

They walked in gloomy silence the rest of the way and Bob said good-night at the door. He took a taxi to his own apartment across town. He mixed a stiff drink and downed it in half a dozen gulps. There was still a lot of anger seething within him. He got out of his evening clothes, donned slippers and a comfortable jacket. Then the phone rang

and he wondered who could be phoning at this hour. It was almost midnight.

Russ Lundigan was on the wire and Bob had never heard a more apologetic man.

"Bob," he said. "I'm terribly sorry. I had a couple too many. I hold the stuff pretty well except in my brain. That gets twisted. Look—I'm ready to make restitution. As much as I'm able. Will you come over to my house now? It's a crazy hour, but I want to go away tomorrow and we must straighten all this out before I leave."

"I've already drawn up some papers," Bob said curtly. "You'll sign them and relinquish all rights to the business. Besides that, I want all the money you have—as nearly up to the sum you stole, as possible. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly. I've got it coming to me. That crack on the jaw sobered my wits. I'm all right now."

"I'll be there in fifteen minutes," Bob said.

"Good. Oh, Bob, you won't be able to drive down my street. A sewer broke and the pavement is all dug up. You'd better stop before you turn the corner and hoof it."

"Fifteen minutes," Bob reiterated.

He changed to a dark business suit. He didn't bother to transfer his wallet from his evening clothes. There was enough change in his pocket for immediate purposes. He took a taxi to the corner of the street where Lundigan lived. As he paid off the driver, he looked for the signs blocking the road, but saw none. He wondered if Lundigan was completely out of his mind.

Bob walked about five hundred feet down the dark street and reached the rather large house, on a spacious estate, which Lundigan maintained. He proceeded along a path toward the front porch. A window opened noisily.

"Bob," Lundigan's voice called out in a hoarse whisper, "is that you?"

"Yes. What's wrong now?"

"Sorry—I had the front porch painted this afternoon. The front door sticks anyway. Just cross the lawn to the side door, will you? Like a good fellow? The side door isn't locked. Step right in."

Bob shrugged, left the path and proceeded to straddle a hedge, climb it and cut across the lawn. The ground squished under his feet. Lundigan must

have just watered it and near midnight was a strange time to water a lawn.

He grasped the side doorknob, but it wouldn't open. He put the flat of his left hand against the door panels and shoved. The door opened under this additional pressure and he found himself in a dark hallway.

"Just turn left and come straight through, Bob," Lundigan called from somewhere at the front of the house. "There's no bulb in the hall light. Blew out last night and I forgot about it."

BOB walked briskly along the corridor and suddenly banged himself against a door, one side of which was a solid mirror. With a grunt of exasperation he pushed the door back, his whole hand resting against the mirrored surface for a second.

Light beckoned him, and he soon found himself in the front hall of Lundigan's house and his partner was approaching with half a smile on his face.

"Like coming through a maze, wasn't it?" Lundigan chuckled. "Sorry. Come in and sit down. Bob, I'm terribly sorry for what happened tonight."

"You ought to be. Let's get this over with. How much did you steal, Russ?"

Lundigan's face darkened for a second and then he smiled—expansively.

"It will run to more than a hundred and fifty thousand, I guess. You're a fool, Bob. Easiest man in the world to rob."

Bob said, "Why not? I trust any man who is my business partner. How do you intend to raise a sum like that and pay me back?"

"I'll get it," Lundigan promised. "Give me a little time. We can work this thing out, I'm sure. Pardon me. That was the doorbell. I sent for some medicine."

Lundigan arose and walked to the front door. Bob could hear him talking. Odd, he thought, that the druggist's delivery boy crossed the porch which had just been painted.

"This stuff is really good, eh?" Lundigan asked. "My doctor claims it ought to do the trick. There's the devil to pay when your stomach isn't clicking smoothly. Let's see now—I take this every two hours. What time is it now?"

"Eleven - forty, Mr. Lundigan," a youthful voice replied. "You take it now and again at one-forty. Funny,

that's the price of the medicine too. One-forty."

Lundigan must have handed over some money. "Keep the change, son, and thanks."

Lundigan closed the door, returned to his study and proceeded to pour a glass of water from a desk thermos. He took a dose of the medicine. It was pink stuff and some of it ran over the side of the bottle and across the label.

"Now where were we?" Lundigan grinned. "Oh, yes—about restitution. I'm going fishing tomorrow with Bill Kinkaid. Two or three day trip. Before it's over, I'll borrow all or most of the money from him. That suit you, Bob?"

"I don't care whom you get it from, so long as it's in my hands no later than a week from now. You've been pretty shabby about this, Russ. I'm not making any concessions. I'll have the books audited. You might as well sign this statement dissolving our partnership now—turning the whole thing over to me."

"Why not?" Lundigan answered. "I'll be glad to."

As he reached for his pen, the telephone buzzed. He answered it promptly.

"Hello, Kinkaid. The trip? You bet I'm ready to go. Got my gear all packed. Yes, you can pick me up about four o'clock. Doesn't give us much sleep, but we'll make up for it. Right you are. Good-night."

"Kinkaid," he explained to Bob as he hung up. "Just wanted to make sure about the fishing trip. Now for that statement dissolving our partnership. I've something here."

LUNDIGAN opened a desk drawer and drew out a pair of thin, black gloves. He put these on slowly, smiling at Bob all the time.

"What's the idea of that?" Bob wanted to know.

"Well, you see," Lundigan reached into the drawer again, "I'm going to kill you and I don't want any fingerprints left around."

He brought up an ugly black automatic and pointed it at Bob.

"Recognize the gun, Bob? It's yours. I lifted it from your desk. Haven't had time to examine it yet, but I suppose the thing works."

Bob's jaws clamped shut, his eyes narrowed a trifle. He arose very deliber-

ately and reached for the gun. As he did so, Lundigan pulled the trigger. The mechanism clicked metallically on an empty chamber.

"That gun hasn't been loaded for years," Bob said grimly. "I wouldn't keep a loaded gun around. It's too dangerous. Now, Russ, so help me, I really am going to push your face in."

Lundigan kept pulling the trigger ineffectively. Bob got around the corner of the desk, grabbed Lundigan and yanked him out of the chair. His right fist went back, snapped forward and Lundigan flew backwards, upset a small table which had a vase of flowers on it. He arose, scowling and wiping the water off his clothes. Bob had the automatic in his hand.

Lundigan sat down behind his desk again. "All right," he said curtly, "I suppose I had it coming to me. However, I want to tell you one thing. I don't believe I have ever hated anyone in my life half as much as I hate you. You—the go-getter. The money maker. You, the man who took Louise away from me. Now you're going to put me in jail because I haven't a ghost of a chance to make that money good."

"Borrowing from Kinkaid was just a stall, I suppose." Bob said.

"It was, Bob. I can't possibly face a judge. You see, about four years prior to meeting you, I served a little hitch in prison for the same thing. On a much more minor scale, of course. With that conviction on my records I'll get about ten years—maybe fifteen. I couldn't stand that, Bob. It would kill me by inches and so—I intend to do something about it."

"I'm not sorry for you," Bob snapped. "Not now, when I realize you even started with me under false pretenses. If that's all you've got to say, I'm wasting time. On my way home, I'll stop at a police precinct."

"No, you won't," Lundigan said sharply. He was holding a .38 revolver in his hand. Bob gulped. He hadn't expected this.

"So you really do intend to kill me," Bob said quietly. "You can't get away with it."

"I know that, too," Lundigan smiled. "That's why I won't kill you. Too easy, my friend. I intend to kill myself and pin my death on you as premeditated murder."

CHAPTER II

Alibi

BOB shouted. "Russ, you're out of your mind."
 "Sit still," Lundigan warned. "I won't hesitate to shoot if necessary although I don't want my little plan spoiled. You see, I don't mind dying. There's nothing left to live for. You've the business and Louise. I'll get a long prison term. So—because I hate you with an intensity that amazes even me, I intend to have you arrested for my murder. I'll see to it that there is no escape for you. Everything is set. Put that automatic on the desk, Bob. Put it down or I'll wing you."

Bob slowly placed the gun on the desk. Lundigan snatched it with his gloved hands, yanked out the magazine and shoved a loaded clip into place. He took time to light a cigarette and puffed on it nervously. The smoke lay heavy and flat in the closeness of the room.

"I'll die with your gun, Bob. It will have only your fingerprints on it. I'll see to that, even though I must handle the weapon myself for a second. I know a way. They'll soon know it was you. I staged that little act at the night club so the police would hear about it."

"I'm beginning to realize that," Bob said, "but you can't possibly get away with it. The police know a suicide when they see one."

"The police are stupid creatures," Lundigan smiled. "They'll never even suspect suicide. First of all, I visited my doctor tonight. He gave me some medicine for an imaginary stomach ailment. Now would a man contemplating suicide have himself treated for a minor ailment a few hours before he blasted himself out of this world?"

Bob bit his lower lip. "The drug store sent over the medicine at an appointed time, didn't they? So you could have a witness as to the moment when you were last seen alive. I heard you ask the delivery boy what time it was."

"You're waking up, Bob. That's it exactly. I also took a dose of the medicine which a suicide wouldn't likely do.

Then I arranged a fishing trip. I had Kinkaid phone me, too. A suicide doesn't make arrangements like that."

For a moment or two Bob considered putting Lundigan to a final test by charging the gun. But somehow he guessed that Lundigan would shoot. He had this thing planned so carefully that he would have made provisions for a thing like that.

"There were some other touches too," Lundigan boasted. "Besides, the fight in the night club where you sounded off quite properly. I rigged the books at the office to show that it was you who stole the money, not I. They wouldn't stand up under expert auditing, perhaps. Especially with you directing the procedure.

"However, you'll be in jail and they'll do a slipshod job and find out you stole the money, not me. Then you came here by taxi. You dismissed the cab some distance from my home. The street was never blocked, you idiot. If you were coming here openly, why dismiss the taxi so close to my home?"

Bob said nothing, but he could see a net closing in on him. There was a way out though. So far, Lundigan hadn't seemed to think of it.

Lundigan went on, "I tricked you into crawling over the hedge, walking across the wet and muddy lawn on which your footprints are nicely inscribed. You had to push the side door open and your hand print is on it. You stumbled against the mirrored door and left your prints there too. How do you like the set-up, Bob?"

"You're a rank coward, aren't you?" Bob asked softly. "Where are you going to get up the nerve to pull the trigger?"

"Because I am a coward, I will have the nerve," Lundigan countered. "I'm so cowardly I couldn't face a prison term. All suicides are cowards, Bob. They can't stand bad luck and if I live, the rest of my life will be nothing but that. You can go home now if you wish."

BOB arose. "I'd like nothing better and I'll stop at the precinct, just as I said. If you really intend to use that gun, you'll have to work fast."

"I intend to." Lundigan kept his pistol trained. "Good-night—and good-by, Bob. Think of me when they strap you in the chair for a murder you didn't

commit. Think of me when Louise comes to make that last Death House visit. Think of me. And I'll be seeing you after they turn on the juice."

Bob slammed the front door and walked to the street. There he hesitated a moment. He had few doubts that Lundigan would put his macabre plan into action. The man was half mad with hatred. But Lundigan had forgotten one little item. An alibi!

"If I can rig an alibi quickly enough, I can prove it was impossible that I shot him. But how? There is so little time."

Bob was talking aloud to himself. Then he saw a dark figure turn a corner down the block. A street light reflected on brass buttons and a badge. Bob felt like cheering. At first he wondered if he shouldn't tell the whole story to this patrolman, but he rejected that idea. It was better not to stall. Lundigan might be dead already. All Bob had to do was create an iron-clad alibi.

Bob quickly stepped behind the trunk of a big tree. He opened his collar, crumpled his hat and ruffled his hair. He put a silly expression on his face and, as the patrolman came closer, Bob stepped out and deliberately bumped into him.

"Whatsa idea?" he demanded thickly. "Look where you're goin', you big flat-foot."

The patrolman was not flatfooted, but he was big. One brawny hand grasped Bob by the collar.

"I saw you duck," the cop said. "You're drunk. Now move along before I run you in."

"Let's see you try." Bob stuck his chin up. "Go on—try it, you big stiff."

The cop didn't even half try. Ten seconds later, Bob was being hauled off toward the nearest call box. He struggled a little, but didn't tempt the cop. A whack from that nightstick was no part of the proceedings so far as he was concerned.

The patrol wagon rolled up. A couple of curious people stopped to watch. The cop grasped Bob by the collar and the seat of his pants, hoisted him up and into the wagon, and climbed in himself.

"Okay, Mike," he told the driver. Then he looked narrowly at Bob. "You act like a drunk, but I don't smell any ooze. Still, it'll be disorderly conduct if the drunk rap won't stick."

"Sure," Bob said cozily and glanced at

his wrist watch. "Fine way to start the new day off. It's ten after twelve, and I'm having a ride in a patrol wagon."

Bob leaned back and smiled complacently. He'd never been quite so content in his life.

Let Lundigan blow his brains out. They'd place the time of his death and no man ever had a better alibi than Robert Arnold. Afterward, when he explained it all, they'd believe him.

He was quickly booked and searched. Then a turnkey led him to a cell and slammed the steel door in his face. Bob sat down on the wooden pallet and decided to make sure of his alibi by staying there a couple of hours. He wondered if Lundigan had used that gun yet.

CHAPTER III

Accusation of Murder



AT TWO A.M. Bob yelled for a turnkey and decided he wanted to get out on bail. It wasn't high, twenty-five dollars. He had twenty-six fifty with him and when his possessions were handed back, he turned over the bail, leaving himself with a dollar and

a half.

"You gave a pretty ritzy address," the desk sergeant told him, "so I checked in the directory. You're Arnold, the big advertising man, aren't you? Sure, you should be ashamed."

Bob grinned. "Under ordinary circumstances I would be, but this time I'm not. Remember the name, Sergeant. Remember it well. And who was the patrolman who hauled me in?"

"Collins. Why?"

"I'm going to send him a box of cigars for his trouble. In fact, I'll send you one too."

"Well, thanks," the sergeant nodded. "Say—your knuckles are pretty well skinned. Have an argument someplace tonight?"

"I did and you'll hear all about it later on," Bob told him. "Good-night, Sergeant."

Bob went directly home, mixed himself a highball and sat down to wait. He considered phoning Louise and telling

her what had happened, but it was too late. Anyway the whole thing was settled. There'd be trouble, without question, but with that alibi, Bob wasn't afraid. He congratulated himself for thinking of such an idea.

He was dozing a little when someone rapped on the door. Bob opened it and his visitor walked in. He wasn't too big. Only six-feet-three or four and weighed about two-sixty. A full grown elephant was bigger. He had dark, kinky hair and black eyes, large and very clear. Bob had believed Lundigan to be a big man, but this stranger was plenty bigger.

His clothing was on the nondescript side. The gray tie was grease stained and the white shirt collar soiled around the lapels. His suit needed a pressing and the shoes were scuffed and dull.

"You Bob Arnold?" he asked bluntly.

"Yes. Yes, I'm Robert Arnold."

There was a flash of a gold badge. "Lieutenant Gleason. Homicide."

"I'll bet you were some halfback," Bob grinned.

Gleason didn't grin. "Never played football. I've been too busy. Rounding up skunks and such. There's a smell about you I don't like. The odor of murder."

Bob sat down again. "Oh come now, Lieutenant, don't jump to conclusions. Lundigan is dead, I suppose."

"The only thing deader is a ten year old oyster shell. What you kill him for?"

"I didn't," Bob replied. He was sure of himself. Even a hulking brute like Gleason would have to admit the truth when it was shown to him. "I saw Lundigan just before midnight. When I left him, he was alive. He told me he meant to kill himself and arrange things so that it would look as if I killed him."

"What you kill him for?" Gleason repeated monotonously.

"I didn't. Let me finish, please. Lundigan was half mad. He hated me—with sufficient reason. I was afraid his scheme might work so I had myself arrested. I spent the time from right after midnight until two in the morning, in a police cell. It's on the record. I wanted that for an alibi."

"You're nuts," Gleason commented and his eyes were glittering brighter than ever.

"No—Lundigan had lost his power of reasoning. I think I was smart enough



Bob put one fist where it doubled Lundigan up, and then he smacked him hard on the chin

to steer myself out of his plot against me."

"Just how?"

"Well, Lundigan was alive when I left him. Then I made an officer arrest me. He probably shot himself. Someone must have heard the shot. There were neighbors and he was going to use a fairly big calibre gun. When that shot was fired, I was either in the paddy wagon or in a jail cell. I can prove it."

Gleason shoved his hat to the back of his head. "Stand up," he ordered curtly.

BOB didn't move. Two hands came down and grasped him by the shoulders. He was lifted, but he didn't stand. He merely dangled while his arms felt as if they were being pulled out of their sockets. Gleason shook him hard. Bob's wits rattled like his teeth. Gleason threw him onto a davenport covered with a very large chinese shawl of silk.

Bob raised himself. His eyes were glittering too, now.

"You went a little too far that time, Lieutenant. I'm no thug you can toss around."

"I tossed you, didn't I?" Gleason smirked. "And I'll do it again if you give me any more of those crazy stories." Bob massaged one shoulder tenderly. "I see. You're going to prove I'm a murderer whether I am or not. You can't do it. That alibi clears me."

Gleason planked one huge foot on a chair which was worth a small fortune.

"That alibi," he said, "is as goofy as your story. Maybe Lundigan did die by a bullet. I wouldn't know. That's up to the medical guys. There wasn't enough left of him to tell."

"Wasn't—enough left?" Bob forgot his aching shoulders.

"That's what I said. Lundigan was bumped and stuffed into the furnace in his own cellar. A lot of fuel oil was thrown on top of a bed of paper and rags and a match tossed in."

Bob passed a tongue tip across his lips. "Then—you can't tell—just when he—died?"

"Sure we can. Not from the sound of any gunshot, but at 11:30 people in the neighborhood smelled smoke and saw it pouring out of the chimney. Nobody has a furnace going at this season of the year. Now are you going to talk? Or shall I shake you up some more?"

Bob didn't answer directly. He

merely mused his thoughts aloud.

"At 11:30 Lundigan was with me, alive and well. He had things all set. I've been a fool. He never intended to kill himself. He had someone else roasting in the furnace as he talked to me. No wonder he didn't worry about an alibi."

"Come on." Gleason stepped forward ominously. "Let's have it. A full confession. You killed him and I know you did."

Bob was thinking as fast as his brain would function. He had to get away. There was too much evidence against him. It was conclusive, thanks to Lundigan's efforts. If he was locked up and charged with murder, he might go to the electric chair. Meanwhile, Lundigan was loose and laughing to himself. Bob had no doubts now, but that his ex-partner was alive.

Bob picked up the fringe of the big Chinese scarf on the davenport. He let go of it and arose. Gleason made a grab for him. Bob avoided that and jumped onto the davenport. Gleason howled and reached again. Bob jumped clear over the back, landed lightly and missed Gleason's extended arms by an inch.

The huge detective was kneeling on the cushions now. Bob grasped one end of the big shawl and threw it over the man's head. Then he pinned it in place with one hand while he reached for a heavy drapery cord with the other. It came free much more easily than he had any right to dare hope. He got this around Gleason, who was struggling savagely. He tied it tight, pinioning the detective's arms. Strong as he was, Gleason couldn't break that cord and the cover of silk kept him blind.

"Listen to me," Bob shouted.

Gleason dropped to a sitting position and promptly kicked out. Bob ran around to the back of the davenport.

"You'll listen if I have to lay you out. I didn't kill Lundigan. He isn't even dead. I don't know who is, but I'm going to find out. Stop bellowing and listen."

THE bellowing kept right on. Bob drew back a first and smacked him one about where his jaw should have been. The howling stopped. Bob's fist felt as if it had encountered a ten ton mass of concrete.

"That's better," he said. "You're no cop, Gleason. You're a man who is using

an official position to gratify your own sadistic delights. I'm leaving. You can hunt me if you wish. That's your job, but from here on, I'll fight you with any means at my disposal. You're too big and brainless to fight fairly."

Gleason's voice was muffled, but no swathe of silk could have smothered the deadliness in it.

"Next time we meet, you're going to the morgue. Nobody ever got away from me yet and you won't. Go on. Beat it, but, so help me, I won't sleep until I've got you boxed in a pretty little corner where I can smash the life out of you. If anything is left, the jury gets it."

Bob found his hat. Gleason was struggling mightily against the scarf and the rope. He'd break loose soon.

"I'll see you then," Bob called out, "in that corner you talk about. And you'll be proven a bigger fool than you were born."

Bob hurried to the elevators, composed himself as much as possible and managed to walk casually out of the lobby. He wasn't too sure that Gleason hadn't brought along someone to watch the outside. He took a taxi uptown for a score of blocks, walked again to a subway station and rode downtown.

So far, no alarm could have been broadcast, but he took care to remain inconspicuous. He found a discarded newspaper and buried his nose in it. At Chatham Square, he got off. Ten minutes later, he was climbing the narrow, dismal steps to Pietro D'Angelo's studio.

D'Angelo was half asleep when he opened the door to Bob's insistent pounding. Instantly, the swarthy man's eyes opened wide.

"*Madre mia*," he gasped. "They are looking for you. For murder. It came over the radio."

"Are you a friend of mine—or aren't you, Pete?"

"A friend, of course. Come in, quickly. There are prying eyes everywhere. Why did you do it? Why did you not ask me to do it for you? I would have slit his pig's throat with great pleasure."

Bob sat down wearily. "Pete, before we go any further, I didn't kill Lundigan."

D'Angelo thought that statement called for a bottle of wine. Two bottles of wine. He fetched them, along with a pair of cracked tumblers. Bob drank his and for the first time it tasted good.

"Lundigan told me he meant to kill himself and put the blame for his death on me—as murder. I thought he planned to shoot himself. Now I find he is suppose to have squeezed into the furnace in his cellar, dumped fuel oil around him and set fire to it. Man alive, Pete, nobody does it that way."

PETE regarded his friend over the rim of the glass. "But you are wrong. They do. There are several cases like that. It is not so good, this business Lundigan rigged up against you."

"Then you believe me?" Bob asked.

"I am your friend." Pete's shrug was continental and expressive.

"Thanks, Pete. I came to you because few people know you are my friend. They'll naturally check with Prof. Ham and Sonny Donahue and Louise, I suppose. It will take them some time to find out you are a friend also."

"Them?" Pete asked vaguely.

"The police. One in particular. A Lieutenant named Gleason. He's huge, bigger than Lundigan, and mean."

"You—escaped, maybe?"

"Not maybe. I did, definitely, and

[Turn page]



TOPS FOR QUALITY

BIGGER AND BETTER



Gleason is going to be sorer than ever. Pete, where can I hide? A quiet place. I'm not fussy. All I need is a spot to duck into if things get too warm. I've got to find Lundigan."

"But he is dead."

"No, he isn't dead. While he talked to me about this crazy plan, he was burning a corpse in the cellar. Don't you see, Pete? It had to be done that way if Lundigan wanted to bring in a ringer for himself. Who can identify a burned skeleton, except through such things as rings and buttons? Lundigan would have fixed that. He's loose someplace, with the money he stole from me. I've got to find him. There is no other way of clearing myself."

"Perhaps. Perhaps." Pete rocked from side to side. "I do not know. All I have heard came over the radio earlier. A place to hide. It is difficult. You cannot stay here. They will find you. Where could you hide here?"

He swept a hand in the direction of the studio. His place was just one large room with a corner of it used for living quarters. The rest of the space was taken up by a workbench, half a dozen busts in preparation and about a score of cloth-covered and completed works of art, as Pete called them.

"Do what you can, Pete. It's almost daylight. I'm a marked man."

Pete drank another glass of wine. "There is just one little chance. A place I looked at a week ago. It was empty then. My landlord was going to throw me onto the street, but the next day I sold a statue. It saved me. You wait here. I will go and see, at once."

Pete was at the door before he thought about not being dressed. He flung on some clothes and disappeared. Bob turned on a small, tinny radio and kept it low, listening for news flashes. None came over.

He lit a cigarette and sat back to ponder his strange predicament. He found that all he could think about lucidly, was his hatred for Lieutenant Gleason. It was as genuine and intense as a typhoon.

Pete came back in twenty minutes. He waved an old-fashioned door key.

"It is done. They think I have rented it and I do not move in for a few days, but a friend is to use it. You must go at once. I will see you tomorrow."

"Thanks, Pete. Just be careful. Don't lead them to me."

Pete whacked him across one shoulder and Bob winced as fresh pain swept through it.

"I am not the fool. They will not follow me. Not Pietro. Wait and see."

CHAPTER IV

No Question of Identity



ARNOLD followed the directions which Pete gave him and found that his lodgings were in a cheap rooming house. The key opened the downstairs door. He climbed three flights and at the top realized how exhausted he was. He let himself into a squalid

room.

The paper was falling off the walls, two ten cent store prints, in cheap frames, were askew. There was a table without a cover; one straight-backed kitchen chair and a cot. Bob wondered if it would start moving in the middle of the night. It looked like something that might crawl.

At five dollars a week, someone was being cheated and it wasn't the landlord. Bob removed the spread on the cot, whisked the grayish slip off the pillow and slept on the floor. It was a sleep of sheer exhaustion.

He was awakened by a hand that shook him hard and he sat up instantly, wide awake and ready to fight. Then he relaxed. Pete was standing over him. He had a bottle of wine stuck in one pocket of a gray corduroy jacket, a slim loaf of French bread in the other. To Pete, this was breakfast, lunch and dinner. To Bob, it was a stomach ache.

Pete also had newspapers which made Bob groan. The only pleasant thing was that his photograph wasn't included.

"They are sweeping out a cell for you," Pete said sadly. "It is very bad, this business."

Bob broke off a chunk of bread and ate it. He had to drink wine out of the bottle to help force the dry bread down. It didn't taste very good.

"This isn't the Waldorf, Pete," he smiled, "but I'm grateful just the same. Have the police been near you?"

"Not yet, but soon, I expect. They

have talked to Professor Ham, Sonny and Louise all night. I telephoned Professor Ham from a pay station and told him you were all right and that Louise must know. He wants to see you."

"You didn't tell him where I was?"

"No. I did not dare. The police could listen in, maybe. He says it is very important."

"I'm scared. I ought to stay under cover," Bob replied. Then he frowned. "But I can't do that. There's little difference whether I rot in a cell or in this room. I've got to find out the truth before they catch up with me. I will see Professor Ham. He may be able to help. But he's such a simple soul. He'd probably tell Gleason I was there and not mean to at all."

Pete stepped over to the window. Bob saw him start visibly.

"This Gleason, he is very big?"

"Bigger than Lundigan, as I told you. Why?"

"Look. Be most careful. There is a man across the street. He watches this house too much."

Bob hurried to the window and peeked out. The man across the street was big too, but he wasn't Lieutenant Gleason. He had a wide, coarse face and wore cheap clothes that were ready made when he needed tailor fashioned garments to accommodate his muscles and build.

"I think he's harmless," Bob said. "That's not Gleason or anyone I know. He doesn't look like a policeman either. If he trailed you here—and how else could he have found the place if he is after me—he'll keep on following you. I'll watch when you leave."

"You will see Prof Ham, then?"

"Yes, Pete. I think so. I know of a way that he can be of definite help. You'd better go now, and keep away from me. It's dangerous for both of us."

Pete ducked his head and promptly departed. The man across the street did not follow. But he didn't go away either. Bob waited a full half hour. It was going to be dangerous, moving about in daylight, but he had to take the risk.

WHEN Bob emerged, the man across the street suddenly became too interested in observing something at the corner, several hundred feet away. His attempt to appear uninterested in Bob was almost humorous, except for the implications it offered.

Bob had to throw him off and he wasn't certain he could. All of this was so new and complex. Not at all like handling an advertising contract. He tried ditching the man by some fast work in the subway tubes, and failed. The big man stuck.

Bob then subwayed far uptown to a station which he knew was in a rather deserted area. The skyscrapers ceased blocks back and here were vacant lots, little traffic and few people. Emerging, he saw the big man moving after him.

Bob sauntered down the street, eyes open for a taxi. One was bound to come along fairly soon. He gave the impression that he was killing time to fulfill an engagement made at this outlying section. The big man remained about three blocks behind, but he was always there. He took few pains to conceal himself, probably guessing that Bob knew of his presence.

A cab turned a corner. Bob saw that it was empty, but he made no attempt to hail it. Not until the taxi was on the verge of passing by. Then Bob whistled sharply and began running. The big man did too. Bob climbed into the cab.

"Downtown, in a hurry," he exclaimed. "I'm late."

The cab turned in the block. The big man was running as fast as his long legs would propel him now. Apparently, he was determined to get into the cab with Bob. But he was too late. The cab straightened out and put on a burst of speed.

Bob looked through the rear window and gravely lifted his hat to the big man, whose running steps were beginning to falter.

Having little cash, Bob dismissed the cab two miles further on and took to the subways again. It was mid-afternoon when he reached Professor Ham's residence. It was one of those common brownstone fronts which the Professor owned outright.

Bob passed the house once, looking for police. He saw no one who resembled the appearance or actions of a detective, took a quick breath and hurried into the tiny foyer of the house. He rang the bell, but nobody came. He tried the door. It wasn't locked. He reflected that Professor Ham was probably the most careless and forgetful man in existence. The very model after which all

absent-minded professors were patterned.

He passed through the living room, dusty and upset. Professor Ham rarely had anyone in to clean up the place. The sharp odor of chemicals reached him and he kept on going. Glass clinked against glass. He pushed open the door to Ham's house laboratory.

Ham was bending over his test tubes and microscope. He looked over his shoulder at Bob.

"Oh," he said, "hello. I'm glad to see you. How are things? Sit down."

"How are things?" Bob grimaced. "They couldn't be worse and if you'd take your mind off those germs or whatever you're handling, maybe you'd remember I'm wanted for murder."

HAM'S lean face scowled. "Murder? You? Oh! Oh, yes. You're supposed to have killed Lundigan and roasted him in a furnace. No way to kill a man. Raises ruddy hell with a pathologist's work. Nothing left but bones."

"Ham," Bob said patiently, "you asked to see me. I'm here at considerable risk. What did you want? Can you help me?"

"You need a lawyer." Ham swung around. "Several lawyers. There's a detective named Gleason who swears he'll shoot you on sight. You must have made him quite angry. Did you kill Lundigan, Bob?"

"You know I didn't," Bob said. Then he went into a full description of what had happened. He had half an idea that Professor Ham heard about a third of it. Ham's eyes had a habit of fading into dull boredom, as if his brain was working on some pathology problem.

"Um—I see," Ham said in a tone that showed he didn't see at all. "I asked Pete to have you drop in because I wanted to tell you just how serious a predicament you're in. Also to inform you that I'm helping the Medical Examiner's office with identification procedures regarding the cadaver found in the furnace."

Bob said eagerly, "That's what I was hoping for, Ham. Praying for. It's why I risked everything to come here and see you. The body in that furnace wasn't Lundigan's. I'm sure of it. Lundigan never intended to kill himself. He had someone else in the cellar, maybe burning while Lundigan talked to me.

Lundigan planned it all so that he'd be considered dead. That was the only way he could avoid being sent to prison for years."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Really identify the corpse. Prove it isn't Lundigan. Then the police have nothing on me. I had no motive for killing anyone else. Furthermore, they'll realize I'm telling the truth. That Lundigan is alive and if they make a concentrated effort to find him, perhaps they will and I'll be absolved."

Ham shook his head. "I'm afraid it can't be done. The body is Lundigan's."

Bob steadied himself. "You—can't be mistaken about that?" he asked.

"Hardly. There was a nice roaring blaze in that furnace, but as luck would have it, enough of one finger was preserved so that we were able to get a fingerprint. We discovered that Lundigan had served time, his prints were on file and—they matched. Lundigan died in that furnace, Bob. Besides, partial reconstruction of the skeleton also matches Lundigan's build and height. There's no question about the identification."

"Then I'm sunk," Bob groaned. "I just couldn't make myself believe that a man like Lundigan would go through with such a crazy scheme. Ham, I'd better give myself up."

Ham said, "It's your neck. Or rather, the seat of your own pants, because that's where some of the juice from the electric chair goes through you. They're planning to give you a fast trial and a quick finish. This Gleason has his eyes on a vacant captaincy and knows he'll get it if he can land you. The newspapers are already licking their chops about the whole affair."

"May I stay here until it's dark, Prof?"

"You're my friend. You may stay as long as you like."

"Thanks, Prof. But I couldn't. The police are bound to come here again and check. There is something else I want you to do. Contact Louise. Tell her I need help. Lundigan had a girl friend. A blonde named Mary Loren. She lived at the Vista Apartments. I want Louise to go see her and find out what she knew about Lundigan."

Ham was bending over his microscope again. "I'll help all I can. I hated Lundigan with the same intensity that I hate cancer. He was an ugly spot that

had to be removed. I'm sorry I didn't do it. I'll reach Louise. What, in particular, did you want to know?"

"Lundigan was short thousands of dollars. He never had a chance to spend it all. Where is it?"

Ham replied, in an absent-minded way, "I'll take care of it in an hour or so. Do you want to meet Louise later?"

"Yes. In the park across from her apartment. I'll be at the statue of General Sherman around midnight. Tell her to be very careful. Gleason knows damned well she'll try to help."

Ham nodded and stayed with his work. Bob paced up and down, finally left the laboratory and relaxed in the living room. He was hungry and found some cold meat and stale bread in the kitchen. He made a sandwich of this, but was too unnerved to make coffee or tea. He washed it down with water.

Darkness seemed hours in coming. He fidgeted nervously, presenting this lost time. Knowing that every passing moment made the trail grow colder. He disturbed Ham again, enough to borrow fifty dollars. Then he decided to risk going abroad. He had formulated a couple of definite ideas.

CHAPTER V

Man of Mystery



THE moment he stepped onto the street, someone moved quietly into a doorway fifty feet away. Bob had a bare glimpse of the man. His size indicated that it must be either Lieutenant Gleason or—the stranger who had shadowed him all day. Bob thought that if it was

Gleason, the huge detective would be after him by now. So it was the shadow.

Bob walked straight toward the doorway and came to an abrupt stop. He turned. The man in the shadows grunted, lit a match and applied it to a cigarette dangling between his lips. He indicated neither surprise nor fear.

"Hello," Bob said slowly.

"How are you, Mr. Arnold?" The man grinned broadly. "Thought you gave me the slip, didn't you?"

"I still think I did. Why are you fol-

lowing me? Who are you?"

"You're my pal," the big man chuckled. "I'm sticking close so if anybody bothers you, I'll be handy. Like cops, for instance. I got me an idea the cops don't like you. Now I don't like cops either so that makes me more your pal than ever."

"Why are you following me?" Bob reiterated.

"My pal." The big man laughed. Then the laugh died away. "Don't get any funny ideas. Don't think you can commit arson with me like you did with that other guy. Have a cigarette. Take the whole pack. I know you must be out."

Bob accepted the pack. "Thanks. I can't make you out, but it's apparent you don't mean any harm. Maybe Lundigan was the same kind of friend to you that he was to me."

"Maybe."

"How about a drink? At some bar?"

The big man cleared his throat. "I wouldn't mind nibbling a couple, pal. But it ain't safe. Tell you what. You mosey along. I'll stick close. If any bull closes in, I'll take care of him. How's that?"

"I'd like it, if I only knew who you were. All right, let's go."

Bob selected the busiest streets on the theory that he would be less conspicuous in a crowd. He passed a score of policemen without being spotted and confidence began to return in some humble measure. Behind him, like his own shadow, hung the figure of the helpful stranger.

Bob reached the vicinity of the great building where he and Lundigan had maintained their offices. He had keys in his pocket. He wanted to get into the office, especially Lundigan's. He was searching for straws now. There was nothing left but straws.

The big man entered the deserted lobby and leaned idly against the closed up cigar stand. He nodded pleasantly at Bob and yawned. His huge mouth opened wide enough to resemble a hippopotamus. Two gold inlays in the middle of his lower jaw, glittered like the flashing of a wild canary against a bright sun.

Bob brought down the night elevator. It was automatic and only put into use after hours. He went to the thirty-second floor, opened the elevator door

cautiously and saw nothing but a deserted hallway. The cleaners, he knew, didn't reach this floor until almost dawn and apparently Gleason hadn't figured that Bob would be so foolish as to come here.

Bob let himself in and turned on the lights. He went at once to Lundigan's private office. It had already been ransacked. By Gleason, probably, but Bob searched it again. He studied, intently, every scrap of paper he came across, hoping to find something which had meant nothing to the police, but which would have a certain meaning to him.

He estimated that Lundigan hadn't paid a bill in ninety days. He was being dunned by everyone from the cigar stand downstairs to a florist across the street.

That fact gave Bob the impression, stronger than ever, that Lundigan had planned to provide a substitute corpse, vanish himself and live on the proceeds of his thievery.

All the firm's books seemed to have been impounded by the police.

BOB kept on examining papers. He found one which had considerable interest. It was a letter from a firm of attorneys, listing eleven small colleges. A client, it appeared from the accompanying letter, had selected these colleges with the intention of leaving them a substantial bequest upon his death. The client was now dead and Lundigan had been appointed one of three men to decide which of the institutions were to get the bequest. He was to select five out of the eleven.

To a person not familiar with all the facts, this looked like some routine business matter, but to Bob it was much more important. One of the colleges named was that in which Prof Ham held the chair of pathology. It was a small college, badly in need of funds.

And Lundigan had crossed it off the list and added the one word "Unworthy."

Bob laid that paper down slowly. The college was Prof Ham's life blood. To further it, he would have sold his soul. To prevent being discriminated against, as Lundigan had done, he'd have gone as far as murder. Bob had a suspect.

He put the papers back in the desk. There was nothing else. His visit here had been a flop except to point a finger at Professor Ham, backed up by a vague motive.

The telephone rang and almost jarred Bob's nerves out of kilter. He automatically reached for it and then hesitated. Who would be calling at this hour? Unless the call was made by someone who knew he was here. He took a chance.

"Pal," the voice was that of his mysterious shadower. "It's Gleason. On his way up. Alone."

Bob dropped the phone back, scampered across the room and turned off the lights. He rushed into the outer office and paused. He heard the elevator doors opening. He was too late.

He left the lights on, seized a paper cutter with a slim, rounded handle off a desk. Then he stepped behind the door. During the next minute or two would come one of the major climaxes of his lifetime.

Someone tried the office door cautiously. Then a key was fitted into the lock. The door opened a trifle, then more, and finally Gleason stepped through. His eyes were on Bob's lighted private office. Gleason started to cross the outer office.

"Good evening!" Bob said softly.

Gleason stopped dead.

"All right," he snapped. "I was so eager to get you I forgot myself. I'm going to turn around. If you're heeled, don't shoot. I'm not carrying a gun."

"Careless of you, Lieutenant. I am. Turn slowly."

Gleason turned. His eyes glanced down at Bob's pocketed fist. He wasn't sure if it held a gun or not but, as Bob hoped, he didn't dare take a chance.

"Why don't you shoot, seeing you got the drop?" the detective asked.

"I've been giving the idea some thought. How did you know I was here?"

"Now do you think I'd tell you that? And, by the way, your little story about Lundigan being alive is all shot to pieces. We know the guy in the furnace was Lundigan. We'd have found out, sooner or later. Dental charts would prove it, but we didn't have to check that way. There was enough left of one hand to get prints. What do you say to that, Arnold?"

"The same thing I said before. I didn't kill him. I'm going to find out who did. With or without your help."

"Without it. I already know who killed him."

Bob didn't even wince. He was becoming inured to accusations.

"Did you come by car, Lieutenant?"

"I don't walk unless I have to."

"Good. Now you're going to go downstairs with me. You're going to drive that car where I tell you. The alternative is—a bullet."

"What have you got to lose?" Gleason asked. "You killed Lundigan. Every last detail proves it. You went to his house to kill him. You dismissed the cab, sneaked around to the side of the house and got in that way. We found footprints and fingerprints. You're just not smart enough to get away with murder."

"But smart enough not to get caught. Start moving, Lieutenant."

"What is it?" Gleason asked. "A trip into the country? One way for me?"

"I'm not killer, unless I'm forced. If I let you go here, you'd have a cordon of police around the neighborhood in two minutes. It's my own neck I'm looking after. Go on."

THEY reached the car without being encountered. Gleason drove, fully conscious of what he believed to be a gun muzzle, sticking into his side. Under Bob's direction, he headed out of the city, across part of Long Island to a woody, deserted spot.

Bob kept glancing at his wrist watch. He had a date with Louise at midnight. There was still plenty of time if things worked out right. He ordered Gleason to stop the car.

"Get out," he said. "Start walking."

Gleason grunted and obeyed. "You certainly pick interesting ways to prove you're an innocent man. What happens now? A bullet in the back, I suppose?"

Bob didn't reply. He forced Gleason to a point a full quarter of a mile away from the car, stopped abruptly and let Gleason continue. The detective didn't know that his escort wasn't right behind him for several hundred feet. Then he turned.

"Good-night, Lieutenant," Bob called. "I'm borrowing your car. It's at least two miles to the nearest phone. By the time you reach it, I'll be back in New York. I'll leave your car at some curb."

"No bullet?" Gleason asked unbelievably.

Bob didn't answer. He walked swiftly toward the car, turning every few steps

to look back at Gleason. The big detective was shuffling slowly in the same direction. Bob reached the car.

There was a single shot from somewhere in the darkness to the left. Gleason twisted crazily and fell. Bob dived for the ground. He waited a moment and then arose cautiously, darted across the road and into the protection of the brush. He made his way toward Gleason, keeping out of the path of those headlights from the car.

He took a chance finally, reached Gleason and knelt by him. He turned the man over gently. Suddenly, Gleason's eyes snapped wide open. His left hand shot upwards and gripped Bob's throat. Gripped it hard. Bob braced himself, got one knee against the detective's chest and pulled away from the man while he used all his strength in pushing him to the ground.

Gleason's right hand was bloody, his left insufficient to resist the pressure Bob applied. Gleason let go and lay back with a sigh.

Bob gently rubbed his throat. "I wish that bullet had killed you."

"Well, you're close enough now so you can't miss."

"Stop being silly. I didn't fire that shot. Whoever did, wanted it to look as though I'd killed you. That would be certain proof I was afraid because I'd also killed Lundigan. I wasn't carrying a gun. How badly are you hurt?"

GLEASON arose and Bob backed away warily. The look in Gleason's eyes indicated he believed nothing Bob said.

"High, between the shoulder and the neck," the detective grumbled. "You're shooting eye is rotten. So it was a one way trip after all. I was almost beginning to believe you were on the level."

"I am," Bob half sobbed. "Don't you see? We were followed here. In the first place, someone tipped you that I was inside the office building. That's the truth, isn't it?"

"Suppose it is," Gleason admitted sourly.

"Someone—whoever called you—hoped you'd either kill me and have the whole thing done with. Or I'd kill you and the murder of Lundigan would take a back seat compared to the killing of a police lieutenant."

"I still say you killed Lundigan and

you tried to kill me."

"Thickhead!" Bob groaned. "You're the most obstinate fool I've ever met. Look—if I had fired that shot, it must have been with the intention of killing you. I didn't. I came back. All right! Why don't I kill you now? I haven't a gun. I never had a weapon."

Gleason opened his shirt and applied a handkerchief to the wound. It wasn't deep or serious.

"Suppose I grant that you didn't plug me," he grunted. "Why was I shot then?"

Bob began to step forward, but came to a quick halt. Gleason was still all cop. He was still crammed with doubts.

"The man who murdered Lundigan naturally wants me blamed for it. But he's afraid I may prove my innocence and thus his guilt. If you were found dead and I was known to have been in your company, I'd be listed as the killer. My story concerning you would sound as wild as the story I had to tell in connection with the murder of Lundigan."

"Maybe," was all Gleason would give as encouragement. "Well, do I get a ride home now?"

"Yes," Bob sighed deeply. "You're hurt. I couldn't leave you here. But remember this—you are hurt and I think I can outfight you now. I'll accept your promise not to try any tricks. I'm not going to be arrested."

"It's a truce," Gleason nodded. "After we hit town, anything goes."

They walked back toward the car, both alert in case the gunman would try again. Nothing happened. Bob got behind the wheel of the car, figuring that Gleason might have some difficulty in driving. The huge detective walked around to the other side. He bent down. Bob leaned far over and saw him pick up a gun.

Bob had the motor going. Before the Lieutenant could grab the door handle, he slid into second gear and stepped on the gas. When Gleason found that gun—certainly thrown there by the killer—he'd refuse to believe any part of Bob's story. He'd be armed and ready to make an arrest.

Two bullets came winging after the car, but they missed. Bob drove as fast as the sedan would travel. Gleason was bound to reach a phone soon. He crossed the bridge into Manhattan proper and

promptly parked the car. He walked a few blocks, hailed a taxi and, realizing he still had almost three hours before he was due to meet Louise, he had himself driven reasonably close to the boarding house where D'Angelo had found him a room.

He was shaken, unnerved. The thing was really beginning to get him now. The police would be hotly in pursuit. Gleason would see to that. And a murderer was endeavoring to close the books with another killing. Whether it was Bob who died, or someone whose death would be blamed on him, made little difference.

CHAPTER VI

Drink and Die



IT WAS nine when Bob let himself into the room. Instantly he sensed that he was not alone. Only the voice of the man who waited in the darkness checked his urge to run for it. The voice was Sonny Donahue's. "Bob, it's you?"

Bob closed the door behind him and turned on the single overhead electric light bulb.

"How did you get in here? Find me?" he gasped.

Sonny came forward with outstretched hand. "Bob, I would have contacted you long before this, but I couldn't find you and the police were watching. At least, I thought they were. Finally, I reached Pete and he told me where you were. I went to his place, got the key and came here alone. I want to help."

Bob sat down. "That's decent of you, Sonny. I could stand some help, but just how you'd be useful at the moment, I can't say."

Bob was eyeing a large basket of fruit, placed in the middle of the floor. Sonny Donahue reached into his pocket and took out a thick wad of currency.

"The only way I've ever been able to help anyone is financially. Other than money, I'm a dumb dodo. I drew cash out of four different banks to accumulate this. There's enough to take you almost anywhere."

Bob estimated there was at least fif-

teen thousand dollars in that sheaf. He shook his head stubbornly.

"I don't want to go anywhere. Running away won't solve my problem. I didn't kill Lundigan and I intend to prove I didn't."

Sonny pursed his lips. "I have refused to believe you did it. But how can you prove you are innocent?"

"By finding the man who is guilty."

Sonny nodded. "I see," he said slowly. "Have you any suspects at all?"

"I haven't had time even to consider anyone as a suspect, beyond Prof Ham, and I can hardly make myself believe he could have done such a thing. Lundigan blackballed Ham's college in some sort of a legacy which would have put the school on its feet."

"No one else?"

Bob said, "Maybe you, Sonny. Offering me such a large sum of money makes me wonder if you aren't overly anxious to have me run for it. And you didn't like Lundigan either."

"I detested him." Sonny put the money away. "He was a racetrack crook. He tried to bribe me and my jockeys. He was capable of any sort of crooked work. I didn't kill him though, yet I don't blame you for wondering if I might not have."

Bob waved a hand. "Forget it. I was just shooting off my mouth. Getting nervous and irritable, I guess. Did you bring that basket of fruit?"

"Me? No—it was here when I arrived. I didn't touch it."

"Maybe Professor Ham or Pete, or even Louise delivered it. Have some."

"No, thanks," Sonny said hastily. "I don't go for it. Isn't there some definite way I can help? Something I can do? I'm not much good, but."

"You're a swell guy," Bob bit into a juicy pear, "for making the offer, but there is nothing. I don't know which way to turn myself. And, Sonny, don't come here again. I'm deeper in wrong with the police now than ever. They'll break their backs trying to find me, which means you and my other friends will be very closely watched."

Sonny arose. "I guess it was a mistake, but a well-meant one. Call on me, Bob, for anything."

THEY shook hands warmly. Bob watched Sonny disappear down the stairs. Then he locked himself in, glanced out the window and saw no one.

He wondered, idly, what had happened to his big protector and shadow. Ever since he had warned of Gleason's coming, he seemed to have vanished.

Bob wrapped the core of the pear into a bit of paper and dropped it into the wastebasket. He was hungry. Somewhat to his amazement, he discovered that there was only one layer of fruit in that basket. The bottom contained only cellophane packages of salted nut meats. There was every variety. He tore open a bag of almonds and munched these.

There was a single bottle of gingerale sticking out of one corner of the basket and tied to its neck was a cheap, flat bottle opener. The nuts made him thirsty. He removed the bottle and took off the top. The gingerale didn't fizz at all.

He shook it slightly and still there was no fizz. Bob got a cracked glass, spilled some of the beverage into it and raised it to his lips. He hesitated a moment. The bottle had been well sealed. Why then, the lack of carbonation?

He picked up the bottle and held it toward the light bulb. There was sediment in the bottom. Bob carried the bottle to the sink and carefully decanted the liquid. He shook some of the precipitate out onto the palm of his hand. It was a white, fine powder.

Very gingerly, he tasted of it. There was no taste or odor. He frowned, decided he was getting overly suspicious, but he didn't want the flat drink anyhow. He tossed the bottle into the waste basket. It clinked against more glass of some kind.

Bob investigated the contents of the basket. He drew out a two ounce, corked bottle. There was more of that white powder in it. Bob wetted his lips. That was poison! He felt positive of it. Whoever had brought that basket to his room, had diabolically planned the whole thing. First of all, there were a lot of salted nut meats to make him thirsty. Then there was a single bottle of gingerale, conveniently supplied with an opener. Last of all, the bottle from which the poison had originally been transferred to the gingerale had been deposited in the waste basket. If he'd been found dead, a verdict of suicide was absolutely feasible. And who, other than a man like himself, strongly suspected of murder, had a better motive for suicide?

Bob shuddered. He sat down, staring

at the basket and wondering if he could trace it. He decided he couldn't. An entire police force might, but hardly one man whose movements had to be carefully guided for fear of being arrested.

He gave some thought to Sonny. The way he'd been willing to turn over a large sum of cash was either indicative of a very generous nature or an avid desire for Bob to try and get as far away as possible. Sonny was no chiseler, but neither was he free with his money.

There was Professor Ham—who had good reason to hate Lundigan and who had ready access to poisons of any kind. One of these two could be the man Bob was after. He hated to think so. They were his friends, like Pete D'Angelo. Pete involved a little thought too. He could easily have placed this basket in the room.

Bob even brought Louise into it. Lundigan had made a vague statement that Bob had not only bested him in business deals, but had taken his girl away from him. It was the first time that Bob ever knew Lundigan considered Louise as his girl. Yet, Bob reflected, he really knew little about the woman he was engaged to marry. Perhaps she had known Lundigan.

Bob grunted in exasperation and wondered what he'd think of next. They were getting him groggy. In his wildest imagination he couldn't see Louise having anything to do with murdering a man and stuffing him into a roaring furnace.

It was ten-thirty. Bob had one more visit to make before he met Louise in the park. Time was precious now. With every passing minute, Gleason would come closer and closer. If he ever cornered Pete in one of his half-drunken states, Pete might reveal everything. It was time to move as fast as he dared.

BOB used a cab again. It was dangerous. Those hackdrivers were always willing to co-operate with the police and might be in possession of a full description of him. But he had to use taxis. The time element again.

Five blocks from the home of Russ Lundigan, Bob dismissed the cab and walked the rest of the way. He made sure no detective lurked outside the house and proceeded straight to the same side door which had become a part of Lundigan's devilish scheme. Bob found

it locked. There were two small windows set in the door. He smashed one of them with a stone which had helped to line the walk beside the house. Reaching through the broken glass and slipping the latch was easy.

Bob entered the house and shuddered slightly. If a murderer needed iron nerves, Bob knew he'd never be one. If his name had been called out of the darkness in that house, he was certain he'd have quietly fainted.

He located the cellar door, went down the steps slowly, feeling his way in the darkness. Then he recalled that Lundigan had used a portion of the cellar as a darkroom for some amateur photography work and the windows were all blacked out. He turned on the light switch and felt a little easier.

The furnace, its very big door wide open, presented grisly memories. The police had cleaned it out very well indeed. They'd sifted the ashes into a neat pile on the cement floor.

Bob disdained examining the ashes. Instead, he walked over to a heavy wooden chair, carelessly pushed into a corner. He grasped it and the arms almost fell off. They'd been practically wrenched from the rest of the chair. And recently, because the wood was fresh and new where it had been sheltered in the round holes in the seat.

He went down on his hands and knees. The cement floor was scratched and nicked, as if the legs of the chair had been violently rubbed against it. He picked up a few strands of what seemed to be bits of rope.

There was a dirty, tightly wadded strip of cloth in the corner behind the chair. He examined it. That bit of cloth could have been used as a gag.

Bob stood there, in the silence that hung over this house and wondered what it all meant. Frayed bits of hemp a gag, a chair almost pulled apart and scratches on the floor. Someone had been tied and gagged in that chair. Someone strong enough to all but rip the stout chair apart despite the ropes that bound him.

Lundigan's prisoner! Lundigan's ringer for his own corpse!

Bob gasped. That was the truth because everything pointed to it. The police had missed this because they were only looking for the remnants of a body in the furnace. Bob slowly walked up the stairs, clutching his minute bits of

evidence. He extinguished the light before opening the door.

He made his way to Lundigan's study, where he'd last seen him and sat down behind the dead man's desk. He could think here, in the quiet and the semi-darkness. Only a little light filtered through the curtained window from a street lamp outside.

Bob put himself in Lundigan's place, as far as possible. He tried to think as Lundigan would have thought when he planned to kill a man, have the victim identified as himself and fasten the blame for the crime on another.

Lundigan would have had to be very, very certain. Extremely positive that the remnants of the man in the furnace would be identified as his body.

WHILE there was no other feasible way to pawn off a substitute corpse, something still had to be present which would convince investigators that it really was Lundigan who had been stuffed into the furnace.

How, Bob asked himself, would Lundigan have tried to make this so certain? The only method of identification in cases of this kind were those portions of the human body which would not be consumed in the blaze. Bones, jewelry perhaps—and teeth.

Bob sat bolt upright. Teeth! Lundigan would have thought of that. He'd have made certain that the teeth discovered in the charred embers would be proven as his teeth. But how, when they obviously were not? Bob frantically opened desk drawers. He even risked turning on the desk lamp.

He found a personal checkbook and flipped through the stubs. He found one made out to a Dr. Matthew Clark, finally. It was for seven dollars, but otherwise unitemized. Dr. Clark could be a physician or a dentist. Bob fetched the phone book over to the desk and checked through it. There was a Dr. Clark, a dentist. Just one, with the first name of Matthew, and no physicians with such a first and last name.

Bob lifted the phone. It was still working. He dialed the number. A woman answered.

"Is the doctor at home?" Bob asked.

"Is this a patient?"

"Yes." Bob held his breath.

"Oh," she said, "I'm sorry. Dr. Clark died four months ago."

Bob exhaled slowly. There was a click in his ear. He hung up too, feeling lower than ever. That one solitary hunch had presented such great possibilities.

Then he dialed the same number and the same voice answered. Bob said, "I'm sorry to disturb you again, but will you tell me who took over Dr. Clark's practice?"

"Dr. Alonzo Barr. He's in the Hartman Building. I'm sure you will find him quite satisfactory."

"Thank you." Bob's blood flowed freely once more. He made a notation of the name and address, extinguished the desk light and left the house. It was time to keep his rendezvous with Louise. Now, he felt, he had something to go on. Something definite and tangible. Not like chasing shadows and suspicions.

A cab deposited him a full mile from the park. He sought the darker streets now, depending upon the gloom for protection. He reached the park and made his way toward the statue to which Louise would come. It was five minutes of twelve.

He studied the base of the statue and the surrounding area intently before coming into the open. No one was around. He could hear a few people walking through the park, their steps sounding hollowly, their voices muted.

Then he heard the faint click-click of high heels moving along rapidly. That would be Louise. Bob hurried toward the wide path leading to the statue. He saw her, opened his mouth to call her name and closed it again quickly. Someone was following her. A bulky shadow, reminiscent of Lieutenant Gleason. At that moment Bob would have given almost anything for a gun.

Louise seemed completely unaware that she was shadowed. Bob berated himself for bringing her into this at all. When Gleason made his arrest now, he'd include her. Bob shuddered at the idea.

SOMEONE else was moving along the path, in the direction of Louise and her shadow. It was a man, shrouded by the deep gloom. Suddenly Louise broke into a run. She hurried straight up to this man. Bob could hear her voice.

"Bob! Oh, Bob, darling."

She had both arms around the man's neck. Gleason was coming up fast and he had a gun in his hand. The man whom Louise hugged was showing signs

of remonstrance. He succeeded in showing her away. He saw Gleason approaching. Noted the gun. Automatically, the man defended himself. Gleason let out a cry of delight and used the butt of his weapon. The man dropped. Louise was running madly away, toward the statue. She skirted it and kept going. Bob went after her. He heard Gleason's police whistle cut the silence.

He caught up with Louise. She was in his arms instantly.

"Bob, I'm so frightened. I discovered someone was following me. I thought it was a policeman so I pretended that poor fellow was you. It was my only chance. We haven't long. If that detective knows you, he'll realize I tricked him when he turns a flash on his prisoner."

"What did you find out from Mary Loren? Talk fast, darling. That detective is Gleason and he's sworn to get me."

"Lundigan wasn't spending any money or paying any bills. He'd bought her some things six months before and the dealers were trying to get them back for non-payment. Mary lied herself blue in the face, but I noticed she hadn't taken the trouble to unpack two bags in the hallway of her apartment, or remove dusters from the furniture. She was going away. I think Lundigan was going with her because her grief was genuine enough."

"Good. I thought you'd find something like that. It's proof Lundigan never intended to kill himself. He was murdered. Thanks, darling. You've done more than anyone else for me."

"Darling, oh darling, I've been so worried. What's it all leading to, Bob? Where are we going?"

"I don't know yet. There is someone, close to me, who is behind all this. I'm not sure just who, but I intend to find out. That man tried to poison me. He sent me a basket of fruit and nuts and a spiked bottle of gingerale. Tell me, what was Pete's reaction to the scene in the nightclub when Lundigan came in and started the fight?"

"He was so angry he couldn't speak. But so were all of us, I guess."

"You're right, of course. Listen carefully. This girl of Lundigan's—do you think she's going to run for it, even though he's dead?"

"Yes, Bob. I'm sure. When I left, she closed and locked the door so quickly

I thought she was up to something. I listened. She telephoned the railroad station and asked when the next train left for Chicago."

Bob glanced at his watch. "Those trains I know, fortunately. The next one won't leave for an hour and a half. Louise, go back to where she lives and watch. I'll get there as quickly as I can. Things to do first. I—listen, Gleason has discovered his mistake. Run for it, darling."

"Kiss me first."

He kissed her, not hurriedly, but well and thoroughly. Then he watched her race away into the night. Bob took an opposite direction and went as fast as he could without making too much noise. He crossed the wide acreage of park and came out on an avenue. Police cars were turning into the park drives and stopping to block all exits. Bob kept going. Another moment or two and he'd have been trapped. He hoped, fervently, that Louise had managed to get clear.

CHAPTER VII

Question of Truth



IN THE Hartman Building, Bob paced up and down before Dr. Alonzo Barr's offices. He kept looking at his watch. There wasn't too much time left before Lundigan's girl friend would start for the station. He had to head her off, but once that was done, he'd

need Lieutenant Gleason. Unless he could furnish Gleason with sufficient proof that Lundigan had plotted all this, the only help Bob would get from him was a shove into a murderer's cell.

Dr. Barr appeared ten minutes later. A small, mincing man with thick glasses.

"Are you an officer?" he queried. "Making me come down here at this hour."

"I told you it was vitally important," Bob said. "I'm Lieutenant Gleason. Homicide. That's how important it is. Open up and let me look in your files."

The doctor was sufficiently impressed so that he didn't ask for credentials. He unlocked his office and led the way to some steel filing cabinets. Bob elbowed

him aside, opened the drawer under "L" and ran through the cards until he found Lundigan's.

Dr. Barr, peering over Bob's shoulder, said, "That's one of Dr. Clark's patients. I took over his practice and some of his patients have come to me, but not this Mr. Lundigan."

"He won't need the services of a dentist any longer." Bob was studying the card. "He departed from the realm of toothaches. Suppose, Doctor, that we called you in to help identify a corpse burned beyond recognition. We told you it might be Lundigan. If the teeth match these on the chart which Dr. Clark prepared, would you then identify the body as Lundigan's?"

"Of course. It would be Lundigan too. Teeth charts are very helpful in identification of the dead."

Bob didn't answer him. On the chart each tooth was carefully described. Two incisors were recorded as having been treated with gold inlays. Bob gasped. The big man who'd shadowed him had displayed inlays just like the ones in the chart when he'd yawned so widely in the lobby of Bob's office building.

"I'll keep these," Bob told Dr. Barr. "Thanks very much for your trouble."

He darted out of the office to the elevators and rode down in what he thought was the slowest lift he'd ever been on. He ran into the street and waved his arms for a taxi, got one and had himself driven to the home of Lundigan's girl friend.

For a moment he was certain that Louise wasn't there, but as he crossed the sidewalk, she called him. He hurried over to a doorway nearby, in which she had taken shelter.

"I'm sure she hasn't left yet," Louise said. "But you cut it rather fine. She

should start any minute now."

Bob took her arm and hurried her into the building. They rode the elevator to her floor. Bob rapped smartly on the door.

"Police," he said. "Open up."

In an aside to Louise, he grinned, "I've been pretending to be a cop so much I'll probably sprout a badge."

THE door opened and a somewhat violent blonde stared at them. She backed up a bit and then suddenly changed her mind. She tried to push the door shut in Bob's face. She was a trifle too late. He had his elbow against it and shoved the door wide.

The blonde whirled, darted into the small living room and reached for a book-end. Louise brushed past Bob.

"Excuse me," she said grimly. "This is my department and I don't have to be a gentleman."

Some four minutes later, Louise slammed the door of a clothes closet and turned the key. Then she sat on the arm of a chair and proceeded to repair her makeup, oblivious to the racket the blonde made inside the closet. Bob, busy with the suitcases near the door, looked up with a grin.

"I don't know," he said doubtfully, "if I should marry you. That right wallop you pack is pretty terrific."

"You should see my left." She managed a smile. "Darn her. I spent half an hour getting my hair right and she pulled it all down. Is there anything of interest in the bags?"

"What they don't contain is the most interesting." Bob arose, walked over and sat in the chair below her. "Lundigan was ready to run for it. He had the money he filched from me. He must have

[Turn page]

Tired Kidneys Often Bring Sleepless Nights

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. When they get tired and don't work right in the daytime, many people have to get up nights. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder. Don't neglect this condition and lose valuable, restful sleep.

When disorder of kidney function permits

poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may also cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 50 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills,

(Adv.)

had, but he didn't trust his girl friend with it. Wait. There's her purse."

Bob got it, dumped the contents on a table and sorted out the money. There wasn't much. He looked at the two train tickets for Chicago with some interest.

"Two tickets," he mused. "So she wasn't going alone."

"I thought Lundigan was going to accompany her," Louise said.

"These two tickets are stamped today and she knew, since yesterday, that Lundigan was dead. So there is someone else. Maybe the killer. Think she'd talk?"

Louise snorted. "She'd talk all right, but her language isn't the kind spoken in the best circles. She's tougher than I thought, Bob. She recognized you. Lundigan must have pointed you out and she knows darn well you are wanted far more than she."

Bob sighed and scooped the articles back into the purse. He dropped it on the table and turned away.

"I don't know," he said. "I hoped she'd prove valuable to us, but she hasn't. How am I going to convince Gleason there is a murderer, besides me, and prove it?"

"I thought you still had to find him, Bob."

"Find him?" he smiled slightly. "No, I've guessed who he is, but without much to go on. I don't know the motive, unless it was a scheme to steal the money Lundigan had stolen from me. Somehow I think there was more to it than that."

"Who—" Louise began, and stopped. The phone was ringing. Bob looked at his watch.

"Her train has gone," he said. "I wonder if she was supposed to meet someone. Louise, follow through if I give you a lead. Stand behind the phone and talk loud enough so the caller can hear you, but not distinguish your voice from the girl friend's."

Bob lifted the receiver and growled a greeting.

A man's voice was on the other end. It seemed vaguely familiar.

The voice said, "I guess I got the wrong number."

Bob turned his head slightly to one side, away from the transmitter.

"Hey, Mary," he called out. "Some guy on the wire. Says he got the wrong number. How about it?"

Bob heard the man gasp and then say, "Hey, is Mary there? Let me talk to

her." There were muttered curses pounding against Bob's eardrums.

Again Bob talked in an aside. "He knows you're here."

"Hang up quick," Louise called and her voice could be heard over the wire. "That must be—him."

"Yeah," Bob grunted and as he slowly put the phone down, he added, "We'd better get out of here quick before he comes up. Find your things and let's blow."

He dropped the phone onto its cradle, rose and walked around the room. He picked up two straight-backed chairs and tested their weight. One of them he seemed to find satisfactory. He walked over beside the door and stood there waiting, tense with expectancy, the chair at his feet.

"Do you think he's coming here?" Louise asked.

"I know it, darling. Right now he's stung by the pangs of green-eyed jealousy and the fact that he is being given the double-cross. He'll get here as fast as he can. I think I know who it will be and there happens to be only one way of persuading him to keep quiet."

He hefted the chair suggestively.

"I'm not afraid of him, but he's powerful enough to get away from me even in a fair battle. Right now, I'm in no position to take any chances. He deserves a headache anyway. He gave me enough of them."

BOB opened the door just a bit. Ten minutes went by and then the door burst open. The big man who had trailed Bob for hours, catapulted into the room. He saw Louise, still perched on the arm of the chair and skidded to a halt. Bob raised the chair and brought it down. One blow was enough. Louise leaped to her feet as Bob struck.

He bound the man quickly with some kind of synthetic cord taken from the drapes. He searched him, found nothing and groaned.

"I was sure he'd be carrying the loot. It has to be some place."

"What are you going to do?" Louise asked.

Bob went to the telephone and dialed a number. "Let me speak to Lieutenant Gleason, please." He waited a moment, humming softly. Then he said, "Gleason? This is Bob Arnold. I'm at the Vista Apartments. Come and get me."

CHAPTER VIII

Killer!

ALL Bob's friends were gathered in Pete D'Angelo's studio, all despondent, no one talking very much. Prof. Ham was studying a small book on pathology, but really derived no good out of it. His mind wandered too much. Sonny Donahue smoked cigarettes

chain fashion, cocked one leg over the other and kept time with his dangling foot to the tuneless music he hummed between his teeth.

Pete D'Angelo sat at a table covered with red and white checked oilcloth. There was one empty bottle of red wine in front of him and another, half empty.

Louise held a glass of the sour wine in her hand, untouched. She looked as if she was ready to burst into tears at any moment.

Pete banged the table with his glass, kicking the wine overside and flooding the oilcloth with it.

"We sit here like ninnies. Why? Because we are afraid to go to Bob's aid. He needs us. Why do we sit and moan? There are things to be done. If Bob did not kill Lundigan, it is up to us to find out who did, now that Bob can't act for himself any longer?"

Sonny closed his eyes wearily. "What can we do, Pete? Louise told us everything that Bob knew. She was with him when Gleason caught up with them. I say our best bet is to hire the smartest lawyer money can buy. I'll furnish the capital, but we'll all have to help. Whatever the lawyer tells us to do—we do."

Heavy footsteps announced someone coming along the hallway. There was a sharp knock on the door. Pete jumped up and opened it. Bob walked in, with Gleason behind him. Handcuffs linked both men together.

Gleason kicked the door shut behind him. "Well," he said, "it looks like the gathering of the clan. I brought Arnold here because I'm still not completely satisfied with things. In the first place he stuck to his story no matter how often we tried to cross him up—and we've some experts at Headquarters. The way

he stuck indicated it might be the truth.

"We did a little further work and discovered that Lundigan had made plans to run for it. With a blonde! So we looked her up and also nabbed another boy friend whom Arnold claims has been tailing him around town. We've both of them on ice. They'll talk, sooner or later, but right now they're a couple of mutes."

"And how do you suppose we can make them talk?" Prof Ham asked beligerently.

"I don't," Gleason said mildly. "One of the reasons I came is because Bob claims that fight at the night club was staged. That Lundigan wasn't drunk and picked a fight to motivate his scheme for having Bob presumably kill him. I say presumably with a great big grain of salt. We still think Bob did that. Now—was Lundigan drunk?"

"No," Sonny said quickly. "He was putting on an act. I'll swear to it."

Prof Ham arose. "I am a pathologist, something of a psychologist and I have a degree in medicine. I will state that Lundigan was not drunk. His reactions were not those of an intoxicated person. If there had been enough of him left, I would have proven this. Alcohol is absorbed and lodges for some time in the tissues. It isn't difficult to ascertain how drunk a man was prior to his death."

"Thanks, doctor," Gleason broke in. "Your word should go a long way. You—in the painter's smock. Did you see Lundigan that night?"

PETE D'ANGELO hastily turned the bottle of wine upside down. Only a little ran into the glass. He quaffed this with a toss of his wrist.

"I was on the dance floor with Louise. Yet even from there I could tell he was not drunk. No—definitely not drunk. And all this talk of drinking has made me very thirsty. I am out of wine. So I will go to the floor below and borrow some from a friend who owes me several bottles. You, gentlemen, and you, Louise, will kindly pardon me."

Pete made his way to the door. Gleason stepped aside.

"Pete," Bob said, "if your friend has any Scotch, borrow some of that too. I could use a drink."

"Scotch!" Pete jeered. "Once I heard of a man who was poisoned by a teaspoonful. There is only one drink.

Wine! Red wine! That I will get. Nothing else."

He slammed the door and ran down the hallway. But Pete didn't stop at the next floor. He kept on going, traveling faster and faster. He raced out of the building to the street and waved his arms wildly for a cab.

One rolled up and he plunged into it, slumping in the seat.

"Grand Central Station," he panted. "Hurry. My train leaves in ten minutes."

The driver glanced back into the tonneau. "Buddy, this crate ain't got wings. You'll miss that train and like it. Or get out here. I don't like to make no guarantees."

"Never mind the smart talk," Pete raged. "Get going anyway. There are other trains."

The cab pulled into the Vanderbilt Avenue side of the station. Pete threw a bill at the driver, pushed through the doors and ran down the steps into the station proper. It was crowded. He threaded his way through the throngs and reached a baggage checkroom. He fumbled in his pocket, drew out a ticket stub and jostled closer until he could present it.

IN A moment or two a brown briefcase was placed in his hand. He clutched it and seemed to wilt a bit as if from relief. He turned around. Someone slipped an arm through his and fingers tightened around his wrist. Lieutenant Gleason held him.

Bob blocked any hope of escape and in wild glances around, Pete saw other quiet, bulky men waiting for him to make a break.

"I guess," he gulped, "you win at last. It makes no difference. I am very tired. Very tired."

He sagged in Gleason's grasp. Then he suddenly flung the briefcase at Bob, reached under his coat with his free hand and drew a knife. Gleason moved with a speed that astounded Bob. The detective shoved a foot behind Pete, twisted his arm slightly and Pete's feet left the floor.

He went up and over. The knife flew from his hand. Gleason bent over him. Handcuffs clicked.

"Get up," Gleason said tartly. "Come on. Oh, my gosh. He passed out. All these guys are alike. Get 'em in a tight and they fold."

CHAPTER IX

Motive for Murder



WHEN Bob walked into Pete's studio again, Louise rushed into his arms. Sonny Donahue stared and Professor Ham's book slowly slid out of his fingers and hit the floor.

Bob grinned at them. "I'm sorry I had to deceive you like that. Pete was our man, but

it was necessary to trick him into revealing proof enough."

"Pete!" Ham and Sonny chorused.

Bob sat down. "Yes, Pete. Our wild-eyed, wine-bibing, loud-mouthed innocent. A man you'd never imagine being capable of murder and attempted murder. Perhaps he wasn't actually capable, but he tried it. The whole thing was thrust upon him accidentally.

"He, Lundigan's girl friend and a big lug named Jim Wilson are now engaged in the cute process of trying to pass the blame off on one another. Their stories were highly interesting. They cleared me and, luckier still, I got back two-thirds of the money Lundigan filched from me."

Prof Ham said, "Bob, you suspected Sonny and me, didn't you?"

"Why not?" Bob argued. "Lundigan blackballed your college, causing your undying hatred. He crossed up Sonny on the race track, and nothing makes Sonny angrier than that. Both of you had motives. Both of you displayed actions which were suspicious. Pete was the only one who never betrayed a thing."

Sonny Donahue grinned. "All is forgiven, Bob. Just tell us how you nailed Pete and why you and that gigantic detective went out of here as if you were shot from a gun."

"The story," Bob said, "is this. Lundigan had stolen my money, but he was an avaricious sort. He wanted more. He planned to run away with his blond girl friend. However, she had an eye to making fast money, too, and she also had a friend. This Jim Wilson, an ex-convict and pug. Wilson, it seemed, had gained possession of some bogus pieces of sculpture. They were supposed to be

genuine articles stolen from Italy and smuggled here by one of our soldiers of occupation. Wilson had the stuff, but no market.

"Lundigan was approached. He went to Pete and convinced him that the stuff was genuine. Pete knew markets and found a man named Elmer Ward who was willing to pay a great deal of money for it. Pete examined the stuff in good faith, convinced himself it was real and recommended it. Ward paid him for it.

build and age. He'd make a good double if there was nothing left but a few bones—and teeth. The teeth were important.

"Lundigan had selected Wilson days before, prepared a dental chart of his teeth, and substituted this chart for his own. Identification would be made through the chart, in the hands of a dentist who never laid eyes on Lundigan and had taken over the practice of Lundigan's dentist who died just a few weeks ago."

What Would You Do If You Committed a Murder?



THAT was the sixty-four dollar question which Manville Moon, the private investigator, popped at Hannegan of Homicide.

"I wouldn't commit one," said Hannegan dryly.

"You'd head for the next state," Moon answered himself. "Well, you're holding Joan Garson for killing Lawrence Randall. You consider her guilty. And yet—when she left Randall's office she went straight to a hairdresser. I checked that myself. No woman would stick a knife in a man and then calmly go have her hair set!"

"Murderers don't act rationally," said Hannegan. "I know one who wiped out his family with an axe, and then went to the movies!"

It looked as though Joan Randall were headed straight for the gas chamber—and it was up to Manville Moon to save her! And incidentally, to solve one of the toughest mysteries he'd ever encountered. A mystery that gathers up bewildering complications as it moves along to an astonishing climax! Follow Manville Moon as he braves danger and defies suspicion on the brilliant and baffling case of—

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Pete turned the money over to Lundigan.

"Then, Elmer Ward did the one thing they were afraid of. He called in some experts who pronounced the stuff phony. Ward came back to Pete for his money. Pete's temper boiled over. He went to see Lundigan and arrived before Lundigan got home. In the cellar he found Jim Wilson tied to a heavy chair and gagged.

"Wilson told his story. Pete went off the handle. He heard Lundigan tell me of his plans to have me convicted of his murder. Only Lundigan planned to burn Jim Wilson in the furnace, not himself. Wilson was about the same height and

SONNY was watching Louise. "Say," he broke in, "Louise doesn't seem very surprised at all this. Did you tell her?"

Bob nodded. "All I knew at the time. The smoke that Lundigan's neighbors saw at eleven-thirty coming from his chimney was made by Pete and Wilson warming up the furnace. Pete killed Lundigan when he came into the cellar. He and Wilson then burned the body and got out of there. First taking with them the money Lundigan had obtained from the sale of the phony statues and the money he'd stolen from me. Pete was smart enough to repay the cash taken

from Elmer Ward.

"Naturally Pete didn't want to be caught. The law had closed around me, and he did his best to kill me in such a manner that it would seem I'd resisted arrest or committed suicide. Jim Wilson watched me and thereby gave Pete away."

"How?" Prof Ham asked. "This is very interesting."

"You should experience how interesting it was to me," Bob chuckled. "Jim Wilson picked up my trail at your house, Professor. Only Pete knew I was going there. Wilson also picked me up at that cheap rooming house and at the time, Pete alone knew I was there. It was Wilson who shot Gleason on Long Island trying to make it appear that I had done the shooting. As soon as those facts struck me, I began to suspect him. Yet that wasn't evidence enough."

"If I could find Lundigan's money, then I'd have something to lay a case on. His girl friend didn't have it, Wilson didn't have it so—Pete did. With Gleason's help, we convinced Pete that the blonde and Wilson were ready to talk. Pete had checked the money in a briefcase, decided it was time to get out and

tried to do just that. He was trailed every foot of the way. I suppose the three of them had made arrangements to meet somewhere and share the loot. It's true that Jim Wilson helped double-cross Pete, but after the pair of them murdered Lundigan, they became friends by sheer necessity."

Louise put her hand gently on Bob's. "I never doubted you, darling."

"I did," Prof Ham said tersely. "Which proves I'm some kind of a super-fool."

"Then move over." Sonny grinned. "When I offered you that money, Bob, I was convinced you'd killed him. Not that I blamed you."

Bob laughed. "Don't feel badly about it, boys. There was a time when I even doubted myself. Now suppose we find some of Pete's red wine and drink—to us."

Sonny grimaced. "I don't want to see red wine again. There's a cafe around the corner. The treat's on me and say, when are you going to get married?"

Bob gaped at Louise. "Imagine that! I'd forgotten all about it."

"We," Louise said severely, "have something to talk about." She kissed him lightly.

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The big man had backed into the trunk and skewered himself on the saber

THE LOOT

By EDWARD RONNS

It takes the chill breath of death to bring Henry Phelps to life!

ONE was big, the other little. The big one was quietly dressed, with a square face and a competent mouth and heavy shoulders. The little one was flashy, with a crooked little face and a crooked little mouth and a scrawny figure. They were alike in that they regarded him with equally unfriendly eyes.

Henry Phelps wiped dust off his hands

onto his green smock. He put the inventory pad down on a marble-topped table with gilt claw legs and tucked the pencil into his vest pocket.

"I really don't see what business it is of yours," Henry said. "How did you get in here?"

"He asks how we got in, Joey," the little man remarked.

"Shut up," said Joey. He kept looking at Henry Phelps. "Who are you?"

"Henry Phelps. From Fairbanks, Ryan and Smith."

"What are you doing here?"

"This house was sold to Fairbanks, Ryan and—"

"Sold, hey?" said the little man. "He says it's been sold, Joey."

"Shut up," said Joey again. His eyes were thoughtful. "You work for that big antique place in New York, don't you, Mr. Phelps?"

"Yes, but I—"

"They bought this place?"

"Lock, stock and barrel," Henry said. "I was sent up here to inventory the furniture."

"Inventory?" The big man was shocked. "I do wish you wouldn't. I wish you would stop it, at once."

Henry said, "I will not. By what authority do you presume—"

"I once lived here," the big man said. His voice was heavy with sentiment. "Born here, as a matter of fact. Linc Courtland was my cousin. He owned this house, you know. He died last winter."

"So I understand," Henry said. "I can appreciate your sensitivity to having strangers poke about here. But I must do my job. I'm sorry."

The little man said, "He says he's sorry. He don't know the half of it."

"I beg your pardon?" Henry asked.

"Skip it," said Joey. "Let's go, Jeep."

HENRY walked after them to the front door. He made sure it was locked after they were gone, and stood frowning at the front lawn until they were out of sight. The house was quiet. Beyond the stone lions at the foot of the graystone steps the lawn was covered with red-gold leaves, dappled with afternoon October sunshine that filtered through the chestnut trees. The street beyond the iron picket fence was peaceful and empty. He heard a car start, the motor throbbing quietly, and he turned back into the house with a sigh.

He rather liked the house. Lincoln Courtland, its last owner, had been a gentleman of the old school, preserving Victorian traditions in himself and his home until his death. It was a huge, rambling granite-walled mansion of the General Grant era, with a broad veranda, jigsaw scroll work, a roof that was a forest of

turrets, gables, cupolas and little galleries tacked on here, there and everywhere in the gingerbread fashion that was rampant in those days.

Inside, the furnishings purchased by Fairbanks, Ryan and Smith were a treasure store of antiques. Nothing had been touched since the old gentleman's death. Sunlight came through the barred parlor windows—they were all barred on the first floor—and touched the fine mahogany shutters with a deep gold and splashed red on the plush button drapes. A gilt clock glittered in its bell jar, and the darkly massive furniture shone where Henry had removed its protective sheet covers. The Courtland ancestors frowned heavily down at him from their oval frames.

He pushed aside his irritation at the interruption the two men had caused and went back to his inventory, thinking no more about them. He was meticulous in his work, but he didn't dally. Greendale was forty miles from New York, and he wanted to be back in the city by nightfall. He had worked like a beaver all morning, burrowing into the furnishings and the china collection in its big, bay-windowed closets. The first floor—parlor, study and dining room—was almost done.

There were no bars on the second-floor windows. The bedrooms were relatively uncluttered, and Henry worked on with vigor, thinking that he might be able to see Martha tonight after all. He had been engaged to Martha for almost ten of his thirty-seven years, and the failure to get married was no fault of his. Martha had her own peculiar ideas, and almost all of them involved a delay in setting the wedding date.

There was no doubt that Martha was a dominating woman, and Henry Phelps was admirably adapted for being dominated. He was small and prim, with a pink face and a quiet voice, and no one would ever notice him in a crowd. Usually, no one ever noticed him even when he was alone. More than once he suspected that this was the cause of Martha's delaying tactics, but there didn't seem to be anything he could do about it. He was no Clark Gable, as he told her, and it was silly to expect him to try to be one.

It was three o'clock when he found the chest. It was up in the attic, blocking the way toward a diamond-shaped win-

dow with panes of colored glass. The attic itself was a source of despair for Henry. There was enough material piled up here to keep him busy for at least two more days, and now he was resigned to the fact that he would have to return here bright and early the next morning. His pink face was smudged and his tidy smock was rumpled and liberally streaked with attic dust. He noticed the chest because he had paused to sit on it. It was the only item up here that wasn't thickly coated with dust.

He stood up and frowned at it. The clasps were heavy, but it wasn't a very large chest. He hauled it out from the wall of the attic room into the diamond of sunlight that came through the window. He gave it a reasonably hard tug, expecting its contents to have appreciable weight. He was surprised when the chest fairly flew after him, throwing him off balance. It seemed to be empty.

He tried the lock, but it didn't give, and his frown deepened. There didn't seem to be much sense in keeping an empty chest locked. Moreover, none of his keys fitted properly. There had been a key attached to the box, as he could see by the piece of string dangling from the gilt snap. But the string was torn and there was no sign of any keys on the dusty floor. Henry gave it up for the time being and went on with his lonely chores.

HE WASN'T lonely for very long. The second interruption of the day came in the form of a blatant auto horn sounding outside the house. He went on with his work, with pencil and pad. The horn blared again. He looked up, annoyed at the sound that shattered the peace and quiet. The auto horn seemed extraordinarily loud, almost as if it came from the graveled driveway that looped into the lawn from the street. He looked through a front window and saw that the car was there indeed, parked in front of the twin gray lions guarding the steps. A girl was sitting in it, looking impatiently toward the front door. Henry put aside his inventory sheets and went down the steps toward her.

She was young and she was pretty—almost too pretty for his taste. She had red hair and a red mouth and red fingernails, and she had a smartly lacquered look that made him uneasy. Her eyes were a startling shade of gray. She

smiled at him as if she were afraid the veneer would crack.

"I wonder if you would look at my car," she said.

He looked at it. It was a very expensive convertible, not red but a kind of sparkling bronze, with all the trimmings.

"What about it?" he asked mildly.

"It isn't working right. I wonder if you could help me with it," said the young lady. She added, as if it might mean something to him: "My name is Sally Fiske."

"My dear Miss Fiske," Henry said. "This is not a garage or a service station."

"I know, but—" This time her smile was real, and her eyes looked really interested. "I wonder if I could use your telephone."

"There isn't any," Henry said. "This house has been closed up for months. There isn't any electricity in it at all."

"Oh. Are you a stranger here in Greendale?"

"Yes, I—"

"I am, too," said Sally Fiske. She leaned back and pouted at the sand-colored steering wheel. The motor was running quietly under the long, sleek hood, and Henry couldn't hear anything wrong with it. Sally Fiske said, "Are you stuck in this burg, too?"

"Stuck?"

"Overnight. I have to stay here overnight." She looked at him and smiled again. She was quite attractive when she smiled. Not quite as lacquered. "You're cute," she said.

He thought of Martha. Martha had never called him cute.

"You're something yourself," he said.

"Well, if you can't help me with my car—" She looked thoughtful. "We're both a couple of strangers here, aren't we?"

"I suppose so," Henry said. He became aware of his smock, and thought that it must look a little ludicrous.

Sally Fiske said, "I hear there's a swell little roadhouse on Route 82, just outside of town. Barney's, I think it's called. They serve swell dinners. I'll be at the bar at six, Mr.—"

"Phelps," Henry said. "I wish I could make it, but I don't think—" He felt himself redden.

"Why not?" she laughed. "Don't you like me?"

"I do, indeed," he said hastily. "But

I have work to do here."

Her smile caressed him with inner amusement.

"I'll still be at Barney's at six tonight."

She flicked the car into gear and drove with admirable recklessness around the gravel driveway and back to the street between the stone gateposts. The last he saw of her was a gloved hand waving a casual good-by. There didn't seem to be anything in the least wrong with Miss Sally Fiske's car.

SOMEHOW, the even pace of his work was disturbed. He picked up his inventory sheets and started upstairs, then frowned and put the pad down and stood hesitating in the parlor. He had the sudden uneasy feeling that he was no longer alone in the house. He listened, but there was no sound anywhere. Whatever noises came from the street were adequately muffled by the thick walls of the house. On impulse he turned and went through the study to the pantry and kitchen in the rear of the house.

The kitchen door was standing open. He couldn't remember locking it after his first inspection. Perhaps the draught had opened it when he went out the front door just now. There was nothing to see in the back except a weedy garden and a cracked concrete bird bath and an arbor surrounding a sundial. Henry closed the door and shot the bolt home carefully this time.

There was something else in the big, old-fashioned kitchen that puzzled him. Half a dozen cans of soup, a loaf of bread in waxed paper, and three thick white candles stood on a shelf over the nicked stove. There was also a small pile of kindling in the scuttle beside the stove. Several burnt matches were scattered over the otherwise clean floor.

The feeling that he was no longer alone grew stronger. Turning, he went back through the dining room and up the broad, carpeted center stairway to the top floor. His shoes made no sound. He paused and listened. He couldn't hear anything. Sunlight from the Palladian window glittered and winked on bare steel blades mounted on the corridor walls. Old Lincoln Courtland had collected swords and foils, army sabers and Renaissance daggers of all varieties and descriptions, and this part of the house looked like a cutlery display of a particularly vicious and dangerous na-

ture. Henry himself owned a Japanese bayonet, a souvenir of a very unpleasant night raid on a nameless South Pacific atoll, but he never showed it to anyone, not even Martha, and never spoke of the encounter in which he had got it. He looked at Courtland's sword collection, shuddered, and went on.

The attic was already gathering evening shadows. And here for the first time he felt a vague little shiver of fear. He might have been mistaken about the kitchen door—but not about the chest. He had left the empty box against the wall. Now it stood in the center of the attic room, still unopened, but very definitely moved. And it obviously hadn't moved by itself.

He took a deep breath and looked around. There was nothing to see.

"Is anybody here?" he called aloud.

His voice echoed through the raftered attic. He didn't expect an answer. He was all the more surprised when a man's voice called up to him from the lower floors of the house.

"Hello! You up there!"

Henry whirled toward the stairs. He held his breath for a moment, then, surprised at his own reaction, went quickly down the steps, past the sword collection on the second floor to the main staircase. The man was coming up from the front parlor. A big man, with broad shoulders straining the seams of a shiny blue serge suit, and a long seamy face hidden in the shadows of a wide-brimmed Stetson. Henry had never seen him before. His momentary panic gave way to quick irritation.

"Saw you moving around," the tall man said. "What's up?"

"See here—" Henry began.

THE stranger's eyes took in Henry's dust-smudged face and green smock. "I'm the sheriff," he said. "Pete Delaney. And you?"

"Oh," Henry said. He explained who he was and what he was doing. "Is anything the matter with this house?" he asked.

"Not a thing," Sheriff Delaney said. "I just checked up when I saw you in a window from the street. Why?"

Henry shrugged. His panic seemed foolish now. "Why are there bars on the windows?"

Delaney grinned and started downstairs. "Linc Courtland was always

afraid of burglars. We ain't had a robbery here in Greendale yet—except one. And that happened two months after Linc died, over on the other side of town. The bank, you know."

"Bank robbers?" Henry asked.

"Got away with thirty thousand bucks, Mr. Phelps. We never did catch them crooks." The sheriff paused with his big hand around the bronze nymph poised on the newel post. "They got the Harrison hat factory payroll. Only real industrial plant in Greendale. Keeps us going. Keeps the town alive."

"I'm sure of it," Henry said. He was suddenly anxious about the time, seeing the shadows gather on the lawn outside. He shrugged out of his smock. "How often do the trains run here? Back to New York, I mean."

"Plenty of trains. Four a day."

"When does the next one leave?"

The sheriff looked at his watch. "Five-five. It's five-ten now. It's gone already." Delaney looked amused. "You can't get back to the city unless you thumb a ride, and I don't reckon you're the type for that. You'll have to stay here overnight."

"Here?" Henry felt dismayed. "In the house."

"The hotel and every guest room in town is full up, what with the hat factory booming and the housing shortage the way it is. There's nothing wrong with this place. I reckon nobody'd be harmed if you slept here, seeing you're here on legitimate business."

"I—I suppose not," Henry murmured.

It was not until the sheriff was gone that Henry remembered the two men, and the girl in the car, who had previously interrupted him.

He locked the front door. There was an inner vestibule door, and he locked that, too. He approved of the barred windows now. He went back to the kitchen, and that was still bolted. He went all through the house, from one room to another, searching with care, but the house seemed empty. He laughed at himself after a fruitless search. He was behaving like an old maid, just because he had to spend the night here.

He didn't really have to stay, he decided. He was sure he could find quarters somewhere else. But it would be just as Martha always said, he would be proving himself a prematurely aged

fuddy-duddy, if he allowed his nerves to drive him away. It was foolish to think of going anywhere else. There were cans of food in the kitchen, wood for the stove and fireplace, and the settee in the study looked comfortable. There were plenty of sheets he could use for pillows and blanket.

Four hours later he set the last of the three candles on the table in the study. The kindling had long been used up, and the fire in the fireplace was just a heap of gray ashes. The windows shimmered blankly, covered with night. Henry surveyed the neatly folded sheets on the settee and the extra roll that served him as a pillow, and felt satisfied. He took off his coat and his shoes and loosened his necktie.

He didn't really expect to rest easily. But it was one of those things. He was tired from the unusually active day. He was asleep the moment his head touched the pillow.

HE WASN'T sure what awakened him. He opened his eyes wide, and the darkness was like velvet tape, muffling everything. He didn't move or sit up. He listened to the whisper of the night wind in the shrubbery beyond the open window, and he could hear the faint ticking of his wrist-watch. It was just three o'clock. It took a moment before he realized he was not in his quiet boarding-house room on West Eightieth Street. Then he reached into the darkness for the candle he had left on the table beside the settee. He had the match ready to strike when he abruptly changed his mind and preferred the darkness.

A faint, almost inaudible footstep came from the hall on the opposite side of the study wall. A door closed somewhere with a soft click. Henry sat up carefully, removing the sheets from his legs and sliding his feet into his shoes. He remembered, too late to do anything about it, the cellar door in the kitchen and the narrow cellar windows all around the foundations of the house.

He stood up and made his way carefully through the gloom to the living room. At the moment he had only one objective—the front door. He wanted out. It was not a lack of courage, but rather an overabundance of caution that impelled him to escape the house. Only a fool, he knew, tackled an armed man

with weaponless hands—and Henry had no doubt that if this nocturnal visitor was bent on a criminal errand, he would be forearmed. He went for the front door.

He had to move slowly, although his day's inventory work gave him a fairly good idea of where the furniture was situated. He could see nothing in the darkness, but once through the curtained archway to the parlor there was a glimmer of light from the front door. He changed his mind the next moment, however. The plush drapes over the dining room suddenly grew visible as someone in there turned a careful light in that direction. Henry turned his head involuntarily toward the beam—and stumbled over a hassock. His gasp was loud in the stillness.

The sudden thump of his body as he sprawled headlong was even louder. Someone in the dining room cursed. The flashlight was doused with a prompt click. Footsteps thudded toward the vestibule. Henry scrambled recklessly to his feet, his heart in his throat. He lunged for the door—and a heavy body slammed into him. A fist shot out of the darkness and caught him blindly between the eyes.

"Got you!" a voice exulted.

Henry reeled backward, dodging around the piano he knew was there. He heard the keys crash in discord as his opponent's hand slammed down unwittingly on the keyboard. He crouched motionless in the dark corner, trapped. He knew it was foolish to try for the front door. He had locked both the inner and outer doors, and he could never get through them in time. He held his breath and listened. Footsteps moved angrily about, stumbling over the furniture.

He heard a man's curse. He wondered why the other didn't use his flashlight again. Perhaps he was afraid that Henry was also armed. Or perhaps he had dropped the flash. He was grateful for the darkness in any case. When the footsteps sounded reasonably far from the piano, he sidled out of the corner and made for the study where he had slept, moving with careful steps. He wracked his memory to recall the layout of the furniture, and he made no errors in the darkness.

He crossed the study safely. He couldn't hear the other man now. Ap-

parently he, too, was listening. The pantry door creaked faintly as he pushed it open, and instantly there came a rush of steps toward him. But not from behind. These came from the kitchen, blocking his way. They had him trapped. A shiver went through him. He couldn't reach either the front or back way now. And every window on the ground floor was barred. For some reason they seemed anxious to capture him, rather than to frighten him off.

There was only one way to go. The back steps to the upper floor led from the pantry. He found the steps after a moment's careful groping and paused. Someone whispered urgently in the darkness, and got an angry grunt in reply. He had been right. There were two of them. At least two. He repressed another shiver. Long ago, Henry had relegated violence and danger to the newspaper headlines.

This pursuit in the dark, in a strange house, had a nightmare quality that made his palms sweat and caused panic to thrust cold claws into his brain. He turned suddenly and ran up the stairs without heed to the noise he made.

His pursuers were right behind him. There was another door at the top of the steps. He prayed it wasn't bolted. It was open. He stumbled through and slammed it shut, his hand flying to the key in the lock. He twisted it just as a heavy shoulder crashed furiously against the panel. The lock snicked home. The door held. There came another crash against the door. It held. Henry drew a deep, shuddering breath and leaned against the corridor wall. He had a few seconds. Perhaps fifteen seconds, until they ran through the lower floor and came up the front stairway.

FAIN'T light crept down the hall from the window at the far end. Evidently there was a street lamp directly opposite. For the first time since he had awakened, he could see—and for the first time he knew what had awakened him. The light touched the swords on the wall, the twin piecrust tables, the deep carpet at his feet. There was a darker shadow in these shadows, in the shape of a man. Or what had once been a man.

It sprawled near the stair door almost at Henry's feet, the face a pale patch of white in the darkness. He could see faint glitter of staring eyes, and the ugly

distortion at the back of the man's skull. His head had been smashed in. He was dead. It was the little man, one of the pair he had caught snooping in the house this afternoon. The one called Jeep.

Henry shivered.

He backed away from the dead man until his shoulders touched the wall. His head bumped something cold and sharp, and it rattled metallically. One of the swords. He put a hand to steady the heavy saber, and a light flickered on the front stairway. His pursuers had circled the floor below and were resuming the chase.

The light drove all thought of Jeep's death out of his mind. If they didn't stop at killing a confederate, there would be only one fate for him. They wanted to kill him. To quiet him. To keep him from talking and telling what he knew—or what they thought he knew.

He had no time to think it out further. There had been only one pair of footsteps on the front stairs. That meant the other man was guarding the back way down. Without pause, Henry reached behind him and lifted the saber from its wall pegs. At the same time the flash beam suddenly glared over the top step and began switching methodically back and forth, probing for him.

Henry pressed back into the nearest door, saber in hand. The light didn't touch him. He saw the glint of a gun in the man's hand, and he eased quickly into the darkness of a bedroom and carefully closed the door.

He stood still in dusty darkness that smelled of moldy disuse and listened to the footsteps of the murderer out in the hall. A lock clicked and the man was joined by another from the back stairs. Their voices came into Henry's hiding place in harsh whispers. The first was the big man's voice—Joey's.

"You see him?"

"No," his partner answered.

"He didn't try your steps?"

"No. I guess he saw Jeep, though."

"The hell with Jeep. Let's get him!"

"Not with the gun, you fool!" The second person's voice rose sharply, and Henry recognized it, too. It wasn't a man. It was the voice of the redhead who had stopped in her car—Sally Fiske. He wasn't surprised. She went on harshly, "One blast from that cannon and you'll have the whole town on our necks!"

"We've got to find that little guy."

"We'll find him," Sally said.

"You start down at that end of the hall. Use your gun if you have to, baby."

Henry stood motionless behind the door, listening to their footsteps separate. He had a moment's grace. They would find him soon enough, and now he had no doubt about their intentions. As far as he knew, there was only the big man, Joey, and the girl. But they both had guns. The sword in his hand was hardly good enough to match it.

Henry was tempted to throw it away, but he didn't. He wanted to run. There was no place to go. He shivered again, listening to the sound of doors opening and closing down the hall. He had to get out of here. He had to get help. There was no way out. There were no connecting doors. Just the hallway and the window.

The window was tall and narrow, and when he looked out he could see one of the little ornamental balconies that were tacked on all over the house. Starlight shone on the steeply pitched shingles of an adjacent gable. The dark mass of a tree on the lawn blotted out any glimpse of the street. He had no time to weigh the decision. There was nothing else to do. He eased up the sash as noiselessly as possible and stepped out over the sill. He still carried the heavy saber. The weight of the grip felt good in his hand. The balcony was narrow, with only a knee-high jigsaw rail between him and a long drop down. As he turned to close the window behind him the hall door opened. The beam of a flashlight shot across the room and pinned him.

For a moment he didn't move. He couldn't move. The man's voice rose sharply:

"Got him, honey!"

THE man's steps thudded across the room toward him as he swung a leg over the low balcony rail. The shingles canted sharply up toward a conical turret nearby. He found traction for his shoes and scrambled up the roof, out of sight of the window, and wrapped his left arm around the turret point. The saber was in his way, adding to his hazards, but he didn't let go of it. He looked back and saw a dark head thrust out over the edge of the balcony.

"Come back here, you!"

Henry edged around to the opposite side of the turret, his feet braced on the pitched roof.

"Come back or I'll shoot!" the man whispered harshly.

Henry knew he wouldn't shoot. Not out in the open like this. But he didn't push his luck too far. He looked across the dizzy maze of planes and slopes and chimneys of the Gothic roof. A little gallery encircled the foot of his turret and he let go of his dangerous perch and slid down the shingles. His feet jarred. The sword clattered on the scrollwork rail. A light flashed in a nearby window, and he ducked back. He scrambled crazily over the pitched roof, climbed upward toward a chimney, and found a moment's respite straddling the gable of an attic window.

It was then that fear took charge of Henry. He looked down. Up to then he had been driven only by a frantic desire to escape the man with the gun. In his first dash across the roof he had taken desperate chances. Now that he could pause and take stock of the situation, he froze to his perch, unable to move.

On either side the shingles pitched downward at sharp angles, bordered by rain gutters that edged a sharp drop to the shadowed lawn. He could see over the tree tops in one direction of the houses across the street. There was starlight and a faint, early-morning breeze, and the glow of a street lamp coming up through the leaves. The trees were much too far away to reach. So was the nearest little gallery projecting from the house. Up above there was only the chimney, towering dizzily over his head.

Henry couldn't move. He clung to his perch with shaking hands. His legs shook, too. His whole body shivered. He was almost sitting on the flat of the saber, clutched in his left hand; but he didn't drop it. He had to get out of there. He couldn't stay here.

They wouldn't let him stay there until daylight, when someone might see him. They'd use their guns first. He had to move. He couldn't move. He hitched forward an inch and felt breathless. He hitched forward another inch and leaned slowly down to peer over the front edge of the gable. There was a diamond-shaped window here, and five feet below it was a wide projection, a kind of edge or cornice. He'd never make it.

There was no sound from inside the house. Once he saw a window at the far end of the roof flicker with light, where they were searching for him. But they had sense enough to stay off the roof. They knew they weren't like cats. Neither was he. The thing to do was to get back inside the house. Anything was better than this. If he tried to cling to the gable, he would drop off, sooner or later. Probably sooner.

He swung his legs carefully over the edge of the gable and slid slowly downward, wriggling his body until he was hanging by the elbows. His feet were still twelve inches from the ledge. His toes scraped the glass in the window. He hooked his right arm over the ridge of the gable and swung a little lower.

The ledge below was more than a foot wide. He slid all the way down and felt his heels jar on the broad plank and he clung to the wall of the house like a fly, hardly breathing. He pushed carefully with his knee against the window. He said a prayer as he pushed, and his prayer was answered. The window opened inward. He let go and tumbled forward, into warm, dusty blackness.

Instantly a heavy body slammed into him, knocked him sprawling, breathless. He stumbled into the darkness. A man's grunt of satisfaction came from the black room. Henry dropped the sword. His shins cracked painfully against something that was knee high, and he heard a sharp slapping sound as if the lid of a chest had been jarred shut. With the thought, he knew where he was. In the attic room. Where the empty, locked chest had been.

HE NEVER remembered the next few minutes accurately. He remembered a fist shooting out of the dark at him, clipping his jaw. He remembered his frantic effort to duck, to slide away into the darkness. The man's body was big and burly, outweighing him almost two pounds for one. The thing to do was to stay away from his grip, to elude those vicious swings. To keep away from the wrong end of that gun.

His legs tangled suddenly in some of the invisible attic furniture, and he stumbled forward with violent impetus. He ran right into the big man. He heard a grunt, and the big man staggered back a step. Then a scream filled his ears and a wet gurgling sound filled the dark.

Someone else began to scream, and then it was quiet.

Henry scrambled backward, sucking gulps of air deep into his lungs. He bumped into a body that was much softer than the big man's. It was the girl. His hands flew for the gun in her grip, twisted sharply. She didn't seem to want to fight him back. He could see a little better now. She shrank back toward the open window, her face white and convulsed, wavering in the gloom. He had the gun in his hand.

"Now!" he breathed angrily.

"Don't—"

"Stand still," he snapped. "Where's your boy-friend?"

"Right behind you," the girl sighed, and fainted.

Henry turned and lunged, and then he stopped and didn't move for a long minute. He struck a match and looked carefully before he understood what had happened. When the big man first hit him and sent him stumbling, he had dropped the saber. It had fallen into the open chest. The top had come down on it like the sudden clamp of teeth, pinning the sharp blade in its grip. The big man had backed up on it, skewering himself. He sat there with his back to the chest and a look of rage frozen on his face and the sharp, bloody point of the saber sticking six inches out of his ribs. Henry didn't blame the girl for fainting.

As he herded the girl ahead of him thunderous knocks beat at the front door. They met Sheriff Delaney down in the parlor. The sheriff didn't waste time listening to details. He went upstairs and was gone for several long minutes. People gathered on the porch and babbled excitedly. A prowler car swung recklessly up the gravel drive with a moaning siren. When the sheriff came down-

stairs his hands were full of packets of currency. He grinned at Henry Phelps.

"Got here a little late, didn't I? The neighbors said they seen a ghost rattlin' a sword and walking around on the roof."

"That was me," Henry said weakly.

"Huh, you're no ghost!"

"They almost made me one," Henry pointed out. "Where did you get all that money?"

"It was in the chest. It's the Harrison payroll. I told you about them bank robbers we had here last winter. They must've used this house for a hideout. At least, they cached the dough here. I guess they had a argument with the little guy on the second floor and decided to split two ways instead of three. Anyway, you sure busted them up, Mr. Phelps."

"Don't mention it," Henry said.

It was two hours before he was free to telephone to New York. The streets were bright with dawn when he closed the door to the sheriff's private office and got his connection through to Martha. Martha sounded sleepy when she answered.

"This is Henry," he said briskly. "I'm in Greendale. I want you to come up here tomorrow—tonight, that is. There's a bar here called Barney's, on Route 82, just outside of town—"

Martha's voice sharpened peevishly.

"Henry Phelps are you drunk?"

"No. Be quiet and listen. I want you to come here and meet me for dinner at this Barney's. I want to propose to you again."

"Why, Henry—" She seemed frightened at the grim tone of his voice.

"Henry, I—"

"And this time I won't take no for an answer," he said.

"Yes, Henry," she said.



Next Issue: A COLD NIGHT FOR MURDER, a Complete Mystery Novelet of the Frost Patrol Service, by J. LANE LINKLATER—and Many Other Stories!

THE CORPSE

CHAPTER I

The Land of the Cod

AMY BREWSTER regarded the sundry bones and minute scraps of discarded food on the oversized plate in front of her with a sadness like that of a pioneer scout gazing upon the bleached bones of the expedition he was supposed to protect. Where, but a few minutes before, had been a monstrous mixed grill, consisting of three double lamb chops, a pound of calve's liver, six thick rashers of Irish bacon, a half-dozen lamb kidneys, a large mound of mushrooms, an even larger mound of French fried potatoes and six grilled half-tomatoes, was now in effect—nothing.

She belched resoundingly without apology and reached for the chin of the

gin bottle that stood already a third empty at one side. As she downed a tumblerful without mixer or chaser, she compared the joys of eating to the melancholy of having eaten.

With somewhat jaundiced eyes, eyes that were bright, malevolent little black buttons in the great globe of flesh that was her face, she looked with disfavor upon the sallow if not unpretty countenance of the young woman who sat alone at the big table with her in the vast Edwardian dining room.

"Undrawn shades of Mae West!" she exclaimed irritably. "Why don't you feed your face, Susan? You're getting to look like a slat."

"Why should I?" the young woman countered. "Eating Sunday breakfast with a female Falstaff is a shocking

*When murder strikes close to home
Amy Brewster starts shaking
skeletons out of
the family closet!*



CAME ASHORE

By SAM
MERWIN, Jr.

anachronism in the nineteen forties."

"Haw!" said Amy, smiling. She reached for one of the cigars in the humidor before her, a long, fat, black-wrapped Havana, and lit it, her disposition improved. At least the girl could bite back. And, in truth, while she was thin, even scrawny by Amy's three-hundred-pound standard, the gay print scrap of something she was wearing revealed feminine amplitude in all the right places.

Outside the long windows of the dining room, the August rain continued to blot out the usually pleasing vista of clipped green lawn between evergreen trees that sloped gently down to the North Shore highway, Massachusetts Bay and, beyond, the rocky peninsula of Hancock's Neck.

If Amy's breakfast appetite were anachronistic, so was Brewster's End. It was a survivor of the so-called reign of terror in American architecture, a sprawling, turreted, mansard-roofed, overporched, half-brick, half-shingled monster whose acres of waste space were matched only by its comfort.

AMY had inherited the mansion only the year before from her uncle, Sturgis Thayer Brewster, who had incontinently died without issue. She had promptly christened the place Brewster's End. "It's big enough," had been her ambiguous and widely quoted comment.

For Amy, incredibly and reluctantly wealthy Bostonian of impeccable and distinguished lineage, was widely



"There's something familiar about her, but nothing I could swear to in a court," said Amy

quoted the length and breadth of the land. Her innate and radical iconoclasm, almost as much as her relentless financial success, had long shocked conservative moneyed circles from Maine to California.

Her gargantuan robustness of living, her disregard of any convention which annoyed her, her Robin Hood ideas about wealth, her incredible success in gambling and her interest in and genius at solving crimes had combined to make her a living legend. Furthermore, as a graduate of Radcliffe, Summerville at Oxford, the Sorbonne in Paris, Leipzig, Harvard and Columbia Law Schools, her erudition enabled her to get away with what she pleased.

"Don't you get awfully lonesome here, Amy?" Susan Ward inquired, looking at a gloomy sepia-tinted reproduction of a Sir Edwin Landseer Scottish stag at bay which graced the red damask brocade wall behind Amy.

"As a matter of fact, I do," said the fat woman, looking at Susan through a cloud of blue cigar smoke. "Sometimes I think old Sturgis left it to me to get even for the time I took his hide in the Continental Tin deal. It's a dingy brown elephant, eating its head off in upkeep and taxes. If summering here weren't a habit, I'd burn it."

"Can't you sell it?" the young woman asked.

"With taxes what they are today?" Amy countered. "I don't suppose more than a couple of dozen people in America could afford it, and the reason they could is because they've got more sense. Put me down on both counts."

"I wish Reg would get here," said the young woman, looking at the small diamond-studded watch on her wrist. "It's eleven ten already."

"Remember, he's driving Rita up from Boston, and I've never known a night club canary to roll out of the sisal before noon if she could help it."

"Oh—Rita," said Susan diffidently.

"Don't be a snob," snapped Amy. "Just because she sings for a living. I like Rita. She's got vitality and that brother of yours needs a shot where it will do the most good. Any man who gets drunk on what he did last night."

"Ollie never could hold his liquor," said Susan with sisterly proprietorship. "It's his nerves. He—"

"Nerves my elbow!" roared Amy. "He

hasn't got the bottom. Wandering out in the rain last night like a peripatetic imbecile. It's a wonder he didn't fall into the Bay and get drowned. Yes, Mary?"

"There's a gentleman, a police officer here," said the trim gray-haired servant who entered. At Amy's command to show him in, a tall, burly, beslickered officer of the Massachusetts State Police came into the dining room, dripping copiously on the Persian carpet.

"Beg pardon, ma'am," he said quietly and a little uncertainly. "There's a—a body on the beach at the foot of your lawn. I wondered if—"

Both women looked startled. The announcement, coming as it did upon the heels of Amy's statement about Susan's brother, Orlando Ward Jr., caused the younger woman to turn absolutely white. But at that moment the subject of their thoughts entered.

"Good morning, Susan," he said. Then, "Horrible day, isn't it, Amy, you old hag?" Tall and fair like his sister, he was red of eye and nostril and his voice betokened the fact that he was suffering from a head cold. He regarded the officer with mild curiosity until Amy explained the circumstances of his presence.

"Who is it?" he asked abruptly.

"We don't know yet," said the state policeman. "I wonder if Miss Brewster would consent to look at her."

"If she had the discourtesy to die on my beach, I suppose it's my duty," said the fat woman. She achieved the vast engineering feat of rising from her chair with a number of grunts, looked at the young people. "You two can stay here and squabble. After all, it is Sunday morning."

THE girl who lay on the rain-washed sand just beyond the furthest reach of the pounding surf, looked like a bundle of old clothes save for the emergence of a single exposed leg. The limb was white except for a few streaks of sun-tan lotion and exposed to almost the full length of the thigh. Amy, looking like something out of a Winslow Homer painting in her slicker and sou'wester, puffed her oversized cigar and examined the pitiful human jetsam critically.

"Not a bad gam," she remarked to Mike Hogan, the local constable, who was hovering about in corpulent excite-

ment. The fat woman bent, studied the battered, misshapen face. "She doesn't look drowned to me."

"She wasn't," said the state policeman, whose name, it had developed, was Lieutenant Tom Folger. "We tried respiration, of course. No water in the lungs. And a bashed in skull."

"Any idea who she is?" the fat woman asked casually.

"Not yet," replied Folger. "The motorist who spotted her is still at the barracks getting over it. "Her clothes came from New York—Bonwit's. Her bag hasn't turned up so far. Probably went necking on the peninsula last night. A hell of a night for it too."

"If she's from New York, she came a long way just to get pushed off a cliff," said Amy brusquely. She was doing some rapid-fire thinking, seeking to make sense out of it, and her memory kept getting in the way.

Almost seven years before, after just such a summer storm as had visited the North Shore last night, Orlando Ward Sr. had vanished without trace. Amy, who had been spending the month at what was then her Uncle Sturgis' house, had never forgotten the unexplained disappearance. Indeed, as trustee of the estate, which was held in chancery until the father of Susan and Ollie was pronounced officially dead, she had had little opportunity to. For the hunt was still being relentlessly pressed—would continue to be for another twenty-four hours or so.

"It's a stinking mess," said the fat woman aloud and could have bitten her tongue out. But Lieutenant Folger regarded her with apologetic courtesy and Mike Hogan was about as quick as a snail on the uptake.

"Sorry to have put you to the trouble," the state policeman said politely. "You have no idea who she is?"

"Hmmm," said Amy, playing it shrewdly. "She's pretty much battered up. Not an uncommon type either—big features, probably pretty once. There's something familiar about her, but nothing I could swear to in or out of court."

"We'll take any lead you've got," said Folger.

"That's the trouble—I haven't any," lied Amy valiantly. "Perhaps she reminds me of someone else. It's very elusive. If I get it, I'll be in touch." Having thus established the possibility

of recognition in front of official witnesses, she turned and waddled back up the lawn.

The presence of Amy's guests of the weekend had direct bearing on the disappearance of Orlando Ward Sr. On the morrow, the seven years would be up and the will would be read for the first time. It was going to contain some surprises for the young Wards, but thanks to Reginald Halley's fairness it was going to work out all right.

At the time of the disappearance young Halley had been the financier's confidential secretary. He had been a brilliant if impecunious young man, who had profited vastly in the years since by his early training in money matters.

He had been a steady, quietly efficient secretary with pleasant social manners. Orlando Ward Sr. had come to rely on him greatly, in personal as well as in lesser professional affairs. And the family's personal affairs had been tangled enough to warrant help.

Young Orlando—Ollie—had been well on the way to claiming the oft-filled title of "Playboy of the Western World" from all other pretenders. Bounced in short order from every school and college which would take him, he had carried on, post-scholastically, in the classic pattern.

Finally, he had run afoul of a dancing girl with all of the predatory instincts of a harpy. Viola Durant had been her name—ultra-Viola her nickname in certain roisterous circles. Shortly before his death, Orlando Sr. had bought her off for a cool hundred thousand.

He had booted his son unceremoniously out of the big house on Hancock Neck and, when Susan stood by him, had sent his sister packing after him. It was generally thought that this domestic smash-up had been responsible for the old man's disappearance.

And this event had shocked young Ollie into shape. He and Reg Halley had formed a partnership which, with the combination of Halley's brains and reputation and Ollie's family connections, had put them very close to the top of the Boston financial picture. Everyone, including Amy, had heaved a sigh of relief over their success.

When young Ollie had taken up with Rita Manning, the sulphurous brunette singer at the *Club le Touquet*, Amy had feared the former ne'er-do-well was re-

verting to earlier type. But acquaintance with the chanteuse, which she had promptly sought, had reassured her. Amy even liked the girl's singing.

Now, however, the fat woman's face was drawn into a rare scowl—difficult to achieve thanks to the corpulent smoothness of her skin. She stamped into the dining room, still in sou'wester and slicker, and regarded her two guests somberly.

"Anybody we know?" said Ollie, looking up from a barely-tasted plate of shirred eggs and chicken livers. Susan looked unhappy at the poor taste of the remark, compressed her rather thin lips. Amy flicked two inches of ash onto the carpet with a plump, stubby and damp little finger.

"I'm afraid it is," she said grimly. "The body belongs to an old friend of yours, Ollie—named Viola Durant. The police seem to think she was murdered, and I'm inclined to agree with them."

CHAPTER II

Death on the Dock



HALF rising from her chair, Susan Ward cried, "Oh, no!" She compressed her lips tightly as she sank back again, slowly, and looked at her brother with an expression which Amy could only read as utter dismay.

Ollie sat where he was, his fork suspended over his food, like one who had faced the Medusa head on. Amy gave him a long, dissecting stare until his fork dropped from nerveless and shaking fingers. Then, before removing her rain clothes, she reached for the gin bottle without courtesy of a glass.

Thus fortified, she permitted a shaken Mary to remove her slicker and sou'wester, revealing the sacklike black dress that covered her squat, shapeless body, and sat down herself. She relighted her cigar, then spoke firmly around it.

"This is going to make a hell of a stink," she said. "So snap out of it, both of you. Ollie, you were out of the house for more than an hour last night. What happened?"

"Oh, Amy," said the young broker,

shocked out of his coma. "You don't think—"

"I don't know enough to start thinking yet," said the fat woman grimly. "But when I do I'm going to blow the top off this thing no matter who gets hurt. I'm not going to have this place turned into a setting for another 'Arsenic and Old Lace' with corpses all about."

"Viola!" said Ollie, shaking his well-combed dark-blond head. "I haven't thought of her in years."

"That won't go so well with a jury," said Amy rudely. "She still has legs." Susan looked at the fat woman with outright horror.

"You didn't—identify her," she said unevenly.

"Of course I did," said Amy. "How do you think I knew who she was?" Then she grinned sardonically. "But if you mean did I tell the police who she was, I didn't, may St. Elmo save my immortal soul. But don't think they won't find out soon enough. Viola's legs are still something."

"How can you be so callous, Amy?" Susan inquired.

"Viola Durant is no skin off my nose," said the fat woman. "But she was a lot of frogskins off your old man's bankroll. And that is a fact which I fear the constabulary will find interesting. Ollie, what happened last night?"

"I don't know. I had some drinks in the living room after you and Susan went to bed. The next thing I knew I was soaking wet and Susan was helping me back to the house. Amy, I tell you I don't know." His eyes were drugged with fear as he fumbled with his knife and fork.

"Susan, you were conscious," said Amy quietly. "You were away from me looking for Ollie for a good half-hour. What did you see?"

"Nothing," said Susan in an ice cube voice. "Nothing but rain until I found Ollie wandering around down by—" She stopped speaking abruptly, her eyes round, and looked miserably at her brother.

"As long as it wasn't down by the old mill stream, keep mum," snapped Amy. "No jury would believe that."

"But I tell you—" the girl began, then shrugged sagging if shapely shoulders hidden by a not-too-trim-to-be-ladylike angora sweater. "What's the use?"

"Plenty," growled the fat woman. "I repeat I'm going to get to the bottom of this, so unless either of you did it and if you know anything, talk."

"Sounds like something out of Torquemada by Himmler," said a deep, cultured voice from the doorway.

"It's out of Brewster by Brewster," said the fat woman. She turned and greeted Reginald Halley, who stood just inside the room with Rita Manning beside him.

Reg Halley, for that was his name to the many who shared his acquaintanceship, wore fashionably unpressed tweeds and flannels, with an air. His off-hand-some ruddy face wore an expression in which friendly salutations and concern were blended. Not more than five-feet-nine, he exuded a magnetism that made him appear much bigger.

RITA MANNING, which was her true name as Amy had troubled to ascertain, was cut on a generous scale. Her black hair hung luxuriantly to her shoulders, her cheekbones were broad, her lips full-cut, her figure a match. She was, in short, a dish, and the black wool jersey dress she wore did nothing to conceal the fact.

Seeing Ollie's obvious distress, she went to him with frowning concern, bent and kissed him on the cheek. Ollie put a shaking hand up to clasp one of hers, as his sister, looking more washed-out than ever besides her vividness, murmured a how-do-you-do. Amy pointed her cigar at Reg Halley.

"You might as well know the worst," she said to the financier. "The police just turned up a body on the beach at the foot of the lawn. It belonged to Viola Durant, and they and I believe she was murdered."

"Holy cow!" said Halley, seating himself abruptly in a chair beside the fat woman. "Do they know who it is?"

"Not yet, but it won't be long," said Amy. She studied the faces around her. Ollie was still in a daze, so much so that the fat woman, against her better instincts, felt sorry for him. Beside him, Rita Manning looked honestly bewildered. At the other end of the table Susan Ward managed to give the impression that the murder had been contrived as a personal affront to herself.

"If you'll take my advice," said Amy grimly, "all of you will take my advice.

I'm not entirely inexperienced in this sort of thing. And I know how the police work. I even know a few of them reasonably well."

"I agree with you, Amy," said Reg Halley. "I agree with you a hundred per cent. You'll have to see Ollie through. You didn't do it, did you, Ollie?"

"Reg!" cried Rita Manning, outraged. But Ollie miserably gestured her to silence.

"I don't know," he said. "I'm just beginning to realize what has happened, and I don't know, I swear it. I got plastered last night and pulled a blank for a while."

"You wouldn't kill anyone," said Rita warmly, and the others, save for Amy, chimed their agreement. But the fat woman cast another chill over all of them.

"I don't know a thing myself," she said, "except the identity of the corpse. But if Ollie did do it, or anybody else present, I'm going to get them for it."

"But Viola Durant was a blackmailer," protested Reg Halley. "A cheap, conning little tart."

"She was all of that," said Amy cheerfully. "But have any of you stopped to think what her reappearance and murder mean just now, with the estate about to be settled?"

"No!" cried Susan Ward passionately. "You don't—"

"I certainly do," roared the fat woman. "I think it looks as if she knew something about your father's disappearance. And I'm beginning to think—" She rose with the inevitable grunts, while terrified eyes followed her, waddled toward the door of the old-fashioned room.

"Where are you going?" Susan asked, horrified.

"I'm going," said Amy without stopping or turning around, "to look in the almanac. Then I'm going to look around as I should have seven years ago."

TEN minutes later, at the tiller of a 1916 electric which could, when pressed, do all of fifteen miles an hour, Amy was moving silently down her long driveway toward the causeway which led to Hancock Neck. It was a dilapidated roadway, actually the top of a rock-pile breakwater, for the sand bar which formed the narrowest part of the penin-

sula at low tide had never been fit for vehicular traffic.

The rain beat a tattoo against the long glass panel windows of the archaic car and the wind threatened to tip it over, but Amy settled her three hundred-odd pounds the more firmly and drove on, peering ahead through the water-fogged windshield, a fresh cigar clamped between her teeth. She swore a blue streak at her own discomfort and at the greater discomfort that lay ahead.

"Should never have given up the search on the Neck," she thought angrily. She hated the idea of lying down on a job, but at the time of Orlando Ward Senior's disappearance she had had little experience with the ways of physical crime. Which was none the less a meagre excuse, as she had learned plenty since and the search for the missing financier had never been let up.

Over a lumpy, grass-grown driveway she drove, to where it circled under the porte cochere of a solitary mansion even larger, uglier and more dilapidated than Brewster's End. It had been built by Orlando Ward's father, had been closed for seven years. There she got out, hesitated a moment and then, hunching into her slicker against the downpour, waddled around the side of the house.

Amy had checked the tides in the almanac as a final precaution. Actually, she knew them like the back of her fat hand. She trudged over an all but vanished pathway that dipped into a hollow, then passed through a thick clump of scrub pines that grew to the cliff edge.

It was a depressing experience, not only because of the outrageously bad weather, but because she could remember when Hancock Neck had been a garden spot under the ownership of Orlando Ward Sr. Now it was weeds, more weeds, a shaggy ruin.

Atop the cliff she could see the rain-soaked whiteness of her own strip of beach a quarter of a mile away across the angry waters and beyond, more dimly, the house atop the rise of the lawn. Behind her, the down-at-heel Ward summer home was hidden by the pines, although one chimney pot and the balled top of a single conicle turret protruded damply against the sky.

Before her the cliff fell sheer and jagged for a good sixty feet. A few feet to her left was the head of a weathered wooden stairway leading down to

the small wharf. Amy studied the ground around her, grunted her dissatisfaction, before walking to it. Had any struggle taken place there, no tracks would be visible after all this rain.

Hesitantly, for she felt not too certain that the half-ruined steps would hold her weight, Amy made her way down to the jetty. She was panting when she reached it, and her cigar had gone out. All in all, she had never been more miserable.

It was the season of tremendous tides along the North Shore, and mercifully the waters were low, or she would have had additional cause for discomfort. She stood still for several minutes, studying the bottom of the cliff face on either side. Then something bright in a space between two boards of the jetty caught her alert eyes, something that gleamed despite the darkness of the day.

IT WAS the top of a man's evening stud—a beautiful thing of white pearl with a small square diamond diagonally inset, and set itself in platinum. Turning it over on the palm of her hand, she could see how its bar spread in a wider circle where it had been snapped from the base.

It was then that something plucked at her arm, something that half-turned her around despite her massive bulk, something that stung her flesh where it had creased her skin. Someone was shooting at her.

Amy took one quick look up at the top of the cliff behind her, was in time to see another sou'westered head and a pair of slickered shoulders. She waddled with unexpected speed back under the shelter of the cliff, clutching tightly her perilous discovery. A bullet whined past her head and plunked viciously into the soggy wood a few feet away.

It was, she thought angrily, like shooting fish in a barrel—and she, Amy Brewster was the barrel. Somehow she reeled along, expecting to feel the impact of a bullet dead center, until she had the shelter of the cliff above her. Crouched against the rough face of the rocks, she waited, wondering what came next.

Then, for the first time in all of her life, the fat woman became truly afraid. She had been in danger before a number of times, but always then she had had opportunity for action. Waiting here, trapped, was something else. And it was

something she found herself increasingly disliking.

She didn't dare move. If she did, she knew she'd be a gone gosling. She didn't even have a cigar, which was an added and unattractive feature. She didn't even have a handy drink of gin. It was a fine situation. Minute after minute passed in increasingly damp silence.

And then she heard the footsteps. At first Amy believed them to be some noise caused by the storm. But they were too measured, too regular, and they became increasingly louder. The sharpshooter, whoever he was, was coming down to finish the job.

Frantically Amy squeezed herself under the steps. It was a tight fit for her bulk, but she made it. Perhaps, she thought, she could grab hold of the killer's legs through the steps when he got close to the bottom and trip him.

Closer the steps came, and closer. They were directly above her as she poised for her supreme effort. She tensed her vast body and something gave way beneath her, plunging her through the base of the wharf onto the rocks beneath in a shower of damp and rotting timber.

"Oh, Lordy!" she thought. "I'm a goner now!"

Someone yelled, and a large raincoated figure appeared above her and peered down curiously at where she sat. It was Lieutenant Folger.

Amy pointed in front of her from her impromptu seat under the stairway as she saw him, and, following her finger's direction, he craned his neck and stared at the mouldering bones of a skeleton, partly visible under the loose stones within the board frame of the wharf.

CHAPTER III

The Story in the Strongbox



WHEN Amy got back to Brewster's End, she looked pale, wan and almost haggard for a woman so robustly fleshed. She shed her sou'wester and slicker in the hall and waddled slowly into the big living room, there to sink into an armchair built to hold her. For a moment,

she closed her eyes and was silent—but for a moment only.

"Mary!" she roared as the hovering gray little servant appeared. "Fetch me some gin—and bring that humidor over where I can reach it. I'm pooped."

The fire that roared in the huge fireplace warmed the dampness that enveloped her, even as the gin warmed her innards to a tolerable glow. She regarded her four guests, who had apparently been playing or attempting to play contract bridge at a table set up near the French windows that led onto the flagged terrace at the rear of the old mansion.

Without displeasure, in view of the shockingly uncomfortable afternoon she had spent, she saw that none of the younger people seemed to have been enjoying themselves. Susan was more compressed than ever, and Ollie's expression was flushed and sullen as if he had sought surcease in the bottle on the table at his elbow without success.

Rita Manning looked puzzled and unhappy, while Reg Halley seemed noticeably annoyed at the turn his weekend had taken. It was the young financier who broke the silence by rising and throwing down his cards.

"For Pete's sake, Amy, what's happened? We've been held virtual prisoners here for the past hour and a half. Police have been all over the place." He eyed with disfavor Lieutenant Folger, who was standing in the doorway.

"Plenty," said Amy, regarding the police bandage which adorned her upper left arm. "For one thing, I've been shot at." She looked at them one by one, accusingly.

"Good Lord! You don't think one of us—" Reg Halley's voice trailed off and his eyes grew dangerous.

"I wasn't stung by a bee," snapped Amy. "It was when I was taking a look around the wharfs at Hancock Neck. That girl's body was washed ashore from the peninsula last night. It's the only place it could have come from the way the tide was running."

"Right, Miss Brewster," said the state policeman. Amy cast a favorable glance upon him.

"Furthermore," she went on, "the lieutenant saw one of my other cars parked at the house by my electric when he went over there this morning. He figured I had company. So it was somebody from here he scared away."

"Did he see who it was?" This,

strangely, from Rita. Her colorful face was lovely in its anxiety with the fire-light flickering upon it.

"He did not," said Amy irritably while the lieutenant looked shocked. The fat woman caught his glance and added, "No use holding out if you can't make an arrest." To the others again, "Whoever did it slipped past him through the woods when Lieutenant Folger came along the path." She glared at all of them in succession again.

"Really," said Reg Halley, "this is ridiculous. You know why I am here, Amy."

"I do," said the fat woman, "but somebody took a bite out of my arm with a bullet, and I'm going to have his hide in return. What did you do after I left, Reg?"

THE financier said, "Nothing. I was right here with Rita. Ollie was upset and went upstairs, and so did Susan. So how could it have been one of us?"

"Mary?" said Amy to the maid. "What about it?"

"Sorry, ma'am," she said, patently flustered but as patently sincere. "I was in the kitchen helping cook clean up. But I did come in here twice. They"—with a nod at Halley and the singer—"were here both times."

"You see?" said the financier with a shrug.

"Okay," said Amy. She looked speculatively at Susan and Ollie. "And both of you were upstairs—together?"

"No," said the girl coolly. "I took a nap. I was very upset over what happened this morning. So was Ollie."

"I took a nap too," he replied sullenly, his voice a trifle slurred. "Reg kept bawling me out for not remembering last night, and I got tired of taking it."

"Hmmmph!" snorted the fat woman. "And a low porch roof under the windows of each of your rooms. Don't worry, I've sneaked out of both of them when I was younger."

"Which one was it?" Folger asked Amy point blank.

"Hold you fire, Lieutenant," said the fat woman. "We still have a lot of ground to cover. For the record, Reg, what were you doing last night?"

"Killing time with Rita until her last show ended. We were going to drive down here then but the weather was too lousy for late night driving. I'd had

a couple of drinks myself." He shrugged again.

"That right, Rita?" Amy inquired. The singer voiced a soft affirmative with downcast eyes. Ollie looked from one to the other of them curiously.

"A hell of a note!" he exploded. "My partner and my girl."

"Take it easy, Ollie," said Reg Halley. Ollie looked about to explode, but Amy shut him up.

"All right," she said. "We haven't time for personalities now. Mary, get me the strongbox in my closet." She paused until the maid had gone, regarded her guests speculatively. "I'm about to read Orlando Ward's will."

"But you can't until tomorrow," said Halley. "It won't be seven years until—"

"Lieutenant Folger and I found the remains of Orlando Ward buried under the wharf," said Amy slowly, her voice a rumble of thunder. "His two gold teeth were unmistakable to me, although the rest of his skull was a battered wreck."

For the second time that day, Ollie Ward looked petrified. Susan quietly fainted and would have fallen to the floor had not Folger and Rita both sprung forward to aid her. Halley swore softly to himself and shook his head as if he couldn't believe the news. It was a good ten minutes before the fat woman began to read.

To all but the financier, who had signed it as a witness, and to Amy herself, the document came as a stunning surprise. The anger of Orlando Ward toward both his children, after their dereliction in what he felt to be their duty toward him, had been savage and fierce.

THERE were a number of bequests to local charities and to servants, most of which, Amy explained, had already been fulfilled. Susan was left with the income of a small trust fund, amounting to ten thousand a year. Ollie was cut off with a miserable thousand dollars in cash. The remainder of the estate, including the house and Hancock Neck itself and somewhat more than six hundred thousand dollars once taxes were paid, had been left to Reg Halley.

"And you knew it all the time?" said Susan, looking at the financier as if he were a stranger to her.

"I did," said Reg unhappily. "But I was bound to utter secrecy by the conditions of the will. Besides, darling, we're planning to be married."

"Just a moment, young man," said Lieutenant Folger, turning toward Halley. Amy waved him back.

"There is a subsequent agreement," she stated, pausing briefly to puff on her cigar. "It was drawn up by Reg and myself more than three years ago. To spare you the legal verbiage. He is planning to have the Neck redeveloped as a resort property as soon as the agreement is signed by Susan and Ollie Ward.

"Ollie is to be president, Susan vice president, each with thirty-five percent of the stock to be floated against the capital. He himself retains only a thirty percent interest and can thus be outvoted by either of his partners. I have gone into the prospects thoroughly and am convinced of their potential success."

"My gosh, Reg!" said Ollie dazedly. "I can't accept it, but it's the damnedest most generous—"

"Oh, Reg!" Susan exclaimed, rising abruptly to go to him and kiss him. Reg looked pleased.

"You'll accept it," he said. "Your father was almost out of his mind when he made the will. I'm being a swine to keep what I have."

"Which is all very ducky," said Amy, "except that it leaves a couple of unsolved murders still on our hands."

Again there was silence. Amy renewed her cigar and downed another tumbler of gin. Her voice was even more of a rasping rumble than usual when she spoke.

"Lieutenant," she said at last, "I've been marshalling my memories of what happened the night Orlando Ward was killed. It was during an August storm like this one. He was over on the Neck, with only the servants and Mr. Halley. As a matter of fact, both Ollie and Susan were staying here. My uncle and I hoped to arrange a reconciliation."

"Can either of you account for yourselves that night?" the lieutenant asked sharply of the younger Wards. Susan shrugged her shoulders and her brother looked sullen and said nothing. Folger glared at them.

"Just a moment," said Amy. "Both Mary and I were here. Perhaps she can check my memory. As I recall it, Ollie

was very drunk that evening—and he had cause to be. Susan and my uncle and I talked here until about midnight after Ollie had been put to bed, then we turned in. Ollie and Susan had the same rooms they have at present."

"Hmmm," said Folger. "Then either of them—"

AMY retorted, "Exactly. Either of them." She ignored the unfriendly glances that came her way. "At about eight o'clock the following morning, Reg here called up to say that his employer had vanished. He had already called the police in town. Orlando Ward was never found—until this afternoon when I fell through the wharf."

"If what you tell me is correct," said Folger, looking at Mary, who bobbed her head in agreement, "then three of the four people here had motives. Both the Wards out of revenge for being thrown out by their father and Mr. Halley to get his unexpected inheritance."

"It doesn't hold water," said the financier. "After all, I would be unlikely to slay a man, wait seven years for his money until his death becomes official and give it away years before I could claim it. I assure you, Lieutenant, I have not become wealthy through giving my prodigal impulses free rein."

"It doesn't seem likely," said the lieutenant, unhappily. He looked at Amy.

"It doesn't at that," said the fat woman. She scowled at Susan. "I wish you and Ollie would talk and help clear this up."

"And—" the girl began, clamped her mouth shut. Outside of herself, the fat woman liked few talkative females, but this girl's silence was growing wearing. She nodded at Folger, who called in a sergeant aide.

"They're clean," he said, nodding in the general direction of the group around the bridge table. "All except the tall guy there. We found these in his room."

He extended toward Folger a male stud box, a square affair with a snap top lined with white satin. Within it, among collar pins, a couple of tie clips and a quartet of gold collar buttons, nestled evening links and studs of platinum in which white pearl and small square diamonds were set. There were a single pair of links, two studs with slide fasteners.

Folger brought them over to the fat

woman, producing from his pocket at the same time the broken stud face which Amy had found on the wharf. There could be no doubt that they were mates in design.

"These sets usually have three studs, don't they?" the lieutenant asked Amy. At her nod, he swung on Ollie. "When did you lose one of your evening studs?"

"Why—said that young man, looking puzzled. "Some time ago, wasn't it, sis? When I sent a shirt to the laundry without removing them."

"That's right," said Susan Ward.

"Can you prove it?" the lieutenant asked, advancing on them.

"Probably not," said Ollie. "What is this, anyway?" He began to back away as both Folger and the sergeant came closer to him. Then, his eyes wide with panic, he charged at Folger, upsetting the bridge table in his path, and butting the state police officer in the solar plexus.

One of the women screamed as Folger went down, his face growing livid with lack of breath, and lay on his back on the floor, making paddling motions with his arms and legs. Then the maddened young man turned on the sergeant, but not soon enough. A savage, well-placed blow just under his left ear dropped him.

Amy, who had been watching the struggle impassively, looked around the room, then down at Folger, who was sitting up, a hand on his diaphragm.

"Thanks, Amy," he gasped. "I guess that fills in the missing pieces."

"Does it?" said the fat woman with the suggestion of a smile. "I think you've just lost another."

Susan Ward had taken advantage of the confusion to disappear.

CHAPTER IV

She Was Mad to Miss



SUSAN WARD, bedraggled and red of eye after an obvious bout with tears, was sitting in the second floor living room of Reg Halley's Commonwealth Avenue house when Amy Brewster clomped wearily in at nine o'clock that evening. The financier,

glass in hand, was standing in front of her chair, obviously seeking to cheer her.

"Thought I'd find you here," said the fat woman without surprise as she waddled in and sat down on a chair whose wooden frame groaned violent protest at her weight. She lit a cigar, waited impatiently until Halley had put an innocent looking tumbler in her hand.

"Lord, I'm hungry," she growled. Then, "Why'd you pull such a damn fool stunt, Susan?"

"Because I had to get help," cried the girl, her face a white mask.

"Careful what you say," said Reg Halley quietly. It was evident that he now regarded Amy as the enemy. Susan looked at him appealingly.

"What's the use!" the girl said with sudden passion. "If you think I'm going to sit by and let Ollie go to jail or worse for something I—"

"Susan!" snapped the financier, putting down his glass abruptly on a table. "Susan, you don't know what you're saying." He looked drained, appalled.

"Let her talk," said Amy placidly. Reg Halley turned on her ferociously.

"You're a devil, Amy Brewster. I've half a mind to—"

"Careful, or I'll poke my cigar in your eye," said Amy unperturbed.

"Let me talk, Reg," said the girl. "Please! You'll only make things worse." She paused, looked at the fat woman with eyes that were the eyes of a forest creature which had ceased to fight.

"Amy, I must have been out of my mind when I shot at you this afternoon."

"You must have been out of your mind to miss," said the fat woman. "What did you do with the gun?"

"It's here," said Susan. She took from the table beside her a large alligator handbag, opened it and produced a thirty-two caliber revolver. "I usually keep it in my car," she explained to the stunned financier. Then, rising, she crossed to Amy, handed her the weapon. "This should be a pretty good convincer."

Amy examined it with apparent detachment, noted that two of the chambers were empty. Little granules of gunpowder showed that the gun had been fired since it had been cleaned. She let it drop to her capacious lap.

"Susan!" said Reg Halley again. "You don't know—"

"Johnny One-Note," said Amy. She settled back in the chair. "Tell us how you did the whole business."

"Not without a lawyer," said the financier. But neither the girl nor Amy paid him the slightest attention.

"When father kicked Reg and me out seven years ago, I was even angrier than he," she said. "That night, in your house, I couldn't sleep. I had to see father again and have it out with him. So I slipped out of the bedroom window and walked back across to the neck."

"Go on," said Amy pleasantly. Halley was pacing the carpet.

"Father wouldn't let me in the house, so I made him come out and talk to me. He wouldn't give either of us another chance. Said if Ollie was fool enough to get into such a mess and I was fool enough to stand by him, he wanted no part of us."

"Sounds like Orlando," Amy remarked reminiscently.

"We walked through the rain to the head of the wharf stairs," the girl went on. "I lost my temper there at some of the things he said and gave him a push. He fell over the cliff and was killed against the rocks. How I managed to conceal his body I'll never know."

AMY said, "Of course not, because you didn't do it. Susan, darling, your story is full of holes."

"Then you mean—" There was sudden hope in Reg Halley's face. He looked at the fat woman wonderingly.

"I mean," she said, "that Susan hasn't killed anybody. She only took a pot-shot at me because she thought I had found something pointing to Ollie's guilt. Susan, you always thought your father was murdered, didn't you?"

"I—I knew it," she said. "I did go over to talk to him that night, but I couldn't get up nerve to ring the doorbell. So I walked by the cliff and saw." She covered her head with her hands.

"Furthermore," said Amy, "someone else saw the same thing at the same time."

"How did you know?" the girl asked.

"Easy," said the fat woman. "Otherwise, why the murder of Viola Durant last night? She must have seen the burial of your father."

"Oh!" said Susan. "But I thought—" She bit her lip.

"Actually, you went out because Ollie got drunk as he did last night and you were afraid he'd kill your father or at least make the situation worse," said

Amy. The girl nodded and the fat woman went on. "When you heard someone else watching, you hid. And when you got home, Ollie was back in bed, his clothes wet and sandy. Right?"

"I guess so," said Susan. "I was so terrified and shocked I hardly knew what I was doing."

"And you were going to say that when Viola Durant showed up for a second slice of the Ward estate as soon as it was legally available, you knew you had to kill her too?"

"That—that's right," Susan replied. "But what's wrong with it? Why don't you believe me?"

"For plenty of reasons," said the fat woman. "But one will have to do right now. Both your father and Viola had their skulls battered in by someone strong enough to pick them up by the heels and swing them against hard rock. You lack that strength, just as you lack the strength and training to do the carpentry job that was done to bury your father—to say nothing of the tools."

"Then it must have been Ollie," said the financier. "The poor fellow must have gone through torture."

"He went through torture all right, but not exactly the sort you're describing, Reg," said a new voice from the doorway. Ollie stood there, drawn, dishevelled, but sober and with a newly determined set to his face.

"Ollie, you're free!" cried his sister, jumping up and running to embrace him.

"Thanks to Amy," said young Ward. He disengaged himself, walked into the room, poured a drink from a decanter of brandy on the bar. "She cleared me."

"Amy—darling—how?" said Susan as Reg Halley stepped forward to offer his partner congratulations.

"She did it with those studs," said Ollie. "She spotted the broken one she found on the wharf as one of his old Shreve & Crump set naturally. She'd seen them often enough in the old days. You remember, the ones you had made up again for me for Christmas the year before last, Susan."

"Of course—but you lost one," the girl said.

"I even proved that—if negatively," said Amy complacently. "The original set was made with the old, circular collar-button fastenings. But no one has made them for years, since the slide-spring fastener was invented. It was

obvious that they were from different sets. And since the stud was the only clue to the murderer on the scene."

"It seems very thin," said Reg Halley, scowling. "You must be something of a legal legerdemain artist."

"Oh, I'm that too," said Amy modestly. "But once Ollie and Amy were cleared, it wasn't so hard to find our real killer." She lifted her voice to a roar. "Folger, you can stop snooping around now. Did you find it?"

"Not yet," said the lieutenant, emerging in the doorway. "He's no doubt got rid of the other studs."

"It doesn't matter, Folger," said Amy. "With Ollie clear, Rita Manning will talk."

THE financier was on her with the speed of a tiger. He snatched the pistol from her lap before she could move to stop or even slow him, lifted it toward his own temple. But Ollie Ward sprang into action.

He hit his partner so hard that the gun flew against a picture on the wall, shattering the glass. By the time Folger reached them, young Ward had Halley tied up in a hammerlock.

"Okay, Reg," said Amy when order was restored. "Why don't you spill and save yourself a lot of trouble."

"I suppose I might as well," he said. He was sitting on the sofa with his hands securely cuffed behind him. "I couldn't stand investigation. For one thing Amy's right. Rita won't back my alibi for last night now that Ollie's clear."

"You dirty dog!" said Ollie. He looked as if he wished he had done more damage.

"Desperate men do desperate things," said Halley with a cynical smile. "The oddest part of it is that none of it need have happened. I didn't mean to kill your father, Susan. Lord knows, I've tried to make restitution since. I've helped Ollie to a new fortune and returned to you all I could of your own without arousing suspicion."

"I always suspected that noble gesture," said Amy acidly. "It seemed out of character for a man in your profession, a man as successful as you."

"I had to do it," said Halley. "After all, Susan—" He looked at the girl, who refused to meet his glance, shrugged wearily and went on.

"My original plan was to waylay Viola and lift the hundred grand off her. She had been paid in cash. I had dug up enough on her to prevent her from blackmailing anyone, including me. But it went haywire.

"Mr. Ward came out and caught me in the act. You've figured out the rest, Amy, except that Viola got away from me. She never came near me, and I had almost forgotten the whole incident. After all, I hadn't planned murder, and no one else would have been hurt.

"Oddly enough, from the moment I killed Mr. Ward, my fortunes went up. I didn't even have to pawn the studs he gave me that evening—in disgust at Ollie's behavior. Ollie and I got backing without trouble. People were sorry for him and trusted me.

"Then, the day before yesterday, Viola turned up again. I took her out there to the cliff last night, supposedly to make her prove she had something on me, and I killed her. But her body fell into the water and was washed away. I didn't have a chance to bury her."

"It was close, wasn't it, Folger?" said Amy. "If he'd got away with it a second time, and there was no reason on the face of it why he shouldn't have we'd never have caught up with him. And Susan would have—"

"Please," said the girl, her voice low.

"My hair is white at the thought of how close it was," said the lieutenant. "Anything more for now, Miss Brewster?"

Amy shook her huge head.

"Okay, Halley," said the lieutenant. "The wagon is waiting downstairs for you." He turned to the others in the room. "If I were you, I'd get out of here. There will be a million reporters here any moment."

They sat there, like statues in a tableau, while Folger led a sagging Reg Halley from the room. Then Ollie turned to his sister.

"Don't take it too hard," he said. "Think how much worse it would have been if you'd married him."

"That's what I am thinking of." She managed a wan smile. "Amy, will you take me home?"

"Sure—glad to, child," said Amy. She turned to Ollie. "And when you give the news to Rita at the *Club le Touquet*, tell them to order a triple steak for me. I haven't eaten since this morning."

COMPETITION IS TOUGH

By O. B. MYERS

*In a legitimate business, they call it the life of trade,
but in the rackets—well, that's something else again!*

AT FIRST I thought I had a bargain. It was a '42 Nash sedan, dark-gray paint job, good rubber, and the speedometer said only 28,000 miles. Of course I've been tinkering around automobiles long enough to know better than to believe a speedometer reading. I've been running this Rotol service station, just off Northern Boulevard, ever since I got out of uniform a year ago, and most of my four years in the army were spent doing third echelon

repairs on jeeps and trucks with an ordnance S. & M. company. I know that it takes more than a shiny coat of Simoniz to hold a jalopy together, and that what counts is under the hood or inside an axle casing.

So I had driven this can twice around the block, checked the differential against the brakes, run up the engine a few times, and listened for the wrong kind of noises.

The little guy who had driven it in

Spot's hand darted under his coat and came out with the stubby automatic



wore an army field jacket with no elbows left in it, and his voice sort of gurgled, as if his adenoids had been pushed out of place.

"Al Briskow sent me," he mumbled, past a cigarette. "He tole me to give yuh a figure."

The figure he mentioned was surprisingly low. Even for resale at a bargain price I could afford to do a little touch-up work on it myself and still make a couple hundred bucks. So I brought him inside, gave him a check for a hundred as deposit, and told him to come back the next morning to collect the balance.

But about an hour after he'd left business slacked off so that even the boys on the pumps weren't busy, and I took another look at that Nash. With my head under the hood I checked the accessories; starter, distributor, carburetor, filter, and fuel pump. Then I drove it over the pit and scrambled down underneath to take a look from the bottom up. Everything was there where it belonged, but I was interested in two discoveries. First, there were an awful lot of nuts and bolt heads which, though rusty and gray with age, gleamed shiny around their hex edges where a wrench had been recently applied. Second, a new paint job had been laid on top of the old—or rather, had been laid on top of *two* old ones.

I could see traces of black, here and there on the frame and chassis; yet on the under side of the body I could also see spots of light blue that hadn't been covered up by the dark gray. Obviously, a new body had been put on. But no; not a new body; a used one, and then the whole works painted over. In conjunction with the other things I'd found under the hood, that didn't smell so good.

I DIALED a number in the city, and after a minute a smooth, impersonal feminine voice murmured, "Mr. Lavant's office."

"I'm looking for Al Briskow. Is he there?"

"I'm sorry; he's not in. Who's calling, please?"

"This is Pete Bush, out in the heights."

"Mr. Bush? Hold the wire a minute, please, Mr. Bush."

I held on, propping the instrument

against my ear while I fumbled a cigarette out of the pack in my pocket. I was facing the windows, so I saw the girl coming past the pumps toward the office. She hadn't driven in; at least I saw no car. She was on foot, and she walked with a quick, lively swing as if she actually enjoyed walking. Her hair was a warm, cafe-au-lait blonde; not the kind that comes out of a bottle, and was feather-cut trimly around her small head. On it was perched a round red hat, slightly larger than a silver dollar but probably ten times as expensive, from which a single slender feather curved impudently out over one eye.

She came in, closing the door behind her. She looked at me and started to speak, but checked herself when she saw that I had the phone against my ear. By this time I had the instrument wedged on my left shoulder, a cigarette between my lips, and both hands busy with a packet of matches. The instrument started to slip; I grabbed for it, and dropped the matches. Without saying a word she dug a lighter out of her bag, flicked it, and held it toward me.

I took a long drag, and said, "Thanks."

She dropped the lighter back in her bag, and her eyes twinkled. They were blue. "You looked about as tangled up as two giraffes trying to walk under a hand-car together."

I grinned, and was about to say something else when I heard Al Briskow's voice in my ear.

"Hello! Pete Bush?"

"Yes, Al. Look; about that car you sent over here."

"What about it?" asked Al quickly. "Not a bad buy, is it?"

"That's just it. It's too good." I stopped and looked over my shoulder. The blonde was standing by the rack of special oil in quarts, carefully looking out the window. She was probably trying not to listen, but she couldn't help hearing everything I said. I finished, "I want to talk to you about it—some time."

Al caught my slight emphasis on the 'some time'.

"But not now, over the phone, huh, fella? Okay. I was just leaving, anyway. I'll be at my apartment in about fifteen minutes. You know where it is, don't you; on Linden Avenue?"

"Yes, I know. I'll be around a little later. See you then."

I cradled the telephone and turned to the girl.

"Sorry to make you wait. What can I do for you, besides a cigarette?"

"No, thanks; not right now." She held a card toward me. "Prudential Guarantee and Casualty; downtown."

I said, "Oh! Well, it happens I've got all the—"

"No, no," she interrupted me. "I'm not selling insurance. I'm following up an accident in which the company's interested. Three days ago, in the morning, a couple of cars side-swiped each other, out here on the Boulevard. One of them was pushed in here afterward; a Chevrolet coupe, black, 1940. Is it still here?"

I looked at her in surprise. "First time I've come across a woman adjuster. You do this all the time?"

"Oh, no," she told me. "I'm just helping out one of the men at the office, because this happens to be on my way home."

She flushed slightly, which made her look very young and embarrassed, but suddenly I wished she was to hell out of there. I had remembered the Nash, standing just on the other side of the partition.

"I remember the Chevvy, yes. The body was bashed in and the steering post bent; too much of a job for a simple guy like me. The owner must have phoned Acme; they sent a wrecker for it."

"Acme? Do you know their address?"

I gave it to her. "Anything else I can help you to?"

"Not unless you have vanilla. Thanks very much, Mr. Bush."

It wasn't until she was outside and half way across the street that I took a look at the card in my hand. The company's name and address was printed in the center; down in the right hand corner she had written her name in ink: Sally McInn. Then it dawned on me why she had looked familiar to me.

I washed my hands, slipped out of my coveralls and into a coat, and climbed into the ten-year-old La Salle convertible that I kept around to push cars that won't start, run errands, and for personal transportation. I cut across 28th, and after I'd gone a couple of blocks I saw that red hat and feather just ahead of me, bobbing along the sidewalk like an animated exclamation point. I braked over to the curb and flicked the door open.

"We seem to be going the same way. Give you a lift?"

SHE looked startled, then smiled. I noticed that her right eyebrow was a little shorter and arched a little higher than the left when she smiled. It was the sort of imperfection that a Hollywood make-up artist would have carefully corrected with a grease pencil before allowing her in front of a camera, but I decided that it gave an interesting slant to a piquant personality.

"Thanks, I guess not. I don't want to take you out of your way."

"I'm going straight over to Linden, if that'll help. And if you don't mind this jet-propelled wheelbarrow."

She gave me a quick look as she climbed in. "How did you guess I lived on Linden?"

"I didn't guess. That happens to be where I'm headed. But you don't mean to say you were going to walk all that way, on your feet?"

"Well, I wasn't walking on my head."

I pretended to gape. "Where do you get all that energy?"

"I'm atomic. When vitamins get tired, they take me." Her tone altered. "I get sick of sitting around that dry, stuffy old office all day. And I really do like to walk."

"Explanation accepted, and filed for future reference. How do you like walking to music, commonly known as dancing?"

"If I said I hated it, I could be arrested for lying."

I pulled up on a red light; remembering the name on the card, I took a shot at random. "How's George?" I asked.

"George?" I could see her face in the rear-vision mirror; for a moment she was puzzled. "Oh, you mean Grace's George! They're living in St. Louis now. Did you know him?"

"He was in Woodrow High, the same time I was."

"Then you knew Grace, too?" She looked at me out of the corners of her eyes, slightly amused. "You had me mixed up with Grace, didn't you, for a minute?"

I could feel the red behind my ears. "Well, I never knew her very well; just in school. And I didn't remember that she had a kid sister—not one who looked like you, anyway."

As in the outlying sections of any big

city, there are still a few families in the Heights whose younger members were born and raised there, like me. These old-timers usually know each other, but not always, and having been away for four years during the war I had rather lost track.

By the time I pulled up in the middle of the eight hundred block on Linden, we had dug up a handful of mutual friends, and I was about to veer the conversation around to a date some night, when I saw Al Briskow swinging down from the corner with that long, loose gait of his.

He came right over to the car when he saw us; I prepared to introduce him to Sally, and I guess she was getting ready to introduce him to me, only it all turned out to be unnecessary.

"Hi, Pete!" he greeted me. "How'd you manage to glom my gal?"

"Oh—you two know each other!" exclaimed Sally, with what I thought for an instant was an odd note of surprise in her voice.

"Why, we're war buddies!" cracked Al, leaning in the open door. "This mug saved my life in Belgium, didn't he tell you?"

"Well, not in the first ten minutes, no," replied Sally.

I snorted, but as usual couldn't think of anything to say. I hadn't saved Al's life, really; it was just one of those things anyone might have done. I'd been out on the taxi strip trying to get a jeep to start when this B-26 came in for an emergency landing. Half-way down the runway a tire blew, the big ship dropped a wing-tip, slewed drunkenly, and plowed through a hundred yards of mud before stopping in a heap.

Naturally I ran over and lent a hand while the crew climbed out through the only hatch that wasn't jammed. It was at least five minutes after we were all clear before enough gas from a burst wing-tank trickled over a hot engine to start a fire, and the whole heap went up in flames.

Al was a gunner in that ship; his arm was broken, and he was a little goofy from being shaken up, so that he needed perhaps more help than the others. Maybe his goofiness explained why he always built the story up so much afterward, although he, along with the others, would have climbed out just the same whether I had been around or not. He

always beefed because I didn't get a medal.

"Listen, Al," I interrupted, when he started beefing to Sally, "I'll give you a medal if you'll lay off that yarn from now on."

"Our modest hero," he grinned. Then he glanced at his wrist watch and spoke to Sally. "Look, if you can be ready by six, we'll have time for cocktails at the Tavarin before we meet Spot for dinner. How about it?"

She scrambled out of the car. "My social obligations never leave me a dull moment, do they? All right, Al—but give me till five after six, will you? I have to change everything but my face."

"I don't like that word obligations, but I'll let it pass if you're not late. Five after, then; I'll ring your bell."

"Good-by, Mr. Bush!" she told me from the middle of the sidewalk. "And thanks a lot for the ride home!"

"The name is Pete!" I called after her. "I'll be seein' you!"

THOUGHT that Al gave me a sharp look as he climbed in beside me; he only said, "My apartment is in the house on the corner." But then as I tooled the La Salle slowly down the street, he asked flatly, "How did you happen to be driving Sally home?"

I told him. He watched me, nodding thoughtfully, and then asked, "She didn't have anything to say about that Nash, did she?"

"No, she didn't. But I do." I braked to a stop near the corner and switched off the engine. "I don't want any part of it."

"Why, what's the matter, Pete?"

"It's a hot job, that's the matter. It's been covered up so you wouldn't notice it, but I can see through that racket. The body's been switched, all the fenders replaced; there are parts from three or four different cars under the hood. It's got wire wheels where that model originally had disc, the cushions don't quite match, and the steering wheel is new, but not the post. There's a nice fresh coat of paint on top, but I can smell stolen car from around the block."

Al lit a cigarette. "What are you worryin' about, Pete? Maybe it was in a wreck. You can tell the buyer that, anyway; they aren't too curious these days. And the papers are all in order, aren't they?"

"Phony papers are a dime a dozen," I retorted.

"When did the price go up?" murmured Al. "Look, fella, I was only trying to give you a break, because—well, because I owe you one. I spoke to Spot; that's how you got an inside figure. And you can easy get two or three C's for your own pocket out of that job."

"Sweetening my pocket is one thing, but handling hot heaps is something else again. I'm not in the used car business; it's only a sideline with me, when a bargain happens to fall my way. But I'm not going to get mixed up with the law."

"You're crazy, Pete. Why fiddle around with pennies, when you can cut yourself in for big dough? Look at Spot Lavant. When you and I came out of the Army a year ago all he had to his name was a kit of tools. Now he owns two garages, a showroom, and has a piece of a night-club. He's a smart business man, that's what. And a damned good friend for you or me to know."

"He's a smart fence, you mean," I growled. "I know his racket, and I'm leaving it alone. How long do you suppose he's going to keep on owning all that stuff?"

"What do you mean? It's all paid for—cash!"

"Listen, Al. In a regular business, when competition is tough, you beat out a guy who stands in your way by legitimate business methods, if you can. If you can't—well, then he makes more profit than you do, that's all. But in the rackets it's different. Competition isn't the life of trade; it's death. The big shot who's cleaning up lasts only until his rival puts a slug in him. It's like fighting a war in peace time, and I've had enough of war." I leaned across and slapped the hard bulge under Al's armpit.

"I thought so."

Al chuckled. "You're not afraid, are you, Pete?"

"Sure I'm afraid, if you want to know. I've got enough troubles without worrying about holes in my skin. You and Spot Levant go ahead; work your racket. I hope you get rich. But deal me out. You can send around and take that Nash back any time."

Al made one last try. "Don't be foolish, Pete. That job is clean as a whistle; go ahead and sell it, and make yourself a profit."

"Listen," I told him bluntly. "I'm getting rid of that Nash tomorrow morning—either to you or to the police. How about it?"

He stared at me angrily for a minute, then shrugged. "All right, Pete. Have it your way. But I still think you're crazy."

I could see that he did, too. He was really trying to do me a favor, as one friend to another. But I've found out, in my short but hectic experience that friends are sometimes more dangerous than enemies. What they intend as a favor sometimes turns out worse than a knife in the back. You're better off dealing in a small, clean way with complete strangers. At least you know right where you stand, and the devil take the dumbest. And you don't lose any friends.

"We're still friends, eh, Pete?" Al was saying.

"Sure, we're friends," I assured him. "Any time you've got a good, clean buy, with no thievery behind it, I'll put in a bid, just like anybody else. But don't ask me to push any hot ones for you."

It was funny, after that lecture I'd read him, but I could detect in Al's eye a gleam of something very much like respect.

"Come in and have a drink while I'm dressing?" he asked.

"No, thanks. You've got a date; I'll run along."

The sleazy little bird with the gurgling voice came around the next morning with my deposit check, and drove the Nash away, and I breathed a sigh of relief when it was out of sight.

The next evening I looked up McInn in the phone book and gave Sally a ring. I had to do a little arguing, but finally got a date for Tuesday, and spent the evening on the Royal Roof. She'd meant what she said about dancing, and she knew her stuff. Nothing fancy or stagey, you understand; but from the way she closed her eyes and didn't talk you could tell that the music just got right inside and did things to her. We had a lot of fun.

After that I saw her once or twice a week, but I was getting stiff competition from Al Briskow, it seemed. He had a lot more money to spend than I did; while I took her to the neighborhood movie or a juke joint, he was giving her a real rush around the hot spots. Yet she spoke of him very casually, when his

name came into our conversation. I couldn't quite figure out the set-up.

I hadn't quite forgotten that she was with a casualty company that wrote theft insurance on automobiles, and I wondered if she might be one of Al's business connections that he used to further his career. Somehow she didn't look like it to me. Maybe she was just a good-time girl to Al; somebody to spend his money on and parade around in front of his sleek crowd.

She was certainly good-looking enough for that part, but still it didn't quite seem to fit her. Of course Al might actually be going overboard for her in a big way. I could understand that, but I could also see what it would lead to. A couple times I had an impulse to warn her, but how can you warn a girl against a guy who calls himself your best friend?

IT MUST have been a month later when this young fellow drove into the station in the light blue Chrysler convertible. He didn't say anything about why he stopped at my place, but asked what I thought he could sell his car for. I looked it over carefully. It was in beautiful shape; paint, rubber, body, everything. It was only about four years old, and looked two; the 22,000 on the speedometer was probably the truth. It was a sporty job; black wheels, pale blue body, black top and lots of highly polished brightwork. A little sporty for the average citizen, but the kind of eye-catcher that would sell for big money to the right type of buyer.

"What do you think you ought to get for it?" I asked him.

He named a figure; twelve hundred dollars. I was surprised because it was so reasonable, but I kept my face straight.

"Maybe you ought to. But will you?"

He laughed. "That's what I'm asking you."

We haggled around for several minutes. He didn't seem inclined to come down, and I was really only haggling for exercise.

Finally I told him, "It's a fairly high figure. The car might bring that, and it might not. But it's a lot of capital for me to invest on a chance. If you want to leave it, I'll see what I can do."

Rather to my surprise he agreed. "Okay, I'll leave it. On consignment, so to speak. Sell it for twelve hundred, and

and I'll give you fifty bucks. But if you get more, I get twelve hundred, and the rest is yours."

"Fair enough. You got the papers with you?"

He dug the bill of sale and license papers out of his wallet and gave them to me, signed in blank.

"You must think I'm an honest man," I remarked.

"You seem to have that reputation," he nodded. "I'll stop in after a day or so to see what luck you've had."

From the price he was asking, the way he handled the deal, I wasn't suspicious: why should I be? But just to make sure I checked the numbers on the papers and even made a telephone call to the Motor Vehicle Bureau in town. Everything was clean. I nosed around under the hood and then drove the Chrysler twice around the block. She purred as smooth as melted butter, and was as tight as a walnut. I parked it out in front of the pumps, hung my little "For Sale" sign on the radiator grille and sat back to wait.

I didn't have long to wait. Two kids who obviously didn't have the price of a twelve-year old Model A between them drooled over it for half an hour before I shooed them away. Then along about the middle of the afternoon a taxi stopped on the other side of the street and a man got out and walked over.

He was middle-aged and well dressed, with the look of the successful business executive about him. Gray Homburg hat, topcoat tightly buttoned, pigskin gloves, and highly polished tan shoes. A little under middle height, he walked with a faint swagger as short men often do, keeping the fingers of one hand tucked in his overcoat pocket. He stopped at the edge of the sidewalk, looking at the Chrysler.

I was finishing up a distributor adjustment on an Olds so I let him look for a couple of minutes while I snapped on the cover and lowered the hood. Then I strolled over unhurriedly.

"Nice looking job, isn't it?" I commented.

He looked at me for just a moment, then back at the car. Beneath straight dark brown brows he had keen brown eyes; his face was smooth, pale, and cut in well-defined angles, the kind of a face that women consider "interesting." When he spoke it was with the clipped,

direct manner of a man whose emotions are not very near the surface, who keeps his private thoughts deep inside, well armored.

"How much could you sell it for?" he asked.

"I could sell it for fifteen hundred. But why should I?"

He smiled faintly. "Let's drive it around the block."

HE DROVE himself, his gloved hands gentle but sure on the wheel. I hardly spoke; I let the car sell itself. He didn't look like the sort to be high-pressured. He asked a few questions; I could see in his manner, as he came back and climbed out, that he liked the job. In the office, he asked about the papers. I pointed to where they lay on the corner of the desk.

"I'll buy that car," he announced flatly.

"Well, mister, I'm not stopping you. Fifteen hundred, right?"

He didn't reply immediately. His eyes slid around the room. I could see that the price was in line. After all, it was a fair enough figure, if a man wanted that type of car. But he was a fellow whose bargaining instincts were very strong; it went against his grain to buy without getting a concession of some kind. He simply had to haggle something off the figure, or else—

"Does it have fog lamps?" he asked.

That Chrysler was loaded with practically all the accessories, necessary or unnecessary, that a dealer could find room for on it, but it didn't have a fog lamp. I saw where his glance had stopped, on the rack behind the desk, so I took down the yellow-lensed fog lamp and put it on a chair.

"All right; you twisted my arm. Fifteen hundred cash, and I'll throw in the fog lamp."

"It's a deal," he said quietly, and reached for his checkbook.

I was happy enough to cut the wholesale cost of a fog lamp out of a three-hundred dollar quick profit. I picked up the check that he pushed across the desk and looked at it.

"Well, thanks very much, Mr. Lavant," I said. "I hope—Lavant!" I repeated suddenly catching the name on the bottom of the check. "But you—aren't you in the—er, business yourself?" I caught myself; I almost said racket, instead of business.

His smile was as thin as cellophane. "In a small way, yes. But for my personal use, I buy wherever it pleases me."

He went out and slid under the wheel, and had already started the motor when I came running after him.

"You bought this; you might as well take it."

It just went to prove that the fog lamp was nothing but a bargaining gesture to him; he had completely forgotten it.

"Thanks," he told me with a one-sided smile. "I might want to find my way back here in a fog." He dropped it carelessly on the floor at his feet and drove off.

That was close to four o'clock; it was about two hours later when Al Briskow walked in.

"Hello, Pete! How's business?"

"I'm still a jump ahead of the sheriff—thanks to you."

There was a strange, steely glitter in his eye as he looked at me. "How do you mean, thanks to me?"

I told him about the deal I'd made on the blue Chrysler. "I'm not such a dope as to imagine that Spot Lavant just stops in any old service station and buys himself an automobile, without some reason. He must have been tipped off—and I repeat; thanks."

Al gestured nervously. "Maybe he was. What do you care? It was a good, clean deal; that's what you wanted, wasn't it?"

"I'm not complaining," I told him. I was half-expecting Al to pull something about a split on the profits, but he didn't mention money at all.

"How was the buggy? In pretty good shape, wasn't it?"

"Well, it wasn't here more than three hours, and I didn't disassemble it. I couldn't see anything much the matter, though."

"Yeah, that's right." Al crushed out one cigarette and lighted another. "Sounded like the kind of a job Spot would fall for. Flashy and fast. Make a big impression on people."

I chuckled wryly. "He's making an impression with it already."

Al's eyes narrowed sharply. "What do you mean?"

"I saw him go by in it about half an hour ago. And he had a passenger alongside of him that I'd like to impress myself."

Al grabbed me by the arm, and I could feel his fingers biting into the muscle.

"Who? Who was with him?"

"Our friend, Sally. You know; Sally McInn."

THE effect of that name on him was astonishing. His grip relaxed, and he slumped as all the strength had drained from his limbs. He almost staggered, and his face was green.

"No, she can't!" he croaked. "She can't do that!"

"What the hell's the matter with you?" I demanded. "She's free, white, and twenty-one, isn't she? I'm not crazy about seeing her with Spot Levant, either, but we can't stop her."

"We've got to stop her!" cried Al. "He'll kill her."

A cold lump suddenly hardened in the pit of my stomach. "What do you mean, he'll kill her?"

"The Chrysler!" he moaned. "It's got a bad steering knuckle on it, that we took out of a wreck. It's all right at low speed, but at high speed it'll lock. Spot's a fast driver."

I shook him by the shoulders. "You mean, you wanted to get Spot out of your way by what would look like an accident, so you tipped him off to a good, clean buy through a dealer he knew was honest—only it's a car that you'd doctored up in Spot's own shops!"

"No, no; in a little shop I run myself, on the North Side. But Sally—I never thought—which way did they go?"

"Out Northern Boulevard. Come along!"

We piled into the La Salle and I wheeled out into the broad avenue with the accelerator on the floor. We were both thinking the same thing. After leaving the fringes of the city the boulevard becomes fifty miles of beautiful, four-lane concrete. With a new car under him and a girl alongside of him, it was the perfect spot for a fast driver to feel his oats. And Sally was not one to be frightened by sheer speed.

Al's face was white and rigid; he muttered curses through clenched teeth, and kept slipping his hand under his lapel to feel of the gun parked in his shoulder holster.

"What are you going to tell him if we catch them?" I asked.

He moved his hand under his coat again. "I'll take care of that—and it won't be an accident, either."

I hoped to hell, under my breath, that

this was the last time Al ever tried to do me a favor as a friend, and slowed down as we passed a roadhouse. There were quite a few inns, bars and restaurants on this route, while it was a little early for dinner, they might have stopped for a drink. If we could spot that blue Chrysler in a parking lot, this thing might still be worked out, I thought, without any bloodshed; without any harm to Sally, anyway. About the other two, I didn't care.

We were about fifty miles out when we came to the Blue Pigeon. A smallish place, but discreet and rather classy, with an unobtrusive neon sign and parking space out in front. I had slowed to about forty when Al yelled, "There is it!" I caught a flash of light blue body through the deepening dusk as I slammed on the brakes. Tires squealed, and the La Salle careened into the drive at the far end.

But even before I was inside the gate I saw that the Chrysler was on its way out by the center gate. They had had a drink and were leaving. I started to back out but another car had pulled in off the road directly behind me, blocking the opening. I shifted gears, shot ahead, and made a full circle, scattering gravel. But the other car still blocked the gate; he had stalled his engine, and it would not start. Cursing between my teeth, I swerved down toward the center gate, but by the time I was out on the highway the Chrysler was a blur, vanishing around the next curve toward the open country.

I flicked on my lights and tramped on the accelerator. I kept the La Salle tuned up pretty well; she could really step. The needle climbed past 50, past 60, past 70. At first I closed the gap, but then Spot must have seen me in the mirror. Whether he took me for a cop or not I couldn't tell, but Spot was not the man to let anyone overhaul him. The Chrysler stepped out. I was doing 80, but the gap wasn't closing. In fact it was increasing. That Chrysler had plenty of oomph under the hood.

An eighth of a mile separated us as we roared along a long, flat stretch. At the end of the stretch the concrete curved gently left and up to cross a bridge over a small stream. Beyond the bridge I knew it swung right again, to parallel the creek.

I saw the Chrysler rise to the bridge like a bird. Then for a moment it disap-

peared over the hump. The La Salle swooped upward, and I let up on my right foot. Ahead of me the Chrysler, never slackening, had wheeled into the second curve, and never came out of it. The front wheels locked, and instead of snapping out straight into the stretch kept on bearing off to the right.

It took the shoulder with hardly a quiver. Beyond was a field, fairly smooth at first, then dipping toward a rocky gully. The blue car lurched and leaped, and threw a fan of dirt like the forefoot of a destroyer. Then at the lip of the gully, still locked in a curve, it hit a boulder. It rose in a bound that carried it fifty feet or more, turning lazily over and over in mid-air. Something shot through the fabric top as if fired from a gun. The car struck the ground again, cart-wheeled three or four times, and stopped in a jangle of shapeless metal.

"Oh, my God!" groaned Al hoarsely. I braked the La Salle down, turned off, and cut back across the field at an angle. Before I stopped near the wreck, Al had the door open and was running toward it. But I ran in a different direction. I had noticed that huddled form catapulted through the top. It wouldn't be the driver, I figured; the steering wheel would hold the driver in. I was right.

The creek was lined with willows, and willows grow a multitude of fine, slender branches. They had cushioned Sally's rushing fall like a hundred delicate springs. She was wriggling and reaching for the ground with her toes by the time I reached her.

"Take it easy," I told her. "Here, let me get your arm."

She stood upright for a moment, then swayed, clutching me. I eased her down until she was sitting on the grass.

"Are you all right? Is anything broken?"

"Everything moves," she said huskily. "I—I guess I'm all right. Oh, Pete—I should have known better!"

"Never mind that now," I told her. Her hair was crumpled, her arms scratched, and her clothing torn, but she was in one piece. I was so glad to see her stand up that I was a little goofy myself, I guess. She was peering toward the smashed Chrysler.

"He—Mr. Lavant—is he hurt?"

"I don't know. I'll go see. You just sit quiet, honey."

It was nearly dark now, but I could

see Al standing by what had been the front seat. Spot Lavant lay twisted grotesquely, his legs pinned out of sight somewhere, his shoulders on the scarred turf. I got a start when I saw what had been driven deep into his chest by some freak of the crash—the cheap fog lamp that had clinched his decision to buy the Chrysler.

He writhed a little, and his eyes opened. They say that a dying man sees all of his past life in a flash. I wouldn't know about that, but perhaps it is true that he is given a moment's clearer insight than he ever had before. Spot stared up at Al Briskow, and in spite of that hole in his chest, his voice was hard and clear.

"So you got me, Al. You rat!"

Al seemed half petrified by the visible consequences of his perfidy. "Shut up, Spot," he murmured. "You don't know what you're saying."

It was plain to me that Spot was dying, but with some idea of making him more comfortable I stepped nearer. Spot moved at the same instant. It was amazing, in his condition, how quickly his hand darted under his coat and came out with the stubby automatic.

"But you're going with me!" he snarled and put the last of his conscious strength into squeezing the trigger.

There wasn't time to move a finger. Al had always given me credit for once saving his life; but now, when presented with a real opportunity, I could do nothing. The automatic yapped three times, like a nasty little lap dog, and then slid from Spot's nerveless fingers. Al crumbled on his face, holding his stomach and groaning.

Sally came wobbling across the grass, trying to run. "What is it? What was that?" she cried.

"Never mind it," I told her, meeting her half way and picking her up in my arms. "You're going home, and stay there."

"Oh, Pete, I'm frightened!" she sobbed as I slid her body gently into the seat of the La Salle. "I wish I'd never gone out with Mr. Lavant at all!"

"It would have saved you grief," I admitted gravely.

"But I wanted to help. They said at the office that perhaps I could find out something about how he operated his racket."

(Concluded on page 109)

**A
Complete
Novelet**



As Langan stood there, gazing down at the body, his gaze suddenly centered upon the knife.



TWICE MURDERED

By NORMAN A. DANIELS

When Larry Langan and his wife Ruth each confess to murder to shield the other, and the police believe her story, it's up to Larry to find the killer—with only a hunch to go on!

CHAPTER I

Two Confessions

LARRY LANGAN still felt odd wearing civilian clothes and keeping civilian hours, but then, he'd been a second lieutenant with service that ran from pre-war clear through Africa, Salerno, Normandie, the Bulge and finally the Philippines.

He was almost thirty, lean, bronzed and built hard. He was also worried. Ruth wasn't home and she'd never failed to be there before. Ruth was the girl

he'd married when he was home on a furlough and the war had been about half over, the girl who sustained him through all the rest of it and made the going a trifle easier.

As he entered, Larry had left the door of his five-room bungalow open. Now he closed it slowly, certain that Ruth couldn't be in the house, wondering—and hating himself for it—if Frank Geary had made her work late.

Frank Geary, her employer, ran a successful brokerage business in partnership with some vague character named

Ned Whipple. Langan didn't know Whipple, had never seen him, but he did know Geary and he didn't like him.

"Frank thinks he is in love with me, Larry," Ruth had said quite often. "We did have a sort of tentative agreement that we'd get married some day. Then you came along. But Frank is getting over it and he is wonderful to work for. Besides, we need the money."

So Larry had agreed she should keep her job. Twice she almost quit but refused to say very much about what had happened. Each time Geary had phoned, apologetically, and she'd gone back. But he'd never kept her at the office after ten o'clock before.

Langan crushed out the cigarette from which he'd taken only one mighty puff. He walked to the telephone and dialed Ruth's office. A woman with a husky voice and an accent answered.

"No," she said, "Mrs. Langan she left here a hour ago. I think she went to her boss' house with some papers. . . Yes, anyway an hour ago, maybe longer. . . I'm the clean-up woman. I was working in the office when Mr. Geary telephoned and she went right away."

Langan muttered his thanks, hung up and stood there, staring blankly at the wall. It wasn't that he did not trust Ruth, for he did, implicitly, but he did not trust Frank Geary. The man was a drinker for one thing, a hot-headed fool for another. On impulse Langan dialed Geary's home.

He heard the phone ringing and he waited until it buzzed at least a dozen times. Then he hung up again. There should have been an answer. If Ruth had gone to Geary's suburban home, he ought to be there. Unless he was now engaged in driving her home, which Langan doubted.

BUT Langan couldn't just stand there and wait. He was too worried for that, so he locked up the house, hurried around to the back and got out the old car which Ruth had owned before the war. Langan didn't know whether to be sore at Geary or worried, but a slow, burning rage was mounting in his heart.

Geary could have sent someone for those papers and not asked Ruth to bring them down. Or, if he was in such an almighty rush, why didn't he go to the office himself? Langan got sorer and sorer.

He turned the corner of the residential street and saw Geary's house at the far end of it. There were plenty of lights burning. Why hadn't he answered the phone? Langan forced himself to be calm. Perhaps his notion had been correct, about Geary driving Ruth home. Perhaps the man had gotten back to the house faster than Langan had reached it. Such things were possible. But Langan didn't intend to handle Geary with any silk gloves. He'd made up his mind that Ruth was through at the office. Langan knew he couldn't endure another episode such as this one.

He parked the car, got out and walked slowly toward the porch. He felt the same old sensations he had experienced a score of times when he'd led his men on an advance toward some battered town and wondered what he'd find there. He rang the bell, heard it peal somewhere in the house, and waited impatiently.

Nobody came. There were no footsteps. Nothing stirred. The quiet seemed almost ominous to him. Langan wetted his lips, curled fingers around the doorknob and turned it. The door wasn't locked. He stepped into a reception hall and saw the living room to his left. It was splendidly furnished. He called Geary's name and his voice echoed back. There was something disquieting in the air here and Langan didn't like it. He could feel prickles of apprehension crawling up the nape of his neck.

He stepped into the living room. Instantly he knew that there'd been a battle. At the far corner was a large desk of dark wood. The things on top of it had been either tipped over or knocked to the floor. One window drape, behind the desk, had been half ripped off its rod. A chair was overturned.

Langan felt like screaming Ruth's name. He was no longer worried about Geary. Where was Ruth? Something must have happened to her. Then his eyes riveted on a shoe that protruded from the edge of the desk. A shoe that seemed to be standing on its heel.

Langan took a quick breath, approached warily and exhaled with the same sort of sound that opening a bottle of pop creates. He didn't have to wonder about Frank Geary any more. Geary was lying on the floor, on his back, and seemed to be carefully scrutinizing the ceiling with eyes which didn't see anything. Langan knew that because there

was a knife driven into his chest as far as it would go.

Furthermore the knife looked familiar. Langan wasn't afraid of death. He'd seen it in about all the violent forms man can create to destroy his fellow man. Without a trace of repugnance, he knelt beside the corpse, his gaze centered upon the knife. He recognized it.

That knife had come from Tokyo. Langan had obtained it there. It was made of bone and sharp as a razor. He'd sent it to Ruth to be used as a letter opener and he knew she'd kept it on her desk. Cold horror gripped him. He sped to the telephone and dialed his home. There was no answer.

He returned to the body. It was warm. Geary hadn't been dead very long. Ruth must have killed him, while resisting Geary perhaps, but murder was murder. Langan became surer of this fact a second later when he spotted her purse lying on a chair. It was big enough so that she could have kept the knife in it—and the bag was open.

Langan knew there were certain things he must do then. First of all he carefully wiped off the handle of the knife, noticing as he did so, that Geary had been stabbed twice, almost in the same place. Both wounds must have penetrated his heart.

The knife handle clean, Langan wrapped his own fingers around it, just as if he'd held it for the murderous thrust. Next he wiped the surfaces of everything he could find so that no trace of Ruth's fingerprints would be found, but plenty of his own would be there, smeared carelessly about.

THIS done, he bent over the corpse again and lifted the dead man's hand. It was rigid, with fingers curled halfway into a fist and talon-like. Langan bent his head and deliberately scratched his face with these fingernails, hard enough to make his face bleed and have some of his skin caught beneath the dead man's nails.

Finally Langan searched the desk, found a large envelope and some tissue paper. He wrapped the purse in the paper, thrust it into the envelope and addressed the package to Ruth at the house. There were stamps, plenty of them and he pasted a dozen of large denomination quite lavishly on the envelope.

Then he put out the lights, left the house and returned to his car. He stopped at the nearest mail box to get rid of Ruth's purse and he tried to phone her again from a drug store on the corner. He didn't reach her. Langan smoked a cigarette before he drove to Police Headquarters and he smoked another while parked directly in front of it.

Finally he marched inside and asked to see the man in charge of the Homicide Division. He was escorted to an office, the door of which was marked **LIEUTENANT MATTHEW SULLIVAN**. Langan took a long breath, opened the door and went in.

Sullivan was a big man, gray but young and agile in build. He had eyes popularly known as iceberg blue, and a mobile mouth with lips that could smile as readily as they could become set and forbidding.

"What can I do for you?" Sullivan glanced at Langan with mild interest.

Langan sat down. "I—I just killed a man," he said.

Sullivan's eyebrows raised slightly. "So?"

"His name is—was—Frank Geary. My wife worked for him. Once my wife thought she might marry him. Before she met me, of course. Geary always was a heel. One of those guys who thinks he's especially selected to thrill the girls. He made my wife work overtime tonight. I went after her. She wasn't at his house."

"She worked at his house?" Sullivan acted as if this were just a pleasant little conversation between drinks.

"No. He phoned the office and asked her to bring out some papers. She did and—well the usual thing happened. When I got there, Geary taunted me. He had been drinking, I think. I grabbed him and he tried to claw me. Guess he did by the way my face feels."

"And looks," Sullivan said with the greatest complacency. "Go ahead."

"I had gone to my wife's office to pick her up. I'd sent her a knife made of bone. Got it in Japan. I took the knife. I guess I sensed what was going to happen. When Geary fought me, my mind—"

"Went blank," Sullivan agreed. "Of course it did. Minds always go blank under those conditions. So you stabbed him? He's dead?"

"Yes," Langan said miserably. "My wife doesn't know anything about it."

I'm ready to face the consequences, but if anyone ever needed killing it was Frank Geary."

"I expect he did," Sullivan said. "Well, thanks for dropping in. Come again, any time."

Langan blinked. "But you don't understand. I murdered a man."

Sullivan arose and put a friendly hand on Langan's shoulder. "Son, what you are trying to do is noble, and I respect you for it, but you didn't kill Frank Geary. The only mystery about the whole thing is how you ever got away from the house before my boys got there. You must have passed one another. The person who killed Geary is under arrest."

Langan felt his world spin madly. "Then—then it's—?"

"Your wife." Sullivan nodded kindly. "She came directly here after she killed Langan. Right now she is dictating her confession to the D.A.'s secretary."

Langan slumped. "Too late," he muttered. "I should have known! Lieutenant, let me see her. Please."

"Not now. Come back in a couple of hours, son. And listen, don't worry too much. Your wife is a mighty nice girl. She killed a man, but she had her reasons for doing it."

"What will happen?"

Sullivan shrugged. "She'll probably be indicted for manslaughter. Maybe a year or two in prison. Nothing much. . . ."

"A year or two in prison?" Langan howled. "Nothing much? Lieutenant!"

Sullivan led him toward the door. "Keep your head, son. I'll help all I can. As soon as she is free, I'll let you see her. Take a walk now. Cool off."

Langan nodded miserably and stumbled out of the office.

CHAPTER II

Offer of Help



LONG the corridor to the main office, Langan saw a tall, slim man leaning lazily against the wall. He stepped in front of Langan.

"I'm Pete Devaney," he said. "A reporter."

"Go to the devil," Langan said morosely.

Devaney grabbed his arm. "Listen, you stoop. I was outside

Sullivan's door when you made that phony confession. I know what the whole thing is about and I can help you. Sullivan can't. The D.A. can't. A jury won't be able to nor the judge. But I can."

Langan looked up. "Just how?"

"It's a cinch," Devaney said. "Judges and juries read newspapers. They're swayed by them, whether they know it or not, and they react as the general public does. Newspaper stories, properly handled, can bring out the mighty potent facts-behind-the-scene of this killing. I can create sympathy, make your wife shine with virtue and turn the dead man into a high class rotter. I'm not kidding, friend. It's been done often and, in this case, I think it's justified."

Langan nodded. He knew the power of feature yarns. Devaney was right and he could be a valuable ally.

"What can I do to help?" he asked.

"Give me an exclusive interview. At your house, if possible. Let me get all the homey touches I can. You know what I mean."

"They won't let me see Ruth now," Langan said. "My car is outside. We'll go to my house if you like."

"Swell," Devaney said. "Walk out alone. The other boys don't know why you came here. If they see us together, they'll smell a rat. I'll join you in the car."

Twenty minutes later they were both seated in Langan's tiny living room and silently raising their glasses in an unspoken toast to Ruth. Devaney got out a folded sheaf of copy paper and looked around. He began taking notes. He asked a hundred questions and by their tenor, Langan knew just how effective Devaney would make his stories.

An hour went by. Devaney was putting away his notes, when the doorbell rang. For one precious instant, Langan thought maybe they'd let Ruth go, but that hope vanished even faster than it arose. It simply wasn't possible.

The man on the porch was fifty or more, rather big all around and wearing a gray suit with a vest edged in black ribbon. A pair of glasses on a silk cord dangled around his neck. He had a wide smile and a hearty voice.

"You are Lawrence Langan." He offered his hand. "Sutton is my name. Attorney Will Sutton. I came here to offer my services. Gratis. I fought in the last

war. I know how tough things can get for vets and helping the men who fought this war has become my way of saying 'Thank you.' I heard about your wife's arrest."

"Come in," Langan said. "I didn't think about retaining a lawyer. My mind is still confused."

Langan introduced the two men. "Looks as if I've got a pair of good friends at any rate. Devaney intends to write sympathetic stories to help my wife," he explained to Sutton.

"An excellent idea," Attorney Sutton said. "Things like that always help. Now suppose you give me all the facts, eh?"

Devaney arose. "Sorry I can't stay, but I want this to make the deadline, Larry. You understand."

As he talked, Devaney linked his arm under Langan's and moved him to the front door. There he dropped his voice.

"Sutton is big stuff, one of the best criminal lawyers in the business, but I don't get it. I heard what he said about helping veterans. But he never helped a vet before. He simply isn't the type. There may be more to this than you realize, Larry. Watch your step."

Langan didn't say anything. He closed the door after Devaney had gone and returned to sit near Attorney Sutton. For a half hour Langan gave the attorney all the facts he knew.

Sutton clucked his tongue. "Foolish of you, son, to mess up the evidence that way. Oh, I know you were trying to take the blame for your wife. Lost your head a bit too. They could arrest you for doing what you did, remember."

LANGAN laughed harshly. "Let them. At least I'd be near Ruth."

"You'll see her soon," Sutton said. "I'll arrange that. Of course there won't be any bail. Also the District Attorney is an odd chap. He may prosecute for murder. He's smart enough not to ask the extreme penalty, hoping that the jury will bring in a second degree verdict. Hang it, man, we've got to make it manslaughter! I've work to do. Lots of it. And you are not to worry. Is that understood?"

"I'll do my best," Langan said. "Thanks, anyway. I know you and Devaney are doing all you can for Ruth and me. I appreciate it. It's times like these when a man needs friends."

Sutton shook hands and walked to the

curb where a big, shiny car was waiting. Langan watched him with growing suspicion. How had the man heard about the case in such a short space of time? Had Lieutenant Sullivan notified him? And why had he come to the house to see a client who wasn't apt to pay much of a fee, when he could have asked the client to call at his office? Why the rush?

Langan went to the phone and called Lieutenant Sullivan. He wanted to find out if he could see Ruth anyway.

"Do the girl a favor, Larry," Sullivan said. "Stay away from her tonight. The doctor gave her a sedative. She knows you're working for her, but what she needs even more than you, is some rest."

"You're a good fellow, Lieutenant," Langan said. "Incidentally, Attorney Will Sutton is taking her case."

Sullivan whistled. "Say, how do you intend to pay his fee? That guy charges in the thousands, cash in advance."

"You didn't send him to me then?"

"Me? Personally, Larry, I hate the guy, though he's a crackerjack lawyer. He'll probably do more for your wife than anyone else, but—I don't trust him. No reason why you shouldn't use him, though. And don't worry about Ruth. Look me up tomorrow and I'll arrange it so you can see her in my office, and alone."

"How did the District Attorney act?" Langan asked. "Sutton was a bit afraid of him."

Sullivan cleared his throat, but his voice was still husky when he spoke. "The D.A. is a funny sort of guy, Larry. He claims murder is always unjustifiable and manslaughter should be strictly confined to things like deaths with an automobile. Also he demanded that you be pinched for messing up the evidence. I talked him out of that. Or stalled him anyhow. And you sure messed it up!"

Langan didn't feel too good when he hung up. He sat down, put out the lights and tried to do some heavy thinking in the darkness. He had to be fair about this case. He needed Sutton's help. But the man had actually forced himself into this case. Perhaps his motives were as honorable as he proclaimed them to be, but if they weren't—then he possessed some sinister reasons for coming into the case.

Langan scowled there in the darkness. He tried not to think of Ruth too much.

She'd be well cared for and Sullivan must have told her he was working for her. Langan thought that it was good he hadn't been permitted to see Ruth. He might have gone to pieces. As it was now, he found himself able to think quite clearly.

There was one dominating idea in his mind and he couldn't drive it out. Ruth's confession of guilt didn't make the slightest difference. What worried Langan was the fact that Ruth, so far as he knew her, couldn't have killed anyone, no matter how desperate the situation was. She wasn't apt to take along a knife to be used as a murder weapon. If she was suspicious and afraid of Geary to such an extent that she thought she needed a weapon of defense, she'd never have gone to his house. Ruth had sense.

Very slowly it came to him then, that maybe she hadn't killed Geary at all, that she thought he'd done it. She knew Langan possessed a violent temper, had been trained in the art of killing, and when she saw Geary lying there dead, might immediately have figured Langan had done it. So she'd given herself up on the theory that she'd probably suffer a less severe penalty than he.

It was all conjecture, but Langan thought it was quite plausible. The whole thing made sense. Ruth was a girl who had once insisted that a skunk be taken from under the house alive, rather than have it killed—a girl who fed stray cats and dogs, sought homes for them, who shuddered at the sight of blood even in a butcher shop. How could she have planned for an emergency which led her to commit murder?

PUZZLED by all this, Langan bit his lip. He wished now he'd insisted on talking to Ruth. But, at least, when he gave her the benefit of the doubt, he felt as if he was doing something to help her.

Geary had a business partner. Where had he been during the time of the murder? Maybe he had a reason for killing Geary. Perhaps there might be something at Geary's office to provide some measure of doubt as to Ruth's guilt. More and more Langan began to believe that she'd never noticed the murder weapon or recognized it as the knife he'd sent her. If she had, she must have believed he'd gone to Geary's office looking for her, appropriated the knife and used it to kill Geary. Ruth was taking the

blame for him because she thought he was a murderer, and Langan knew he wasn't guilty. So Ruth had mistakenly made her sacrifice for somebody else who was basking in the comfortable security of her confession and the knowledge that his guilt would never be discovered.

Langan almost rushed out of the house. He drove quickly to the midtown office building where Ruth worked. The lobby was open. Geary's office was only on the fifth floor, so Langan decided to walk rather than try to get a building guard to come for him with an elevator.

He pushed open the fire stairway door on the fifth floor and peered down the long, silent corridor. The cleanup people had already finished their work. The floor was still damp from their mops. Langan crept softly along the hall. He saw the sign on the door. **GEARY & WHIPPLE, INVESTMENTS.** It was a solid wooden door, but beneath it came feeble light, as if from a flashlight, moving erratically.

Langan grasped the knob, turned it and the door opened. He stepped into the reception room, crossed to the low gate and pushed that open. The door to Geary's private office was ajar. He could see the ray of a flash centered on a blank wall and held by someone who stood very still.

Someone who had no legal business there, otherwise the overhead lights would have been on. Langan couldn't see beyond the flash. Something dark and solid-looking stood behind it. He doubled his fists, put his shoe firmly against the partly opened door and kicked it wide. Then he launched himself straight at the object behind the flashlight.

His arms encircled a mass of loose clothing and some very solid wood. He realized the flash had been affixed to a clothes tree and it was all a trick. This came to him a fraction of a second before the weapon crashed down on his skull. . . .

When he awoke, everything was very quiet and painfully dark. His head hurt. He put a hand to it and felt dried blood. That meant he'd been unconscious for quite some time, long enough to allow the blood to congeal. He got up, reached out with one arm and encountered a door. It was locked. He fumbled in his pockets and found matches. Striking

one, he saw that he was a prisoner in a supply closet.

He tackled the door but it was stout and wouldn't give. He used up all his matches looking for some object with which to attack the lock and he found one in the shape of a large screw driver. It wouldn't pick the lock, but he managed to gouge out a hole in the door panel, get the screw driver through it and crack off a good-sized chunk of wood. By repeating this operation he finally wriggled one hand through, encountered the key and turned it.

As he stepped out of the closet, he wondered why his attacker hadn't killed him and why he'd been made a prisoner. It had taken all of an hour to get out of the closet and by his watch he knew he'd been unconscious for thirty minutes even before he went to work on the door.

There was a quiet little smile of satisfaction on his face though. His investigations were bothering somebody and that meant his theory was right. Ruth had no more killed Geary than he had. The person who was the real murderer was getting scared.

CHAPTER III

The Murderer Is Worried



MARKED close to the curb, Langan's car was out front where he'd left it. He drove home. There wasn't much he could do. He wondered why Geary's office had been so carefully ransacked. The killer was after something, perhaps an object which might betray him. Certainly it was something very important.

Langan gave the killer credit. He was smart and quick thinking. Langan knew now that, upon entering Geary's outer office, he'd set off a tiny buzzer which announced his arrival and the killer had found time to balance the flashlight on the clothestree and get set behind the door to knock Langan senseless. He'd have to be careful and not fall into any more traps like that.

Langan put the car up, walked around the house and let himself in. Instantly he was alert for more trouble. He'd had

a visitor too. The house looked as if a horde of cleaning women had attacked it and then gone on strike right in the middle of the mess.

Langan didn't know whether or not the killer was waiting for him, but he did realize now why he'd been locked in the supply closet at Geary's office. The person who put him there had wanted time to search this house. For what? Langan couldn't figure it out, but he knew he'd feel better with some sort of weapon, just in case.

So he made his way to the bedroom and opened a bureau drawer. The clothing inside was a tumbled mass. He reached beneath it, groping for the big trench knife he'd brought home from the wars. It wasn't there. Langan frowned. Was the knife what this intruder had come for? It hardly seemed possible. The knife wasn't well hidden and by the looks of the house, the intruder had searched it very thoroughly.

At any rate Langan was in no danger. Nobody lurked behind a door waiting to strike him down. He locked up, taking pains to be sure no means was provided for a quiet entrance. Then he went to bed, for sleep was essential whether he wanted to sleep or not. A man couldn't think well when his brain was clouded with fatigue.

He woke up about the usual time and for a moment he thought he smelled coffee and toast, just like when Ruth made his breakfast as on any ordinary day. Then it all came back to him in a bitter rush of memory. He shaved and dressed, made his own breakfast and fetched the morning paper from the porch.

The case was being given a big play. It had all the elements of a human interest story and the main article was by-lined with Pete Devaney's name. Langan read it with appreciative interest. Devaney had done a good job. Over millions of breakfast tables there'd be tears for Ruth, condemnations of men like Geary, and a sob or two for Ruth's ex-soldier husband. Devaney was a friend. He'd meant it when he said he wanted to help, and Devaney knew all the angles.

Before Langan finished reading the story, Devaney arrived, and joined Langan in a cup of coffee. He listened to Langan's story of the attack in Geary's office and the ransacking of this house.

"Sounds like there is more to this than we had thought," he said. "But why did you go to Geary's office in the first place?"

"Because I was getting more and more suspicious that Ruth hadn't killed Geary. But she believed I had and made a confession to save me. Sure, it sounds like a crackpot idea but, Pete — that's just what it was. I thought Ruth had killed him and I confessed. She'd do the same for me."

Devaney looked interested. "You got close to somebody at any rate, though I can't see what they were looking for here. Ruth didn't come home to hide anything. She went directly to police headquarters, the way I understood it. And you still haven't told me why you went to Geary's office."

"I became suspicious of Whipple, Geary's partner, like I told you. I was vaguely concerned with checking up on him and I thought maybe there might be something in the office."

Devaney whistled softly. "Say, you might have something there! I've got a little bit of interesting information, too. Did you know that Attorney Sutton, who offered his services last night, is also Ned Whipple's attorney?"

"No. Pete, that gives us something in the way of a lead. Maybe Whipple is the killer and became so remorseful over Ruth's arrest that he retained Sutton."

"It's worth working on," Devaney agreed. "Just a minute."

DEVANEY went to the telephone and made several calls. When he returned, he shook his head disgustedly. "Whipple attended a banquet last night. He got there at seven-fifteen and left around midnight, and since Geary was knifed about nine o'clock, that puts Whipple right in the clear."

"Unless he hired someone to do it," Langan said. "Gosh, if we could only find a motive!"

"Look, Larry, this is work for the cops," Devaney said. "You'll stick your neck out too often and get it lopped off. Anyway you've got to go see Ruth."

"I'll tell Lieutenant Sullivan what happened. Will you come along, Pete?"

Devaney nodded. "Sure thing. I'll drive my own car, though, and meet you there."

They left the house together. A mail truck had pulled up in front and the par-

cel post man was approaching with the envelope which contained Ruth's purse. Langan took it, thanked him and put the package under his arm without comment. Devaney drove off in his coupe while Langan went around to the garage where his own car was parked.

He threw the package onto the seat, drove out and headed for town. It was better than a two-mile drive for he lived in the suburbs. At this hour the roads were not heavily packed with traffic and Langan stepped on it.

He saw the black sedan coming up fast, but paid little attention to it. His mind was too busy with thoughts of Ruth and the probability that she hadn't killed Geary.

The black sedan edged out until it was running parallel with his car. The driver's face was obscured by a handkerchief tied, mask fashion, right up to his eyes, and his black hat was pulled way down. Langan saw that about the same time that he spotted the gun aiming at him.

He gave the wheel of his car one savage yank. The gun blasted twice. Langan felt a tremendous blow alongside his head. Things spun crazily. He felt the car bumping over a field and then it crashed through a fence. Some tall bushes finally brought it to a stop. Langan fell across the wheel.

He knew he wasn't dead or even in danger of dying, but he wished that awful paralysis would leave him. There was blood streaming down his face. He could feel it and smell it. A little later he tasted the saltiness of it.

Someone was approaching him, drawing nearer cautiously. That would be the killer. Langan fought to regain his wits and strength. He was unarmed, and he had to get out of there or a bullet would snuff his life away. He got one hand on the door lever and pushed it open. The door creaked. The approaching steps faltered.

Langan slipped from beneath the wheel, sought the running board with his foot and tried to step out. He pitched forward and landed on the ground. Someone ran briskly away and he heard a car drive off. The danger was gone.

Langan mopped blood off his face and wondered how many more of these close shaves he could stand. Finally he felt able to drive, but when he reached the highway, he stopped to look over the damage to the car. It consisted mostly

of bent fenders and a bumper which dragged. He fastened the bumper somehow, but the effort tired him and he had to rest.

The package was still beside him and also the morning paper with Devaney's account of the case. He read it again, just for assurance. Devaney went into the greatest detail. He described the murder scene vividly, telling of the heavy-handed knife which had been buried in Geary's heart. He told how it had been fashioned to kill enemy soldiers and now had been used against someone who'd become an enemy in a different sort of way. Vaguely Langan wondered why this story bothered him, and he wished he could think more clearly.

He was still sitting there when Devaney came from the direction of town. "I was waiting for you a mile ahead," he explained. "When you didn't show up, I got worried and it looks as if I had something to worry about."

AS BRIEFLY as possible, Langan told him what happened. Devaney lighted a cigarette. "I can't make head nor tail of it, Larry. Not yet. But you must be getting close to a solution. The guy took a long shot in approaching your car when he couldn't be certain whether or not you were dead. What did he want?"

"I wish I knew," Langan groaned. "Maybe he just wanted to be certain I was dead."

"Maybe," Devaney said doubtfully. "Well, I'm not leaving you here. Get into my car. We can pick yours up later on. Did you get the number of the sedan?"

Langan nodded. "Yes, I managed that much." He picked up the package containing Ruth's purse and climbed into Devaney's car. The reporter drove him straight to police headquarters and Lieutenant Sullivan listened quietly and without comment to Langan's strange story of two attacks. He checked the number of the car Langan gave him.

"It was stolen from the outskirts of the city, just before you were shot at," he explained finally. "That killer acted fast."

A half hour later they were still in Sullivan's office, talking with him, when the phone rang. Sullivan answered the call, talked with someone, hung up and turned to Langan.

"We've just found the sedan and some of the boys are checking it for prints," Sullivan said. "They probably won't find any. Now suppose I have Ruth brought in here."

Langan laid his hat and the package on a chair. He stepped to a mirror and straightened his tie, examined the furrow which the bullet had ploughed along his scalp and slicked his hair down to cover it. There was no use in alarming Ruth too much.

CHAPTER IV

The Letter



DEVANEY quietly departed. Sullivan waited until Ruth appeared and then he, too, went away. Larry Langan and Ruth didn't say much at first, just clung to one another in eloquent silence. Then he helped Ruth into a chair. She'd always looked beautiful to him, but she looked better than ever this morning. He wondered how anyone could even think of accusing someone so sweet and lovely of being responsible for the death of a man.

"Darling," he said, "I don't know how much time we have, but we must work fast. Did you kill Geary?"

She gazed straight at him. "Did I, Larry? Don't you know?"

He gasped. "You didn't. You think I did and you're taking the blame. Ruth, when I arrived at Geary's house, he was already dead, with that bone-handed knife I sent you as a paper cutter, sticking out of his chest."

"Paper cutter?" Ruth cried out. "Larry, are you certain?"

He wrinkled his whole face. "Sure. Why, of course, I am. I wiped what I thought were your prints off it. I handled the thing."

"But he was knifed with your trench knife, Larry. That's what I saw."

Langan remembered the twin wounds. "Ruth, someone killed Geary and tried to pin the blame on us. He knew very well you'd take the rap for me and I for you. He used two knives. Mine, which you saw. Yours, which I saw. The killer was in that house all the time. After

you fled, he used the second knife. Maybe he'd used both of them before you arrived, so an autopsy wouldn't reveal that one wound was made in a dead man. It's not hard to reinsert a blade into a wound that same blade has created."

"But, Larry, they'd have found out."

"No, they wouldn't. They'd accept your confession, because you had a motive and nothing much would be done to you. The killer realized that. When you were sentenced, and your story accepted, the case would be closed. He'd have gotten clean away with it. But there is something else. I was attacked twice. The killer wants something. I don't know what. Do you?"

"No. No, Larry, I can't even rouse a glimmer of an idea."

She was excited and justly so. Larry held both her hands. "Think hard. Tell me exactly what happened."

"Geary asked me to finish up some extra work," she said. "I was quitting the job, but he was nice about it, and gave me a month's pay. Naturally I couldn't just walk out unless I straightened my affairs. Then about eight o'clock, he phoned and asked a special favor. I was to open the safe, take out an envelope marked with Ned Whipple's name, and bring it to his, Geary's, home. I did exactly as he requested. When I got there, the door was wide open. I stepped in and saw him—lying there, with your trench knife through his heart. I—I thought the world had ended then, for I knew how much you hated him. I thought maybe you learned he'd asked me to come to his house and had lost your head."

Langan rubbed his chin. "What sort of terms were Geary and Whipple on?"

"Bad. I think the partnership was ready to break up. Whipple always was a spender and never attended to business. I know he was deeply in debt."

"What was in the envelope he asked you to bring out?"

"I don't know, Larry. It was sealed and he specifically asked me not to open it. He never did that before, so it must have contained something very important."

"When you got there, Geary was dead," Langan said. "So he couldn't accept the envelope. What did you do with it, darling?"

She thought hard for a moment. "I forgot it entirely because I was so

frightened for you, Larry. I wanted to reach the police before you did. I suppose I reasoned that I'd be punished less severely than you."

"Yes, I guessed that. The envelope?"

"Oh, it's still in my purse, I suppose. I never took it out, but I can't remember where I left the purse."

Langan jumped to his feet and sped across the room. The package was gone. He yanked the newspaper out of his pocket and read Devaney's article again. He knew what was wrong with it now.

SULLIVAN was outside. Langan went right past him. Sullivan called to his retreating back.

"That was quick. Say, Devaney just left. He said he'd look you up later."

"Thanks," Langan called over his shoulder and kept on going. Devaney was in his car out front. Langan hailed him and ran to the car. He got in.

"How'd it go, Larry?" Devaney asked.

"Tough," Langan said. "Very tough. She insists on going through with it. I—oh, there's my package. I could have sworn I carried it into Sullivan's office with me."

He picked it up. The seal had been opened and crudely pasted back. What mucilage had been left was still moist. Langan glanced at Devaney.

"I'll take the envelope with Whipple's name on it, Pete—the one you fished out of Ruth's purse, the one you were hunting for in Geary's office last night. It's the reason why you locked me in a closet so I'd be delayed while you searched my house for it. It's the reason why you tried to kill me for this morning."

Devaney's lips became tighter and tighter. "Larry, I wanted to help you. Concede that much. Now I've got to have a break. You can have the envelope and I'll even write out a neat confession. Honestly, I'd have practically gotten Ruth off with my stories of the case. Nobody would have been hurt much."

"Except Geary. Let's have the envelope, Pete."

Devaney nodded listlessly. "All right, Larry. I was sorry about the whole thing. Yes, I rigged it. I knew Geary had a case on your wife. I knew she'd had to put him in his place twice before and I knew all about the bone-handled knife and the fact that you owned a trench knife. I—found out from talking

to people at the office. Geary's office. Why I killed him doesn't matter. He was a complete heel."

"The envelope," Langan said tonelessly.

Devaney reached for his inside pocket. His hand came out gripping a gun. In a flash, Langan was at his throat. He gripped Devaney's right wrist and kept the gun from leveling. With his other hand he squeezed the reporter's throat. Squeezed and squeezed until Devaney got purple and limp. Then Langan let go. He'd squeezed a Jap like that once—without letting go. He suddenly realized he'd nearly become a killer.

Enough cops to stop a riot came when Langan began yelling. Among them was Sullivan. Moments later they opened the envelope in Sullivan's office. It was a complete history of Ned Whipple's guilt as an embezzler and some of the money he'd taken had gone into Pete Devaney's hands as blackmail.

"Devaney would have lost his hold on Whipple if Geary had exposed the mess," Sullivan said. "Besides, Whipple would then have accused Devaney of blackmailing him because he no longer had any reason to be held up. Devaney knew all about it. I suppose Whipple boasted or threatened him, and Devaney had to take some action. When Attorney Sutton honestly tried to help you, Devaney made him out as a suspicious character. He must have known every step Geary was likely to take and got set for it. He meant to get that envelope, but you probably arrived so quickly after Ruth departed that there was no time. Devaney just had to stay in his hiding place and watch you walk out with her purse."

Langan nodded. "That's it. He didn't know I'd mailed it back to myself so he searched Geary's office for it and then my home. He was on deck bright and early, just in case I mentioned the purse. Then he saw the mailman deliver the package and he knew what it contained.

"So he drove on ahead, parked and swiped that sedan. He doubled back,

waited for me and tried to kill me. Lieutenant, last night I thought all cops were stupid because you accepted Ruth's story. Now I see why there was nothing else you could do. But talk about being stupid. This morning the whole thing was presented to me in black and white and I never saw it."

Sullivan scowled. "How's that again, Larry?"

"What knife did you find in Geary's chest?"

"A regulation trench knife. One of those big, wide-bladed affairs. Ruth described it, identified it as yours."

LANGAN nodded. "Just what I thought," he said. "That's where Devaney pulled his boner and there was no way out. He knew that I believed Ruth's paper knife had killed Geary, but if he described the paper knife in his story, you'd start wondering. He had to call the murder weapon by vague terms, but they fitted the trench knife better than the paper knife. I sensed there was something wrong with the article, but I couldn't read between the lines. It was Devaney's weak point and it almost slipped past me."

Sullivan sighed. "All killers have weak points. Devaney was smarter than most because he knew exactly how we operate. Ruth would have pleaded guilty to a lesser charge than murder. Devaney would have seen to that by means of his articles. No evidence would have been introduced, certainly not the murder weapon, so you'd never have been wise. It was a good scheme, so far as murder schemes go. They never go far enough to be safe—for the killer."

"Devaney killed Geary twice, once with the trench knife and again with the paper cutter," Langan said. "One murder for my benefit, one for Ruth's. Of course, the first blow killed Geary. I'm just speaking figuratively. Can I see Ruth now?"

"See her?" Sullivan grunted. "You can take her home."

●
NEXT ISSUE

STALLING ALL CARS

An Uproarious Willie Klump Yarn

By JOE ARCHIBALD



Jed went into panicky trembling. What would he say?

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

By RAY CUMMINGS

There was only one time in his life when Jed Balch found it easy to use words—and then they sounded a knell of doom!

WITH his crosscut saw on the ground at his feet, Jed Balch sat on the tree stump and mopped his face with a dirty red handkerchief. The little mountain stream babbled over the stones beside him. It was late afternoon. The deep woods frayed out here at the stream—a trackless tangle with the Tennessee mountains rearing up behind it. The setting sun sent shafts of gold from under the black storm clouds that were gathering,

shafts that briefly touched the deepening shadows of the woods.

There was a ragged little hill upstream. Jed could see the thin grey wisp of smoke, rising straight up in the still air from behind the hill—smoke from the chimney of the cabin where Martha was getting their supper. She'd be out here presently, nagging at him that he hadn't done his work. Always something that had to be done. Wood to cut, because it was September and the mountain cold

would soon be coming; vegetables from their little truck farm to cart into town and try to sell, because you had to have money. Work nagging at him all the time from sunup to dusk, and the fool woman nagging to make him do it.

The bottle in Jed Balch's back pocket pressed against his hip. He drew it out, drank a swallow or two, rubbed his mouth with the back of his hand and replaced the bottle. He was a big, lanky figure. His grey flannel shirt was open at the throat. Tangled black hair was plastered on his wet forehead; his lean rugged face was dark with a two-day growth of beard. He was thirty now, and would have been handsome except for the slack jaw and the sullen, glowering look that mirrored his resentful thoughts.

"OH, JED—you Jed, where are you?"

There it was — Martha's sharp voice, around the turn of the hill. In the dusk Jed could see her coming toward him, her angular figure in the cheap cotton dress she had gotten last week from the mail order house. She thought it made her look slim and young, but it didn't. The fading sunlight glinted on her brown hair. Like most of the mountain women, she wore it primly pulled back from her forehead, and done in a knot at the back of her neck. It might have been nice hair once, but it was faded now, with streaks of grey in it.

Martha Hutchinson was crowding fifty and she had never married. Her father, when he died, had left her this little place—the cabin, ten acres of woodland and truck patch, a couple of cows, chickens, a few pigs, and a horse and wagon. And then Jed Balch had drifted here. He had rented it for twenty dollars a month, and they teamed up on the work and shared the profits.

Perhaps even at the beginning, a year ago, Martha Hutchinson had gazed at her new tenant with a secret romantic interest. Jed contemplated it now with a sour sullenness. Maybe he had encouraged that a little, so as to make a better dicker with her. Whatever it was, Martha had been getting more and more bossy. As though already they were married and she could tell him what to do. And nagging him all the time because he was behind in his rent.

Now she was standing on the path by

the stream, calling again, "Oh Jed—" She waved at him. "Come on, Jed, supper's ready." Then she looked around in the fading light, and instead of turning back she came on down the path.

"All right," he said. "Sure. I'm comin'."

Martha was standing in front of him now and he got up to face her, a head taller than she was. His sullen gaze shifted off to the woods as he felt her staring accusingly at him.

"Jed, you ain't done a thing. You just been settin' here."

There it was, at him again. "You shut up," he said. Her hand was on his arm, but he roughly shook it off. He tried to start up the path, but she blocked him.

"There's the saw, Jed," she said. "You might as well carry it back. There's a storm comin'. It'll rust if you leave it out here."

Her voice was quiet, repressed. It brought a vague wonderment to him, because usually she wasn't like that. She was still staring at him as he picked up the saw.

"You been drinkin' again, Jed," she said. "You promised you wouldn't."

Just as though she had a right to tell him what to do! She had seen the bottle as he stooped for the saw, and now she reached for it. Sure, she'd grab it and smash it, like she had the other one. And they cost money. Black anger rushed over him, black like the shadows of the woods and the black storm clouds so close over them. He seized her bony wrist, pulled it in front of him, twisted it. She let out a little cry of fear and pain, and he let go. He was starting for the house, but again she blocked him.

"Wait, Jed." She sounded breathless. "You—you never done nothin' like that to me before. That's—somethin' new."

BLACK night was closing in on them. The little shafts of sunlight under the storm clouds were gone. There was wind now, a strong puff that stirred the treetops.

"We—we better have it out, right now, Jed," Martha said.

"I've had enough of you," he muttered thickly. Then he stopped on the path, startled, as she laughed suddenly. It was a strange laugh, low and choked.

"That's pretty funny, Jed." She was still standing in front of him. "You sayin' that. It's funny, because that's

what I have to say to you."

"You come on to supper," he mumbled.

"No. I got to tell you now."

"Tell me?"

"You're my tenant," she said. "But you ain't paid much rent. Not any, lately. So I—I'm puttin' you out, Jed. I'm through with you."

"Through with me?" Martha had startled him, confused him so that he could not think what to say. Words had always been difficult for Jed Balch to use. They all seemed to go inside, to turn into thoughts that he could not express. Like the silent woods and the hills, Jed Balch was a man of silences.

"Through with me?" he mumbled again.

"That's it," she said. "We been sort of partners, but we're failures at that. Like I told you when you came, this place is too much, for a woman alone. But with a man, too, it could be easy." Her voice broke a little, but she forced herself to keep on.

"I guess I was dreamin' too much, for you and me, Jed. Our plans for the future— Well, anyways, with the work, I been doin' my best. You know that. But you—well, a lot of money goes out for that corn likker—"

"You shut up on that."

"Sure. Sure I will. What's the difference now? You're leavin' here, but I—I won't be bothern' you about the money you owe me. You just been livin' off me, Jed, for quite a while. I won't say nothin' about that. But it's finished now."

So she was throwing him out. What would he do? No money. No place to live. . . .

"Maybe I'd have gone right on tryin' to make a go of things," she was saying. "But you see, I heard about that girl over to town you been makin' passes at."

"That's a lie! You—you—" If only he could find a lot of words like she had, maybe he could talk her out of all this.

"All right," she said. "Have it your own way. No use arguin' about it. I guess I been sort of makin' a fool of myself with you, Jed. Makin' my life insurance payable to you. Things like that." She laughed. "Thought maybe it wasn't so silly, because I got no relatives to leave things to."

The life insurance policy her father had taken out for her! More than a thousand dollars maybe! That would be

a way out! It was only a vague, stray thought to Jed. He didn't plan anything. He was just struggling to think about it in the confusion of his slow mind.

"If you chuck me out, what *you* goin' to do?" he said.

"I can rent the place, Jed," she said quietly. "There's a young service feller an' his wife from Nashville. They had farm experience and they got no place to settle on. I could live here with them—"

She had it all figured out! She'd been planning this. Planning to get rid of him because she'd found something better.

"You—you measly cheat," he muttered. "You—you lyin'—"

IT WAS raining now, and the wind was stronger. There would be a puff, and then another that roared more loudly through the giant treetops. But neither of them noticed.

"All right," Martha said. "Callin' me hard names won't change nothin'." He had drawn the bottle from his pocket and was raising it to his lips. The sight of it, so openly displayed, somehow seemed to send her into fury so that she snatched at his arm again and her voice rose shrilly. "Sure, go ahead! That's all you're good for! And you bought it with my money, too!"

Both of them were angry now Jed felt a blur of resentment as her hand twitched his arm. The bottle hit his lip, and then her hand struck at the bottle and knocked it from his grip. There was a little splintering crash as it hit the stones at the edge of the stream.

"Why, you—" He was hardly aware that he had clenched his fist and struck her on the side of the head.

"Jed! Jed!"

She hadn't fallen, and now he was cuffing her. "You said you'd smash it," he muttered. "You said you would, and you did."

"Jed! Jed!" She was really frightened now, and she was staggering. Then she fell over the loose stones and he pounced down on her.

"Jed—Jed—stop! You've gone crazy!" Now she was screaming, her voice rising to a piercing shriek.

The road to town was only a quarter of a mile away, just around the hill. Someone might be passing and hear her. Terror rose in Jed, a red blur of terror

so that all he could think of was to stop her screams. Shut her up! Stop her!

"Help! Help—"

One of his big, sprawling hands rested on a loose rock at the edge of the water. His fingers closed over it, raised it up, crashed it down.

That did it! There was the crack of it against her skull, and her screams were silent. She had been partly up, but she sank back. There was still enough light so that he could see her body quivering, twitching. Then she was just a crumpled, lifeless figure lying there, face up and the rock he had used was among the stones off to one side.

Jed Balch crouched beside the still figure, panting. Martha—was—dead. It had happened so quickly that, for a moment, he was numb. Then he went into a panicky trembling. They'd find out he had killed her. The sheriff would find it out. Accuse him. What would he say?

It was raining harder as Jed staggered to his feet, and the wind was roaring wildly in the treetops. He'd go up for murder. But why would he? He stood there, trying to reason it out. No one had seen him out here. Nobody could know that he wasn't in the cabin all this time at dusk, with the storm coming on. He'd figure it out, just what he'd say. He'd never been much of a talker, but this time he'd think carefully and get what he'd say just right.

He took a last look at the gruesome figure, with its smashed head, lying there and the slab of sharp-pointed rock near it. Then he turned away, picked up the crosscut saw and ran along the path that went around the little hill to the cabin.

The storm broke suddenly into full fury as Jed got indoors. It wasn't so much rain, as a weird, pounding tumult of wind. It surged in after him, blew out the lamp which Martha had lighted and placed on the table. Jed banged the door closed, lighted the lamp again and hung the saw in its usual place on a nail in the wall. Then he sat down in the chair by the stove, panting, listening to the wind of the storm and thinking what he would say to the sheriff.

It was a queer storm, with little rain, but with a wind that came in great puffs so close together that it sounded like one steady roar. The tailend of a hurricane, maybe, that had lashed its way up here from far down in the West Indies and was blowing itself out in the mountains

with a mighty final gasp. The little cabin shook under the force of it.

Once Jed went to one of the windows, cupping his hands around his face, but all he could see was a dark mass of swaying, whipped trees. While he watched one of them went down with a grinding crack. A branch of its bushy top broke off, sailed on the wind and hit the cabin roof, so that the building shuddered under the blow.

JED went back to his chair by the stove. Martha had their simple evening meal cooking there. Jed shoved it aside, and turned the dampers to cut down the heat of the burning wood. Half an hour passed, and the violence of the wind seemed to be decreasing.

Still Jed sat sprawled with his long length back in the chair and a hand up to his wet, throbbing forehead. He wasn't thinking much of the wind, but of what he would say to Sheriff McNabb. It would be easy, once he got it straight in his mind. His head seemed clearer now, much clearer as he sat here alone, thinking about it. That bottle had fallen out there on the rocks. But it had no label. If anybody did notice those few pieces of splintered glass, it wouldn't mean anything.

He had it all figured out now. He would tell McNabb how through the storm he had sat here alone, wondering where Martha had gone. Then when the storm finished, he had run out and found her lying there by the stream. An innocent man would run and tell the sheriff at once, of course. He'd be all horrified, frightened, excited. It would be easy. He'd tell it straight and simple, and stick to it. There was that traveling salesman, too, who had gone by this afternoon. Jed had seen him stop and speak to Martha, and she had laughed and simpered and waved after him when he drove away. Sure. Jed would know just how to tell that to the sheriff. For once, he'd find a lot of words and talk freely.

Abruptly Jed was aware that there was pallid moonlight at the window. The wind had died, even more suddenly than it had begun. Jed flung open the cabin door. There was just silence outside, with the full moon streaking down through the breaking clouds. Across the cabin ridge-pole the broken tree branch hung teetering. Jed was picturing to

himself how he would describe to the sheriff that just about now he had run out and found Martha.

The road to town was on this side the hill, winding past the truck patch. Jed ran down to it. McNabb's house was on this road, near the edge of town, not more than half a mile away. Jed loped along it, lumbering, in his heavy leather boots.

Then Jed was pounding on the sheriff's door, gasping out, with his newly-found, determined fluency, the terrible news of how he had just found Martha Hutchinson dead—murdered....

Three of McNabb's men who lived nearby had been summoned by the sheriff. They all had shotguns. Jed led them as they hurried out along the road toward Martha's place. The clouds were all broken and rifted now, whirling silently away so that the night was cool and filled with moonlight.

"She was gone maybe an hour before the storm broke, Sheriff," Jed told them. "I was out in the truck patch and didn't really notice. Then I came in. I found she had started supper. So I sat down, waitin'."

"Figured she'd come over to town?" one of the men said. "I see her sometimes in town of an afternoon."

"Over to town?" Jed repeated. He gulped, keeping his mind steadily on what he was saying. "Yes, I guess so, maybe. Yes, that's what I thought. Only I was thinkin' too, about an old feller that came through here this afternoon. I'll tell you about that."

THEN he told them how he had at last gotten really worried over Martha. He was thinking of starting out to look for her when the wind came. Tree branches were cracking. One of them broke off and hit the cabin, and Jed told how he had run back inside, banged the door against the storm, and waited for the wind to let up a bit.

McNabb nodded. "Sure was some wind. More like a little cyclone, a twister. Anybody who stayed out in it sure'd be a fool."

McNabb was a big, burly fellow. He made a good sheriff, Jed had always heard. And he'd had detective experience on the police force in Chattanooga, before he came up here.

"Then when the wind let up, I went

out lookin' for her," Jed was saying. "The moon was shinin' then. I called and called, and then, other side the hill by the stream at the edge of the woods, I seen her. She's lyin' there, with her head bashed in by a rock. The moonlight was on her. I could see at once she was dead, hit by that rock. That flashy salesman maybe." Jed gulped, glad that his story was finished.

They were passing Martha's cabin now, heading around the hill; and the excited men were all arguing about that salesman. One of them remembered having seen him in town this morning.

"He went through here about a month ago, too," someone asserted.

"Sure, I remember," Jed agreed.

"Maybe he met her then," the man suggested.

"I seen him talkin' to her," Jed agreed. "Sure. I remember it now."

McNabb had run on ahead. He had gone on around the little hill, and now he was running back. In the moonlight Jed could see that his face was very queer.

"Out there by the stream in the moonlight," he said. "With the rock by her head and her head bashed in—Come take a look, Jed."

He took Jed by the arm and pulled him around the hill, where the moonlight bathed the babbling stream and the path and the deep woods in silver light. Jed and the three deputies stood gasping.

Martha's body lay there, but only the feet and legs were visible. The upper part was under the bushy top of a giant tree whose fallen grey length lay like a monstrous snake stretching back into the woods to where its roots were a huge ragged circle.

"So you saw her lying here after the storm, in the moonlight, with her head bashed in and the rock somebody hit her with beside her," McNabb was saying grimly.

The scene whirled around Jed. "I—I guess I was wrong the way I told you," he stammered. "Sure. That's it, I was wrong. It was before the storm when I came out here an' saw her. Then I ran back home—"

BUT McNabb ignored him. With the other men, he was moving the tree branches aside, pulling Martha's body

out. Jed looked away, but he couldn't help seeing what the fallen tree had done to her head when it crashed down on her.

"He says there's a rock here," one of the men was saying. "Rock that hit her on the head an' killed her."

McNabb with his flashlight finally found it under the smashed treetop and brought it out. Then he was kneeling over the body; and now he came striding at Jed, grabbing one of Jed's hands and turning the flashlight on it.

"You— What's the idea?" Jed stammered.

"Nice of you to tell us she got killed by somebody hitting her with a rock," McNabb said grimly. "That's the rock, all right. There's blood on it."

"Sure," Jed gasped. "I saw it, like I

told you, but I made a mistake. It was before the storm when I was here—"

"It sure was," McNabb agreed. "That rock was originally by the edge of the stream. There's green-slime algae on it, and you were holding it. Didn't wash your hands when you got back home, did you? That green-slime algae dried on your hands and under your fingernails. We've got you, Jed. No argument on that. It sure was swell of you to give us all the dope so we couldn't miss getting the evidence."

McNabb was smiling grimly as he added, "Without *your* help, Jed, we'd have figured it was a tragic accident, that tree falling on her."

Jed stood numbed. If only he had had the sense to keep his mouth shut!



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NOT ACCORDING TO DOYLE

By CARTER CRITZ

When a bodyguard's wished on him and a blonde lovely asks him to tackle a mystery, this snooper has his hands full!

DOYLE is the name, Joe Doyle. I'm a private detective so I spend my time minding other people's business. Not that I'm too nosy—I only get curious when I'm hired to do some snooping. Remember the case of the Singing Parrot, and the one about the Headless Taxi Driver? Well, I didn't solve either of those. I only read about them in the newspapers—but I get along all right.

I'm just an average looking young man, who has been around here and there and a couple of other places I'd rather forget about. There was a time when I thought I was an actor and worked in summer stock, and I've been around Carnies enough to know a midway from a runway, and I still agree with the song that there is no business like show-business.

I live in a hotel on a side street in the

Norma was kneeling beside me, some keys in her hand



Forties and, as hotels go, a tramp steamer couldn't take this one far enough away to suit me. But be it ever my grumble, it's still my home.

It was just at dusk one day when I wandered into the hotel and up to desk to get the key to my room. I'd had a hard day playing poker with three bright businessmen who had offices on the same floor as mine, and Joe Doyle and his wallet were weary.

"Good evening, Mr. Doyle," said the desk clerk, reaching into the pigeonhole for my key. "Your cousin has been waiting for you."

"That's nice, I said, taking the key. "Not Aunt Martha's boy, Hiram?"

It had always been my personal opinion that Small, the clerk was studying to be a mouse, and was afraid he couldn't pass the examination. He was little and gray-haired and I'd bet he stamped his foot when he went into a towering rage. But right now he was all dignity.

"I wouldn't know about that," he said. "But the gentleman said he was Austin Hempstead."

I had heard of the old homestead, but a gentleman named Austin Hempstead who claimed he was my cousin was a page out of another script. Besides, so far as I knew I only had one cousin on my father's side and none on my mother's side, since she'd been an only child. Quaintly enough Father's brother's son was named Doyle—Bill Doyle.

"And where is dear Cousin Austin?" I asked.

"There." Small nodded toward a chair in the lobby. "He said it had been so long since you had met that you probably wouldn't even recognize each other. So I was to point him out to you when you came in."

"How true," I said. "Just after the Civil War it was, how well I remember! We were crossing the plains when my covered wagon ran into his tractor."

I TOOK a good look at the man in the chair, and I no longer felt so merry and bright. Austin Hempstead was tall and thin, bald-headed and he looked like a corpse someone had left carelessly sitting around.

"Evidently Cousin Austin comes from the more repulsive branch of my family," I said. "But I would converse with you cadaver."

I walked over to the man in the chair,

and then stopped. He just sat motionless staring at me. Karloff couldn't have played a better zombie.

"I'm Joe Doyle," I said.

He nodded in slow motion. "I was afraid of that," he said in a voice that seemed to come out of the bottom of a well. "I need a man of strength, of resource and courage, and what do I find but a gangling youth."

"I outgrew both the gangling and the youth, years ago," I said sharply, for there was everything I didn't like about Austin Hempstead. "What's the idea of the cousin routine?"

"'Twas but a jest fit only for yon varlet's ears," said Hempstead nodding toward the desk clerk. "But to get down to business, Mr. Doyle, I expect you to hire me."

"For what?" I asked.

"To protect you from being killed," said Hempstead in a matter-of-fact tone. "Shall we say for one hundred dollars a week?"

I sat down in a chair near him. I'd often heard of someone hiring a private detective to protect them from being murdered, but when it was suggested that the detective hire someone to keep from being killed that was a horse from another merry-go-round.

"And who is going to kill me?" I asked.

"If I told you that then you wouldn't need me to protect you." Hempstead's coat slid back as he moved around in his chair. The gun he wore in a shoulder holster looked very sinister. "Perhaps we had better make it two hundred a week—the high cost of your living, you know."

"Blackmail?" I asked.

"Perish the thought." He looked horrified. "Merely business."

"Suppose I turned you over to the police?" I demanded.

"On what charge? Offering to protect your life?"

He had something there, and to the police his word was as good as mine. I sat there staring at the slender blonde who had just entered the lobby. She walked like a dancer, and she was lovely. She went to the desk and spoke to Small. Hempstead caught the direction of my gaze.

"Her name is Norma Tilson, and she's looking for you, Mr. Doyle," he said. "Too bad. Such a pretty girl, and I'm

afraid she may cause your death." He rose from his chair and started to walk away. "Sorry, you don't feel your life is worth two hundred a week to you now. Tomorrow the price goes up."

"All right, Hempstead," I said. "You're hired for a week anyway. Starting tomorrow morning. Be at my office at nine."

"Splendid!" The cadaver actually smiled. "I'll be there."

I watched him shamle out of the lobby. I had a feeling it might be worth two hundred dollars to have him around where I could watch him. I was quite curious about dear Cousin Austin.

The girl was talking to the desk clerk. Small caught my eye and motioned to me to come over. The girl looked in my direction and smiled, which didn't slacken my speed any in getting to the desk.

"This is Miss Norma Tilson," Small said. "Miss Tilson—Mr. Doyle."

"I need a private detective, Mr. Doyle," Norma Tilson said. "Perhaps you may be interested?"

"That's quite likely," I said. "Let's talk it over, Miss Tilson."

We went over to a corner of the lobby and sat down, much to the disappointment of Small, who had been all ears.

"Here's the situation," said Norma. "I live out in Pelham Manor. My brother and I have a house there. We are orphans. Robert has a job in a bank here in town. He seemed worried about something at the bank when I saw him, two nights ago."

"He's missing then?" I asked when she paused.

"Apparently," she said. "He didn't come home last night and he hasn't been at the bank today or yesterday. I don't want to report his disappearance to the police yet. It might be that he is in some sort of trouble, and has to hide."

"I see. And you want me to try and find your brother, is that it?"

"Yes." She looked at me anxiously. "I have the strangest feeling that Robert is in some sort of terrible danger. Will you try and find him, Mr. Doyle? I'll pay you whatever your fee may be."

THIS was agreeable to me. I needed to make some money.

"I'll try," I said. "The charge will be twenty-five dollars a day and expenses. By the way do you happen to know a

man named Austin Hempstead?"

"Of course," she said. "Though I don't know him very well. He lives in the same block we do out in Pelham. Has a nice place and I've heard he is quite rich."

"Did you happen to notice the man I was talking to when you came in the lobby tonight?" I asked.

"No, I'm sorry, I didn't." She frowned. "Why?"

"That was Austin Hempstead."

"Oh!" Norma said. "What was he doing here?"

"He had a little business with me," I said dryly. "Now about your brother. When he went into town the last time did he take a bag with him, or any clothes, as though he planned to take a trip somewhere?"

"I don't think so," she said slowly. "To be truthful I don't really know." She looked at me appealingly, and she had the face for it. "My car is outside. Could you drive out to Pelham with me now, Mr. Doyle?"

"Sure," I said. "I'm anxious to see your place and learn a little more about where Mr. Hempstead lives. That man interests me."

We went out through the lobby to the street. Her car, a smart looking sedan, was parked in front of the hotel. I thought she might find a parking ticket tied on it, but I guess she was lucky. She unlocked the door on the right hand side and climbed in and seated herself at the wheel. As I took the seat beside her I noticed there was a car robe tossed carelessly on the floor, and it might or might not be covering something. But I never did believe in looking a free ride in the upholstery, so I asked no questions.

Norma drove west across town until we came to the Westside Highway and headed uptown. It was nice along the river and the George Washington Bridge seemed to be hanging in mid-air up at 180th Street. I should have felt swell. Riding along with a pretty girl on a nice night and all that, but I was worried.

"A car has been following us ever since we left the hotel," I said finally. "A gray coupe."

"I know," Norma said. "I noticed it. Do you think that means trouble, Mr. Doyle?"

"Let's not be formal," I said. "Make it Joe."

"All right, Joe. My name is Norma, you know."

We found that the coupe was still following when we got up around Dykeman Street. Norma decided to try and lose the car behind us so she drove through Inwood Park. That was a mistake. The gray coupe speeded up beside us and then the driver forced us over to the curb. Norma had to stop or get the sedan smashed up.

The coupe rolled on ahead, stopped and two men got out. They wore ordinary clothes but they were both husky and hard looking.

"What's the idea?" I demanded. "Is this a holdup?"

"Don't give us that," growled one of the men. "We're police." Opening his coat, he flashed something bright, which might have been a badge or a brass suspender buckle. "What have you got in that car you don't want us to see?"

"Nothing at all, officer," I said, suddenly feeling happy about the whole thing. "I'm a private detective myself."

"Goody, goody!" said the second man, and I didn't like his tone. "Not a real private detective. Isn't that wonderful, Blake?"

"Yeah." Blake was not amused. He glared at us. "Get out of the car, you two."

Norma stepped out on the left side of the car and I got out in the right. Blake drew a small but powerful flashlight out of his pocket. I watched as he climbed into the sedan and pulled back the robe. The face of the dead man lying on the floor was ghastly looking in the light from the flash. He had been shot through the head.

I heard Norma gasp and I thought she was going to scream, but she didn't. I didn't feel so good myself. So far as I was concerned the corpse was a stranger, but hardly perfect.

I MIGHT say that thoughts flashed through my brain, but they didn't, they rumbled through like a slow freight. Had the girl known the body was in her car when she came to the hotel to see me? Had Norma killed the man and left him in the sedan? Had someone placed the body in the car while she had been in the hotel talking to me? Yeah, who was going to win the World Series next year!

"Nothing at all in the car, he says!"

said Blake looking at me as he climbed out. "Nothing, but a dead man with a bullet in his head!"

Norma came around the car and was standing close to me.

"He—he must have been in the car ever since I took it out of the garage and drove into town," she said. "I didn't know the—the body was there, Joe. I didn't!" Her voice rose and she sounded a bit hysterical.

"Of course you didn't, Norma," I said soothingly.

"Put the cuffs on them, Lansing," Blake said. "We'll take them in."

Lansing produced a pair of handcuffs. He snapped one cuff on Norma's right wrist and one on my left. Blake frisked me and took my gun out of the shoulder holster. They didn't search Norma.

"So you and the girl killed John Stanton to keep him from talking about the bank job," Blake said. "What with Robert Tilson and fifty grand of the bank dough missing, Stanton might have been able to put the finger on your brother—but good, Miss Tilson."

"Sure," said Lansing. "With Stanton working right along beside Tilson at the bank, he had a good chance to know who got away with the dough."

It struck me that Blake and Lansing were smart detectives to know so much about everything. A couple of real bright boys, all right. Maybe just a little too bright.

"And just where does Austin Hempstead fit in the picture?" I asked.

"Who?" demanded Blake.

"You're slipping," I said. "Austin Hempstead got the fifty grand that was lifted from the bank."

"So that's what—" began Lansing, and then stifled a yelp as Blake stepped on his toe.

"Don't talk so much, Lansing," Blake said. "Come on, let's get going."

He forced us to get into Norma's sedan and sit on the back seat. With the corpse lying on the floor at our feet we didn't like it much. Lansing crowded in, too. He sat on one side of Norma and I was on the other. Blake took the wheel of the car.

We started off. It didn't surprise me much to find that instead of going back downtown Blake drove out toward Westchester. We still appeared to be headed for Pelham.

"I just remembered," Norma said to

me in a low tone. "I heard a noise in our cellar last night. I was alone in the house and thought it might be rats so I was afraid to look down there."

"Probably was rats," I said. "Don't worry about it."

Blake was a wild driver and he loved speed. We must have been going nearly seventy when a tire blew out. The sedan sailed off the road, hit a rock and turned over. My head hit something and that was all I knew about it until I regained consciousness about twenty minutes later.

When I finally revived I found I was lying beside the car. Norma was kneeling beside me, some keys in her hand. She was unlocking the handcuffs that still held her wrist and mine.

"What happened to Blake and Lansing?" I asked weakly after she had unlocked the handcuffs and freed us. "Where did you get those keys, Norma?"

"Lifted them out of Lansing's pocket just before the crash," she said. "Are you hurt badly, Joe?"

"Don't know yet." I managed to get to my feet. I was bruised and cut but didn't seem to have any serious injuries. "How about you?"

"I'm all right," Norma said. "Though I was knocked unconscious for a time. Blake and Lansing are gone. I guess they thought we were both dead and didn't want to be found at the scene of the accident."

"Probably not," I said. "Besides they had some other business to take care of right away. A little matter of money—fifty grand in fact."

SINCE I didn't see any point in our staying there with the body of Stanton, which was still in the wrecked car, we went away from there. Finally we managed to get a taxi that took us out to Norma's house in Pelham Manor.

When we got to the house, I insisted upon going down in the cellar. In an old wine closet we found her brother bound and gagged. He breathed a sigh of relief when we released him.

"I thought no one would ever find me," Robert Tilson said. He looked at me. "Who is this man, Sis?"

"Joe Doyle, a private detective I hired to help me find you, Robert," Norma said. "He's nice and has brains."

Bob grinned when he shook hands with me. I liked him.

"Careful, Joe," he said. "Sis has stars in her eyes—that might be fatal."

"I'll be brave about it," I said. "So Stanton was stealing money from the bank. He got away with fifty thousand, fixed the books so it looked like you had been doing the stealing and then had you kidnaped the night before last. Right?"

"Right," said Bob. "The men who kidnaped me brought me here last night. Thought it was the last place anyone would look for me and they were correct."

"Who were they?" Norma asked.

"A couple of boys named Blake and Lansing," I said. "Our pals, the fake detectives. But they were too greedy. They wanted the fifty thousand for themselves so they killed Stanton and left the body in your car, Norma. After Stanton was dead, they found they had failed to learn where he had hidden the money."

"I know where the money is now," said Bob. "Stanton was with Blake and Lansing when they brought me here. He hid the money in the coal pile in our cellar. Blake and Lansing didn't see him do it."

"Come on," I said. "We better get to Austin Hempstead's house right away. Let's go."

We went out and hurried down the street to Hempstead's house. Just as we reached it I heard two shots and then three more that sounded like they came from another gun.

We rushed inside. Hempstead was standing in the living room. His gun was in his right hand, his left arm was bleeding at the place where a bullet had creased it. He was staring down at the still forms of Blake and Lansing sprawled on the floor.

"Mr. Doyle," he said, looking at me. "Perhaps you can tell me the meaning of this. I was here alone when these two men rushed in. They accused me of having fifty thousand dollars that had been stolen from some bank. When I told them I knew nothing about any such money, they started to get tough, so I had to shoot them."

"I know, Hempstead," I said. "I suggested to them that you might have the bank money, hoping they would come here looking for it." I grinned at him. "You see, at your request I hired you to protect my life and in shooting these two

(Concluded on page 108)

A mad strangler goes right down the line with his gruesome crimes—to Marty Rand and Nora!



I recognized him the moment I turned my head

One, Two, Three—MURDER!

By ROBERT J. HOGAN

AS WE went underground from One Hundred Twenty-fifth Street, I was thinking how glad I had been to go on my vacation and how glad I was to be back. I'd been glad to get away from that dizzy blonde, Nora, and get a rest.

I was glad to get back and feel the big town around me again and also I would be glad to see Nora. There was a girl. I couldn't live with her and I couldn't live without her. Meantime, she could get me into more trouble than I could cover with a Police Positive.

I got off the Adirondack Special in Grand Central and walked with the rest of the herd up the ramp of track thirty-six. I was thinking how swell it was going to be to toss out my chest and walk around the streets, feeling I was part of the biggest human show on earth.

I was thinking a lot of wonderful thoughts when I came up out of the ramp and there was Nora.

"Marty! Darling!" she screamed. There was never any holding that girl. She ducked under the rope and threw her arms around me. She kissed me.

"It's so good to have you back," she said. "It's simply wonderful, darling. I got off rehearsal this afternoon just to meet you. Did you get my letter about the new show I'm in? It's going to be a hit. I know it will be a hit, darling. How are you? Do you still love me, Marty?"

She babbled on like that. She hung onto my arm. We got in a taxi and moved uptown toward her apartment. She wouldn't stop kissing me. She had me looking like a stuck pig with her lipstick smeared all over my face. I wiped it off with my handkerchief.

"I must tell you about the darling dog I have, Marty. He's the cutest thing. I caught him yesterday chasing Sylvia and I simply had to have him. He's a darling. He sits up and begs and—"

I wanted to say, "What, another dog?" but then I remembered she'd written me that Teddy had been run over while I'd been gone. I started to say, "But you can't take a dog just like that. He must belong to somebody." But she didn't give me a chance.

WHEN we entered her apartment, I saw the pup soon enough. He was cute, all right. He had Sylvia, Nora's black tabby cat, up on the mantel and he also had Jeep, Nora's night-roaming Tom, up on the lampshade. He was having a time for himself, persuading first one and then the other to stay put. He was barking his head off. He had a voice that was high and shrill—but playful, too, to show there were no hard feelings.

Nora said, "My poor darlings. Marty, take him out for a walk, will you? He wants to go out. He's been in too long already."

So there I was, Detective Martin Rand of the Homicide Bureau, on my first assignment after my vacation. I was walking a mutt that looked like he might be somewhere between a white poodle, a sky terrier and a Boston bull, with a spattering of airdale and a heap of reckless living in general for a background.

We were walking along, taking in the scenery and the lamp posts and hydrants when this pooch spotted an alley cat up the block and he started yipping his head off, high and handsome in that queer, shrill voice of his.

Across the street and down the block a door opened and I saw a doll come out and look our way. Then she looked up

and down the street and started on a dead run for us. She snatched the leash out of my hand and her words sizzled.

"What are you doing with my dog, you thief?"

Somehow, her face seemed familiar, but I didn't have much time for any close inspection because she slapped me a smack that set my eye teeth to vibrating.

"I'll teach you to steal my dog," she said.

I heard somebody call from a window behind me and it was Nora. She said:

"Leave him alone. He didn't have anything to do with taking your dog."

"Then who was it—you?" This brunette was smart looking and her eyes were pretty black as she looked up at Nora.

"I'll be right down and explain," Nora said and slammed shut the window. Before you could say "Finnegan's Wake" Nora was there, sweet as my favorite butter creams.

"It was a mistake," she said. "I caught your dog running loose, after my cats and I lost a dog of my own two weeks ago and I was afraid your dog would get run over like mine did." She went on like that and before she was through they were practically in each other's arms and the brunette, who turned out to be named Doris Kane, was coming up to Nora's apartment with us for a drink.

I took a short, quick one and said I had to get back to headquarters. This Doris Kane pricked up her ears when I mentioned headquarters and I kept trying to place her. I was sure it would come to me in time, and it wasn't important, anyway, so I excused myself and took my bags and went to my room and washed up. Then I went to headquarters.

All the time I kept trying to figure who she was, but it always came out nothing.

It was good to get back with the boys. I shook hands with Bill Bender, the desk sergeant, and Arty Koretski of the files department and then the chief came out.

John Corrigan was an old hand at Homicide. I guess he'd been on the force and mostly in Homicide ever since I was born, almost. He was still long and lean and had bushy eyebrows and a lot of pink hair. "How are you, Martin?" he said.

I was fine, but then he added:

"Say, Nora called a while ago. She wants you to get in touch with her as

soon as you get in."

I didn't feel so good then. That Nora!

"I'll call her pretty soon," I said. "I just left her a while ago."

Corrigan looked a little worried. He said:

"She sounded pretty anxious. She said to tell you it looks like a murder is about to be committed."

I laughed. "Don't you know Nora, Chief?" I said. "She's just kidding."

Corrigan didn't crack a grin. I began to think it was some kind of a gag the boys had cooked up.

"She didn't sound as if she was kidding, Martin," he said. "Better call her."

I FIGURED I might as well let them have their fun and get it over, so I called Nora. She must have been sitting right beside the phone, because she answered before the bell stopped ringing the first time.

"Marty," she said and when she didn't say darling, which she did on every possible occasion, I knew she was pretty tense. "Marty. Remember that girl who owned the dog? She's in terrible trouble. She thinks someone is trying to kill her. Please come up right away."

I guess I must have been thinking of the Dick Tracy strip I'd been reading coming down on the train. I said:

"Don't do anything. This looks serious."

"Marty, you're joking," she said as if she'd like to bite my ear. "This is serious. Believe me."

"What did she say? Is she there now?" I asked her.

"No. She waited until it got dark and then she went back with her dog. She went back to her apartment. Come up right away, will you, Marty?"

I knew how emotional Nora was. I couldn't take much stock in the whole thing. Likely this Doris Kane had gotten Nora all worked up over nothing. Anyway, I said I'd be up and I took one of the police cars and drove uptown.

I kept trying to place Doris Kane all the way up but she kept just out of reach. But by the time I got to Nora's apartment I was sure I'd seen that Doris doll somewhere. That's the trouble with vacations. They let you down and your mind goes stale and it takes a while to get it back to the normal routine of thinking.

Nora had her hat on and was waiting

when I came in. She said:

"I'm terribly afraid something may have happened already, Marty."

We started to go over to Doris Kane's apartment.

"Tell me all about it," I said. "Who was she afraid of?"

"She didn't say who she was afraid of," Nora said. "She just said that she'd been worried. That somebody was trying to find her, to kill her. She started telling me when you left."

"After she found out I was on the police force?"

"That must have been it."

"What did she say? Try to remember."

"I'm trying," Nora said. "I'm all confused, I'm so excited."

"Why didn't she go hide some place if she was afraid somebody was looking for her?"

"Oh, yes. I remember now. Doris said she would have left yesterday but she had lost her dog and she wanted to wait until she found him."

By now we'd crossed the street and were coming to the house where Doris Kane had an apartment. It was an old brownstone made over.

It was dark as we got there, but I could see something moving up on top of the high stone steps and then the thing let out some shrill yips and I knew it was the purp.

He came to the edge of the top step, wagging his tail and barking. He came limping.

"The poor thing," Nora said. "He's limping. You poor darling." She picked up the dog in her arms. The leash was dragging under her arm.

We went in and looked at the mail boxes at the right side. We found Doris Kane's name. She lived on the top floor, apartment 3B. We climbed the stairs. Everything was quiet in the apartment house. We could smell the odor of cooking. Somebody was fixing hamburgers and somebody else or maybe the same ones were cooking cabbage.

I knocked at Doris Kane's door. I knocked again and nobody answered and the dog whined and tried to get out of Nora's arms. I tried the door. It was unlocked. We went in.

The first thing I saw was an open window at the side of the room. I remember thinking automatically that that window would open on a narrow alley at the side

of the house, and then I forgot all about windows.

Nora let go a gasp that was almost a scream and I looked to the left, sort of behind the door and partly toward the middle of the room. Doris Kane lay there in a heap. The dog spotted her and was crying his eyes out. I knew at a glance that she was dead.

FROM the general marks on the girl's body, I guessed that she'd been choked to death. Anyway, I'd leave that up to the medical examiner.

Nora and the dog were having a time, crying by themselves. "Who did this awful thing, Marty?" Nora sobbed.

"I don't know," I said, "but I'd certainly like to know." It sounded pretty silly. "Anyway, it was a very quiet affair. I don't think she had a chance to scream."

Nora took another look at the body and turned away quickly.

"Think, Nora," I said. "Did she give you any hint?"

"I can't—remember a thing," she said.

"Did she say whether she was afraid of a man—or a woman?"

"I don't think so. I can't remember, Marty." She was holding tight to the little dog in her arms. Suddenly she said, "It seems the dog would have put up a fight for Doris."

"Maybe he didn't have a chance," I said.

"What do you mean?" Nora asked.

I picked up the phone and called the desk at Homicide. I gave Bill Bender, the desk sergeant, the brief details and the address.

"Better send a flock of men up to this section and surround it," I said. "Pick up anybody on suspicion. I don't think the killer can be very far away." It looked like a pretty recent job. In fact, Doris' body was still warm.

Nora seemed to have a lot of faith in that little pooch in her arms. She said:

"Marty, what do you mean the dog didn't have a chance?"

"I'm just making a wild guess," I said. "But I think the killer was in this apartment when Doris Kane and the dog got back from your place."

"But how did he get in?"

"The door was probably unlocked," I said. "You remember Doris Kane left in a hurry when she heard her dog barking out in the street. So she might have left

the door open. The guy was probably hanging around somewhere waiting for it to get dark. Quite likely he saw her come out after her dog. He could easily have entered this apartment while Doris was over at your place."

"How terrible," Nora said. "What an awful thing."

I pointed to the collar on the dog's neck.

"The dog was limping when he came to meet us," I said. "That open window into the alley is three flights up. My guess is that the guy was pretty strong. Strong enough to hold Doris by the throat with one hand and carry the dog, by the leash or his collar where he couldn't bite him, over to the window and drop him out. Or he could have hung the dog up by the leash."

"But the dog would have barked, wouldn't he?"

"Not if the killer hung him up by the leash on—" I looked around and pointed to a hook back of the door—"on that hook. The collar would choke him and keep him from yapping. Then the killer could have choked Doris and, after that, taken the dog, dangling from the leash, and dropped him out of the open window into the alley."

"How terrible. It's a wonder he wasn't killed."

I took my flashlight and stuck it out the open window. Down below was a loose pile of ashes. I could see they'd been disturbed as if the dog had dropped in them.

"He was lucky to get off with only a limp," I said.

"But wouldn't the dog come around to the front door and bite the killer when he came out?" Nora said.

"Not if he spotted a cat first."

Nora thought a minute and then she said:

"Now I've got to keep the little darling, Marty."

"Looks like you got yourself a dog for keeps this time," I said.

"I'll call him Teddy," she said, cuddling the pup. "I'll call him Teddy—after Teddy."

I heard police sirens growing louder out in the street.

"Look, Nora," I said. "You better go back to the apartment because this isn't very pretty stuff."

"No, I'll stay, Marty," she said, but she looked scared.

"Okay, but exit to the hall when they start going over things."

"I'll stay right here," she said. "They may want to ask me some questions." Nora was a born ham when it came to publicity.

"Okay," I said. It was the way all our arguments ended.

THE boys came up and I told them what I knew. The chief was with them. It was always nice to see John Corrigan go to work. He never missed anything, but in this case there didn't seem to be anything to find. No fingerprints, except Doris Kane's. No clues of any kind. The fellow must have been wearing gloves, of course. The killer apparently had planned all this out very carefully. He was going to be a tough guy to nab.

Nora stuck to the last. I was proud of her. She stayed until they loaded Doris Kane into the wicker basket and carried her down the stairs. I walked over with Nora and went up to her apartment with her. I left her talking to her cats.

She was telling Sylvia and Jeep that Teddy was going to live with them. She was getting them acquainted. She told them she didn't want any more battles. She had a way with her. The two cats and the dog seemed to be starting off okay when I left.

I saw a couple of police cars down the block and one up the block when I went to the car I'd driven to Nora's apartment. They were still combing the neighborhood, but it began to look like they wouldn't find anybody.

I got into my car and switched on the instrument lights and turned on the ignition. I saw the piece of paper stuck in the steering wheel about the same time. I unfolded it and read the words.

"Doris is number one. You are number three, copper. Sweat, blast you."

Back at headquarters, I checked with all the boys. The short hair along my spine hadn't got so it would lie down flat—not yet. I didn't let them know that it had raised my fur. I just kept trying to find one of the boys who might have seen somebody go near my car while they were checking in the section. Nobody had seen anyone. I had a feeling I wasn't going to sleep much that night.

[Turn page]

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Even the chief was jumpy, and from that I knew he was baffled. I was in the record room trying to figure something out with Arty Koretski when the chief came in and laid a hand on my shoulder. We had the main light turned on one file case and it was a little dim where I stood so he could make the mistake easily. He said:

"Joe, why aren't you out on that—" Then, when I turned my face, John Corrigan said, "Excuse me, Martin. I thought you were Joe Kulsar."

It wasn't unusual for me to be taken for Joe Kulsar. We were built about alike and looked a little alike, even in the face, and we had the same tastes about our clothes. But it showed how jumpy Corrigan was at the moment.

"I wish I could place Doris Kane," I said. "She looked familiar to me when I met her this evening but I haven't been able to recall where I saw her before."

"Dugan is making a fingerprint check now," Corrigan said. "Maybe that will turn up something to refresh your memory. Found anything here?"

"Not yet," I said. Of course we were all working on the same angle. It seemed pretty clear that this was an instance of someone coming back to get revenge. I was trying to dig up some case where I'd caught a man, and a girl of Doris Kane's description had had something to do with convicting him. But we couldn't find any case that tied me up with Doris Kane or any brunette like her.

"We've got to find out who number two is," Corrigan said.

"Yes, sir," I said. "It's apparent that the fellow wants to make me sweat while he knocks off number two."

"I don't think you'll be in too much danger, Marty," the chief said, "until he gets number two."

"I'm not worrying," I lied. "Old Police Positive and my fists will take care of me. What I'm trying to find is number two."

"If you could find the case you're after, then you could learn, perhaps, who the judge was that convicted the scum," Corrigan said.

That was pretty evident. I was thinking of a judge myself, but a lot of judges had convicted plenty of people that I'd brought in—only he couldn't tie in the girl, Doris Kane.

The handwriting expert was going

over the note I'd found in my wheel, but it was tough because the note was printed. Anyway, handwriting takes a lot of checking to tie it up to something.

On top of that, there weren't any fingerprints on the note. We couldn't tie the paper the note was written on to anything because it was just a piece of wrapping paper—a torn off corner that could have come from any trash barrel in town.

I let the boys go on with their investigation and went to my room to try and get some sleep.

I LAY there trying to figure things out until it began to get daylight, then I must have fallen asleep. When I woke up the telephone bell was trying to shake itself off the wall, ringing. I got up and answered it.

It was nine o'clock and it was Nora. She was all excited again. She wanted me to come right over. She sounded mad. She said, among other things:

"Listen, you two-timer. If you want to continue knowing me, you get over here right away."

Dressing and shaving, I tried to figure out what I'd done to make her sore. That Nora! I couldn't think of anything and she wouldn't tell me more over the phone.

Teddy started barking his head off when I knocked on her door but when she opened it and he flew out at me, he saw who I was and started jumping up on me and wagging his tail. I wish I could have said the same for Nora, but I couldn't.

Nora was glaring at me like I'd stolen all her nylons. "Come in here, you," she said.

I went in and she closed the door.

"Look," I said. "I don't know what this is all about but I could stand a cup of coffee."

"You'll get no coffee from me," she said, "until you explain this." She held out a hunk of wrapping paper with some pencil printing on it. It was the same kind of paper and printing as the note I'd found on my wheel last night.

"I found that in my mail box this morning," she said. "Fine thing."

I thought back and remembered when I'd brought her home from the murder last evening we'd passed the mail boxes in the entrance and had come right up to her apartment.

"You didn't look in the box last night, did you?" I asked, just to make sure.

"Certainly not," she said. "Why should I? The mail only comes in the morning and then again right after noon. Stop stalling."

I started reading the hand printing on the note. It said:

"I think maybe I'll tell your copper's wife about you. And maybe I'll kill you both, before I get him."

Nora's finger was trembling, she was so mad. She didn't seem to be worried about the last part of the note. She was pointing to the first part only. That was what had her in a stew. She said:

"Let's see you talk your way out of that wife angle, you stinker."

"Now wait a minute," I said.

"Wait nothing," she said. "You tell me you love me. You make me think you're single and you get me so crazy about you I'd jump out a window, if you told me to. And now—" She started to cry.

"Oh, shut up!" I said. "I never was married and by the looks of things I never will be."

I was trying to think fast, but I was all at once so scared for Nora that I couldn't think—not straight, anyway. There was something trying to get through my haze of fear for Nora but I couldn't make it out. I kept having a feeling that I was getting there but it wouldn't come.

Nora kept crying but all that dizzy dame was crying about was because I didn't love her. She didn't seem to have an idea that this same killer who had choked Doris Kane to death so quietly would sure be after her next—after he'd given the mental torture to her boy friend, which was me. But somehow, I couldn't feel too scared for myself.

I said, "For the love of Charlie Knickerbocker, will you shut up so I can think?"

"But you can't love me if you've got a wife," Nora said.

I took her by the shoulders and shook her. "Look," I said, "I love you. I never was in love with anybody else. I never was married. I never thought of getting married."

"You—you didn't?" She stopped crying and looked hurt. "You never thought of marrying me, Marty?"

[Turn page]

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"But you just said—"

"You got me mixed up like I was caught in a concrete mixer," I said and that didn't help because all at once I remembered the case of a vengeance killer who only six months ago had taken the girl friend of a man he was trying to get even with and he'd poured her into a slab of concrete just to heckle the guy before he killed him. I started to tear my hair.

"Darling, what are you doing?" Nora said with her eyes wide.

"I'm going mad," I said. "And if you don't shut up I'll get violent."

SHE quieted down at that. She only let one more peep out of her on the subject.

She said in a meek voice:

"But you do love me?"

"Certainly I love you. That's what I've been trying to tell you. And I haven't got a wife. I never did have."

She even smiled at me.

"You haven't?" And she added. "Then maybe the note I found in my mailbox was for somebody else."

"Okay, okay," I said. "It was for somebody else. But don't forget that the killer will try to knock you off when he decides it's time."

It all came to me suddenly out of the talking. I said:

"But he's after somebody else, not me."

"Then he wouldn't attack me if he's after somebody else," Nora said.

"He'll get you when he's ready," I said, "because he thinks you're a girl friend of another fellow."

"But I don't understand," she said.

"And don't hold your breath until you do," I said. "Where's the telephone directory?"

I ran through the names starting with K. I found the number and called and heard the ringing signal. Nora stood at my elbow pumping questions, but I didn't pay any attention to her.

A woman's voice answered the phone.

"Hello," I said, "is this Mrs. Kulsar? This is Marty Rand. How are you this morning?"

"Terrible," she said. "What do you want?"

"I think you're excited over nothing, Mrs. Kulsar," I said. "Can I speak to Joe?"

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He came on and I said:

"Joe, what's up?"

"Plenty," Joe Kulsar said, sounding even madder than his wife. "Some stinker called my wife this morning and told her I had a blonde in an apartment at—"
He mentioned Nora's address.

"We'll be right over," I said. "We'll get you out of the doghouse. Meantime, there's a killer looking for you, Joe. Keep your roscoe handy. This guy means business and he's after you."

On the way I explained to Nora and then, when we got over to Joe Kulsar's apartment I explained all over again to all hands.

It was easy to figure out now.


Joe Kulsar and I had often been taken for each other. We weren't close enough for twins, but at a distance or from the back, as the chief had caught me, we could be mistaken for each other.

So the killer had me mixed with Joe Kulsar. And, knowing that I went to see Nora and also that Joe Kulsar, the man he was after, had a wife, he was trying to make Joe sweat plenty before knocking him off. Maybe the killer had heard

[Turn page]

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about the concrete case I'd just been thinking about. The idea of Nora getting in a jam like that, scared the devil out of me.

Mrs. Kulsar was as white as the cloth on the table.

"My God! He's after you, Joe," she gasped.

She looked as scared for Joe as I felt for Nora.

We worked out the idea together that it would be best for Nora and Mrs. Kulsar to go stay at a hotel until this thing was under control. We got a taxi, circled, made sure we weren't being followed and then put the girls in a room in a midtown hotel. From there, Joe and I went to headquarters and started working on the new angle.

Feeling sure, as we were now, that Joe was the one the killer was after, it wasn't hard to run down the case.

Everything pointed to one Lefty Greco as the killer we were after. Greco was a plenty tough lad. In fact, he was a little on the maniac side, Joe had figured two years ago when he'd made the pinch. It had been a gang killing and, although we couldn't get enough direct evidence on him to tie him to the actual trigger, there'd been enough to convict him, and Judge Summers had given Lefty Greco twenty years.

They'd led Lefty away screaming that he'd get everybody in the case when he got out and now, looking over his record of brutal beatings and suspected gang tortures, I knew we were in for trouble of the gruesome kind.

"Judge Summers is the man next on Greco's list," Corrigan said, wagging his thick eyebrows. "We've got to get him if it isn't too late."

Judge Summers should have been in court right then. We called, but he hadn't showed up at the courthouse yet. Nobody had seen him.

I knew the judge well. He was a rather testy old fellow who had lived alone for years in a nice apartment in an old brownstone in the sixties.

We couldn't reach him by phone at his apartment, so we jumped in a couple of police cars and went up there as fast as we could.

WE FOUND the judge—what was left of him—but no clues. Nobody had seen anyone enter or leave that

sounded like Lefty Greco, but of course that wasn't unusual and it didn't mean that Lefty hadn't done the nasty job.

The little apartment house didn't have a doorman or an elevator man and the janitor and his wife, who took care of the place, lived in the rear basement apartment. They'd been in their apartment all evening and all night.

The judge wasn't pretty to look at. The killer had really worked on the poor old man. First he'd tied him and put a tight gag in his mouth. He had him so tight that he couldn't move or make a sound.

The judge was only half dressed and his feet were bare. He was lying on the divan in the living room so he couldn't have thumped his feet against the floor and given anybody downstairs a signal.

Lefty Greco, and we were sure it was Lefty by now, had burned the soles of Judge Summers' feet—burned them terribly. But that hotfoot angle was just a beginning. The rest isn't nice to talk about and I'd just as soon forget it. It was bad and you can take my word for it.

At the last, after he'd had his fun, Lefty had choked the old man to death.

Joe Kulsar looked pretty white and pretty mad at the same time. He was probably thinking what Lefty Greco might do to his wife, the same as I was thinking what might happen to Nora.

The general idea was there in writing, or rather printing, so we didn't have to guess. There was another note pinned to Judge Summers' underwear that said:

"This gives you an idea what's going to happen to you. But I think I'll give your wife and girl friend some treatment first. No hurry. I got lots of time to get even."

Joe and I were scared, all right, but we felt that for the moment our women were safe. So we went down to headquarters figuring that everything was under control for now.

But there was that feeling that Lefty might wait a year before he struck again. He was a clever fiend. He'd broken out of the big house three months ago and he'd been lying low ever since, just waiting. On the other hand, who could tell about women?

All the way back to headquarters, Joe simmered like a hot teakettle and when

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we got in he called up his wife at the hotel right away. But only Mrs. Kulsar was there. She said:

"I told Nora she shouldn't go out, but she said she just wanted to take a walk and get a little air."

Dang that Nora! Mrs. Kulsar said she'd been gone almost two hours now and she was worried. She was worried. I was sweating blood.

I started pacing the floor, trying to figure where to look for Nora. I was still pacing like a caged cat when the desk sergeant called to me.

"Marty, your girl friend wants to talk to you."

I could have kissed him. I said:

"Hello, Nora!" I must have yelled, the way the boys looked at me. "You all right?"

"Of course I'm all right," she said.

"Where are you?"

"Up in my apartment," she said. "I had to see that my darlings were all right." I should have known. "Come up as soon as you can."

"Nora," I said, with the sweat pouring out all over me. "Don't you know you're in danger?"

I heard her laugh.

"Oh, I don't think so," she said. "Hurry up to the apartment, darling."

"Nora," I yelled. "You blamed fool."

She laughed again. "Stop calling me names and hurry."

TRAMPED on the siren and broke all traffic laws going up there. All I could think of was what that killer had done to Judge Summers. All the way up the stairs to her apartment I kept thinking about the judge and I kept going faster until I got to her door.

I wasn't in the habit of busting into Nora's apartment without knocking, but that didn't hold me back this time. The door was unlocked and I went charging in like a mad rhino.

What I saw was the thing I'd been afraid of. Nora was lying on the daybed at the other side of the room. She was tied up tight, just as the judge had been, and her beautiful mouth was covered with a gag that would keep a Great Dane from barking.

I also heard a sound. It was a choking sound as if some animal were being gaged.

I went for my gun but I was late. Behind me, someone said:

"Reach, copper." And then the door slammed shut.

I recognized Lefty Greco the second I turned my head and saw him. He was a nasty-looking guy, about five-nine tall, but broad in the shoulders and strong enough. He had a square face and little black eyes that were looking through me like a couple of X-ray gadgets. He had a thirty-eight automatic not three feet away from my head, and there was a devilish grin on his face.

I looked to see what the choking sounds were. They came from Teddy, the dog. Lefty had hung up on a hook in the kitchenette door, and he was slowly choking to death. He was hung just as I'd suspected Lefty had hung the dog in Doris Kane's apartment, before he'd dropped him out the window.

I thought of a lot of things, including what was going to happen to Nora. I saw her move and try to break free and I knew she was still alive. It looked like I'd come in just in time to head off Lefty from working on her like he had on the judge.

But now I was in line for the same treatment. I wasn't thinking so much about that, though, as I was of Nora and what would eventually happen to Joe Kulsar and his wife. I was getting madder by the second.

It began to dawn on me that maybe Nora had said what she had on the phone with Lefty's gun stuck in her ribs. She'd laughed twice, though, and they'd both been good, solid, real laughs, like she had a good joke on me.


But there wasn't any time now for speculation. I had to be thinking ahead.

Lefty stepped up behind me and stuck the gun in my back. He reached under my coat and lifted my Police Positive.

"Now, copper," he said, "You're going to see your girl get it before I work on you."

I'd turned just a little so I could look at Greco without twisting my head off. I remembered his face just the same way I'd remembered Doris Kane's face. I'd seen their pictures at headquarters and in the papers when Doris Kane had testified against Lefty at his trial.

[Turn page]



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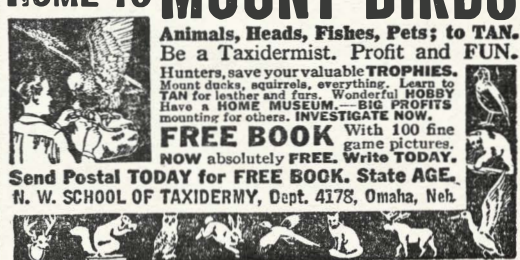
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"Listen, Lefty," I said. "You got the wrong copper."

He took a quick look at me and gave a low cackle.

"Don't make me laugh," he said.

"You think I'm Joe Kulsar, the detective that made the pinch three years ago. Right?"

Lefty tried to pretend he was sure, but I could see uncertainty written all over his broad face.

"I'm Marty Rand," I said. "Joe Kulsar and I are always being taken for each other. You got the wrong guy."

It was a break that I thought of telling him this because he began to think it over. He came around in front of me to get a good look at my face. He was looking at me hard.

I knew this was the time to start anything I had in mind, so I went into action. My hands were up about head high. I smashed my left down and caught his gun and as I did that I cocked my right and let him have it.

His gun barked and I could feel the bullet rip through my coat, but there wasn't any burn so I knew the bullet hadn't creased me.

That right was smack on the button. It made his eyes jiggle and he reeled a little with the blow. I followed up. I had his right wrist in my left hand and I jerked it hard, giving it a twist at the same time.

HE DROPPED his gun and dived for it. I let him have a left uppercut as he ducked and his head snapped back. A right to the jaw dropped him and I followed him down and put the cuffs on him, behind his back. Then I picked up the guns, put mine back where it belonged and laid his up on the mantel where I could reach it.

Teddy was still choking on his collar, so I got him down. He was all right after he got his breath.

I cut Nora loose. She was boiling mad.

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Seemed she'd come back to her apartment and Lefty was waiting in the hall. When he'd forced his way into the apartment, Teddy bit him and he kicked the dog across the room. Nora grabbed a fireplace poker and let him have it and knocked him out cold, then she'd called me.

"But why didn't you tie him up and take his gun?" I asked.

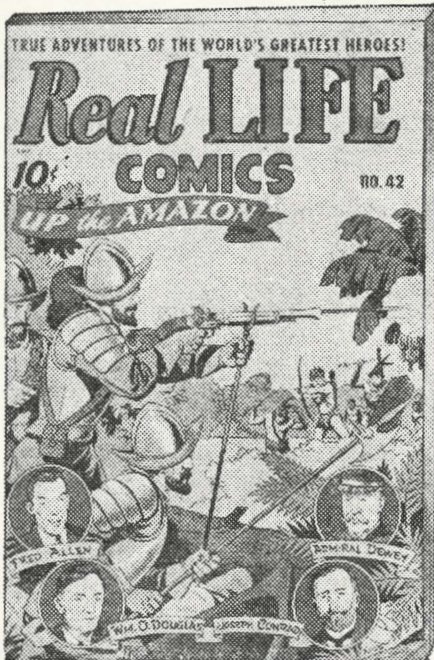
"I guess I was too excited," she said. "I was half afraid I'd killed him and anyway, I was sure he couldn't regain consciousness before you came. I was so proud. I wanted to surprise you." She looked like she was going to cry.

Of course, Lefty had come around after she'd called me and he'd made the switch and been waiting for me to come, so he could finish Nora while I looked on.

About the time she got through explaining, Joe Kulsar and some of the boys arrived.

[Turn page]

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"I got thinking maybe you might run into trouble," Joe said, "so we decided you might need some help, Marty."

"You came just too late for the fun," I said. "But you can take your playmate with you when you go." They carried Lefty out.

I got the two cats down from the drapes and sat down in my favorite chair and tried to quiet them. Teddy came over and lay down at my feet. It was all very homelike. It made me feel good.

Nora said, "Maybe I'd better get you some breakfast, darling."

"It's about time," I said.

NOT ACCORDING TO DOYLE

(Concluded from page 92)

men, you were doing just that!"

"I was merely bluffing," protested Hempstead. "I didn't think you would really fall for that gag about hiring me to protect you from being killed. I was in town, visiting some friends at your hotel a day or so ago. They told me about you staying there. I wondered what a detective would do if someone offered to save him from being murdered.

"But you carry a gun and can use it," I said. "How come?"

"I have a permit," said Hempstead. "Got it when my house was robbed some time back." He glanced at the two dead men. "But think of a retired actor killing a couple of murderers. They were that, of course?"

"They were," I said. "And we'll all swear you did it in self-defense, Cousin Austin."

"Thank you, Cousin Doyle." He frowned. "But think of the publicity, my name is in the papers!" His face lighted up. "Yes, think of it—it will be simply wonderful!"

I grinned and looked at Bob, and then turned to Norma. There must have been something in my expression that made her lower her eyes. I moved closer to her.

"I'm going to kiss you, Norma," I said. "That's the way this case should end—according to Doyle!"

She lifted her head as I took her in my arms.

"Clinch—curtain!" said Austin Hempstead.

COMPETITION IS TOUGH

(Concluded from page 69)

"Oh!" I slipped under the wheel from the other side and stared at her. "So that's why you were running around with those two! Did your office tell you to go dancing with me, too?"

"You? Oh, no, Pete. That was—that was different."

The way she said it made me feel all warm inside.

By this time there were a number of cars stopped on the highway, and a State trooper came across the field with a flashlight.

"I'm Pete Bush, from the service station on Northern Boulevard and 28th," I told him. "I can give you all the dope on this, but first I'll run this lady home. She may be hurt."

He threw his light on the lettering on the body of the La Salle.

"Yeah. Okay, Mr. Bush. Then come back, heh?"

I felt warm again, but for a different reason. When a State trooper gives you a big Mr. you really rate as a respectable citizen of the community.

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OFFICIAL BUSINESS

(Continued from page 8)

her. Don't tell them where she is, especially don't tell them she's getting off that bus. I'll head her off."

Running down the sidewalk, about a block from the house, Moon easily recognizes a glowing face and perfect figure. Joan Garson is walking toward him—

Of course we know the solution of the crime isn't going to be all beer and skittles, especially since we promised you that "Manny" Moon is going to be such a knock-down-and-drag-out guy, who manhandles gangsters in an awesome manner. What we have given you folks, is the meekest peek under the curtain.

But the action is so rugged, the plot so well worked out, the characters so interesting, we're sure you're going to be glad we've brought you THE JUAREZ KNIFE. A couple of deep kudos too, to our author, Richard Deming. He's turned out one swell whale of a story!

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Dealing as we have been right along, in what are known as "Whodunits," here's one in the form of a novelet to be the companion of the novel in our next issue. It is laid in a most unusual locale—the orange country of California, where one of the principal enemies of that tremendous industry, is one of the necessary forces of Mother Nature. We refer to Old Jack Frost.

The story too, concerns an interesting, whole-hearted and wholesome lot of people—people you will be glad to take into your home and treasure as real friends, just as if you had known them all your life. The name of the novelet is:

A COLD NIGHT FOR MURDER

by

J. LANE LINKLATER

When Bill Treat opened that automobile accessory store there in Moravia, little did he think two other chaps would have the very same idea. Of course there wasn't room for three of them and all his savings soon dwindled away. It was then that Osa Dunne began to act coldly toward him—or was it? On this particular night she is sitting in the Moravia Cafe, drinking coffee with Charlie Flax. You can get drinks there too. Treat has just ordered his third bourbon. It is a

cold night and Treat feels he needs it.

Treat keeps trying to catch Osa's eye in the mirror. She won't even glance in his direction. Treat doesn't feel anyone can truthfully say he is hitting the bottle. So why does Hank Smalley keep tapping him on the shoulder? He knows he has to go on duty in a few moments with the Frost Patrol. Hank Smalley is Osa's stepfather.

One word leads to another. Bill Treat just feels nasty enough to fight. They are finally separated by Silas Hocking of Central Packinghouse. Hocking brings Treat a cup of coffee and says: "You're on duty in a few minutes. They're depending on you!"

At the South End Protective Association, Paul Horton is the manager. He glances sharply at Treat and sniffs suspiciously. Treat has taken this temporary job with the Frost Patrol. It is his job to drive around to the different groves and report the temperature back to headquarters. Osa has a job there too, on the switchboard. You can always depend on Osa. No matter how often Treat glances at her, she always seems to be looking the other way. When Treat calls up to report, it's always the other operator, Shirley Blane, on the other end of the line.

Bungalow 17

This night he reports: "Number Seventeen, on Three Hundred, is down to twenty-six." He doesn't even notice who is the owner of Bungalow 17. He does know that temperature is at the danger mark. He knows he will have to go back and wake the occupant up, unless he can be reached by phone. The owner of the bungalow fails to answer. There is nothing for Treat to do but drive back to Number Seventeen. Mean-

(Turn page)

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while, Treat has found out that the aforementioned bungalow is owned by Hank Smalley.

Yes, friends, you have guessed it—Hank Smalley is dead, the back of his head bashed in by the proverbial blunt instrument, which lays, conveniently now, on the floor of the bungalow. All night long Treat has been vainly trying to reach Osa by phone. Now, when he doesn't want to talk to her, it is her voice on the end of the line. He is forced to tell her about her stepfather's death and the unfortunate-for-him-circumstances surrounding the finding of the body. Things look mighty bad for Bill Treat!

The police arrive, and an investigation begins—an investigation that brings astonishing things to light in this suspenseful, action-packed crime novel! It's a humdinger, folks!

There will also be our usual galaxy of shorter stories to round out a grand issue. We're sure you'll enjoy every bit of it.

LETTERS FROM READERS

OUR famous red-headed secretary, Nasurtium McGonigle, has just waded through a whole bale of letters and come up with some bouquets and brickbats. We are only too happy to pass on to our readers some excerpts from the most "meaty" letters in the collection.

Due to the fact that I spent over three years in the Army of the United States, I have missed a few issues of your monthly, POPULAR DETECTIVE Magazine, which I have found to be very enjoyable reading. Some time ago the feature story was named "The Crimson Clown's Return," by Johnston McCulley. I enjoyed it very much and I would like to request more of the clown's adventures if it is

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possible. My main purpose in writing was to find out for certain if that was the only clown adventure written by Mr. McCulley. If not, could you advise as to what the others were and if printed in your magazine, would you tell me in what issues and whether or not those issues are still available?
—Clifford C. Nelson, Columbus Ohio

Thank you very much, Clifford. As the title so aptly suggests by the mere mention of the word "Return," the Crimson Clown must have been away somewhere in order to "return." Mr. McCulley's fascinating hero was featured in POPULAR DETECTIVE Magazine for quite a few years. We are sorry, but no copies of these magazines are available at this time. Mr. McCulley is quite a noted and prolific writer. We'll be glad to pass your letter along to him. Maybe you can convince him to bring the clown back again.

From New York's northmost borough, we hear as follows:

I just finished reading a short story by Joe Archibald, "Two Grand Finale" about William Klump, his fictitious character. Mr. Archibald is a very good comical short story writer. I trust he continues the good work.
—Julius S. Wagner, Bronx, N. Y.

You're telling us Julius! Old Joe is one of our stand-bys and has been for years. Thanks for your letter. Here's a bit of a knock from the Keystone State:

Please give the "perfect murder" type of story a rest as the formula is getting monotonous. Even though they are short and so give you a chance to run more stories, this is a reader who enjoys fewer stories, but ones with more meaty plots. Your issue of July, 1947, was good with the exception of Myers' D. P. From Brooklyn, which I found slow.
—Miss Crystal M. Neale, Sewickley, Pa.

And now a note from Texas:

LOCATION FOR MURDER, by Edward Churchill, in your September number, was one of the best crime novels I ever read. I also like the Chet Lacey yarns very much.

—William T. Tender, Dallas, Tex.

Keep the ball rolling, folks. Send all letters and cards to The Editor, POPULAR DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.

Thanks to you all and happy reading to everybody. See you next issue!

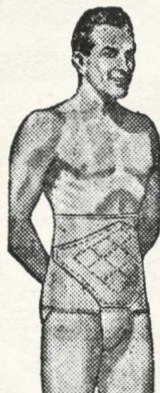
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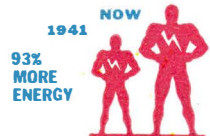
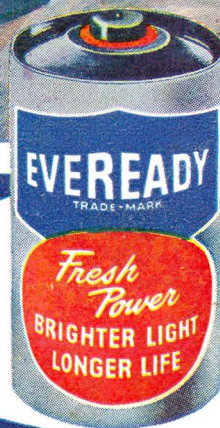


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