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DETECTIVE

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POPULAR Detective

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Teen-Agers on the Loose!

**ANYTHING
FOR A THRILL**

By M. E. CHABER

CITY OF STRANGERS

A Novel By PHILIP WECK



A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

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POPULAR Detective

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

NOVEMBER,
1952

VOL. XLIII
No. 3

● **Featured Novel**

ANYTHING FOR A THRILL

By M. E. Chaber

Eddie found he got a kick out of torture, and so he decided to try some—on one of his pretty classmates! 10

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DAVID X. MANNERS
EDITOR

ALL STORIES IN THIS ISSUE ARE BRAND NEW

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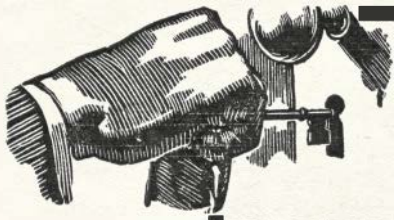
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INSIDE STUFF

WHY CALL HER JAILBAIT?

PRESUMABLY you will never be in such a predicament as described here. Nevertheless, if you are male and under eighty, you will no doubt understand and possibly sympathize. The young man concerned was charged with rape. Certain circumstances made the case peculiar.

After the trial, I talked to a woman member of the jury which debated his guilt. I can't give you too many details about her because there were only two females on that jury and for reasons which will presently be appreciated, none of those twelve good citizens and true are in any position to be identified. I had witnessed the trial and formed my own opinion but I was not prepared for the actual outcome. I wanted to know how come. Mrs. K——told me.

The lady in question is in her early thirties, married and the mother of a baby girl. Her blue eyes were troubled as she told me what had gone on when the jurors discussed the fate of Benny W——. She wasn't certain she'd voted right and wanted to be reassured.

The Case of Benny

Benny was nineteen, thin and quick in his movements, with a large head, a shock of hair that needed cutting, and a very scared expression in his brown eyes. He earned a fair wage as a punch press operator in a can-making factory and sent some money home to his family in North Carolina. The draft board had passed him up on account of some knee defect. He was just an average, ordinary fellow, earning his own keep and a little over and getting as much of a good time

as he could afford. He'd picked up this kid, Evaleen, in a juke joint one night when he was looking for that good time.

Evaleen was something. Most of this magazine, properly, is devoted to fiction, and the full truth about Evaleen would sound like over-indulgence in that old imagination sauce. But here are the essential details. Age—a matter of the most bitter and savage debate. Weight, one fifty. Height, five two. Hair, jet. Eyes—w-e-e-ll!—big, dark, and inviting. Figure, just plain sexy—full breasts, wide hips, neat legs. Skirt, short. Posture—anything to show as much as she could. A wobble walk. Her parentage, too, was more or less debatable, and she hadn't lived at home for three years prior to piling up with Benny.

How Old Was She?

She'd worked in a five and dime, a lunch-room, a beer joint. She had never, she admitted giggling, confined her earning efforts to prescribed working hours. When asked how many times she had had sexual relations with boys, she shrugged and said blandly, "Gee, who keeps track of that sort of thing?" Pressed by defendant's lawyer and finally by the judge to give an approximate answer, she squirmed around on the witness stand and protested: "I don't know. Maybe fifty, I guess. If you just count the different boys, not the times."

The point at issue was her age. In the state in which the alleged crime had been committed, it is a statutory offense to have relations with a girl under sixteen, with or

(Continued on page 113)



**KNOWLEDGE
THAT HAS
ENDURED WITH THE
PYRAMIDS**

A SECRET METHOD FOR THE MASTERY OF LIFE

WHENCE came the knowledge that built the Pyramids and the mighty Temples of the Pharaohs? Civilization began in the Nile Valley centuries ago. Where did its first builders acquire their astounding wisdom that started man on his upward climb? Beginning with naught they overcame nature's forces and gave the world its first sciences and arts. Did their knowledge come from a race now submerged beneath the sea, or were they touched with Infinite inspiration? From what concealed source came the wisdom that produced such characters as Amenhotep IV, Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton, and a host of others?

Today it is known that they discovered and learned to interpret certain *Secret Methods* for the development of their inner power of mind. They learned to command the inner forces within their own beings, and to master life. This secret art of living has been preserved and handed down throughout the ages. Today it is extended to those who dare to use its profound principles to meet and solve the problems of life in these complex times.

This Sealed Book—FREE

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OPIUM SMUGGLERS MEET THEIR MATCH WHEN...



THE "JUNKS" IN THE SPARE ALL RIGHT. WHAT NOW? OP

PASS 'EM THROUGH. I'LL FOLLOW THEM HOME

HOMeward bound after a day at TIJUANA, SENATOR BLAIK AND HIS DAUGHTER STOP AT THE BORDER FOR ROUTINE CUSTOM INSPECTION...



OPIUM? IN MY CAR? YOU'RE BEING PREPOSTEROUS! I'M SENATOR BLAIK!

USED BY OPIUM SMUGGLERS, SENATOR. LET ME SHOW YOU



AMAZING! YOU SAY THEY PUT IT IN THE TIRE AT THAT PARKING LOT?

EXACTLY! AND TONIGHT THE GANG AT THIS END WILL TRY TO NAB IT. MAY I USE YOUR 'PHONE?



THAT'S THAT. WELL YOU FOLKS HAVE YOUR DINNER. I'LL BE BACK ABOUT NIGHTFALL

WHY NOT STAY AND HAVE A SNACK WITH US?

SURE. COME UPSTAIRS AND FRESHEN UP



MIND IF I SHAVE, SIR? I'VE BEEN ON DUTY SINCE DAWN

CERTAINLY. HERE'S A RAZOR



THIS BLADE SURE SURE MAKES SHORT WORK OF WHISKERS. MY FACE FEELS GREAT!

I'M SOLD ON THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE PLENTY KEEN AND LONG-LASTING



PUT UP YOUR HANDS AND NO FUNNY BUSINESS!

THE FEDS!

LATE THAT NIGHT



SO THIS TIME TOMORROW I'LL BE HEADING EAST ON THE "SUPER-CHIEF"

THAT'S WONDERFUL! WE'LL BE ON THE SAME TRAIN!

HE'S HANDSOME



WHEN YOU'RE OUT TO GET QUICK, EASY SHAVES AT A SAVING, THIN GILLETTES ARE JUST YOUR DISH. YOU CAN'T FIND ANOTHER LOW-PRICE BLADE SO KEEN AND LONG-LASTING. THIN GILLETTES ARE MADE FOR YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR... FIT EXACTLY AND PROTECT YOUR FACE FROM NICKS AND IRRITATION. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES IN THE CONVENIENT 10-BLADE PACKAGE



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The

WELSHER

A True Story by CARTER CRITZ

ONE of the strangest murder trials of all time occurred a quarter of a century ago in Manchester, England. What makes it so odd is that, actually, no murder was committed.

There was a victim—a beautiful young girl—but the prosecution conceded that the man tried for her death did not kill her with his own hands or hire anyone to do it for him.

The prosecution went even beyond this. It acknowledged that the girl had taken her own life—but, nevertheless, it tried the man for her murder.

As a matter of fact, the prosecution was really demanding his life because he wasn't dead himself.

The curtain on this bizarre drama was rung up one night when a man came running out of the woods, shouting at some passers-by: "My girl and I—we planned to do away with ourselves—but I couldn't seem to make it at the end."

The man was one William Arthur Hallows. The girl who lay dead in the woods was Kathleen Primrose Wheeldon, a ravishingly beautiful sixteen-year-old girl.

Their romance had started in a quite ordinary, commonplace fashion. They were both on the same Manchester trolley one day when she'd lost her balance alighting, and he'd caught her.

As their acquaintance ripened, their trysts became more and more clandestine for William Arthur Hallows was a married man.

He told Kathleen that he loved her, that he wanted to marry her, but that his wife wouldn't give him a divorce. It was an old, old story, but the innocent, sensitive Kathleen believed it with all her heart and soul. In the classic tradition of great love affairs doomed to frustration, she kept talking about a Romeo-and-Juliet-like suicide. They agreed on a time and early on the appointed evening had stopped in a chemist's shop

and bought the poison. Then they'd walked into the woods and, by moonlight, had written farewell letters to families and friends.

There was a long last kiss, and a few minutes later, Kathleen lay dead on the ground, weirdly beautiful in the moonlit woods. Her lover, had taken some poison, too—but only a little—and had even tried to cut his wrists but couldn't summon up enough nerve to follow through either time.

The Manchester prosecutor, G. Eastham, showed Hallows no sympathy whatsoever but took the view that a man who "welshed" in a suicide pact with a woman and who "cowardly survived her" deserved to be punished to the full.

"A man who encourages an infatuated woman to kill herself," he told the jury that heard the case, "promising to die with her and follow her into eternity, and then has a saving second thought is a murderer of the deepest dye."

Perhaps the trial received its most hauntingly macabre twist when the suicide letters written by the pair in the moonlight of the woods were read to the jury. "I can't stand it any more, for I love Kathleen Wheeldon better than life itself," Hallows had written just a few moments before deciding otherwise.

Few trials in England have been followed more closely by the public. The end, in keeping with the rest of the case, was a dramatic one. The jury found the man guilty of the murder of the woman who had killed herself but recommended clemency. But Judge Sir William J. Hicks, in his black cap, declined to accept the jury's recommendation and sternly sent young Kathleen's weak-spined lover to the gallows.

Although Hallows left behind not only a wife but a child, the severe verdict was generally popular with the English public. Brit-ishers like all honorable people, do not like a "welsher."



ANYTHING

for a Thrill

A Novel by M. E. CHABER



Eddie was a high-school football hero who delighted in torture, and one night he decided to try some—on one of his pretty classmates!



There was one thing
he wanted to do before
he used the rope . . .

Chapter 1

THE car had been stripped and cut down until it resembled a burnished beetle more than it did an automobile. The motor had been hopped up until it responded to acceleration with a deep-throated roar.

The boy who drove it was big and blond and handsome. He wore a blue sweater with the letters "AC" on it in white. A small, dark-haired girl sat beside him, still marvel-

ing that he had asked her to go for a ride. There wasn't a girl in high school who wouldn't have given anything to be in her place—sitting beside the star fullback.

They drove north on Lincoln Boulevard, out of Aragon City and through Santa Monica. They crossed San Vicente and followed the winding street down into Santa Monica Canyon. Then, as they neared the

ocean, they swung right and drove up into the hills. The motor roared its response to the challenge of the hill.

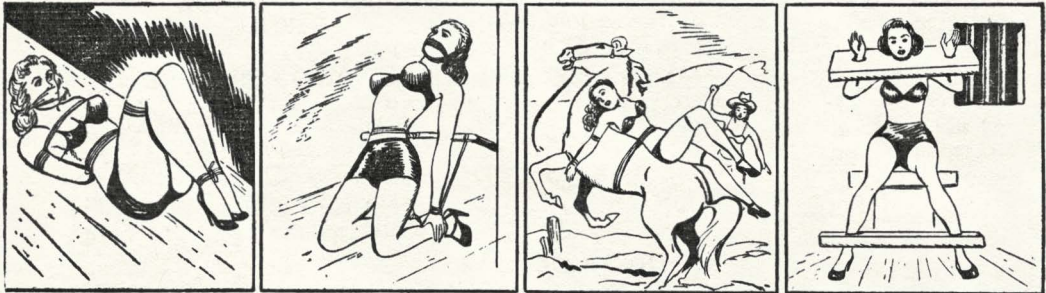
At the top, they turned left down a side street. A few blocks brought them to a semi-circular parking place on the edge of the cliff. A few cars were already there. Swinging the car into the most deserted spot, he turned off lights and motor.

Off to one side the lights of Greater Los Angeles sparkled like a cheap Christmas display. Ahead of them, and far below, curved

IT WAS easy," he said and forgot about the game.

He bent over and kissed her, forcing his mouth on her until he could feel her lips bruising against her teeth. He liked the way she tried to pull her head back.

He dropped his left hand on her knees. They clamped tightly together. He waited a few minutes, enjoying her signs of resistance. He pulled his mouth from hers, keeping his face down so he could see hers in the moonlight that came through the windshield.



A hot, almost unbearable excitement gripped Eddie as he

the shoreline of the Pacific Ocean. Beach lights reflected briefly on incoming waves. Moonlight cut a narrow path across the water. As they watched, a small sailboat cut silently across the path and was gone.

The faint hum of the distant cars on Roosevelt Highway drifted up through the night. There was a muted giggle from one of the other parked cars.

"It's beautiful up here," the girl said, sighing deeply.

"Yeah," the boy grunted. He'd put his right arm around her and was looking down at her.

She glanced up at the dim blur of his face. "You were wonderful this afternoon, Eddie. We wouldn't have won if it hadn't been for you."

"I guess not," he said matter-of-factly. He let himself be tricked into a momentary memory of the game. "I would've made still another touchdown if Leo hadn't fumbled that pass. The guy's got butter fingers."

"But you made three touchdowns," she insisted. The admiration in her voice was real.

"No," she said, as his hand tightened on her knee.

His fingers dug into her soft flesh. She flinched from the pain.

"Eddie, you're hurting me!"

He laughed softly. He slid his right hand in under her arm, cupping the hand. His left hand slid along her thigh, tightened.

"Eddie!" she moaned.

Excitement gripped him. He squeezed with both hands and her body convulsed with pain.

The girl drew a shuddering breath and opened her mouth to scream. His right hand rose swiftly to clamp over her mouth. He felt her lips writhe against his palm, knew that her throat was working, but no sound got past his strong hand.

He put all his strength into his left hand and her body arched up from the seat. She quivered as she tried to twist out of his relentless grip. He held his hand over her mouth until he felt her go slack. Then he released her.

She slumped into the corner, sobbing.

"Sissy," he said scornfully.

"Take me—home," she said. She was crying so hard she was beginning to get hiccups.

"Sure," he said. "Who wants to be out with such a deadhead? You must be sitting on a cake of ice, kid."

She sobbed quietly in the corner of the seat, her body pressing against the door.

He started the motor and switched on the lights. He swung the car around and headed back the way they'd come. As he stepped on the gas, the car surged wildly in response

He had all the answers, because he was ashamed of what he did. But he made a lot of money at it and he liked the hours, so he never thought seriously of giving it up.

Joe Cadell's wife had died within a year of giving birth to a son. Joe had raised the boy himself, and he had raised him to live clean. Eddie Cadell had been working out with miniature footballs and baseballs and boxing gloves almost as soon as he could walk. There had never been any nonsense about playing with dolls—that was for girls and



looked at the pictures of the pretty girls being tortured

to his excitement. The tires squealed as they took the curves down into the canyon. . . .

Joe Cadell had lived in Aragon City all of his life. A Native Son of California, as he was quick to tell anyone. By profession he was a bookmaker. He took bets on horse races, fights, football and basketball games. It was illegal, but Joe Cadell claimed that didn't bother him. Some of his best friends were on the Aragon City Police Force. If people wanted to bet, he was fond of saying, you couldn't stop them, no matter how many laws you passed.

And there were worse things than book-making. Joe believed that the cops ought to run all the call girls and the dope pushers out of town before they worried about a guy booking bets. The truth of the matter was that the cops didn't worry much about any of them.

Joe had plenty of answers to prove that his job was as good or better than others. "Look at the insurance companies," he'd say. "They bet on whether you're going to live or not. Looks to me like it's more honest to bet on horses."

sissies. When another kid on the block would swing at Eddie, it hadn't done him any good to run home crying. Joe would make him go back and fight it out. If he hadn't won the fight, he'd feel the bite of Joe's belt.

By the time Eddie was five, he could spot any kid two or three years and take him. The younger kids he took just to keep in practice.

MOST of Joe's explanations to his son about bookmaking started when he could no longer hide from Eddie what he did. About the same time, Joe started to drink. But he saw to it that Eddie never touched the stuff. The one time Eddie tried, the belt got an extra workout.

The same thing happened when Joe caught him being secretive in the bathroom, and the time when Eddie was about twelve and had been caught fooling around with a girl. Joe Cadell was raising his son to be a he-man and nothing was going to interfere.

The happiest day of Joe's life was when he discovered his son was really going to be a football star. He never missed a game of

Aragon City High School. While everyone else would be yelling their heads off over Eddie Cadell, Joe would sit in the bleachers quietly sipping from his bottle and listening with pride.

Joe and Eddie Cadell lived quietly in an apartment on Herendos Vista in Aragon City. Both of them usually ate out, and their meal times weren't apt to coincide. Eddie was always in training and was in bed early—at least early by Joe's standards. Joe was generally out until two or three in the morning, or if he were home he'd sit up drinking until then. Joe gave Eddie a good allowance—with extra money for every touchdown he made—and their contacts with each other were casual and infrequent.

His father was still out the evening Eddie came home after his brief date with the little black-haired girl. He'd driven her to within a block of her home and then gone to his own apartment. By the time he arrived, his excitement had worn off.

The mail was on the floor where it had fallen when the postman had put it in the letter-drop. Eddie picked it up. Everything was for his father except a large manila envelope. It was addressed to "Mr. Edward Cadell." He hurried into his room with it.

The envelope seemed a little thick. A few days before he'd answered an ad in a magazine. It was a national magazine, but the ad had been run from Aragon City. There'd been a box number. The ad's headline had read:

MISFORTUNES OF MARY

Below that, in smaller type, it had announced:

A new glamorous series of bondage cartoons. In these pictures Mary, our heroine, is trapped by the king of the outlaws who subjects Mary to various ordeals and tribulations before she is freed. Send twenty-five cents to *Cutrix*, Box 12, Aragon City, California.

There was a drawing of a beautiful girl tied to the back of a rearing stallion. She wore only panties, bra, stockings and high-heeled shoes. Eddie had promptly mailed the necessary quarter to *Cutrix*.

He tore open the envelope. It contained the drawing that his quarter had bought. It

was the same that had been in the ad, in an eight-by-ten size. Eddie put it to one side and pulled out the pamphlet which was in the envelope. His first sight of it made him whistle softly.

Most of the front of the pamphlet was given over to the photograph of a shapely young woman in black panties and bra. A line of type at the bottom identified her as:

Betty Leaf, Popular Hollywood Model
No. K-79.

There was just enough room left on the front to show that *Models and Cartoon Parade* was "published by Aristidia Mora, the Pin-Up King, for Artists, Photography Students, and Collectors."

Eddie eagerly turned the page. Then he turned more pages. At first, he was disappointed. The pamphlet was only a catalogue, showing drawings, photographs and films that Mora offered for sale. There were only girls in the pictures, and they were all dressed alike—in panties, bras, stockings, and spike-heeled shoes. But as Eddie looked closer, his disappointment changed to a growing excitement.

First, there were cartoons. They featured Priscilla, Queen of Escapes; Madame La Bondage; Madame Wasp; Misfortunes of Mary; Yolanda, the Fighting Waitress; Tahia, Savage Girl; Bizarre Museum; Sheba, the Slave Girl; Ruth's Wild West Adventure; and Princess Elaine's Terrible Fate.

DESPITE a great difference in their backgrounds and professions, these girls seemed to meet people who immediately started tying them up, or whipping them, or putting them in torture machines.

Then there were the photographs. There were fighting girls and wrestling girls. There were Hosiery Honeys in High Heels, Sultry Queens in High Heels, Silk Stocking Sirens in High Heels, Boudoir Beauties in High Heels, and Chained Slave Girls in High Heels. There were any number of "Specially Posed Model Series." Eddie Cadell found himself immersed in the description of the H-300 series:

—contains 33 different Bound and Gagged poses

(5 spanking while bound) and 7 other poses Bound but not Gagged at 40c each. We have 31 different Chained, Shackled and Bound poses (5 being spanked) at 40c each. Also there are 16 different Spanking poses at 40c each pose.

There were still the descriptions of movies to be read, but Eddie didn't wait. He'd seen plenty of sex pictures—all the kids had them—but he'd never seen anything like this. He went to the phone and dialed a number.

"Hi, Stan," he said when a pal answered. "Eddie— Yeah, it was a great game. What're you doing?— Okay, I'm coming right out. Wait'll you see what I got!"

Chapter II

EDDIE CADELL hung up without hearing what the boy on the other end of the wire had to say. He grabbed the pamphlet and the drawing and went out to his souped-up car. He cut across Ocean Avenue to California, then down the hill to Roosevelt Highway. He drove north as fast as he could without drawing the attention of the cops.

He was heading for Malibu Beach where Stanley Giles, one of the boys in Eddie's class, lived. Stanley was a small, wise youngster—too small for any of the athletic teams—wise enough to make friends with the athletes. His father was J. Milton Giles, the movie producer. His father had plenty of money and no time for his son, so Stanley had a four-room cottage on Malibu Beach.

The cottage had been turned into a club house for Stanley and four or five of the boys with whom he was friendly. They often had parties there, usually with high school girls, although occasionally Stanley had produced a few movie extras whom he introduced to his friends as starlets.

Eddie braked in front of the cottage and went in. Leo Bishop, the Aragon City quarterback, and Tony Espes, the team manager, were with Stanley. They'd been drinking whisky and colas. They automatically offered some to Eddie.

"Nah," he said, waving them away. "You guys know I don't touch that stuff. I stay in training—even if some guys don't." He gave Leo Bishop a meaning glance.

"Go blow your jets," Leo said. "Why

don't you just be a hero on the field and forget it when you're off."

"I've got something that'll make you blow your jets," Eddie said amiably. "Take a look at this."

The four boys huddled over the catalogue.

"Hey, get a load of this," Tony Espes said. He read from the booklet. "This movie opens with Joyce at her vanity table and she orders servant Lois, who is attired in chains and leopard Bikini outfit as well as six-inch high-heeled patent leather shoes, to help her dress. Lois dresses Joyce in stockings, six-inch high-heeled shoes, long kid gloves, and satin skirt and satin blouse. When Lois rebels, she is punished for her insubordination and then chained to a chair to prevent escape. This movie is well-lighted and has several clear sharp close-ups of the feet walking around in the high-heeled shoes." He looked at the other boys. "Some plot. That the kind of movies your old man makes, Stan?"

"Could be," Stan said. "I don't get something. What's with this close-up of the feet walking around?"

"Maybe the idea is that they walk on you with those high heels," Tony said.

"Hey, I wouldn't like that," Leo said. "Any babe is going to walk on me, I want her to do it with her bare tootsies."

"Me, too," Eddie Cadell said. "Still, I wouldn't mind seeing them walk on somebody else with heels like that."

"Yeah, somebody like our math teacher," Tony agreed.

They all laughed and went back to looking at the book.

"Hey, this gives me an idea," Stan Giles said. "I'll bet if I work on my old man right, I could get him to dig up some really hot movies. You know, with the works. And I've got a movie projector."

"Who wants them?" Eddie said roughly. "You start showing movies like that when we got girls here and half of them'll run out yelling for their mamas. I got a better idea."

"What?"

"We pool our dough and get some of these pictures and movies. They don't cost too much. We can get the pictures for anywhere between twenty-five and fifty cents apiece.

That movie Tony was reading about is only twenty-four bucks for two hundred feet. Then we throw a party with some of the babes. They can't accuse us of showing them *dirty* pictures, but I'll bet you these'll run their temperatures up."

"Maybe he's got something," Leo said. "I'll bet we could do more than that. I'll bet there are a lot of guys around who'd pay fifty cents or a buck to see movies like these, so they'd end up costing us nothing."

"Yeah," Stan said. "Maybe you're right. Some of these tomatoes look pretty good—Hey, that's an idea! We'll call ourselves the Tomato Circuit and become regular exhibitors."

THEY all laughed again. But they were excited by Eddie's idea, and before he left they'd agreed to try it. He left the catalogue with them and went home. It took him a long time to go to sleep. In the dark room he kept seeing the pictures.

The week dragged by for Eddie Cadell. As usual, he marked time in classes. But football practice failed to give him the lift he normally got from it. Even the crunching impact of a driving tackle failed to thrill him. The sweaty smell of the locker room palled and he scrimmaged mechanically.

On Thursday the pictures and the film arrived. That night the four boys gathered at the cottage in Malibu. They shuffled through the pictures and ran the film. Eddie went home in such a state of excitement that it took him hours to fall asleep.

On Friday, he was slow in practice. He shrugged off the coach's concern, promising surlily that he would be all right in time for the game.

He kept his promise. Friday night he was filled with a pleasant tension, but he slept well. When he reported for the game, he was on a fine edge.

Aragon City High was playing South Ventura in Aragon City. On team form, South Ventura was the favorite, but Eddie Cadell's record for the season brought the odds down to even money. Joe Cadell, whose bookie eye was even sharper than a father's eye, took all the South Ventura money he could get.

From the kickoff, there was little doubt who was going to win the game. Eddie took the kick and went sixty yards before someone downed him. It took him three more plunges straight through the line to go the remaining twenty yards. He crossed over, standing up and dragging half of the Ventura team with him. He scored again in the second quarter and twice more in the last quarter.

When Ventura had the ball, it seemed that Eddie Cadell was all over the field. Three times, he was the only one to get up from a tackle and the three Ventura men who were carried off the field did not return to the game. They scored once on a long pass which left the passer's fingers a split second before Eddie crashed into him. The final score was 27-7.

It was close to eight o'clock that night when the cars converged on Malibu for the party. Eddie drove his hotrod. The new girl who sat beside him was another who was thrilled to be out with the hero of the day. Eddie never worried over the fact that few of the girls he dated ever went with him a second time. If he had thought about it, he wouldn't have been aware that this was voluntary on their part. He just never thought of asking most girls a second time.

Once they were in the cottage, Eddie was anxious for the main feature to start. But Stan Giles shook his head when Eddie mentioned it. There were plenty of drinks and after a short time, Stan went into the bedroom and came out with some loosely rolled cigarettes. The air in the room soon became acrid. The party got a little louder, the boys shouting and the girls giggling.

Eddie shook his head impatiently every time a drink or cigarette was offered him. The girl he was with held a cigarette cupped in her hand, sucking the smoke up through her clenched fingers. She looked up at him, her eyes a little glazed.

"What's the matter, Eddie?" she asked. "You a square?"

"Nah," he said. He made a face as the marijuana smoke curled up around his nostrils. "I don't have to do any of this kid stuff to get hot. I'm always ready to go." He was unaware that his big hands were

kneading his own legs as he was speaking.

She laughed at him. "Blowing up a joint isn't kid stuff," she said. "You ought to light one up. It would make you mellow."

He shook his head and waited.

FINALLY, Stan Giles wheeled out the portable screen and the projector. He announced that they were giving the girls a special treat and turned off the lights. The light flashed on the screen and there was "Joyce" at her vanity table just as the ad had promised.

There was silence while the movie moved jerkily through its scant story. The whir of the film was the only sound. The girl beside Eddie wriggled in her seat, but he kept his hands off her.

Two of the girls giggled when the lights came back on. The other two still stared at the screen with glazed eyes, their expressions uncertain.

"Man, that's crazy!" the girl with Eddie exclaimed. She was talking to no one in particular. "You suppose they were queer, or maybe nobody ever told them?"

"Look at these," Eddie said.

He jumped up and began to pass around the eight-by-twelve photographs. These were nearly all pictures of girls tied up in various positions. One showed a girl bound to a board with her legs and arms firmly tied to it, with a rope also around her neck, but loose enough so that apparently she could twist and struggle.

"Now I get the idea of this one," Eddie's girl said. "But you wouldn't have to tie me to get the idea across." She glanced at Eddie from beneath lowered eyelashes.

"I'll bet you'd be afraid to be tied like that," Eddie said.

"Afraid?" she said scornfully. "You're flipping!"

Under his prodding, she finally agreed to try anything once. She stood up and pulled her dress over her head. She stood there in wispy panties and bra, still pulling on her cigarette, and waited.

There were no two-by-eights in the cottage and they finally compromised on a chair. Stan Giles brought a rope from the kitchen and they trussed the girl over the chair, face-

down. The combination of marijuana and liquor was enough to put them in the mood for anything that seemed mildly hilarious, so there was no objection when Eddie suggested that they take turns spanking her.

Chapter III

IN SINGLE file, the boys strode around the room past the girl over the chair and delivered their flat-handed blows. The girl laughed, and twisted in her bonds. The flesh over her buttocks began to redden.

Laughter welled up hysterically in the cottage. Only Eddie Cadell failed to laugh. The first time he'd brought his big hand down to strike her plump hips, he'd been excited. But that was all. He felt that he'd been building up to a big letdown. The laughter irritated him, his stomach knotting with undirected anger.

Suddenly, he wheeled and plunged through the door. None of them noticed him leave. They had stopped hitting the girl, but were grouped around her, making remarks. Each remark would be greeted by a fresh burst of laughter.

Eddie climbed into his car and gunned her into the road. He drove back toward the city, letting his anger express itself on the accelerator. As the motor roared, his anger abated, but his frustration was just as great.

Back in Aragon City, he parked near the Rough Riders Malt Shop. Named after the high school football team, it was the favorite spot of most of the students. He strode inside. There was nothing on his mind. But he knew he would be unable to sleep.

He ordered a Pepsi and looked around. There was a pretty redheaded girl sitting alone in one of the booths. He didn't remember ever having seen her before, but she seemed about to smile when he looked at her. He picked up his drink and moved over to the booth.

"Hi," he said.

"Hi," she answered. This time she did smile.

"Don't I know you?" he asked.

She shook her head, the red hair dancing about her face. "No, but I know you. You're Eddie Cadell. I watched you make four

touchdowns this afternoon."

There were many advantages to playing football, Eddie thought, as he sat down in the booth.

"What's your name, Red?" he asked.

"Teri Kearn. And I don't like to be called Red."

"Okay, Teri. How come I haven't noticed you before?"

"Maybe you've been too busy," she said. "Then this is my first year at Aragon. We just moved here from Seattle."

He looked her over. "A lucky break for Aragon," he said. "Or maybe it was a lucky break for me."

She gave him a studied glance from the corner of her eyes.

"You're really jane russelled," he said. "I could go for you."

"Is that your line?" she asked. She tried to act older than her years, but it didn't come off too well. Embarrassment and pleasure were intermingled on her face.

"No line," he said earnestly. He finished his drink. "Like to go for a ride?"

She hesitated for only a second. Then she nodded.

He picked up her check and paid both of them. They walked out to his car.

He turned around and drove back to the Roosevelt Highway. As they swept up past the Santa Monica beach homes, the car picking up speed, he glanced down at her. The wind blew her red hair back and the street lamps lighted her face like a cameo profile. She caught his glance and laughed.

"It's a wonderful night," she said. She snuggled down in the seat, lightly resting her cheek against his shoulder. "Where are we going?"

"Just riding," he said.

WHEN they reached the road to Topanga Canyon, he turned right. They followed the twisting road for a mile, then started to climb. As they pierced farther into the Canyon, the forested hills seemed to absorb the light from the moon and the darkness moved in on them. There was no other traffic on the road and only occasionally did they catch a glimpse of a house light half-hidden up the side of one of the hills.

"Where are we?" she asked once.

"Topanga Canyon," he answered. "We can cut through this way to Ventura Boulevard, then down to Sepulveda and back home."

"Nice," she murmured dreamily.

They were about four miles up into the Canyon when he suddenly turned to the right onto a narrow gravel road that went almost straight up.

"Where now?" she asked.

"Up on the hill," he said, shifting into low gear. "There used to be a house at the end of this road. It burned down last year, but the view is still there."

But he wasn't thinking of the view. His heart was pounding. He'd suddenly remembered that he had a long piece of rope in the rear of his car. It had been there since the time he'd taken it from the school two weeks before. Some students had carried off a goal post and he'd tied it to his car to take it back.

Finally, they reached the top of the hill. There was a little jutting table of land barely large enough to turn around on. He braked the car and shut off the motor and lights. Silence fell over them.

They were facing west, and far in the distance they could catch the faint glint of moonlight on the ocean. It looked like a toy ocean set down the other side of toy mountains.

The red-headed girl sighed and he leaned over to kiss her, bruising her lips with his. She responded, then twisted away as he pressed harder.

"Get out of the car," he said. His throat had tightened, making his voice thicker.

"Uh-uh," she said. "I'm sorry, Eddie, but I'm just not that kind of girl."

"You're *this* kind of girl," he said. He reached past her and opened the door. Then he pushed her from the car. He leaped after her as she scrambled to her feet.

"You big ox!" she flung at him angrily.

He slapped her hard across the face. The sting of her flesh on his hand felt good.

The anger drained from her face. Her eyes widened with fear. She opened her mouth, and he could see the muscles of her throat tensing to scream. He hit her on the side of the jaw with his fist. She gave a

strangled moan and slumped to the ground.

He picked her up and carried her away from the car. When he reached the ruins of the house, he put her on the ground and kicked among the debris. There was a partly gutted wall on the ground, with some blackened boards still intact.

He left her on the ground and went back for the rope. When he returned, he was breathing heavily, although it had been but a few steps. He threw the rope down and knelt beside her. He tried first to undress her carefully, but the buttons and zippers were too much for his shaky hands. He ripped the clothes from her body, then wadded up a piece of cloth and shoved it in

between her slack jaws. He used her bra to tie it firmly in place.

He waited after that, watching the moonlight on her rounded body. The only sound was the rasp of his breath.

After a few moments, she moaned behind the gag and her body moved. He reached down and dragged her over to the board. Swiftly he tied her legs and arms, then loosely knotted the rope around her neck and fastened it to the board, leaving her head free to roll from side to side, the way he'd seen the girl tied in one of the pictures. The excitement had built up in him until it was hardly bearable. The feeble jerking of her body made him feel better.

Eddie had no patience. He was shaking with eagerness



THERE was still a section of rope left. He cut it off with his pocket knife and stood there holding it for several minutes before the idea occurred to him. Then he swung the rope experimentally and watched, fascinated, the red welt that he had raised on her body.

He whipped her then in a sudden frenzy, the convulsive jerking of her body driving him to greater effort. Sweat streaked down his face and the tension suddenly exploded in him. He failed to hear the snapping sound that followed one flinching heave of her body.

He stood there for a long minute while sanity slowly returned. He felt a sick emptiness within himself.

Then he became aware of the girl at his feet. He threw the rope from him and dropped to one knee beside her.

"Teri," he said. "I'm sorry."

He pulled at the ropes around her, trying to find the knots. It was some time before he was aware of the way her head rolled loosely. He prodded at her flesh, felt the coolness already taking possession of it.

He was never to remember how long he knelt there, one finger held stiffly against her flesh. Then suddenly he was on his feet again. He heard the dry sobbing without realizing that it came from his own throat.

He ran stumbling to his car.

Chapter IV

PHIL BANTA was a cop. Many learning this were surprised, for he didn't look like a cop. Or act like one. He was tall and slender and well-dressed. He wore an ordinary size shoe with a narrow last. His face was sensitive, his eyes intelligent. He spoke reasonably good English when he wanted to. Anyone who talked to him for a time soon discovered that he was well-read and that his interests roamed far beyond the sports page. The only mark his profession had left on him was his slightly worried expression.

He'd been on the Aragon City Police Force for fifteen years. Since he had been twenty-two. For ten years he'd been on the Vice Squad. He'd taken a one-year leave of

absence and carried a full load at the University of California at Los Angeles. He'd gone to night school for five years thereafter, one of the few men in the country who had tried constantly to improve himself for his job.

He hated working on Vice, but knew that it was one of the most necessary jobs on the Force. Soon after he had been assigned to the squad, he had learned that there were only two ways to work on Vice—one, to hate the people he had to look for; the other, to try to understand them. As a result, he now was a lieutenant and known for his work beyond the borders of the state.

For years he'd been in the fight for proper legislation dealing with sadists, rapists, the hundred variations of psychological cripples which were his daily fare. The fight was far from won, but in the meantime, he often stepped out from behind his badge to do what he could himself.

Lieutenant Phil Banta was a cop—but no one could accuse him of being an old-fashioned cop.

On Monday morning there were always the odds and ends of the week-end to catch up with. He read through the reports on his desk, scribbling notes, occasionally picking up the phone to give an order. He'd almost finished when a knock came on his door.

"Come in," he said, finishing the last few lines of a report from the men who were covering a wire-tap on what they suspected was a call house.

The door opened and one of his detectives came in. Walter Forman, Detective First Grade.

"Hi, Lieutenant," Forman said. He dropped into a chair and pulled out a cigarette. "I saw Johnny Stark yesterday."

"You tell him what I said?" Phil Banta asked.

"Yeah." The detective lit a cigarette. "I told him that we had a complaint that he'd been exposing himself on the beach again. I pointed out that we could pull him in for the lineup, get an identification. With this being his fourth offense, he might get as much as ninety days. Then I told him you said we wouldn't arrest him if he went to a psychiatrist—at least as long as we got a

weekly report from the psychiatrist to prove he was going."

"What'd he say?"

The detective grinned. "Said he didn't have to go to a psychiatrist because he's already being audited."

"Audited," exclaimed Phil Banta. "What the hell does he think he is—a set of account books? Tell him I'm not interested in his prenatal memories."

"He also said he couldn't afford to go to a psychiatrist."

"The hell he can't. There's a clinic in town. Fifty cents an hour. I'll make the arrangements for him."

"He also mentioned his constitutional rights."

"To express his hostility by going around exposing himself?" Phil Banta asked. "Go out and see him again. Either escort him down to the clinic or back here."

"Okay," the detective said. He snubbed out his cigarette and left.

Phil Banta waded through another twenty minutes of paper work before there was another knock on the door.

"Come in," he said again.

THE man who came in this time was older. Short and heavy-set, he usually wore an amiable expression. But this morning his face was grim.

"You," Phil Banta said sourly. "Don't tell me another one from my department has strolled into yours?"

Jack Gordon, Lieutenant in Homicide, nodded. Banta could tell from the way the man dropped into the chair that he'd been out on a case that morning. Gordon was a cop who never had got used to looking at the results of murder.

"At least, maybe you can be of some help," he said. "This one looks like I'm going to need plenty of help to get any place. The County's in on it too, but they're not doing any better than I am."

"Okay," Phil said. He glanced at the last report on his desk and saw that it wasn't pressing. He leaned back and lit a cigarette. "Who was it?"

"A girl. Teri Kearn was her name. Sixteen and pretty. She didn't come home Sat-

urday night and the usual reports went out on her. Then this morning some week-end farmer in Topanga Canyon called in. He'd found a body. I went out. The sheriff's men got there about the same time. It was Teri Kearn. Doc says she died some time Saturday night. Probably before midnight. Cause of death was a broken neck. But all her clothes had been ripped off and part of them used to gag her. She'd been tied to an old fire-blackened board. Then she'd been whipped with a piece of rope."

"No attack?"

"No. Phil, where do guys like that come from? From under slimy old rocks?"

"Some of them do," Phil Banta said slowly. "In fact, you might say they all come out from under slimy old rocks—which are found in all of us. Jack, were you ever a kid?"

"Yeah, but I didn't do things like this, if that's what you mean."

"Sure, but I'll bet you played cowboy, cops and robbers. And I'll bet you tied kids up and let them tie you up. When you did the tying, it probably made you feel pretty important. Sometimes you probably tied up little girls and that was even more fun. Or you pulled the little girls' hair, or whacked them across the rear with a stick and got a hell of a bang out of it."

"Maybe, but what's that got to do with it?"

"You were experimenting with a drive to express your individual power and a drive to sex. Later you probably made other experiments. In the beginning the two drives were often expressed in the same experiment, but finally you arrived at what is accepted as proper, according to the moral codes of society, and rightly so unless humanity is to revert entirely to the level of beasts—which sometimes can be much more moral than human beings, at that. So you are normal."

"You're damn right I am!"

"But others," Phil Banta went on, unnoticed, "never get past that first stage. To them, the only proof of their strength or power lies in beating others, or whipping them, or sticking pins in them—sometimes killing them. It also expresses their sex drives, maybe because they've never got beyond confusing the two or believing they go

together. A child who gets whipped or punished for every sex experiment may get the idea that sex always must be accompanied by pain, if there is to be complete satisfaction."

"Okay, so you know all the answers," Jack Gordon said. "How's that going to find the guy who killed this kid?"

"It may help. What have you got on it?"

"Too little. It rained in the Canyon yesterday morning. The first damned rain in four months and it had to happen then! If there were any traces they were washed away. We've checked on the girl. Her family moved here from Seattle last fall. No steady boy friend. Went to the movies once in a while with one of three boys about her age. We've checked all three and they're in the clear.

"She left the house Saturday night about nine to go to the Rough Riders Malt Shop. Apparently she didn't have a date with anyone, and she promised to be home by ten-thirty. She was with some other kids there until just before ten. They're all in the clear, though—been double-checked. The guy who runs the shop thinks maybe she went out with some boy, but has no idea who he was. We're trying to trace the piece of rope the girl was tied with, but that's about our only hope."

BANTA said, "If she left the malt shop with a boy or man, there ought to be someone who remembers it."

"That's what you think," Gordon said. "Not unless it was a stranger. You ask anyone there who was in and they'll tell you the usual gang. But you try to pin them down and they can't name half those who were in and out. And of those who are named, maybe half a dozen of them haven't been in for two days. But they're part of the usual gang. So there you are."

Phil Banta thought about it a minute. "Can you describe the way the girl was tied?"

"I can do better. Here's a picture." Gordon took a glossy print from his pocket and tossed it over. "Doc thinks her neck was broken when she was jerking around under the whipping. He said something about the

way her neck was tied so her head could jerk around, while her legs and arms were tied tight to the board."

Phil Banta nodded, studying the picture. When he handed it back, there were deep lines in his face. "I can't name the murderer from that picture," he said, "but I can tell you where he got his inspiration for the method."

Chapter V

BANTA opened a drawer in his desk. He took out a copy of *Models and Cartoon Parade* and tossed it to the Homicide man. Gordon caught the pamphlet and riffled through the pages. His expression of surprise changed to one of anger.

"What the hell is this?" he demanded.

"A catalog of the wares of one Aristidia Mora, the Pin-Up King. If you look carefully enough, you'll probably find a picture of a girl who's tied up pretty much the same way as your little sixteen-year-old girl."

"This stuff is being sold here?" demanded Gordon.

"Right in Aragon City, Jack. On Flores Street. There are other stores like it all over the country. They advertise in our best magazines. Aristidia Mora's name is legion."

Gordon asked angrily, "Why the hell haven't you thrown him in the can? What kind of a Vice Squad are you running, Phil?"

"The usual kind," Banta said, unruffled. "Aristidia caters to a wide variety of tastes, but you can find some of these same things in a lot of comic magazines, true detective magazines, and true confession magazines on every newsstand. Plenty of magazines accept Aristidia's ads. As a matter of fact, you can find the stuff in other places."

He reached out and took the catalogue. "Here on one page," he pointed out, "Aristidia offers a bunch of movie stills. Listen to this: 'We have just added fifty new poses of Girls in Bondage taken from various movies which have appeared on your local movie screen. There are twenty scenes of girls bound and gagged, and thirty scenes of girls tied up but not gagged. These are from such movies as *The Plainsman*, *Two Flags West*, *Return of Monte Cristo*, *Hunchback*

of Notre Dame, Jamaica Inn, Having a Wonderful Crime, Pirates of Capri, Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, Guilty of Treason, and many others.'"

"I still want to know why you don't throw him in the can?"

"On what charge?" Banta asked mildly. "Strangely enough, he's not doing anything illegal. The girls in these pictures are as well-clothed, or better, than most of the women on our beaches. They're better clothed than the girls in a large percentage of ads. Don't tell the Ladies Aid that I said so, but we live in a country that's so busy trying to keep men and women from crawling into bed with each other that it ignores everything else. There are only girls in these pictures—so everything is nice and clean."

"Inciting?"

"Try to prove it. Even the characters who are incited by these pictures are pretty safe for a while. Every police department in the country has thousands of records of arrests for exposure, molesting, pin-sticking. What do the miscreants get? Thirty days, sixty

days, sometimes as much as a year. Then they're out doing the same thing again. Just throwing them in the can is no answer anyway. Though that's the only sort of answer we think of."

"So what the hell do we do?"

"We pretend that such things don't really exist," Banta said savagely, "until it gets so bad we can't ignore them any more. We let the exhibitionist become a molester, the molester become a rapist, then when the rapist becomes a killer we get all excited and burn or hang the poor devil. It's like ignoring a heavy chest cold, then executing the patient for getting pneumonia."

"Maybe the old-time cops were right." Gordon muttered.

"King Night Stick," Banta said. "You mean treat sadists sadistically? I got news for you, Jack. Some of our best sadists go on the Force and become socially acceptable. Let's go."

"Where?"

"We'll visit the pin-up emporium. Aris-

[Turn page]



oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

"BILL'S A GREAT DATE, but he's a square about his hair. He's got all the signs of Dry Scalp! Dull hair that a rake couldn't comb . . . and loose dandruff, too. He needs 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"



*Hair looks better...
scalp feels better...
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NEAT SOLUTION, this 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic! Just a few drops a day check loose dandruff and other annoying signs of Dry Scalp . . . make your hair naturally good-looking. Contains no alcohol or other drying ingredients . . . it's economical, too.

Vaseline HAIR TONIC
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Listen to DR. CHRISTIAN,
starring JEAN HERSHOLT,
on CBS Wednesday nights.

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tidia doesn't keep very good records, but maybe we can get some kind of a lead."

They got in a squad car and drove downtown. Flores Street was filled with small stores of all kinds. It would have been hard to miss the emporium of the Pin-Up King. It was on the second floor. The window was filled with blown-up photographs of movie stars, male and female, and huge letters announced:

The Home of Aristidia Mora, King of
The Pin-Ups.

Smaller letters also identified this as the home of *Cutrix*.

THE two cops tramped up the stairs and into the room. There was a long counter running the full length of the room. The wall behind it was lined with shelves and large pigeon-holes crammed with folders. There were several men at the counters, some of them glancing through the catalogues while others were looking through folders of photographs. There was a slightly furtive air about them. Two women and a man waited on them.

"It's a family affair," Phil Banta said in a low voice, nodding to the three behind the counter. "Aristidia's wife and daughter."

Jack Gordon shook his head as he stared at them.

The man spotted them and came quickly along the counter. He was a small, untidy-looking middle-aged man. He barely moved his lips when he spoke.

"What's wrong, Lieutenant?" he asked. His voice was hardly above a whisper.

"Just slumming," Phil Banta said. "I wanted my friend to see how the other half lives. This is Lieutenant Gordon."

Aristidia Mora met the glare of Jack Gordon and looked indifferently away. He waited, his gaze fixed on the top button of Banta's jacket.

"We're looking for a local customer of yours," Banta said.

"I've got a lot of local customers," Aristidia answered. His voice was like a dry husk. "Some of them are on the Force."

"I know about them," Banta said. "We're

looking for a recent customer. Maybe he only started last week, or at least he sent in an order last week. By mail." He saw the questioning look on Gordon's face and explained, "There's no point of trying to check on who came in here last week, Jack. Even if Aristidia knew their names, we'd end up with a list of a third of the population of Aragon City."

"That's right, Lieutenant," the proprietor said. There was a new note in his voice which wasn't pride, but might have been triumph. He lifted his gaze fleetingly, then returned it to the button. "I had a lot of mail orders last week."

"This one was interested in your bondage line."

"A lot of them are."

"We'll settle for any new local customers who ordered by mail last week."

"Who remembers every order that comes in? I don't keep no record of every picture that goes out. We do a big business."

"Don't give me that," Banta said sharply. "You take down every name that comes in to add to your sucker list. You want to give us the list, or do you want us to start shaking down your customers a couple of times a day? We can do that, too."

Aristidia Mora hesitated a moment, then shrugged. His glance flickered across them as he turned away. It was filled with sheer hatred.

He went over to a littered desk and pawed through the papers. Hunched over like a weird gnome, he began scribbling. When he returned to the counter, he bore a list of fifteen names and addresses.

"There's the new ones from last week," he said. "I don't know what kind of stuff they ordered. Now get out. You're interfering with my business."

Banta had noticed several of the customers glancing uneasily their way.

"Don't worry, Aristidia," he said. "You can tell them we probably won't be able to touch them until Lieutenant Gordon starts looking for them. He's on Homicide."

The two cops turned and walked downstairs. When they were on the street again, Banta glanced at the paper in his hand. Two of the names were of people in Aragon City,

two were from Santa Monica, one from Malibu, and the remaining ten from Hollywood and Los Angeles. He handed the paper to Gordon.

"There's fifteen for you to screen," he said. "Maybe you'll find your boy among them, and maybe you won't. But at least it'll give you something to do."

LIEUTENANT GORDON took the list "You know something?" he said. "Every minute we were up there, I kept wanting to hit that little slug in the face."

"Careful, boy, your flat feet are showing," Banta said. "Come on, let's get back. I've got work to do. Aristidia recruits them faster than I can keep track of them. Let me know what happens after you've covered that list." He hesitated, then went on, "I know how you feel, Jack, but take it easy. Maybe taking a punch at some of these fifteen will make you feel better, but it'll push them a little farther along. . . ."

When Eddie Cadell left Topanga Canyon, he drove almost blindly. His shoulders ached after the release of stored-up tension. His head ached, throbbing in tune to the roaring motor. Fear kept his foot frozen against the accelerator, yet he hardly knew what caused his fear. What had happened existed vaguely in his memory as though it were something he'd watched through a discolored window. He knew what he'd done, yet it seemed as if someone else had done it.

He remembered half-hearing the brittle crack. That must have been her neck breaking. As long as he could cling to the feeling that someone else had done it, there was pleasure in the memory. Ahead of him, between him and the winding road, he could still see the dim outlines of her white body arching against the ropes. But his ecstasy was spent and fear kept crowding the image away.

He wiped the sweat from his face when it trickled into his eyes. It was better this way. Now she wouldn't be able to tell anyone what had happened. No one would be able to tell. But fear still trod on the heels of his assurance.

It had been an accident. He told himself this over and over. It could have happened

to anyone. In a way it was her own fault. She shouldn't have resisted so much. She'd been foolish to think she could resist him. She'd brought it on herself. She'd been punished for it. Anger chased away his fear and for a moment he felt a strange and giddy exhilaration.

Twice before he reached Roosevelt Highway he had to pass another car. Each time he'd passed on a curve, oblivious to the thought that there might be cars from the other direction, his tires squealing loudly. That way he was around the curve before anyone could think of noticing his license plate.

The motor throbbed and roared, transmitting its sense of power to him.

When he finally reached home, he hesitated before opening the door. For a minute he experienced a strange flashback to his childhood, and found himself wondering if his father would whip him. There was pleasure in this fear. Then he lost the time-mirage and opened the door to the apartment.

There was a light in the kitchen and he knew his father was sitting in there drinking. He stepped to the doorway and looked in. His father was sitting at the kitchen table, his head on his arms. He was asleep. There were scribbled sheets of paper on the table. And the bottle and glass. The clock on the kitchen wall gave the time as twelve o'clock.

Chapter VI

TIPTOEING softly across the kitchen, Eddie Cadell reached up and turned back the hands of the electric clock. He hesitated, remembering, then put the hands at five after ten. He went over and put his hand on his father's shoulder.

"Eh? What is it?" his father mumbled thickly. He raised his head and stared with heavy eyes. "Oh, it's you, Eddie. Great game today, my boy, great game." His gaze went past his son to the wall. He struggled briefly with a puzzled frown. "Just dropped off to sleep—five minutes ago. Tired, I guess. How's the boy?"

"Fine," Eddie said. "Why don't you go to sleep, Dad?"

"Work to do," his father said. He tried to conceal the thickness in his tongue and only he was unaware that he failed. "Got to balance the books before I go to bed. You run along, Eddie. You're the one who has to keep in the pink. Great game today."

"Thanks," Eddie said.

He turned to go. Now that his father had seen the clock, he wanted to get away from him. He knew his father's habits well—he'd remember the time now no matter how drunk he got before he went to sleep.

"Meant to tell you," his father said. "Cleaned up today. Been thinking about it. Five-dollar bonus for every touchdown isn't enough. Going to make it ten for every touchdown after this." He struggled with his pocket and brought out a thick wad of bills. He carefully peeled off four tens and held them out.

Eddie took the money and put it in his pocket. "Thanks, Dad," he said. "Good night."

"Good night." Joe Cadell reached for the bottle and poured himself a drink. "Must've dozed off right after I looked at the clock." He tossed off the drink. "A great game today, boy." But his son wasn't there to hear him.

Fear was in the bedroom with Eddie Cadell, but it was weaker. His father had accepted the revised time on the clock. Eddie felt a sort of triumph as he relaxed in bed.

He was sorry, he thought drowsily, that the girl had died. She'd been a cute little trick. He remembered how beautiful she'd looked, with her white body lashed against the blackened wood. He'd enjoyed it in spite of the accident—but he'd be careful not to do it again. He fell asleep. . . .

In the morning his headache was gone. He felt fine when he awakened. There was still the memory of the night before, but it was even more like something that had happened to someone else.

He went into the kitchen and turned the clock ahead two hours, then put away his father's bottle and put the glass in the sink. It was an accepted part of his morning routine. He had long before ceased wondering how someone who knew so much about clean living could drink the stuff.

He had some scrambled eggs and milk. Then he went into the living room with the comic and the sport pages from the Sunday paper.

It was noon when the phone rang. He picked up the receiver and answered it.

"Hi, Eddie." It was Stanley Giles. "What happened to you last night?"

"That stuff bored me," Eddie said. "I came home."

"You should have stayed, Eddie. What happened later wasn't boring. We really had a ball. Boy, am I pooped this morning!"

"I feel fine," said Eddie, feeling faintly superior.

"I was stuck with my own girl and yours, too. Not that I had any beef about it. That girl you brought was sure a hot little number. Boy, you missed something."

"The stuff bored me," Eddie repeated.

"Yeah, but you had something when you said those pictures might warm the girls up. It sure did— You coming out tonight?"

"Nah," Eddie said. "Who wants to sit around watching that stuff? It's for creeps."

"We've got some more girls coming out."

"I got to go to bed early," Eddie said. "We got a tough game coming up this week."

"Okay. Take care, fella."

"See you around," Eddie said and hung up.

HE WAS glad that Stan had called up. It was a good idea to get the idea across that the pictures they'd bought bored him. He remembered the movie of the night before and felt the faint stirring of excitement.

He heard his father finally getting up. He got his trunks and went down to the beach.

He didn't come home until after he'd eaten. He bought a couple of comic magazines and a fight magazine. He went to bed and read them until he was sleepy, turned out the light and went right to sleep.

Monday morning at school everyone was talking about the murder of Teri Kearn. At first, when he heard them talking, Eddie felt his fear returning. After a while the personal element retreated and he joined in the conversations. When Leo Bishop met him in the lavatory and said that the girl must have been picked up by a guy who was in-

sane, Eddie agreed. He even thought it might have happened like that.

But talking about the murder of the pretty redhead couldn't take up all the time. By afternoon only a few were still talking about it. Eddie went to football practice, feeling fine.

Practice still didn't give him the old lift. He tried a little harder and the coach had to call him down for unnecessary roughness with the second team. But Eddie knew it was all friendly. He and the coach understood each other.

After practice, Eddie went straight home. It was one of the days when he felt like showering and changing at home. He clomped into the apartment in his football suit. He stripped and took a shower. When he finished with the cold water, he left it on until his flesh tingled. Then he toweled and dressed. He'd just buttoned his shirt when the doorbell rang.

He opened the door. The short-heavy set man who stood there was unfamiliar to him. He was about to shake his head and automatically close the door before the sales pitch started, when the man spoke.

"Eddie Cadell?" he asked.

Eddie nodded.

The man put his hand in his pocket and came out with the badge. "Police," he said. "I want to talk to you."

Eddie felt the muscles in his stomach pull up tight. It wasn't exactly fear; it was more like the way he felt when he had the ball and was charging at a tackler. In a way, it was a good feeling.

He stepped aside and held the door open.

Then he led the way into the living room.

"You're Joe Cadell's son?" the man asked.

"Yeah," Eddie said. He grinned. "Don't tell me the cops are trying to pump me about my old man again?" He knew better, but there had been a time when they'd tried to question him.

"No," the man said. "My name's Gordon. Lieutenant Gordon. I'd like to ask you a few questions." He glanced around the apartment and brought his gaze back to Eddie. "You bought something from Aristidia Mora on Flores Street last week."

"Mora?" Eddie asked.

"Yeah. The guy calls himself the Pin-Up King. Sometimes he calls his outfit *Cutrix*."

"Oh, that one," Eddie said. He wondered if the guy kept a record of everything he sold. It was better, he decided, to take no chances on it. "Yeah, I sent for a picture. He had an ad in a magazine. I thought I was going to get something pretty hot—you know, something I could flash around the locker room—but it turned out to be a screwy picture of a dame roped to a horse. I guess I was taken on that."

The man nodded. "You also chipped in with Stanley Giles"—he pulled a notebook from his pocket and glanced at it—"Anthony Espes, and Leo Bishop to buy some pictures and a film from Mora. You had a party Saturday night."

EDDIE wondered if they had remembered that he had insisted on their pooling money to buy the pictures. He thought again that this was like a football game; you had

[Turn page]


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By Cooper

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to try to guess what the other fellow was thinking and what he was going to do. He felt the way he did when he went into a game.

"Yeah," he said. "When I got my picture there was a kind of catalogue with it. Crazy pictures. We thought we'd see what it was like. So we ran the film Saturday night at Stan's. It was pretty silly stuff. I was so bored I left."

"That's what Stanley Giles told me," the man said.

Good old Stan, Eddie thought. "What's this all about?" he asked.

The Homicide man ignored the question. "In fact, Giles seemed to think you missed the best part of the party," he said. Some of what he was feeling crept into his voice.

"You mean the girls?" Eddie said. "I don't go in much for that kind of stuff. You can't play football and horse around all the time."

The man nodded. "What time would you say it was when you left the party?" he wanted to know.

"It must have been a little before ten. I came straight home, and it was about five after when I got here."

"Anybody see you?"

"I don't know if anybody saw me on the way here. My father was here when I came in, though. What's it all about, huh?"

"Did you know Teri Kearn?" the man asked.

"So that's it," Eddie said. "I heard about it in school today. I didn't know her. Too bad, huh? Who do you think did it?"

"We'll find out," the man Gordon said. He closed the notebook and put it in his pocket. "Were you in the malt shop last night?"

"The Rough Riders?" Eddie shook his head.

The door opened and Joe Cadell came in. He stopped in the doorway and stared at the man with his son.

"Hi, Dad," Eddie said. "This is a cop. I don't remember his name. I think he'd like to ask you—"

"I'll ask him myself," Gordon interrupted smoothly. "Mr. Cadell, do you happen to remember what time your son came home

Saturday night? Just a routine check."

"Sure. It was five after ten. Why?"

"One of the girls at school was murdered over the week-end," Eddie said. "I guess they're checking up on everybody at school."

"That the girl they found up in Topanga?" Joe asked.

"That's the one," Gordon said.

"Heard about it. Sounds to me like you got to find a pervert of some kind. Boys like Eddie live clean. You won't find anybody like that among them. You ought to start looking for the queers."

"We're just looking," Gordon said mildly, "Well, thanks, Eddie." He nodded and walked out.

"You see," Joe Cadell said when they heard the door close. "He knows. It's like I always told you, Eddie—live clean and you're always in the clear."

Eddie laughed. There was something ugly about it. "What the hell would you know about clean living?" he asked.

He grabbed up his coat and left before his father could answer.

Chapter VII

ON TUESDAY morning there were fewer reports than there had been the day before. Lieutenant Phil Banta went through them quickly. He checked the newest report on the phone tap and ordered his men to pull a raid that night. He checked over the vice arrests of the night before. He'd just finished when a knock came on his door.

"Come in," he said. He waited until the door was open, then said, "Good morning, Jack. I thought it might be you."

"Got some time?" Lieutenant Gordon asked. He looked as if he hadn't slept much the night before. When Banta nodded, he dropped into the chair beside the desk. "I hate to bother you with my problems, Phil, but I just don't understand guys like this."

"In a way, it's my problem, too," Banta said. "The ones I work on are liable to turn up in your department any day. I gather you haven't made much headway."

Gordon shook his head.

"What about the County?"

"They're even more in the dark than I

an," Gordon said. "I don't like this case, Phil. It makes me feel grubby."

"You mean sometimes you like murder?" Phil Banta grinned as he asked it.

"No, that's not what I mean. But there is something cleaner about a guy who shoots another man for running around with his wife, or a guy who shoots while getting away from a robbery. At least, I understand that kind. And most murderers are strictly one-shots even if they don't get caught. But a guy like this is liable to keep on— isn't he?"

Banta nodded. "The odds are in favor of it. Right now, he probably thinks it was an accident and he'll never do it again. But he will—and the next time it won't be an accident. Even on this one, you know, if she hadn't broken her neck he would have probably killed her."

"Why?"

"To keep her from talking. That's why a lot of them kill. Once they've had their fun, they're frightened. Fear may keep him inactive for a while, but it'll wear off. He'll begin to feel that he's too smart for everyone, or that it was something the girl brought on herself, or that it all happened to somebody else."

Jack Gordon rubbed a hand over his face.

"It isn't just the murder of that girl," he said, "although God knows that was bad enough. It's everything connected with this case. It's those fifteen people I saw yesterday."

"All of them clear?"

"It looks that way. The ones down in Hollywood and Los Angeles are all definitely in the clear. Both of the men in Santa Monica were out with their wives and friends Saturday night. They keep the pictures they buy in their offices. One of the men in Aragon City, a big shot in church affairs, was busy on a church committee until almost midnight Saturday night. He tried to tell me he'd ordered pictures because he was making a survey on morality for a religious publication, but I know damn well he was lying."

It was an old story to Phil Banta. He just nodded.

"The other one in Aragon City was Eddie Cadell, the high school football player. He

admitted sending for a picture all right, apparently wanting to get hold of some kind of smutty picture—and he had the guts to tell me how clean he lived! Anyway, they sent him a catalogue with the picture, and he took it out to Malibu to this Stanley Giles—that's the Malibu name on the list. There were some other kids out there—it seems the Giles kid's father gave him a cottage and they use it as a sort of club house—and they all decided to send for more pictures and a film. They all claim they were just curious."

BANTA said, "That could be true—in a way."

"Sure." Gordon shrugged. "And maybe curiosity got them to invite four girls out to look at the damn things with them. Saturday night. The oldest girl was sixteen and the youngest fourteen. Eddie Cadell left right after the film was shown. He says he got bored, claims that he went straight home and got there at five past ten. His father backs him up. That would seem to clear him."

"You sound doubtful," Phil said.

"I guess it's just that I didn't like him," Gordon admitted. "The boy's father is a bookie, you know. But the boys in that racket that I talked to say that Joe Cadell would never lie to protect his son. He's hipped on the idea of the kid going clean. They tell me that every time the kid stepped out of line the old man beat hell out of him, and that Joe would be the first one to report the kid if anything was wrong. So I guess Eddie's out, even if I didn't like him."

"What about young Giles?"

"Three boys and four girls who were out at that cottage alibi each other from about eight Saturday night to around two in the morning—at that party. I got an idea they were smoking marijuana, but they don't admit that. Anyway, all swear that no one left, though the Giles boy was in the bedroom with two of the girls most of the time after Cadell left. I'd like to turn the lot of them over my knee."

"Want me to arrest them?" Banta asked, with a grin.

"I guess there'd be no proof," Gordon growled. He managed a feeble grin.

"You see, they were really breaking the law," Banta said. "That kind of sex stuff and smoking marijuana could probably send them all to reform school—and make real criminals out of them."

"I know, I know," Gordon said.

"Go out and yell at their parents if it bothers you, but don't yell at the kids. You'll likely get farther if you take a look at how the parents treat them. A lot of damage can be done by careless or shrinking parents too 'modest' to tell their kids about the birds and the bees."

"I promised I wouldn't say anything to their parents," Gordon said sheepishly. "That was the only way I could get them to talk."

Banta grinned. "We'll make a good vice cop out of you yet, Jack. So you drew a blank on the fifteen names. Well, it was only a stab in the dark anyway. Got anything new?"

"Only one thing. We traced the rope that was used on the girl. It belonged to the school. Came from the gym. Only eight hundred kids had a chance to take it."

• "Plus the faculty and people who might have dropped in to visit the gym," Banta said. "Got any ideas?"

"Not one. I was hoping you might have one."

"Well," Banta said slowly, "you can probably take a chance and say that because of the rope your murderer is among the students, the teachers, or the other employees. That narrows it down to less than nine hundred."

"A big help," Gordon muttered. "Say—I've been thinking. The guy who did this must be a queer. You know all about such stuff. Maybe you could spot him."

"Are you kidding? How about that church-goer in Aragon City you saw? Had you ever seen him before?"

"Yes."

"Well, could you guess he was a character who liked to look at pictures of girls being tortured?"

"No, but—"

"Well, I can't, either. Too many of them look and act normal." Phil Banta played with a pencil on his desk. "Another thing,

Jack. I haven't made any special study of Aragon City High School, but I can tell you some things." He ticked them off on his fingers. "There's a janitor employed there who's been arrested for indecent exposure. One teacher who's an active homosexual has been warned about trying to pick up boys on the beach. Another likes to dress in women's clothes. One bunch of kids there regularly smoke marijuana, and I suspect they use a little heroin when they can get it. There's a girls' club—girls from fourteen to sixteen—called the Non-Virgin Club. All this, you understand, has just fallen into my lap, so to speak."

GORDON shrugged. "If I had your job, I'd cut my throat."

"No, you wouldn't. Sure, juvenile delinquency is on the increase, but thank God the majority of kids are still just healthy youngsters. Other people—adults—are becoming more neurotic, too. It's estimated that one out of every twelve adults will spend some time in mental institutions."

"What the hell's going on?" groaned Gordon.

"You want me to give you a lecture on the social ills of our times?" Banta asked, with a grin. "Or do you want me to help you catch a murderer?"

"You've made me feel we have a fat chance of catching him," Gordon growled. "Me, I'll settle for a straight, ordinary gang murder every time."

"We can probably concentrate on the school," Banta said. "I'll put some of my men to work on it with you. If we can keep an eye on the kids' hangouts, we may get a lead. And hold on to the list of the six kids at that Saturday night party. Even if they're in the clear they may lead us to somebody else. Specially if they keep on patronizing Aristidia."

"Okay."

"That's all we can do, Jack. We'll just have to wait—wait and hope we catch the dirty killer on the next try. . . ."

By Wednesday Eddie Cadell was getting jittery. He wasn't sure what was wrong, but he knew that practically everything bored him. Even football. He knew it would be

different when he got in a game, but there was no kick in the gentle scrimmages. After practice that afternoon, he started to make a date with one of the girls who'd been watching the practice, but changed his mind at the last moment.

Not that he had intended anything but a little mild necking, but then he remembered how often girls objected to his necking and demanded to be taken home. Everyone was still a little nervous about the Kearn girl. If a girl squawked about him being too rough, it might give someone ideas.

That was the only thing that worried him. He knew there'd never be another accident like that again. It wouldn't have happened when it did, he thought resentfully, if the redhead hadn't fought so hard.

He thought of having dinner at the malt shop, but changed his mind about that, too. He hadn't gone in there since Saturday. It wasn't that he was afraid, he told himself, but he just didn't care for the place any more. He ate dinner in a small restaurant down near the pier.

After dinner, he went for a ride alone. He drove up through Pacific Palisades to Sunset Boulevard and turned west. There wasn't much traffic on Sunset and he let the hotrod out.

The roar of the motor and the harshness of the wind in his face made him feel some better. But he was still restless when he drove back along the ocean to Aragon City. He picked up some comic magazines and then, as an afterthought, added a couple of girlie magazines. He went quickly home and to bed.

That night Eddie slept badly. He dreamed about Teri Kearn and woke up drenched with sweat and with his head aching. He got up and drank some milk, then went back to sleep.

Thursday was no better. When football practice was over, he had made up his mind. He drove down to the center of town and parked on Alvarez, just around the corner from Flores Street. He got out and walked down the street.

[Turn page]



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put into laws are
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Chapter VIII

ABOUT to turn into Aristidia Mora's store, Eddie noticed a man who was standing across the street. He was a heavy-set man, in nondescript clothes. Something about the way the fellow stood, staring stolidly across the street, reminded Eddie of a cop. He stopped and stared into the window of the store next to the Mora entrance, shifting so he could see the man across the street reflected in the window. When the man continued to stand there, Eddie was sure.

He walked on past the pin-up store and down the street. He didn't look around, but half a block down he turned purposefully into a department store.

It was some kind of bargain day and the store was crowded with women. Eddie Cadell pressed through the crowd around one counter, conscious of the bodies he brushed against. The scent of perfume was heavy in the air.

Eddie walked on, not going anywhere. He was sweating, and his head had started to ache again. The air seemed hot and heavy. He was having trouble breathing. Suddenly a glitter on a counter caught his eye. He stopped and stared down at a tray full of short hat pins.

"May I help you, sir?" a salesgirl asked from in front of him.

He nodded without looking up. "One of those," he said. He handed the girl some money. He didn't notice how much nor what change she handed back. She gave him the hat pin in a small brown paper bag.

As he turned back the way he'd come, he started to take the pin from the bag, then thought better of it. He shifted his hand on the bag so that his fingers grasped the head of the pin through the paper. His headache was worse.

He started to shove through the crowd around another counter. He was half-way through when there was a shrill scream just behind him. He turned to stare at the woman who was rubbing her generous hips and speaking indignantly to the woman next to her.

Eddie saw the outrage on the woman's face and his muscles tightened with pleasure.

He watched until the expression faded from her face. Then he went in search of another crowded counter.

An hour later, Eddie Cadell was out on the street again. He walked on around the block instead of going back past the pin-up store. As he passed a waste paper container, he tossed the small paper bag into it.

He felt cooler out in the air, but his clothes were wet and clammy. His head had stopped aching. Suddenly all of his tenseness was gone. He felt so relaxed it was an effort to walk.

When he reached his car he drove straight home. Without bothering about dinner, he undressed and fell into bed. He slept peacefully for fourteen hours. . . .

During the week, Phil Banta and Jack Gordon had seen each other several times, but only briefly to report that nothing had turned up. Banta had assigned several of his men to the case, but he'd been too busy to give it much time himself. There had been raids against three call houses and a Turkish bath establishment which specialized in a fag trade. He'd also had to work overtime on the case of a persistent molester who worked the park and had managed to avoid the policewomen they'd sent out.

On Saturday, after lunch, Banta dropped into the Homicide office. Jack Gordon looked up, surprised.

"Don't tell me we got a break?" he said at the sight of the vice officer.

"Not that I know of," Banta said. "What are you doing, Jack?"

"Working," the Homicide man said. "I've got two other murders besides the Kearn girl. At least I'm making some headway on them, but the newspapers are starting their usual yelp about the inefficiencies of the Police Force, and the old man is on my neck. Why?"

"Put it to one side," Banta said. "We're taking the afternoon off. We're going to the football game. As loyal citizens of Aragon City it behooves us to go out and watch them trounce Alhambra. Come on. I've got the tickets."

GORDON sighed. "I'd like to," he said, and glanced again at his desk, "but what

will the taxpayers say if they see us wasting their money by going to a football game?"

Phil Banta made a rude suggestion about what taxpayers could do. "Besides," he added, "even cops have to relax. If we can't relax on our own time, then we'll do it on their time. Get your hat, Lieutenant."

Gordon stared at him. "You're up to something. I've known you ten years and I never knew you to quit work for a football game before. What is it?"

"Next to baseball, football is the great American vice. I am a Vice Squad officer. Ergo, I go." Banta grinned. "I've got a sort of idea, Jack, but we can't do anything about it until right after the game, so we might as well go."

"Okay." Gordon stood up and reached for his hat. "But we'd better either pull a rabbit out of one of those football helmets, or be sure the old man doesn't find out about it. I'd hate to start looking for a job."

"They couldn't run the department without us," Banta said gravely. "Come on."

They left the building. Down in the parking lot, they took an unmarked squad car and drove over to the high school stadium. It was only a few minutes before the game and the stands were already packed. Down on the field a band was marching around the field. Colorful pennants waved from spots all over the stands.

"A good crowd," Gordon said, as they found their seats. "This will be the first game I've seen this year."

"You ought to arrange for all your murders to be committed on Monday and solved on Friday," Banta suggested.

"Oh, sure. How come you don't like football, Phil?"

"I don't dislike it. I just have other ways of sublimating my hostilities."

"Meaning what?"

Banta was staring around at the crowd as he answered. "As civilization becomes more complicated, all of us are subject to increased hostility—but we also have less means for expressing it. Any fighting other than organized global massacre is strictly frowned upon. So we all find different ways of working it off. Football, fights, wrestling, reading murder stories or watching them on tele-

vision, or dozens of other ways. The extraction of the milk of human unkindness."

"When I listen to you," Jack Gordon said, "I'm glad I never got an education."

Banta laughed. "That remark alone ought to be enough to get you promoted to Inspector. You'll go far, my boy."

Gordon glanced at him suspiciously, then joined in the laughter. Both turned their attention to the field.

The band had withdrawn to the sidelines and the two teams were running out on the field. Waves of shouting rolled down from the stand.

After a while the game started. Alhambra won the toss and Aragon City kicked off. It soon became evident that with one exception the teams were evenly matched. The one exception was Eddie Cadell. He seemed to be all over the field, bashing out of nowhere to cut down ball carriers before they could get started. When Aragon City had the ball, he slashed through holes that seemed non-existent, or simply ran over the defense.

"I don't like that boy, as I told you," Jack Gordon said, "but he certainly is a whale of a football player. He's practically a whole team by himself. Look at him go!"

EDDIE had just swept around the end and had gone twenty yards for a touchdown.

"Yeah," Banta said. When the game had started, he had pulled a small pair of binoculars from his pocket and had been watching the game through them. "Jack, did you ever do any serious thinking about football along the lines I was commenting about earlier?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that in my opinion football is one of our socially acceptable forms of sadism. To a lesser degree, and in a far more acceptable form, it's not too different from the pictures that Aristidia Mora sells."

"I think you're being a little extreme," Jack Gordon protested. "Are you trying to say that we ought to do away with football?"

"Of course not. I wouldn't do away with any games. In fact, I wouldn't even do away with crime shows on radio and television that some group is always screaming about. I wasn't advocating anything, Jack. I was merely pointing out that football is an ac-

ceptable form of sadism in our civilization."

"So what?"

"So watch Eddie Cadell with these." He handed over the binoculars. "Forget about his fine form and how beautifully he tackles. Watch his face."

Jack Gordon took the binoculars and watched while the game went on below.

"I don't notice anything," he said finally, "except that he seems to be enjoying it."

"Watch some of the other players," Banta said.

Gordon obeyed. After a while he handed the binoculars back. "Eddie Cadell seems to enjoy the game more than the others, but that's all," he said. "I don't get what you're driving at."

"That's all I was driving at. There are twenty-one boys down there who are getting nice healthy enjoyment from playing football. The twenty-second one—Eddie Cadell—is getting an unusual amount of pleasure from it. Were you aware that Cadell has so far knocked three of the other players unconscious on tackles?"

"Well, it's a rough game, you know."

"I was watching Eddie every time," said Phil Banta. "I could swear he was trying to knock those fellows out. And I know his pleasure in the game was greater on those occasions."

"Are you trying to say he's the one we're looking for?"

"I think he is," Banta said.

"But you can't seriously be judging him by this game!"

"Of course not. I've been merely making observations. I was convinced that Eddie Cadell is the one we want before we came to the game!"

Chapter IX

JACK GORDON had suddenly lost interest in the football game. He was staring at Phil Banta.

"But—but what about Eddie Cadell's alibi?" he blurted.

"It's not such a good alibi," Banta said. "So I think we can just go on the assumption it doesn't exist. I checked up a little more on Joe Cadell. It's true that he

wouldn't lie to save the boy. But Joe drinks a lot. It might be easy for the boy to fool his father."

"You mean turn the clock back and then get his father to notice the time?"

"It's been done before," Banta shrugged. "When you first told me about Eddie, I knew something was bothering me. Finally I figured out what it was. That business of the four boys getting the film from Aristidia. That was a curiosity reaction which might have been expected, although you'd have thought that straight pornography would have satisfied their curiosity better. It was not surprising, either, that they should want to show the film to the girls. And because of what followed the showing, those boys wanted to show more girls. That, at least, was the reaction of all the boys but one—Eddie Cadell. In spite of evidence that he may have instigated the purchase of the film, Eddie was suddenly bored by the film. He was deviating from the norm of his fellow students."

"Yeah—" Gordon sounded doubtful.

"It was enough to make me think more about Eddie," Banta said. "No more than that. I was just mildly curious about him until Thursday."

"What happened then?"

"I put one of my men down on Flores Street, Crocker. He's a good man. I told him just to keep an eye on who entered or left Aristidia's. Crocker is a football fan, so he recognized Eddie Cadell when Eddie showed up Thursday afternoon. Crocker says that it looked like Eddie was going to turn in at Aristidia's, but suddenly changed his mind. Crocker thinks Eddie may have spotted him. Anyway, he went on down the street and into Jaynor's department store. Crocker didn't notice when Eddie left the store."

"Maybe he was going there in the first place," Gordon said.

"Maybe. But I don't believe in coincidences. And for the next hour after Eddie was seen going into the department store, there was a sticker at work in the store."

"A sticker?"

Banta nodded. "Somebody was jabbing women with a pin. Six women reported it.

There may have been others who didn't report it. This doesn't leave us with much, but it's enough to make me more interested in Eddie. We know he was the first one to send for pictures. He received a catalogue. He was a member of the group that ordered a bondage film—he may have been the instigator of it. He walks out on the party just before it gets good and hot, even though he must have known it was heading that way. Thursday he shows up on Flores Street and acts like he might be going into Aristidia's. Instead, he goes into the department store and right after that there's reports of women being jabbed."

"So what do we do about it? Pull him in?"

Banta shook his head. "We'll do a little of the leg work we usually pass on to someone else. If I'm right, this game may have excited him enough so he'll make another move. So we keep an eye on him—and wait."

There was the usual confusion in the locker room after the game. The other boys, especially those who hadn't been in the game, crowded around Eddie Cadell, slapping him on the back. The coach gave him a playful jab in the ribs and gave him hell for almost fumbling in the third quarter.

Eddie shook them all off as quickly as he could. He showered and changed clothes, slipping out before the others were ready to leave.

The game had been fun, but Eddie still felt all keyed up. Playing hadn't relaxed him the way it once had. He was irritable and jittery. Part of this, he thought, was

due to the fact that he kept thinking of how Teri Kern had looked in the moonlight the week before.

OUTSIDE the stadium people were milling around. He managed to duck most of them, and he grunted answers to the ones he couldn't avoid. A cute little blonde who was in one of his classes tried to attach herself to his arm, but he shook her off.

He got in his car and drove down near the ocean. He picked up a restaurant he'd never been in before and went in for dinner. He took a long time eating and it was almost dark when he came out.

He still felt tense. His head was aching again. He wondered if he were overtrained. He'd read about how that sometimes happened to athletes.

He drove slowly around town, not going anywhere in particular, having no plans. He wasn't even thinking much. The cool night air felt good on his head and he liked to listen to the rumble of the motor. His eyes idly scanned the sidewalks, although he wasn't looking for anyone.

Ahead of him, a young girl was walking along the street. As he caught sight of her, she suddenly seemed familiar. He puzzled over this, slowing his car down to a crawl, until he realized what had made her seem familiar. It was the absurdly high heels on her shoes. Then it reminded him of the pictures in the catalogue. Excitement quickened in him. He swung the car over nearer to the curb.

"Hello, baby," he said as he pulled up even

[Turn page]

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with her, cruising near the curb.

The girl looked around, a frown on her face. Then she saw him and the frown was replaced by a smile.

"Hello," she said. She stopped uncertainly and he brought the car to a halt.

He didn't recognize the girl, but she apparently knew him. That was the advantage, he thought, to being a celebrity. He looked her over. She was a pretty little thing, with blue-black hair down to her shoulders. The Hedy Lamarr type, he thought.

"Want to go for a ride?" he asked.

She hesitated, although it was obvious that she did want to go. "I have to be home early," she said.

"Me, too," Eddie said. "You have to go to bed early if you want to keep in shape." His eyes raked over her. "But you seem to be doing all right on that score, baby."

She laughed self-consciously.

"Come on," he said. He opened the door on her side. "Hop in. I'll get you home early."

"Okay," she said. She got into the car and sat down.

"What's your name, baby?" he asked as he stepped on the accelerator.

"Sherry Norton."

"You know me, huh?"

She nodded. "Everybody knows Eddie Cadell. I watched you win the game this afternoon."

"Yeah, I guess I did at that," he said.

He swung to the left and drove down to the Roosevelt Highway. He reached over with his right arm and pulled the girl closer to him. She made no protest.

"That's better," he said. "How do you like the boat?"

"It's super," she said.

"Yeah, it'll do a hundred easily." He turned his attention back to driving. He enjoyed this, speeding along with the wind whipping in their faces, going no place, having no plans.

He'd gone a couple of miles when he noticed that one pair of headlights seemed to be sticking close behind him. He watched them for a minute, wondering who was driving the car. Probably some of the boys, he thought, who had seen him pick up the girl

and was following him because they had nothing else to do. He'd done the same thing a number of times himself. He grinned, thinking he'd fool them.

He'd just gone past Sunset Boulevard. He rounded the curve. There were no cars coming from the other direction. In the moment that the following car was out of sight, he swung in a U-turn and stepped on the gas. There was no chance to see who was in the other car, but he chuckled as he passed them.

BACK around the corner, he swung left on Sunset and pressed the accelerator to the floor. The hotrod surged ahead. He knew he'd be out of sight before the other car could turn around. They wouldn't know whether he'd gone straight back to Aragon City or turned on Sunset.

With the girl snuggled against him, neither of them talking, he drove down Sunset until they reached Sepulveda. There he swung left and cut through the Pass.

He was still driving aimlessly until they were in the valley. He swung left on Ventura Boulevard and suddenly he knew where he was going. His pulse quickened with excitement. He looked down at the girl, her face outlined in the moonlight. He stepped harder on the gas.

When they reached Woodland Hills, he swung left again, onto the road that cut through Topanga Canyon.

"This is nice," the girl murmured dreamily.

"Yeah," Eddie grunted.

They went up over the hill and started down the other side. The motor idled as the car coasted around the curves. They passed Horseshoe Curve and Eddie suddenly turned off the road. He shifted into first gear as the car nosed up the steep grade.

"What's up here?" the girl asked.

"A place," Eddie said. "You'll see."

They topped the grade and came out on the small plateau. Eddie braked the car to a stop and cut the motor. It seemed to him that he could still hear the motor roaring.

He got out of the car and went around on her side. She was gazing ahead at the miniature ocean in the distance. He opened the

door and pulled her from the car.

"You're hurting me!" she said. "What—"

Eddie had no patience. He was shaking with eagerness. He swung hard on her jaw and caught her body as it slumped. He picked her up and carried her to the blackened ruins of the house.

He stared down at the skeletal remains, dimly lighted by the moon, and for a moment it seemed that he could see the red-headed girl still lying there. He remembered exactly where she'd been. It made no difference that this one was black-haired. She'd look just as beautiful.

He dropped her to the ground and knelt beside her, trembling.

He tore the clothes from her, ripping her skirt into long strands. He had no rope, but this would do just as well. The girl stirred as he removed the last of her clothing.

His head was throbbing. He stood up and stared down at her. His mouth was dry. His breathing was like a roaring in his ears. His hands gripped a strip of her skirt.

He felt the hand on his shoulder, but it meant nothing but interference. He shrugged the hand off, flailing back with his right fist, without looking up from the girl's body. Then hands gripped him by both arms. They were strong hands.

Anger flooded over Eddie at what seemed

like an invasion of privacy. He twisted free, striking out blindly. He never saw the blow coming. It exploded against the side of his head, the pain biting deeply. He sprawled on the ground not far from the black-haired girl.

Then, looking up at the two men, he suddenly understood. He wanted the punishment they offered him, wanted it more than he had ever wanted anything in his life. He wanted to tell them everything. They'd punish him, but they'd understand, too. The words gushed up faster than he could form them.

"God!" Jack Gordon said. "I was sure that it was all over for that kid when we lost him by Sunset. It's damn lucky you guessed right in thinking he'd come back to the same place he took the other girl."

"Yeah," Phil Banta said.

He was kneeling on the ground, wrapping his coat around the black-haired girl. He was trying to think what to say that would be most reassuring when she awakened. For the moment, he didn't care about anything but the scar that might be left on her.

Eddie Cadell huddled on the ground. His breath came in great racking sobs. He loved the men who were about to punish him—even as once he had loved his father. The fantasy of the red-headed girl and the black-headed girl was gone. ● ● ●

Coming Next Issue

A killer loose in a house of flesh

The BEAUTIFUL and the DOOMED

By STEWART STERLING



Two pretty delinquents hit New York!

MEET ME ON 47th STREET

By BRUCE ELLIOTT



He slammed his head
against the table



NURSERY CRIME

By TALMAGE POWELL

THE GUY who said that trouble can come in small packages must have been thinking of Gentleman Joe, who is a baby, as chubby as a teddy bear and as harmless looking as pink fluff. But it is better that Suzie and I should have adopted a keg of dynamite.

The way Suzie and me meet Gentleman Joe takes us back some time, to the day when I was called to City Hospital. There I was confronted by a stern looking doctor who told me, while I was twisting my hat to shreds, that Suzie had taken a tumble down the back steps at home. A neighbor saw this,

Denny ran a poolroom, and his record wouldn't permit him to adopt a baby the regular way—so he tried to get one on the black market!

which is how Suzie was rushed so fast to City Hospital. If she had been longer getting there, she might have died, and I would have croaked too, feeling as I do about Suzie.

The doctor laid his hand on my shoulder. "Your wife will pull through okay, Mr. Denny, but we—"

He seemed to be hunting a word and I said, "Give it to me straight, Doc."

"We lost the baby. I'm sorry. We did what we could, but I'm afraid your wife will never be able to have a child again."

He went out and left me all alone in the waiting room. I was glad nobody was around to see the tears in my eyes. I sat there, this lump in my throat so big I cannot swallow. I was thinking of Suzie and what this meant to her and what it might do to her.

Suzie had been so proud of me and our life together. I had quit running numbers when I married her and bought this little poolroom, and we settled down to being real folks, living in a house out in the suburbs, like real working joes do. When she learned the baby was on its way, Suzie had just bust out bawling, she was so happy. This rounded out our life, made everything complete, she said.

And plans! The plans she made for that kid! He would have everything decent in life Suzie and me had missed, on account of us growing up in tenements and having fathers who were a lot alike in that they drank like fishes, worked only on week ends, chased broads, and beat their wives.

Like they say in books, I cannot dwell upon the next several days. Bringing Suzie home, seeing her so washed out and listless was terrible. It was like a part of her had died in the hospital. I gnawed my nails down to nubs, wondering how I was going to snap her out of this. I decided another baby was in order and that if we couldn't have one of our own, we'd have to get a delivery job somebody else had done.

Suzie wouldn't hear of the idea at first, but finally I persuaded her. We got in the car and headed toward the big orphanage out on the edge of town. We pulled up in front of the place, and I watched Suzie's face when she saw the dozens of kids playing in the big yard. My heart did a glad flip-flop as

I saw the light kind of come back in her eyes at the sight of the kids.

I have already phoned the people at the institution, and they were ready for us. We were given a third degree by this receptionist, who takes us into a private office where a horse-faced woman in starched white was behind a large desk. She gives us another third degree, then throws the bombshell.

"I believe you are a poolroom proprietor, Mr. Denny?"

"That's right," I admitted.

"We have looked into your record upon receipt of your application to make adoption. I found several charges against you on the police records."

I saw Suzie's face start to crumple. I put my knuckles on the desk and pleaded earnestly with Horse-face. "Lady, that was long ago. Everything has changed now. I am so straight I do not even allow a few sharks to hang around my poolroom for a percentage of their take."

"You look like nice young people," Horse-face admitted, "but there are certain definite rules we must abide by in this institution. I'm sorry."

She picked up some papers from her desk. It was all over.

Suzie didn't speak on the way home. That was the trouble. If she had only muttered some polite female poison about Horse-face, I would have known she was still fighting. Fighting inside, see, where it's important to fight. But from that quiet of hers, I knew Suzie was licked.

WE KIND of drag through life the next couple days, then this dry, angular dame with the beady eyes and steel-trap mouth shows up at the poolroom. Jo-jo the rack boy scurries into my hole of an office, stretching words about his chewing gum. "Boss, a broad! A dame outside, waiting by the snooker table to see you."

"Well, show her in, bean brain. Ain't you got no business etiquette?"

Jo-jo showed her in, and she offered a hand which I shook. Her palm was somewhat on the order of dry sandpaper.

"I am Miss Spoonsbury," she intoned. "I will come right to the point, Mr. Denny. I

understand you wish to adopt a baby."

My natural suspicion is always aroused when anyone understands anything about me, unless I know how they got their understanding.

"It is possible," I said in my best manner, offering her a chair. "If you would inform me how you came by the knowledge—"

"Quite simply, Mr. Denny. I am employed at the Glad Heart Orphan Asylum. I heard of your case. I should like to help you."

I cut a look at her. "Why? What's your gimmick?"

Her eyes beaded on me. "Gimmick, Mr. Denny? I have no motive other than wishing to see that a homeless child is happy in good hands."

"Glad Heart didn't think my hands so good."

"Personally the directors did, being thoroughly convinced that you have reformed. But Glad Heart has inflexible rules. There is, however, a private home operated by a Dr. Theron Banklin that might help you. I will give you the address."

I was still leery, but when she had given me the address, she said, "I—ah—should like to call on you again if you succeed in getting a baby. Perhaps you—"

I relaxed. That satisfied me. I pegged her as an underpaid worker who knew of this Dr. Theron Banklin's home and who hoped for a bit of reward for sending me there.

"Sure," I said. "If we get a baby, we will not forget you."

Her dry face cracked in its first attempt at a smile, and Miss Spoonsbury went out.

Well, I was taking no chances on dragging Suzie through disappointment again. I got my hat and went to this Doctor Banklin's home alone, telling nobody. It was a big, gloomy old house, the roof sagging, needing paint, set back from the street behind an unkempt yard. It was almost hidden by century-old trees, like a kid's idea of a haunted house.

The joint makes me feel creepy, but I have knocked and the door is opened by a tired-looking dame in nurse's uniform. Behind her, the hallway was gloomy. I could hear a kid crying somewhere in the building.

After a little of the usual chit-chat as to

who I am, I was showed into a room that had been turned into an office. Shortly, Dr. Theron Banklin came in, a big, beefy man with iron-gray hair like a brush on his dome and eyes reduced to piggish size by the thick glasses he wore. We shook hands, and I told him the rigamarole about a Miss Spoonsbury sending me here.

He said affably, "Yes, of course, Mr. Denny, Miss Spoonsbury phoned me about you. I am certain we can help you. You understand the nature of our home?"

I had to admit that I didn't.

"Girls," he said, "ah—unfortunates, shall we say, come to our home. If they are able, they are given work to do. In any event, we provide them with a haven until their babies are born."

"And it's these kids up for adoption?"

He shrugged, making the fat roll up under his chin. "If the girl cannot provide for the child or has no desire to keep it, we naturally attempt to find a proper home for the offspring."

"I dunno—" I muttered.

"If you are thinking of paternity, have no worries. Most of the girls who come here are poor, but respectable, usually from good homes, the victims of a youthful mistake. Come along, Mr. Denny, let us see some of the children. We have four on hand at the moment."

THAT is how Suzie and me came to meet Gentleman Joe. I picked Joe out of the lot that first day. I didn't know much about babies, but Joe looked okay to me, husky, broad of chest, kicking his feet and tasting his fist the first time I saw him. I brought Suzie back out to Doctor Banklin's that same day. She fell in love with him on sight.

Banklin patted her shoulder. "Perhaps you'd like to take him along for a day or two, get acquainted, see if your first impression holds."

"Oh, it'll be my impression always," Suzie said, looking like a pert blond angel with Joe in her arms. Later in the car she hugged him close to her. "Denny—" and there were tears in her eyes— "can you imagine anybody giving up such a perfect little gentleman?"

Suzie had already started collecting didies, bottles, and such like for the arrival of that baby of ours we'd never have, so we were pretty well fixed for the Gentleman.

Inside of three days, it seemed like we had had Joe with us always. I am considered a pretty cool customer in some quarters, but I don't mind admitting that the Gentleman got my number. He kicked in fat good humor. He laughed and gurgled and grabbed for your thumb every time you got near him. He was so darned little and helpless and good-natured, taking it right in stride that his mother was some wench who'd abandoned him. I got this knot in my throat thinking about it.

Rough as my own childhood had been, I figured that kids is kids, and you ought to treat them right. My feelings for the Gentleman grew to be almost as important as my relief at the way Suzie had snapped back to being Suzie once more, all gold and pink, laughter and bounce.

That fourth day, Theron Banklin showed up at the house. He grinned, laughed his fat laugh, and said, "I can tell by your faces that you two have made up your minds."

"We sure have," I said. "We'd like to keep him."

Banklin had long, legal-looking papers in his pocket. We were to sign these. He also talked for quite a while about the process of adoption, its responsibilities, and that kind of stuff. Suzie and me both began to fidget. Get it over, I thought, and let us have the kid!

Then Banklin brings up the subject of his home, how much good it does, how much it costs to run it. I get a little cold in the eyes when I look at him. I get his gimmick now. Still and all, I told myself he did deserve some credit and help with the work he was doing.

"Okay, okay, Doc," I broke in. "How much?"

"Oh, not a large donation—" he waved it down to being unimportant with a gesture of his hand—"and after all, you must think of the expense entailed in having one of your own. You're saving all that. With your success in business, Mr. Denny, I'm sure fifteen hundred would be a small enough figure."

I could have questioned that success angle. I could have questioned a few other things, too, if the noggin had been hitting on all twelve. But all I could think of was the wide, scared look in Suzie's eyes as she held the Gentleman close to her. She was begging, and I knew how much this meant to her, knew that I just couldn't afford to put her through that same kind of racking disappointment again. We signed the papers, and I reached for the checkbook. I wrote the check anyway, but somehow I couldn't feel quite right about the whole thing. It was kind of like buying the Gentleman.

EVERYTHING went swell for about two weeks, until the afternoon Hardknucks Harry Sloan showed up in my poolroom. Hardknucks Harry was a private detective who now and then picked up a fancy case among the carriage trade. He was dark, handsome as a movie star, and had earned his nickname because he always carried brassknucks to keep his beauty from getting marked up if he had to work in close. One pop, and Harry had flattened the other guy, and the other guy couldn't mark him up any.

Jo-jo busted into the office, nearly swallowing his chewing gum, to tell me that Hardknucks was outside. I didn't tell Jo-jo to bring him in. Despite the fact that his big-time front and good looks got Harry Sloan a lot of work from rich dames who needed a husband shadowed, a necklace got back secretly from a loan shark, or a gambling tab taken care of, I knew Hardknucks for what he was—mean and tough and thinking only of Hardknucks Harry Sloan. I didn't want him around my joint any longer than I could help.

I followed Jo-jo out. There was Hardknucks, idly rolling a cue ball in a three-cushion bank with his hand.

He gave the white ball a shove, watched it bounce from cushion to cushion, and said, "I hear you got a baby now, Denny."

"So?"

"So I'd like to talk to you."

He lifted his attention from the pool table, letting the cue ball roll to a slow stop. "In private, Denny."

I shrugged, led the way to my office. He

helped himself to a cigar from the open box on the desk. He savored it, regarded it, said, "A mighty little man to smoke such big cigars, aren't you, Denny?"

"What about my kid?" I said.

"Your kid?" he said, his brows raised in mock surprise. "Why now, Denny, how come you're so sure the kid is yours? You know how risky it is to buy things on the black market."

"Black market?"

"Now, now, Denny, don't tell me you've never read anything in the papers about the black market, so-called, in babies." He wagged his finger chidingly under my nose. Then his face went harsh, and he grabbed a handful of my collar, jerked me up close to him. "You little punk," he grated, "I knew you in the past. I know how you deal. You don't expect to keep that baby, do you?"

"I adopted him," I said.

"You think you did—or maybe you were in on the sham with Doc Theron Banklin. Anyway, the papers you signed were fancy bogus documents fixed up by Banklin. Come on. I'm going to report to my employers, and you're going with me."

I wanted to get to the bottom of this, even if I'd been in the mood to argue with Harry. We drove over in his car to the swanky west side of town, up a long street where the houses were mansions, set way back on neatly manicured lawns. Harry swung up a driveway to the one of the mansions. A butler answered the door, showed us through a hallway big as a train terminal, into a long sunken living room that held, among other things, a big concert grand piano, an ankle-deep carpet, huge square furniture, and rich drapes that reached practically to the ceiling.

There were three people in the living room, a tired-looking rich old dodo, a middle-aged dame who was dieted slim and who looked like the clubwomen you see in the roto sections, and a wrung-out little blond dame of maybe eighteen.

The man stiffened as the butler showed Harry and me into the room.

Harry said, "Mr. Wildering, I think I've located the baby."

Old man Wildering shifted his gaze to me. "This gentleman has him?"

Harry nodded.

The bejeweled middle-aged dame didn't look as if she liked the setup at all. "Wiley," she snarled at the old man, "for the last time, as your wife, I insist you give up this fanciful idea. The tabloids will murder us! I can see the headlines now—Out of Wedlock Child to be Wildering Heir. I simply never could face my friends again!"

"Victorina," old man Wildering sighed, "please."

"I will have no part of it!" Victorina screeched. "I was against it from the first. Do not try to recall water that has passed under the dam. Our Joannie here—" she flung a gesture toward the tired, bitter little blonde— "made a mistake, disappeared, and when she returned we wormed the whole truth out of her. You insisted on hiring this private detective, without thinking of the consequences if the truth comes out. Who can you help, you with your stodgy notions of doing what is right? Bah! If this leaks out, Joannie will never be able to marry Archibald Twyford! Think of losing the linkage with the Twyford name and millions. Anyway, they make such a lovely couple, and Archibald simply dotes on Joannie. You see it my way, don't you, daughter?" she demanded, fixing Joannie with her eyes.

JOANNIE WILDERING lit a cigarette, said, "To hell with you. Yes, I'll marry Archie. You've got me now. I made my bid when I left home and tried to be somebody else. I failed at living because I had never had a chance to live. I'm just a hot-house plant. If Archie wants to pay enough to have the decoration around, why not?"

She got to her feet, hands on her hips, head thrown back. "Mister," she said to me, "he oughtta be okay. His father was. I met him when I was clerking in a department store. He never knew who I was. He had an old sick father to take care of and didn't make much dough. He couldn't afford a wife and baby. I never let him know about the kid. The whole thing was a crazy stunt on my part, but I was sick of all this, see? Now I know that when you've lived in chains long enough, you never can break them. Keep the kid, mister. Maybe he'll turn out

as I might have, if I'd ever had a break."

"A break?" Victorina was screeching again. "Wealth, luxury, your name opening the best social doors in town."

Joannie took the screeching calmly. "Don't break your girdle, Mater. I know we need the Twyford millions, that we haven't got nearly as much dough as you let people think. Okay—" she laughed on a shrill, hollow note—"we shall have the Twyford millions! All my training has been bent toward getting them." She trailed limply out of the room.

Victorina gasped. "Don't pay her too much attention. Spoiled. Too much done for her. Headstrong."

The quiet voice of old Wiley Wildering came persistently. "Is the baby well?"

Before I am given a chance to answer, Hardknucke Harry said, "The baby is well. But as a matter of fact, Mr. Wildering, there is some work to be done yet, to determine whether we actually have the right baby."

Victorina grabbed for the straw. "I'm sure it couldn't be!"

Wiley Wildering ignored her, running his hand tiredly through his white hair. "How much longer will it take, Mr. Sloan?"

"Oh, a day or two longer," Hardknucks said. "See, Banklin works this way—to get the babies, he sticks an advertisement in the personals columns of the papers something like, 'Our charitable maternity home is sympathetic to your troubles. Girls may work their way.' Most of the girls are so poor, bewildered, and hopeless they leave their babies on his promise of good adoption. He plants a spotter in a reliable institution to give him leads on prospects, applicants to make adoption, a certain percentage of which are going to be turned down and on which Theron Banklin goes to work.

"You can leave it to him to see that the couple gets attached to a baby and is drawn into making a payment to his institution. He's smart that way. A couple babies a month, along with what he picks up off abortion cases, and he's rolling in dough. When one location begins to get warm, he jumps a few states, hunts a large old house somewhere, and starts over again. He can't miss."

"But," Wildering said, "if you've dug up

all this information about him—"

"Only enough to let me guess the rest," Hardknucks informs him, "and that took some trouble, breaking into his office at night. Knowing the date of the birth of your daughter's baby, I checked the records, followed them to the record of the baby going to Denny here. But there must be no slip-ups. I need more time."

"No, Wiley!" the screech rose again. "Forget this thing. It will ruin us all, the dreadful publicity!"

Wildering wavered, closed his eyes, opened them, and said, "A little more time, Mr. Sloan."

I didn't miss the oily smile on Hardknucks's face as we went out.

"I don't dig you," I said. "This stall for time. You could have pitched in, in there, on either side, and put a stop to it, cleared the whole matter up. You know which baby is which."

"Who wants a stop put to it?" Harry demanded. "Drive, punk, while I think."

Back to my poolroom, Harry opened a checkbook, shoved it toward me. He was grinning like a cat that has just swallowed a juicy canary bird.

"In my probing," he said, "I have talked to your neighbor, the doctors at City Hospital, have seen Suzie and the kid together. I know what this means to you. With me on your side, we might get everything fixed up legal."

"I dig you now," I said. "How much?"

"A grand."

"Is that ethical?"

"Who said anything about ethics?" Harry said. "I want the kid to be happy, don't I?"

"But if you'd doublecross the Wilderings, how would I know—"

"My word, chum. Anyhow, you got no choice. This is your only chance to get that kid legally—with my help."

Gentleman Joe, it seemed, was turning into rather an expensive investment.

I THOUGHT the whole thing over, and being of a suspicious turn, decided not to swallow all the cake because of the flavor of the icing. I called the Glad Heart Orphanage, found out that Miss Spoonsbury got off duty

at four. I didn't have much time to make it out there. I kept thinking—Miss Spoonbury with the corn-husk figure, the sandpaper palm, the dry, angular face—Miss Spoonsbury, Doc Theron Banklin's plant.

She drove the coupé out of the orphanage grounds at five after four. I moved out of the bushes where I was watching, ran along behind the screening bushes, and reached my car where I had parked it out of sight on the side road.

Tailing Spoonsbury was easy, which meant she had no idea she was being followed. Twice I circled the apartment building where she stopped before I parked. Her name was on the tab under the mailbox for apartment 2-D. I went up to 2-D, listened against the door. I could hear her moving about inside. I rapped.

Spoonsbury answered the door. There was only the merest hint of surprise in her eyes when she saw me. She still had on that starched white uniform, but there was a lighted fag in her hand, and her breath smelled as if she had taken a couple of quick double slugs as bracers after her day with the kiddies.

I smiled blandly so she wouldn't notice my foot in the door. "I never did get a chance to show our appreciation for your telling us of Doctor Banklin."

"Oh," she said, leery, glancing behind me at the empty hall.

I was still smiling. "May I come in?"

She was reluctant about it, but I pushed the door back and went in. She closed the door, turned toward me. I was holding out a C note. She reached for it, but I didn't let it go. We stood there, each clutching an end of the bill.

"Who's baby is it, really?" I said.

"I don't believe I understand!"

"I think you do, Spoonsbury. I want to do the right thing, but I want to keep the baby, too, if I can. Let me guess how it happened. You tumble to the fact that a certain dame in Banklin's place is really rich little Joannie Wildering. You see a chance to make a bigger killing all at once than you'll ever make with Banklin. Maybe you're getting edgy because of the risk and you see this chance to break away and grab off some dough at

the same time. It had to be an insider that tipped off Hardknucks Harry Sloan where the Wildering baby was. I'll gamble on it being you, Spoonsbury."

Her mottled face contorted in preparation for telling me something. But she didn't say it, because at that moment, the door slammed open.

Banklin closed the door behind him, his breath hissing in the room. His eyes looked little and mean and insane behind the thick lenses of his glasses. His face was slick.

He mouthed at me. "I heard, through the door, what you just said to her. So you know, too. Well, I don't suppose it matters."

Spoonsbury was backing up, her face white as new snow, and looking about as cold. She saw Banklin slide the revolver from his pocket.

"What are you going to do?" she managed.

"You're coming with me," he said. "Both of you. It had to be you who tipped the private detective, you slat-sided excuse for a female! The whole deal is going to explode under my feet, but I won't be around. I'll clean the cash box and the safe and leave you two where I'll have plenty of time for a get-away! But before I go, Spoonsbury—" his voice got thick and vicious in his throat, and his head seeming to burrow down in his shoulders— "before I go, I'll show you what happens to people that cross me!"

SHE let out a yelp and tried to run. Banklin pounced like a fat bear, brought the gun down hard. I heard Spoonsbury's skull crunch.

"Ha!" Banklin snarled. I rose up on my toes, staring straight down the bore of the gun so hard my eyes crossed. I backed water a step or two. His panting sounded all through the room.

"That's better," he said, his voice shaking. "A safe distance is much better."

I couldn't help taking a look at Spoonsbury. Her eyes were staring toward the ceiling, filming already.

"You've killed her," I said.

Banklin was getting a better grip on himself. "Have I?" he inquired in a tone that implied he was letting nothing stand in his

way of grabbing all the ready dough he had and vanishing. "There is very little else for me to do, Denny," he informed me. "All I need is time. Turn around."

Any second now ribs number three and four were going to crack under the hard thinking of my heart. But there was nothing I could do but turn around.

I heard the rustle of his movement. I sensed the rising of the gun, its swift descent.

But Banklin didn't connect with the Denny bean. It was a little trick I'd learned back in the old day when I was running numbers. His down smashing wrist slapped in my hand. My head was ducking to one side as I swiveled my hips, twisted my shoulders, jerked my arms. Veins almost burst in my face with the effort, but I hadn't lost the touch. Banklin made like a pinwheel, trying to scream suddenly. The scream was cut off as he completed his ride across my body and his head slammed against the corner of a table.

I stood trembling, trying to get air back in my body. His face was gray. He was still alive, but he would be out cold for a couple hours or more. I looked over the room. With one or two details changed, it looked fine. It looked damn good. It looked like Banklin had slugged Spoonsbury in a struggle that had torn her dress and put the claw marks of her fingernails on his cheek. Stumbling back from the struggle, he had spun in his haste to get out, tripped, and knocked himself cuckoo. Even the dumbest cop could put it together.

Like Banklin, after a manner, I needed only a little time now. Fifteen minutes later I careened my car to a stop before the old house where Banklin had operated. I slipped inside, ducked into a dark alcove until the footsteps of a nurse had passed. I eeled along the wall to his office. It was locked, but I had remembered to take Banklin's keys.

One of them worked well on the filing cabinet, too. Sweat was breaking out on me, the silence of the office was bursting my eardrums when I found the records I wanted, the records tying me to Banklin. The other records I didn't bother with, except to make sure the name Wildering wasn't mentioned in any of them. Practically all the births

were listed as "Smith infant." I left the keys.

Half an hour later, back in my own office, I watched the last of the charred records wash down the basin in the corner. Before that I had made two phone calls, an anonymous call to the cops to check Spoonsbury's apartment and a call to Wiley Wildering.

"Come in," I called, as a knock sounded on the door.

OLD WILEY WILDERING came in. I said, "You'd better sit down for what I've got to tell you."

When he was seated, I said, "I know you'll keep this confidential because you've got about as much to lose as I have. At this minute, cops are probably hauling that bogus doctor, Banklin, to headquarters. They're going to charge him with the murder of an accomplice in his crimes. The motive is obvious—they'll mark it up to a falling out among thieves. They'll find enough in Banklin's records to bust his racket."

"I'm glad," Wildering said quietly.

"The only point that remains is Gentleman Joe," I said. "The baby."

"I'm afraid I can't hold out against my wife any longer," he said.

That cut it. I pointed out to him that there was no need for publicity. We didn't have to worry about Banklin, who was going to keep mum as possible at the trial, what with the charges facing him already.

So that is how Gentleman Joe came to live with Suzie and me. With a legal adoption, we had nothing to fear from anybody. That night when I got home, Suzie was out in the kitchen, cooking dinner and looking bright as a new penny. When I'd kissed her, she said, "See if the Gentleman's bottom is damp, Denny."

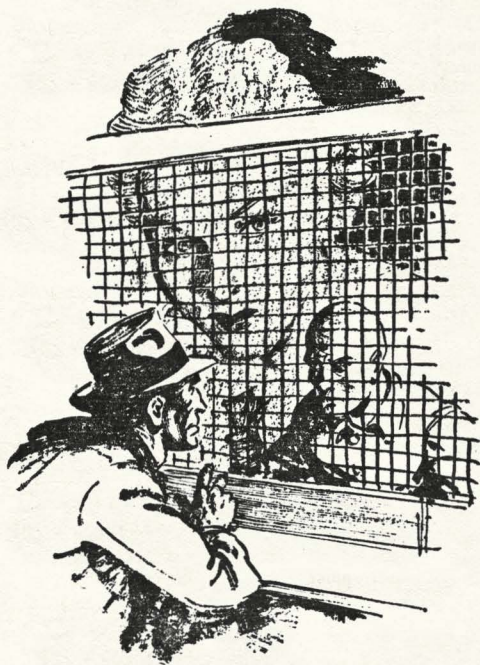
It was. I took him from his playpen in the living room into the nursery. There I held him out in front of me, looked him in the eye, and said, "Joe, up there in that big house, it's rich. But gold can be awfully cold, kid. We're just working gees, Joe. But we can give you a home and all of our love. Enough, guy?"

Joe grinned that happy, toothless grin of his, blew a spit bubble, and gave me his answer: "Yug!"

The man in Death Row had twenty dollars—and he wanted to send it to the only decent girl he had ever known!

A GIRL NAMED LIZZIE

By HAROLD HELFER



IT WAS FUNNY, talking to a healthy, well-built man and knowing that he was going to be dead in a few hours. Although, if I had stopped to think about it, I suppose it shouldn't have been too big a surprise that Joe Greene was going to wind up on the wrong end of a rope. Joe always had been in a peck of trouble. Maybe, as he had said at the trial, he hadn't meant to kill the druggist in the holdup. But he'd been in so many scrapes that that part didn't seem to make much impression.

I hadn't seen him in quite a few years, and I remembered him as a trigger-tempered guy with a pair of cold, don't-give-a-damn-about-anything eyes and a batch of unruly curly hair. But now all the bravado seemed to have gone out of him, and there was a quietness and a very deep soberness about him as he sat across the screen from me. He was thinner than when I had known him last, and there was a grayness about him that made him look older than he was.

"It was good of you to come to see me, Hal," he was saying. "It's been a long time. But no matter how many people you get to know, well, there's really only one or two persons in all your life that you can ever really trust, that you can feel is a true friend. I was hoping, Hal, I could ask you to do something for me."

I told him I'd be glad to do anything I could.

"I'd better come straight to the point, Hal, because we only have a few minutes," he said. "There was a girl named Elizabeth Rogers. Back in Denver. I was there for a spell, you know. Well, I guess she's the only decent chapter in my life. I wanted to marry her. But instead I gave her up. She was the real reason I left Denver, not the cops. She was a fine girl, fine family—I figured she was too good for me. She seemed to think a lot of me too, and I decided that if I really cared for her, the best favor I could do her was to get out of her sight. So I did. I just

packed up my gear one day and left, that's all. Just like that.

"Well, I've hooked up with any number of females since. But I've never forgotten Elizabeth. There never was anyone else that mattered like she did. The only thing that makes me able to live with myself now is that I keep thinking, well, no matter what else I did, I did one good thing in my life. That's one thing nobody can take away from me—I let Elizabeth go—although it was the hardest thing I ever had to do.

"Hal, this is what you can do for me now, if you will. I want you to go to Elizabeth and tell her good-bye for me. Don't tell her what really happened to me. She never knew what I was. Tell her I was in some kind of accident or other. And tell her my last thoughts were of her. Somehow or other, I'd like for her to know that."

Then he said, "Oh, yes, there's something else." He handed me four five-dollar bills. "Give this to Elizabeth," he said. "It's all my earthly belongings. Of course, she won't need it—it's just a gesture—but I'd like for her to have it."

The next day I was on a Denver-bound train. I suppose I'll have to admit that I felt a certain amount of curiosity about Elizabeth and that there was some excitement about the trip, but it was with a heavy heart, too, that I went. Joe and I had played football in high school together, had had a lot of fun in each other's company until we'd drifted apart. He'd always been a little wild, but I had never thought he was a bad guy at heart. Maybe if he'd married this Elizabeth, I couldn't help thinking, he'd have settled down to a normal, respectable life. But, no, he had to go and be gallant—or whatever you wanted to call it.

THERE was an Elizabeth Rogers in the Denver phone book but she didn't turn out to be the one. I hadn't much hope I'd find her number under that name, anyway. It had been a dozen years since Joe had seen her, and she probably was very much married now with two or three youngsters under her wing. She'd come from one of the town's leading families, and I didn't figure I'd have too much trouble tracing her.

I was on my way to do some inquiring at

the Chamber of Commerce when I suddenly realized I was passing police headquarters, and it occurred to me that that was a good place to make inquiries, too. Cops generally know just about everybody worth knowing in a town.

I went over to the desk sergeant, a balding man with a round face, and told him I was trying to locate an Elizabeth Rogers—at least, that had been her maiden name—who belonged to one of Denver's better families. He looked me up and down, as if trying to decide in just what category to pigeonhole me, and then said, "Sure, I can tell you where she lives. Bowie Avenue. The 300 block—315 Bowie Avenue, to be exact."

I found myself a little puzzled. "How do you happen to know her address offhand like that?" I asked.

"Everybody," he answered promptly, "knows 'Leggy Lizzie'."

"'Leggy Lizzie'!" I frowned.

"She's a police character," the balding man informed me. "Shoplifter. Narcotics. Bawdy house. We've had her here for any number of things."

"There must be some mistake. This Elizabeth Rogers comes from a well-thought-of family who handled mining equipment around here—"

"That's her," said the desk sergeant.

Even with all this warning, I was somewhat shocked at the sight of 315 Bowie Avenue. It was a ramshackle, dying house, with a sagging veranda and several broken windows that were patched up by filling the open spaces with wads of newspapers.

A plump, blowzy female came to the floor, looked me over, gave me a knowing smile, and said, "What can I do for you, Big Boy?"

"I'm looking for an Elizabeth Rogers."

She brushed aside some wisps of hair that had fallen over her forehead. Her eyes were regarding me closely. "I'm Elizabeth Rogers," she said. "Nobody's called me that in some time, but that's me all right."

A strong, acrid stench came from her. Homebrew or cheap wine, I wasn't sure. "Most people call me 'Leggy Lizzie,'" she went on. "That's all right with me. It's as good a name as any. Better than some." Giving me a sharp, shrewd look, she asked, "What do you want? Are you from a maga-

zine?" And she continued: "Some magazine, Honest Confessions, something like that, sent somebody down to write a piece about me. About my life. About coming from a high class, swellegant family. That was after I was arrested on a dope charge. They were going to have a big story about me in the magazine. They were going to write the story, and I was going to sign it. They were going to give me \$100 for it. But I told them no. Didn't want to have all that stuff come out in print. But now—" Looking me up and down, the corners of her mouth twitching— "maybe I'll change my mind."

When I didn't say any thing right away, she said, "Come in, come in. I may even take a little less money for it now. It so happens I'm a little hard up for cash now."

WE SAT in a large, damp, faded-looking room. "Not that I couldn't have used the money before," she said. "But there was a guy. Long ago. Before all this other began to happen. Before I became Leggy Lizzie. He left all of a sudden one day. Without saying anything. Never came back. Never wrote. And I've never much cared what happened to me since. Still, I didn't want him to ever see anything like that about me in some magazine. I didn't care about anybody else. I just never wanted him to see it."

She reached over to a near-by table, got hold of a brown bottle, took a long swallow. "Don't ask me why," she said, when she put the bottle back. "It was a long time ago, years and years. But I'm really hard up now. So maybe I'll do it, maybe I'll let you write

the piece. I'm down to my last bottle."

"This man, was his name Joe Greene?" I asked.

Her startled eyes stared into mine. "How did you know?" she demanded.

"He asked me to find you," I said. "He had an accident. His last words were of you. I was his friend. He had some tough financial sledding at the end, but he asked me to find you and give you what little money he had left."

I got up, went over to the small table by the plump woman and placed on it four five-dollar bills.

Then I returned to my seat.

Her eyes focused strangely into space, she asked me to tell her something about Joe. I made up some biographical lies, painting a picture of an average, respectable fellow in the community. "Just what did he say before he died?" she asked, her words only half audible.

"That he loved you," I said.

She reached over for the brown bottle. As she did so, her hand brushed against the four bills and sent them to the floor. She took a very long swallow.

I stood up. "I'd better be going," I said. "I've got to catch the 4:15 out of here."

"I'll show you to the door," she said. She got up heavily and trod on the bills that laid at her feet, but paid no attention to them. She opened the hallway door, hesitated, then suddenly said, "Wait a minute."

She disappeared and a second later was back. She had something in her hand—the four five-dollar bills with her heel prints on them—and she handed them to me.

"Flowers for Joe," she said. ● ● ●

SHE WAS HALF NEGRO, HALF WHITE!

Somewhere in the past, the blood of two races had mingled and now in a city jungle came—the payoff!

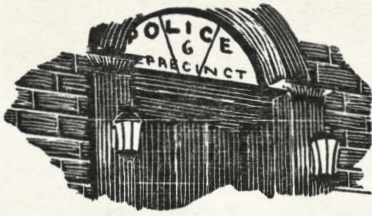
HOMICIDE in HARLEM

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BUREAU OF MISSING PERSONS

Are there any friends or relatives with whom you have lost contact through the years and whose whereabouts you'd like to determine? Perhaps there's some old war buddy or former schoolmate or sweetheart you'd like to locate. Let's have the facts and we'll publish them. Tell us the name of the person you are seeking, the last known address, and any other facts that will help in making contact. There is no charge of any kind for this service, but please let us know of your success.

I'll appreciate your assistance very much in helping me locate my half-sister, or my father. I last saw both of them in Mt. Sterling, Ky. My half-sister, the former **Minnie Ingram** (married name not known), is living somewhere in the city of Dayton, Ohio. My father, **Wm. Henry Ingram**, is believed to be living on a farm near Windsor, Canada. — *Wm. Brooks Ingram, The Shoreham Hotel, 666 S. Carondelet St., Los Angeles, Calif.*

I am 38 years old now and my father, **David Dewey Roshon**, left shortly after I was born. I have never seen him, only his picture. He was a young man then. He must be in his fifties now. He wrote to Mother for a while, then we never heard from him any more. The picture he sent was taken while he was in the navy, which he must have joined in 1914 or 1915. I never asked Mother for more than she wanted to tell me as I know it hurt her deeply. I can't get it off my mind. If I only knew if he was dead or alive, then I think I could calm myself.

Mother says father had brown eyes, light red hair, was a little on the chunky side, and not a real tall man. Mother is now on her death bed in the last stages of cancer. The doctor said she might not be here in

another month. I will be praying that my father will buy your magazine and see my plea. — *Mrs. Marcella Robbins, 535 Linden Ave., Zanesville, O.*

My son has been missing since Nov. 1945. **Richard R. Giffin**, born Oct. 9, 1914, Dunseith, N. D. Last heard from in Las Vegas, Nev., where he was working on the Union Pacific Railroad. He is 5' 11" tall, weighs around 200 lbs., has dark hair, blue eyes, and walks with a slight limp due to an accident. Anyone knowing anything about him, please notify me.—*Bertha A. Giffin, Roosevelt Arms Apartments, Apt. 58, Milwaukee, Wis.*

I am very anxious to locate my dear ex-wife whom I have not seen in a couple of years. I had a little misunderstanding with her, but am anxious to square myself with her if I can. She last lived at Route 5, Box 146, San Antonio, Texas. Still goes by her married name, **Rosa Damen Gonzales**. Born in Chicago, Ill., June 27, 1927. She is 5' 5" tall, weighs 119 lbs., has long, black-brown hair, down to her waist. Sometimes she rolls it up. Round face. Brown eyes. A small birth mark left side of her mouth. Sometimes wears long or short earrings. She is friendly, but sometimes has bad moods.

I am awfully broken hearted about her. I must know about her. Am willing to listen now! I have been fair with you, dear one, now please give me a chance again. Your loving ex-husband who will never forget you. — *Joe A. Gonzales, Racine County Court House, Racine, Wis.*

A Novel by PHILIP WECK

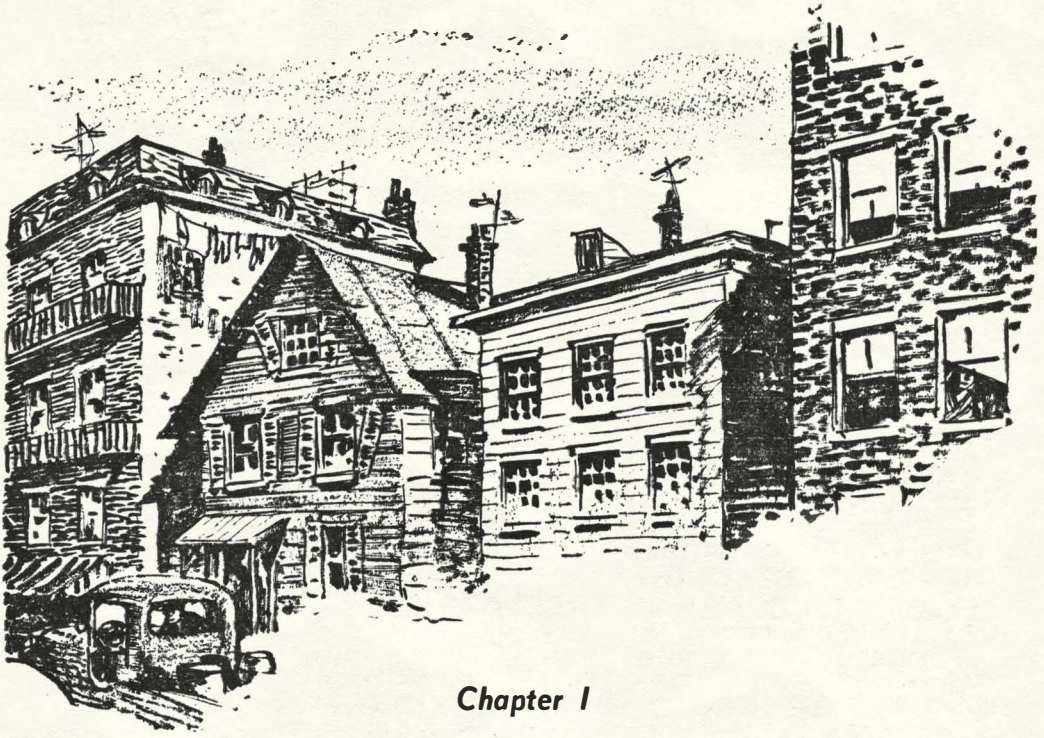
City



One minute you're an ordinary
Joe, babes giving you the come-on
like anyone else, and then—

of STRANGERS

Suddenly people began running when they saw Joe Murray coming—and he didn't have the faintest idea why!



Chapter I

IT'S A LONG street, a long, long street, and it never comes to an end. You walk down it on the balls of your feet, tensed, ready to dive and roll and scramble for the gutter. You watch for the slightest movement—every shadow, every lamp post, every parked car. You strain for the slightest sound; you sniff the air for the slightest odor, as if you could smell the blue steel of their pistols.

And you're all alone in this big, silent, suddenly lonely city. Behind those window shades people are watching you, fear whitening their faces, their doors barred against you. Ahead, half a block ahead, a kid is playing on the sidewalk and you hear a window being opened and a woman's voice screeching and the kid runs and the window is slammed shut and the door is locked and you go on, alone, a stranger in a city of strangers, a man to be feared and shunned and avoided by all but a few of them—and hunted down and shot by the rest.

Ever been in a spot like that? One minute you're an ordinary Joe, like everybody else, neighbors talking to you, babes giving you the come-on, kids grinning at you and cracking wise. The next minute—you're it. You're tagged. People run when they see you coming. The babes turn pale, the kids hide.

But that's getting ahead of the story.

I'll start with being an ordinary Joe. The Monday morning when people nodded and smiled at me for the last time.

It was a summer morning and I felt pretty good when I left the rooming house where I lived. So good I thought maybe I'd take a ride through the park on my lunch hour.

This was a crowded neighborhood. If I wanted to take a lunch-hour ride I needed my jalopy, and if I wanted my jalopy I had to hike half a mile to the only public garage where I'd been able to find space. But a half-mile walk didn't bother me. I stepped it off briskly.

In the garage, I went right back to the stall where my car usually was parked. It wasn't there.

I looked around and spotted it up in front on the wash rack. Jake, the fellow who ran the place, was giving it the final polish of a wash job.

"Hey," I said, "what gives? I didn't order a wash."

JAKE went on rubbing the windshield. Some character with white hair and pink eyes came out of the office and leaned against a stack of tires and watched me with a wise grin on his face.

"How about it, Jake?" I asked.

He didn't answer me.

"Hey, look," I said.

But hell, it was a nice day and I didn't want to quarrel. And the jalopy had been pretty grimy. "Okay," I said, "put it on the bill."

Still Jake didn't speak. He tucked the chamois-skin in his pocket and he didn't look at me.

"You through?" I asked him.

He whirled around on me.

Jake was a cocky, good-looking kid about twenty-five, the gigolo type, usually with a

funny wave in his hair and long sideburns and a big grin on his puss.

But this morning he wasn't grinning. He looked uneasy and scared.

"I got something to say to you, Mr. Murray," he told me in his strange, gravelly voice that sounded like he'd swallowed a mouthful of pebbles.

"Yeah?"

"You got to get out of here. You got to leave me alone. Park your car somewhere else."

He was dead serious. I could see in his face that this wasn't any gag. And I didn't like it.

I said, "Why? What's the matter, Jake?"

"I give you a wash, I drained the oil and greased it and filled the gas tank," he said. "That's the end, see? You got to stay away from here."

"For cripes' sake!" I cried. "What's wrong? What did I do?"

"It ain't nothin' you did, Mr. Murray," he went on. "But you got to stay away from me, see? Take your car and get out of here and forget about the bill. I don't want your business, see?"

I could feel a flush of anger flaring in my cheeks. I clenched my fists and stepped toward him and he fell back. Behind him was a work-bench. He bumped into it and without looking reached around and picked up a tire iron.

"Get out and don't come back!" he yelled. "I don't want your business and I don't want to see you again!"

When a man picks up something like a tire iron, when he looks around uneasy-like, he's afraid. Jake was afraid. Cocky, swaggering Jake, with a deadly weapon in his hand, was afraid of me.

I hopped in the car and gunned out of there with Jake glaring after me and Pink-Eye grinning like a fool.

What the hell was that all about?

The sun didn't seem quite so bright when I parked behind Donnerwetter's Department Store, and I was doing a slow burn. I went in and hung up my jacket and took my place behind the shirt counter. It was a Monday and business was slow, and to keep my mind off my anger I went to work re-

arranging the jumbled piles of stock.

Five minutes after I got in the stock boy sauntered by and said Donnenwetter wanted to see me, right away.

So I went in.

Donnenwetter was slobbered on the little chair behind his desk and his fat, sloppy face was pale.

"Murray," he said, "I like you. You're a fine lad, a fine salesman." His pudgy, dirty hands were fluttering around like a couple of fat butterflies. "But I can't take a chance,

Murray. It ain't fair to the other people here. I got to let you go."

"Let me go!" I sat down. "I don't get it," I said. "What did I do?"

"They got their rights, too, Murray," he said. "And the customers. What about the customers?"

I said, "I don't know what the hell you're talking about, Mr. Donnenwetter."

"Look at me," he said. "This little store—it's all I got in the world. Every penny. Somebody gets shot, the customers sue me, I lose it. Everything. I can't take a chance, Murray."

He was nuts, I thought. Sitting there in his filthy cubby-hole of an office and gibbering like a baboon in its cage, with his baboon's droopy mustache and his baboon's little black eyes and his protruding baboon's belly.

FIRST Jake, now Donnenwetter. Everybody was nuts.



Before I could reach the corner he was firing

He took the cigar from his mouth, then rammed it in again. "You got to get out, Murray. Please!"

And then I saw it. Donnenwetter was frightened. Baboon-Face Donnenwetter was scared to death to have me around.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "What happened? What did I do?"

He pushed himself to his feet. "You're a fine boy, Murray," he said. "A fine boy. But I can't take no chance. The cashier will give you a week's pay."

He waddled out of the office through the side door.

And I couldn't figure it. Here I was as clean as a whistle. Working hard. I didn't know hardly a soul in town. I hadn't been in any kind of a jam at all. What was I—a leper?

But it didn't do any good to sit there and worry about it. I got my hat and coat and went to the cashier's cage. Old Mr. Stauffer handed me an envelope.

"I sure don't know what this is all about," I told him.

He turned around at his desk again, back to me, and he didn't say a word.

When I passed the shirts, the kid from the stockroom was behind the counter, taking my place already. And putting the sales stuff, the fast-selling merchandise, back on the shelves, the fool.

Outside I went onto the crowded sidewalk, and down two doors to Tom's Bar. I needed a chance to figure this thing out, figure what was happening.

More than thinking it out, I needed something familiar, something to grab hold of, like a glass of whisky.

The joint was empty except for a little jerk about halfway down the bar. Tom was talking to him. I grabbed a stool near the door and fished a couple bills out of my pocket and waited. And waited. Tom kept on talking, like I hadn't even come in.

I slapped the counter and bellowed, "Service!"

And waited some more.

"Hey!" I called out. "How about a drink?"

He went right on talking to Shorty.

"Hey, you!" I hollered. "Let's go!"

Finally he slouched toward me.

"A whisky," I said.

His cold, dead eyes went over me and his dead pan didn't flicker.

"No whisky," he said. "We're all out."

No whisky? Tom, too?

"Gimme a beer, then," I said.

"No beer. We're all out."

I dropped the two bills on the bar, near him. He pushed them back.

"Your money's no good in here, Bud," he said.

That did it. I could feel the anger licking through my brain like a red-hot iron, and I grabbed Tom by the collar and yanked him half across the bar.

"I oughta knock your teeth down your throat!" I bellowed.

With his left hand he fumbled around under the bar. In a second he'd have a bottle in that hand, or a club. I shoved him, hard, and he flew against the backbar. Then I walked out.

"And don't come back!" he yelled after me.

What the hell was going on?

First Jake afraid of me. Then Old Man Donnenwetter. Then Tom.

Why?

For half an hour I walked, over the bridge and back again, trying to get my thoughts straight, trying to remember anything I'd done, anything that had happened to me.

The trouble was, I hadn't done a thing except work. And not a thing had happened to me.

Get a new job, I figured. Anywhere. In some other town or some other neighborhood. Forget about Jake and Donnenwetter and Tom.

But you can't forget things like that, especially when you can't explain them.

Maybe a newspaper could explain it. So I bought one.

A COUPLE of trains had tried to pass each other on the same track and ten people were dead, with pictures—especially of the blonde movie star who'd been in the wreck. A tourist court had burned down in the suburbs and two people were dead, with pictures—especially of a slinky brunette babe running out of a cabin and wearing a towel.

A politician had made a speech, nobody dead, but the picture this time of a blonde in a bathing-suit giving him a key to some city somewhere. The Cubs had lost again—no pictures.

But nothing about good old Joe Murray. Nothing at all. Nothing to explain why anybody should be afraid of him.

People shoved past me, hurrying, bumping into me, paying no attention. All kinds of people, big ones, tough ones, ugly ones, men with scars, men with a day's beard, men with black eyes, with bloodshot eyes, with pink eyes and white hair. Nobody was afraid of them, none of them.

I'd go to my room, I decided. Sit down and figure out what to do.

I got my car and drove back across the bridge and over to Hubbard Street and up.

Chapter II

I WAS sitting on the edge of the lumpy bed when the door to my room opened and Mrs. Paul, the landlady, stood there. She had a long, white envelope in her hand and she, too, was scared. You could see it in her face and the way she had her mouth set.

She wasn't any little old maiden lady, to get frightened easily. No, she was young, maybe my age, and not bad-looking. She was a widow, a war widow, judging by the photograph on her mantel of some fellow in uniform.

But this morning she was scared.

"Mr. Murray," she said, "you've got to go some place else."

She, too.

Again she said it. "You'll have to move right away, Mr. Murray. I need your room."

I said, "Why? What have I done?"

"It's just that I need your room, Mr. Murray."

"Look, lady," I said, "I'm no kid. What's up? What gives?"

She backed away from me until she was almost against the wall. "They've been here already, Mr. Murray," she said. "They'll be back."

"Who's been here?"

"Please, Mr. Murray. I'm just a woman and I'm all alone. Won't you please leave?"

I snapped at her; it was beginning to get me. "Who was here?"

She said, "A man. A big, rough man in a black suit, looking for you. And then a boy with this." She handed me the envelope.

It was just a plain envelope without any return address and with my name scrawled in pencil on the back. I tore it open; it had been sealed. I peeked inside.

Then I said, "All right, Mrs. Paul. I'll get out."

"It's money, isn't it?" she asked. "I could tell just by the way it felt."

So I took it out and counted it. One thousand dollars. I'd been kicking around for a dozen years and I'd never had a thousand dollars in my hands before.

Something else was in that envelope. I took that out, too. It was a railroad ticket to Los Angeles.

A thousand bucks is a lot, a big hunk of dough. Enough to give a fellow a new start in Los Angeles. All I had to do was slip it in my pocket, put my tail between my legs and run.

But my tail isn't that long. I was getting a little too browned at the whole deal.

"Who brought you this?" I asked.

"A boy."

"What did he look like?"

"I don't know," Mrs. Paul said. "I don't know. I don't want to get mixed up in this thing. Please, won't you leave, Mr. Murray?"

So I pushed her out of the door and closed it in her face. She was scared to death.

Donnenwetter. And Jake. And Tom.

And Joe Murray. But I wasn't running yet.

Ten minutes later I was on the sidewalk, walking slowly down the street, my battered old Gladstone in my left hand, my few battered clothes in the Gladstone, a thousand dollars in my breast pocket. And a boy to find.

Tall and skinny, short and fat, tough, sissified—I didn't know. Just a boy. But that shouldn't be hard. It probably would be a boy from the neighborhood and when one kid picks up a buck or two for an errand, the other kids hear about it in a hurry.

So I stretched my legs along the pave-

ment and kept my eyes peeled for a boy. Instead, I saw a man, across the street, loitering in front of a window. A man with white hair and pink eyes. The man who'd been in Jake's and who'd been tailing me all morning.

I crossed at the next intersection and went around a corner and flattened myself against the wall. If Pink-Eye was still tailing me, he'd come scooting around that corner mighty fast.

He did.

HE WAS a short man, and skinny, and he wasn't expecting any trouble. Before he could put up a fight I had a hammer-lock on him and I was pushing his face into the brick wall.

"Don't!" he squealed. "Don't!"

I patted his pockets and took a neat little .25 from his shoulder holster. Then I whirled him around, keeping my grip on his wrist.

"Look, buddy," I said, "what the hell is this all about?"

"Let me go!" he cried. "Let me go!"

Crisscrossing his thin, pale skin were a lot of tiny red veins. They bugged out at me and his face got whiter and covered with perspiration. He struggled and twisted, trying to get away.

Then I got a good look into his eyes. They were desperate, frantic.

He, too, was afraid of me.

Not afraid of what I might do to him—just afraid. Scared to be close to me.

"Look out!" he cried. "You fool, look out!"

With a desperate, frantic jerk, he pulled his wrist away. He whirled and tried to run. I grabbed his arm and he clawed at me to get loose and slipped and fell against my legs and we tumbled to the sidewalk with Whitey on top.

I don't know how that happened, Whitey landing on top. I didn't try to put him there; I didn't know a thing about the fellow across the street until I heard the shot and felt Whitey's body jerk as if he'd been slugged in the belly with a brick.

He screamed, a high, womanish scream. Then his body jerked again and I heard the

gun go off for the second time and the third and the fourth.

Somebody shouted in the distance and I could hear people running, not toward me, but away. The gun was silent then, and so was Whitey, sprawled on top of me and limp, a sodden mass of weight. I pushed him away and felt something warm and sticky on my hand, and then I got up and ran, too. . . .

It was a pretty good picture of me if I have to say so myself. I'd had it made in one of those bus-station slot machines just a week or so before and it couldn't be anybody else but Joe Murray. Take a look at my puss and take a look at that picture on the front page of the newspaper and anybody would be able to make the connection.

The picture had been in my battered old Gladstone, with a couple of letters. Nothing incriminating or personal, just identification, that was all. When they'd picked up Whitey's body they'd picked up the Gladstone, too, where I'd left it.

Under the picture it said:

WANTED FOR MURDER
JOSEPH MURRAY

The fellow who wrote that story knew more about me than I did. My age, my height, my middle initial, my service record. He had written:

Joseph T. Murray, thirty, a clerk at a small neighborhood department store, shot and killed a man named Eyre on Hubbard Street this afternoon. . . .

Witnesses had seen me run north through an alley, a gun in my hand, he said. But no witnesses had mentioned the lug across the street with the big black revolver.

Motive, the story said, was unknown. Police were investigating.

One thing that newspaper writer didn't know, I hoped. Where I was. Nobody knew yet. Nobody had seen me slip through the alley and hop on a trolley that was speeding by, get off and walk and get on another trolley and leave that one and walk some more and sit in the park for an hour and then take a third trolley until finally a newspaper truck had dumped a brand new edition at a stand as I was passing and I'd seen my-

self staring at me and snatched a copy and hit for this greasy little restaurant with the big window.

Maybe, just maybe, all those trolley conductors would remember me and the cops could trace me. More likely, somebody would bring a newspaper into the joint and spread it out and take one gander at me and run for the cops.

I was on a big, black spot, all right, with a thousand dollars in my pocket and a ticket to Los Angeles that I couldn't use.



FLAMING YOUTH

**Dotty Dimple, angel child,
Set a fire when she was riled—
The jury, though, was far from
rough,
All twelve agreed she was hot
stuff!**

—*Cellblock Sam*

Somehow, I had to think my way out of this mess. I sat there with my eye on the window and my hand on the cup of black coffee I'd ordered, and a girl came in, a pert-looking little thing.

SHE didn't mess around. She walked right down to the end of the counter and took the stool next to mine and said, "Hello, Joe."

She had those soft brown eyes that don't quite seem to focus and a brave little smile on her face. But it was a phony, that smile. I could see it in the tight lines around her eyes and the expression on her face—the same expression I'd seen on Donnewetter's face and the landlady's and Jake's and Eyre's.

She was scared. Afraid of me.

But there she sat, saying, "Hello, Joe," with my picture in the newspaper and the

word "Murderer" under it. And I'd never seen her before in my life.

"Hello, Joe," she said again.

"Lady," I told her, "you've made a mistake. My name isn't Joe."

"Yes, it is," she said. "And you just killed a man."

I said, "Lady, you're crazy. I'm Herman Fenstermacher. I—"

"Listen to me," she said, and there was a desperate note in her voice. "Just listen to me for a minute and then if you want to get up and walk out, go ahead. I can't stop you anyway. But just listen."

So I listened.

"I used to live around here," she said. "In this neighborhood. I know what it's like around here and where you can hide and where you can't go without a thousand people seeing you. I thought the whole thing out—where I'd go if I thought the police were after me. I'd go to the park and I'd sit down and wait awhile until some of the police cars had gone away. Then I'd go into a restaurant or a hotel. That's how I found you. That's how I know you're Joe Murray."

I sighed. "And why would you want to find Joe Murray?"

She opened her purse and took out a card and handed it to me. "Joyce Finley," it said on the card, and in one corner was a photograph of her, not a very good one. She was a reporter for the *Daily Tribunal*, the card said.

I handed it back to her. "Well, you're all wet, Joyce. My name is Herman Fenstermacher and—"

"Why did you kill him, Joe?" she asked.

I said, "I didn't kill anybody."

"Then what happened?"

"Nothing happened."

"Listen," she said, "I'll give you a break. Tell me your story and I'll let you walk out of here and I won't call the police for half an hour."

"Joyce," I said softly, "who's supposed to be the murderer? Who's going to give who a break?"

She didn't answer me; she just stared into my eyes and I could see the fear flicker across hers again.

From my inside coat pocket I brought out

the little, stub-nosed .25 I had taken from Pink-Eye.

"Joe," she whispered, "what are you going to do?"

I put it on the counter, with my hand half over it.

"Take it," I told her, "That's the gun they said I had in my hand. It's the only one I've got. Take it to the cops and they can prove that the bullets that killed this fellow didn't come from that pistol."

Chapter III

FOR a moment this Joyce Finley didn't move. She sat there looking at me and then at the gun. I think she really expected me to pull the trigger.

Then she said, "Put it away, Joe, before the counterman sees it."

"Take it."

She shook her head. "It won't do any good. How can you prove you didn't have another one?"

The counterman came up and I palmed the gun.

"What'll it be, miss?" he said.

She ordered coffee. "Why did you do it, Joe?" she asked when he left.

"I didn't do it."

A heavy cup was banged down on the counter. The counterman walked past us, toward a telephone booth.

"Joe," she said, "he's going to call the cops."

I tossed a half-dollar beside my plate. "So long, Joyce," I said. "It was nice knowing you."

On the sidewalk, I hesitated for a moment. Which way could I go? Where could I hide? Then I felt a slight pressure on my elbow. Joyce.

"Come on," she said. "Hurry! He's calling the police."

With her hand on my elbow, we walked down the street.

"Don't run," she cautioned. "We'll only attract attention."

Around the corner we went, until we were well out of sight of the restaurant. Then she hailed a cab.

She sat next to me the cab and she nodded

and made her eyes big in the direction of the cabby. Keep quiet, she was telling me. Even though she was still frightened. Running from the cops with a man she believed to be a murderer and afraid of him, not knowing what he might do—but she wasn't backing down. Not this kid.

I could feel her knee touching mine, and the lines of her thigh. Cute, too, with a pert little face and a pert little figure. Any other time, with her in a cab beside me—

But this wasn't any other time. And she was still frightened.

When I thought the cabby wasn't looking I sneaked the .25 out of my pocket and put it into her hand.

"Just to make you feel better," I said.

She slipped it into her purse and she didn't say a word.

After a block or so she said, "We've got to go some place where we can talk."

"How about a hotel?"

Softly she said, "No thank you." Very softly and very emphatically.

For a while we just rode around. Then she tapped the cabby on the shoulder and told him to head for the Southeastern Railroad Depot.

We didn't go into the station, though. Instead, after I'd paid the driver, with my back turned to him, she led me across the street and down a side street for two blocks and into a taproom.

I'd never been there before. The place had a horseshoe-shaped bar, an egg-headed bartender and, off the ends of the horseshoe, a big back room with tables and booths.

That's where we sat down and ordered a sandwich and a beer and she said, "Why did you do it, Joe?"

In a corner booth four or five men were playing cards, and at one of the tables a big fellow with a florid face and a shock of white hair was holding hands with a waitress. Nobody was paying any attention to us.

"Aren't you going to tell me?" she asked.

Well, why not? She was a nice kid, and she wasn't going to turn me over to the cops, for a while yet, anyway. So I told her. Everything.

From the very beginning. How I'd kicked

around after the war, working here and drinking there, having a good time, until finally I got tired of the same old faces and the same old hangovers, the same pin-ball machines and numbers bets. The same old dirt and squalor of the tenement where I'd grown into a uniform and where I might have hacked out my grave in the pavement.

I TOLD her how I'd lit out for a new life and a new town and I'd found it—and how, suddenly, that morning, everybody was afraid of me.

She said, "I'm not, Joe. I'm not afraid of you. Really."

But she picked up her handbag from the table where it had been lying, and she put it in her lap, out of my reach if I'd decided suddenly that I wanted the gun back.

"Maybe you should be," I said. "Somebody tried to kill me this morning. Those bullets were meant for me, not the man who got them."

I gave her the rest of the story as well as I could, beginning with Donnenwetter licking his baboon's lips in fear and ordering me to get out, and ending with the tall, husky fellow in the dark suit standing across the street and emptying his gun at me and killing someone else instead.

"That's my story," I said. I took a couple of bills from my wallet and got to my feet. "You promised me a half-hour, remember?"

But she said, "Wait a minute, Joe."

So I sat down again.

"Maybe it's the truth," she said.

"Thanks, kid."

"If it is," she went on, "somebody must have seen that man. Somebody else besides you, who can prove it."

"The cops didn't find anybody."

"Maybe they didn't look. Let's try it ourselves."

"There's a man," I reminded her, "who has a gun and who's likely to use it again. On me."

"Are you afraid, Joe?" she asked.

I picked up the money, then put it down again.

"Sure I am," I said. "So are you. Let's try it."

This time we took a bus, hanging onto straps and swaying back and forth every time it stopped and started. Right next to each other where she pressed against me with each jerk of the bus and stared straight out the window.

On a bus you see a lot more people, but they don't see you. They have their noses buried in newspapers or packages or in the past or the future. They look at the face on the front page of the newspaper but they don't look at the face hanging over them in the aisle.

So we rode the bus to Hubbard Street and we walked two blocks and there we were. Right across from the white patch of sidewalk that had been red with blood not so long before.

I could sense the difference as soon as we stepped onto Hubbard Street. It was strange, a strange street in a strange city peopled by strangers, strangers who stared at me unrecognizing as we walked by, but who might remember that picture in the newspaper any moment and blow the whistle and send me scuttling for cover like a rat.

Strange people, and strange cobblestones in the pavement and strange buildings, buildings I'd looked at before but had never seen, homes and tenements and stores and warehouses that were fifty years old or a hundred, but hadn't been there before, ever. It looked different, it felt different, it even smelled different.

Because I was the stranger now.

Oh, we weren't lost; we were at the right corner, where another man had died in my place. But now this no longer was a street that offered a haven, a roof to shield me from the night or a pillow for my empty head. Now it was a street of enemies, a street to slink along in the shadows and run from. And a street where we had to find a stranger, man or woman, and snatch him from his slow, eventless life and thrust him in front of another stranger's gun.

"He was standing right here, by this lamp post," I said to Joyce. "I couldn't see him very well because Pink-Eye was on top of me, but he was standing here."

We looked around. Behind us was a warehouse, a two-story building, windows

empty, doors rotted off their hinges. Next to it was a tavern I'd never been in even if I did live only a block away, and on the other side a dingy, dirty little store with a name on the window, "Green's Grocery."

A tobacco shop was across the street on the first floor and to its right a door that led to one of the thousands of drab, hopeless apartments in this drab, hopeless city.

JOYCE grabbed me by the arm and pointed to a window above the cigar store. "Look!"

It was a woman, middle-aged, with heavy, coarse features, facing the open window from the inside. She was motionless, as if she had been sitting there staring out all her life and would be sitting there when the building collapsed a hundred years from now.

We crossed the street and opened that door and went up the dark, musty, dusty stairway that smelled as if the frayed carpet on it had been watersoaked long ago and never had dried. At the top of the stairway we turned toward the front of the building and found a door there in the darkness and I knocked.

No one answered. I knocked again, louder.

Then we heard a chair squeak and scrape across the floor and the faint rustle of someone moving and the shuffle and tap of steps. A tap-tap, shuffle, tap-tap, shuffle, as if some unearthly creature of enormous bulk were moving slowly and ponderously and ominously to that door.

We waited, listening, breathless, and finally she opened the door.

It was the woman we had seen in the window, the same coarse, masculine features, the same stringy, lifeless hair hanging from her head. She was big, tremendously big, and she leaned heavily on a white cane.

"What you want?" she asked in a voice that was shallow and empty.

She wasn't looking at Joyce and she was not looking at me. She wasn't looking. She was blind.

"What you want?" she asked again.

I said, "Nothing, Nothing. We—we must have the wrong address. I'm sorry." Then we turned and went out, down those long stairs that were dark to us and even darker to her.

We recrossed the street and I said, "Let's try the tavern."

So we went into the tavern.

It, too, was dirty and dark and the smell here was the stale smell of a thousand hangovers and nightmares.

At the bar we took stools side by side. The bartender was a big man, dark-skinned and wearing a big, black mustache.

"Yeah?" he asked.

I ordered beer and when it was served I said, "That was some shooting this morning, eh?"

"You cops?" he asked suspiciously.

"Just curious," I said. "Did you see it?"

He had a damp rag in his hand and he squeezed it between his fingers. "Naw," he

THE ADVENTURES OF

IT SMELLS GRAND



TAKE ONE WHIFF!
(FOR THIS YOU'VE YEARNED!)

IT PACKS RIGHT



PACK YOUR PIPE—
NOW YOU HAVE EARNED

Chapter IV

said. "Me, I don't open till one o'clock. I didn't see nothing."

The beer tasted sharp and green and we sipped it and went out again.

Next was the grocery store.

Hubbard Street is a street where merchants use lights only for decoration. The grocery, too, was dim, stacked with canned goods and cartons that almost hid the cash register and the tiny little lady who stood beside the register.

She was maybe in her fifties, with sharp, shrill features. Like a setting hen. And a voice like a hen's, grating and harsh and unhappy.

"A box of soda crackers, please," Joyce said to her.

"Can't you see?" she shrilled. "They're right behind you on that shelf."

I picked up the box, ducking under the solitary electric bulb that hung unshaded from the ceiling.

With her head back like a hen's she was staring at me when I put the crackers on the counter.

"How much?" I asked her.

She didn't answer. Instead she backed away from the register, as far away as she could get. Her lips trembled and the deep lines around her mouth deepened as she stared at me.

She was afraid of me, too.

"It's you!" she gasped. "The killer!"

I said, "Don't be alarmed, miss. I haven't killed anyone."

THE little woman shrank back further, trying to press herself against the shelves behind her, her mouth hanging open. One hand was behind her back and she knocked a bottle off the shelf and it crashed on the floor, breaking and spreading the sharp fumes of vinegar over the place.

Then she had found what she'd been reaching for. A gun.

A big old one, old enough to have been Jesse James'. She pointed it at me and her hands trembled as she tried to steady it with both fists.

"Get out of here!" she cried. "Get out before I shoot you!"

She meant it, too, every word, and the gun she held looked even bigger than she was as I stared at it and watched it wobble from Joyce to me and back to Joyce again.

It isn't a very comfortable feeling, to stare into a big, black pistol that might go off any moment. It isn't a comfortable feeling to realize that already one person has died in your place, that another might die in a second. My mouth was dry and I couldn't see a thing but that gun and the beady, frightened eyes behind it.

"Come on, Joyce," I said. "We'd better do what she wants."

But Joyce wouldn't move.

She said, "Did you see that killer?"

[Turn page]

UNCLE WALTER

IT SMOKES SWEET



—HAPPINESS FOR ALL CONCERNED!
—with Sir Walter Raleigh!

IT CAN'T BITE!

SIR WALTER RALEIGH'S BLEND OF CHOICE KENTUCKY BURLEYS IS EXTRA-AGED TO GUARD AGAINST TONGUE BITE, AND SIR WALTER RALEIGH NEVER LEAVES A SOGGY HEEL IN YOUR PIPE. STAYS LIT TO THE LAST PUFF.



*It costs
no more
to get
the best!*

"I seen it, all right!" the woman croaked. "Get out!"

"Is this man the killer?" Joyce asked.

The woman leaned toward us and her shoulders hunched as she grasped the gun tight to steady it.

Then we heard a step behind us. A man slouched from the back room of the store, a tall man with tired, stooped shoulders and a tired, lined face and a tired, baggy vest over his shirt sleeves.

"What's going on out here?" he asked mildly.

"You keep out of this, Howard!" the woman screamed. "You mind your own business!"

He wound through the cartons and cans to us and he said, "Now, Martha, what's all the fuss?"

"Keep out of this!" Martha snapped. But she stepped back again and the gun wobbled once more uncertainly.

Again Joyce spoke up. "We're looking for witnesses to that shooting this morning."

Howard took a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles from a vest pocket and put them on.

"Did you see the shooting?" Joyce asked.

He peered at us, leaning forward slightly.

"You keep your mouth shut, Howard!"

Martha shrilled. "You don't know—"

But Howard took his glasses off again and wiped them on a soiled handkerchief.

"I seen this man, yes," he said, pointing at me with the glasses.

"Did you see him kill anybody?"

"Howard!"

He shook his head. "Not him. He was fightin' with the other fellow, but he didn't do the shootin'."

"You fool!" cried Martha.

We weren't listening to her, Joyce and I. We were staring at Howard. And Joyce, I thought, had moved closer to me, until our bodies were almost touching.

"You saw the man in the black suit, then?" I asked.

Again Howard wiped his glasses. "Sure we did," he declared. "Me and Martha. He was in here buying some cigarettes just before. Then he went out on the sidewalk and we seen this gentleman here fighting with

somebody across the street."

"And then?"

"It was terrible," Howard said, shaking his head. "It was sure terrible. This man, the one with the cigarettes, he took out a gun and he was shooting and shooting."

"Why didn't you tell the police?" Joyce asked.

HOWARD looked at his wife. She was standing there, still pressed against the row of shelves, and her face was almost black with fury.

"You fool!" she cried. "You fool!"

But Howard shook his head. "Now, Martha," he said, "I told you we shoulda talked to the police. You don't want this innocent gentleman here to go to jail, do you, for something he ain't responsible for?"

"He's a killer!" the woman cried. "I don't care what we seen—he's a killer! The newspapers said so!"

Joyce said, "You'll tell them, won't you? You'll go to the police with us now and tell them?"

"Don't you do it, Howard!" Martha snapped.

Howard sighed. "I don't know what's got into you, Martha. You'd best put that gun away and mind the store while I run along with this lady and gentleman."

"I'm warning you, Howard!" Martha shrilled. "You'll be sorry!"

But he paid no more attention to her. From the back room he got his shabby, wrinkled suit coat and we walked out on Martha, still holding the gun, still backed against the row of shelves, with the broken, vinegar bottle at her feet and the fading odor filling her pinched, sour nostrils.

"I don't know what's got into her," Howard said as we walked along Hubbard Street, the street of strangers. "She's an honest woman. All our lives Martha and me, we've been honest. She wouldn't want no innocent man to go to jail."

We didn't reply.

"She's got a sharp tongue but she means well," Howard said. "She's as honest as the day is long. She wouldn't send an innocent man to jail."

The police station was only two blocks

away and we turned the corner.

"She wouldn't never want an innocent man to go to jail," Howard said again. "I know she wouldn't."

But he didn't know, really. He was trying to convince himself.

The City Avenue police station was an old one, old and gloomy and sad. It was built out to the edge of the sidewalk, crowding the pedestrians as they walked by, trying to suck them into its eager doors or glaring at them balefully from its big, shadeless windows if they went on unscathed.

We were only a few feet from the entrance when Howard stopped us.

"That's him," he said casually, almost disinterestedly.

A tall man in a black suit, with a brown hat and a grim, black look on his face was standing on the sidewalk in front of the station, facing us.

"That's the fellow who done the shooting," Howard said.

"Good Heavens!" Joyce gasped. She seized my arm, stopping us. "That's Lieutenant Spinkle!"

He saw us then, saw the three of us, but his piercing glance picked me out in the center, focusing on me alone. With his face still grim and black, he moved toward us.

"Run!" Joyce cried. "Run! I'll meet you in the tavern later. Run!"

The Lieutenant's hand eased slowly toward his shoulder and I ran.

Before I could reach the corner he was firing. I heard one explosion, then another. I hit the corner, turned.

Something smashed into my right shoulder.

Like a blow, it sent me stumbling, sprawling, scooting forward, almost falling, setting my shoulder afire with a hot, searing pain. I spun halfway around. A black wave of dizziness and nausea swam up through my brain, closing in on me, covering me like a blanket of darkness. The roar of a thousand rushing trains blasted against my eardrums.

Then, through the roar and the darkness, I heard those footsteps, heavy, running, coming closer.

Somehow, I didn't fall. The blackness lifted a bit. I put every ounce of will power

I had into my feet, into a desperate effort to move them, to keep on going, to run and run and run.

Behind me I heard a shout, then another explosion. I stumbled to the curb between two cars and into the street. Brakes squealed and a hoarse voice cursed me and then I was across the street and in an alley and stumbling and running on.

HALFWAY down the alley I found a gate that led into a decrepit, junk-strewn yard and out to the next street, and I made that street and then into another alley. There I came to a little weather-beaten shed, its door standing half open, and I ducked in and pulled the door behind me and sank down on a box and tried to catch my breath.

I was wounded; warm blood was spreading down along my shoulder. And I was on the biggest, blackest spot I'd ever dreamed of. For the cops were shooting at me. The police. With the power of the law, and a murder charge, behind them.

I couldn't go to them for help. I couldn't go to a hospital or a doctor, either. I could not go far with that bullet in my shoulder, and I couldn't sit still long. Soon the neighborhood would be crawling with policemen, directed by the whip-lash glare of big, black-eyed Lieutenant Spinkle.

In that squalid, crowded semi-tenement neighborhood I had not one friend, and only a few persons who even knew me. I could go to only one place—back to the rooming house where I had lived, back to Mrs. Paul's.

So I went there, slinking along the alley and into yards, falling and sprawling over low fences any boy could have jumped, fighting the dizziness and the nausea and the sea of black that lapped upward into my brain again and again and again.

But somehow, finally, I made it to her back door, and it was unlocked and I stumbled into her kitchen, where she was standing at the sink peeling potatoes.

She whirled around, frightened. She recognized me and her mouth opened to scream as the wave of darkness surged upward for good this time, flooding my eyes and my ears and spinning me around until the floor was there, the cool, damp linoleum of

the kitchen floor, under my feverish cheek.

I didn't hear the scream; I don't know if it came or not. Through the darkness and the dizziness I felt hands tearing at my coat and my shirt and stripping me bare from the waist up and then something rubbing gently across the searing pain of my shoulder.

Then the hands were under my arms and she was saying, "Sit up now—sit up and drink this." And when I had gulped it, and the shock of alcohol had shot a faint, dim day of light into my consciousness, she tried to lift me to my feet.

"Come on now, Mr. Murray," she said. "In here, into the bedroom. Please!"

She half dragged, half carried me in and I sprawled on the bed and gradually, slowly, the darkness left and I could see her.

She was kneeling beside the bed, her face only inches from mine, her eyes wide with fright, and she was bathing my shoulder.

"Why did you come here?" she asked. "Why? What am I going to do!"

I didn't answer her because I couldn't. But she knew I was conscious again; her eyes met mine, then flashed away.

She said, "I'll have to call the police."

I couldn't ask her not to.

"What else can I do?" she said. "You killed a man. You—you broke up another man's home."

I said, "What?"

"Oh, it's in all the newspapers. You can't deny it. You're a murderer and a—and the police want you."

"But—"

"I'll get in trouble if I don't," she said.

"But—"

"Besides," she said, rising to her feet, "you need a doctor. I can't take the bullet out. I've never done anything like that."

All right, go ahead, I thought. Call the police. Call Lieutenant Spinkle. It doesn't make any difference.

I heard the swish of her dress as she moved toward the door of her room.

"I—I have to," she said. "I have to call them."

The door closed behind her.

Slowly and cautiously I moved my unhurt left arm and got it below me. With all my strength I pushed on it, trying to raise

myself off that bed, trying to flee.

But the darkness came back and a new, sharp, tearing pain throbbled in my shoulder. I was dizzy and sick at my stomach and I couldn't—I *couldn't* push any more. I could not make it. My head spun and I collapsed again on my face.

Chapter V

SOMETHING tinkled, I heard the door open again and close and heard the sound of metal against porcelain, and something cool, yet hot, was rubbed gently against the raw wound on my shoulder.

"I was an Army nurse," Mrs. Paul said. "Try not to scream."

I couldn't have, because when she touched that wound a shrieking, violent ball of fire burst inside my brain and inside my whole body, a blinding sheet of red that burned everything it touched and turned my body into ashes.

When I opened my eyes again, when the red had faded into a dark purple and my shoulder was throbbing and beating with the pounding of my heart, she had finished. A bandage was on my shoulder and it was stiff.

"You'll have to sit up," she said.

I shook my head. I was too weary and spent even to talk.

"You'll have to," she said. "The police are going into every house on the street and they'll be here any minute."

I tried, straining and pushing on my left hand. With her help I made it and I sat there, my head hanging until the spinning room slowed down somewhat.

"What are you going to do?" I asked. "They'll find me."

She shook her head and held something out to me. "Put this on."

It was a brassiere, a woman's brassiere.

I said, "But—"

"These go inside it," she said.

So I put it on with her help. She propped me up in the bed, pillows behind my back, and she got a dress from a bureau drawer.

"I made the bandage small—it doesn't even show from the front," she said.

Then carefully, she arranged the dress

over the bad shoulder, and draped a dress-
ing-gown over my bare left arm, and turned
out the light.

"It's crazy," I said. "It won't work."

The doorbell rang.

"Put the dress over your head, like you're
just getting it on," she whispered. "Be sure
your head is covered. It's your only chance.
There's no place to hide you here."

A heavy fist pounded on the front door
and she was gone, closing the door of the
bedroom behind her.

As fast as I could, I arranged the dress to
cover my arms and my head and then, heart
thudding, I waited and listened. I heard
them outside in the hall.

"We don't need no warrant, lady," a
man's voice said. "We're going to search the
house, see? He's got to be around here
some place."

They tramped up and down the hall and
their feet boomed on the stairs. They went
into the basement and into the kitchen and
even into the attic, I think. They opened
doors and slammed them shut and I could
hear the other roomers protest and shuffle
about.

Then, finally, the footsteps lumbered along
the floor and stopped by the door to this
room.

"My sister's in there," Mrs. Paul's voice
said, and a man answered, "We got to look,
lady."

Then the doorknob turned with a slight
squeak and I could feel a draft of air strike
my bare midriff and I held my breath.

"Excuse me, miss," the man said, his
voice booming directly at me.

"You can see there are no closets here,"
Mrs. Paul said.

Then the door closed and the footsteps
went on down the hall.

If that cop had looked at my shoulders
he'd have noticed the unfeminine swell of
the muscles. If he'd looked at my ribs he'd
have seen the darkness of the skin and
the black of the hair on my chest.

But he saw only a well-filled woman's
brassiere and he looked no further.

Maybe I passed out again then, maybe I
fell asleep. I don't know. When I opened
my eyes, the bedroom light was on and I

was still propped up on the pillows. Mrs.
Paul was in the room looking at me and the
fear had gone from her eyes. They were
soft, instead, and half smiling.

"I'll help you out of those things and get
you some soup," she said.

WHEN she brought the tray in she sat
down on the foot of the bed and watched
me slobber as I tried to eat with my left
hand.

Her face was soft, too. Funny, but I'd
never noticed before how well she filled her
dress, how nicely rounded she was.

"You're pretty swell," I told her.

Her first name was Eve; I'd seen it on
the rent receipts. "You're swell, Eve," I
said again.

She didn't answer at first. Then she said,
"I don't know why I did it. You've killed
a man and you've done something worse
than that."

"But I didn't, really," I told her.

She shook her head. "It's in the news-
papers. You don't have to lie to me."

I said, "I didn't."

"Here." She left the room and came back
with the evening newspaper and put it down
on the bed and went out again.

It was a later edition of the paper. My
picture, of course, was spread all over it,
the picture I couldn't deny.

But under it was something new. Some-
thing chilling. Something that sent a new
wave of fear through me. It said under my
picture:

PSYCHOPATHIC KILLER AT LARGE

And below that:

MURDERER OF THREE ESCAPES POLICE TRAP

Three!

I read the story with a clear, cold brain,
swept clean by the knowledge that I was
marked for death. It read:

Joseph T. Murray, arsonist and killer, es-
caped from a police trap in front of the City
Avenue police station this afternoon and is
still at large. Police are searching the city
in a mammoth effort, determined to capture
the slayer who, they say, was wounded breaking
out of the trap. They have orders to shoot on
sight.

Shoot on sight!

Any cop in the city could shoot me down
without a chance. Without even a question.

Any cop and every cop. Any and every cop would have this picture of me in front of him and beside him and burned onto his memory.

The newspaper story went on:

One of the three Murray killed was Samuel Eyre, a small-time gambler and bookmaker who has a minor police record. Murray leaped on him this morning entirely without warning or provocation, threw him to the sidewalk and shot and killed him. The others are Mr. and Mrs. Homer Twombly of East Falls, Massachusetts, burned to death in a fire that police say Murray set in a tourist court early this morning.

Four persons were registered in the court last night. Two of them were Mr. and Mrs. Twombly. The other two were signed Mr. and Mrs. John Smith of Peoria. They have disappeared. However, Lieutenant Ward Spinkle says that the proprietor of the tourist court wrote down the license number of the car in which "Smith" drove to the court.

"That license number," Spinkle said, "is the number of Murray's automobile, which police later found parked on Hubbard Street near the spot where Eyre was killed."

On the second page was the picture of the babe who'd escaped from that fire. The caption read:

MISSING COMPANION OF MURDERER

She was still wearing that towel, and whoever Smith was, he had good taste. But I'd never seen her before in my life, wearing a towel or not wearing one.

It didn't make sense. It just didn't add up.

I'd never been near that tourist court. Instead, I'd been asleep in this very rooming house on Hubbard Street.

What was it all about? Why was Ward Spinkle, police lieutenant, out to kill me? Why was everyone afraid of me? Who was dreaming up all this stuff, smearing it over the newspapers? Why?

My shoulder was throbbing and I was tired, weary, beaten, as I sat there and tried to reason out what was happening and what I could do about it, if anything.

And then Eve came in.

She'd done something to her hair; it was down around her shoulders. She'd done more than that. She was wearing a negligee, a soft, shimmering, almost transparent negligee that was cut startlingly, breathtakingly low.

SHE took the tray from my lap, stooping over next to me when she did it, so close that her hair brushed against my face.

Then, putting it on the dresser, she came back and sat down on the bed again.

Not at the foot of the bed. At the head, next to me and close, very close. Her face was smooth and white, her eyes were soft and glowing, her skin satiny.

At first she didn't speak. She leaned against the head-post of the bed and looked at me, with her lips slightly parted.

Then she said, "Joe, what was she like?"

I didn't get it. I said, "What was who like?"

"Mrs. Diamond. She's very beautiful, Joe, and very wealthy. Tell me what she was like."

"I don't know," I said. "Who's Mrs. Diamond?"

"You don't have to lie to me, Joe. It doesn't matter now, after—after what I've done."

"That woman in the tourist court was Mrs. Diamond?"

She nodded. "Didn't you even know her name? She's rich, Joe. Her husband's a big politician in Washington and she's had her picture in the paper before. I recognized it right away."

"Eve," I said slowly and distinctly, "I've never killed anyone, and I have a witness—two witnesses—who will swear that somebody else, not me, shot Eyre this morning. And I never saw Mrs. Diamond in my life. Sunday morning when I was supposed to be with her I was sound asleep in my room upstairs."

The softness disappearing from her eyes and from the lines of her face, she sat up and peered at me.

"If I'd gone out or come in late, you would have heard me," I said.

"Yes," she said, remembering, "I would have heard you. Of course I would have."

"It's not true, Eve."

She said, "No, it isn't true, is it?"

I put my left hand on her forearm, then onto her shoulder. Somehow I managed to lean forward.

"It must be some other Joe Murray," I said.

Almost angrily, she pushed my arm away, got up from the bed and rushed out of the room.

For five minutes I sat there, my brain in a whirl, the blood pounding through my temples. Then she came in again.

Her hair was on top of her head and a scarf was pinned over it. Instead of the negligee she had a flannel robe pulled modestly around her. And in her hands were a shirt and a suit coat.

"You'll have to go, Mr. Murray," she said.

Chapter VI

NO ARGUMENT about that, so I left. The shirt and coat Mrs. Paul gave me belonged to a roomer who had walked out on his bill. Although my shoulder was sore and throbbing, I managed to get them on and make my way down the hall to the kitchen and the back door.

Before I went out she handed me the white envelope. The thousand, I knew without counting, would be there, all of it. I put it in my pocket and there in the darkness I grabbed her with my left arm and pulled her to me.

At first she came close, very close and yielding. Then she shoved me away.

"You're a wonderful kid, Eve," I whispered. "Don't ever forget that."

For a while, as I slipped through the back yard, I thought I saw her white face pressed against the window, watching me.

Then I was in the darkened alley and out on the street again. Hubbard Street. The street that had meant death to me on one corner, life on another. The street that had brought me hope and had sent my blood rushing through my temples, just half an hour before, and had seen me staggering and falling, blood pouring from my shoulder, a few hours earlier.

Hubbard Street, where the cops would be watching even now.

I couldn't take a street car or a bus. The motormen and drivers would be aware of my identity, their eyes busy and eager. I had to walk.

So I hiked it. Slipping through back yards and alleyways. Slinking with the shadows down lonely, deserted, narrow streets. Ducking whenever I saw a black car parked near the curb, ready to swoop out. For mile after

mile, until at last I thought I was far enough away to hop on a trolley.

I rode across the bridge and up to the railroad station. I got off there and hiked to the tavern where I'd talked to Joyce that afternoon.

I was too late.

Only a solitary light shone inside the place and by its rays I could see the egg-headed bartender as he counted the money in his till. The customers were gone, the place locked.

And I was alone in the city with the police looking for me. With every police gun ready to jerk into swift, violent death at the sight of me.

Alone and, if anything, in a worse spot than I would have been during the daytime. For late at night the cops watch everyone they see. They stop men and question them just for being on the streets. They're alert late at night and suspicious and they're everywhere, all over, walking their beats or cruising slowly by in their silent black cars.

I stood there next to the door, trying to hug it, trying to become a part of the shadow of the building. Behind me the light in the tavern went out. I heard someone at the door and then it opened and Egg-head came out.

He glared at me suspiciously. Strange men aren't welcome anywhere in a big city late at night.

"I'm not a stick-up," I said softly.

Not answering, he locked the door and turned to leave.

"I'm looking for a girl named Joyce Finley," I said. "She was supposed to meet me here tonight."

"She ain't around," he muttered over his shoulder.

"Do you have any idea where I can find her?"

He didn't answer. Instead his broad shoulders moved on through the darkness to the corner. Then he stopped and, apparently reconsidering, he came back a few steps.

"She ain't been around, either," he said. "Her office was calling for her all afternoon and a couple of *Tribunal* reporters were here looking for her, and her mother called. Nobody knows where she is."

I grabbed his arm.

Joyce—missing! It couldn't be!

"Look!" I said. "She's in a jam! They've got her! They must have!"

"Who's got her?"

But I didn't know. All I knew, all I felt with a dread certainty, was that she was in danger. Because of me, something had happened to her.

"Who got her?" Egg-head asked again.

"I don't know," I said. "Spinkle, maybe."

"Spinkle! What for?"

"I don't know, I don't know. But—"

"Bud," Egg-head said, "everybody around here likes Joyce. She's a nice kid and we wouldn't want anything to happen to her. You better come on inside while we get to the bottom of this."

SO HE unlocked the tavern door and I slumped in a chair while he went into the telephone booth. I heard him dial a number and say, "City room," and then, "Is Eddie Lewis around? I got to talk to him." Then he closed the door of the phone booth and I couldn't make out the rest of his conversation.

Soon he was back, sitting across from me.

"One of the boys will be out soon," he said. "Say, you look like you're in a bad way."

From behind the bar he brought a bottle of whisky and a glass and he watched me manipulate it with my left hand.

"What's the matter with your shoulder?" he asked.

"A bullet wound."

He turned on another light, peered into my face, then switched the light off fast.

"By gosh!" he whispered. "You're that Murray fellow, that killer, ain't you? What's going on here?"

I tried to tell him but I was weary and exhausted and my shoulder was throbbing and sore. The words jumbled in my mouth and wouldn't come out.

Behind the back room was the kitchen and Egg-head brought me a sandwich and a cup of strong, bitter, black coffee and I was eating and drinking when Eddie Lewis came in.

Eddie Lewis was a little bit of a shrimp,

a young man with a weather-beaten face and a slightly wheezing voice. He didn't waste any time. As soon as I'd gulped the sandwich he was questioning me.

As best I could, I told him and Egg-head the whole story, from the beginning when Jake had given me the freeze until Eyre, the white-haired man with the pink eyes, had fallen in the way of a fusillade of bullets meant for me.

And on, about meeting Joyce and Howard and going to the police station.

"I've been hiding since," I said. "At a friend's home. I ran without even thinking that Joyce would get in trouble."

When I'd finished, Lewis sat there for a few minutes playing with a book of matches.

"I know one honest cop in this town," he said finally. "Shanahan, at Headquarters. Maybe he'll help."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Here's the way I figure it. Spinkle must have Joyce. She knows who really killed Eyre and he's got to keep her out of the way until he gets things under control. Maybe he's stashed her away in some police station under a phony name. He's done that before." Lewis crumpled the matchbook in his hand. "I only hope he hasn't found out that he can't keep her mouth shut. Gimme a nickel, somebody."

He made a call from the phone booth and then he was back.

"Shanahan's going to get it for me," he said, "and call here. All we can do is wait."

So we waited.

After a few minutes I said, "I don't get it. What's it all about?"

"The dame," Lewis said. "What else?"

"The dame? Who?"

"Look," Lewis said in his jerky, wheezing voice, "this Spinkle is a dirty, filthy, money-grabbin' killer-cop, see? He's the boy who collects the ice, the pay-off man, and he runs the Police Department and the whole city and he's getting fat on it. Well, a man like that wants everything he can get his hands on and once he grabs ahold, he isn't going to let go. One of the things he grabbed was this tootsie. You cut in on him, see, so he's out to blast you. And Joyce got in the way."

That made about as much sense as every-

thing else that had happened. I said, "Maybe you better draw me a diagram."

He took a pencil from his pocket and drew a line on the back of a menu.

"That's Spinkle, see?" he said. Then he drew another line. "That's the babe, Gloria. She's a looker, right out of a chorus. She marries a politician, a phony who gets elected to Congress somehow."

"Mrs. Diamond!" I said.

HE GAVE me a funny look and went on with his lines.

"Spinkle meets the dame." He connected the two lines. "He falls for her; she falls for his dough. They forget all about her husband and the husband shuts up on account of Spinkle is powerful enough to cost him the next election." Down at the lower right corner of the menu he drew a third line. "That's you. You come along. You pick up this Diamond babe—don't ask me how you do—"

"I never saw her!"

"Save it for Spinkle!" Lewis told me. "And shut up and listen. You came along and you pick up Gloria somewhere and take her to the tourist camp. The joint burns down in the middle of the night—that arson business was a phony, see. It just burned down accidentally. Some amateur gets a picture of Gloria running out of the cabin and brings it to us. We print it. We know it's Gloria but we can't prove it, so we don't say so.

"Well, that picture hits the stands about five o'clock this morning. Spinkle sees it. He knows it's Gloria, too. So he bangs out there. By that time you've lit out with Gloria but you've left your license number. The proprietor has to write that down according to law every time somebody registers. And there it is, see?"

He drew another line connecting me with Spinkle and Gloria, and then he sketched in a rough figure of somebody lying flat on the ground—me.

I said, "No. I don't see a thing. I wasn't—"

"Look," Lewis interrupted angrily, "I ain't the judge and I ain't Spinkle. Save your alibis for them. I'm giving you facts. That arson deal is a phony. We covered the

tourist court ourselves. Spinkle invented it to give him an excuse to plug you in the back. But the license isn't any phony. It's yours. The proprietor described the car to us too—make and model and year and even a crack in the left front window. The same one the cops picked up on Hubbard Street. You're hooked, Buddy."

I stared at the back of the menu, and at the picture of me lying there on the ground. Hooked? I was good as dead.

Because it was my car, all right, down to the crack in the left front window.

And I'd never seen Gloria Diamond in my life. I'd never been near that tourist court.

"All Spinkle had to do," Lewis went on, "was look that license number up, like any cop can, then buzz out to your rooming house and pump you full of lead when you showed up. And he's just the boy to get away with it. He's got the city sewed up tight, him and that stooge of his, that Sergeant Jackson. They tell off the captains and the aldermen and everybody else. They missed you once and got Eyre instead and pinned that one on you to get every other cop in the city to do their shooting for them. . . . I wish to hell Shanahan would call."

He crumpled up the menu and tossed it on the floor. Stooping over, I picked it up and straightened it.

"All right," I said. "If he's a killer and he's out to plug me, what about that thousand bucks? What did he send that to me for?"

"That's your fairy story," Lewis said. "You can take that grand and—"

The telephone rang and he leaped for it, knocking his chair to the floor and almost tearing the door off the booth.

In a minute he was out of the booth again.

"We found Joyce!" he chortled. "Shanahan spotted her! Way over on the west side in the Wilson Park station. Spinkle has her booked as a street-walker."

He grabbed his hat and I got up from my chair.

"Where you going?" he asked.

"Where do you think?"

He shook his head. "Like hell you are! With every cop in town aching to put a bullet in your belly? No, sir, all you'll do is start

things popping. You stay here and when we get Joyce sprung I'll call, see, and we'll figure out what to do about you."

I sat down again. He was right, of course.

In the doorway he hesitated. "Street-walker!" he said. "The dirty, filthy slob!"

Chapter VII

JUST for a few minutes after he left, we sat there without speaking, Egg-head and I.

"Some mess, eh, kid?" Egg-head asked finally.

There wasn't much point answering him.

Egg-head picked up the menu and stared at the strange scribble Lewis had scrawled there. Then, with the pencil Lewis had left, he scribbled on it, too. "What are you going to do now?" he asked.

"Get some sleep," I said. "Rent a hotel room somewhere and sleep for a week."

"With Ward Spinkle looking all over town for you?"

I said, "But—"

Then I stopped. But what?

So we found Joyce; so Spinkle couldn't prove I was a murderer. Would that stop his gun? Would that satisfy his wild jealousy, his wounded ego?

No, it wouldn't. No matter what happened, I was still on the spot, a spot I couldn't shake as long as Ward Spinkle lived. Unless, perhaps, I could prove to him that I hadn't been the man in the tourist court with Mrs. Diamond.

"The way I figure it," Egg-head said, "is you ought to find out who made that train reservation for you."

I said, "Yeah, sure."

"They're open all night, them train reservation places," Egg-head said. "Here, I got a nickel. What railroad was it on?"

He even looked up the number for me.

Reservation clerks for a railroad are busy people. I had to wait some time before I got a girl on the phone who could answer my questions.

"I have a ticket to Los Angeles for eight o'clock," I said to her when she came on. "I just want to verify the reservation."

"What's the name, please?"

"Murray," I said. "Joe Murray."

"Mr. Joseph Murray," she repeated. "And what—" For just an instant she was quiet. Then, "One moment, please, Mr. Murray."

She left the phone and I hung up.

You can't trace a call made from a dial phone unless you keep the party on the line. And I wasn't going to hang around on that line. Not after the way she'd hesitated over my name.

Egg-head had poured me another drink when I came out of the booth. "Any luck?" he asked.

I shook my head. "I'm too hot."

"Maybe Eddie will know what to do. Drink up."

So I sat and gulped the whisky and stared at him. Inside my stomach the liquor struck like a mouthful of red peppers, then splashed around and settled, uneasily, on top of everything else I'd eaten and drunk in the past twenty-four hours.

"I sure wish Eddie would call," Egg-head said.

Yeah, I did, too.

Egg-head's bald scalp came almost to a peak on the top of his head. As I watched, that peak became more and more pronounced; it grew sharper, like a sword. His face, too, changed shape and grew and stretched and twisted and got fuzzy on the edges. I blinked my eyes and nausea tugged at my stomach and when I looked at Egg-head again I barely could make him out.

"I sure wish Eddie would call," he said.

The peak on the top of his head stretched into a shape like a pencil and his eyes blurred and merged into one and my head slumped forward to the table.

And then the telephone rang, cutting shrilly through the fog, ringing and ringing in my ears.

Slowly, I tried to get to my feet. But my arms were like soft plastic, my legs wouldn't support me. I sank down again and Egg-head went into the booth.

My hand, flopping on the table, touched the wadded-up menu and I smoothed it out and stared at it. The lines leaped at me, wavering and uncertain. There was I, stretched out flat on my back. There was Spinkle, a dark, heavy line. There was the

dame, an uncertain, undulating line.

And there, on the bottom of the menu, was what Egg-head had added:

\$1,000—One thousand bucks.

He had underlined it several times.

One thousand bucks. That was a lot of money. Some people will go pretty far for a thousand bucks. Such as slipping a Mickey into a man's drink.

WITH my left hand, I felt around under the table. It was smooth, unbroken. If I only had a roll of tape or a wad of gum.

But I didn't.

Between the table top and the boards on the side was a narrow slit, just a crack. I took the envelope from my pocket and, reaching under the table while I was slumped there, tried to wedge that envelope into the slit. It wouldn't go. Instead it fell to the floor.

Behind me I could hear the whirr of the telephone dial. I closed my eyes and, lying flat on the table from the chest up, reached for that envelope and found it and picked it up.

This time I slid the envelope along the slit until it went in and stuck there. Then dizziness overcame me and my hand swung toward the floor.

"It was the wrong one," Egg-head was saying.

He was sitting across from me again. I opened my eyes and tried to straighten up and look at him but I saw two Egg-heads, two fuzzy outlines blending into one and swerving apart again, with lights behind them that were going around and around.

"It wasn't Joyce out at the Wilson Park station," Egg-head went on. "It was somebody else."

"It wasn't?" My voice was sticky.

"No, it wasn't. Eddie's talked to Spinkle, too, and he said he never saw her. Eddie wants you to hang around until he gets here."

"Oh, sure." I shoved against the table and somehow I straightened and got my feet under me. "Sure," I said. "I'll be around."

For a moment I stood there, my spaghetti legs curving and wobbling. And then the room circled and dived and the wall swung

up toward the ceiling and I crashed to the floor.

This time when I opened my eyes I could feel him. Prodding at my pockets. Lifting my coat. Dimly I could hear the wheeze, "All I want is that thousand, buddy. That's all I want."

Egg-head was crouched over me, the way a baseball catcher crouches, on the balls of his feet, knees stuck out. With my left hand, I shoved against one of those knees and he fell back, off-balance, supporting his weight on one hand, and I kicked that out from under him and he sprawled to the floor.

Somehow I got up before he did and I hit him flush on the mouth with my left. He stumbled back, knocking a stool over.

Then I ran.

I didn't stop to see if he got up; I ran. From the tavern into the gathering dawn, down the lonely side street and into the alley in the back. There I gave way to the nausea that had turned my stomach into a spouting volcano.

And then I ran on.

Egg-head could have had only one reason for feeding me that Mickey—a thousand-dollar reason. And he'd have tried it only if he knew I wouldn't be around to squawk later.

So who do you think he'd called after he heard from Eddie Lewis, when I noticed the whirr of the dial?

I was on my own again, alone in a city of strangers, dodging through strange back yards and alleys, strange dogs barking at me, strange children gaping in astonishment, fleeing from the mad vengeance of a man who knew me only by name and who knew that name only because someone else had used it.

Two persons, only two in that whole city, could help me.

The first was Howard, the grocer. He had been with Joyce when I saw her last. Perhaps he knew what had happened to her.

Back I went to Hubbard Street, and this time I walked all the way, as the sun bounced higher in the sky, as the streets filled with traffic, as people came out to greet a new day and new hopes. Walked slowly and carefully, trying to submerge my identity in the crowds

and hide my face from the eyes of those who passed me by and who, luckily, were too busy to more than glance at me.

Over the bridge and down the boulevard and then to the left and then at last to Hubbard Street, the cobblestones and the cracked sidewalk, the rubbish-strewn vacant lot. There, ahead of me, was the sign of the tavern that served green beer, and across the street the blind woman staring out to see what she never could see. And beyond, the grocery store where Howard waited.

THE grocery was closed, its front door locked, so around to the back I went and to the living quarters, picking my way through the litter of the unoccupied lot next door, opening a gate in the high board fence.

The back door was closed, too. I knocked on it.

No one answered. No sound of stirring or of footsteps came to me.

I knocked again and then I rattled the door and still no one came, no one moved inside the house.

Once more I seized the knob to rattle, and it turned in my hand and the door opened. I stepped inside.

There in front of me was Martha, the grocer's wife. The little woman with the pinched, hen's face and the staring, wide eyes, the woman who'd been pointing a big, old-fashioned pistol at me when I'd seen her last.

She was seated in a rocker facing the big window. Her hands were clenched tight in her lap; her eyes were dull and hollow and unseeing as they glanced briefly, just briefly at me, and then back to the curtainless window. Not a flicker of expression crossed that face, not even a sign of recognition.

"Good morning," I said.

Still she did not move.

"Your husband," I said. "Is he in?"

This time her eyes moved and she looked at me again.

"Upstairs," she said.

I waited for her to say something else, or perhaps to call him. But she didn't budge.

"Go on," she said. "Go up and see him."

The stairs were just beyond the kitchen, narrow, mean stairs, and they led into a

narrower and gloomy hall that opened into three small, poorly furnished, cheerless rooms. The rooms of two who had worked together for years, who had stayed just ahead of poverty with their never-ending hours of toil, who long since had given up hope of finding a better, easier life.

Howard was in the third room. Right in the center of it, with two inches of air beneath his feet, with his head slumped downward at a sharp, unnatural angle, with his mouth closed and a rope knotted hard around his neck and stretching up to a rafter in the ceiling.

I cut him down. I couldn't leave him there. I loosened the noose around his throat with its smooth, soft skin, the skin of a man who had worked indoors, away from the sun, all his life, and I left him there on the floor.

Chapter VIII

DOWNSTAIRS I found Martha still perched in the silent rocker, still silent herself, and I stood beside her looking at the wrinkled hands clasped together in her lap.

That was when I noticed the green money knotted in her fists and I thought I knew what had happened.

"How much?" I asked her.

She stirred and her head turned a fraction of an inch and the rocker swayed.

"Two hundred dollars," she replied. "Two hundred dirty dollars."

There wasn't anything I could say.

"It wasn't much he wanted," she went on, her voice low and bitter. "He came around after the shooting when Howard was out, and he just wanted us to forget he was there. To forget we'd seen him."

"And you didn't tell Howard."

"No," she said, "I didn't tell him. Until last night, after he went out with you and he came back with that man in the black suit. He wouldn't believe me, Howard wouldn't. He said I was an honest woman; I'd give that money back. And the man laughed at him and said I couldn't."

She opened her fists and stared at the money and then dropped it in her lap.

"Then he went upstairs, Howard did. And I was afraid to go up to talk to him until—

until—" Again she picked up the money. "It'll pay the bills. All of them. Every one. We never had a time in our lives when we didn't have bills."

I wanted to put my arm around those thin, bent shoulders, to say something soft and helpful. But there are no words soft enough and helpful enough and so I left her there, seated in the rocker and staring out the window.

I went across the street to the musty little tobacco store and I gave the clerk a dollar bill and asked for a handful of nickels. He was a little, middle-aged man, that clerk, with a stiff, high, old-fashioned collar and frightened eyes and a mouth that stayed open while he made the change for me.

From the telephone book I got the number of Egg-head's tavern and I dialed it.

There's a sign in a lot of phone booths here that says, "Let it ring ten times." I let it ring twenty times, and then when no one answered I hung up.

Then I looked up the number of the *Daily Tribunal* and dialed that.

"City room," I said when the operator answered me, and a moment later I heard a man's voice repeat my words but not my inflection, "City room."

"Is Eddie Lewis around?" I asked.

"Eddie Lewis? Naw, he don't come to work until two o'clock."

"How about Joyce Finley?"

"Who"

"Joyce Finley," I repeated.

"Listen, hud," he said, "if you know where Joyce Finley is, for gosh sakes tell us, will you?"

But I didn't know. I hung up again.

I went out of the phone booth slowly, into the empty store, and when I saw the open front door and realized that the clerk had left, I knew what to expect.

He was down the street in a greasy little restaurant as I passed, talking rapidly into a telephone. But already he'd spread the news. Already they knew—everyone who lived there. Already they were hiding behind locked windows, running, fleeing.

The killer's out there. The murderer. Joe Murray, the murderer. Walking along in broad daylight, bold as brass. Ready to kill

again, maybe. There he is—Joe Murray, the murderer.

I could sense it and feel it and smell it and taste it. The fear and the hatred. And the strange, sudden quiet of that street of strangers. In the houses and the stores, staring out of upper-story windows, crouched on porches or behind the furniture. Afraid of me. Afraid with a living, growing dread, a nameless fear that reached out and touched everyone.

FOR I was Joe Murray, the murderer. Already I had brought death to four persons who hadn't known me. Who hadn't wanted to know me, who had tried only to keep me out of their lives. I would bring death again, perhaps to the people along this street. I was a man to be shunned, avoided, a man to flee from and lock out of your home and your sight.

I walked along the street of strangers, alone, all alone, alone for the rest of my life among strangers.

All around me, I knew, they were watching in tight-lipped silence. And ahead of me and behind me those others were closing in, the cops, their guns ready, hunting me down like a mad dog. Like a murderer.

It was a long street, longer than I'd ever realized, a street that would never end. Half a block ahead a milk truck was parked at the curb, but it was empty and its driver had fled to the protection of brick walls. Across from it, a boy was working on his bicycle and as I approached I heard a window open, a woman's voice cry out, and the boy ran and the window was banged shut again and locked.

And on I went. It didn't matter any more. It made no difference. Let them run and hide. Let them shun me. Let them shoot me down. Who cared?

It didn't matter, I thought—until that shot rang out.

And then, suddenly, intently, like a pang in my heart, it made all the difference in the world. Then, with death beckoning, I wanted fiercely, desperately, to live.

The shot had come from my right and I was almost abreast of the truck. Just one single shot ringing out in the stillness.

Just one shot, that was all. From the opposite side of the street.

A few feet ahead of me was the truck. One fast, scrambling dive and I could have that truck between me and the gunman. I could be safe in its shadow.

But I didn't dive. Because it was a little too obvious. Cops don't shoot like that. Just one shot, then nothing more. They'll call out first and ask you to surrender—or they'll burst into a volley, a fusillade, a whole wave of shooting.

That one shot hadn't been fired to stop me; it had been a decoy. Crouched at the side of the track, peering across the street, I would have been a perfect set-up for anyone behind me. With no protection around, with only a few feet between me and someone hiding in the shadow of a doorway there, I'd be a dead duck.

So I didn't dive for that truck. I ran, instead, to the right, straight at the doorway I thought the shot had come from. Because only one man would be there, probably. The others, the concentration of cops, would be hidden near the truck.

He came out of hiding before I was even close, a short, squat man with light hair and a frown on his tanned face and a revolver in his hand, at hip level. Behind me, someone shouted. Ahead of me, the blond cop fired, and even in the daylight I could see the flare of his pistol.

I swung to the right and he fired again, and then I dived. Head down, driving with my left back because it was my only weapon, that left fist.

He fired again and I swear I could feel the breeze of the bullet as it whipped by just over my head. And then I hit him with my shoulder.

We sprawled on the ground.

Clawing, kicking, rolling, swinging, we sprawled there, the two of us, and we tumbled over and over, and somehow I got my left hand on that revolver, twisting it and turning it and tugging at it, and I brought my knee up into his face.

Then the pistol was in my hand, loose, mine, and I leaped free.

Half across the street, at a dead run, came Lieutenant Ward Spinkle.

He saw me and he saw the gun in my hand and he stopped. Not because he was yellow. Nobody ever could say that about Lieutenant Ward Spinkle, no matter what else he could be called. He stopped because the gun he was cradling in his arms was a riot gun and you can't fire a riot gun with any accuracy while you're at a dead run.

I MIGHT have shot him then and there. I might have put a slug in him before he could squeeze the trigger on that riot gun, before its pellets ripped into my body and stopped me.

But I didn't. I ran. The blast of that riot gun filled the street and echoed off the buildings in front of me and rolled and roared. Somewhere, a window tinkled as its glass was broken.

The gun roared again, and like an angry bee, something stung my leg.

That was all. Just a slight sting on my leg, a scratch it turned out later.

If I'd been crouched behind the truck, only fifteen yards from the buildings behind me, that riot gun would have torn me to bloody shreds. A riot gun is in reality a sawed-off shotgun, firing shotgun shells. At a range of thirty-five yards it is a thing of horror, tremendously effective.

But fifty yards is its maximum range, and at seventy-five yards, Spinkle could reach me only with his curses.

He must have thrown aside the riot gun and yanked out his revolver, for as I sped between the buildings in front of me, I heard the sharp, short bark of a pistol.

That was all I heard. I ran.

Away from Hubbard Street. Away from Ward Spinkle and death. Down alleys again, and out to the next street where a cab was cruising by.

I leaped into the front seat of the cab and I shoved the pistol I held into the cabbie's face and I said, "Get moving, buddy!"

Not for long, though. Only until the sirens behind us had faded a bit, until the screaming, whining police car had rushed by, headed for Hubbard Street and the trap I'd just escaped. Then, at the first busy corner, I scrambled out, gun in my pocket now, and I

dived into the crowds, trying to lose myself.

The nearest telephone, I knew, would bring the police to that corner in answer to the cabby's call. I had to keep on the move.

Keep going, Joe. Don't stop to rest. Don't stop to eat or drink; don't stop to catch your breath. They're behind you, right behind you. Keep moving. Pick up your weary feet and put them down again. And again and again and again. Forget about the throb in your shoulder, the sting on your leg. Forget about your pounding head and your worn, sagging body. Keep moving. Through the crowds, with the crowds, in the crowds, never alone. Don't run; they'll only stare at you then. Don't look around. Keep moving.

So I moved through the city. Not knowing where I was going, not caring. Just on the go, watching, wary, cautious, breathless, aching and worn and fatigued.

Chapter IX

BECAUSE you form habits in only a few months and because those habits control your subconscious, and because streets I hadn't seen before could lead to a dead-end trap, there I was, an hour later, in front of Jake's garage.

Its doors were closed and locked. It was empty.

"What's the matter with Jake?" I asked the newsboy on the corner.

"Aw, he's closed," the boy said. "On account of that shooting."

"What shooting?"

"Ain't you read about it? Jake's brother-in-law. The one with white hair. He got shot the other day by that screwball over on Hubbard Street." Then he said, "Ain't I seen you around before?"

So I moved on again. Sure, he'd seen me before. He'd seen my face staring at him from the newspapers he'd carried. Soon he'd remember it and he'd run for a telephone. I moved on.

But this time I had some place to go.

I hopped a trolley and rode a while and got off and looked it up in the phone book. Preston Diamond. The address was a swank one, on the North Side.

I rode another trolley, hiding my face in a

magazine, and I walked a couple blocks until I found the address. Swank, all right, with a doorman and a clerk behind a desk in the small lobby.

But the doorman has to summon a cab once in a while and the desk clerk has to turn around occasionally, and sometimes a man can sneak into those places, even a man with bloodshot eyes, with his shoulder wrapped in a bandage, with a two-day growth of beard on his face. Sneak in and find the service stairway and walk up, and up, and up.

Thank goodness, each door had the name of the tenant on it. I found the right one finally, on the seventh floor.

I knocked and after a moment I could hear the swish of a skirt and a voice, a soft, warm voice, call out, "Who is it?"

"Electrician," I replied.

Just a crack, the door opened, and I could see that the chain lock was still fastened. Only half a face, and half a body, showed through that crack, and behind it a long, sunken room.

The eye in that half face glared at me distastefully. "I didn't send for an electrician," the half mouth said.

"Lady," I said, "there's trouble in the power line. Will you see if your refrigerator's working?"

For an instant, the eye and the face disappeared. I leaned as close to the door as I could, pressing on it. The chain held, all right.

Then a man's voice came from the back of the apartment, a flat, timbreless monotone. "Nothing wrong here," it said.

The eye reappeared. "It's working," the woman told me. And she closed the door firmly.

In that building, even the halls had thick, smooth carpets. Nobody could hear me run toward the stairs. Nobody could hear me bounce down six floors to the phone booth I'd noticed at the foot of the service stairway as I sneaked in.

I dialed the Police Department and when the operator answered I said, "Lieutenant Ward Spinkle, please. It's urgent."

Yeah, I was calling Lieutenant Spinkle. The man who was out to kill me.

Because I'd recognized that voice upstairs.

I'd known it almost as well as I'd known my own. And I'd known, too, in that instant of recognition, what it was about. The whole thing was plain now.

Spinkle wasn't in, of course. I gave the man in his office the address of this apartment building.

"Tell him to get over here in a hurry," I said. "It's important." Then I hung up.

He'd recognize that address when he heard it, I was sure. And he'd come.

Then I went back up to the seventh floor, walking slowly, pushing one leg wearily after the other. This was the way it would end. This was the showdown, and my chance to get out of it all. To live in peace again and to call men friends instead of strangers.

But still my feet dragged, my will weakened. I wanted to stay out of this dirty, nasty mess. I wanted to get far, far away from it, shut it from my mind, forget about it. And I knew I couldn't.

ON THE seventh floor, finally, I knocked once again on that solid, massive door and once again I heard the silken swish of a woman's clothes and once again that voice said, "Who is it?"

And once again I answered, "Electrician."

The door opened just the same distance, and the eye reappeared. It was a soft, brown eye, with big lashes.

"I told you I don't need any electrician," she said.

"We've traced the short right to your apartment," I said. "I'll have to come in before there's a fire."

The door closed slightly. I heard the chain being unfastened.

Then alarm flooded into that face. "You're no electrician! You're—"

I hit the door with my left shoulder, reaching for the gun at the same time, and I stumbled and almost pitched headlong into the apartment. My right arm hit the woman, sending her to the floor in a sitting position, and I felt something rip and tear in my shoulder and a sharp, throbbing pain shot through me.

She was getting to her feet when Jake came into the room from the back.

Yeah, Jake. The garageman. The brother-

in-law of the man I'd supposedly killed. The gigolo.

"Well," he said, "so you finally got smart."

I didn't answer him; I didn't have anything to say. The gun in my left hand was eloquent enough.

"Who is he?" the woman asked as she got to her feet. "What does he want?"

She was in a negligee and she was a tall woman, still youthful-looking, striking.

It was a modest negligee, not like Eve Paul's. Because, on her, it didn't have to be revealing. Every curve of her body, every line of her face, every voluptuous, soft swell, was feline, feminine, immodest, so much so that the clothing she might have been wearing on any occasion at all could have made no difference.

Statuesque, she might have been called. Except that a statue is made of cold stone, and nothing about her was cold. Even then, in her moment of fear in the awkwardness of rising from the floor, she was striking and warm and inviting and promising.

Promising hours of forgetfulness and rapture to many men. And bringing hatred and death instead.

"Who is he?" she asked again.

"Don't you recognize Joe Murray?" Jake replied in the strange voice that accented each syllable evenly, that went neither up nor down.

"What does he want?"

"I don't know," Jake said. "But he's leaving."

Deliberately, slowly, he walked toward me.

"Stay back, Jake!" I warned.

He came closer.

"I'll shoot!"

"No, you won't," he said. "You don't kill, Joe Murray. You couldn't shoot me. You—"

Then, abruptly, his mouth snapped shut. His feet froze. Onto his face came a stark, sickening, living look of terror.

That was when I sensed that two men were standing beside me in the doorway to the apartment. Lieutenant Ward Spinkle was one of them. Big, dominant, vibrant Ward Spinkle, dark-visaged, with his piercing black eyes, with his solid, threatening bulk,

vibrant and hateful and ominous. Next to him was the short, blond man I had struggled with just an hour before. Sergeant Jackson.

I stepped carefully away from them, to a spot where my gun could cover them all.

THIS was what I had planned when I'd telephoned. This was my one chance to live. And yet, in that instant, with the look of terror on Jake's face, I knew I couldn't turn him over to Spinkle.

"What's going on?" Spinkle asked, his voice deep and yet mild, with an undertone that made the mildness so obviously deceptive.

"Don't move," I said. "Don't go for your gun. I'll blast you if I have to, Spinkle, because it's my only chance."

I think he realized that I meant it, because he said, easily and assuredly, "What's your pitch?"

"Look at them," I said. "The two of them."

"Yeah?"

"That's your Joe Murray," I said. "That's the man who drove my car to the tourist court. Ask him! Go ahead, ask him."

"You lie!" Jake cried. "It isn't true!"

But the sickening, haunting fear on his face was all the evidence anyone would need.

"I don't know why he used my car," I went on. "Maybe he knew he might be traced and he was afraid to use his own; maybe he just didn't have another car. But he had a date with Gloria here and he took my jalopy and they went to the tourist court and the fire interrupted them and they left.

"He knew all about you and Mrs. Diamond and when he saw Mrs. Diamond's picture in the paper after the fire he was pretty sure you'd follow up the license number. So he sent me a thousand dollars to get out of town, because he was afraid I might be able to prove the truth. He sent his brother-in-law to follow me and see that I did leave, and instead his brother-in-law was killed."

"It's a lie!" Jake moaned. "Every word is a lie."

But Spinkle wasn't looking at him. His eyes were on the woman instead, and he stepped up to her, glaring at her. Before

that piercing, burning stare, she faltered. She looked down at the floor, in a strange, wordless admission.

"A punk!" he said. "A two-bit, greasy-haired, no-good punk, without two pennies to rub together! You picked him up in a bar, didn't you?"

"No!" she cried. "No! I didn't, Ward. I swear I didn't!"

He slapped her. A stinging, ringing, brutal slap full on the cheek, leaving the red marks of his fingers there.

"That's enough!" I said.

They froze.

"I'm going to give this man a chance," I said. "Jake, get out of here."

He didn't budge. Fear rooted him to the spot, made him a trembling, quivering hulk incapable of motion.

"Move!" I said.

He couldn't move.

"In three minutes," I said, "I'm going to turn this gun over to Lieutenant Spinkle. You have three minutes."

He looked from me to the woman, then back to me, pleading, indecisive, frightened.

Then he ran.

And as he reached the open doorway, Spinkle shot him twice in the back.

I hadn't seen Spinkle draw. I don't know where he got the gun, nor how. He was standing to my right and when I swung awkwardly around, trying to reach him with my own gun, Jackson hit me with the full force of his body.

We sprawled on the floor and the gun flew out of my hand and a fist landed on my jaw and lights crashed and burned in my brain.

Then they were standing over me, the two of them, Jackson and Spinkle. Behind them, in the doorway, was Jake's body, blood running slowly from his side and sinking into the deep, soft green carpet.

"Get up!" Spinkle said.

Chapter X

CAUTIOUSLY, slowly, fighting the darkness, I got to my feet and I had to hold onto a table for support.

Spinkle turned his back on me. Mrs. Dia-

mond had slumped onto a sofa, her head buried in her hands. He walked up to her, the gun in his hand.

He placed the muzzle of the gun on her cheek, angling it upward toward her brain. A tremor swept through her body, twitching her muscles, leaving her trembling uncontrollably.

But he didn't shoot. Instead he straightened and said to me and to Jackson, "Outside, you two!"

Heaven knows I tried to protest, to stop him. I stepped forward, and Jackson slapped me with the heel of his hand, spinning me half around. He grasped my arm.

"The Lieutenant means outside, buddy," he said, and he half shoved, half carried me, kicked Jake's inert body out of the way, and closed the door.

I don't know how long we were out there. Three minutes, maybe, or four, or five, while I leaned against the wall, white and sick and barely able to stand. She screamed once, just once, and then she was sobbing and then Spinkle came out, closing the door behind him.

"Let's go," he said, and we walked down the hall with the sound of her sobs coming to us as we walked.

Into the elevators we went and downstairs and out to the sidewalk. A squad car was parked at the curb. Spinkle opened the back door.

"Get in!" he said to me.

I said, "But why? What for?"

He grinned, a grin without mirth. "Murder, buddy," he said. "Remember? The murder of a fellow named Eyre."

He hit me in the face and as I pitched backward he hit me again and I fell, stumbling, into the car.

Like a blanket, a welcome blanket of oblivion, it swept over me. The fatigue, the painful throbbing of my shoulder, the shock of the blows to my face. And most of all, the words Spinkle had said. "Murder—murder—murder, buddy—Remember?"

Sure, it was murder. And I was hooked. I was trussed up and headed for the electric chair, and I hadn't a chance in the world. Spinkle had a murder to cover up and I was the fall guy. Two murders. He'd probably

pin the killing of Jake on me, too.

I had two witnesses who knew I hadn't slain Eyre. But one of them, Howard, was dead. The other—Joyce, where was she? What had happened to her?

And Spinkle had more than two. Half a dozen, probably, who had seen me tussle with Eyre and then flee, a gun in my hand. What jury would believe my story, in the face of these witnesses? What chance did I have?

We bumped over the street and I sat alone in the back, slumped down, eyes closed, the words, "Murder—remember, buddy," dining in my ears. Had I really expected Ward Spinkle to let me go? To admit his own mistake?

"Murder — remember, buddy? — murder—"

A hand on my shoulder, my wounded shoulder, shook me roughly and I opened my eyes. We were in front of the City Avenue Police Station, the end of the road for me, and a dozen persons were crowded around on the sidewalk, newspapermen and passers-by, gaping at me, gawking, fear still showing in their faces and the ghoulish glee of humans everywhere for the misery of another human.

They shoved me out roughly as flash bulbs popped in my face.

"What's going on here?" Spinkle demanded. "How the hell did you fellows get wise?"

A man in a captain's uniform was there, too, a gray-haired little man with a pompous face. "They came in on account of a suicide, Lieutenant," he said. "Some fellow named Green over on Hubbard Street hanged himself."

"Clear 'em out of here!" Spinkle roared.

"So you got Joe Murray, eh?" the captain asked.

Jackson said, "For cripes' sake, forget it! We'll tell you when we got time."

Three or four officers pushed the crowd back and we made our way through, the lieutenant and me, with Jackson following. In that mob I saw a face that was familiar. Eddie Lewis, the reporter, was there, with desperation written on his features, his lips compressed into a grim line.

UP THE two steps we went and into the corridor of the station. There we stopped and waited for Jackson to catch up.

And there the little old lady appeared suddenly out of the shadows, directly in front of us.

The little old lady with hen's eyes, the one I'd seen last seated in a rocking-chair and staring unseeing from her kitchen window while on the floor above her was her husband's lifeless body.

Martha Green.

She stepped up to Spinkle and she said, "Mister, I've got to see you."

"Not now, lady," he told her. "I'm busy."

"I've got to know why you did it," she said. "I've got to know."

Something in her voice, some desperate, strained, tense quality, seeped through the semi-consciousness of my brain. But Spinkle didn't notice it.

"Get out of my way!" he muttered.

"I've got to know now," she repeated.

He pushed her. Brutally, he shoved that little old lady backward and only the wall kept her from falling.

And then she had the pistol in her hand. The enormous, black, ancient revolver she'd been pointing at me not so long before. Pointing it at Spinkle this time.

"I'm a-going to kill you," she said.

She held the gun with both hands, as she had held it on me, with her frail, worn shoulders hunched forward and her hen's eyes glaring, undaunted, into his.

"Like you killed Howard, I'm a-going to kill you," she said.

"Lady," he yelled, "you're crazy!"

"No, I ain't," she said. "I seen hangings before when I was a little girl in Arkansas. Howard, his tongue wasn't sticking out, and he didn't have no rope burns on his neck. You killed him, mister. You went upstairs with him. I seen you. I don't know how you done it but you killed him, and I'm a-going to kill you."

He lunged at her, across the narrow hall, and he'd almost reached her when she fired, closing her eyes, squeezing with both hands, firing point-blank into his chest.

She must have had cartridges loaded with old-fashioned black powder. Because the

roar filled that hall, growing and swelling and echoing, and black smoke curled up from the cylinder of the gun, thick, black smoke, and the smell of gunpowder crowded into the hall while Ward Spinkle stumbled and pitched backward and fell, an enormous hole in his chest.

They grabbed her, the uniformed cops there, and they rushed her away and someone sent for a doctor, and then they gathered around Spinkle. Even the captain came out to kneel beside the body.

But they were too late. As we watched, Spinkle's body jerked and then he lay still. Dead. With blood still spurting from the gaping wound.

Eddie Lewis was there somehow, close beside me, rushing in from outside.

"He's gone," somebody said. "Spinkle's dead."

"Did you hear that, Captain?" Eddie Lewis asked. "Spinkle's dead."

But the captain paid no attention. Instead he looked apprehensively first at one man, then at another in the crowd gathered there.

"That's Ward Spinkle," Eddie said. "He's dead, Captain. Ward Spinkle's dead."

The captain got to his feet and brushed at the knees of his trousers.

Once more Lewis said, "Spinkle's dead, Captain. You are the captain, aren't you?"

He straightened his shoulders and his mouth became grim.

"All right!" he shouted. "Clear out, all of you who don't belong here! And somebody bring that woman into my office!"

They brought her, stolid-faced, with her head down, and she was in there for half an hour while cops ran in out out of the station. Then the captain sent for me.

Eddie Lewis went in with Jackson and me. "Now what's this all about?" the captain asked.

Lewis jerked his thumb at Jackson.

"Spinkle's gone, Captain," he said. "Let's get rid of his stooge."

"Outside, Jackson," the captain said.

JACKSON left. And Eddie and I told the captain the whole thing, slowly, point by point, going over much of it several times.

"That's quite a story," the captain said.

"I'd hardly believe it, if the old lady hadn't told me a lot of it already. She's undoubtedly insane to some degree, but her facts back up yours."

"How about Joyce Finley?" Eddie asked.

The captain sent for Jackson.

"Sergeant," he said. "you're a lucky man. You're going to be busted all the way down to patrolman. Aren't you lucky, Jackson?"

He cried, "You can't do that!"

"What's more," the captain went on, "you have two minutes to tell us where Joyce Finley is or go to a cell. What do you think of that?"

Jackson didn't think much of it. His flushed face got redder.

"One minute now, Jackson."

"All right, all right!" he bellowed.

"Say, 'all right, sir,' Jackson."

"All right, sir."

"She was locked up in one of the gambling joints Ward Spinkle had protected."

He gave us a rundown on the whole deal, with a little urging, and cleared up a couple of points for me. As soon as Spinkle had traced the license number to me, Jackson said, they had buzzed out to my rooming-house and Mrs. Paul had told them where I worked. They'd rushed over to Donnenwetter's and told him I was hot. They'd canvassed the neighborhood, stopping in at Tom's bar and giving him the same story. That's why Tom and Donnenwetter, and Eve Paul, too, had been leery of me right off the bat.

And that was it. That was the end of the line, the end of Ward Spinkle and the end of terror and fear for me. I could breathe again and live again and laugh and love again, no longer a stranger in a city of strangers.

Siren screaming, the captain slammed out to the gambling joint, Eddie and I in the back seat of his car.

The first floor was a fake cigar store. It was empty. On the second floor we found the roulette wheel, the dice table, the poker and faro equipment. But it, too, was empty of people.

In the basement was a furnace, a wash tub, a coal bin, and behind the coal bin, in a

little, dusty, dim room, bound to a chair and trembling with fright, Joyce Finley.

I untied her myself. She didn't look at me.

"Oh, Eddie!" she cried. "Eddie!" She rushed to him.

He put his arms around her. After a moment she pulled away.

"Where's a phone?" she cried. "We got to get this story in!"

They walked out on me, just like that.

"Well, son," the captain said, "want a ride back to the station?"

But I decided to walk. It wasn't far.

I stopped at a barber shop first, nodding and dozing while I was shaved. At a doctor's office I had my shoulder rebandaged. Then I went to Egg-head's tavern and I sat down at the table closest to the telephone booth and while he glared at me through the crowded room I fished the envelope out of the crack under the table top and waved it at him.

He brought me over a drink.

"You don't hold nothing against me, do you, Mac?" he asked. "I just wanted to pick up an extra grand, that's all. You don't hold nothing against me?"

No, I didn't hold anything against him. But I didn't touch the drink he'd brought, either.

I left, and went back to Hubbard Street.

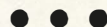
Hubbard Street, with its cobblestones and broken sidewalks and trash-strewn gutters. With its rundown, ancient buildings, its deserted warehouse, its broken windows and vacant lots. With kids playing on the sidewalk and women gabbing at their front doors.

Familiar Hubbard Street. Home.

I whistled at the blind woman in the window. I thumbed my nose at the clerk in the tobacco shop. I patted kids on the head as I went by.

Straight up to the front door I went, the door I'd entered so often before without knocking, and I knocked this time and a woman answered, a woman with the bloom of youth still on her cheeks.

"Hello, Eve," I said, and she stood aside to let me in.



PUZZLE PAGE

Answers to puzzles appear
on page 112

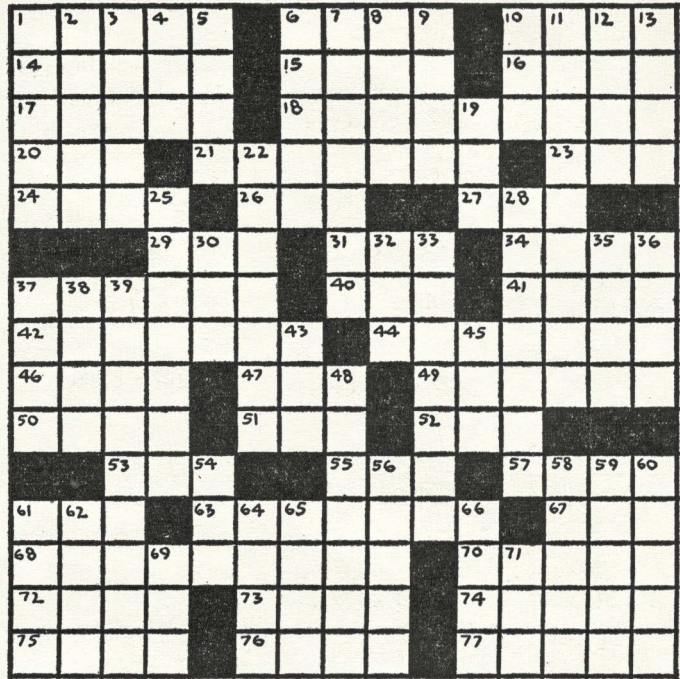
* * *

DETECTAGRAM

by A. F. Schroeder, Jr.

ACROSS

1. Counterfeiter's equipment
6. How many judges on the supreme court?
10. Distant
14. Mysterious
15. War god
16. Principal meal
17. Earth
18. Lawyer
20. Bolivian city
21. Jailer
23. Unit
24. Prison sentence
26. Born
27. Took it on the lam
29. Wing
31. — with blood
34. Stone (comb. form)
37. Sawbones
40. Hindu weight
41. Hawkeye state
42. Commit arson
44. Little tongue
46. Penalty short of death
47. Bitter vetch
49. Realizes guilt
50. Mine entrance
51. Pickpocket
52. Digit
53. Distinguished Service Medal (abbr.)
55. Swiss canton
57. Sleuth
61. Sleeveless garment
63. Treatment of disease (comb. form)



67. Demure
68. Gats
70. Secret —
72. Surety for arrested person
73. Sheltered
74. Bird
75. Moll's name
76. Boys
77. Obtained from parsley

DOWN

1. Kind of juror
2. Pass rope through
3. Crooks make this
4. Title of respect
5. Where killer dies
6. Mother-of-pearl
7. Smoothers
8. Nook (Scot.)
9. Serf
10. One dollar bill
11. Showing criminal purpose
12. Soon
13. Uncommon
19. Syria (abbr.)
22. Without a rod

25. Judges' gavels
28. Mustered suspects for identification
30. Meadow
32. Elongated fish
33. Harsh
35. Note of small birds
36. Tasteless in prison
37. Fissurelike intervals
38. Wife of Geraint
39. Sworn declaration
43. Silkworm
45. Prefix: New

48. Wearing spurs
54. Wire measure
56. The sun does it
58. Ancient British tribe
59. A. — Doyle, Sherlock Holmes creator
60. Show (Scot.)
61. Yugoslavian island
62. Cop's territory
64. Civil law term
65. Tissue
66. Trance inducing dancing
69. Palm leaf (var.)
71. Swindler

THE WEE SMALL HOURS

It was during the wee hours of the morning that Ted Roustabout got home from the party. He wondered exactly what time it was, but a glance at his watch told him nothing. He had forgotten to wind it, and it had stopped at 12:30.

Without consulting clock, radio, stars, or any other watch or person, Ted tiptoed to bed. Yet the next day when his patient and understanding wife asked him what time he had come in, Ted truthfully replied, "Two-thirty."

How could he possibly have known?

DETECTIVE MOVIE NEWS

IF some of this season's mysteries have a familiar ring to them, that's because you've been reading the newspapers. Screen writers are often headline hunters—not in the sense of looking for their own names in the news but of always seeking inspiration from real life.

Have you heard about a newspaperman taken prisoner by the Communists and put through torture to make him confess to being a spy? So has Columbia Pictures Corp., and the result is a thriller called *Assignment—Paris*. Originally, by the way, this movie was called *Trial by Terror*, which is more descriptive of the story but apparently not as enticing on a movie marquee.

Most of the movie takes place in Hungary, but it starts in Paris and was actually filmed there, since Iron Curtain countries are not exactly cordial to movie companies who want to expose Communist police methods. The hero is Dana Andrews as an American reporter trapped behind the Iron Curtain and sentenced to hang for espionage. Marta Toren, Audrey Totter, and George Sanders also work for the same newspaper, making a pretty glamorous quartet of journalists.

Thrills in Budapest

The story is only inspired by real life; most of it, of course, is the product of the writers' imaginations. The newspaperman does a lot more cloak and dagger skulking around in Budapest than would seem advisable, and his captors do not lack reasons for accusing him of spying. But, in the movies, there wouldn't be much excitement about a reporter who minded his manners in Budapest.

Assignment—Paris

Top Secret

The Turning Point

Sudden Fear

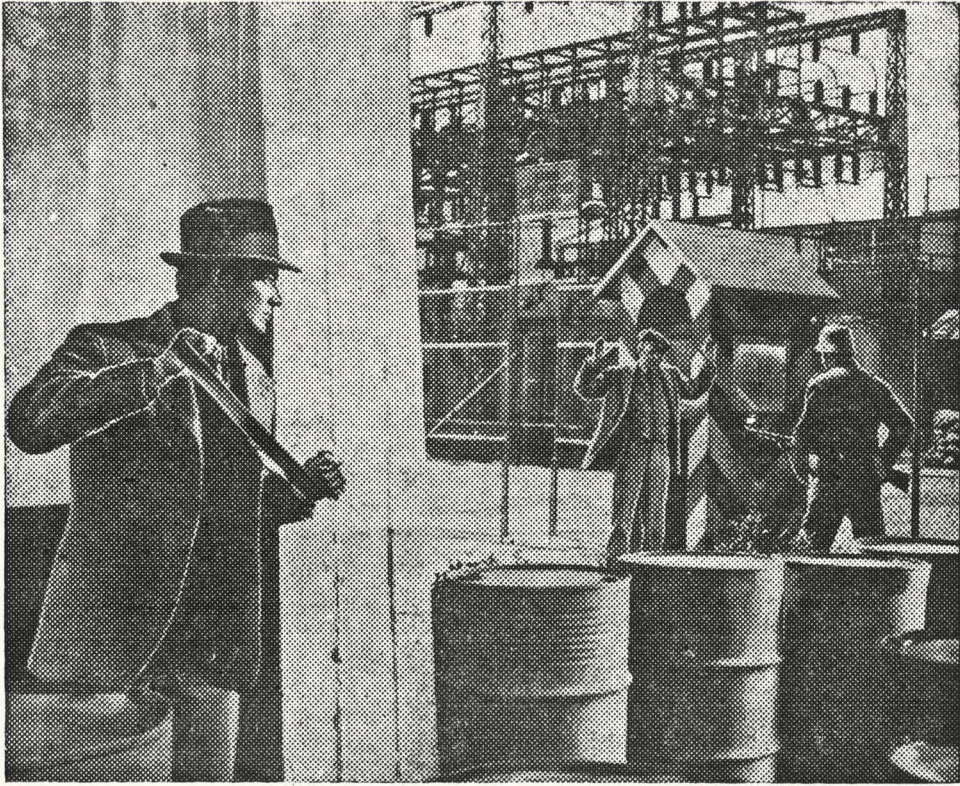
The Hour of 13

Marta Toren's part is somewhat of a departure from what she's been playing. She's usually cast as a vamp, but in *Assignment—Paris* she's a good, ordinary, intelligent girl with sex. "And that," says Marta demurely, "is just what I really am—I hope."

The newspaper concerned is the Paris edition of the *Herald-Tribune*, and its buildings and offices were filmed just as they really are. George Sanders plays the editor, and his English accent fits in fine because the real editor is British. The whole cast is a pretty cosmopolitan group, as a matter of fact. Marta, of course, is from Sweden. Herbert Berghof, who plays the Hungarian



©Columbia Pictures
Dana Andrews returns from prison to Marta Toren in Columbia's "Assignment—Paris"



INTRIGUE AND MURDER—Cornel Wilde in a gripping moment from Warner's headline-inspired "Top Secret," a whodunit that's like a spy thriller

dictator, was originally German, though he's been playing on Broadway for many years. Albert Ben Astar (the wily foreign minister) is from Israel and has his own acting company in Tel Aviv. During the war he was in the British Army's Jewish Brigade which fought in the Libyan desert, and once entertained the troops by giving a one-man performance of *Othello*. This was such a success that he was called to London to repeat it.

Underground Murder

Another headline-inspired movie is Warner's *Top Secret*, the story of the long and complicated unraveling of an underground murder mystery, suggested by the wartime experience of Marine Major Peter Ortiz, who served with the OSS. The film has all the excitement of a spy thriller, plus the fascination of an unrelenting, clue-by-clue hunt for a murderer.

Four of the chief underground workers are played by Cornel Wilde, Phyllis Thaxter, Steve Cochran, and Karl Malden. One of them was not only a murderer by a Russian spy. By piecing together all four stories, the French police hope to discover which of the four is the Communist and whether he's still up to his old tricks.

Though the movie has fifty different scenes, ranging all the way from New York to Germany and including England and France, the actors never left Hollywood. Real background shots, however, were taken by cameraman Ted McCord, and for him it was a retracing of old steps. During the war he served with an army motion picture unit and took many of the first pictures that Americans saw of the devastation of German cities. He was the first cameraman to reach Schweinfurth, which had been flattened by U. S. bombers, and almost seven years later he found himself taking pictures

of the same ruined factories for *Top Secret*.

Making the picture in Hollywood gave the prop department lots of headaches. For instance, if you're in Paris, and you want a picture of a French automobile, you just set your camera up on the sidewalk and shoot the traffic. But if you're in Hollywood, the prop men have to find you a Citroen or a Renault. Warner Bros. is well prepared for calls like this, having an old and new foreign car collection of some fifty makes. Besides the two cars mentioned, *Top Secret* also required a British Vauxhall, a German Opel and Volkswagen. The latter was called "the German jeep" by GIs and it's the car that Hitler promised to every German family. According to Warner's foreign car experts, the German families can be glad Hitler didn't keep his promise. It's not much better than a jalopy and requires just about as much tinkering to keep it going.

The subject of crime-busting has been taking up a lot of newspaper space lately, too, and Paramount has made a picture on that subject—*The Turning Point*, starring William Holden, Alexis Smith, and Edmond O'Brien. The setting of this one is, of course, the USA and concerns a crime investigating committee's hunt for gamblers, racketeers, and crooked cops. There's not much mystery about this one—you can separate the good guys from the bad ones after one glance at their faces—but there's plenty of excitement. Informers are rubbed out, witnesses disappear, and a gambling syndicate blows up a tenement in order to destroy incriminating records.

If you prefer your movies minus headlines, there are a couple of good ones current which have nothing to do with organized crime on either side of the Iron Curtain. Joan Crawford has a new one, *Sudden Fear*, which she helped to produce and which is released by RKO. This one is strictly for suspense. It tells the story of a woman who finds out on Friday that her husband wants to murder her before Monday morning. The wife is desperate, but she is also intelligent and courageous and she makes a daring plan to save herself from any kind of "accident" and to trap her husband at the same time.

Joan gives one of her fine, emotion-charged

performance and she's ably supported by Walter J. Palance, as the scheming husband, and by Bruce Bennett, as the faithful friend. It's one of those spine-tinglers which keeps you shivering long after it's over, the kind that makes you look under the bed before you get in it and listen for stealthy footsteps when the light is out.

Crooks Can Be Charming

Since we're eager to please every taste, the last mystery on our list is completely different from all the others except in excitement. MGM's *The Hour of 13* is about a charming crook who wouldn't hurt a fly, though he has a sticky-fingered way with ladies' jewelry. The story is set in London in 1890 with Peter Lawford as the Raffles-like leading character. Unfortunately, a coincidence links him with a much more unsavory criminal who goes around murdering policemen. The old saying of "set a thief to catch a thief" is changed to "set a thief to catch a murderer." He does it, too, and makes Scotland Yard look pretty silly in the process. Of course, since no wrong-doer can get off scot-free in the movies, no matter how handsome he is, he finally gets his comeuppance, too. But his jail sentence for jewel robbery is shortened because of his heroism, and you can be sure he'll be just as dashing, though more law-abiding, when he gets out.

If you're one of those who complain that mysteries ain't what they used to be, we've some good news. Alfred Hitchcock's classic, *The Lady Vanishes*, is being released again. If you missed it before, be sure to catch it this time. If you saw it before, you probably don't have to be urged to see it again.

We hope you haven't been looking around for a movie we told you about in the July issue, because you'll never find it. When we described it, it was scheduled for release in the early summer and was called *The Ragged Edge*. Now it's titled *Beware My Lovely* and will be coming out soon (unless RKO changes its mind again), but it's the same creepy story of a woman trapped by a homicidal maniac.

It looks to us like a promising season for mystery fans—tough on the nerves, rough on the fingernails, but that's how we like it!

*Mugs Kelly, the gargoye
detective, tackles the
case of the
dummy's head!*



The door of the closet
was open just a crack

The TALKING CORPSE

By **DONALD BAYNE HOBART**

IT was one of those hot summer days in New York when you could fry eggs on the sidewalk—which I always considered an unsanitary custom at best. I was sitting in my office, wishing for a nice cool blonde, when the other door

opened and what could only be considered a character slid in.

He was a thin, gray-haired man who looked like he could have won first prize modeling for zombies. He was dressed in a linen suit and was carrying a large

suitcase in one hand. He saw me sitting at my desk in the inner office and blinked.

"Wrong office," he said in one of those voices that sound like they came out of the bottom of a well, and which I'm willing to let stay there. "This must be the place where they book the animal acts."

"I'm Mugs Kelly, Private Investigator," I said without moving from my chair. "What can I do for you?"

"Wonderful!" he said. "A talking gorilla."

I did a slow burn. I'm big and tough, and the face is a bit on the leathery side, but personally I have always thought I wasn't bad looking. In fact, even distinguished in a repulsive sort of way. Besides, some of my best friends are gorillas, and I didn't like hearing them insulted.

"Sorry, Mr. Kelly," said the walking cadaver. "Now that the first shock is over I realize your good points. The keen blue eyes, the firm chin—"

"The snarling mouth and the flapping ears," I interrupted impatiently. "If you came here to play 'What Am I?' it is much too hot, Mr.—"

"The name is Craig Harper," he said. "And I came to see you on a special mission, Mr. Kelly."

"Goody, goody," I said languidly.

HARPER walked into my private office and put the suitcase down in front of my desk. He reached into a pocket of his linen coat and drew out a wallet that looked like a relic of the Civil War.

"Just to show that I am in earnest about needing your services I will pay you your fee in advance," Harper said.

He reached into the wallet and placed ten crisp new bills on my desk. Never have I seen anyone make so impressive a gesture with so little money—for all ten of them were one-dollar bills.

"You mean all that money is for me?" I said. "The whole ten bucks? I—I'm overcome."

"Ten bucks," said a voice that seemed to come from under the desk. "Must you always be such a tightwad, Pop?"

"My boy." Harper sank weakly into a chair and wiped his eyes with a handkerchief. "He talks—his voice haunts me—and yet poor Martin is gone. He has been murdered, that's what."

"Yeah," said the voice from under the desk. "I lost my head and you've got me talking out of my elbow, Pop."

It dawned on me that the voice was coming from Craig Harper's suitcase. I rose to my feet and peered over the edge of the desk at the bag, but all I could see was the closed suitcase.

"Take him away, Pop," said the childish voice. "The face scares me."

"Have you a boy in that bag?" I asked. I glared at Harper. "A kidnaper, eh? You stole the millionaire's son and are holding him for ransom. Well, don't think you can get me to work for you and protect you from the law."

"Horseradish," said the voice from the suitcase.

"Never liked it," I said.

I looked at Craig Harper and discovered that his lips were moving just a little bit whenever the voice apparently came from the suitcase. Light dawned in the east, though it was pretty late in the day for it. My gray-haired visitor was a ventriloquist.

"All right, Harper," I said. "So you have been tossing your voice into the suitcase. Very funny! Now toss it into the wastebasket along with this petty cash." I stacked up the ten one-dollar bills and motioned for him to take them. "Then run along and don't tell anyone I met you."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Kelly," Harper said, still sitting in his chair, and making no attempt to take the money. "I just can't help it when Martin starts talking. I never know what he is going to say next."

"Me neither," said the other voice.

Harper got to his feet. He placed the suitcase on a chair and opened it, as I

stood watching. I saw a ventriloquist's dummy dressed in a white sailor suit, but it didn't have any head.

"You see," Harper said sadly. "Someone has murdered Martin. Without his head he is as good as a corpse. It was stolen."

I got the general idea. A ventriloquist's dummy without a head wasn't much good. I was actually beginning to feel sorry for Craig Harper, but then I'm so impulsive.

"Have you any idea who might have stolen the head?" I asked, as I again seated myself at my desk and Harper dropped into a chair. "Any suspects, Mr. Harper?"

"At least six," Harper said. "I live in a theatrical boarding house over on the West Side. There are still some of them around town, you know." He looked at me pleadingly. "I have been at liberty for some time now, and haven't much money, but I'll pay whatever fee you ask if you will find Martin's head for me, Mr. Kelly."

"All right," I said, picking up the ten bucks. "Suppose we consider this a retainer—and if I find the dummy's head you pay me another ten?"

"You're very generous, Mr. Kelly," Harper said, as he got to his feet. He walked over and closed the suitcase. "If you could come to the boarding house this evening as an old friend of mine, you could see the six people I suspect, and judge for yourself."

"All right," I said. He gave me the address, and I wrote it down on a desk pad. "I'll be there at eight this evening, Mr. Harper."

"Thank you," said Harper, as he picked up the suitcase and headed for the door of the outer office. "I knew when I first saw you that you had a kind face."

"Glad you noticed something nice about it," I said dryly.

He stepped out of the office, closing the door behind him. I had nothing to do and all day to do it in. Business was

so good that I didn't even bother to have a secretary. It appeared to be a dull summer for private detectives. I amused myself by trying to make like a ventriloquist and the results were pretty terrible.

THEN the door opened and she stood there. She was blond, she was slender—but not too slender. In other words, besides being pretty, she had a figure. She wore a summer dress and no hat. She carried a straw bag that looked like a little lunch basket, and I had never seen her before in my life.

"Mugs, darling!" she said, as she saw me and came toward me, carefully closing the outer door behind her. She had one of those voices that are just too, too chummy. "It has been so long since the last time we were together."

"Not so long," I said, getting to my feet. "What's a few reincarnations between friends? Who were we last time—Romeo and Juliet?"

"Of course not, darling," she said. "They were so young. Ours was a more mature love."

"It sure was," I said. "It died of old age before I even knew about it."

She was close to me now, and she blinked her eyes as though she was about to cry. "Oh, Mugs," she said. "How can you be so cruel! Have you really forgotten your Nan?"

"I've also forgotten Betty, Agnes, Nell and what was that dame's name," I said. "Since I never knew any of them—and you, too."

"You have forgotten!" she said. "Kiss me!"

My family never raised any foolish children. She moved closer and I kissed her with an assist from the lady. I knew the weather was warm, but I didn't know it was that warm!

"Now do you remember Nan Martin?" she asked, as she drew away from me.

"I didn't," I said. "But I will."

"Just what I hoped, Mr. Kelly," Nan

said, with a smile. She dropped into a chair. "Actually we have never met before, but I thought I might interest you if the approach was a bit different."

"It was and you did," I said, seating myself at my desk. "But now I've got a feeling it was quite a buildup to an awful letdown. Don't tell me that you are just a gal who wants to hire a private detective to find the Rajah's ruby?"

"Not exactly," said Nan. "I'm an actress, as you may have suspected, Mr. Kelly."

"Curses," I said. "And up to this moment I thought you had been overcome by my fatal beauty."

"Give me time." Nan smiled. "Handsome is as handsome does, and you sure don't fool about it when you kiss a gal." She grew serious. "Was a Mr. Craig Harper here to see you today, Mr. Kelly?"

"He was," I said. "Just left a little while ago. Why?"

"I live in the boarding house where Mr. Harper lives," said Nan. "In fact, I was the one who suggested that he see you about finding the head of his dummy. We looked up private detectives in the classified phone directory, and your name fascinated me."

"Harper was here," I said, "and I agreed to try and find the head for him. He doesn't seem to have much money."

"Don't let your sympathy overcome you," Nan said dryly. "Craig Harper has plenty of money. He has saved it for years. In fact, there's a rumor around the boarding house that he has always kept ten one-thousand dollar bills in the secret compartment he had made in the dummy's head."

"Ten thousand bucks," I said. "That would make it an awful temptation to steal the dummy's head." I looked thoughtfully at Nan. "But where do you come in, as far as Harper and his dummy are concerned?"

"I like the old man," Nan said. "Though I think he is a fool at times. Letting people know that he carries all

of his money with him, instead of putting it into a bank. He's just asking to be robbed, and perhaps even murdered."

"You mean he has more cash, besides the ten grand?" I asked.

"From the way he talks when he has a couple of drinks, he must have," said Nan Martin. "Though I don't know the exact amount."

I SHOOK my head. "And I thought the old boy was broke," I said. "I told him I would take the ten bucks he offered me as a retainer and ten more if I found the dummy's head."

"Which proves you have a kind heart," said Nan. "I wanted to learn if you had agreed to take the case. That's why I came here after I saw Mr. Harper leave. He didn't see me, though. He will probably tell me about it when I get back to the boarding house tonight, but I was anxious and wanted to learn what had happened."

"I took the case," I said. "And I'm to meet Harper at the boarding house at eight this evening. He said there were six people he suspected might have stolen the dummy's head, and he wanted me to look them over."

"Six people," said Nan. "Why that includes everyone at the boarding house, including me. Mrs. Ward only has four paying guests—Craig Harper, Marshall Drake, John Lance and myself. The landlady and the maid make up the six people in the house."

"Small cast," I said. "What bothers me is that I haven't a thing to do until eight this evening." I grinned at her. "Seen any good movies lately, Nan?"

"Why no, I haven't," Nan said. "I'd like to see the one at the Music Hall, and strangely enough I haven't a thing to do this afternoon, either."

So I locked up the office and took Nan Martin to the movies. I also took her to dinner, and a good time was had by all. It was nearly eight p.m., so we headed for the boarding house in a taxi.

When we got there we met Mrs. Ward

in the hall. The landlady was a stout gray-haired woman with hard dark eyes. I didn't like her and I gathered she didn't think much of me either.

"Mr. Kelly is an old friend of Mr. Craig Harper," Nan told Mrs. Ward. "Is Mr. Harper in now?"

"I think so," said Mrs. Ward. "I saw him go up to his room about an hour ago, and he hasn't come down since then." She looked at me. "You can go up, if you wish, Mr. Kelly. It is the first room to your right at the head of the stairs."

"Thanks, Mrs. Ward," I said.

I smiled at Nan and headed up the stairs. The place was an old brownstone that had been converted into a boarding house. Mrs. Ward had spared the expense when it came to fixing up the house. The walls and ceilings needed painting, and the hall carpet and stair runner were old and well worn.

The door of what I decided was Craig Harper's room was closed. I went to it and knocked. Nothing happened at what seemed great length, so I knocked again. Still the silence from within the room. I didn't like it. On a sudden impulse I turned the knob and the door opened.

There was a ceiling light burning. I stood there in the doorway looking at the figure in the white linen suit sprawled face downward on the floor with the handle of a knife sticking out of his back. I had a strange feeling that Craig Harper wouldn't care whether I found the dummy's head or not. Even though I couldn't see the face of the man on the floor, I was sure it was Harper.

A door along the hall opened and closed. I glanced over my shoulder as I heard the sound. A thin dark-haired man had appeared. He saw me standing in front of Harper's door and came toward me.

"I'm Marshall Drake," he said. "Is there something wrong?"

"I'd call it that," I said. "Take a look."

Drake took a good look into the room

and then gasped. "This is murder," he said. He glared at me. "Who are you?"

"Kelly is the name," I said. "An old friend of Craig Harper. He asked me to drop around and see him, but I appear to have arrived a bit too late."

"Seems so." Drake was quite calm about it. "Kelly, uh? Seems to me I've heard of you before." He looked at me again. "With that face you must be Mugs Kelly."

"With this face I could also be John Smith," I said. "But you're right, I'm Mugs Kelly. What of it?"

"From what I've heard you usually get along all right with the rest of the boys down at headquarters, Kelly." Drake drew a detective's shield in a leather case out of his pocket and let me have a good look at it. "I'm a headquarters detective, but I live here when I'm off duty. Harper talked a lot and he never mentioned you among his friends. What's the real story, Kelly?"

WE stepped into the room and closed the door. Then I told him how Craig Harper had come to my office and hired me to try and find the missing head of his dummy. Drake listened silently until I had finished, and then he nodded.

"He would hire a private detective," Drake said, "and not tell me anything about it. He never did like police much."

"I heard that Harper had a lot of cash and carried it around with him," I said. "That he had ten thousand dollars in thousand-dollar bills hidden in the head of his dummy and that's why the head was stolen."

"Funny I never heard of Harper having so much money," Drake said, with a frown. "But he knew I was a detective, so he would never talk much to me."

I noticed that the suitcase Harper had been carrying when he came to my office was standing in one corner of the room. I walked over to it, picked it up and placed it on the bed. I opened it and then blinked. Martin, the dummy, was there

all right—but he now had a funny head. He had red hair and a mouth that opened and closed.

Drake was examining the dead man. "That's funny," he said. "This isn't Craig Harper. It's John Lance, one of the other boarders here."

"And here is the dummy, complete with head and all," I said. "This is getting complicated. I'm sure glad we have a police detective on the case," I grinned. "How do you spell Centre Street?"

"C-e-n-t-e-r," Drake spelled it. "What brought that on? I always was a rotten speller."

"Unhuh," I said. "And there have been rumors that sometimes I'm a rotten detective. Just who is John Lance, aside from being a boarder here?"

"He was an actor," Drake said, "though I don't believe he has had a part since last season, or maybe before that. He sure looks a lot like Craig Harper from the back. They both are about the same build and have gray hair."

"Maybe somebody thought Lance was Harper and that's why he got killed," I said. "I wouldn't know about that. I'm a stranger here."

I found the dummy's head came off, so I examined it. If there was a secret compartment in it where you could stick a roll of money, even ten one-thousand dollar bills, I couldn't find it. I knew police routine as well as Marshall Drake did, and I was waiting to see what he did next.

"Guess I better go down and phone Homicide on this," he said finally. "Tell them to get ready to roll. The only phone in this place is down in the lower hall." He walked to the door. "Take care of things until I come back, Kelly."

"All right," I said. "And if anyone asks what I'm doing here, I'm just waiting for a rowboat."

"Why?" asked Drake. "It isn't even raining out."

There didn't seem to be any answer to that so I remained silent as he stepped out of the room and quietly

closed the door. I sat on the edge of the neatly made-up bed holding the dummy's head.

"Would you mind putting my head back?" came the voice of Martin. "I have more trouble that way."

I was startled for a moment, and then glanced around the room. I saw that the door of a closet was open just a crack, and I was sure it hadn't been a few moments ago.

"Harper?" I called. "Is that you?"

"It is," said Craig Harper, as he opened the closet door. "I'm lucky to be alive."

"What happened?" I asked.

"I came up here to my room to wait for you," Harper said. "A little while ago I stepped into the closet to see if I had a suit that was pressed to wear tomorrow. Just as I did, John Lance opened the room door. Before I had time to come out of the closet someone must have sneaked up behind Lance and stabbed him in the back. He staggered into the room and dropped to the floor."

"And you decided to stay in the closet?" I asked.

"Not at first," Harper said. "I was going to rush down and report the murder when someone knocked on the door."

"That must have been when I knocked," I said. "Then what did you do?"

HARPER mopped his brow with a handkerchief. "I was afraid it might be the killer, and that he might really be after me," Harper went on. "So I just stayed in the closet. I've been there ever since."

"How did you get Martin's head back?" I asked, as I put the head back on the dummy.

"I still don't understand about that myself," Harper said, as he walked over to the bed. "Just before dinner here this evening I went out to buy a paper. When I came back to the room the suitcase was standing in a different part of the room from where I had left it.

I opened it and found that someone had brought back Martin's head."

"What's this talk about you having ten one-thousand dollar bills hidden in the head?" I asked.

"Who told you that nonsense?" Harper demanded, glaring at me.

"Nan Martin told me," I said. "She came to my office just after you left

one stole Martin's head. They thought I really had ten thousand dollars hidden in it. When they discovered they were wrong they brought it back." The ventriloquist scowled. "I'm not like John Lance was. He really had money, and always carried a lot of it with him."

The door opened and Marshall Drake stepped into the room. He looked at



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and told me all about you. What good friends you were, and how she had helped you look me up—or rather, how you had picked me out of the classified telephone book."

"Oh, she did," said Harper. "It was all a pack of lies. I haven't spoken more than a few words to that girl since we both have been boarding here. I believe she is after me for my money."

"Thought you didn't have any money," I said. "From the way you talked at my office you made it sound like you were practically broke."

"For the money Nan thinks I have," Harper said quickly. "That's why some-

Craig Harper in surprise.

"Where did you come from?" he asked.

"Harper was hiding in the closet," I said. "He was afraid the killer might come back and get him, too." I got to my feet. "You examined the corpse, Drake. Did Lance have any money on him?"

"No, come to think of it," said Drake. "His wallet was in his pocket, but it was empty."

The door of the room was open and Mrs. Ward stood there, watching and listening. She gasped as she heard what Drake said.

"Why, Mr. Lance told us all at break-

fast this morning that he had fifteen thousand dollars in his pocket and was worried about it," Mrs. Ward said. "He couldn't deposit it because this is Saturday and the banks aren't open."

I saw that Nan had appeared in the hall and was standing behind Mrs. Ward, listening.

"Looks like murder and robbery to me," I said. "And I know who did it."

"Who?" demanded Drake. "Give, Kelly. I just want to tell the boys from Homicide we have this all wrapped up and ready for them when they get here, and see the expressions on their faces."

"I know," said Harper, before I could say anything else. "It must have been Mrs. Ward."

"You're crazy," snapped the landlady. "Why should I kill him?"

"For the fifteen thousand dollars he had in his wallet," Harper said.

I walked over to the corpse and stood looking down at it, with my back to the others. "What's the use of stalling?" I said, changing my voice as much as I could. "Craig Harper killed me."

I SWUNG around. Harper was staring at the dead man with horror in his gaze. "He talked!" he muttered. "Lance said I did it."

"You did do it, Harper," I said coldly. "All that stuff about your coming to my office and hiring me to find the dummy's head was part of the buildup. Nobody stole Martin's head. You must have hidden it somewhere and then got it again. Besides, your story of how the murder occurred has a couple of big holes in it."

"What do you mean?" Harper demanded.

"You said that you stepped into the closet just as John Lance opened the room door," I said. "Unless you stepped out of the closet you couldn't have seen who came in, since the door opens from the far side of the room, yet you knew it was Lance."

"Well, I—I knew it must have been Lance who came in," Harper said falter-

ingly, "because he was the only one who ever came in uninvited."

"Pish tush, you can certainly cook up something better than that," I said. "And you remained in the closet? Even after you heard me knock?"

"Of course," said Harper. "I was afraid it was the killer, and that he would get me, too."

"Very logical," I said dryly. "You figured the killer came in here, disposed of Lance without seeing you, then returned to the hall to try to bring you into the open by the more formal approach of knocking on the door? The jury will be just a bit skeptical, I'm afraid."

I walked over to Harper. "I'm collecting my fee on this case, even if I didn't find the dummy's head. Give me that other ten bucks you owe me."

"All right." Harper drew out his wallet and reached in it and took out a bunch of bills. He counted off ten of them without even looking at them. "Here you are, and I'm glad you're no longer working for me, Kelly."

"So am I," I said, staring at the ten one-thousand dollar bills I was holding in my hand. "The police wouldn't like it at all."

Harper took a good look at the bills in my hand, then staggered over and sank weakly down on the bed.

"I gave you the wrong bills," he said, gasping like a fish.

"You sure did," Drake said, looking at the bills. "You're under arrest for murder, Harper."

"You always were a sap, Pop," said Martin's voice.

I was beginning to wonder if Harper really didn't know what the dummy would say next. I handed the money over to Drake. There were voices coming up the stairs. The boys from Homicide had arrived.

I stepped out into the hall, heading for Nan. There were a lot more things I wanted to say to her, and I didn't need the help of a ventriloquist's dummy to say them.

GENTLEMAN BURGLAR

FREEMAN H. HUBBARD

*tells the true story of a
rascal who led two lives!*



IF YOU LIVED in New York during the lace-and-velvet 1890s you may recall William Barrett, a handsome gentleman who walked as if he were heading a procession and who cut a dashing figure as he cantered beside his pretty young wife along Central Park bridle paths.

The Barretts occupied a luxurious brownstone house in upper Manhattan. Both came from fine old English families and were good judges of horseflesh. The wife, Alice, had been given a medal by the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, for her skill in clearing the hurdles on a superb mount.

Before settling down in New York, the stylish couple had run through a legacy from William's uncle and after moving several times, finally returned to New York. Mr. Barrett opened a private stable for breeding and handling blooded horses, and his pretty wife showed off the steeds he wished to sell.

Now and then Mr. Barrett took mysterious trips to Boston and upon his return would shower Alice with diamonds and pearls and all kinds of attention that women crave.

"William," she pouted one day, "why must you leave me so often?"

"To sell horses, my pet," he replied with a smile. "You know that we need money to live the way we do."

Alice was enjoying herself too much to question him further.

Once he got to Boston, Barrett changed into coarse togs and looked and acted like a different person. While in the Hub City

he even used another name, Bassett. His Manhattan mansion was sumptuous; his Boston quarters, in sharp contrast, consisted of two shabby rooms on slummy Eliot Street, his aim there being to attract as little notice as possible.

For years William Barrett played a Jekyll-Hyde role. Except for a personal fence, Jim Chaffey, he had no accomplice. Presumably, no one but Chaffey linked the haffing wave of burglaries in and around Boston with the mild-mannered horse dealer. Presumably, too, not even Chaffey knew that "Bassett" was one of New York's elite.

The burglar kept his trail well hidden. Quietly entering strange houses at night, he went straight to dining rooms, parlors, and boudoirs and showed amazing insight in finding where bijouterie was concealed. He always displayed a connoisseur's judgment, too, in the objects he stole, invariably passing up cheap flashy jewelry and imitation art.

Police were puzzled. They could not trace him through any known fence. Barrett was too sly to be caught easily. He broke glittering diamonds and other rich gems out of their settings and delighted his unsuspecting wife with gifts of unset precious stones, which she promptly had jewelers set to match her taste.

"Your horse market must be doing well, William," she remarked on more than one occasion.

"Yes, my darling," was his stock reply. "Very well indeed."

In his cheap little Boston flat he kept a complete kit of burglar tools and even a crucible in which he melted heavy silver and gold plate to be sold as bullion lest the original loot be recognized. Some plunder he hid for years until it could be marketed safely. Another of his tricks was to lay low right after making a large haul, meanwhile pushing his legitimate horse business until the scent cooled off.

But even so, William Barrett was not invincible. One dark May night in 1894 he went to rob the home of a well-to-do farmer at Weston, Massachusetts. The farmer had no dog or near neighbors, so the setup seemed to be perfect.

First, Barrett took off his shoes in a clump of bushes and put on a pair of sneakers. Then he deftly jimmied open a window. Since there was nothing he wanted in the kitchen, he tiptoed up to the bedroom. A creaky floor plank awakened the farmer.

In that instant Barrett's luck changed. He fled empty-handed, evading several men who quickly gave chase, and spent the night in a wooded section near the Cherry Brook railroad depot. He was building a camp fire to cook breakfast, which he carried in his pockets, when the farmer came by with a companion, later identified as his brother.

"Mornin', stranger," greeted the tiller of the soil. "We're lookin' for a feller who broke into my house at Weston last night. Seen any suspicious character around here lately?"

Barrett shook his head. "Nope, but I'll keep an eye open. What'd he look like?"

"He looked mighty like you, mister." Before the flabbergasted Barrett could answer, the man had collared him. "Mebbe you'd better come along with us."

"No, you don't!" said the housebreaker, shaking himself free. "I'm leavin' right now

and I don't want company."

Whipping out a Colt .38, he fired three shots. The farmer groaned, spun around crazily, and clutched Barrett to his reddening shirt as he fell.

His brother kicked and slugged the prostrate criminal, shouting, "You'll pay for this!" and held him tightly until help came.

After "Bassett" had been locked up in the county jail, police found the burglar kit and crucible in his Boston flat and afterward identified him as the socially prominent William Barrett of New York.

A few weeks later Jim Chaffey was nabbed for trying to sell part of a costly postage stamp collection which Barrett had lifted from a Boston banker nine years before. An odd coincidence had tripped Chaffey. The philatelic dealer to whom Chaffey offered the stamp album was the very same man who had originally mounted the collection and sold it to the banker; and of course, he quickly recognized it.

Having no alibi, the fence sought leniency by revealing the location of Barrett's entire cache of stolen articles which included some of great value. A sensation swept over the staid city of Boston when these treasures were displayed and were identified, one after another, by their owners. Back Bay families of social distinction claimed old heirlooms they had never expected to see again.

Meanwhile, the unfortunate farmer died of bullet wounds in a hospital. Barrett was placed on trial and was convicted of second-degree murder.

The bewildered Alice stuck by her husband but could not adjust herself to the shock of learning about his split personality.

"William," she asked during one of her periodic visits to the Massachusetts State Prison, "isn't there something I can do to get you out of this horrible place so we can go horseback riding in the park as we used to?"

But William never again saw a leaf-strewn bridge trail. The only exercise he got was on foot in the prison yard. ● ● ●

Three Fine Magazines

TRIPLE DETECTIVE ● 5 DETECTIVE NOVELS ● POPULAR DETECTIVE

*This is how it looks when muggers go to work on a victim—
was it what happened to the runner for Wong Fat's lottery?*



PINK

Lady

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

I'M BARNEY BRACHEN of the Seattle Skidroad Detail, and this is the first night I'll have worked in plain clothes instead of the uniform of the pavement-pounding harness cop.

As I walked, I naturally kicked around a problem that's made the department fighting mad. A couple of punks have been mugging the service men, just back from Korea. The boys have been paid, which means dough on

their person. They're sick of conflict, of being on the alert, and they've let down. It makes it easier for the muggers.

I'm particularly burned over the Randall case. His young wife—and baby he'd never seen—arrived to find him in the hospital with his face smashed. He'd resisted when a mugger had thrown an arm around his throat from behind, and the second mugger had worked him over.

In a few minutes I hit the Skidroad where tough luck has brought men from various levels of life to a pretty fine understanding.

They look out for each other, so when Bim Weaver said, "Les Callow has skidded again, and is on the make with pink lady," I knew Bim was asking me to give Les a hand.

Ye gods! The times I've tried to get Les on his feet and make him a taxpayer instead of a taxpayer's burden. "It's wasted effort," some say. I didn't believe it.

Near Les Callow's cheap Skidroad hotel I met Pete Sather. Pete is a furtive-eyed, underweight individual who seems chronically on the verge of taking off. Habit, I guess. He gets a nervous chill the minute he spots me because he knows that I know he's a runner for Wong Fat's lottery. The lottery is against the law, but Wong Fat is honest. If a man hits eight or nine of the numbers drawn, Wong Fat pays. Sometimes several thousand dollars.

If a runner gets enough men to mark tickets and pay anything from ten cents up for the ticket, he does okay. There are sure to be a few winners in a large number of tickets, and Pete collects his ten per cent.

But Pete doesn't know that I haven't collected enough evidence of the Wong Fat operation to make a pinch. He thinks I'm liable to grab him any minute. I laughed inwardly as he passed with a "Hi, Brachen."

I nodded at the Japanese who operates the hotel and climbed the stairs to Les Callow's room. When I knocked, he said thickly, "Come in, Pete. You back already?"

"It isn't Pete, it's Brachen," I answered as I walked into the room. It's a cheap room, full of smells, and the worst smell, to me, is that of canned heat. There's a narrow view of a piece of Seattle's waterfront—half of a wharf warehouse, a deep-sea steamer taking on cargo, and the bay's blue waters beyond. The moon's out, and the water looks silvery.

Les had canned heat in a sock and was twisting the sock to squeeze out the alcohol. "My old crutch," he said thickly. "What'd I do without good old Barney Brachen, my friend and crutch? Listen, Barney, if I draw an eight spot, know what I'm going to do?"

"Yeah," I said, "you're going to a hospital and take the cure." I'd heard that scores of times. "But you never hit more than a five spot."

LES is thirty-three, of good family, and well educated. Most social drinkers can handle the stuff, but not Les. Three years ago he downed as much as two-fifths of a gallon daily. Then he began living for it. There were days when he would get away with four-fifths. Every so often someone on the Skidroad Detail would call the wagon, and Les would be hauled off with a man-sized case of delirium tremens in good working order.

I hate to see a brilliant man waste his life, so I'd try to straighten him up. He'd do okay for a while, then he'd take a drink to prove he could take it or leave it alone. He proved he couldn't leave it alone. You think you can help such a guy. But the urge to lay off the stuff has to come from within.

"Sure, Les," I said now. "I can take that stuff away from you, but what the hell. Thought I'd check. Some of these days the men in the white coats will pack you off in a basket, and the boys will say, 'He *was* a swell guy.' And they'll be right."

He put the squeezings into a glass, added water, and downed it. Put his hair on your chest," he said, smacking his lips.

"And fuzz on your brain," I said. "I'll check again later tonight."

Shortly before midnight a Japanese called headquarters, and the call was relayed to me. A dead man had been found in the hotel light well. The informant hadn't broadcast the information, and no crowd had gathered.

When I got there, I found an open window, four floors up, and a torn curtain flapped in a lazy breeze. The bottom part of the curtain was clutched in the dead man's hand. I turned a flashlight in the man's face. It was Pete Sather. In death, as in life, he seemed furtive, ready to take off. Well, he has taken off, I thought.

Pretty soon a couple of uniformed men of the Skidroad Detail showed up, and I went to the room with the open window and the torn curtain. It was Les Callow's room.

"Les, was Pete here?" I asked.

"Good old Pete," he said drunkenly. "Here one minute, gone the next. Blooie—right out the window."

I looked at the floor. A rug had been pushed hard against the wall, and there were black streaks on the wood. It looked as if the marks had been made by a rubber heel that had dug into the wood, skidded, caught, then skidded again.

Going to the window, I cupped my hands and yelled, "Was Pete wearing rubber heels?"

After a moment an officer answered, "No."

Les Callow had gone to bed with his shoes on. I checked. He was wearing rubber heels. But when I pulled off a shoe and scraped it hard against the floor, there were no black marks.

"Les," I demanded, shaking him, "snap out of it! Who came with Pete?"

"Good old Pete," he said thickly. "He says, 'Les, you lucky bastard, here's three grand plus, less my ten per cent.' And I says, 'I'm off the stuff.' Or did I? Then it seemed like two guys came in, and I said, 'Boys, have a pink lady on me.' I closed my eyes. When I opened 'em again, the boys were gone—Pete was gone. Here today and gone tomorrow."

Les passed out cold. I telephoned the city hospital boys, asked them to pick up Les and straighten him out long enough to be questioned. Then I talked to the Jap manager. He had seen Pete come into the hotel and make the rounds upstairs. In fact, he had bought and marked a two-bit ticket. The manager was a busy man and was often absent from the small lobby. He hadn't seen Pete return. It would have been an easy matter for anyone to enter and leave the hotel without being observed.

The manager hadn't heard anything unusual until Pete's body landed in the light well. An hour later the coroner's boys reported that Pete was a mugging victim. The skin, veins, and tissues around the throat were bruised and torn. Except for unmarked lottery tickets, his pockets were empty.

But it was the fall, not the mugging that had killed Pete. Evidently he had broken away in a desperate attempt. In his confused

condition, or because of sheer momentum, he had gone through the open window clutched the bottom of the curtain.

EVEN so, it was murder. The muggers, realizing this, had quietly escaped. No doubt they believed that the police would pin the rap on Les Callow.

"How much dough do you suppose he had on him?" Chief of Detectives Stand, asked.

"I'll ask Wong Fat," I said.

"You'll get fat asking Fat," Strand said with a grim touch of humor. "We've trouble convicting him of running a lottery. You don't think for a minute he'll convict himself by admitting to you he paid lottery money to Pete?" His expression was that of a man who believed I should be told about the birds and bees and other facts of life.

"I've been on the Skidroad Detail quite a while, Chief," I answered. "I know some of the odd, self-imposed code in effect. Wong Fat and I will smile at each other. We will parry words, and my guess is that the smooth Oriental will manage to tell me what I want to know without convicting himself."

"Go ahead, Barney," Strand said. "This case is your baby. We don't want muggers to get a foothold in this city, not with service men coming through by the thousands. This is the first American city they've seen in many months. They like what they see. They want fun and they rate it. Any ideas?"

"Yes, Chief," I answered. "Let's give the muggers enough rope to hang themselves. Tell the newspaper boys that Pete, a Skidroad character, was found dead. Give details and suggest Les Callow is being held for murder."

"Okay," he said. "Send in the reporters."

Wong Fat, who isn't fat but is a well-built Chinese in his sixties, was expecting me. He admitted it with a wise smile. He was born in San Francisco, which makes him an American citizen, but has spent much of his life in China, where he learned more than a few tricks. His English was better than mine—if that's a compliment.

"The newspapers aren't out yet, but you've heard what happened to Pete, Wong?" I suggested.

He sat in a heavy, beautifully carved chair several hundred years old. The room was filled with priceless vases and examples of Oriental art. Just the blue rug on the floor would have kept the average American lamely in beef steaks, roasts, and bonded whisky for a long, long time. His slim, steady fingers removed a cigarette holder from his lips.

"Yes, I heard," he said. "Pete has been around quite a while."

"He had lottery tickets in his pockets," I said.

"You find strange articles in the pockets of little boys and—grown men," he said.

"Any suggestions?" I asked.

"A very wise person, English or American, has well said, 'Silence is golden'."

"A Chinese wise man probably said it a thousand years earlier," I said.

"Could be," he observed in colloquial American.

"Have you, by any chance, heard that Les Callow marked a ticket that paid off big?" I asked.

"A rumor," he said. "But you know how those things are."

I nodded. This man could save me a lot of leg work if I played my cards right. One of the reasons I'd been transferred to plain clothes is because I'm supposed to know the right angles in the Skidroad area. Wong Fat had me at arm's length and knew it.

"Muggers are at work," I said. "Service men, who might want to buy art work in your store, can't spend money the muggers have taken from them."

"If I know my service men," he answered, and I think I do, they've loaded themselves with Oriental art work in Japan at very low prices. They'll not come to my store. Strings of pearls, worth hundreds of dollars, were bought at fifty dollars or a little more. Come again, Barney."

"Good. You're against mugging and you're kidding me along," I answered. "If I can hang a lottery rap on you, I will, and no hard feelings. But right now, it's muggers. What does wild rumor claim Les Callow's ticket was worth?"

"Something over three thousand dollars," he answered. "But I wouldn't swear to it." There was a fine distinction between the

words *wouldn't* and *couldn't*. I didn't miss it.

"Thanks, Wong," I said. "My theory is this. Pete was paid. Naturally he was excited. He would make a beeline for Les Callow's room. The muggers, knowing he'd been paid, trailed him. How about a membership card to your social club? My word of honor, I'll not look for evidence that might remotely suggest you are guilty of even a minor law infraction."

"A lawyer could not have put it better, Barney," he said. He gave me a membership card to the Wong Fat Club.

"Thanks," I said.

"Good luck, Barney," he said. "Isn't it about time we got together and rounded up a hundred healthy men for blood bank donations?"

"Just as soon as I finish this job," I said.

THE morning and afternoon newspapers carried brief accounts about a "skidroad character" being found dead in the light well of a cheap hotel. Police had arrested Joe Doe Callow, a chronic alcoholic, on suspicion.

"Tonight," I thought, "the muggers will want to relax and spend a little of that dough."

I dropped up to the hospital. "He's in a padded cell," a male nurse reported.

Les Callow was hurling himself against the padded walls and rebounding to the floor. He had torn off his clothing, and there was stark fear in his eyes. "Slugs!" he screamed. "Slugs! Everywhere!" He was seeing the slimy, snail-like things you find under rocks and that come out at night, or after a rain, to feed on your choice garden plants. They were coming to him in giant size.

"The poor fool," I thought. "Wants to be a good citizen, but Pink Lady has him damned well licked. And I'm hoping he'll identify the muggers."

Later, when I arrived at Wong Fat Club, the Chinese doorman looked startled. He checked my card, then looked puzzled. The waiter gave me a good table, and I ordered a drink.

After a while Wong Fat came over to the table and said, "A couple of heavy spenders at the table near the wall."

I looked. Two well-dressed men in their late twenties were eating high up on the hog but were drinking little and were sober enough. In fact, they had shoved their glasses back, but they had tipped heavily in advance and were now taking on a pair of pheasants with all the side dishes.

Their suits, of imported wool, fell into the two-hundred dollar class—without extra trousers. From their talk, anyone at a nearby table would conclude they divided their time between Hollywood and San Francisco. One said it was cooler in Seattle, but a man felt fine. The scenery was beautiful. The other said it was too bad their vacation was ending in a couple of weeks. The first mentioned his boyhood in Los Angeles. It was before the smog," he said.

Smog is the combination of fog and smoke they're getting around L. A. since it has become an industrial city. I was just about to lose interest when the L. A. boy said, "I lived seven squares from Westlake Park."

That was the tip-off. In the West, it's *blocks* not *squares*. "A couple of lads from Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love," I thought, "but damned little love for their brothers."

The L.A. guy's name was Al Baxter. He was wearing a pair of new shoes, and the heels left black marks on floor. It was nothing conclusive, but coupled with the squares business, it looked like progress.

The other guy's name was Eddie Walters. Somehow they didn't look like men who'd be named Walters and Baxter, though you find misplaced names often enough. I'm developing what is called a "camera eye," though I've a long way to go before the job's finished. Tomorrow I'd go through the mugs, and if their faces were in the files, I'd be able to identify Walters and Baxter.

When they paid their check, I went over to their table and scraped some of the heel marks off the floor. I went down to Les Callow's room and got a sample of the heel markings left on that floor. I turned the samples over to Doc Pullen, who can get amazing results whether you give him poison, hunks of human flesh and hair, or bits of clothing.

NEXT MORNING I telephoned headquarters. The night had been quiet. A stick-up or two, the usual number of drunks in the bucket, but no mugging reports. No blue-in-the-face bodies picked up in an alley.

I called on Les Callow. They had him in a restraining sheet—a heavy canvas thing with sleeves stitched to it. You can't move your arms much, once they're in the sleeves. You're put flat on your back, the sides of the sheet are secured to the bed—and there you are, with a hole for your face.

He was calm for the moment and confused. Thirst was driving him crazy, and he said so. But he wasn't seeing giant-sized slugs. "The old crutch," he said, almost in a whisper. He was physically spent. Some men, in the sheet, fight it until exhausted, then fight it again after they're rested. Others don't. Les had fought it.

"You know, Barney," he said, "if I ever hit the Chinaman for real dough, I'm going to take the cure." Right there he stopped. I felt the same way I had that time on Kodiak Island when I was waiting for a Kodiak bear to come out of the brush. Hopeful, impatient, heart pounding with excitement, but outwardly calm enough. "Nuts!" he said and shook his head.

"What's eating you?"

"Too much pink lady," he muttered "Damn that woman. She'll be the death of me yet."

"Why'd you say nuts?"

"That's all it is—a drunken bum's dream that seems real at the time," he said.

"Let's have it," I said.

"Pete came," he said slowly. "I was getting ready to squeeze out some canned heat. I felt lucky. Hell, a man always feels lucky when he marks a lottery ticket. I marked it. It seems like you were in it somewhere."

"I've been in your life a lot. I want to make a citizen and taxpayer out of you. Les," I said.

"A man loses track of time when he's playing with the pink girl," he said. "But Pete came. Face lit up like a church. 'You hit it!' Pete says. 'Jeez, the room stinks.' He opens a window, then goes around to the foot of the bed—I think."

I nodded. That would put Pete's back to the door. "Pete says, 'Wake up, you drunken fool, you got better'n three grand.' Then, slugs came from under the rocks and got bigger'n a man. Two guys came in and choked Pete. It was all mixed up—men, Pete, and slugs. Sometimes if I shut my eyes and hang onto myself the slugs go away. I opened my eyes, and Pete was gone."

Substantially it was the same story, except for the slugs, that he had told me in his room. "Les," I said, "here it is, cold turkey. You caught an eight spot, and the pay-off netted you a little over three thousand. A pair of muggers followed Pete to your room." I spoke slowly and went into detail.

Unless he were able to separate the truth from what he thought had happened, including the slugs, Les's evidence wouldn't be worth a damn in court. A good criminal lawyer would scatter it all over the courtroom. "What do you want me to do?" he muttered.

"We'll talk about it some other time," I said.

"Three grand," he whispered. "Right in my hands, then it's gone."

"You've got to divorce the pink lady. No reconciliation and remarriage," I said, "or we can't put you on the stand against Pete's killers."

"Tell the doctor to come here."

The doctor came in ten minutes later. "I want to divorce pink lady, Doc," he said. "My head's clear. Got a hell of a craving. Feel like hell, but my head's clear."

Doc asked him a few questions and was convinced Les Callow's head was reasonably clear. "Doc, tapering off won't work. I've got to make a clean break. Do any damned thing necessary. I'll take it."

"Padded cell, restraining sheet, and the rest," Doc warned. "You've had it. If that's the way you want it—"

"That's the way I want it," Les said. "I've come down a long way. It's a longer, harder way back. Climbs are always harder. Come around and see what's left of me, Barney," he said to me. "Might need the crutch for a while."

He smiled, a sort of baring of teeth in a

too-old face, but it was a smile. "Pete was a bum. Lived hand to mouth. But not a bad guy," he said. "Not a bad guy."

There was room for argument on that point, but I nodded. He grew restless and confused, as if thinking the thing through had cost his nervous system too great a price.

"Better go, Brachen," the doctor said. "This isn't going to be nice."

"I know it isn't," I answered. "I've watched it. Weak guy. But—brave guy."

I REPORTED to Strand, and we sifted the evidence and added up the stuff that might convince a jury. It wasn't enough.

"They'll hang around a while longer," Strand said, "then figure their luck has run out and drift. Right now they think they're in the clear and that we, the stupid dicks, think Les Callow did the job. Any idea?"

"I'm not bad as a steam-line repair man," I said. "I might play live decoy, with Wong Fat's help—a fake pay-off and a mugging. I'm the mugee. Charge 'em with murderous assault. Offer to settle for a lesser charge if they'll plead guilty. That would hold them until we see how Callow turns out."

Wong Fat thought it would be fairly easy to get the two men down to his place at a specified time. So several afternoons later, I dressed in greasy overalls, jumpers, and an old hat, opened up a manhole over a steam-line tunnel, and disappeared. I fooled around in the steam long enough to get a convincing damp, sweaty look, then poked my head above ground and sucked in fresh air. People always stop and look.

Shortly before Walters and Baxter showed up at Fat Wong's I came up for air. As they arrived, a guy said, "Steamer, how does it feel to be rich. You caught a ten spot on the lottery."

"Quit your kidding," I said. "I've a weak heart and couldn't stand up under great wealth. Let's see, a ten spot would pay over five grand. They know where to find me." I laughed like a guy would who can go along with a gag and went below.

Maybe ten minutes later, a voice bellowed, "Steamer! Come up here!"

I came up. There was quite a crowd. A

runner handed me a snug roll of bills. "I deducted my ten per cent, steamer," he said. "It comes to a little over five thousand. You'd better call a cab with all that dough."

"Got a job to finish, or some nice people will be without heat," I said. I shoved the money into my jumper and went below again. Walters and Baxter had the damndest expressions on their faces. If they were the muggers, they were wondering how they could get at a man who was working under ground.

I moved down the tunnel fifty feet and checked the roll. It was a stack of stage money with a fifty-dollar bill on the top and another on the bottom.

There were only a few people around when I came out. I slung my big wrench over my shoulder and plodded along the sidewalk. It was getting late. For the benefit of those hanging around, I said, "Sorry boys. Too tired to buy the drinks tonight. Don't wait. The next tunnel takes me to the plant." Then I moved a manhole cover, disappeared, and shifted the cover into place.

I took my time. I opened my tool bag and put on a little gadget I'd invented. I came out a few blocks from the plant and plodded down an alley as if I could hardly drag my feet. A strange feeling of danger came over me. It was followed by one of disappointment as I neared the plant. My plan wasn't working.

Then it happened! Talk about precision on the baseball diamond or the football grid-iron! The muggers have their play down to a science. I didn't know they were near me until an arm went around my throat and my head was jerked back. The second mugger's hands were going through my pockets. Then as the mugger put on the pressure, he suddenly screamed.

DID you ever hear a man scream? A woman's scream is bad enough, but a man's is worse, maybe, because men don't scream so often.

Like the precision play that is thrown off balance and goes completely haywire, the muggers' attack blew up. I yanked my gun from the shoulder holster and covered the Number Two man who had found nothing

in my pockets. The Number One man was clutching the arm he had had around my neck.

I recognized Walters and Baxter, all right. They had shed their expensive clothing and were wearing cheap suits. But their shoes were new, and even in the vague light I could see heel marks on the pavement.

"I'm bleeding to death," Baxter said.

"You're bleeding plenty," I said, "but not to death. Get moving. After this, you'll think twice before you try strong-arming hard-working steam-line men. We're in all kinds of places, among all kinds of people, at all hours of the night. We can't take chances. We protect ourselves in the damndest ways. You must've heard about me hitting a ten spot in the lottery."

They didn't answer but walked down the alley to the nearest police box. It was no accident that a policeman was there. I had arranged that with Strand. A couple of plain-clothesmen had been lurking at both ends of the alley in case something went wrong and I was on the business end of a workman-like job of mugging.

The policeman went along with my role. "Trouble, steamer?" he asked.

"These guys tried to strong-arm me," I said. "I'll testify against them."

I went to the plant, changed into my business suit, and reported at headquarters. "Doc wants to know what in hell you did to Baxter's arm," Strand said. "It looks as if it had been worked over with an ice pick."

"I bought a wide, heavy leather dog collar studded with long, blunted spikes," I answered, "and sharpened the spikes. I padded my throat, put the collar around my neck, covered it with a wool scarf—and let nature take its course."

Strand grinned. "So far, Barney, things are going according to plan. We'll keep that pair in storage until Les Callow is in shape to testify, then we'll charge them with Pete's murder. I'm having their room searched. We'll photograph and fingerprint them and see what happens. My guess is they're a pair of second-raters from the East who figured they'd be first-raters on the Coast."

"A second-rater is a second-rater wherever he is," I answered. "I'm taking Wong Fat's

flash roll to him right away."

"He isn't supposed to operate a lottery," Strand said, smiling. "I wonder what he'll say?"

"He'll be equal to it," I answered.

I found him at his home. "Rather late," I said, "but I've had quite a night."

"There's a rumor you caught a ten spot," he said, smiling faintly. "I'm shocked. A policeman marking a lottery ticket!"

"I'll go along with the gag," I said. "It was a steamer, a man who works on the steam lines, who caught the ten spot." I gave him the flash roll. "Steamer has a conscience. Thinks gambling is evil. He wants to return this."

Wong Fat examined the roll. "Strange. A fifty-dollar bill top and bottom, stage money between. I hope you don't think I'm operating a lottery."

"Far be it from me," I said. "But the steamer doesn't want the money. It's tainted."

"Then it should be cleansed by putting it to a worthy cause," he said. "It so happens I am trustee of a Chinese charity group and—"

"That will cleanse it whiter'n snow," I said. "Thanks, Wong Fat. You've been a friend." We had a drink, and I went home and to bed. I hoped I'd never have to arrest him.

A WEEK later I checked on the situation. Walters and Baxter had broken their necks to plead guilty to a lesser charge and take six months in the county jail. A raid on their room had yielded nothing much in the way of evidence. Muggers don't need burglar tools.

The three thousand dollars in currency, hidden in a portable radio, must have bothered them. Wong Fat had paid off in notes issued by Seattle banks. Because of guilty consciences, they had hesitated to spend the money, though at the rate they were living, they would have had to dip into it soon. Between them, the police property man, had found less than five hundred dollars.

Doc Pullen's chemical tests proved that the rubber heel markings found in Les Callow's room were from Baxter's shoes. The only problem left was Les Callow. We might

prove a case with the heel markings, but there's nothing like a flesh and blood guy on the witness stand—if he can stand up under cross examination. Could Les Callow take it?

I took a bunch of pictures to Callow's room. He had been through hell. Loss of weight, sunken eyes, the scabs on elbow, cheek, and knee, and hip—where flesh had been rubbed raw by his struggles against the restraining sheet—proved it.

"Death can't be bad after what I've been through," he said.

I tossed him the pictures. "Anyone in here you recognize?" I asked, not telling him they were mostly East Coast criminals.

He went through them slowly, fairly pounced on Baxter's picture. "This man choked Pete," he said. A minute later, he picked out Walter's picture. "This guy was with him."

I brought him up to date on the case. "We'll charge them with murder," I said. "In the meantime, you'll be sentenced to ninety days on the farm the county maintains for alcoholics. You'll be up against a smart criminal lawyer when you testify. He'll tear your reputation to shreds. But you're the chief witness."

"I'll tackle it," he said. "What about the three grand I won?"

"We're working on that angle," I answered.

"I had a drunken bum's dream," he said thoughtfully. "A shot or two of pink lady, then the dream before the slugs. Cabin, stream, rearing ponds to raise trout for the market. With three grand—well, it'd be a start."

A month later Les was getting along fine. We charged Baxter and Walters with murder. Their astonishment was a confession of guilt in itself. An hour later they had sent for Steve Crammer, criminal lawyer. I wasn't surprised, and I knew Les was in for a rugged time.

A week before the trial, Les Callow dropped in on me. I was listening to the radio and enjoying a whisky and soda. He was clear-eyed and bronzed and had put on weight. We shook hands.

"Drink, Les?" I offered.

"No, Barney, thanks," he said.

"Oh, come on. To celebrate. Just a social drink," I urged. "To prove you can take it or leave it alone."

"Damn you for tempting me," he snarled. "Some guys, most guys can take a social drink, and that's that. But I can't. The hell with you. I thought you were my friend."

"I am and I feel low and mean, but I had to try you out," I said. I started to put the bottle away.

"Leave it there," he said. "I've got to get used to being around it when I'm with friends."

"Okay," I said. He was highly nervous, but resolute.

"Who is going to get the three grand?" he asked. "The police grabbed it, but won't Steve Crammer get it in the long run?"

"Not if we prove it was stolen property," I answered.

We talked over the evidence and his testimony, and he left, promising to see the district attorney the next day.

The trial day found Steve Crammer, as usual, in top form. He had a neat way of seeming to be on an adverse witness' side, then suddenly throwing him off balance and confusing him.

SELECTING the jury was a slow business, and Crammer, I noticed, excused those whose sons were serving in Korea. McNeil, the deputy district attorney, put Doc Pullen on the stand. Doc testified that the heel marks made at Wong Fat's and in Les Callow's room came from Baxter's heels.

"Lester Callow," McNeil called, "please take the stand."

Les was sworn in and quickly identified the defendants. He told his story briefly and incisively. Then Crammer, distinguished-looking and confident, began his cross-examination. Suddenly he thundered. "As a matter of fact, you are a pink lady addict."

"Was," Les answered.

"On the night in question you were stinking drunk on pink lady and incapable of identifying your own mother," he shouted, shaking a big, manicured finger under Les' nose.

"I had had a drink or two," Les said quiet-

ly. "But I was capable of understanding what Pete meant when he said I'd caught a ten spot. I saw Baxter strong-arm Pete and I saw Walters reach into his pockets. Pete broke loose and fell through the window. Later, I passed out entirely," he continued frankly, "and had the D.T.'s and was taken to the hospital. I haven't had a drink since."

Crammer failed to shake Les' testimony. McNeil then gave us a surprise, and behind it I could see Wong Fat's shrewd move, Wong Fat who believed in honest gambling but detested crime.

A slim American of Chinese descent was sworn in. He was Wong Fat's son, Quong. McNeil handed the witness the money found in the defendant's room.

"This money," Quong said, "was given by me to the deceased to be handed to Lester Callow, in payment for a debt. It is Lester Callow's money."

"And the nature of that debt?" Crammer barked. "A lottery pay-off?"

"Objection," McNeil said. "The nature of the debt is not at issue."

"Sustained," the judge said.

Crammer was never better. The jury hung on every word and gesture. Twice Les, stung beyond endurance, started to leave his seat, and I whispered, "Easy, Les."

Crammer finished his address, wiped his face, and whispered, "Ladies and gentlemen, you can't send these fine men to the gallows on the word of a Chinese lottery operator and a Skidroad bum, pickled in pink lady. You can't and face your—Maker."

The jury was out four hours. Someone with a reasonable doubt had to be won over.

Their faces were resolute, coming back.

The formalities at such times are hard on the nerves. Les almost stopped breathing, and his hand clutched my arm. "Stay with me, Crutch," he said.

The foreman licked his lips and said, "Guilty as charged."

Les closed his eyes. His fingers tightened on my arm. He could see the cabin, trout stream, and rearing ponds. He could see decency ahead.

"Thanks, Barney," he whispered. "Thanks for everything. From here on, I can go it alone."



It was a lovely day for Blair—until those two masked gunmen tried to take over the—

PAYROLL

By **STUART FRIEDMAN**

FRIDAY started good. Sunlight streamed into the apartment and the air sparkled. I didn't even mean my grumbling when I got up. It was just a point of integrity, a protest against the inhumanity of 5.30 A.M. When I went in the kitchen Sally gave me an over-

the-shoulder smile from the stove while her wide violet eyes calculated my mood.

"Coffee's nearly ready. Isn't it a nice day?"

I looked at her admiringly. She was wearing a little blue sunsuit and sandals. She had a pink ribbon in her taffy hair

I damned near kicked my gas pedal through the floorboards



and she had on a bright mouth as red as cherries and only slightly crooked.

"The nicest thing about this day—" I paused and she beamed—"is the fact that there's going to be an extra week in my pay envelope."

She looked suddenly like a two-year-old whose ice cream falls out of the cone. The look was real and hoked-up in a tasty combination. I relented and told her she was the nicest thing about any day and kissed the pretty slope where her neck curves to her shoulder. She hunched and made silly sounds and left part of her mouth on me. At breakfast we talked so long about the vacation we were starting on that afternoon that I was almost late for work.

The minute hand of the time clock was crouched for the 6:59-7:00 jump when I slotted my card, hammered the lever.

"Now I'm on company time," I told the timekeeper, "I'd better slow down." He was not amused.

Joining the gang at the foreman's bench, I pinned a medium-length tail of rag strips to Hank's overalls, dropped an assortment of select iron slugs in Joe's pocket. The gang went into the routine about how Sally would tone me down, how she'd be at the gate paydays after we'd been married six years, instead of six months, and all such stuff. A sane man finds life difficult among such characters.

When they broke up to head out through the plant on repair jobs, I got the electric platform truck and drove to the paymaster's office. En route, a couple of the commoners in the annealing room salaamed in honor of the fact that it was the truck which carried "Fort Knox," as we call the paymaster's cage.

Fort Knox stood outside the offices on the third floor of the main building. I jockeyed the truck's platform under the cage and in a few minutes I had the special fittings secured, locking it in place. I went into the office. Payroll was the only office department at work that early. Paymaster Kincaid, his secretary, and two men assistants were strangling in adding machine tape as they made a final check. Two company watchmen, armed, were there to see that the money got into the cage safely.

I SMOKED, wandered along the rows of empty desks, and looked out the windows while I waited. Yard men swarmed, trucking pig and scrap iron to load one of the furnaces. A sand truck chugged toward the core room; a string of boxcars screeched around the curve of a siding. It was then, about 7:15, that I saw the big white van the first time. It was backed up at the Local Shipping Department platform and it caught my eye because there wasn't any name at all painted on it.

"We're ready, Blair," Kincaid called.

Kincaid's men assistants carried the boxes of pay envelopes to the cage. The watchmen went along. Kincaid unlocked the cage, got inside. It took him a few minutes to pigeonhole the groups of envelopes by departments. Then he looked out at his secretary and said:

"Katie, will you bring my gun and the route envelope?"

She did what he asked without a word or a flicker of expression. She was a sulky wench, who wore her black hair in a tower and moved as if there were a charm-school book on top. Last year Katie had represented the company in the state beauty contest, and it hadn't worn off. She didn't walk on ordinary things like floors and ground, but sort of flowed along. When she flowed back with the holstered gun and sealed manila envelope, Kincaid thanked her, and his sour puss changed into a smile. Then he was Kincaid again.

He broke the envelope seal, handed me one of the two route maps from inside. The maps showed factory buildings and numbered departments. A twisting, arrow-studded line had been drawn in red ink, showing the route. It was different each week. It was planned by the insurance company, and nobody connected with the plant knew what it was going to be.

Kincaid locked himself in. That ended the job for the watchmen and they went back to the office with Kincaid's secretary and the two other men. I whined the outfit into motion, after noting that the first stop was going to be Local Shipping. That took us down the long, dim gangway, through acres of barrels and crates, to the southwest elevator.

The cage was in front of me, the top of its steel-lattice enclosure on a level with my shoulders as I stood on the driving platform. I could see Kincaid studying the route. He was protected by solid, bullet-proof steel up to his chest. If there was ever trouble, all he had to do was drop down and trip a lever, and a steel lid would fall shut, enclosing him and the seventy thousand bucks. That would automatically set off an alarm of amplified sirens and whistles. The seventy cents I usually had left on payday wasn't considered worth enclosing.

Kincaid took the .38 out of the holster while we waited for the freight elevator to take us down. He opened the chamber. Suddenly he twisted and stared back up at me. He was a middle-aged, wiry little guy with thin, faded red hair and freckles. But I had never seen the freckles till that minute. They showed up because all the blood had gone out of his face. His dull eyes were narrowed and gleamed as if a current had been turned on. Even his nose seemed to sharpen, he was so tense.

A stare like that smacks you. I held my breath and felt my heart suddenly speed up. Then Kincaid flipped the alarm switch under the pay wicket. There was a click. Nothing else. He tried it two or three times. It didn't work.

There was a little color in his face when he looked at me again, and his eyes were more thoughtful than sharp. When he spoke his voice was so low I had to lean toward him to hear. Usually his tone is thin and yappish, but it was almost bass this time.

"I thought it was you for a minute, Blair. But you'd have made your move by now. This gun's empty, and the alarm is gimmicked, as you could see. I think we'd better back up and turn and head for another elevator. I didn't like the looks of this route the second I laid eyes on it. Local Shipping is too far from any other department and it would be ideal to make a getaway from. We certainly shouldn't be going there first with the whole damned payroll!"

EVEN while he was talking I snapped alive and was backing in an arc. He braced himself as I braked. I put the

truck in forward and sped down the gangway toward the other side of the building. The outer wall of the building was on our right. On our left, empty steel barrels were stacked up almost to the pipes of the sprinkler system.

We were three-quarters of the way to the end of the gangway when I heard the elevator doors open behind us. Kincaid was riding backward, peering past me.

"Trouble!" he said.

I snapped a glance back and saw two men running toward us. They wore over-alls and had blue bandanna handkerchiefs over their faces. They carried pistols. They didn't yell, so they probably figured to overtake us and didn't want to make extra noise in case somebody else was up on that floor getting storage barrels or something.

I had to slow to take the turn into the gangway which led to two other elevators. After the turn, the stacked barrels shielded us from the gunmen.

"Better stop, Blair," Kincaid decided. "I could lock myself in, but you're unprotected."

We could hear their shoes pounding on the concrete halfway to the corner we'd just turned. In a matter of seconds they'd be at the turn. Kincaid sounded as if he really gave a damn if I got shot. He sounded human, and I damned near fainted with surprise. It sort of turned me idiotic, like a pup ready to knock itself out for a pat on the head.

Hell, I thought, I'll show a human guy that Dick Blair wouldn't let anybody down.

I turned the truck around.

"What're you doing," he demanded.

I aimed the front of the cage at an angle against the third stack of barrels from the corner and threw on the power. The stack of barrels in the third row began to move forward, sliding at a diagonal out into the gangway that the gunmen were running along.

As the cage front moved forward and came into contact with the second row of stacked barrels, it pushed them, too. It was like a high thick door sliding into place, shutting off the gangway.

I whined away from there, backing the truck as fast as we could move. I knew if the gunmen wanted to smack

into the barrels hard enough, they could move them, but they had as good a chance of toppling them on their heads.

They could climb over, but that took time, too. In the meantime, we had come to a cross aisle. I nosed the cage into it and hit for the center gangway, turned into it without slacking speed, then shut the power, calculating our momentum, and coasted into the next cross aisle.

We heard the barrels crash with a hellish racket. Then we heard running steps. We were out of sight, and the gunmen had no sound to guide them. Kincaid was rapidly taking the pay envelopes out of the pigeonholes and sacking them. He unlocked the cage, motioned me in with him. In case they found us, we'd just duck and sit tight and let them empty their guns at the cage if they didn't have any more sense.

We stood, barely breathing, listening. They ran for about a dozen steps, then slowed to a fast walk, and finally stopped. I knew they'd reached the cross aisle next to the one we were in. Then they were taking that aisle toward the central gangway. If they came along the central gangway, they couldn't miss seeing us. Kincaid and I tensed, and our glances met for a second. Very solemnly he winked.

The gunmen didn't turn into the central gangway toward the aisle we were in, but kept going to the other side of the building. Presently we heard them hurrying down the stairway.

WE GOT out of the cage, Kincaid locked it, and we hurried to the windows on the other side of the building. I opened the casement window and we peered at the outside stair exit. The two men came outside, moving fast. Their masks were off, but I didn't get a good look at them as they turned and moved away from us toward Local Shipping.

I shoved the window wider open, cupped my hands, and bellowed down at some of the yard men. A few of them lifted their heads, and one of them recognized me. His face split in a grin, and he called:

"Can't be as bad as all that, Dick. Don't jump. She'll f'give you, wait and see."

[Turn page]

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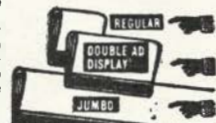
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That's what I had coming, with my clowning around all the time. I pointed frantically at the men who were now climbing into the cab of the white van with no name on it. Kincaid and I both tried to tell them to get the cops. Just then the yard crane opened its maw and let half a ton of iron cascade onto the pile. The white van, back doors open, tail gate flapping, roared away from the Local Shipping platform.

Kincaid took off for the office with me on his heels.

"Katie, phone the front gate. . . . Jack, use an outside line and call the police," he told an assistant.

"Switchboard's not open yet, Mr. Kincaid," Katie said.

"What happened, Mr.—"

Kincaid waved the question away. "C'mon, Katie. You used to operate a switchboard."

He was already streaking toward the office stairs. Katie got some mercury into her flowing motion as she went down to the switchboard. She plugged the connection, and Kincaid began to snap hellos into the phone before the watchman answered.

"While you're at it, get me Perry Zinkler at the Acme Indemnity. I want to talk to him about that route! Hello, watchman? . . . Has a white van truck already gone out? . . . You get its license? . . . Oh, hell, no, of course not!" He slammed the receiver down.

I was looking out the door windows of the main entrance. I could see the white truck, stopped in a line blocked by a slow freight.

"Mr. Kincaid, the truck's down at the railroad crossing right now. If I could get to my car out in the lot, I'd—"

"My car's right out front." He tossed me the keys. "The Buick coupe. If you could just keep that baby in sight! Don't try anything, just get the license."

"I'm on my way!"

The freight had cleared the crossing when I went out the gate, and the traffic line had broken up into beads and strung out. But it was no trick to keep the white van in sight. On Western, about a mile from the plant, I was in position right back of it. The tail gate was down, and I couldn't see the license. I swung out and started to pass.

The hair began to crawl on the back of my neck. I didn't know whether they'd recognize me or not. But I did know that a guy in overalls and driving a classy Roadmaster and staring back at them, trying to read the front license plate, wouldn't go unnoticed. It wouldn't put them at ease. I dropped back and hung on their tail, not quite ready to be a target.

A few blocks farther a traffic signal stopped us. Ahead, a door slammed. One of the men came back along the right side of the truck, perhaps to put up the tail gate. He'd get a good look at me. There was a car behind me and one in the left lane, trapping the Buick.

I couldn't get out with it, but I sure as hell could get out of it. I unlatched the door. Then I began to rev the motor and idle it. I tipped my head as if listening and tried to make like a garage mechanic on a tune-up run.

Then the lanky, horse-faced man with a busted nose and an ugly, twisted mouth came in sight at the rear of the truck. He looked at me, irritated. I was tensed, ready to duck out and put the Buick and as many other cars as possible between him and me. But he didn't know me. The irritation was because of the noise I was making with the motor.

HE DIDN'T shut the tail gate, though, but crossed the sidewalk and went into the drugstore next to a corner grocery. I saw him enter a phone booth and then the traffic light changed. The truck made a slow turn at the corner. I went on across the intersection and stopped fifty feet beyond the corner, figuring the truck would park and wait for the man phoning.

Peering back, I saw the truck stop on the side street. The driver got out and went to the back of the truck. He'd closed the rear doors and had his hands on the tail gate when the lanky, busted-nose guy tore out of the drugstore.

Thinking they'd be heading out fast, I geared in and watched for the chance to make a U-turn and get back on their tail. I'd only need to follow a block or so.

But instead of heading down the side street the truck began to back out on Western. Traffic was coming toward me

from the front, so I couldn't make my U-turn. Anyhow, the truck was going to be passing me and continue along Western. I thought I'd sit tight and pick up its license as it passed.

It came toward me in a grinding first-gear crawl, raising a helluva lot of sound. I started to get itchy, wishing it would speed up. But it wasn't till the truck had crawled even with the Buick's rear bumper that I caught on. It wasn't moving as if anyone were in a hurry. It was making noise enough to swallow the sound of a gunshot.

I twisted and looked up and back. The busted-nose, horse-faced guy was leaning out his side window and he was pointing a gun at me. I damned near kicked the gas pedal through the floorboards, and I thanked my stars I was in Kincaid's powerful job instead of my own car. The gun exploded, and I heard very clearly the clank and thump of the bullet when it hit the rear fender. I don't know if there were any more shots because I was gone from there, screeching around the turn into the next street. The truck didn't follow.

When I got back to the plant, the regular girl was taking over the switchboard from Katie.

"Where's Kincaid?"

Katie lifted her nose, a natural attitude for the queen, but this time it meant "Upstairs."

Stenos, clerks, and bookkeepers were gabbing in groups at the desks of some of the other departments by then. Kincaid was alone in Payroll, looking miserable.

"Any luck, Blair?" He sounded tired.

"No. They shot at me."

"What?" He came erect in his swivel chair. "I never should have sent you out like that. What happened?"

I told him, and finished with: "I can't figure if they shot because they recognized me or recognized your car."

"You don't mean they thought it was me?"

"Not that. But the guy that shot didn't seem to recognize me *before* he went in and phoned. I figure he might've gone in to phone somebody to find out if the cops were wise yet, or what. Whoever they phoned probably told them

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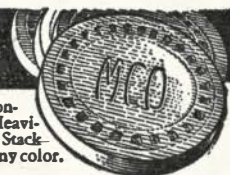
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your Buick was following them to get their license. When they saw the Buick, they knew I wouldn't still be hanging around if I'd already got it. So maybe the shooting was just to scare me off."

Kincaid nodded slowly. "There's no doubt that the gunman phoned the plant here. I know there was an inside contact. I talked to the insurance people and found out that the route we had was a fake. My gun had been unloaded and the alarm system disabled. We were led into a trap. The plan must've been to load the payroll cage in that closed van. Given time they'd have got it open. But I expect they'd have killed us, Blair." He paused, looking sad and bitter. "And to think it was probably one of my own people on the inside!"

One of Kincaid's assistants had pussy-footed up alongside me. He stood swallowing and bugging his eyes at Kincaid.

"Yes, Jack?" Kincaid demanded. "Speak up."

"Katie's crying," he blurted accusingly. "She thinks you suspect her just because she handled your gun."

"It's out of my hands. It wouldn't matter who I suspected. The police are coming."

JACK turned and scowled at me, his face turning red. "It's funny you didn't get that truck license."

"What's funny?" I said. "And how do you know if I got it or not?"

"You told Katie."

"I didn't tell her anything!"

"You did! And you let them get away so they wouldn't implicate you. And you accused Katie of getting a phone call from those robbers."

"That's another lie. Where is she?" I said, turning, looking through the office. I didn't see her. I looked back at Kincaid who was on his feet and frowning. I didn't know what the frown meant, but remembering his soft smile at Katie, I knew he'd rather believe her than me. I reached out and picked up Kincaid's handset. When the girl at the switchboard answered I said:

"This is Blair from Maintenance, Mary. You remember me coming in a few minutes ago?" She said sure. "Tell Mr. Kincaid just how much conversation I had with Katie."

I handed him the phone. While he listened, I said to Jack, "You tell your Katie that I did get that license number—which I'm giving to the cops. So we'll see how her lie sounds when she claims I told her I didn't get that license."

He sneered at me and hurried toward the other end of the office. Kincaid cradled the phone, watched Jack's retreating figure. "At least you're not lying," he said softly. "Mary says you barely spoke to Katie. You were at my desk one minute after you were at the switchboard. So you couldn't have talked to Katie later. What were you saying to Jack?"

"I told him I had got the license," I said. "I thought that would make him nervous. He scurried to tell Katie. I bet she makes a phone call and tips off her pals in the van to scam out of town."

He caught up his phone again. "Mary! This is Kincaid. Contact me at once if anybody from my department makes an outside call and make a record of the number called." He hung up and stood gripping the phone, ready to snatch it up. Not ten seconds passed before it rang. "Yes? . . . She is? What phone's she using? . . . Good. You listen in!" he said. "And take your time getting her number for her!"

He motioned me to follow, saying, "She's on a phone in Foreign Sales on the second floor."

That department was under a vice-president and was sectioned off to make it private. Katie was alone in there, standing with her back to the door, holding a handset close to her face. She heard us come in and spun guiltily, her eyes and mouth widening. Then she gave a fake laugh.

"I was trying to call my girl friend. But I guess she's already left for work." She hung up. "Have the police come?"

Kincaid ignored her, took up the phone. "Did you connect her, Mary? . . . No? Good." He hung up.

"You're stuck, baby," I said. "That's all the cops need. The phone number is as good as the truck license."

"Well, Katie," Kincaid said, looking away from her, "you can wait and let your two friends talk about you. Or you can talk first about them. That'd be

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INSIDE STUFF

(Continued from page 6)

without her consent. In this case, there wasn't any question of consent, for Evaleen had been living with Benny as his wife for a month. When the juvenile protective officer who was called in to investigate her after she'd been caught shoplifting asked her age, she'd claimed she was thirteen, figuring that would save her from a tougher sentence than if she'd said sixteen.

Her things were found in Benny's room. Benny admitted he'd been sleeping with her and was haled into court on the charge of rape. The prosecution wanted a ten-to-twenty-year sentence imposed on him.

Naturally, Benny howled. She had, he said, assured him she was seventeen. On the stand, Evaleen claimed she'd been lying and was really sixteen. A record in her home town made her fourteen; it had been in her mother's application for relief, when her father had left his family of four unprovided for.

In a disposition presented by the prosecutor the girl's mother swore under oath that Evaleen was only fourteen. Evaleen said she'd given her age as sixteen because she 'thought she was'!

Questionable Testimony

At this point in the trial the juvenile officer testified that Benny had admitted he knew the kid was under age and had agreed to lie about it if they got into trouble. Perhaps he wanted a conviction to bolster his record; perhaps he was telling the truth. My own opinion was that the guy needed a conviction. Maybe the society which paid his salary needed something as a basis for soliciting financial support.

That was about the way the case stood before it went to the jury. The judge, in his instruction, virtually ordered the jury to return a guilty verdict if they believed the girl was under sixteen.

"But we wouldn't," Mrs. K———told me. "We just couldn't find it in our hearts to send that poor youngster to the peniten-

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tiary, no matter if that girl *was* underage. In honesty, we couldn't acquit him, either. So we just stalled. The judge asked us what was holding up a verdict. We couldn't tell him.

"A couple of men on the jury wanted to vote Benny guilty and get out of that stinking old jury room and go home. But the other woman and I, with about four of the men, said no. We must have taken thirty or thirty-five ballots. Every one was dead-locked.

Was the Jury Right?

"Between ballots we argued about the injustice of a law like that and the things that are going on in our own high schools. Why, they'd be sentencing half a dozen of our teen-age boys every year if that law was enforced!

"So, even though the judge called us back for a reprimand and additional instructions, we hung that jury until half-past ten that night. Then they called us in, polled each of us individually, and realized no verdict could ever be reached. I thought the judge would have apoplexy. He bawled us out, told us we were bad citizens, unfaithful to our sworn duty, and ordered our names forever stricken from the jury rolls. But I don't care; they haven't sent Benny to the penitentiary—and somehow I don't think they will.

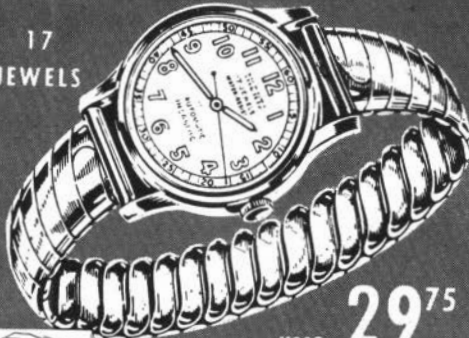
"He hadn't committed a crime unless you call adultery a crime and we wouldn't have jails big enough to hold all the people who break *that* law! The prosecutor knows he'd get a hung jury if he tried the case over again. I don't feel as if I'd been unfaithful to my duty as a human being. But some of my friends tell me I had no business trying to decide, that we should have voted him guilty and left it to the judge to use mercy when he sentenced Benny. What do you think?"

I said I'd ask the readers of **POPULAR DETECTIVE**; maybe they'd have a different opinion. But if I'd been in that jury room, when they counted the ballots there'd have been a 'Not Guilty' one in the handwriting of—

Frank Talker

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