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THRILLING DETECTIVE

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In This Issue

HOMICIDE SHAFT

A Nick Ransom Novelet

By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

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NIGHT WITHOUT END

A Mystery Novelet

By WYATT BLASSINGAME

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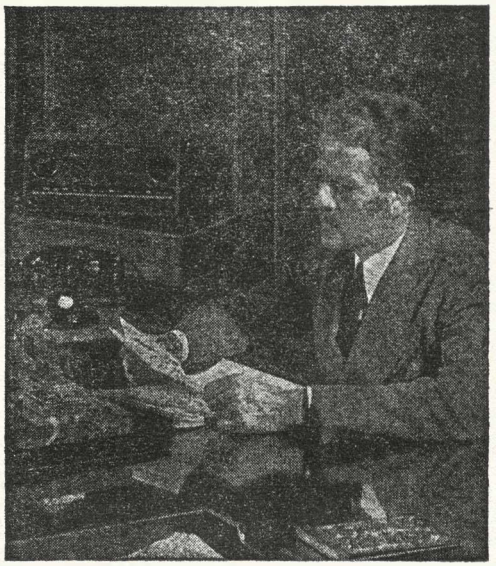

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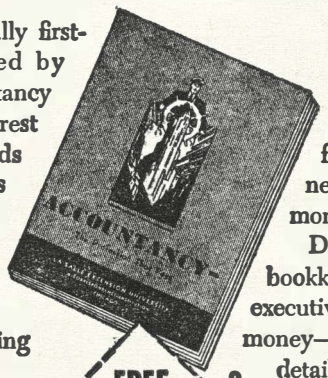

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THRILLING DETECTIVE

Vol. LXIII, No. 3 A THRILLING PUBLICATION APRIL, 1949

Featured Complete Novelet

NIGHT WITHOUT END

By WYATT BLASSINGAME

Shy, verse-writing Fred Nash became a private eye just for the gag, but found it was no fun when diamonds and death tangled on the strange trail of a lost necklace! 13

A Nick Ransom Novelet

Short Stories

Features

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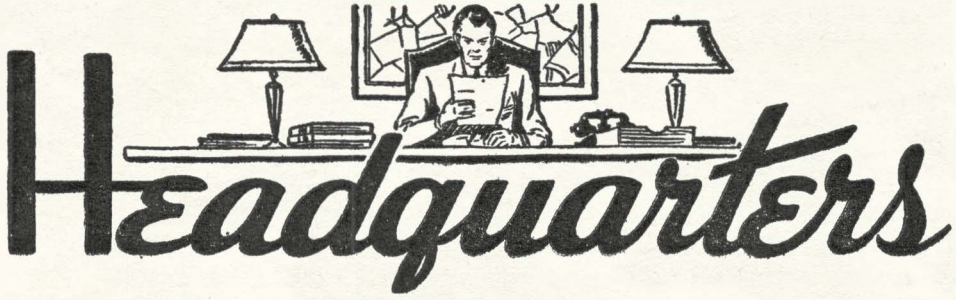

WELL, readers, we don't see how we could have better news for you than we have. Our two-fisted, wisecracking pal Nick Ransom is back again next issue in another grand novelet—PREVIEW OF MURDER, by Robert Leslie Bellem.

You'll be glad to know that the locale of the story is again Hollywood where Nick Ransom is so much at home. While the story doesn't concern the motion picture game as such, it has the movie industry as a motif.

Of course you all know that Nick used to be a stunt man in the movies. He takes a crack at it even now when important people need him. Fifteen years ago he did more of it—before he became a successful private eye. That was in the days of a FACE—the face of an Apollo. The face of Ronald Barclay, leading man.

It was said about Barclay that he would have to fight his way through mobs of women, swinging a baseball bat, in order to reach his car. He was not only the reason why daughter left home, but mother as well. But why should Nick Ransom think of Barclay in this day and age? Wasn't Ronald Barclay dead and in his grave? Hadn't Nick Ransom been deeply concerned by his demise and attended his funeral?

But let us not be too sure of that!

A Mysterious Call

For Nick Ransom answers a mysterious phone call, to meet a certain Joseph T. Fullerton at six o'clock that evening at the Chaple Arms hotel. He finds said hotel to be a ramshackle, ill-smelling "fleabag" of a rundown old house. The deaf old night-clerk tells Ransom that "nobody" sees Mr. Fullerton, not even the maid who makes up his room or the bellboy who serves his food. No one has *ever* seen Joseph Fullerton. He has never left his room in ten years.

Yes, you've guessed it. Fullerton is none other than this Adonislike leading man Ronald Barclay. Ransom doesn't see him either, for quite a while. He just hears his voice from behind a trick mirror, up there in that shabby, ill-kept room.

It all dates back to Ransom's stunting days. They were on the set at Paragon Pix and the situation was for Barclay to open a cigarette box during a certain scene. There would be a puff of white smoke and the harmless flare of flashpowder. Barclay was rehearsing the close-up, minus the flash. The studio didn't want to risk those handsome features in the long-shot. That is where Nick as stunt-man would step in. Dressed and made up like Barclay, he would open the box in which the fake "bomb" was planted.

The Bomb Was—A Bomb!

The bomb had been just that—a bomb—but in actuality, the plan didn't work at all, and it went off in advance! Naturally, the first person to blame in an affair like this would be the man responsible for making the bomb—the property man. They didn't have to go far, for "props" had been standing right there to see that this handiwork had the proper effect.

But what happened was scarcely the effect Paragon Pix had desired. There were two mangled bodies on the floor of the set. One was a lifeless corpse. The other had lost both legs and an arm—and there was *no face!*

(Continued on page 8)

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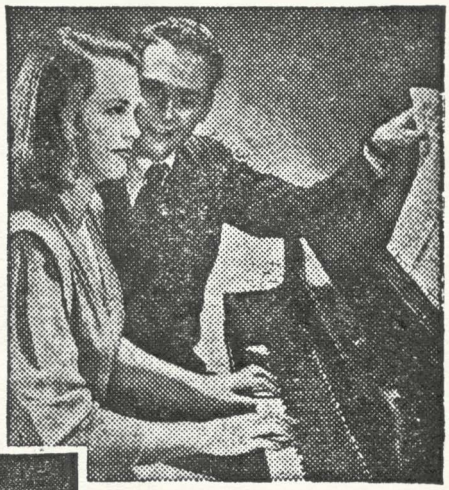

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*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by Professional models

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HEADQUARTERS

(Continued from page 6)

It was reported that the handsome Ronald Barclay had died in the accidental explosion. There was a spectacular Hollywood funeral. The poor, mutilated property man—true to his work and loyal to his post—had "dropped out of sight." His name was Joseph T. Fullerton.

Now Nick Ransom knows that it is the actor who lived and the stagehand who died. Strange twist of fate—he who was once so handsome now won't let anyone see him!

Barclay has lived all these years on Fullerton's accident insurance policy. Even the casualty company doesn't know! Amazing situation!

But what does this poor, legless, one-armed and faceless being want with him, Nick Ransom asks himself? It is then that the luckless actor confides in the detective, concerning the secret diary that was in the false bottom of the property man's trunk. The whole set-up—the scenario, the rehearsal, the use of Nick as a stunt man—it wasn't an accident at all. The whole thing was a deliberately-planned murder!

We've only given you the tiniest peek under the curtain. We've just set the stage for you! Now—*action! camera!*—in the next issue.

The Body in the Mine

Another grand novelet will be UNDER THE HANGING WALL by Louis L'Amour.

Following our usual policy of presenting stories set in odd, unusual and interesting places, here is one set in a desert mining town, known to us as Winrock. Our detective, Bruce Blake, has been hired by Lew Marshal, brother of Tom Marshal, whose body has been found in the mine.

Of course, it looks like an open-and-shut case, with the man who ostensibly committed the dastardly crime safely behind bars in the local jail. This would be a chap by the name of Campbell, a former partner in the old Dunhill mine.

Campbell always had faith in the mine, even when the vein of rich ore petered out. Gaining full control, Campbell sent for a mining expert to look things over. This expert was the deceased, Tom Marshal, who

(Continued on page 10)

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HEADQUARTERS

(Continued from page 8)

reported after two weeks of extensive study that the mine was worthless. So Campbell sold out for a mere pittance to an Eastern syndicate. Imagine the surprise of the entire town of Winrock, when it was learned that the syndicate was headed by Tom Marshal. Not only that; but the lost vein was then quickly uncovered, and the old Dunhill mine proved itself to be the bonanza Campbell always thought it was.

So when they found Tom Marshal's body in the mine—and the watchman swore he saw Campbell going into the shaft after the day shift had left—there was considerable wagging of heads. Hadn't Tom Marshal played their good friend and fine citizen a dirty trick? *If* Campbell had shot Tom Marshal in the mine he had cheated him out of—and they hadn't proved it yet—didn't that serve this chiseler right? And that wife of Tom's—what was she doing here in town? She looked and acted as if she belonged in a night club. In a small town like that, everybody knew she was running around with—

"Get Out of Town!"

All this heady gossip duly sinks in as far as our detective is concerned. He even approaches Soderman, the representative of the Law there in Winrock. He tells the big, tough lawman he is not satisfied that Campbell is the killer. As a matter of fact, he is thoroughly convinced that it was —

For an answer, the husky lawman grabs himself a handful of the detective's lapels.

"You tryin' to make a fool out of me?" the big man snarls. "You tryin' to come in here and show me up? I'm tellin' you—get out! Get out of town—fast!"

Of course you may well imagine that our detective *doesn't* go. He proves himself to be just as tough as the husky lawman. It's an uphill battle all the way, folks, one that'll keep you on the proverbial tenterhooks until the very last page!

A True Murder Case

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(Continued on page 96)

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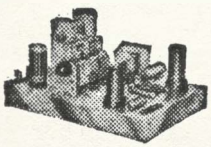

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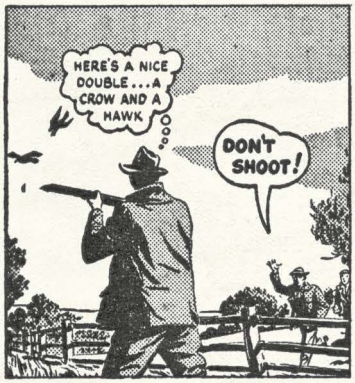

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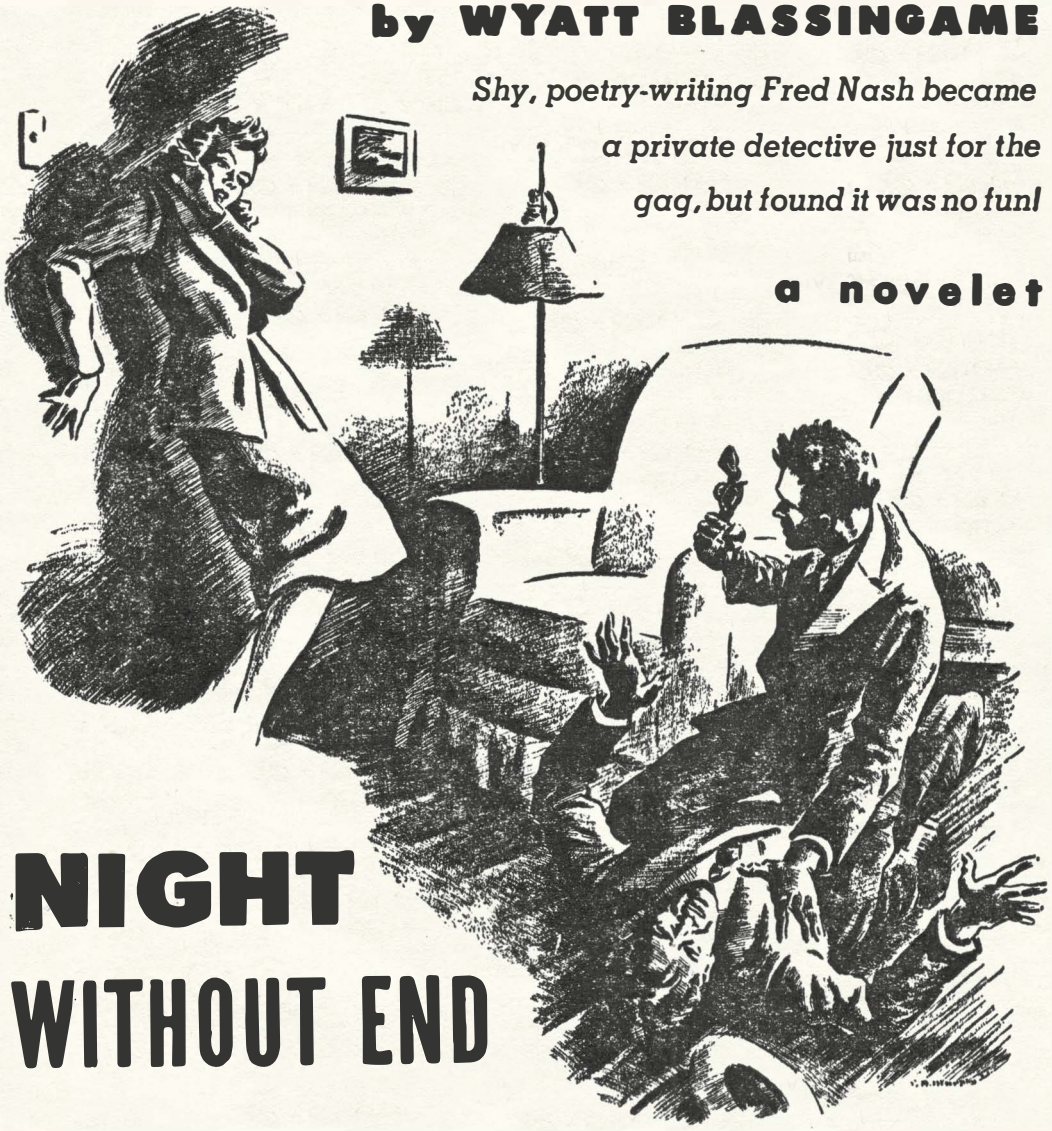
by WYATT BLASSINGAME

Shy, poetry-writing Fred Nash became a private detective just for the gag, but found it was no fun!

a novelet



NIGHT WITHOUT END

CHAPTER I

FRIEND IN NEED

A HUNDRED years ago the building had been a mansion; now it was a converted office building. The ancient courtyard was still there, with a fountain and flowers and wisteria bushes as thick as a fat woman's leg. Most of the tenants were young lawyers who found the inconvenience of the location more than overcome by the fact the owner never pushed for his rent.

Inside, there was no elevator. You walked up three flights of steps where the bannisters were made of solid mahogany. On the top story, at the end of the hallway, was the owner's office, but the lettering on the door said nothing about real estate. It read:

FRED NASH
PERSONAL INVESTIGATIONS

Nash was a biggish, blond young man with a pleasant, rather shy face. He sat

hunched over a typewriter and his forehead was wrinkled with thought, his eyes narrow. He wrote:

> A blackwinged bat crossed the newmade moon,
> Out of the silver, into the blue.
> And the black pines stirred with the first faint breeze
> That out of the purpling twilight blew.

"You can't rhyme 'blue' and 'blew,'" Fred Nash said half aloud. He took a pencil and marked out "blew" and wrote in "grew." He marked that out and wrote "flew." Then he marked that out and put "grew" back.

Finally he dropped the pencil, swung the chair around so that he looked out the window into the courtyard. The smell of wisteria and the tea olive came gently to him.

"'From the courtyard,'" he said aloud, "'perfumes like remembered music rise.'"

He stopped there, fortunately. He didn't think much of the line, and anyway he couldn't think of another line to go with it.

He looked at his watch. The time was three forty-two.

"Maybe I can make it to the track in time for the fifth race," he said to himself.

But he didn't move. He was no gambler, but he liked the horses because they were beautiful and he liked to see them run. Still, he didn't care enough about racing to hurry himself on a spring afternoon.

At the same time he was bored with sitting here.

THAT was the situation when a knock sounded at the door.

Fred Nash swung his chair half around. "Come in!" he shouted.

Huge Copeland was a handsome man and would have been more so if it were not for his chin. His chin was like a girl's, soft and round, and giving his whole face a slightly weak look.

"You busy?" he asked.

"Let's not be funny. Come in. How are you, Hugh?" Nash crossed the room, hand outstretched. "I was just thinking about going to the track, but couldn't get up energy. You want to drive out?"

"No." Copeland stood there, neat, conservative in a double-breasted blue suit. But there was something strained about him. "Margaret told me she saw you at the track the other day."

"Yes. First time I've seen here in—must be two years. How about a drink?" Nash was already at the portable bar. "I keep this to give my tenants whenever they pay their rent. Trouble is, they are always coming in for a drink and forgetting the rent." He dropped in ice from the electric tray. "Pull that chair over here and put your feet in the window. How are things going? This is the first time I've seen you in I don't know when."

"It was Margaret saying she'd run into you at the track that reminded me—" Hugh Copeland let the sentence drift off. He took about half his drink in one pull.

"Margaret said you were still with LeClerc and Bradford, and doing quite well."

"Yes. You haven't married?"

"The only girls stupid enough to marry me," Fred Nash said, grinning, "are too stupid for me to have anything to do with."

Hugh Copeland smiled faintly. "I think Margaret wanted to marry you at one time."

"She never told me anything about it," Nash said, coloring slightly. He added, "We were just kids then."

Hugh Copeland had lost interest. He stood up and made himself another drink. He gulped half of it, then swung around. His lips were tight against his teeth, but not so tight they did not tremble.

"When Margaret said she'd seen you it, it reminded me you had gone into business. That's why I came. I—I'm in trouble, Fred. I'm in bad trouble. It's my own fault, but—I need help, Fred."

"What are you talking about?"

Copeland jerked his thumb toward the lettered door. "You've opened a de-

tective agency, haven't you?"

"Detective agency?" Nash felt a curious tangle of emotions, like those of a small boy approaching the moment when he must make a public speech. "That 'investigations' was sort of gag," he said. "That's the result of being bored, and of reading detective stories and drinking liquor all at the same time. I was about half tight when the idea hit me, and before I knew it I had that sign on the door and a license. I even thought

Fred Nash

about getting a blonde secretary, but I never got that tight."

"You were in the Military Police during the war," Copeland said.

"Sure. Maybe that's what gave me the idea. But it was just a gag, Hugh. I've never had a customer."

"You've got one now."

"No—"

"I've got to have help," Hugh Copeland said. "And I—I can't trust just anybody. You've got to help me, Fred. You've got to!" They stood looking at one another. "It's about the firm," Hugh Copeland said. "I took—"

"Wait!" In Nash's voice was a touch of panic. And then he said more calmly, "Don't tell me what you've done. Not yet. Give me a moment."

He turned back to the window and stood there, looking down into the courtyard but not seeing it.

"Why did I put that sign on the door?" he thought. "Why get a license to practise as a private detective?"

The motive was obscure, buried in the past, and until now he had not faced it clearly.

Fred Nash's father had been an extremely wealthy man. The boy had been lonely, too sheltered, and not popular even with the few children he knew. He had had too many possessions, and the other children had resented them.

SO HE had grown up, shy, with a passionate desire for friendship and popularity—and at the same time a fear of these things because he had quickly learned that most of the persons who made overtures to him sought only to benefit themselves. It had been that way with girls as he got older. All of them were not gold diggers, of course. He had known that and had made a definite effort to be honest.

But he had never been sure. Take Margaret for instance. Had she really liked him, or was it only his wealth that had interested her?

He had met her when he was in law school where he had gone, not because he liked law, but because his father expected it of him. Fred had never wanted to practise, had never hung up a shingle. Then the war had come and his years in the Army had been the happiest years of his life. For the first time he'd had a feeling of useful accomplishment. Then the war was over and he was back in civilian life again, without aim or purpose.

Fred Nash would joke and say that nobody ever burst into a flood of sympathetic tears when he explained that he had all the money he could comfortably spend and was, therefore, at a loss what to do with himself. But to Nash it was a definite problem. He had no ambition to make more money, nor was he

content to simply fritter away his excellent, steady income.

He was troubled by a social consciousness. If he had been left all the Nash fortune he would have worked hard and happily at spending it intelligently, at seeing that donations went to the proper charitable and educational institutions. But his father had left him only enough for a comfortable income. So now his wealth was no problem, but what to do with himself was one. He wanted to make himself useful, and had found no definite way.

The sign on his door, as he said, was partially a joke. Yet it was more than that. He had hoped, without actually admitting it to himself, that he might help, in some small way, the attainment of justice—that he might help *somebody*. He had never admitted this, because he was almost ashamed of it, afraid someone would laugh at the idea as childish. Yet it was true.

Now there was someone here, wanting help, and he had to make up his mind.

He turned away from the window.

"I'm not a regular detective, Hugh," he said. "I don't know that I could help."

"I don't know that anybody can help," Copeland said. "But you've got to try. I can't trust anybody else."

Nash could feel a trembling in his muscles. But the little boy was on the stage now; he had to make his speech or run off the stage in disgrace.

"I'll help if I can," Fred Nash said.

CHAPTER II

WITCH GIRL

COPELAND took his third drink and came and sat down in the chair before the window. His smooth, girl-like chin trembled, and was still. He didn't look at Nash.

"Do you know Sylvia Hightower?" he asked.

"No."

"She's a witch. I don't think she's human."

"Did you say 'witch' with a 'w'?"

Copeland raised his face then. It was tortured and sallow.

"I'm not joking. Oh, I don't mean anything supernatural. Or maybe I do. Did you ever read 'Of Human Bondage'? You remember the girl in that, the things she could do to the hero?"

"I always thought it was the man's fault," Nash said. "He could have left her, if he'd had the strength."

"But he didn't have the strength," Copeland said. "And he couldn't leave her." He looked away again. "It's like that with me," he said slowly. "I know she's evil, and I can't leave her."

"And Margaret?" Nash asked.

"I don't think Margaret knows anything. I'm not sure. Anyway, she isn't the problem. Not now. It's the firm. I took a diamond necklace, and it's lost. And I've got to get it back."

"Wait!" Nash said. "Go slower. How do you take a diamond necklace from LeClerc and Bradford? And what did you do with it? Start at the first and try to make sense."

"Sylvia had a new dress. I had given it to her. And she said it ought to have a diamond necklace to go with it. I told her I could get one, just to loan it to her for a night. She swore she'd be careful with it. So I took it from the A. B. Huntington safe deposit box at the office."

"You what?"

"I know I shouldn't have done it. But she promised to return it the next morning. And the Huntingtons are out of town. They weren't supposed to come back for a month. Now I hear they'll be back next week, and I've got to have that necklace!"

"Now wait!" Nash said again. "How in the name of common sense do you steal something from a safe deposit box?"

"LeClerc and Bradford isn't a bank," Copeland said. "We manage estates, investments. We look after estates for wealthy persons, who—er—don't have the time or inclination."

"I know," Nash said. "The firm managed a good part of my father's property, and my grandfather's before him. And you still manage most of what was left to me. An ancient and respectable firm. And how do you steal from a safe deposit box there?"

"It wasn't stealing. At least—"

Copeland lay on his back and blood made a pool beneath his head

"All right. How did you get the necklace?"

"We aren't a bank and the boxes don't operate on exactly the same principle. Our clients often call and ask for things to be brought to them. Or sometimes sent to them outside the city. So it is necessary for us to keep a set of keys. Of course, no one is supposed to touch them except under prescribed conditions. I'm the only one, in fact, who can get at them. So—if the necklace is missing, they'll know I took it."

"Where is it now?"

"I went to get it from Sylvia this morning. And she—she said she'd lost it. She thought she'd left it in Kerry Corbett's automobile, but he said it wasn't there."

"You mean," Nash said, "you stole a necklace so that this woman, this Sylvia Hightower, could wear it, and a dress you gave her, on a date with some other man?"

"I can't often go to public places with her. I'm married, and there's the firm. They wouldn't want scandal." His face was more tortured than ever now. He wasn't even remembering the necklace. "She likes to go out. She likes other men. I can't keep her from it. If I tried to she—she wouldn't have any more to do with me."

"Great glory!" Nash looked at him with disbelieving eyes. But the truth of what Copeland said showed in the man's anguished face, and Nash shook his head and turned away to the bar. "All right," he said, mixing the drink, "what do you think happened to the necklace? Did the girl really lose it?"

"I don't know."

"And this Kerry Corbett? I've heard that name."

"He's got money. I don't know why he should take it. But he—he's crazy about Sylvia."

"He is?" Nash said. "You're sure this girl's name isn't Circe? What does she do—burn opium for incense? All right," he said quickly, "I won't joke. I'm just a little dazed that you should get yourself in a jam like this. And what is it you want me to do?"

"You've got to get the necklace for me," Hugh Copeland said. "I'll pay. I'll pay whatever I have to. But I've got to have it before Wednesday, when the Huntingtons come back. . . ."

SUNSET advertised with neon in the west. The pink and gold reflected high in the sky, filtered down again to this oak-lined street giving the air a kind of misty shimmer. Lights were coming on in some of the houses. Children loitered on the sidewalks, knowing it was time to go home, and not wanting to go.

Nash found the number. It was a square, two-story building cut into four apartments, each with its own entrance. It was a prosaic, middle-class building, the sort of place where young married couples live until the first child gets too large and noisy, or a second child is on the way.

Nash stopped his car and sat there and looked at it. It didn't look like the bower for a siren, for the sort of woman Hugh Copeland had talked about.

He pushed open the car door, went up the walk and rang the bell. A moment later the door opened and a girl stood looking out at him.

"I'd like to see Miss Sylvia Hightower," Nash said.

"I'm Miss Hightower."

Most of the light was behind her so that her face was in shadow. His first thought was that she didn't look as he had expected. She wasn't beautiful. Attractive, but not beautiful. Her hair was blonde without being gaudy—just a light brown really.

He saw that she was smiling at him.

"You look surprised," she said.

He felt himself blushing and it angered him. He had always been too easy to blush.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "My name is Fred Nash. I'm a friend of Hugh Copeland's."

"Come in, Mr. Nash."

The living room was small, furnished with taste, but not extravagance. The lights were shaded but bright enough for a person to read in comfort. Nash noticed these things at the same time he saw the man on the sofa.

The man stood up. Physically, he and Fred Nash were enough alike to be twins—the same height, the same spread of shoulders, narrowing waist,

long legs. But here the resemblance ended. Where Nash always seemed a little shy, awkward even, this man moved with feline grace and assuredness. Nash was blond, fair-skinned. This man's hair lay in black, smooth waves across his head. His face was sharply cut and handsome, his eyes dark and arrogant.

"Well, hello Fred," he said, smiling.

"You know one another?" the girl said.

"I've met Mr. Lassell," Nash said. "I've dropped quite a few dollars on his roulette and crap tables."

"Not enough," Frank Lassell said. He looked at the girl. "The trouble with Fred is that he has so much money already he has no desire to make any more."

"Yes?" She turned and looked frankly and openly at Nash, her eyebrows slightly arched. "I never heard of such a person."

"That's it." Lassell said. "Fred Nash is the only wealthy private detective in the state."

Nash had often been kidded about the sign on his office door, as he told himself that Lassell was only kidding now. There was no way that he could know about Copeland and the fact that he, Fred Nash, was actually working at this moment.

But the girl was saying, "Private detective? Are you really a private detective, Mr. Nash?"

"I got tight once and put a sign on the door. It was a gag."

Lassell stood up. 'He probably wants to quiz you on some robbery and murder case, Sylvia. So I'll leave you in his clutches."

Then he was gone and Nash and the girl were alone. She sat directly opposite him, relaxed, leaning back in her chair, her eyes cool and steady upon his face. And he looked back at her without speaking, trying to untangle his own thoughts and emotions, be sure of himself before he went ahead.

She was not actually beautiful, he thought again. And yet there was a quality of something beyond beauty. Her eyes were light blue and set level in her face. Her lower lip was full, puffed out and down from the upper lip. It had a moist look and he thought instantly that she would be good to kiss. And when he thought this he knew that every man who saw her would think the same thing, think it immediately on seeing her.

HER quality of appeal was not a breath-taking beauty, but intense femininity. She was a woman born for men and for trouble, he thought. Not wanton. There was nothing of that in her face. Some day, married to the right man, she might make the perfect wife. But until then she could no more avoid men than they could avoid her. She would never be without men, though she knew they stole or even murdered because of her.

"I don't look as you expected me to, do I?" she asked.

"No," he said.

His gaze slipped down from her face. She was wearing a street dress of some gray-blue material. It was modest enough both in price and design, but it did not hide the fact that her figure was good.

"How did Hugh say I looked?"

"He didn't say. Somehow, I got the impression you were older than you are." He thought she was about twenty-five, not more.

"Hugh asked you to get his necklace, didn't he?" she said, quite calmly.

"Yes."

"I wish I could give it to you. But I told Hugh the truth. I lost it."

"Where did you wear it?"

"I remember having it on at the Blue Moon. You know where that is?"

"It's one of Frank Lassell's places."

"Yes. I had it when we first got there, but we danced and gambled a bit, and it could have been lost there. I didn't notice it was missing until I got home and started to undress. Then I thought it must be in Kerry Corbett's car, but when I called him he looked and said it wasn't."

"Where did you go after you left the Blue Moon?"

"We rode around for a while, then came home."

"That's all the help you can give me?"

"Yes. I called Frank Lassell and he said he would ask all his employees. But

tonight he told me none of them had found it."

Maybe she was lying, Nash thought. Maybe she wasn't. He felt an inclination to believe her, and for some reason that half angered him.

"I'm willing to pay for the necklace," he said. "Without any questions."

Her eyes were quite steady on his. "I don't have it. I wish you'd believe me."

"I believe you. Sure."

"It doesn't help to be insulting."

His temper had a raw edge that he couldn't understand, or control.

"All right," he said. "You don't have the necklace, and maybe you didn't even know Hugh was married. Maybe you didn't know he was spending more money on you than a man in his position could afford to spend."

"Yes. I knew he was married."

"His wife's name is Margaret," Fred Nash said. "She never had much money. She worked her way through college, worked after she got out. A tall, pretty girl. Not so lush as you, of course. But she left other women's husbands alone."

"Are you in love with her?"

He made a sound meant for laughter. "I've seen her once—and that by accident—in the last several years. But I don't like for her to be hurt by—"

"I never meant to hurt Mrs. Copeland."

He stood up. 'That's fine. That helps a lot. Good night." But with his hand on the door he swung around. "Does either Lassell or Mr. Corbett know where you got the necklace?"

"No."

"Well, let's leave Hugh out of it then. Just pass the word to your friends that I want it. And I'll pay for it, without questions."

He pushed open the door and went down the steps into gathering darkness. Behind him the girl said:

"Good night, Mr. Nash."

CHAPTER III

PLAYING DETECTIVE

KERRY CORBETT was not at home. He had taken a plane for New York about noon, a servant told Nash. No, he didn't know exactly when Mr. Corbett would return, but probably within two or three days. No, Mr. Corbett had left no New York address. Was there any message Mr. Nash would care to leave?

It was personal, Nash said; of no importance.

"I didn't know Kerry was always dashing off to New York," he added, as an apparent afterthought. "What's he got up there?"

"It's his first trip in more than a year, sir. And quite sudden. I don't know the cause of it."

"Well, thanks. I'll see him when he gets back."

From the first corner drug store he phoned the Blue Moon, got Frank Lassell on the line.

"This is Fred Nash, Frank. I'm playing detective. You know the necklace that Miss Hightower lost? Well, I'm trying to find it."

"Having any luck?" Lassell asked.

"I'm just starting. Miss Hightower thinks she lost it at your place. So I'd like you to pass the word that I'm willing to pay a reward for it—and no questions asked."

"How much of a reward?"

Copeland had told Nash he didn't know the exact value of the necklace, estimating it at twenty thousand, or more.

"I'll go as high as any fence would," Nash said, "and I don't mean that as a pun. Besides, I'll be safer to deal with."

He could hear Lassell's easy laughter. "I don't think it was lost here, Fred. But I'll see that your message gets around."

"Thanks."

It was five minutes after nine when he went up the walk to Hugh Copeland's home. The house loomed large and rather impressive, a larger place than you would think a young man get-

ting started in business could afford. But Margaret would like a large house, Nash thought. She had always been ambitious, hard-working.

It was Margaret who answered his ring.

"Why, Fred! Come in. It's good to see you."

"Thanks. I was passing, and thought I'd stop and speak to Hugh a few minutes, if he's in."

"He's out right now. But he'll be back soon, I'm sure. Come in and wait."

She made him a drink and they chatted, the small talk that people use while they are waiting for something else to happen. No, she hadn't been to the track since that day she met Fred.

"Actually it was quite a fling for me to go that day," she said. "I can't afford it, but—" Her voice trailed off.

She sat holding her glass with nervous fingers, a tall, slender woman, dark-haired, her high cheek bones making faint angles across her face. With the shadows under her eyes it gave her face an almost hungry look.

Then her gaze lifted, dark and intense, to Nash's face.

"Fred, what's happened to Hugh? What's he done? Is he in trouble, Fred?"

Nash swallowed. He had never been good at lying. "He's in no trouble that I know of."

"He was asking the other day if you hadn't gone into business as a private detective. And now you come here, for the first time since we were married." He tried to interrupt, but her voice plunged on. "I know about the girl, Fred. At least, I know there is *somebody!* I've seen bills for jewelry and dresses that never came to me." Her voice had a kind of viciousness now. "Things he could never afford to buy me!"

"I—I don't know anything about it."

"Then why are you here?"

"I was planning on taking a trip, going to Mexico, and thought I might leave some business with LeClerc and Bradford. That's all."

She put down her glass and crossed the room to stand over him. And he stood up then, so they were close together. He could smell the perfume she

Sylvia watched with interest as Fred Nash met Corbett

was wearing.

"Don't lie to me, Fred," she said. "You're no good at it." She put her hands on his arms. "Don't you think I have a right to know, Fred?"

He had no chance to answer. There was the sound of steps on the front porch, the door opened and shut. Margaret moved away from him and picked up her glass. Hugh Copeland came in.

"Hello, darling," she said. "Here's an old friend come to call."

A FEW minutes later she left them, and when she was gone, the door safely closed behind her, Nash told Copeland what he had done since seeing him that afternoon.

"But there is a good chance," Nash said, "that the necklace was lost accidentally, just as Miss Hightower claims. And anybody in the city may have found it. Or nobody."

Sweat made tiny circles under Copeland's eyes. "I don't care who found it. I've got to get it back."

"I've advertised in all the papers, under my name," Nash said. "That's in case it was found accidentally, not stolen. And I've tried to pass the word that I would pay." He hesitated. "How high are you willing to go, Hugh?"

"As high as I have to. I've got to have it!"

Nash didn't want to ask the next question. He didn't like to poke his nose in other persons' business, which was a fine way for a detective to feel he thought, and yet he had to know.

"You have that kind of money, Hugh?"

Copeland's face was haggard. "I'll try to raise it. I thought, maybe, you might help me."

"Sure," Nash said. He finished his drink and stood up. "Maybe we'll hear something tomorrow."

All day, that next day, he sat in his office, waiting for the phone to ring. And it didn't ring.

He thought of Hugh Copeland as he had been in college—likable, good company on a party, a little weak, smart enough, but not above cheating on exams for which he hadn't prepared. And there was Margaret.

Nash wondered if he himself had been really in love with her. There was the childish suspicion that he wasn't really liked for himself, that her affection might be for his wealth rather than for him. And Hugh Copeland had always been in love with her.

Now evidently Sylvia Hightower had got into Hugh's blood like the need for dope. Nash thought of the old superstition that an evil spirit could move into a man's soul and take possession of it. That was the word from the Salem witch-burning days—"Possessed."

Nash thought of the girl as he had seen her last night, her hands folded and motionless in her lap, her blonde hair loose, looking almost uncombed about her face. Not beautiful, and yet—

He swung around to the typewriter and began to write:

> Beauty is not the binding-iron,
> Man will not follow beauty.
> Light loveliness is not the ring in
> the nose of a man's soul
> By which this woman leads him
> Helpless beyond desire for help.
> It is her womanness—

"It is," Fred Nash said aloud, "punk." He ripped the paper out of the typewriter and threw it in the trash basket. " 'The ring in the nose of a man's soul,' " he said. "I better go strengthen myself with dinner, if I can eat after that."

So it was after dinner and he was at his apartment, reading, when the call came. Over the phone the voice was muffled and indistinct.

"Fred? Is that you, Fred?"

"Yes."

"You've got to come out right away! Hugh's in terrible trouble!"

He could scarcely understand the words. "Who is this?"

"Margaret. You've got to help me!"

"I didn't recognize your voice. Where are you? What's wrong?"

"We're at the summer cottage, at the lake. You know where it is?"

"Yes."

"Hugh's in trouble. There's somebody who—" Her voice stopped.

"Margaret! What's wrong, Margaret?"

There was no answer. Just the humming of the wire, and quiet.

"Margaret!" he said again.

Her scream was not loud but thin and terrible, muted, as though in the moments of silence she had moved away from the phone. Then her cry broke, jagged as glass. And in the same instant there was the sound of the shot.

Nash knew it was a shot, although it was muffled. It shook at the phone, faded into silence, and the silence dragged into deadly seconds. Then came the sound of the steps. Slow, unhurried, they sounded louder, more clearly as the person moved closer to the phone.

There was the click of the phone being replaced on its hook, and all sound ended.

FRED NASH moved with that fast, non-thinking precision of which some men are capable in time of emergency. The gun was in a dresser drawer in his bedroom. It was a Luger which he had brought back from Europe and had never fired, not being a man who cared much for guns. He slipped it under his belt, inside his shirt. He caught up a coat and went out, fast, running down two flights of steps without waiting for the elevator.

As he ran out the front door he looked at his watch. It was thirty-one minutes after eight, and not more than thirty seconds since he had heard the sound of the shot over the phone.

He drove fast, but not too fast, not wanting any trouble with cops. If Margaret had wanted the police she would have phoned them instead of him, Nash thought. Then he was outside the city and the highway stretched like a strip of adhesive tape before him, unrolling into the glow of his lights.

Fifteen miles of this and he braked, turned left on an unpaved road that twisted and wound off through the trees. His headlights sliced the trees and threw sharp, leaping shadows. On his left was the lake. Under the moonless sky it seemed as dreamless sleep.

He passed one cottage which was dark, apparently unopened yet for the summer. A hundred yards more and he was at Hugh Copeland's.

Lights burned in the front room. Nash drove past, pulled over to the side, and parked. He could hear the lake lapping at the beach, rhythmical as the ticking of a watch. A wind stirred in the oak trees. That was all.

He left his car. Another car was parked under the shelter beside the house and he had to pass it to reach the steps. He went up these, pushed open the screen door, and went across the porch. The door into the front room was open and light flowed out over him. He moved to one side, into shadow, and stood looking into the empty room.

"Margaret!" he called. And after a moment, "Hugh! Anybody home?"

There was no answer and he realized that he hadn't expected one. His mouth was dry. He could feel the Luger pushing into his side, uncomfortable, and he put his hand to it, touching it through his shirt. Then he stepped out of the shadow and through the lighted doorway and into the living room.

It was like any one of a thousand summer cottages. The furniture was wicker, comfortable but not expensive. It was coated with dust now. Evidently the place had not been opened and cleaned yet for summer occupancy.

The telephone was on a table in the rear hallway. Nash stared at it as if it should be able to give him some message. He could imagine Margaret standing there, clutching the phone, talking to him in that agonized, almost unintelligible whisper.

Which way had she been looking? What had she seen?

CHAPTER IV

THIS IS MURDER

IN FRONT of Fred Nash was the living room. He could see across it to the front door, the light making a streak across the porch. On his right was a blank wall. On his left was another door into darkness. He turned his head and saw that behind him was a third door, closed now, which must lead outside.

He chose the door on his left. He groped inside, found a light switch and turned it on. This was the kitchen. There was a half empty bottle of whisky on the table, a half dozen dirty glasses.

All but one looked as though they had been dirty a long time. This one was a third full, and the outside of the glass was misted with water. Nash touched it with his finger. It was cold. The ice had melted, but the glass was still cold.

In the stillness the sound of the knocking that suddenly came seemed as loud as gunfire. Nash whirled, crouching in that instinctive way that a man has of trying to make himself small in time of danger. Then he realized what the sound had been and he straightened, took a long breath, and stepped into the shadowed hallway. From here he could see the porch and the screen door beyond. A man stood there, barely visible against the night.

The man knocked again. It wasn't really a loud knock, almost soft and cautious.

Nash went down the hallway, across the living room, across the porch.

"Hello," he said.

The man was small, with a dark, bony face. In this light that was all Nash could tell.

"Is Mr. Copeland here?" the man asked. His voice was small and thin.

"I don't know. I just came and haven't seen anybody. But that's his car in the garage, isn't it?"

The little man didn't turn his head, so he must have noticed the car already. Nash realized that his own car, pulled to the side of the road, was out of sight.

"It's his," the man said, "but he ain't here?"

"Doesn't seem to be. Come in, if you want."

"No." He backed down the steps. "No. I'll come back later."

Nash pushed open the door and followed. "Who shall I tell him was here?"

"It's all right," the man said. He was getting into his car now. "It ain't important."

"He'll want to know your name." The little man had already started his engine, but Nash was leaning against the car, one arm resting on the window.

"Jones," the little man said. "Sam Jones."

He drove off, fast, the tail-light making a white glow over the license plate, showing the number 52-437. Nash took out the notebook in which he usually wrote ideas for poems, and wrote down the license number.

He went back into the house, through the living room into the bedroom on the right. He groped around inside the door, but could find no light switch. Light from the living room made a streak across one end of this room, leaving the rest in gloom.

Nash flicked a cigarette lighter into flame and, holding this face-high, he stepped away from the door. The little blaze flickered and jumped. Nash saw the pale sheen of an overhead light, a chain hanging down from it. He stepped forward to catch the chain.

His foot hit something, yielding but heavy. He staggered. Then his left foot shot out from under him as though he had stepped on a roller skate and he fell face down. There was an instant of half blind panic in which he felt clothing, cooling flesh, the features of a man's face. Blood was slimy between his fingers.

Somehow he was on his feet. Somehow he had found the overhead light and clicked it on. The naked glare of it was almost blinding, and instinctively he raised a hand toward his eyes. He saw the blood on his hand and stared at it as though his own hand were something he had never seen before. Then his gaze went beyond his spread fingers and he was looking at Hugh Copeland.

Copeland lay on his back. His eyes were open. Blood had run out of his mouth and across his chin and throat. It made a pool on the floor beneath his head.

He had been shot twice, once high in the chest, once through the stomach. . . .

THE sheriff, a dark, burly man with John Lewis eyebrows, was named Beauchamp.

"Let's get this straight," he said. "Mrs. Copeland phoned you at exactly eight-thirty."

"Within one or two minutes. It was eight-thirty-one when I left my apartment."

"I reckon that times it better than the coroner can do. Now, Mrs. Copeland said her husband was in trouble, and for you to come out here?"

"Yes."

"If he was in trouble, why'd she call you? Why not the cops?"

It was a question Nash didn't want to answer. Hugh Copeland had come to him for help, and Copeland was dead now, murdered. The murderer had to be found, and any information which would help the police find him, the police should have. Yet he didn't want to drag a dead man's name through the mud more than was necessary.

And there was Margaret—if she were still alive. That was the thought that kept hounding him. Where was she? What had happened to her? She must have seen the murder. Would the murderer let her go free after that? But if she were alive, he wanted to protect her as much as possible. That was his job now that Hugh was beyond help.

"I was a friend," Nash said. "I've known both of them for years."

"Then maybe you know what kind of trouble her husband was in."

"She didn't say."

"And you didn't find the gun?"

"No."

Beauchamp lifted his heavy shoulders. "All right. We'll find Mrs. Copeland eventually, though I got an idea she's going to be dead when we do. And we'll find this little guy who told you his name was Jones. At least, if that's his license number you got we'll find him. And maybe—"

He stopped, hearing the sound of a car outside. There were steps, the door opened and a deputy came in.

"We found her, Sheriff," he said.

"Mrs. Copeland?"

"Yeah."

"Where?" Nash said.

The word seemed thick in his throat. He stood up slowly. As he did the front door opened again and Margaret Copeland came in.

She stopped, just inside the room. Her face was so pale it seemed almost gaunt, and her eyes were dark and sunken. Her eyeballs moved slowly, in little jerks, as she gazed around the room. Her gaze went to the bedroom door, shuddered away, and came finally to Fred Nash.

"Fred," she said. "What—"

He went to her. She held out both hands and he took them.

"Where—is he?"

"You're all right now," Nash said. "Sit down."

Beauchamp had her by an elbow and together they helped her to a chair.

"There's something screwy, Sheriff," the deputy said.

"The whole business is screwy," the sheriff said. He pushed a thumb through his thick eyebrows. "I know you're upset now, Mrs. Copeland, but try to help us for a few minutes. Tell us what you saw when you were phoning Mr. Nash."

She looked at the sheriff as though she realized she should understand his words, yet couldn't.

Her gaze shifted to the deputy, then back to Fred Nash.

"What does he mean, Fred?"

"When you phoned me at eight-thirty," Fred said. "What happened? Did you see—"

"Eight-thirty? She put her hand to her forehead. "I didn't phone you, Fred. I haven't telephoned you in five years."

Nash felt the breath go out of him as though he had been struck in the chest. He could only stare at her. The sheriff was staring at her.

"I told you, Sheriff," the deputy said. "I found Mrs. Copeland playing cards with the folks who live next door to her in the city. She said she hadn't telephoned anybody and hadn't been out here since last summer. She didn't know anything about her husband being shot."

"We were to go over to the Steve Raymonds' at eight o'clock," Margaret said. Her voice was hollow. "About eight-twenty, or eight twenty-five, when Hugh still hadn't come home, I walked over alone. I thought he'd be over, so on—"

THE sheriff stepped back. He carefully smoothed down both eyebrows with his thumb, then bristled them wildly with a second push.

"Look here," he said to Nash. "I thought you said you were a friend of Mrs. Copeland's. I thought you recognized her voice on the phone."

"It was muffled. I thought it was because she was afraid, whispering." He was trying to remember everything that had been said, the tone of voice. "I had to ask who it was. But after she—after whoever it was—gave Margaret's name, it didn't occur to me to doubt it."

"At least you're certain it was a woman?"

"Well—not any more. It was a whisper. It could have been—"

The sheriff's face was getting red. "Are you sure there was a phone call? You're sure you hadn't been taking dope?"

"I—"

"Mr. Nash is trying to protect my husband," Margaret Copeland said. "He knows Hugh had been running around with some woman, buying her clothes and jewelry. Maybe he had been stealing from the bank to do it. I don't know where he got the money, because we didn't have it at home." Her eyes were like flame in her white face. "Are you trying to protect her, Fred? If she killed him, why don't you tell the police?"

The strength went out of her. She put her face in her hands and began to weep, her body shaking with terrible dry sobs. Nash was sorry for her. He wanted to put his arm around her and try to comfort her, and he knew there was nothing he could do or say.

"So he was playing around," the sheriff said. "Who's the woman, Mr. Nash?"

He didn't have to tell them, Nash thought. He had no way of knowing that Sylvia Hightower had killed Copeland. Suddenly he could remember her as clearly as if he were looking at her—the hair so light-brown it was blonde, the curving mouth, the hands motionless in her lap as though she were waiting for the right moment to reach out and touch him.

He felt a sudden, reasonless desire to protect her, and then he remembered that she had known Hugh Copeland was married. She had known what she was doing. And the police could find out who she was, whether or not he told them.

"Her name is Sylvia Hightower," he said, and gave the address.

CHAPTER V

NEW RIVAL?

LATER, Fred Nash drove Margaret home. The headlights sliced at the blackness of the trees, the lake lay quiet and empty to their right. Neither of them spoke until they reached the highway.

"I shouldn't have told the police about that woman, should I, Fred?" Margaret said then.

"They would have learned anyway."

"I shouldn't have told them. But I hate her, Fred. Without knowing her, I hate her."

Tires made a soft whining on the pavement. The lights of the city were a haze in the sky.

"What is she like, Fred? Is she very beautiful?"

"No. Not beautiful."

"What did she give Hugh then? What was it that made him like—like a dope fiend in need of his drug?"

"I've only seen her once."

"I want to see her, Fred."

He glanced quickly toward her. She was sitting back in the corner of the seat, her hair dark about her face. Her hands, small and white, were clinching and unclinching. They were never still, he thought; like white butterflies always in motion. He could remember the touch of them from years ago.

"Will you take me to see her, Fred?"

"It would do no good. What good could it do?"

"I just want to see her."

He didn't answer, and they drove on in silence into the city. . . .

It was three fifteen the next afternoon when Sylvia Hightower came into Nash's office. Her dress was blue and white and as modest as the average dress a girl would wear shopping or to work. Yet something about the woman herself gave it an air of reckless daring. It clung no more tightly than did the average dress, yet the male eye followed the curves with a kind of breathless expectancy.

Nash held a chair for her. He sat opposite her and was aware of nervousness in himself. He waited for her to speak

—and she sat there, quietly, motionless, watching him.

"Will you have a drink?" he finally said.

"Thank you."

He got up and went to the bar. She did not turn to look at him. From where she sat she could see out the window and into the courtyard below.

When he gave her the drink she said, "The police were at my place all morning." She smiled faintly, almost apologetically. "I don't blame you for telling them about me. You were Hugh's friend. But I didn't kill Hugh, Mr. Nash."

"I never claimed that you did."

"I didn't phone you either. The police kept asking about that."

"They asked where you were last night at eight-thirty?"

"Yes. I was in my apartment, with Frank Lassell. They called Frank in, too, and asked if he'd heard me phone you. Of course he hadn't."

"Is that what you came to tell me?"

"No. The police asked me about the presents Hugh had given me." Her eyes were clear as a child's. "They didn't ask about the necklace. And Hugh hadn't given that to me. It was only a loan. So I didn't tell them. Don't they know about it?"

Perhaps he should have told them, Nash thought. But he hadn't. Hugh Copeland had asked him to find that necklace, wanting to return it to its real owner. Copeland was dead now, and there was no need to make him out a thief it it could be helped.

"The night I wore that necklace," the girl said, "Kerry Corbett and I went to his lake cottage after leaving the Blue Moon. It might have been lost there."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I asked Kerry to look. He said he had, but he may have been lying. And since then he's disappeared. If you'll drive me out there I'll show you where it might have been lost."

They drove through the late afternoon. Sylvia put down her window, the wind whipped her hair, and she made no attempt to control it. Any young girl riding in a car with the wind blowing her hair has an intensified look of freshness and beauty, Nash thought. Yet most of them try to control their hair, to hold it in the smooth, too perfect waves of the hairdresser. This girl sat with her head back, her face turned now and then into the wind as if it were sheer physical pleasure to breathe.

SHE did not talk much, and yet he was intensely aware of her. He knew what she had done to Hugh Copeland. And Hugh was dead now, and perhaps this girl had killed him. He did not forget that, yet at the same time he was aware of her, of the almost tangible physical appeal of her face and body.

And because of this his other senses seemed sharpened also. He felt more keenly the rush of the wind past his face, he saw the wind catch dust in the gutter and spin it along in a tiny tornado, the sight seeming beautiful beyond reason, he was aware of the odors from the walled courtyards they passed, the tea olive and wisteria, the new-rain smell of azaleas—and with these the other odors of the city, the dust and dirt and decay.

He remembered that it had been this way years ago when he first had known Margaret and was half in love with her. Being near her sharpened all his senses. Perhaps it was always that way, he thought, when you were falling in love with a new girl.

Only he wasn't falling in love with Sylvia Hightower, he told himself. You didn't fall in love with a girl who might have murdered your friend. You didn't love a girl who lived as Sylvia Hightower lived. But if not love, what did you call it? What had Hugh Copeland called it? "I know she's evil," Copeland had said, "but I can't leave her."

He saw that she was looking at him.

"You'll never forgive me, will you?" she said.

"Forgive you?"

"Because Hugh was married."

He did not answer. They were going through City Park now and boys were playing baseball in the fields. He could hear them shouting to one another, the words caught up by the wind, snatched away again.

"It's no defense, really," she said. "But I never asked him to visit me."

"You didn't deny him."

"No."

"You took the presents he gave you, without asking whether or not he could afford them."

"I like pretty things, Mr. Nash. I never asked for gifts, but I accepted them."

"How much did he give you?"

"The police looked at the things today. They must have cost twenty to thirty thousand dollars, the sheriff said. I didn't realize it was that much. You don't have to believe me, but I never really thought about the value."

"Not even the necklace?" Nash said. "Not even a diamond necklace?"

"I knew it must be expensive, if I had thought. Not the diamonds so much, but the way they were strung, and the clasp. I never saw a necklace like it."

It was the same road Nash had driven over the night before. When he left the highway the road wound through trees, and the lake was a coffee-colored shimmer on their left.

They went past the cottage where Hugh Copeland had been killed, past another a quarter mile away. At the third cottage she said:

"This is it. Pull over here."

In front of them was a sand beach, then the lake where the colors of sunset were beginning to run now like dye dropped into the water. Off to the right a sailboat was visible, going away.

"Kerry and I parked here," the girl said. "Just about this spot."

They got out and went over the ground carefully, inch by inch. Nash didn't expect to find the necklace, and yet he wanted to find it. Strangely, it seemed more important now than ever before that he find it, that he learn it had not been stolen but only lost.

But there was no trace of it.

"It could be in the cottage," the girl said. "If we could get in."

"I thought the cottage was a more likely place to have lost it."

She looked at him. "Are you really such a Puritan, Mr. Nash? Or is it just because you're angry?"

"I'm not angry. Why should I be?"

"Because I went to the cottage with Kerry and had a drink doesn't mean there was anything else."

"I'm only interested in the necklace," he said. "Not your morals." And he went away from her, up the slope of the lawn, toward the house.

IT WAS a much larger and more imposing place than most of the summer cottages. There was a curving doorway, a garage attached to the house. The door of the garage was closed now and the cottage apparently deserted, the windows shut.

Fred Nash went up the front steps and tried the door. He expected it to be locked. Besides, he was unreasonably angry and he twisted the knob, pushed with the force of a man uses in testing a locked door.

The door jerked out of his hand. He stood there on the threshold, staring into the face of a man who looked back at him with an expression half anger, half fear.

Sylvia Hightower came up the steps behind Nash.

"Hello, Kerry," she said. "I had no idea you were here."

"Is that why you bring some other man to my place?"

"Don't be silly. We were looking for that necklace I lost. This is Mr. Fred Nash. Mr. Nash, Mr. Corbett."

"Hello," Nash said.

He had never met Corbett before, but realized now that he had seen him on several occasions. He was a slender blond man with the face of a spoiled child. When he was young his parents had given him too much money and too little affection. He was convinced that money should have the power to buy anything and when he had found something that money could not buy he was afraid of it at the same time that he wanted it with a starved hunger.

You could envy him his money, or feel sorry for him because of what money had done to him. But the average human being would find it impossible to like him.

He shook Nash's hand, knowing his name and feeling a kinship because they both were wealthy, being suspicious of him and hating him instantly because he was with Sylvia.

"I dropped by to see you the other night," Nash said. "Your man told me you'd gone to New York."

"Yes."

"Mr. A. B. Huntington is in New York now, isn't he?" Nash said, quite casually.

Shadows flickered in Corbett's eyes. "I think so. Why?"

"I just wondered."

"You didn't find the necklace, did you, Kerry?" Sylvia said. "It might be in the kitchen."

"It's not."

"I'll look."

CHAPTER VI

THE NECKLACE

SYLVIA went past Kerry Corbett and he turned instantly and went after her, leaving Nash alone in the living room. He made a quick inspection of it, flipping back the pillows on the chairs, the sofas, expecting to find nothing.

In the bedroom, the bed was a huge thing, built low on the floor, piled with pillows. The window shades were drawn and the room deep in gloom. Nash flipped on the light and began to search.

"I say! What're you doing?"

He turned to see Corbett staring at him from the door, with Sylvia at his arm.

"I was looking for the necklace," Nash said.

"Mr. Nash was quite sure the bedroom would be the place to look," Sylvia said.

Corbett whirled on her. "Why?" His face was pale, his mouth twitching. "He wouldn't think that unless he had reason. What have you been doing?" He caught her by the arm. "You—"

She stepped away from him, her face cold. "Don't talk to me like that, Kerry."

The man kept looking at her, breathing hard. And, watching him, Nash knew this girl was one thing Corbett's money had been unable to buy. Probably he had spent a fortune in the effort, and frustration and hunger were eating at him. Hugh Copeland had said, "He's crazy about Sylvia." Maybe there was more truth in the colloquial use of that word than Copeland had realized. Certainly Corbett would hate any man he believed Sylvia had loved.

"Why?" Corbett asked her again.

"Mr. Nash doesn't like girls who go with married men," she said. "Besides, his wife."

"Widow," Nash said. He watched Corbett's gaze swing wildly toward him. "You've been away," he said. "You may not know. Hugh Copeland was murdered last night, about a half a mile from here."

He could not read Kerry Corbett's face except to see the man was under some terrible emotional strain. It was hot here in the house with the windows down. Sweat stood on all their faces.

"Murdered?" Corbett said at last. "Why?"

"I think it was because of the necklace," the girl said. "Was that the reason, Mr. Nash?"

"I don't know—yet," Nash said. . . .

Sheriff Beauchamp had had a deputy investigating Fred Nash, and the re-

[*Turn page*]

ports brought back did not make sense to the sheriff. Beauchamp was quite sure that no man could have more money than he wanted. He was even more positive that no man would hang out a shingle and seek work unless he hoped to make money from it. Also any man who wrote poetry, professional or amateur, was, in the sheriff's opinion, definitely suspect. The deputy had brought him a sample of Nash's verse which began:

> The March wind is a king's jester,
> A fool gone mad with spring,
> Who pinches the king's daughter
> And limericks will sing.

At this point the sheriff had muttered something about the justification of starving in attics and had quit reading.

But he knew a good bit about the Nash fortune, and he was a great respecter of wealth. He also had a respect for votes, and he knew, far better than most, the close association between these two. So, atlhough Fred Nash rode high on his personal list of suspects for the murder of Hugh Copeland, the sheriff was polite and cooperative when Nash called on him.

"The license number you gave us," the sheriff said, "belongs to a man named Meisner. He's a jeweler with a second-class shop on Decatur Street. But we haven't been able to locate him. His shop was closed all day yesterday, and still is this morning. We opened up the place this morning and looked through it, but there's nobody there."

"How about his home?"

"He had a room in the back of his jewelry store and it seems like he stayed there sometimes. Probably had another place, too, but we don't know where."

"Did he handle stolen jewels through his shop?"

"Not that we know of."

TRYING to add it all together Nash felt futile and inadequate. It seemed to him that he should have done a great deal more, to recover the necklace, to protect Hugh while he was still alive, to help Margaret now. And he wasn't even sure which way to turn. LeClerc and Bradford, Inc., was checking on Copeland's accounts there, but so far had found nothing, the sheriff told him.

"This Frank Lassell who was with Miss Hightower when Hugh was killed —is he in any new rackets?" he asked.

With his thumb the sheriff smoothed his eyebrows, then bristled them again.

"He's in all the rackets he can get in. What new ones you talking about?"

"You said this Meisner was a jeweler."

The sheriff stared at Nash, his eyebrows jutting out like a windblown thistle.

"You mean Copeland may have been buying some more jewelry for this blonde babe he went with? Maybe he was getting her something big, and hot, and maybe it got too big, or too hot!"

Later, as Nash was about to leave, his hand on the door, the sheriff said:

"Did you ever check to see if Mrs. Copeland was at her neighbors' house when you got that telephone call?"

Nash held on to the doorknob. "No," he said. He had the feeling of coming face to face with something he had long tried to avoid. "Should I?"

"The next woman who shoots her husband because he's playing around won't be the first one. Besides, Copeland was carrying twenty thousand dollars insurance."

"That's no more than most men in his position."

"I reckon not," the sheriff said. "Anyway she did go over to her neighbors' house at eight-thirty that night. I've checked. So she couldn't have been at the lake."

"Margaret couldn't have killed her husband anyway," Nash said. "I've known her for years."

"So I hear," the sheriff said. "I hear you two used to be pretty thick."

"That was a long time ago. I haven't seen her recently."

"You were at the race track with her on the fifteenth."

"That was an accident. And the first time I'd met her in a year or more. Two years, I expect."

The sheriff smoothed his brows. "That's what I understand. I was just showing you, Mr. Nash, that in this law business you got to look at all the angles. . . . Well, drop back any time."

Nash closed the door behind him. His

mouth felt dry. He went slowly down the hall to a water cooler and let the water spurt cold against his lips.

"The sheriff believes I killed Hugh," he thought. "He thinks I did it."

He stood there feeling the shadow of suspicion, the shadow of the electric chair cold and damp upon him. He remembered once during the war when he had been told he was to join the combat infantry the next morning and move up with the attack on Naha. The feeling had been a great deal like this—a coldness in the chest, a tightening of the throat muscles, and the need to make some kind of joke to break the tension.

"Maybe I ought to go make a pass at Margaret," he muttered. "If I'm going to take the blame I ought to have some of the fun."

It was a poor joke, but it served its purpose. He shrugged and walked out into the warm spring sunshine.

He got back to his office at three-twenty-five. On his desk were two letters and a small package, evidently left by the postman on his last visit. The letters contained poems of his, returned by publishers. The package contained a diamond necklace with an elaborate, wrought-gold clasp and small gold figures between the strung diamonds.

But there was nothing to show who had returned it. . . .

At five minutes of four his phone rang and a voice said, "Fred, this is Margaret. Can you come over here?"

"Of course. When?"

There was a pause. "In an hour or two? You can have dinner with me."

IT WAS a quarter of six when she opened the door for him. Her black hair lay smooth and close about her head. Her face was pale, without make-up except for the crimson lips. She wore a white spring dress and she was aware of Nash looking at it.

"I'm not in mourning, Fred," she said. "How could I be, under the circumstances?"

"You loved him."

"I did once. But he'd changed. I didn't love him when he died."

Her eyes lifted and met his. Her lips parted, framing words that she didn't speak, and he knew, or thought, that she had been about to say, "Perhaps I never loved him, really. I married him because I had given up hoping to marry you." But she did not put it into words. Her eyes lowered and she led the way into the living room and did not look directly at him again until she was handing him a drink.

"Over the phone you sounded as though something had happened," he said.

"Yes." She shifted her glass from hand to hand. Her slim, white fingers were never quite still. "I had a telephone call from someone with a high, thin voice. At first I thought it was a girl, but it must have been a man. He said his name was Meisner. Do you know him?"

"I think he's the man I saw at the lake cottage the night Hugh was killed. The police have been trying to find him."

"He told me to come and see him at ten tonight. He said he'd done some work with Hugh and that it was very important I see him, that it could mean a lot of money for me, if I didn't tell the police."

"Did you tell them?"

Her dark eyes met his. "I called you. You don't know what it is to want money, Fred. But—" she paused—"Hugh left me his insurance, and his debts. If there is any money that I can have, honestly. . . . But I'll do what you say."

He said it would be best for her to call the sheriff, but he said it without emphasis. He finished his drink.

"All right," he said, "I'll go for you. I'll talk to him."

"He wanted me, Fred. So I'll have to go. We'll go together."

CHAPTER VII

DEAD MEN'S SCHEME

THE section was one of old homes turned into tenements. The streets were dirty. What had been lawns were semi-garbage dumps now. But the oaks still grew, massive and dark against the darkness.

Nash drove slowly. Marga-

ret leaned from the car window, trying to see numbers.

"This must be the house," she said at last.

There were tin cans and trash in the yard. A distant street light that filtered through the trees made a can gleam like a cat's eye for an instant. The wind shook gently in the oaks.

The front door of the house stood open and beyond it a small bulb burned in a vast hallway. A quarter way down the hall a spiral staircase rose into darkness. There were the ancient odors of dirt and decay.

"The apartment number was One F," Margaret said. Her voice was little more than a whisper.

They went down the hallway, past the stairs. The gloom thickened and merged around them. Overhead a door slammed open. A woman's voice shouted drunkenly. Her voice cut off. The door slammed again.

"A nice cozy place," Nash said.

Margaret was a step behind him, her fingers on his arm.

"The next door," she whispered.

He stood between Margaret and the door, but enough to one side so that anyone looking out of the door could see her. Because it would be Margaret that Meisner would expect to see when he first looked out. Anything else might frighten him into flight.

Nash knocked. For a moment he thought he heard sounds inside, as though someone was coming to the door. But the door did not open and he couldn't be sure.

He knocked again. Still there was no answer.

"Call him," he whispered to Margaret.

She put her mouth close to the door. "Mr. Meisner! This is Mrs. Copeland. May I come in?"

"All right," Nash said after a moment. "Maybe he isn't here."

He tried the door knob and the door swung open into darkness.

He reached in, felt along the door frame, but could find no light switch. Margaret was crowding close behind him.

"Wait a moment," he said.

He took out his cigarette lighter, flicked it on, and stepped forward into the room.

The blaze of the light reflected on the gun like a streak of toy lightning. Margaret screamed. Nash tried to duck and the gun caught him on the back of the neck rather than the head and he went face down into the floor. The dark figure stepped over him, caught Margaret by the shoulder, and whirled her into the room.

Nash had hit the floor rolling. His vision was blurred with shooting lights and through these, only half consciously, he saw the figure of the man. He lashed out with his foot. The man was going out the door and Nash's foot caught him behind the knee. The man's leg went out from under him and he came down backward. Nash rolled and caught at him with one hand.

The man coiled like a snake. His gun struck out against Nash's ribs. It glanced off his face. Nash caught at the man's wrist, felt it slip through his fingers as the gun swung up.

Then the room was filled with light and Margaret was standing beside the light switch, on the opposite side of the door from which Nash had felt for it. On the floor Nash and Frank Lassell clung to one another, Lassell with his gun raised to strike again. But the light seemed to stun them so that they lay blinking at one another.

Lassell was the first to recover. Still stretched on the floor he said:

"Fancy meeting you here, Mr. Nash."

"You were expecting Dr. Livingston, I presume."

Nash sat up and the light seemed to grow bright then dim before his eyes. He could see Margaret, still with her back against the wall, her face white. He could hear her voice without for a moment being sure of the words.

Lassell stood up. He put the gun into a shoulder holster, smoothed down his coat over it, straightened his tie, ran his hand over his dark, gleaming hair.

"Don't be frightened, Mrs. Copeland," he said. "Fred and I are old friends, or acquaintances, at least."

She was staring at him. "Who—"

"My name's Lassell. You are Mrs. Hugh Copeland, I expect?"

"How do you know?"

He was still breathing hard, but seemed perfectly at ease. "I heard you call through the door that you were Mrs. Copeland. And Hugh was the only Copeland I know of who palled around with Meisner."

NASH was on his feet now. His head hurt and one rib felt like it was cracked, but the light had quit wavering.

"What did Hugh and this Meisner have to do with one another?" he asked.

"That's what I was trying to find out."

"Where's Meisner now?"

"I expect he's still hiding in the closet."

The closet door was half open, blocking the view from where they stood. Nash had to walk past the door.

It was a big closet and the man was small. He lay inside except for his feet which stuck over the sill into the room itself. He was on his stomach, his face to one side. It was the little man who had come looking for Hugh Copeland at the Lakeside cottage.

He had been shot from behind, just under the left shoulder blade.

"He was that way when I found him," Lassell said. "And though I'm no detective"—he grinned unpleasantly at Fred Nash—"it looks fairly obvious that somebody has given this room a thorough searching. At least, I couldn't find anything."

"The gun?"

"No gun," Lassell said. "And no diamond necklace."

"So it was your own gun you tried to kill me with?"

"I've a permit for it. But I didn't try to kill you, Fred."

Fred Nash rubbed the back of his head and said nothing.

"Under the circumstances, however," Lassell said, "I did want to get away without being recognized."

Margaret Copeland had moved away from the front of the room, along the wall, until she could see past the open door of the closet. For seconds she stood there, staring at the body. Then, without a sound, she slid down the wall to the floor, before Nash could reach her. . . .

Mr. Harrison Bradford was a big man with white hair, a benign face, and small, hard eyes. He was the senior member of LeClerc and Bradford, and as such his pure devotion to Fred Nash's father-and-fortune had been a thing of beauty. Fred no longer had the mass of that fortune, but he had enough to make Mr. Bradford leap to his feet and welcome Fred to his office.

"What can I do for you, my boy?"

Nash looked as if he had not slept. His face was drawn, and in his eyes there were the shadows of ancient pain.

"I'm working for Hugh Copeland," he said. "Hugh hired me to find and return a necklace he had taken from a safe deposit box in your firm."

Mr. Harrison Bradford set back in his chair. "That's impossible!"

"Hugh had charge of the safe deposit boxes?"

"Yes. But—but—"

Nash took a package from his pocket and opened it and in the fluorescent lighting of Mr. Bradford's office the diamonds seemed to quiver and flow together.

"I think this is the necklace," Nash said. "If so, it came from the box of Mr. A. B. Huntington. I'd like that verified, and if this is the necklace, returned."

"How—" Mr. Bradford sputtered. "How—"

"That was all I was hired for," Nash said. "To find this necklace and return it. It's kind of late to try and protect Hugh, and things have got out of hand." His shoulders were bent forward and his mouth was sad rather than bitter.

"Mr. Bradford, could you have your safe deposit box holders check their boxes to see what's missing? Especially jewelry. Not missing outright, but replaced with imitations."

"This is absurd!"

"This necklace," Nash said, looking at it as if it were a coral snake, beautiful and deadly, "couldn't easily be imitated. Look at the way it is made. It would take weeks, possibly months, and perfect workmanship, to make an imitation that wouldn't be detected on sight. So it had to be replaced. But there must have been other jewelry in other boxes that could be imitated easily by a good jeweler. Few persons can tell real jewels

from fakes. And a person taking his own possessions out of his own safe deposit box wouldn't think he needed to have them examined by an expert. If he went to his box and found something missing, he would know that and report it.

"Hugh told me he was the only man who had access to the safe deposit boxes, and therefore if anything was stolen from them he would be held responsible. But if a woman came in and took jewelry out of her box and didn't find out for days, or weeks, maybe years later, that it was fake, she would have no way of knowing when or where the substitution was made."

Nash raised his eyes to Bradford then. "So I think you will find that anything stolen has been replaced by imitations. You should have an expert examine them."

MR. BRADFORD'S face was a mixture of red and white splotches.

"This is absurd! This firm is over a hundred years old, with an unsullied reputation!"

"I've got this necklace," Nash said wearily. "And Hugh told me where it came from. I can go to the sheriff with the story, if necessary. I thought this way there would be less publicity."

He stood up and reached slowly for the necklace. Mr. Bradford's hand beat his to it.

"Now, now, my boy! I didn't mean that I refused to cooperate."

"I want to know what you find out," Nash said.

He went back to his office and for a while he sat at his desk, his face in his hands. Finally he opened the phone book to the classified section and began to phone the U-Drive-It garages. After that he sat for a long time, looking out the window into the courtyard. The odors of the flowers came softly to him, and with them the memory of one of Coventry Patmore's poems, and he quoted, half aloud:

> Till 'gan to stir
> A dizzy somewhat in my troubled head—
> It *was* the azalea's breath, and she
> *was* dead.

"Only not dead," he thought. "Not yet."

He saw the girl coming across the courtyard. It was noon now and the sun shone down on her hair, making it more blonde than usual, almost golden. He could see the way she walked, sense the easy flow of her body under the demure dress. From a first floor window one of the young lawyers whistled exultantly. The girl looked up and smiled and came on into the building.

Nash turned away from the window. He waited, and a few moments later Sylvia Hightower came into his office.

"I thought maybe you would take me to lunch," she said.

He looked at her without answering. He knew now what it was that had led Hugh Copeland to make a fool of himself over this girl, finally to be killed because of her. "Light loveliness is not the ring in the nose of a man's soul," Nash had written. An awkward line, and yet, to him at least, it had meaning. It was not beauty alone with which Circe had brought men into her house and changed them to swine.

"It's not lunch you came for," he said at last. "What is it?"

She sat down in the chair before the window. She looked at him and said. "I'm afraid." He did not answer and she said, "The sheriff keeps questioning me about Hugh's death. And now, today, about some man named Meisner. The sheriff made me go to the morgue and—look at him. I had never seen him before. I had never seen a dead man before."

"Not even Hugh? Not even the man you killed?"

"I didn't kill him."

He shrugged. "Go ahead. What else are you afraid of?"

"Kerry Corbett. He keeps threatening me. I—I think he's gone a little mad."

"He was never very smart."

"No. But recently . . . And I don't know what he's threatening me with, except that it has something to do with the necklace I lost."

"What does he want?"

Her eyes were on his for an instant, then she looked away, out the window into the courtyard.

"What he has always wanted."

"And has tried to buy with gifts,

with his money. And now he's finding out it takes more than money, and he's using fear. Well, you got yourself into it."

"I am no worse than other girls, Mr. Nash."

"Perhaps not," he said bitterly. "Only you have more talent." He stood up. "Let's go to lunch. I want a drink."

After lunch he left her at the table while he phoned Mr. Harrison Bradford.

"I—er—I'd rather not speak about this over the phone," Bradford said.

"But you have found substitutions?"

"Only one. Of course, we are just beginning."

Nash went back to the table where the girl was waiting.

"Come on," he said.

"Where are we going?"

He did not look at her. "Out to see Mrs. Hugh Copeland," he said.

CHAPTER VIII

For Old Times' Sake

NEITHER of them spoke again until they were in Nash's car, in that small, private world of leather and steel with other worlds passing to right and left like stars in the sky, without heed for each other so long as each stayed on its course.

"Why are you going there?" the girl asked then. "What do you plan to do?"

"I don't know," he said. "So help me, I don't know." He glanced at her. "I read a book once where the author spoke of emotions as colors; white for love, red for hate, black for despair, all the things that motivate a man's action listed as colors. If that were true, would any action ever have a stream of only one color behind it? Is anything ever done solely because of love? Love and hate get mixed, and greed sneaks in on everything. Any action would trail behind it a scotch plaid of reasons. And when you try to see them all you only grow confused and can't tell good from evil."

He parked in front of Hugh Copeland's home and they went up the walk together. Margaret answered his knock.

"You told me you wanted to meet Sylvia Hightower," he said. "I brought her to meet you."

The two women looked at one another. Neither of them spoke. And Nash, going past Margaret, went into the house. He went down the hallway. The telephone was there. He went past that and into a butler's pantry at the rear. Here, when the door was shut, he was closed off from the outside world on all four sides. He got down on his hands and knees and began to search.

The door of the butler's pantry opened.

"What are you looking for, Fred?" Margaret said.

"For the bullet hole," he said. "Here it is, under this shelf. The bullet must have gone through the floor into the ground. Probably the sheriff can get it, to compare with the ones he found in Hugh and Meisner."

Her hands were clasped together in front of her and it was the first time, he thought, that he had ever seen them completely still.

"What are you talking about, Fred?"

He stood up. He dusted his hands against his trousers, not looking at her, unable to look at her.

"You followed him to the lake cottage, using a U-Drive-It from Goodall's garage. Maybe you didn't mean to kill him then. Maybe you thought he was going to meet Sylvia Hightower, but it was Meisner he was to meet, so he must have had some jewels with him.

"Or maybe the jewels had been sold already and what he had was the money from them and was to pay Meisner his share. Because Meisner must have made the imitations for him. Maybe you knew all this, or maybe you went only because you knew about Sylvia and hated him for that. Maybe you didn't learn about the money, or the jewels, whichever it was, until you found him at the cottage. But you already hated him. You knew he was trying to leave you. And you had the gun with you."

He could hear her breathing, but he still did not look at her.

"Hugh was killed at eight-thirty," she said. "You heard the shot. I was next door playing cards at that time."

"I heard one shot. And Hugh was shot twice. The shot I heard wasn't fired at the lake. It was fired here, in this closet, where the sound could be heard over the phone but not outside the house."

"Why would I have done that, Fred?"

"No autopsy can tell to the minute when a man is killed. You wanted an alibi. You wanted us to think that the shot I heard was the one which killed Hugh, and I did think that for a while. But Hugh had been dead a half-hour or more and you had rushed back to the city, checked in the U-Drive-It, taken a cab home, then called me."

"I was next door when you heard that shot."

"Under normal conditions people don't notice time to the minute. I looked to see the exact time of the shot I heard, but your neighbors didn't notice to the minute the time you came in their house. You told the sheriff it was about eight-twenty or twenty-five. They told him about eight-thirty, and that could have been a few minutes off. Time enough for you to walk from here next door."

"Fred—"

HE LOOKED at her then. Her hands were still clasped, but trembling now.

"You have no proof of these things," she said. "How can you say them?"

"There's the bullet-hole in the floor here. And last night, looking for Meisner's house, you said, 'This must be the house,' before we reached it. In the hallway you said, 'The next door,' though half those doors had no letters on them. And then, in the room, when I was fighting with Frank Lassell, you found the light switch instantly, and it was on the wrong side of the door.

"It was an old house, and the electric lights must have been put in by some amateur because the switch was on the side of the door where you couldn't reach it when the door was open. You couldn't have known that, unless you had been there before. How could you know you had to close or at least partially close the door before you could reach the light switch?"

"So you think I had been there before?"

"Meisner was at the lake when Hugh was killed. How much he saw or heard I can't know. But he must have tried blackmail."

Her hands were no longer folded. They were plucking at the throat of her dress now.

"You have it all figured out, haven't you, Fred? Can you tell me why I would ask you to go with me to Meisner's?"

"I can only guess. You searched his place for jewels, and perhaps you forgot about fingerprints until later. Then you realized your prints were all over the place, and you had to have some reason for them to be there, before the police found the body. So you got me to go with you. Then any prints that were found later you could say had been left when we were there together."

Her face was ghostly, the lipstick like smeared blood across it.

"You believe all these things, don't you, Fred? And yet you were in love with me once—or almost in love with me."

"I know," he said. "I think that is why I came to tell you, before I went to the sheriff."

He had almost to touch her to get past. He was so close he could smell her perfume and it was the same she had always worn.

Sylvia Hightower was waiting in the front room.

"Come on," he said.

They went out together into the warm spring sunlight. And when they reached his car they heard a sound that might have been another car backfiring somewhere. Or it might have been a gun.

"Will you drive?" Fred Nash said. "I don't feel like it. I think I'm going to be sick."

She drove, and after a while he said, "The sheriff won't bother you any more. It's all over now. And Corbett won't bother you either. The necklace has gone back to the person it belonged to."

"Who had it?"

"It was sent to me through the mail. I don't know who had it, and I don't care if I never know."

"You must have an idea."

"I have an idea. I think Kerry Corbett had it all the time. He knew the Huntingtons, and probably he recognized the

necklace when he saw it on you. Then he found it in his car, where you'd dropped it—and I hate to try to follow the workings of his mind."

"It isn't a nice mind," she said.

"He went to New York, probably to talk to Mr. Huntington, to make sure he had the right necklace. I don't imagine he told Huntington about it, however. Just, 'Where's that beautiful necklace your wife used to wear sometimes? . . . Oh, stored with LeClerc and Bradford, eh? And that's where Hugh Copeland works.' So he must have figured that Hugh stole it. Maybe he thought you knew that. Then he meant to use his knowledge to force Hugh out of competition, to force you—" He shrugged.

"But he sent the necklace back to you."

"After you told him Hugh was killed because of it. That scared him. He wanted to get rid of it fast. Actually, Margaret never knew about that necklace. It had nothing to do with the murder."

They were in the downtown section of the city now. The courthouse and sheriff's office was only a block away.

"It may not be of any interest to you, Mr. Nash," the girl said. "But I think I've learned something. I think I will avoid married men in the future."

"It's time," he said. Some day, married to the right man, she might make the perfect wife. But until then . . .

This was the thought which had crossed his mind the first time he saw her, and now he found he was thinking again, watching the way her hair blew in the wind.

"Unless you happen to be married to him," he said.

"I'm Alive, Nick—and I'm All that's Left of Robert Barclay!"

AFTER fourteen years, that voice again! The voice of a man who was supposed to be dead! A man who was apparently killed in a freak explosion on a movie set.

Nick Ransom listened to the voice, dread coursing up and down his spine. The mysterious recluse, "Joseph T. Fullerton," was talking to him—from behind a trick mirror. Fullerton, who was really Barclay, could see Nick through the mirror, but it didn't work the other way round. There was only that sepulchral voice, recalling a tragedy of the past. . . .

"Come out of hiding," Nick Ransom called. "I want to take a look at you, if you are Barclay!"

"Nobody looks at me, Nick," came back the voice. "Not even you. Nobody's looked at me since I moved into this hotel after the hospital released me. Nobody ever will."

"But—but—"

"Don't come any closer. If you try to smash the glass I'll kill you! Now listen carefully, Nick. I want you to find my murderer and bring him here! He was—"

The strange revelations that came to Nick Ransom's ears sent him on the peril-packed trail of one of the most baffling mystery cases of his career—in PREVIEW OF MURDER, by Robert Leslie Bellem, the exciting Nick Ransom novelet featured in our next issue. Be on hand when the curtain rises on PREVIEW OF MURDER—for the reading thrill of a lifetime!

HOMICIDE SHAFT

Nick Ransom, investigator extraordinary, faces an odd bow and arrow murder case!

CHAPTER I

NEAR MISS

AS A murder weapon a bow and arrow can be just as lethal as a gun. The main difference is largely a matter of muscle, it doesn't take much strength to squeeze a roscoe's trigger, but you need an extra backlog of brawn to bend a seasoned osage orange hunting bow with a seventy-five pound pull. Which was okay with me, I had the brawn, the bow, and a thirty-inch broadhead arrow—and I was aiming this deadly steel-tipped shaft at an extremely gorgeous Irish doll named Molly Shannon.

"Please!" she whimpered in frantic desperation as I hauled back the tough

I got an abrupt case of the fantods at the thought of a miss

a novelet by

ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

linen bowstring. "Spare my life, I beg of you! Then shall I be your handmaiden, your slave forever!"

As a sample of allegedly dramatic dialogue the line was pretty banal if not downright corny, but that was how the script was written, and the Shannon wren gave it all she had.

She had plenty, too, not only in voice and acting ability but in looks as well. Her red tresses hung down her back and over her shoulders like a wavy firefall, her piquant features were just irregular enough to be demurely alluring, her eyes were as blue as Killarney Lakes are supposed to be, and she had a

slight smattering of golden freckles on a complexion otherwise creamily flawless.

Moreover, her figure was like an excerpt from a bachelor's dream—dainty and slender where slenderness counted, but unexpectedly lush when it came to curves. All you needed was one slant at her contours to make you start drooling like a wolf with a lamb chop.

I notched my arrow, inched it backward, got ready to twang it at my target. Once again Molly made with the woeful whimpers, begged me not to render her deceased.

"I am too young, too fair, too desirable to die!" she pleaded in panic-stricken accents. "Let me live, and your reward shall be my warm lips—my love—my enduring fealty to your banner!"

Of all the nauseating sheep dip ever scribbled by a benzedrine-happy scenario writer, that copped the fur-trimmed trophy. No matter how many times I'd heard it in rehearsal, it still gave me an irritable yen to hunt up the author and dish him a load of lumps by way of criticism.

His stuff smelled. Every time the Shannon muffin delivered it the odor got worse. And for garbage like that, Paragon Studios coughed up perfectly good geetus—probably in the neighborhood of two grand a week. Which is no niggardly neighborhood, even by Hollywood's opulent standards.

I SHARPENED my aim, tightened the bowstring another couple of pounds. Twenty-five feet ferninst me, across the width of the Paragon sound stage, the red-haired Shannon tomato cowered and cringed, registered abject terror.

The set was dressed to represent a medieval nobleman's baronial banquet hall complete with tapestried walls, tesselated floor, massive wooden furniture and a cavernous fireplace big enough to berth a barbecued bear. And Molly stood in front of the fireplace beside a mammoth hardwood stairway leading up to a ramparted balcony directly over her head, ready to freeze on cue when I shot my shaft at her trembling form.

Standing beyond camera range, I sweated out the final few seconds of waiting. All around me, Klieg lights and reflectors and baby spots blazed on the scene. A microphone on a fish-pole boom picked up Molly's words for the sound track, while three cameras rolled silently to blot up the action on celluloid negative. Then, as I listened for her final line of dialogue that would be my signal to let fly, a sudden ugly notion nibbled at my brisket.

What if I missed?

Or rather, what if I *didn't* miss?

The thought gave me an abrupt attack of the fantods, because a slip was possible. After all, it had been many a year since I had undertaken a caper of this caliber. I was out of practice, rusty at the thrill racket. In the old days the routine would have been duck soup for me, back when I was a cinema stunt expert with my own professional organization—"Risks, Incorporated." But that was long past. Now my business card says "Nick Ransom, Private Investigations." And a licensed snoop should stick to his snooping, not go horsing around with a bow and arrow.

All at once my nerves got as taut as the bowstring. This, I reflected bitterly, was what I got for listening to Molly Shannon's sweet talk.

She had barged into my agency office on Hollywood Boulevard earlier in the day, slim and girlishly graceful in a sea-green confection of cotton print that fooled you with its artful simplicity. You noticed the swirly skirt and puff-soft bodice, and you promptly forgot them because of your preoccupation with the contours they contained.

That kind of dress designing is expensive—and worth every nickel of what it costs. Molly knew this. She had a flair for clothes, a subtle sense of understatement in everything she wore. She seemed to realize that men don't make mental passes at a frock. It's the wearer who gets the whistles.

"Hi, Nick," she had greeted me, perching on the edge of my desk and swinging a tapered, nylon-smooth gam. "How's the Sherlocking trade?"

Having known her since the days when she was climbing out of mob scenes and Central Casting bit rôles, I didn't mind letting my hair down.

"Right now, hon," I had said, "the Hawkshaw business is a shtoonk. I

don't know where my next murder's coming from. To say nothing of my next fee."

"Ever think about going back to stunting?" She tossed this off casually, a throw-away question that fished for information without actually seeming to.

"Stunting?" I said. "Me? Perish forbid. Better I should sweeping the streets, no less. When a guy reaches my age his bones get brittle, and he learns to cherish them very tenderly indeed."

She grinned, glommed one of my gaspers, leaned down so I could light it for her.

"Pooh! You're in the prime of life and you know it. Rather handsome, too, in a dissipated sort of way."

"Thanks. And now that you've buttered me with blarney, suppose you come to the punch line."

"Punch line?"

"The payoff," I said. "The gimmick. You want something, no?"

"We-ell, all right, I want something, yes."

"Name it, sugar. Favors for friends wrapped up to take out on short order, day and night service, redheads our specialty. Whatever I have you want, you've got it." I opened a drawer, dredged up my office fifth of Vat Sixty-nine, two glasses, and poured a pair of snorts. "I'm all yours."

"Ransom the Rover boy. Nick the knight-errant." Suddenly, then, she had grown serious over her drink. "You're right, Philo, this *is* a professional call—with a retainer attached. You set the price. I pay it." She sipped. "Nice Scotch, this."

"Yeah. What shenanigan have you been up to that you crave the services of a private dick?"

"No shenanigan at all. I mean I don't need a private dick. It has nothing to do with detecting." She crushed out her cigarette, nervously. "It's a sequence."

"You make everything so lucid," I said. "So beautifully clear. Like a jug full of mud."

"Go on, be funny. You're not the one who's to get shot at."

"Hunh?"

"With a bow and arrow."

"Oh," I said. Then I added: "I don't get it."

SHE frowned, fidgeted.

"Late this afternoon it's to be. At Paragon, Sound Stage Six, the castle banquet hall set. Our new medieval opus—costume stuff. Produced. directed and midwifed by Benny Thornton. Script by some schmoe who should have been exterminated in his cradle. My biggest starring rôle to date."

"Rattle on." I said patiently. "Sooner or later you'll probably say something valid. I can wait."

"I'm an archery target in the final reel. We're shooting the final reel first."

"That's Hollywood for you."

"Isn't it just? The arrow is supposed to miss me by less than an inch. A genuine arrow; not a prop. The villain does it, after I beg for my life. He misses, and then the hero abolishes him."

"It sounds thrilling," I said.

She made a wry mouth. "Spectacular. Of course a stunt specialist will double for the heavy with the bow and arrow routine."

"Natch."

"The trouble is, I don't trust the average movie stunt expert. Not when it's my life they're risking." She slid off the desk and smiled at me quizzically. "But I do trust you, Nick."

"Meaning you want me to make with the archery, eh?"

"Will you? For me? Pretty please?"

Bemused, bedazzled, and bereft of my common sense, I had answered without reflection.

"All right, kitten. If it's okay by the producer, it's jake with me."

Later I had wafted myself to the Paragon lot, cleared the deal with Benny Thornton, boss of the unit. Now I stood waiting for my cue to sling a murderous shaft at the Shannon cupcake—and my nerves were getting slightly frayed around the fringes. I didn't like this at all. It made me uncertain of myself, unsure of my ability to pull the trick without accident.

For the last time Molly spouted a line of corn. "Spare me, Sir Harold, and my kisses shall be your reward!"

That was it. I flexed my bow to the limits of its pliancy and let drive.

And at the same instant a silk crashed down at me.

In the manufacture of movies a silk is a large metal frame on the order of a window-screen, only instead of wire mesh it is covered with bluish-white silk stretched taut and held in place by clamps on all four sides. When placed in front of a floodlight it diffuses the concentrated brilliance, softens up the harshness of raw bright illumination. High above the banquet hall set there was a catwalk on a wooden scaffolding, a platform on which several floods and baby spots were ranged in a ragged row, turned downward to bathe the scene in light. And it was from this lofty catwalk that the heavy steel-framed silk came smashing full at my unprotected noggin.

Somebody bellowed, "Ransom, look out!" just as I fired my arrow. And then Molly Shannon gave vent to a hideous scream.

CHAPTER II

GAFFER'S GETAWAY

AT THE last split instant I jumped like a frog with a hotfoot and hurled myself sidewise. The silk-and-steel diffusion gadget landed with a thunderous *ker-blam!* less than six inches from where I had been standing, smashed itself cockeyed on the sound stage flooring.

Splinters flew like a shower of toothpicks, and over the noise of the impact I heard the Shannon quail screech again. Her yeep was a high banshee ululation that ended in a stricken gurgle of pure agony. Then it was cut off as if chopped by an axe.

All the ketchup abruptly curdled in my veins and I had a dopy impulse to close my glimmers, shut out the sight of something I was scared to see. Resisting this, I forced myself to cop a gander at the Shannon squad.

I groaned. And I hurtled toward her with all the velocity my hundred and ninety pounds of heft could muster.

It wasn't going to be pleasant, fumbling around with a corpse, particularly when I was the guy who'd caused it to become defunct. But everybody else on the set seemed frozen, rooted in his tracks. The camera crew stood petrified, the sound engineer looked like a horrified statue, the grips and juicers and prop men were stricken in motionless attitudes, and even Benny Thornton, producer-director of the opus, resembled a tall and slab-sided monolith carved from pallid marble. At the moment I was evidently the only bozo in the unit with motive power, so I used it.

Over by the massive staircase Molly Shannon sagged against the fireplace as limper as wet spaghetti. Her freckles stood out like scattered gold coins on the whiteness of her face, her body slumped loosely in its wool-and-velvet Renaissance costume, and her knees had buckled under her, deprived her of support.

Yet she remained awkwardly upright, and when I rushed closer I saw that it was my arrow holding her there. The shaft had buried its steel tip six inches deep in the woodwork, and at first glance I figured it had gone all the way through her head; pinned her to the fireplace.

Then I discovered I was wrong, and I heaved a sigh of relief all the way from my toenails. Instead of impaling the quail, the arrow had merely grazed the side of her scalp and collected a thick strand of her flame-red hair in passing, had then buried itself in the hardwood, along with that swatch of her tresses.

This was what kept her from crumpling to the floor. She was literally hanging by her coiffure. Otherwise she was unharmed and alive. I made sure of that by feeling for her heart beats, finding a steady pulsation there. Shock had made her swoon, but aside from that she wasn't even scratched.

I slid an arm around her waist, braced her to take the strain off her hair-do. Then I lifted my voice and yodeled:

"Fetch me a knife, somebody. And for Pete's sake make it snappy!"

My yeep broke the spell that seemed to have settled on everyone in the troupe. Eleventeen assorted citizens

snapped out of their collective trance, started running around in chaotic circles like chickens in a Kansas cyclone. Worst of the whole blundering bunch was Benny Thornton. Forgetful of his dignified position as the picture's big-shot executive, he unwound himself and charged at me with both fists flailing and an expression of hysterical indignation in his glimmers.

"A knife the bum wants!" he shrilled. "He's not satisfied to murder my top star with an arrow. Now he wants to hack her to pieces with a knife!" Then he swung a sizzling haymaker at my unguarded jowls.

My hands were busy supporting the Shannon colleen, so I did the next best thing. I lashed out with an upraised brogan, and booted Thornton in the short ribs. By and large, it wasn't much of a kick, because I was off balance and out of position. Even so, Thornton uncorked a howl of pain and surprise, skittered slaunchwise across the set, and brought up with a resounding wallop against a camera dolly.

The collision dumped him on the cheeks of his breeches and he floundered there briefly, his sandy hair coming uncombed and his long-nosed narrow map registering bewilderment.

"You—you . . . Wh-why, you dirty—"

"Belay the sputtering and bring me a blade," I said. "I can't stand here holding this chick all evening."

EVEN as I voiced the remark, Molly stirred in my clutch, opened her peepers.

"Oooh-h-h!" she moaned. "My head—my scalp—my hair . . . Ouch!"

"Take it easy, sweets," I told her gently. "I'll cut you loose in a minute. You'll be minus a lock of your crowning glory, but on you a wind-blown bob should look good." Whereupon I lamped Thornton barging at me again and I got ready to fend him off if he tried any more warfare.

He didn't. My kick had drained all the truculence out of his skinny system and besides, it was obvious that he now realized he had made a fool of himself. He peered at Molly, discovered she was okay and dished me a sheepish grin of apology.

"Sorry, Ransom. I must have been out of my mind to suspect you of—of—ah . . . Here, pal, here's my knife. Hurry up and whittle that confounded arrow."

"Whittle it yourself," I said. "I've got other fish to fry."

By this time the Shannon tomato was standing firmly on her stems and needed no further bolstering, but meanwhile I'd glanced upward at the overhead catwalk and I had piped movement there. The movement triggered me into rapid action.

Vengefully I strode over to where the heavy steel-framed silk had fallen, noted the dent it had made in the floor. Nothing but luck had kept that dent from being in my skull instead of marring the stage, in which case I would have been ready for installation in a mahogany overcoat. A scant few inches had separated me from a reunion with my ancestors—and I don't like to be shaved that close.

Of course a private eye grows accustomed to attempted assault and bashery. When you're in the snooping game you're bound to accumulate enemies who thirst for your gore. As a rule I'm on guard against ambushes, but this time my mind had been on other matters and I'd left myself wide open for mayhem. And now that I'd spotted the party who had tried to crunch my conk from above, I determined to do something about it.

The guy was leaning over the catwalk's brink: a wispy, overall-clad loogan with a coil of electric cable in his mitt which proclaimed him to be a gaffer—the electrician in charge of the scaffolding's floodlights. Since there was nobody else up there on the platform with him, I decided he was the guilty geepo, whereupon I swarmed toward his airy trestle like a monkey climbing after bananas.

Gaining the narrow platform, I stalked at him with my knuckles all set to dole out disaster.

"You careless creep!" I snarled. "What was the big idea, dropping that gadget overboard?"

"I never done nothing of the sort!" he said in a high, defensive whinny from somewhere in the region of his adenoids. "I don't even know how it

come to fall. I wasn't nowheres near it."

"You lie like a taxi meter. You're the only character up here, and the thing couldn't tumble by itself. It had to be nudged. You were either trying to brain me or spoil my aim so the arrow would give Miss Shannon a hole in the head."

He started retreating. "That ain't so! You lay off me!"

"Not until I run you through the wringer and make you whistle the truth," I said, closing in on him.

He pivoted clumsily, broke into a panicky gallop toward a ladder at the far end of the catwalk. As he turned, he yanked at the electric cable coiled in his fist, a line which ran to an outlet box across the trestle.

Maybe it was accidental, maybe not; but in tugging at the insulated cord he snapped it up in front of my feet just as I lunged to grab him. I tripped and sailed headlong, landed sprawling and skidded over the edge of the catwalk like a glider being launched from a catapult.

For a dizzy instant I plummeted through space, falling free and knowing I'd be crushed to cranberry jelly when I smacked the floor of the stage far below. Then, twisting in mid-air, I reached out wildly and glued the grasp on a small square platform that happened luckily to be located about seven feet beneath the higher walkway. Seizing its projecting lip with both hands, I broke my fall, swung pendulum fashion with my full weight dangling from my fingertips.

Something touched my soles.

I STARED downward, lamped a couple of carpenters jabbing a ladder at me. A moment later they braced it in position. I rested my hoofs on its topmost rung and slowly regained my balance. Then I descended in an almighty yank, reached the stage level and panned my enraged peepers around the set.

"Where's that gaffer?" I caterwauled.

Molly Shannon drifted over to me, still shaky from her recent brush with death, but at least capable of moving around under her own steam. There was a jagged gash in her coiffure where a hank of red hair had been chopped out to free her from the arrow I'd shot into that property newel post, but most of the color had returned to her complexion and her forefinger scarcely trembled as she pointed to a stack of wild walls and flats beyond the stage.

"He went that way," she answered my question about the lamming electrician. "And Benny Thornton went after him."

Breathing fire and brimstone, I pelted in pell-mell pursuit. A bit player got in my way and I stiff-armed him, vaulted over his somersaulting poundage, blammed off the banquet hall set and past the stacked flats.

Now I was in a sort of narrow passageway, flanked on either side by high-piled props and painted scenery. The only light came from a raw, dim incandescent far up on the vaulted ceiling of the gigantic sound stage building. Shadows slanted downward across the passage, making my path precarious. And then, suddenly, I stumbled into something soft, yielding.

It was the pic's producer-director, Thornton.

He moaned under the impact of my toe, stirred and tried to sit up on his haunches.

"Ransom!" he whispered.

I hunkered down. "What is it? What the devil happened to you?"

"I—don't know. I was chasing—Grenzinger—"

"Grenzinger being the electrician?" I said.

"Yes."

"Did he slug you?"

"I can't remember. Maybe—so. Or maybe I fell—hit my head on something." He groaned again, rubbed his forehead where there was a nasty blue swelling the size of third base. "All I know is he—got away." Thornton's voice strengthened as I helped him upright. "By Jupe, he'll never work on this lot again. Carelessness is bad enough, letting that silk fall off the catwalk. But tripping you with a cable and then waylaying me . . . I'll blacklist him off every pay roll in the entire industry!"

"Maybe you won't have to," I said grimly. "He'll have a devil of a time

finding jobs when he's reposing in a cell."

"Wh-what?"

"I'm going to have him pinched," I said. "In my book that falling silk was no careless accident. And if I ever lay my hands on him he'll wind up behind bars—after a considerable stopover in an emergency ward for repairs."

"Pretty vindictive, aren't you, gumshoe? Not that I blame you, considering."

"Vindictive my nostrils," I said bitterly. "The way I look at this afternoon's clambake, Grenzinger made a felonious and deliberate attempt at premeditated murder!"

CHAPTER III

DEATH ARROW

MOLLY SHANNON'S dressing bungalow was twice the size of a millionaire's trailer and three times as lavish. Located on the back lot behind the Paragon sound stages and scene docks, it dwarfed a dozen other cottages in the double row and was equipped with typical Hollywood conveniences—shower, living room, makeup quarters, even a fully outfitted miniature kitchenette in case the Shannon doll preferred not to take nourishment in the studio's commissary with less important stars.

Moreover, the kitchenette's stock of refreshments included a copious repertoire of bottled goods, a fact I'd discovered while prowling the premises and waiting for Molly to divest herself of grease paint. She was taking her time with the job, probably because she didn't know I had barged into the joint without knocking.

I wanted it that way. I wanted to surprise her, catch her off guard, then maybe I could startle some information out of her before she had a chance to think up a lot of evasions.

After the dizzy events on the banquet hall set, Benny Thornton had postponed a retake of the arrow scene until tomorrow. He had dismissed the troupe, cleared the stage and called it a day. Now my strap watch showed six o'clock, even up, as I sat in the front room of Molly's private shanty with a beaker of Scotch in my fist and a cargo of questions on my mind.

Off in the distance, carpenters were hammering hollowly at a hunk of spurious outdoor scenery. Inside the bungalow there was a steady hissing splash of water gushing from the bathroom shower.

Presently the shower was shut off, and a moment later the Shannon cutie hove into view, dainty as a red-haired naiad. I cocked an appreciative eye at the emerald silk kimono that flowed over her figure like poured oil, then lifted my glass in salute to beauty.

"Hi, hon. You've got company."

"Nick!" She drew a startled breath around the name. "What are *you* doing here?"

"Making like a detective," I said. "After I phoned the cops and preferred charges against that missing Grenzinger ginzo I decided to drop in on you, ask you some questions."

"Questions? Like what?"

"Like who's your worst enemy in the galloping snapshots?" I fired back at her.

"Enemy?"

"Yeah, and quit parroting everything I say. Who disliked you, up to and including homicidal hatred?"

"Why—why, nobody! I—"

"Don't slip me any hogwash, sugar. You had fear in your heart when you came to me today, asked me to stunt-double in the bow and arrow routine. You claimed you didn't trust the ordinary stunt expert. Why?"

She peered at me through fringing lashes. "Just a precaution," she said unconvincingly.

"Precaution against what?"

"Against accidents—like the one that happened."

"You know that was no accident, kitten. Let's stop shadow boxing, hmm-mm-m? I crave to know why Grenzinger dropped that gadget off the catwalk. What's your opinion?"

"I—I have no opinion. Unless he was trying to maim you, or—or—"

"No dice there," I said. "Or rather, no motive. I never saw him before in my life, therefore he had no conceivable reason for wanting to extinguish me. On

the other hand, though, suppose the guy was trying to joggle my aim so *you'd* get croaked?"

"That's fantastic!" she said swiftly. "Grenzinger wouldn't be fool enough to kill the goose that lays the golden . . . That is, I—I mean—" Her voice dwindled away, as if she realized she had let something slip and regretted it.

I finished my drink, lowered my bulk into an easy chair. "You were about to say?"

"Nothing. N-nothing at all. Skip it."

"Look, pet," I said. "I hate to be persistent, but this is hardly the time to clam up on your old pal Ransom. I'm the guy you entrusted with your life, remember?"

SHE came over, perched on the chair's upholstered arm, patted my hand.

"Of course I remember. And I'm grateful to you, Nick. If anyone else but you had shot that arrow at me I wouldn't be here now. I'd be in the morgue."

"Very likely. But what's with this goose-and-golden-egg stuff you started to mention?"

"Please, Sherlock. Don't ask questions."

"How else can I get answers?" I said logically. "Come on, unburden yourself. There was something between you and that gaffer, wasn't there?"

"N-no."

I slid an arm around her slim, supple waist. "Was he shaking you down for dough?"

She gasped, reddened, tried to squirm away but didn't get far because I tightened my hold on her.

"How d-did you know?" she whispered. "I mean, wh-what makes you think—"

"A moment ago you rejected my theory that he had tried to get you bumped off," I said. "You started to say he wouldn't be foolish enough to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. Meaning yourself, of course. Okay, there's only one kind of golden egg he could possibly squeeze out of you—moolah. Cash. Carrying that a step farther, why should a screen star of your magnitude pay geetus to a mere gaffer? And why are you so reluctant to admit it—unless there's something smelly in the background? Mix those ingredients, stir thoroughly, and it comes out looking suspiciously like extortion. Spelled blackmail."

Unexpectedly she wriggled off the chair arm into my lap, cuddled against me. She was warm and fragrant and feminine, and her nearness sent tingles skittering through my system like a jolt of voltage.

"I don't want to talk about it," she murmured. "Can't we forget—unpleasant things like that?" And she nestled her cheek on mine.

I realized she was trying to sidetrack me and I said: "Wait a minute, baby, let's not—"

Then her lips battened on mine and stopped me from completing the protest. The only thing that got completed was a kiss of sizzling proportions, and I suddenly discovered I liked it. After all, I'm as human as the next joe, and this Shannon cupcake was a mighty appetizing portion of pastry in the gossamer icing of that green negligee.

By and by, though, I snapped back to normal, resumed my quiz program.

"About Grenzinger and his shakedown caper," I said. "Why not come clean with me, pet?"

"Because I—well, there are some things no g-girl likes to admit. Please Nick, can't you let it go at that?"

"But you've already admitted paying blackmail," I said. "Or anyhow you practically admitted it. You intimated Grenzinger wouldn't try to murder you because your death would put a stop to his extortion collections. What did he have on you?"

"Enough to ruin my career, wreck my reputation," She stood up, twisted her mouth in a crooked grimace. "I may as well tell you the rest of the juicy scandal now that I've gone this far. I spent a week-end in Las Vegas with somebody."

"A man?"

"Don't say it like that, Nick. It wasn't just a man, it was a guy I was in love with; a guy I thought loved me. I was wrong, as I discovered when it came time to use the marriage license."

"He backed out, eh?"

She laughed a thin, brittle laugh that

sounded like pieces of glass breaking, small and sharp and mirthless.

"Yes, he backed out. Not that I'm whining," she added wryly. "You don't get anywhere crying over spilled milk. It just happened that I was unlucky two ways. First by falling for a heel's smooth line of talk. And second, Grenzinger was in Vegas that week-end."

"I get it. He saw you with the guy, or coming out of his room, or something like that."

She nodded. "I've been paying hush money ever since."

"Who was the man in the case, kiddo?"

"A writer. You wouldn't know him. He's new in Hollywood."

"Big time?"

"He draws big time pay, but to me his stuff smells. Of course I may be prejudiced."

AGAIN she made with that brittle, breaking-glass laugh.

"What's his monicker?" I said.

"Hal Brookman. He scripted this costume pic I'm doing."

"Oh-oh. Now I understand why you told me the opus was authored by some schmoe who should have been exterminated in his cradle," I said. "No wonder you sounded bitter. Incidentally, could Grenzinger be blackmailing this Brookman wolf on the same grounds he used for mulcting moolah out of you?"

"I wouldn't know. Why? What's that got to do with it?"

I shrugged. "You never can tell. For the sake of argument, suppose Brookman was also being shaken down. Assume, further, that he craved to eliminate the blackmailing gaffer. So he writes a bow-and-arrow scene in his script; then he sneaks onstage, unnoticed, while the sequence is being shot. He jiggles the framed silk, causes the thing to fall—"

"But why? For what reason?"

"Self-preservation. He risks braining me and getting you killed, too, the idea being to pin the blame on Grenzinger so he'll either be pinched or take it on the lam. Either way, Brookman is rid of him. How does it sound to you?"

She started to answer, but before she could get the words uttered there came an insistent rapping on the dressing bungalow's front door. Frowning, she went to the portal, opened it.

"You!" she choked.

The bozo who ankled over the threshold wasn't merely handsome; he was downright beautiful. He had wavy hair the color of buffed platinum, skin as clear as a baby's caboose and a profile that belonged on Greek coinage—aquiline, regal, haughty.

In altitude he topped my own six-feet-plus by a good two or three inches, and he probably weighed all of two hundred and ten with no visible lard. His slacks were silver-gray and strictly Bond Street, his hound's-tooth loafer jacket had cost at least a century, and there was a scarlet silk scarf around his throat in place of a necktie. For a moment I thought I was seeing a fashion show.

"My dear Molly!" he started yacking. His voice was reedy, and he pushed out the words with too much energy, like a guy talking into a high wind. "My very dear, I just heard what happened over on the banquet hall set. Good heavens, I would never have written that arrow routine if I had known it would expose you to jeopardy. Really, I'm desolated!"

Aha, I thought, so this is Hal Brookman. This is the lad that took Molly to Las Vegas and then gave her the brush-off. Even if I hadn't known about that episode I still wouldn't have liked him. He may have been attractive to dames, but there was something in his general appearance that made you want to take your Sunday poke at his supercilious mush. Morever, he talked the way he wrote—flowery, mid-Victorian verbiage full of fancy embroidery. He gave me a pain in my cornerstone.

I bulled my way forward, shoved Molly aside and stood facing the scenario scribbler.

"So you're desolated." I favored him with a sarcastic leer. "You wouldn't have writen the arrow scene had you known it would expose this Shannon chick to peril. That'll do to tell, sonny."

"I beg pardon?" he said reedily. One eyebrow fled upward like a bird's wing. "Do I know you, my good man? Wait—now I've got it. You're the stunting fel-

low who almost killed Molly."

"Stunting fellow my elbow," I said. "I'm a private dick, name of Ransom. And I wouldn't be a bit surprised if you turned out to be guilty of—"

"Nick!" That was the red-haired cupcake thrusting her oar into the hassle. "Please don't!"

Brookman looked at her, archly. "Let him have his say, my love. By all means let him sound off. The chap seems laboring under the impression I had something to do with that accident on Stage Six—which is preposterous, of course. But let him talk. Then I will be most happy to tell him about my alibi."

"What alibi?" I growled.

"At the time that silk fell from the catwalk, I happened to be in my office on Writers' Row. With my secretary, I might add."

"Alibis can be rigged," I said. "Secretaries can be bribed."

"Dear me." He delicately patted a yawn. "Pardon me if I'm just a bit bored, won't you, old man?"

I reached out, harvested a handful of his scarlet scarf. "Yeah. And maybe *you'll* pardon *me* if I waltz you back to the banquet hall set and paw through my brief case for a roll of Scotch tape."

"Get your hands off me!" he said testily. Then, in puzzlement: "Scotch tape?"

"To lift and preserve any latent fingerprints there may be on the light-diffusion screen," I grated. "I want you along, so that later you can't claim I pulled any hocus-pocus. And gosh help you if I find your prints on the gadget."

THEN I spun him around, got him by the collar and the slack of his slacks, walked him Spanish out of the dressing bungalow.

Dusk was thickening and the Paragon lot was practically deserted as we crossed to Sound Stage Six and barged onto the set where my arrow had almost despatched Molly Shannon to everlasting glory. Still keeping my clutches on the Brookman bozo, I headed for the spot where the steel-framed silk had crashed from the catwalk down to the floor.

You could see the deep marks of its impact, but the screen itself was gone.

A sinking feeling hit me when I remembered how efficiently a major studio like Paragon functions. Apparently a salvage crew had already carted away the damaged equipment for repairs—which meant several guys had now handled it, and had smeared their dabs all over the metal frame.

A fervent curse formed in my kisser—and then it got stuck there, unuttered. All of a sudden my throat went dry, tight, and I felt my glimmers bulging like squeezed grapes.

And no wonder. Over at the foot of the property staircase was a huddled figure sprawled face-down and motionless in a pool of congealed gore. The guy was a wispy citizen in overalls, and when I glommed a flabbergasted gander at him I recognized him as Grenzinger, the blackmailing gaffer.

I recognized something else, too—the arrow which weirdly protruded from between his shoulder blades with its lethal steel tipped shaft buried deep in his bellows. It was a thirty-inch broadhead hunting shaft, obviously from the quiver I'd used in the archery sequence earlier that afternoon, an exact duplicate of the one I had twanged at the Shannon cutie.

But that arrow had fortunately missed its human target, whereas I needed no second squint at the prone electrician to realize he was deader than a bucket of chopped bait.

CHAPTER IV

SNOOP ON THE LAM

I LOOSENED my hold on Hal Brookman, barreled wildly across the set and hunkered down by the slain juicer's remnants, went through the formality of feeling his pulse. It was absent, just as I'd expected, and his wrist was cool, indicating he had been deceased for quite a while.

There was a short length of fine black nylon thread clutched in his stiffening grasp, although at the moment I didn't savvy its significance. I was more interested in the fact that he had been croaked by an arrow.

"So now it gives murder," I yodeled, and peered at the shaft that stuck out of him. Its spiral-wrapped feathers were bent and bedraggled at the notch end, and an idea began to percolate into my think-tank. I straightened up, pivoted to face the Brookman bozo. "Well, that's one way to stop paying hush money, eh, pal?"

Scowling, he drifted toward me. "Maybe I don't understand the meaning of that remark."

"And then again maybe you do," I said. "I'm referring to your Las Vegas episode with Molly Shannon."

Color flooded his Greek-coin countenance, then went away in a sudden ebb. White-lipped, he drew in a breath that pinched his patrician nostrils to the narrowness of a knife and slitted his glimmers at me.

"So she told you about that," he said harshly.

"Yeah."

"And now you're accusing me of—"

"Nobody's accusing anybody—yet," I broke in. "Of course if the shoe fits, wear it. I don't mind."

"But I do," he said tautly, through his teeth. "I mind it very much indeed."

Then he stooped like a shortstop fielding a red-hot grounder, snatched up a hammer that some dopy carpenter had left on the stage and hurled it spang at my noggin.

He threw it from a crouch, as gracefully as DiMaggio pegging a runner out at third, and he did it so swiftly I didn't have a chance to duck. The missile clipped me on the side of the conk and knocked me to my knees, dizzy as a drunk on a roller coaster. Then Brookman launched himself forward, deliberately measured me and hung a roaring haymaker on my prow.

Unconsciousness gulped me like a raw oyster. . . .

When I swam back to my senses I had a knot on my scalp the dimensions of a hockey puck and a jaw that throbbed like a compound fracture where I'd been festooned with a fistful of knuckles. I was stretched out flat on the sound stage and I was surrounded by people, mainly cops. Uniformed and in plain clothes, they were all over the set like an infestation of termites, and as soon as I got my bleary peepers open I saw my friend Ole Brunvig of the Homicide Squad.

Apparently Ole had been summoned to the scene during my temporary sojourn in slumberland, and he had brought along a full complement of his Headquarters minions. Sallow, surly, sulphurous and sullenly resembling a dyspeptic horse with stomach ulcers, he was now directing the removal of Grenzinger's remainders, watching as a pair of white jacketed morgue orderlies deposited the murdered gaffer in a wicker basket.

At the same time he was engaged in sour conversation with three assorted characters—the handsome Brookman, the red-haired Molly Shannon, and the lanky, slab-sided Paragon producer, Benny Thornton. Although as yet I was unable to stir a muscle, I could hear everything being said. And I didn't like what I listened to.

"Well, yes," Thornton was saying in a reluctant tone. "Ransom did make threats against Grenzinger, on account of that silk falling off the catwalk like we've been telling you. But I'd scarcely call them murder threats."

"Just promises of physical violence, eh?" Ole grunted.

"Physical violence indeed!" the Brookman bozo's sarcastic voice chimed in. "What is more physically violent than killing? It seems perfectly patent to me that Ransom is the murderer."

"No! He couldn't be!" That was Molly Shannon defending me. "I know Nick, know the sort of person he is. He'd use his fists, yes. He wouldn't shoot a man in the back, though."

"I'll go along with that," Thornton said. "Ransom's a tough man in a fight but I'd never cast him in the role of an assassin."

"Aren't you forgetting something?" Brookman purred venomously. "Aren't you overlooking the point that this Ransom fellow was the only the man on the lot strong enough to use a seventy-five pound bow with a thirty-inch hunting arrow?"

SUCH a crack was exactly the tonic I needed to tilt me out of my torpor, bring me surging drunkenly upright.

"Include yourself in that class, mister," I said. "You're as hefty as I am. Heftier. And you pack plenty of punching power, judging from the way you crowned me with a hammer and then cold-corked me."

"I had to, don't you know," he said contemptuously. "For an unpleasant moment you looked as if you might be going to attack me. Naturally I took steps to safeguard my welfare. Then I phoned the police, notified them of the murder, and informed them I had captured a prime suspect. Meaning you, of course."

"Oh, of course." I gave him back his leer with six per cent interest. "Thereby making me a fall guy and diverting suspicion from your own coat-tails. Phooey to that. Let's consider what I said concerning your beef, your brawn and your potential ability to handle a bow with a seventy-five pound pull."

His kisser got ugly. "So I'm strong. That proves what?"

"It may prove nothing. But it hints you might have killed Grenzinger."

"You're being absurd, my dear man."

"Am I? Even when I mention your possible motive?" I said. Then I turned to Ole Brunvig. "The defunct gaffer was blackmailing this lug."

Brunvig stiffened. "What?"

"I dare anybody to make that stand up in court," Brookman said haughtily. "Furthermore, I have a leak-proof alibi. I was dictating a scenario to my secretary all afternoon, up to the time I visited Miss Shannon's dressing bungalow and encountered this insufferable Ransom cad. He then forced me to accompany him here to the banquet hall set, where we discovered the body. That disposes of any accusations made against me." He sniffed a delicate sniff of triumph.

Brunvig glared at me. "Well, Sherlock, what have you got to say to that?"

"Shucks." I made a disparaging gesture. "I was only kidding. I realized from the beginning that Brookman couldn't have croaked Grenzinger with the bow and arrow. For the simple reason that the gaffer wasn't croaked by a bow and arrow."

Brunvig nodded, then did a Keystone-comedy double take. He leaped three feet in the air and clapped a hand to his brow.

"He wasn't croaked by a bow and arrow?" he screeched. "What kind of pastrami are you trying to slice me? Nell's bells and buckwheat cakes, didn't I see the arrow sticking out of him with my own two eyes? Didn't I watch the medical examiner yank it from the wound?"

"The murder was committed with an arrow," I said. "It was *not* committed with a bow and arrow."

"Of all the—"

"Did you notice the feathers?" I waved him quiet.

He looked at me slantwise. "Feathers? What about feathers?"

"A broadhead hunting arrow is fletched in a characteristic way," I said. "The feathers at the notch end are placed in what you might call an elongated spiral instead of being straight with the line of the shaft, the line of flight. That's done for the same reason a gun barrel is spirally grooved—to impart a twist to the bullet as it blams to its target. This twist keeps the slug from veering off course, makes for greater accuracy, better marksmanship. Same way with a spiral-fletched arrow. The twist of the feathers causes the arrow to revolve slightly in its course, to go straight, with no deflections."

"End of archery lecture?" he demanded heavily.

"End of archery lecture and beginning of lesson in detective technic," I said. "The feathers on that death arrow were bent down, crushed, deformed."

"So what?"

"So if anybody had shot that arrow from a bow it would've gone in six different directions at once. You couldn't possibly have scored such a perfect bull's-eye in Grenzinger's back. Therefore the arrow wasn't shot from a bow."

"Oh." He lifted a lip. "It was fired from a cannon, huh?"

"Use your head," I said. "The crushed feathers indicate that the killer held the arrow in his hands, like a spear. He didn't shoot it at the gaffer. He jabbed it at him, thrust it into him. Stabbed him. Which means the kill wasn't necessarily committed by a hefty

person. A lightweight midget could summon enough strength to spear a guy. Even a woman could do it. A dame as dainty as Molly Shannon, for instance."

THE red-haired quail gasped audibly, blinked at me.

"Nick, you aren't suggesting—"

"Sure I am," I said in harsh accents, and gave her the frosty focus. "Grenzinger was blackmailing you. You've admitted that. And you could have bumped him while I was in your dressing bungalow, while I was waiting for you in the front room. Your shower was running, but that doesn't prove you were taking a bath. Maybe you had turned the water on to give yourself an alibi; maybe you'd slipped outdoors in the dusk, skulked over here to the sound stage, speared the gaffer and sneaked back again to your shower without being tabbed."

Tears as big as cough drops splashed out of her Killarney-blue optics, skidded down her cheeks and left streaks of mascara. She had exchanged her emerald kimona for a two-piece ensemble of smoke-gray sharkskin with a bright red handkerchief in the breast pocket for color contrast, and now she pulled the coat more snugly around her as if taken with a sudden chill.

"So that's what you think of m-me," she said. "You think I'm a m-murderess. It's what I get for trusting you, for talking to you, telling my secrets."

I dished her a satirical sneer. "Never confide in a detective. And never try to frame one," I added.

Hal Brookman regarded me as if I'd been something he'd found in the plumbing.

"You low heel, trying to hide behind a girl's skirts. That's about the lowest thing I ever encountered." Then he drifted to the Shannon cookie, took her hand. "Guilty or innocent, Molly, I'll stand by you. Not that I think you're guilty. I'm more certain than ever that Ransom is the murderer."

"*I'm* not!" Benny Thornton snapped. "Considering what Grenzinger had on you and Molly, I wouldn't be at all surprised if you'd both had a hand in killing him."

Brunvig, who had been quietly listening to all this, now swelled up with typically pompous police authority.

"I've had enough of your condemned bickering!" he rumbled. "I'm arresting Brookman and Miss Shannon on suspicion. As for you, gunshoe,"—he gave me a wrathful glower—"you're taking a ride downtown, too."

"Me?" I squalled indignantly. "What for?"

"I'll think of a charge. Material witness, maybe. Or accesory before and after the crime. Give me trouble and I'll call it resisting arrest, obstruction of justice, and vagrancy."

"Now just a cockeyed minute!" I said with heat. "Here I've been knocking myself out to help you—"

"I need your help like I need leprosy. All you've done is to muck around fouling up an otherwise open-and-shut case, pointing the finger at practically everybody in sight so you won't be suspected yourself. I'm fed up."

This was characteristic of Brunvig. I've chummed with him for years, solved scores of his mysteries for him, and invariably he shows his gratitude by threatening to throw me in a cell, have my license rescinded. Ordinarily you might put it down to envy, but I'm inclined to think it's his chronic indigestion, which gives him the disposition of a misanthropic mule.

As a rule I make allowances for this, but sometimes it's hard to hold my temper in check. Right now I was trying virtuously not to blow my wig. "Before you take me in custody there's an angle I wish you'd let me check," I said in a mild tone. "A nylon thread clue—"

"Didn't you hear me say I wanted none of your meddling?" Ole demanded. Then he reached toward his hip pocket. "Looks like you won't be satisfied until I hang handcuffs on you." He unlimbered a pair of bracelets. "Hold out your wrists."

That was going just too confounded far.

"In a pig's valise you'll nipper me!" I said, and darted to his left.

He lunged in that direction and I reversed myself like a broken-field runner in the Rose Bowl, blipped around to his right, and got away from him before he

could put on his brakes.

Two harness coppers leaped into motion, tried to converge me as I sprinted for the exit. Unfortunately for them they both chose the same angle and collided like a pair of brewery trucks, sideswiped each other and bounced apart, reeling. One of them fell down, loudly announcing that he had been stabbed.

I kept churning toward freedom, at which instant Brunvig got oriented and came thundering in pursuit. He called on all and sundry to halt me even if they had to break my legs in the process.

The door was dead ahead of me now, and I risked a backward glance over my shoulder, saw Benny Thornton deliberately rush across Ole's path. The maneuver looked clumsy, but I realized it was intentional. The producer-director was imperiling his own slabsided form in an effort to give me a chance to lam.

It was nice interference, and I appreciated it—but I didn't take time to say so. I gained the sound stage portal, catapulted outdoors and took a powder in the darkness of the night, made like jet propulsion. No private snoop ever scrammed in a bigger hurry.

CHAPTER V

STRING TO A KILLER

HUNTING for Paragon's electrical department was a tough task. In the first place I didn't know where it was located on the lot, and in the second place I had to keep in the blackest shadows in my search. Otherwise Ole Brunvig and his Headquarters satellites might pinpoint me, corner me, nab me.

I could hear them behind me, fanning out to fine-comb the studio precincts. Now and then I saw the flicker of a flashlight beam probing at possible hiding places.

I kept moving, zigzagging from one building to another. Presently luck roosted on my shoulder and I found what I wanted. When I tried the door, though, it was locked. And the windows of the shedlike one-story structure were all closed, bolted from inside. That was bad—for me.

At any other time I'd have had a ring of master keys with me. I would also have packed a pencil flash and a roscoe. But today I had temporarily abandoned the snooping profession and it accouterments and had reverted to the stunting racket. Consequently I was unarmed, unequipped for detective work. And the minutes were running out. It wouldn't be long until Brunvig and his minions picked up my trail, closed in on me.

I considered smashing one of the window panes, then rejected the notion. Too much noise. It would bring the bulls down on my neck. Yet I had to get into that electric shop pronto. But how?

A hunch hit me.

Around back there was a raised loading dock where the studio trucks could take on or disgorge heavy apparatus. I hauled myself up onto the platform, felt around until I discovered the big corrugated metal door. This was slung on an overhead truck by means of flanged wheels and fastened by an ordinary hasp-and-padlock.

I tested the padlock; no dice. Then I worked the hasp and found a little play in it; the screws which held it to the wooden doorframe seemed lose, insecure. Dry rot in the woodwork, probably, and I gave silent thanks for a California climate that plays hob with structural lumber.

Unfastening my belt, I whisked it off, used the curved steel prong of the buckle to gorge a furrow in the wood behind the padlock hasp. When the furrow was wide enough and deep enough I inserted the belt proper, threading it downward back of the metal plate until I could draw it all the way through. Then, making a loop of the leather, I braced myself against the building and began to pull.

For a moment nothing happened. Then there was a sudden weird whine, a suppressed shriek of screw threads tearing out of rot-soft pine and I yanked the hasp's plate out like a dentist extracting four teeth with one pull of the forceps. Now the hasp dangled against its keeper, and the padlock wasn't worth a pinch of fertilizer. I shoved at the door and it slid smoothly open on its overhead trolley.

I blipped inside.

The joint was darker than the interior of an eight-ball and I fumbled in my pocket for matches. And then, before I could strike one, I heard a noise.

Somebody was using a key on the electric shop's front portal. Somebody was sneaking in.

I crouched.

Door hinges creaked and footfalls sounded, cautious, stealthy. A switch clicked and an unshaded bulb glowed alive in the ceiling. Somebody prowled around a portable generator, skirted a welter of coiled cables and lamp standards, approached a rectangular metal frame containing a screen of tattered silk. The frame was misshapen, bent out of square, and a hand pawed at all four sides of the gadget as if seeking something.

I strode up behind the hand's owner and said:

"Looking for a fragment of black nylon string, buster?"

BENNY THORNTON gasped like a hooked fish, straightened up to his full skinny height, and started to turn around. His sandy hair seemed to rise on end like a fright wig and he made inarticulate gurgles in his gullet such as perhaps no other cinema producer-director has ever made before or since.

"Better freeze," I said, and poked him in the back with an extended forefinger. "That's a gun you feel against your vertebrae," I added untruthfully. "Make a wrong move and it goes bang, rendering you as dead as the Grenzinger gaffer you murdered, as dead as you hoped Molly Shannon would be."

"Wh-wha-what... How—"

"The jig's up, Thornton," I said. "Even after you killed him it was Grenzinger who stooled on you. I found a length of black nylon thread in his grasp when I first inspected his body, and later I got hep to what it meant. In the shadows behind a brightly lighted set a length of black string is practically invisible. They use it in movie productions, frequently, to make a prop jump or fall without anyone touching it. See what I mean?"

"Now listen, Ransom—"

"You listen," I said. "Suppose somebody had a grudge against the Shannon quail; wanted her bumped off. Suppose this person tied black nylon thread to a light-diffusion silk on an overhead catwalk, and yanked the gadget down just when a stunt man was firing an arrow at the dame. Suppose this same party yelled *'Look out, Ransom!'* hoping the arrow's aim would go haywire and Molly would be skewered."

"Now wait! You can't—"

"The way I construct this clambake," I said, "you're the rat who set up the nylon string contrivance, tugged the diffusion silk off the high catwalk. You were the only creep on the set who was in the right position to pull the thread. Your scheme missed fire, though, and the whole plot might have simmered down except for an electrician with blackmailing tendencies—Grenzinger.

"I think Grenzinger must have been hiding somewhere on the Paragon lot all the time everybody thought he was lamming. I think he must have gone back to Stage Six after you'd cleared the banquet hall set. Maybe he was just doing his job, taking the damaged silk screen away to be repaired. Or maybe he brought it here to the electric shop for a different reason—to study it, see what had made it fall off the catwalk."

"Ransom, let me say—"

"Quiet," I rasped. "Stop interrupting my train of thought. Now where was I? Oh, yes. Grenzinger found a length of black string on the screen and realized you were the guy who'd rigged it and pulled it. So he returned again to the set, figuring you would show up to remove that thread and destroy any evidence against you. I imagine he confronted you when you walked onstage and, knowing he was a blackmailer, I have a hunch he accused you of trying to get Molly Shannon croaked. Then he demanded hush money from you, huh? He threatened to expose you unless you made a payoff."

Thornton's skinny back quivered. Even though he was facing away from me I could hear the hissing sound of his labored breathing. He didn't try to turn around, however. He was too scared.

"So what did you do?" I said. "You

grabbed an arrow, stabbed him between the shoulder blades and left his corpse on the set, forgetting to take the black nylon thread out of his hand. That was your worst blunder, but not your only one."

"Wh-what do you m-mean?"

"A while ago, when accusations were flying thick and fast for Lieutenant Brunvig's benefit, you pretended to defend me against homicide charges. You looked Brookman in the eye and said, 'Considering what Grenzinger had on you and Molly, I wouldn't be surprised if you both had a hand in killing him.' Meaning that you knew Grenzinger was an extortionist. Also meaning that you knew about Molly's trip to Las Vegas with Brookman.

"In brief, bub, you knew too much. This, plus the fact that you'd been the only guy in a position to pull the silk from the catwalk, told me all I needed. It told me you were capable of murder—and you hankered to bump Molly Shannon. That's why I tried to have her pinched. I knew you might make another attempt on her life, and the safest place for her was the bastile."

"You clever snake!" he said bitterly.

"Thanks a whole," I grunted. "So then I dropped a hint that I wanted to trace a nylon thread clue. That was my way of putting you in a panic, making you show your hand. I was reasonably sure you'd come hunting that light-diffusion frame to make sure there was no thread left on it. By helping me escape, you figured the cops would be so busy looking for me you would have time to come here to the electric shop. Which you did—and thereby convicted yourself."

"Ransom, listen to me. Let me explain something. I was crazy in love with Molly Shannon, and she refused me. She turned me down cold—and she went to Vegas with that Brookman rat. Is it any wonder I went out of my head with jealousy and tried to kill her? As for Grenzinger, I gave him just what he deserved. He was a crooked, thieving shakedown artist. Look, Ransom, can't we make a deal?"

HE turned around as if to offer me a bribe. And then he saw my extended finger. No gun. Suddenly his glims glittered like a maniac's.

"Bluffing, were you?" he snarled. He dug for his coat pocket, came up with a .38 automatic. "It'll be your last bluff!"

Frantically I tried to swing on him, bat the gat aside. There came the abrupt *Ka-chow!* of a heavy-caliber roscoe sneezing its lethal pill and I thought I was a goner. I was wrong. Thornton was the goner. He sagged, swayed, dropped his heater and sobbed like a spanked child. Then he fell down with a bullet in his tripes. Ole Brunvig stepped into view holding a smoking service revolver and looking smug.

"I heard it all, Sherlock. You can now thank me for saving you from a premature grave."

"Hah?"

He grinned. "Every time I threaten to arrest you, you manage to clear yourself by turning up the guilty guy for me. That's why I do it. Keeps you on your toes. Good grief, man, I was behind you every step of the way. Well, that's another crime buttoned up for the files," he added, leaning over the moaning Thornton. "Hmm-m. I think he'll live to go to the gas chamber."

"Yeah," I raged. "And you can go to—"

"Naughty, naughty. Remember the censors. Now go round up my tech squad for me. Then you have permission to blow."

What can you do with a cop like that? Nothing. There's no justice for a private dick. I didn't even collect a fee from Molly Shannon, because she was too busy falling in love again with Hal Brookman. All I got out of the hassle was an invitation to their wedding. This time they really went through with it.

Oh, well, I didn't want to be a bridegroom anyhow. I'm satisfied to be the best man.

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Next Issue's Nick Ransom Novelet

PREVIEW OF MURDER, by Robert Leslie Bellem

THE RED BAG

By O. B. MYERS

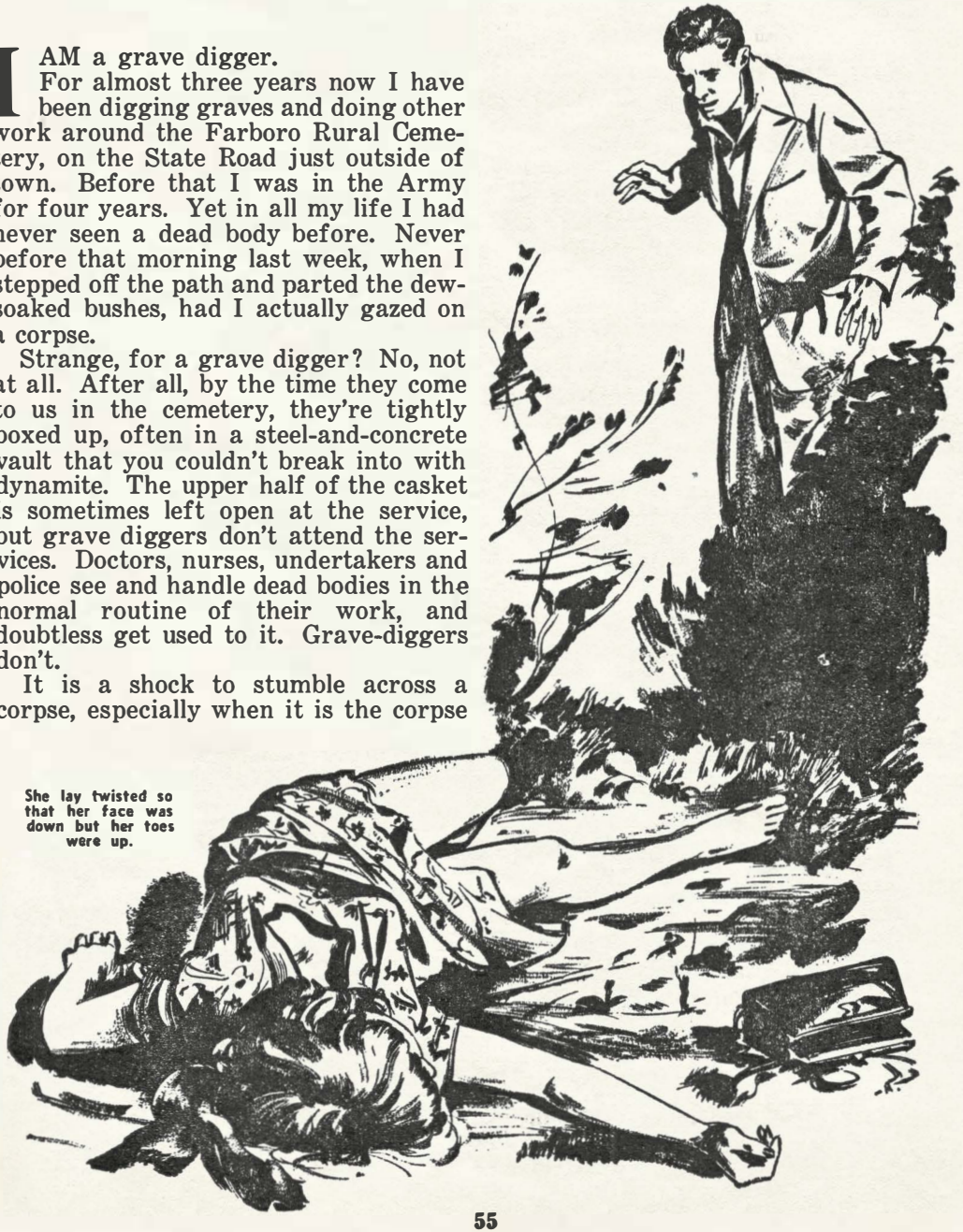
Ordinarily Death is no novelty to a grave digger, but when murder takes a hand, curious things happen in his cemetery!

I AM a grave digger.

For almost three years now I have been digging graves and doing other work around the Farboro Rural Cemetery, on the State Road just outside of town. Before that I was in the Army for four years. Yet in all my life I had never seen a dead body before. Never before that morning last week, when I stepped off the path and parted the dew-soaked bushes, had I actually gazed on a corpse.

Strange, for a grave digger? No, not at all. After all, by the time they come to us in the cemetery, they're tightly boxed up, often in a steel-and-concrete vault that you couldn't break into with dynamite. The upper half of the casket is sometimes left open at the service, but grave diggers don't attend the services. Doctors, nurses, undertakers and police see and handle dead bodies in the normal routine of their work, and doubtless get used to it. Grave-diggers don't.

It is a shock to stumble across a corpse, especially when it is the corpse



She lay twisted so that her face was down but her toes were up.

of a beautiful young girl who has been brutally murdered. I could feel the muscles in my throat twitch as they tightened up, and there seemed to be lead weights tied to my hands and feet. I wished that I were not alone; I wished that I had followed the State Road instead of cutting through the woods from Hoover Street; I wished that somebody else had found this gory horror.

I tried to move closer, but my knees trembled so violently that I had to wait. The warm September air whispered softly through the branches over my head, as if warning me against something. Out on State Road tires hummed as a car passed at good speed. After a minute I clamped my jaw and took two more steps. This brought me to the edge of the small clearing, where I got a good look.

She lay on the hard-packed shale, her body twisted so that her face was down but her toes up, a posture that gave evidence of a desperate struggle. She wore a simple little dress of cotton print, and it was half torn off. Her legs were tanned so that it looked as if she had on stockings, though she didn't, and her feet were without shoes.

This struck me as odd, and I looked again. Her soles, turned toward me, were quite clean, though it didn't occur to me at the moment what that meant.

There was a bright orange scarf about her neck, and when I looked at it a second time I saw that it had been drawn tight and knotted. Her hair was dark and curly, the light, fluffy kind of hair that formed a cloud about her head. It wasn't all light and fluffy now; some of it was matted and stiff. It fell across her face, so that I only partially saw her profile. That was enough, for what I did see included an ugly wale with purple edges. She must have been beaten as well as strangled.

I KNEW that I shouldn't touch too much, but I felt that at least I ought to make sure that she was dead. I hunkered on my heels, no closer than absolutely necessary, and reached out to touch her calf. It was firm but cold; cold with a coldness that did not belong to living flesh. At that instant a vagrant breeze stirred the hair that lay across her cheek; I jumped so violently that I almost went over on my back.

With my lungs tight I rose and backed away. The last thing I saw was also the first thing I had seen—the flash of reflected sunlight on a bright metal surface. It was the clasp of her handbag, which lay just beyond reach of her outstretched fingertips. I remember noticing that the bag, of imitation leather, was a deep, rich red in hue, and not at all a good match for the orange scarf.

I did not run, yet I was breathing heavily when I had covered the fifty yards to where the path came out of the woods onto Chestnut Lane. Diagonally across the road was the main gate of the Farboro Rural Cemetery, and just inside it the small building that housed the office. I unlocked the door and went directly to the telephone.

"Police Headquarters? This is Lucius Coyne, out at the Rural Cemetery. . . The cemetery, yes. Look, I just found a dead body out here!"

"You found a . . . hey, what is this!" That officer's tone held petulant disgust. "So you want me to call up the Aquarium and ask for Mr. Fish, I suppose? Go dunk your head. It's too early in the morning for—"

"No, no, I'm not joking! I don't mean in the cemetery. I found the body across the road, in the woods, on my way to work, just a few minutes ago. It's a young girl. She's been killed."

"A young girl?" He was still skeptical. "Describe her."

I started to describe her clothes and general appearance.

"Say, wait a minute. Wait till I get Cummings."

After a brief pause another voice came on the line. John Cummings had been a cop in Farboro since before the war. I knew him, though not intimately. I repeated my description.

"Say, that sounds like Marion Figart. She's been missing since last night. Is anyone else there—in the woods, I mean?" When I told him no, he said, "Well, stand in the road, by the entrance to the path. Don't let anybody go in there. I'll be right out."

It is more than a mile from the middle of town, but John meant it when he said right out. His tires squealed as he turned

off State Road almost before I had time to get a cigarette lighted. He was in civilian clothes—I found out later that John was a detective-sergeant—but the officer with him was in uniform. I led them into the oppressive silence of the woods, where they didn't do much else right then besides look around, except that they looked around a lot more carefully than I had.

John Cummings crossed the small clearing, walking around the edge, and at the far side peered downward through the underbrush.

"Harry!" he called back over his shoulder. "She came in—or was brought in—this way, not by the path."

Chestnut Lane makes a sharp bend, almost a right angle, as it starts down the hill. There is an excavation in the bank, where sand and gravel was taken out when the road was first built. It gives room for two or three cars to turn off on a hard, gritty surface which, especially when dry, takes but little impression of either tire tracks or footprints. John was looking down on this pit.

What signs he saw to tell him that the girl had come into the clearing from that side I did not find out.

"Lead me to that telephone," he told me brusquely.

He called headquarters and gave a lot of instructions about photographers, fingerprint men, doctors, and others.

"Contact the prowl car," he ordered last, "and have them pick up Homer Figart at his apartment and bring him out here. . . Yes, I know he's got a car of his own, but I want them to pick him up in a police car, and keep an eye on him. Never mind why."

HE had left the lad in uniform standing guard over the body, so while waiting for the others to arrive he questioned me some more. I explained that I used that path nearly every morning on the way to work, except in the winter when there was deep snow, but that hardly anyone else ever did. It came out on Chestnut Lane almost opposite the cemetery gate, but there was nothing else on Chestnut Lane until you came to the brickyard and the brewery, way down at the foot of the hill by the railroad, and they were more conveniently reached by Ward Avenue along the tracks. Few people knew about the path.

"The murderer probably didn't." John nodded. "It might have been a long time before she was found, from the road. It must have been dark when he took her in there. He never even saw the path, and didn't realize her body might be discovered from that side." He eyed me thoughtfully. "You ever notice people using that gravel pit much, to park in?"

I shook my head. "The only view from there is the cemetery, with the brickyard in the distance. It's not exactly the kind of a spot you'd take a girl to neck her."

"It's the kind of a spot where somebody took a girl to kill her, though," muttered John. His line of thought focused on me again. "You haven't always been a grave-digger, have you?"

I explained to him how I happened to be in this line of work.

During the war I was crew chief on a C-54 flying the Hump between India and China. Early in Forty-five, on my nineteenth trip, my oxygen failed at twenty-five thousand feet. I was back in the cargo compartment, and nobody found me for an hour. The combination of anoxia, altitude, latent malaria, and nervous tension put me in the hospital for nine months.

When I was discharged, the medico told me, "You're young, so your lungs will come back, all right. Get plenty of physical exercise, outdoors if possible, avoid mental strain, and don't worry."

My father had owned the cemetery in the Twenties, but had been forced to sell several shares during the depression, when times were tough. My mother, however, had inherited his interest, and still owned a majority block of stock, but was now too old, of course, to be active in the management. What more natural for me, when I came back from the C. B. I., than to take over this responsibility? Running the affairs of a small cemetery involved no harrowing nervous problems, and I could get my exercise on the end of a shovel.

"You know many people here in Farboro?" John asked me.

I shook my head. "I went to school in Buffalo, and during the war I was

away a long time. Nowadays I don't run around a lot, on account of Mother. She's not very well. That girl—I may have seen her on the street, but I don't know her. You say her name is Figart?"

"I think so." A siren wailed from the corner of State Road. "I'll know for sure in just a few minutes now."

A black coupé, followed by a couple of sedans, pulled up before the gate. I had a brief glimpse of a face between two uniforms—a pale, angular face sown with freckles under a mop of dull, reddish-brown hair. There were dark circles under the watery blue eyes, and the lips were clamped in a rigid line, as if the man were looking forward to a shock. I felt sorry for him, for he had one coming.

They all got out and went into the woods. I did not follow. After all, I had my work to do. But all morning there was constant coming and going—cops, doctors, detectives, newspaper men, an undertaker's closed truck, and finally morbid sightseers. I was frequently interrupted, and didn't get much done. It took me all morning to complete the back-filling and sodding of the grave on the shoulder of the hill where Grandpa Appleton had been buried the afternoon before.

The detectives were all through the woods, up and down Chestnut Lane, and even over the low stone wall into the cemetery, poking behind every stone and bush. I asked one what he was looking for.

"Her shoes," he told me. "She had shoes on when she went in there, because the soles of her feet haven't been walked on. Therefore the killer must have taken them off, afterward. If he did, it's probably because they hold some clue to the crime."

I gazed at him, wrapped in thought. "Say! I was in the East a long time—China, and India. They have funny religious customs. They take off their shoes before entering a house, and especially before entering a temple. Now when somebody dies, they enter Nirvana, a new life, so to speak. Maybe they're supposed to enter it without shoes. If you look for a killer who is a Buddhist, comes from the Orient, you might have something."

He regarded me in amused disgust. "Yeah? We'll probably find him burning incense and chanting hymns in front of headquarters, I suppose. What kinda pipe do you smoke it in, buddy?"

I didn't ask him any more questions.

I LEARNED, of course, that Homer Figart had identified the body as that of his wife, Marion, and naturally I read the newspapers the next day with unusual interest. They reported it as the crime of a sex maniac, identity unknown. She had last been seen alive in town, shortly after nine o'clock, and had then apparently been picked up on the street by a man in a car. He had taken her to the turn-out in the gravel pit, attacked and strangled her, dragged her through the bushes, and had then crushed her skull by repeated blows with a billet of wood, which was found lying nearby.

The article laid considerable stress on the curious point of the missing shoes. They had been removed and either hidden or destroyed, obviously because they would in some manner have furnished a clue to the identity of the killer. How or why, no one could say, but an intensive search was being pressed.

The inquest was held on Monday afternoon, in the rooms above the undertaking shop of Silas McCann. After giving my testimony about finding the body, I sat down in the rear and listened.

The police physician described the condition of the corpse, the wounds, the evidence of strangulation. From physical factors alone he estimated the time of death as between eight and ten P. M.

Homer Figart took the stand. He answered the coroner's questions in a low tone, but with a certain sullen aggressiveness in his manner, as if he resented the necessity. His eyes were bloodshot, as if he had been drinking. Under the circumstances, no one blamed him much for trying to drown his grief.

When asked to outline his movements on the fatal evening, he told a straight, simple story. He stated that he had gone downstairs to Paul Folsom's apartment shortly after eight-thirty to sit in a little poker game. His wife, Marion, had popped in for a few minutes about

nine o'clock, greeted his friends, and had remarked that she was going to take a short walk before going to bed. He had stepped into the foyer with her to kiss her good night. That was the last time he had seen her alive.

When the game broke up, some time after midnight, he had asked Paul Folsom upstairs for a night-cap. Immediately upon entering his own apartment, he had noticed that his wife was not there. Surprised, he had phoned her sister, June, who occupied a furnished room around the corner on Haley Street, but June had told him that she had seen nothing of Marion since that morning.

His surprise had quickly become worry. At one A. M. he had called the local police and reported her disappearance. He had slept but little.

Folsom and three more of the poker players followed him in the witness chair, corroborating his story in every detail. They all knew Marion Figart, at least by sight, and they even recalled her quip called from the foyer as she departed.

"Play 'em close, honey. Baby needs shoes!"

At the time this had merely drawn a laugh. The gruesome significance of the words did not dawn until the following day. Had she had, even then, some subconscious premonition?

I did not grasp the import of this testimony until after I had heard the next witness. He was an elderly lawyer from Syracuse, and represented the estate of Homer Weatherby, who had died a few years before. Weatherby's property, with a net value of something over fifty thousand dollars, had been bequeathed to his sole surviving nephew, Homer Figart, but with the strings of a trust attached.

According to the terms of the will, Figart was to enjoy the income from the trust, somewhat over two hundred dollars a month, as long as he was married. Only when he no longer had a wife, *or* an ex-wife, was he to inherit the principal sum. The lawyer explained drily that this provision was intended to make sure that young Homer did not cast his wife aside merely to lay hands on a lump sum and run through it. The old man had evidently had a rather low opinion of his nephew's sense of marital responsibility.

Now I understood why John Cummings had brought this attorney to testify at the inquest. This furnished a possible motive. As long as Marion Figart was alive, Homer could support her at least decently on two hundred dollars a month. But as soon as she died, her husband came into the principal—and the attractions of a solid sum of fifty thousand dollars were obvious. Men have often killed, or been killed, for less than that.

And yet the previous testimony was a complete contradiction of this possibility. Four men besides Homer had seen Marion Figart alive at nine o'clock, and from that hour on until morning, at least one of the four had been with Homer every minute, at a distance of nearly two miles from the scene of her death. His alibi could not have been more perfect if it had been planned in advance.

THE lawyer was followed by one last witness whose testimony seemed almost superfluous. She was a plump woman with beady, inquisitive eyes who ran the rooming house on Haley Street. Yes, she knew Mrs. June Barrett. She had rented the young lady a room ten days ago, when she had first arrived from Tacoma. She was aware, of course, that Mrs. Barrett was Marion Figart's sister. In fact, she had seen the two together a couple of times, and had been struck by the close family resemblance, although they were not twins. She had learned that June was older by a year.

She had also learned other things, apparently, as is the way of landladies with a highly developed sense of curiosity. June had recently left her husband, a soldier she had married on the West Coast in 1942. He was, according to her, "impossible." She had come to Farboro, where she had never been before, because her sister lived here, and had been looking for a job, but without success.

Mrs. Barrett, from the landlady's description, was rather a quiet sort, and did not run around much, probably for financial reasons. On the day in question, the young lady had gone out about

four, saying that she planned to eat an early supper and go to the movies alone, as her sister had declined to join her.

She had apparently done just that, for she had reentered the house on Haley Street at exactly five minutes past nine. The witness had noticed the hour when she spoke to June in the hall, and got a reply. The double feature at the Colony, she had reported, was good. June had then gone upstairs to her room, and had not, the landlady could state positively, left the house after that time.

Yes, she remembered Mr. Figart calling about one. She had first answered the phone herself, and then called Mrs. Barrett downstairs. She had not realized the significance of the conversation at the time, but she could, nevertheless, repeat every word of it. What's more, at the coroner's suggestion, she did.

Since that time Mrs. Barrett, obviously overcome with grief, had kept much to herself.

I perceived that John Cummings had introduced this witness in order to narrow his field. This testimony proved that it was impossible for June Barrett to have murdered her sister. But there had never been any hint of such a suspicion on the part of anyone. It was generally conceded, from the brutal nature of the beating and other indications of attack, that the crime had been committed by a man, and this evidence struck me as superfluous and irrelevant.

The jury retired. I did not wait for them to return, not knowing how long they might deliberate. I learned the next morning that they had brought in the usual verdict of "death at the hands of an unknown assailant."

The following day, after eating my lunch, I was in the little cemetery office studying a map when I heard the tap-tap of hard heels entering the open door. I looked up, and almost fell off the chair.

The girl who had just come in was tall and slender, and the simple black dress accentuated the smooth curves of her figure. She moved with a catlike grace on slim, patrician ankles, and her hands, narrow and white, had a well-manicured look. A mass of glossy black hair was crowded by a tiny tricorn hat from which a half veil dangled just far enough to emphasize the languorous effect of her big, dark eyes. Her voice was low and slightly husky.

"I wish to see the manager."

I was in overalls, so of course she took me for a workman. Also, I was gaping like a fish.

"I—er—yes. That's me. Who are you?"

"My name is Barrett—Mrs. June Barrett. I wish to make arrangements about a burial, for my sister."

I drew a deep breath and straightened up on my feet. "I beg your pardon. I manage the cemetery. For a moment there you gave me quite a shock."

She raised her penciled brows in a question.

"You look so much like your sister," I explained. "You see, I am the one who found her."

"You!" She was obviously startled, almost as startled as I had been at her entrance. Then her eyes dropped quickly. "If you don't mind, I'd rather not talk about it."

"Oh, of course not. I understand, naturally. But what can I do for you, Mrs. Barrett?"

She wanted a grave. I explained about family plots, large and small, quoted prices, and pointed out locations on the map.

People are odd about death. In some it seems to stun the monetary sense. They spend money they haven't got on lavish accommodations that do their loved ones no good. Others are just the opposite. They begrudge every nickel put underground, and haggle dreadfully over the cost of a sprig of ivy. She was evidently the latter type.

NO, she didn't want a family plot. No other members of her family were buried in this part of the country, and probably none ever would be. Just a single grave, and the simplest arrangements.

I never try to take advantage of the moment by selling customers something they don't want.

"The single graves," I pointed out, "are naturally not in the most desirable location. But perhaps you would like to look at the site itself?"

She seemed to welcome the sugges-

tion. I led her along the graveled drive that curved left under a magnificent elm. Fifty yards farther it branched before the squat, marble mausoleum of the Quist family. Again we bore left. The drive kept curving back on itself as it slanted across the crest of the hill and sloped off down in the general direction of the lower end of Chestnut Lane.

Suddenly she s t o p p e d. I almost tramped on her heels.

"Isn't that—is that where—"

Ahead on our left ran the low stone wall that bordered the cemetery. Beyond it was the macadam road, on the far side of which a shallow excavation was gouged out of the bank.

"Yes, it is," I replied, divining her question. "I hadn't intended to mention it, but—"

"Oh, can't you take me somewhere else?"

I pointed out again, as gently as I could, that the more desirable sites on the north and east side were reserved for large plots. This was the only area in which single graves were available. I pointed ahead to where an oblong of fresh turf marked the last single grave I had just closed.

"There, by that hydrangea bush. About five feet this side of it. It's on a slope; good drainage. And the bush will stay, to furnish interest."

"Oh, very well!" she blurted abruptly, turning on her heel.

She marched back along the drive toward the office without once turning to look behind her.

"That will be satisfactory, I suppose," she said when we got there. "It will be ready for Friday afternoon, at two, then?"

I assured her that it would. We closed the transaction on paper in the office. When it came to the financial angle, she seemed to have quite recovered her self-possession, and checked every figure. Then she asked several questions about types of coffins.

"Those matters are usually taken care of by the undertaker," I told her. "Have you talked with Silas McCann?"

"No, I haven't gone there at all." Her long lashes fluttered uncertainly. "I thought I'd see—I'd have to look at—"

"Oh, no," I reassured her. "You can leave everything to Silas. He's competent, and not expensive. He'll do all that for you. If you call him up, he'll probably come to the house, to get her things."

She looked puzzled. "Her things?"

"Clothes, I mean. To dress her properly. The dress she had on was—er—damaged. And shoes. You'll have to give him a pair of shoes for her to wear, of course."

"Shoes?" Her cheeks were so pale behind that veil that the rouge stood out as a blurred splotch. "For her—to wear?"

"Why, yes." I felt uncomfortable. These delicate discussions were usually part of the undertaker's responsibility. "It's customary for her to be fully dressed, you know. But doubtless you'll find plenty of shoes in her closet, to serve the purpose."

She stared at me, wide-eyed and rigid, while she swallowed her emotions with an effort. Then she stood up abruptly.

"Why, yes, of course. I'll take care of it. And thank you for telling me. If there's anything else, let me know."

I watched her swing through the gate on her high heels and reenter the taxi that was waiting. It occurred to me to wonder if her apparent dismay over the matter of shoes had been caused by a reluctance to spend five bucks on a new pair, before I reminded her that her sister had plenty of others in the closet. Some people—would you believe it?—are just that small.

But on that score, it seems, I was mistaken. John Cummings searched the woods again that afternoon, and later vaulted the wall and came over to where I was digging. I told him about Mrs. Barrett's visit, her general attitude on expense, and how she had been so visibly affected when I mentioned the missing shoes. He followed my recital with the closest attention.

"Close-fisted, is she?" he remarked. "If it was her money, I could understand it. She hasn't got any. But it's Homer Figart's money she's spending, and he's due to get enough for sixty funerals. Incidentally, why isn't he making these arrangements himself?"

"I wouldn't know. Maybe he's too broken up."

John only shrugged.

IT WAS five o'clock. I decided to quit for the day. We strolled together toward the gate. I heard the phone ringing. We have a large gong on the outside of the office shack for just that purpose. It turned out to be someone asking if Sergeant Cummings could be reached.

"Yes?" he barked, into the instrument, grunted, and muttered a number of times, and finally said, "That's fine, Mr. Willis. Thanks for letting me know. Yes. Good-by."

He hung up and turned to me. "She bought a new pair of shoes in the Kaye Shoppe half an hour after she left here."

He explained that the newspapers had harped so much on the missing shoes that every amateur detective in town was agog. Willis, the proprietor of the store on Main Street, had had a customer that afternoon who asked for a pair of black suede pumps, size 7½-B, had them wrapped, and walked out without trying them on. A woman who bought a pair of shoes without trying them on was, in his experience, such an oddity that he reported the incident to the police. His description of the customer fitted June Barrett to a T.

"So"—I shrugged—"she treated her sister to a new pair, eh?"

"Ye-e-es," said John slowly. "She's tight with her money, shaves funeral expenses to the bone. And yet, with Marion Figart's closet doubtless full of used slippers that would serve the purpose just as well, June goes out and spends seven-ninety-five on a new pair. Now why would she do that?"

I admitted that it seemed a trifle odd, but I could furnish no easy explanation. John stared at me, chewing his lips in thoughtful study, but said nothing more at the time.

By Friday the weather broke, Indian summer dissolving into a chilly drizzle. I erected a tarpaulin on poles, to protect the clergyman and the mourners at the side of the newly opened grave, and laid a few planks to keep their feet out of the mud. I saw that the strips of webbing, for lowering the coffin, were in proper place, and then went inside the office to wait.

The funeral service was at two, in Silas McCann's chapel. In order to avoid a merely curious crowd, this had not been publicly announced, the notices saying only, "Interment Private." The casket was not open, for in addition to the severe mutilation of the crime itself, the body had undergone an autopsy at the hands of the coroner, and minute examination by the police, and Homer Figart had decided it were best to remember his wife as she had looked when alive.

It was nearly two-thirty when the cortége came along Chestnut Lane and turned in at the gate. It was quite small—the hearse, followed by a single limousine for members of the family, who included only the husband and the sister, the minister in his coupé, a couple of sedans holding a few local friends and neighbors of Homer Figart's. Another sedan carried the pallbearers, furnished by Silas McCann. The last car contained three men whom I recognized as detectives in plain clothes, but did not include John Cummings.

I waited near the grave, hovering in the background while the passengers descended and gathered under the makeshift awning. The pallbearers lifted the coffin from the hearse and set it across the strips of webbing. It was not quite square so I moved in and showed them, in whispers, how to shift it so that when the time came it would descend smoothly and without tipping.

As I stepped back I saw another car turn in at the gate. It stopped some distance away, and I had only time to observe that it contained John Cummings and one other man—a tall, square-shouldered stranger in a light tan topcoat and a soft brown hat. The clergyman, leaving his hat and coat in his car, had stepped to the side of the grave. Opening his prayer book but not looking at it, he began to murmur the phrases he knew from memory:

" 'Ashes to ashes—dust to dust—' "

The pallbearers manipulated the straps. The coffin sank slowly out of sight. I stepped close and, using a trowel, tossed a handful of earth into the opening. A hollow, soggy thud came up, but failed to produce the usual reaction. The little group stood in bitter silence.

No one sobbed; no one seemed even to breathe.

The minister closed his book with a small gesture of terrible finality. He spoke a word or two to Homer Figart, pressing his hand, and repeated the phrase of sympathy to Mrs. Barrett. She wore a longer veil today, but of a light material, one so transparent that it was easy to see that her features were frozen in a rigid mask in a determined effort to suppress the emotions that seethed beneath.

John Cummings stepped to her side and, after a word, drew her a step or two away from the others. It happened that he drew her toward the head of the grave where I was waiting with a shovel, so that I overheard what he said.

"I do not like to intrude on your grief, Mrs. Barrett, any more than necessary," he said gently. "But we have to seize our opportunities when they present themselves. You have no doubt heard the old adage about a murderer returning to the scene of his crime. This has sometimes been known to work out as the murderer attending the funeral of his victim, drawn by a morbid fascination."

"You mean, he is *here?*" Her voice was a tense whisper. I could see her long, slender fingers grip his arm.

"I don't know," said John. "Perhaps you can help me find out. Now most of these people you know—friends, relatives. I have three of my men here." He pointed them out to her. "And that short chap with the mustache is from the Farboro newspaper. Now among the others, do you see anyone you don't know?"

THE small group was standing around in the usual embarrassed discomfort, each waiting for the other to make the first move to leave. Out of earshot of John's remarks, none of them knew why her eyes were darting from one to the next. They halted suddenly, resting on an elderly man in an old raincoat, standing next to the hydrangea bush.

"That's Erich, my helper," I said quickly.

Her eyes searched on. They paused again.

"That man—over there."

Now I noticed that the tall, rugged fellow who had arrived late, with John, had taken up a position on the opposite side of the grave and was staring across it at the girl in black with a fixed intensity which somehow held something ominous.

"Yes?" encouraged John.

"I don't think I know who he is."

"Are you sure?" insisted John, watching her face.

"I'm quite sure. I never saw him before in my life."

John turned his head and gave a beckoning jerk. The tall stranger stepped around the foot of the grave until he stood directly in front of the girl. His heavy gaze seemed to burn through her flimsy veil to sear her face. He never uttered a sound.

"That is a little strange, *Mrs. Barrett,*" said John, in a different voice, giving a peculiar emphasis to her name. "This is your husband, George Barrett, from Tacoma."

There was a moment's silence when it seemed as if the sky were about to fall.

[*Turn page*]

Homer Figart, who had heard John's last words, took a couple of quick steps forward. The girl at John's side stiffened. I heard a stifled gasp of horror between her clenched teeth. Her hand came up to claw at her cheek through the veil. Then John touched her on the arm, and spoke firmly.

"Mrs. Marion Figart," he said, "I hereby arrest you, and your husband, Homer Figart, as co-defendants and accomplices in the murder of your sister, June Barrett, on Friday, the sixteenth—"

He never finished the formal sentence. The terrifying suddenness of the accusation galvanized Homer Figart into action. Had he stopped to think, he would have seen that he had no chance for ultimate escape. But sheer terror gripped his mind, and drove his muscles. He started to run.

Eluding John's quick clutch, he sprang past the pole that held up the corner of the tarpaulin. The shovel was in my hand; I tossed it between his legs. It half tripped him; the slippery mud underfoot did the rest. He lost his balance; with arms flailing, he crashed headlong into the open grave, thudding heavily down onto the lid of the coffin. The screams of mortal anguish that came up out of that tomb, before we hauled him out, were enough to make anyone's blood run cold.

John borrowed the undertaker's limousine to transport his charges in to headquarters. They left the cemetery in the same car in which they had come, but under quite different circumstances.

After considerable excited discussion, the group of mourners drifted away. The pallbearers and the detectives departed. I picked up my shovel, wiped off the handle, and went to work. It wasn't exactly a pleasant task in the rain, for the soil in that corner of the cemetery is rather harsh and gritty. But ground that has been dug up once digs easier the second time. Nevertheless, it was late afternoon before my efforts were rewarded.

I drove into town and found John in his office.

"Did they confess?" I asked immediately.

He shook his head. "They admit, of course, that it was June Barrett who was killed, and not Marion Figart. No woman ever failed to recognize the man she'd lived with for five or six years. But Marion claims she decided to play the part of June *after* the crime, so that her husband could lay hands on that inheritance. They're going to make us prove deliberate murder, and it'll be difficult."

"Maybe this will help."

I opened up the newspaper bundle I had carried in, to show him a pair of high-heeled, lizard-skin slippers, well-worn, and right now lightly crusted with gritty mud.

"I recalled that old man Appleton's grave was only half filled in that night," I told John. "My shovel was stuck in the pile of dirt, next to it. A man with a pair of shoes to hide could have dropped them in, shoveled in enough dirt to cover them, and gone his way. The next morning I filled in the rest, hiding them for—what he thought—all eternity."

JOHN'S eyes beamed. "Have you handled these at all?"

"No. I lifted them out with the shovel, and wrapped them in the paper without ever touching them with my hands."

"Good. We can bring out prints. The insoles will show the toe prints of June Barrett, of course. Toe prints are just as distinctive as fingerprints, you know, and we've got hers, taken from the corpse. And maybe we'll find Homer's, too."

"But John, how about that perfect alibi of his?"

"Pooh! It won't stand up, now. It was all nicely planned. He took June out to the gravel pit and murdered her, a little after eight o'clock. He had with him a handbag of Marion's, full of Marion's things; compact, handkerchief, keys, cards, and so forth. He planted that near the body, to bolster the identification he was going to make, later on. It sure fooled us."

"But it wasn't the right color, to go with the scarf?"

John grinned.

"What man would ever notice that? I didn't. Now remember; June had recently left her husband and come to Farboro with only the clothes on her back. Her sister, Marion, kindly helped her out by giving her dresses and things, so that everything she wore could be identified as Marion's. Everything except the shoes. June wore seven and a half-B, but Marion's size was six-A. Furthermore, June's shoes were bought on the West Coast, and might carry the name—"

"They do!" I interrupted, pointing. "See, it's stamped in there. *'I. Magnin, Seattle, Washington.'* "

"Sure. Homer thought of that. He took them off, and dropped them where you dug them up today. Then he brought June's handbag back to town with him, and gave it to Marion in the foyer. Her appearance there, as Marion, was a clever stroke. It made us think that the killing must have taken place after nine o'clock, whereas by that time June's body was already beginning to cool. From the moment she left that apartment, Marion played the rôle of June. She went straight to June's rooming house, mentioned the movies, and answered Homer's telephone call in the middle of the night. It wasn't too hard; although they were not twins, the resemblance was close enough to fool anybody—but a husband."

"When did you begin to suspect the deception?" I asked.

"When she bought the new shoes. I had looked in Marion's closet. There were six or eight pairs there. And you told me she hated to spend an extra nickel. But of course those shoes were all six-A's, and wouldn't have fitted the corpse. She had to buy seven and a half-B's."

"But how do you figure these shoes will prove murder?"

"Look. When you go to pick up a pair of slippers, how do you naturally take hold of them?"

"Why, like this."

"Hold it!" John stopped my hand in mid-air. "Don't touch them! But you see what I mean. Ninety-nine people out of a hundred will lift them just like that, with the two inner sides gripped between thumb and forefinger. Now he must have carried them for at least two or three minutes, and with the tension he was under at the time, I'd guarantee his grip was tight. Unless I miss my guess, we'll develop a thumb print in the right side of the left shoe, and a forefinger print in the left side of the right shoe. And if those prints aren't Homer Figart's, I'll eat my shirt!"

When I saw John the next day, he was still wearing the same shirt.

BLUEBEARD

Constable Heath found Lloyd holding his wife's head out of the water

When Smith's wife took her first bath, Chief Inspector Neil of Scotland Yard was called upon to clean up the case—by discovering the cause of her so-called "accidental" demise!

OF THE BATH

by JACKSON HITE

THE NAME of Smith is a most commonplace one in England and yet it occupies a special niche of its own in Great Britain's Hall of Infamy. Smith—George J. Smith to be exact—is considered one of England's most notorious killers, a man who murdered trusting women as a cold-blooded business operation. Millions of words probably have been written about him, his background, conjectures about how he got that way, but practically nothing has appeared about the remarkable role Scotland Yard played in bringing this master killer to justice.

The case as far as the Yard was concerned had a deceptively mild beginning. Letters pour into large police departments daily, crank letters, letters that repeat gossip and rumors, malicious letters in which the writer is trying deliberately to get somebody into trouble, and letters from amateur detectives who see plots and counterplots in innocent news stories. Scotland Yard, of course, receives many such letters every day and like all good departments investigates them on the outside chance that a crime may be uncovered. Officials are more than surprised when such an investigation does pay off.

Scotland Yard Gets Letter

In the month of December, 1914, Sir Basil Thomson, Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Scotland Yard studied a letter which had been forwarded to him from the Chief Constable of Buckinghamshire. The letter contained two newspaper clippings.

One was a recent dispatch printed in *The News of the World*, a weekly newspaper in Great Britain which devotes itself to news about marriages, births, deaths and any hijinks that would interest backstairs maids. The clipping was a brief story about an inquest held on the death of Mrs. Margaret Lofty Lloyd, 38 years old, a bride, who drowned in her bathtub, the day after her marriage.

The tragedy had occurred in a Lon-

FROM THE ARCHIVES OF

SCOTLAND YARD

The mere mention of the words "Scotland Yard" conjures up a picture of a busy and efficient center of crime solution, highlighted by memories of great detectives and famous cases. It brings back to mind Sherlock Holmes and Baker Street, countless heroes of fact and fiction, enveloped in an aura of mystery and glamour. In this series of true stories about the Yard, we bring you the authentic facts—an actual "inside" glimpse into the workings of the organization, based on real cases—not legend!

don rooming house. John Lloyd, the bridegroom, a land agent of Holloway, made the discovery. A coroner's jury returned with a verdict of "death by misadventure," the phrase used in England for accidental death.

Year-old Clipping

The second clipping was over a year old and from a Lancashire paper. It reported the highlights of an inquest held at Blackpool over the death of Alice Burnham Smith who had drowned in a bathtub.

The writer of the letter was Charles Burnham a well-to-do retired coal merchant, father of Alice, who said he always had been suspicious regarding the death of his daughter even though a coroner's jury held it to be an accident. He wondered about the two similar deaths although he admitted that his son-in-law's name had been Smith while the husband of the second victim was named Lloyd.

Sir Basil realized that the fact that two women in different parts of England had met death a year apart by drowning in a bathtub hardly was an unusual matter but with the thoroughness for which the Yard is noted, decided to have the London death checked as a matter of routine.

He sent the clippings to Detective Inspector Neil, commanding officer of the Y Division which had jurisdiction over the Highgate section of London where the death had occurred. Sir Basil frankly admitted that he did not expect anything of value to develop.

Inspector Neil Investigates

Neil, who rose to become one of the five Chief Inspectors of the Yard, known colloquially as the Yard's "Big Five," was a most thorough and painstaking officer. He decided to make the investigation personally. Calling for the police report on the drowning he learned that Lloyd and his bride had appeared at a rooming house at 14 Bismarck Road on December 17 where they had rented a room from the owner, a Miss Blatch. Lloyd had specified that there must be a bath that the couple could use before he would rent the room.

Lloyd explained to the landlady that they had just arrived in London for their honeymoon. His wife had developed a headache on the train and the worried bridegroom inquired about the nearest doctor. He was recommended to a Dr. Bates.

The couple arose early the next morning and returned to the house about 7:30 P.M. at which time Mrs. Lloyd inquired about hot water for a bath. The landlady said she was on the first floor just below the bath and heard some splashing and a sound like a sigh. A few minutes later she heard some one playing a hymn on the harmonium in the sitting room. She assumed it was Lloyd since his wife still was in the bath. After the hymn was over the front door slammed.

Lloyd "Discovers" Death

Several minutes later the front doorbell rang and Lloyd was outside with some parcels. He had purchased some food for dinner. Lloyd called up to his wife that he was home. When he received no answer he went up the stairs. Miss Blatch was startled by his sudden agonized shout, "My God, she's dead!"

The landlady hurriedly summoned Dr. Bates and Constable Heath who was on patrol nearby. The officer arrived before the physician and found Lloyd holding up his wife's head out of the water. The tub still was full. The Constable assisted the husband in removing the body from the tub to a bed. When Dr. Bates arrived he pronounced her dead from drowning.

There were no marks of violence on the body.

Inspector Neil puckered his lips after reading the report. There was nothing suspicious so far in the death of the woman. He questioned the landlady but she could tell him little. Dr. Bates revealed that Lloyd had called with his wife his first night in London. He was concerned about her health. An influenza epidemic was spreading through London at that time and the physician thought the woman might be coming down with it. A sudden dizzy spell while in the tub could account for her

head slipping under the water and her subsequent drowning.

Coroner Is Questioned

The coroner was the next one questioned. He reported that Lloyd had wanted the funeral to be held on December 21 but since this would have rushed the inquest, the coroner ordered a delay until after the inquest on the 22nd. At that time the jury returned with the misadventure verdict, ending the case and permitting burial. Lloyd had produced the wedding certificate for the records and the coroner showed a copy to Inspector Neil. The couple had married in the resort town of Bath. Neil wrote to police there asking for what information they could give.

Meanwhile Neil also checked probate records and found that Lloyd had employed an attorney named W. P. Davies to file his wife's will in which she left her meager possessions to him. In addition there was an insurance policy for 700 pounds with him named as beneficiary. The policy had been issued in Bristol the same day they were married.

The Inspector learned that the dead woman had been the daughter of a clergyman who had died some years before. She had a mother and sister but had not informed them of her pending marriage nor had she introduced her fiance to them. In fact, she told them that she was leaving for London for a new position. Inquiry at her bank revealed that she had withdrawn her total savings of but 19 pounds, less than one hundred dollars.

Gets Her Insurance

Neil shook his head at the information. Beyond her insurance Lloyd stood to gain nothing from her death.

There still was one fact that needed investigation; the death of Alice Burnham Smith. Neil spoke to her father whose letter had started the investigation. Burnham said his daughter had been 26 years old and in the best of health. She was a nurse. He didn't know where his daughter had met Smith but he admitted that he had formed an intense dislike for the man when Alice brought him home. Smith, he said, was about 40 years old. After several unpleasant scenes, Burnham actually had ousted his future son-in-law from the house. A few days later, in defiance of her family, Alice had married Smith.

Burnham had tried to learn something about Smith and had an attorney write to him requesting information about his background. Smith sent a postcard to Burnham as follows:

Sir:—In answer to your application regarding my parentage, etc.: My mother was a bus-horse, my father a cab driver, my sister a rough-rider over the Arctic regions—my brothers were all gallant sailors on a steam roller. This is the only information I can give to those who are not entitled to ask such questions.—Your despised son-in-law—G. Smith.

The Scotland Yard Inspector realized that with the father so outspokingly prejudiced against Smith he would have to accept everything Burnham said with a grain of salt. He next went to the lodging house in Blackpool where Alice had drowned in the tub.

Couple Engage Room

Smith and his bride had taken a room at the home of John Crossley on Cocker Street. Their luggage had consisted of one bag and a paper parcel. Since it was out of season, the Crossleys had rented them a room for ten shillings a week with the privilege of using the bath whenever they liked. In addition, Mrs. Crossley agreed to cook their meals if they provided their food.

On a Friday, two days after the couple had arrived, they went for a walk leaving instructions to prepare hot water for a bath for Mrs. Smith. It was about dinner time when they returned and Mrs. Smith went to the bathroom, which was directly above the kitchen. The Crossley family were eating in the kitchen when they saw water staining the ceiling. They realized that Mrs. Smith must have filled the tub with too much water which spilled over when she stepped in. While they were debating what to do Smith came into the kitchen with a package.

"I have brought these eggs for our breakfast in the morning," he said.

Smith then went up the stairs to the

second floor. They heard him call out to his wife and then suddenly shout for help. He had found his wife dead in the tub. A doctor who lived nearby was summoned. He was the same physician who had examined Mrs. Smith when the couple first arrived. Smith had been worried because she had a headache. The physician pronounced her dead from drowning.

Deaths Just Alike

Inspector Neil sat upright at the information. The few facts he had learned so closely paralleled the other death that his suspicions were aroused. He found that the Crossleys disliked Smith because he had acted so callously after the death; they had even told him they didn't want him to stay in the house that night.

He did find new lodgings and wrote the address on a post card for Mrs. Crossley. At the inquest Smith had sobbed and broken down several times and when the doctor said he found no signs of any bruises on the body, the coroner's jury returned with an accidental death verdict. Despite this judgment by the jury, Mrs. Crossley had taken the card Smith gave her and wrote across it, "Wife died in bath. We shall see him again."

Crossley said he would recognize Smith if he ever saw him again and agreed to come to London to see if Lloyd was Smith as Burnham suspected. Meanwhile Neil reported back to Sir Basil that he considered the death of both women as suspicious.

The man known in London as Lloyd had moved after his bride's death and police had no address for him, but since he would be getting in touch with the attorney he had hired to probate his wife's will, a watch was kept on that office. For nine days Crossley waited outside the attorney's office for the man to show up to see if he would recognize him. Finally he informed Inspector Neil that he would stay only one more day and then would return to Blackpool.

Visits His Lawyer

In the last day the suspect did go to his attorney's office. Crossley watched the man enter the building and then turned to Inspector Neil.

"That's Smith, all right," he exclaimed.

Although the Inspector had no proof that Smith or Lloyd actually had murdered his wives, he decided to take him into custody when he left his solicitor's office. Smith could be picked up on a minor charge of giving false information in his marriage certificate.

When Smith did step out of the office building he was surrounded by several detectives. Without giving the other time to think, Neil asked him if he was the George Smith who had married Alice Burnham.

"Why, yes," the other replied.

He promptly was arrested on the false information charge while Inspector Neil began an exhaustive investigation into the man's background.

The Inspector soon learned that the suspect's correct name was Smith and that he had a police record. He was the son of an insurance agent. At the ripe age of 9, Smith had been sent to the reformatory for some juvenile offense, until he was 16. Upon his release he stayed out of trouble until he was 18 and then was sentenced to one week in jail for a petty theft. The following year he stole a bicycle and was given six months. In 1896 he was arrested as George Baker for larceny and receiving stolen goods and sentenced to a year in prison. He opened a sweet shop upon his release.

Marries Under False Name

Delving further into his history the officer learned that Smith married a girl named Caroline Thornhill using the false name of George Oliver Love. In his application for a marriage license he added an air of respectability to his false name by declaring that his father was a detective.

The marriage turned out to be a sorrowful affair for Caroline. Smith wrote letters of recommendations for her so she could obtain employment as a maid and she had to steal from her employers and turn the proceeds over to her husband. He disappeared after

she was caught and sent to prison. He was captured while she was in prison and sentenced to two years. When Caroline finished her sentence she fled to Canada to escape from her husband. She revealed that he had married several spinsters for their money and then left them.

Inspector Neil had Canadian police trace Caroline and she informed them that she never had divorced Smith.

"At least we can charge him with bigamy, if nothing else," the Inspector commented to Sir Basil.

Witnesses Are Quizzed

All the witnesses in the two bathtub deaths were questioned and it soon became apparent that if Smith had murdered his wives he had been exceedingly clever. In both instances coroner's juries had held the deaths to have been accidents. In neither case were there any eye-witnesses. Smith seemingly had been away from the house shopping while his two wives were bathing and coming to their strange ends.

In attempting to trace Smith's movements the officers learned that he never seemed to stay more than two or three weeks at a place.

As the many-pronged investigation continued, several facts emerged about his courtships with Alice Burnham and Margaret Elizabeth Lofty. In each case the women seemed doomed to spinsterhood and although Smith obviously was not a man of culture and a cut or so below both women, they were flattered at receiving the attention of a man. He met them at seashore resorts where a strange man can talk more readily to a woman. In each instance there had been insurance taken out by the woman with Smith named as beneficiary in the will.

Smith Is Avaricious

Smith had been exceedingly greedy in getting his hands on all the money he could. Despite the respectable amounts of insurance, both women had been buried almost as paupers in a common grave with the cheapest casket obtainable. When Crossley heard of the funeral arrangements he had remonstrated with Smith but the latter had remarked that it made no difference how one was buried.

"When you're dead, you're dead," was Smith's reply.

The officers learned that he met Alice Burnham at Southsea and became engaged to her within a matter of days. Burnham said that when he retired from business he had given each of his children 60 pounds in cash. In addition Alice had saved some 40 pounds making a total of 100 pounds in all. Burnham took charge of the money and paid her 4 per cent interest on it.

Immediately after the marriage, Smith wrote an insulting letter to him demanding that he turn the money over to his daughter or face suit. Burnham consulted an attorney who told him to pay the money. On December 1, 1913 he received a receipt from Alice acknowledging payment. That same day Smith sent him a card from Blackpool in which he said, "Alice is very ill. I will write you tomorrow." Then came a telegram announcing Alice's death in her bath. The only known illness Alice had at that time was the slight headache.

Arrive Too Late

Even though members of the family left at once for Blackpool they found they had arrived too late. The inquest was over and Alice had been buried. Smith had delayed in sending the telegram to them. He actually had sent a letter to Mrs. Burnham telling her that the inquest would be held the following week and the letter was mailed by him the same day the inquest was held.

The constant probing and tracing of Smith's movements which involved investigations into more than 40 different towns and the interviewing of some 112 witnesses began to bear fruit. Yard detectives learned that in 1908, under his own name, he had married bigamously Edith Pegler.

The officials discovered that she was the only woman whom Smith had not abused. He opened an antique shop with her in Bristol. She told of lengthy absences by him from home after which

he would return with a good sum of money and inform her that he had been away on a trip during which he sold several antiques at a neat profit. These trips, Inspector Neil learned, coincided with Smith's romances with Alice Burnham and Margaret Lofty. He returned to his "wife," after these deaths, with the insurance money in his pocket. She told the Inspector that Smith had invested his money in several annuities which were bringing him a yearly income plus real estate.

Smith Got Annuities

Following up this lead Inspector Neil found that Smith's largest investment in annuities had been in 1912 when he returned with almost 2,500 pounds, the equivalent of $12,000. He claimed that he had been in Canada where he had picked up a Chinese idol for a song which he later sold for several thousand pounds.

Reasoning that the story about Canada and the Chinese idol was an invented tale, Inspector Neil began to trace through death records for 1912 and finally came across evidence of a third bathtub death involving Smith. While it was the third to be discovered by police, it was the first death in the series. The victim was Bessie Constance Mundy.

The Inspector found that the Mundy case involved two separate incidents. Smith first met Bessie in Bristol in 1910. She was then 33 years old and had been left a legacy of 2,500 pounds by her father who had been a bank manager. Smith used the name of Henry Williams and gave his occupation as a picture restorer. After a brief courtship the couple were married in Weymouth.

Collects Wife's Money

The bride's legacy was under the control of her uncle who had invested the money so that she received an income of 8 pounds a month. After the marriage Smith composed a letter to the uncle in which he pointed out that there was 138 pounds due his wife in connection with the interest on her money and he requested that it be sent to her.

Bessie added a postscript to the letter in her handwriting informing her uncle of the marriage. The uncle at first did not want to pay over the interest until he met the new husband, but Smith, still posing as Williams, hired an attorney and the uncle paid the money. The following day Smith disappeared, leaving Bessie as another of his abandoned wives.

Smith returned to his wife, Edith Pegler, and they lived on the money buying some stock for the antique shop. In February, 1912, Smith apparently needed money once more and left on another trip. By a strange quirk of fate he appeared at Weston-super-Mare, a beach town and there met Bessie again.

Smith promptly told her that he had been seeking her for over a year and talked Bessie into coming back to him. As soon as she agreed he took her to an attorney where she signed a paper acknowledging that she had borrowed 150 pounds from her husband at 4 per cent interest. Smith then turned the note over to an attorney and asked him to collect the money from the uncle who still was trustee of her estate.

House, Sans Bathtub

Bessie and Smith then left town and on May 20 the couple arrived at Herne Bay where Smith rented a small house with no bathtub. He told the woman in the realty office that his wife was a cut above him and that she had a monthly income. When he was unable to furnish any bank as reference, he agreed to pay the rent monthly in advance.

Several weeks after moving there Smith appeared at a local attorney's office with a copy of the arrangement his wife had made setting up her uncle as administrator of her funds. He wanted the arrangement set aside so control of the 2,500 pounds would revert to his wife. The attorney said that the agreement could not be changed without the trustee accepting the change. If his wife made a will naming him as heir, the money would pass to him upon her death. On July 8, Smith

and Bessie signed mutual wills and on the next day Smith appeared at the shop of an ironmonger and bargained for a tin bath, knocking the price down a few shillings.

On the day after this purchase he brought his wife to a doctor and told him that she had had a fit. The woman said she had no recollection of the fit but she did remember having a headache. The physician prescribed a simple bromide for her.

Smith Summons Doctor

Twenty-four hours later Smith summoned the doctor on an emergency call to his home. Bessie was lying on her back in the bath, her head under water, a square piece of soap clutched in her right hand. Later he appeared at the realty office and informed the woman there, "Lucky thing my wife had made her will."

A coroner's jury had termed it an accidental death.

With three deaths all following the identical pattern even to the advance alibi of calling a doctor to examine the women before drowning, Sir Basil Thomson ordered the arrest of Smith on a charge of murdering his three "wives." Although there wasn't a scrap of direct evidence, officials decided to try Smith for the murder of Bessie Mundy and to present information of the other deaths as evidence of a system Smith used in marrying women, insuring them and killing them for their insurance money and whatever other possessions they had.

Smith was placed on trial on June 22, 1915, and the prosecution admitted that Smith's exact method of murder was unknown. Inspector Neil had performed experiments which showed that if you suddenly grabbed a person's feet while they were in the tub and swung them up, the head would go under water and drowning could occur in a very short time.

Despite this flaw, the positive picture of Smith profiting from each death and then returning to Edith Pegler to live the quiet life of an antique dealer until his funds ran low, convinced the jury, and he was found guilty.

On August 13 Smith died on the gallows after he had spent all day trying to convince the prison chaplains that he was the innocent victim of a plot and had not murdered his wives. His own attorney later, however, said he was convinced that Smith was guilty.

Helen surged forward, seized his arm

Driven to Murder

George Turner might hide from everyone that he was a brutal killer—but his victim knew!

EVEN after five years of marriage, there were times Helen felt she didn't know her husband at all. Ordinarily, George was kind and considerate and his hardware business was prosperous, so there was never any money trouble between them. But every once in a while, something inside of him seemed to snap. He'd become irritable and senselessly jealous at first, then, after provoking a quarrel, he'd rush off in his car and ride—heaven knew where—for a couple of hours. When he came home, he'd be all over it.

By WILLIAM DEGENHARD

Helen could understand there was something gnawing inside of him, but what it was baffled her. Her girl friend, Agnes, who dabbled in popular psychology, thought it was a sign of emotional immaturity, a manifestation of a periodic rebellion against being tied down in marriage and a hidden desire to return to those free and easy days when he was a traveling salesman. Helen was never quite satisfied with that explanation. She sometimes felt she had never seen the real George, that behind his facade of respectability was another and less pleasant personality.

On the night of the Mansfield's party, George showed all the signs of the old trouble coming on. He hadn't wanted to go out, anyway. As soon as she dared, about midnight, Helen made the break, on the excuse that George wanted to rise early Sunday morning to go fishing. Outwardly, the leave-taking was pleasant enough. Ed and Agnes stood in the doorway, shouting their last goodbys as Helen and George went down the path to their car. George was a little ahead of his wife, striding along with that stiff legged gait Helen knew as a sign of his inner anger. She knew what was coming and she dreaded it.

"Helen!" Agnes called. "I forgot to ask. What time do you want us over tomorrow night?"

"Make it early," Helen called back. "About seven or seven thirty?"

Ed lifted the highball glass he was still carrying. "We'll be there. Goodnight, beautiful . . . 'Night, George."

George turned and smiled genially as he returned the wave. But Helen wasn't fooled. She wished Ed hadn't called her 'beautiful.' She noticed her husband's face was a cold, expressionless mask as he slid across the front seat behind the wheel.

THE car started off with a jerk. George always drove a little too fast when he had a few in him. There was complete silence between them until they had turned out on Central Avenue and were heading across town. Then:

"Ed was very attentive to you tonight."

"Please, George," Helen said wearily. "Let's not start that again."

"You went out to the kitchen with him," he went on. "You two were out there a long time."

Helen didn't answer. She could have told him she had gone out to help Agnes prepare the buffet supper. But she knew when he got into this mood, there was no reasoning with him. She kept her eyes straight ahead, watched the asphalt road taking shape in the glare of the rushing headlights.

"He kissed you," George said in a low voice.

"Oh, stop it," Helen said snappishly. "I've never heard anything so idiotic in all my life."

George's voice was tight. "Your lipstick was smeared when you came out of the kitchen."

Helen kept silent. She felt furious, even though she could see the same old pattern being repeated. He was deliberately provoking a quarrel. She kept her eyes straight ahead. The whine of the motor grew louder.

"I won't be home tomorrow night," he said abruptly.

Helen straightened. "You have to be home. Ed and Agnes are coming. You heard me tell Agnes to be there at seven or seven thirty at the latest."

"I wasn't listening."

"That's a lie and you know it."

"I'm not having that man in my house."

"Don't be childish, George. Ed is the best friend you ever had. You're being ridiculous."

"Ridiculous, am I?" His voice was harsh. "I suppose it's ridiculous to object to another man stealing my wife. Oh, I'm not blind. I know what's going on. You've been seeing him afternoons while I was out. You met him for lunch Tuesday. I've given you everything and this is what I get back. You're trying to make a fool of me. But I won't let you, do you hear me? I won't let—"

She shut her mind to his words, only vaguely heard him babbling on and on. She watched a man in gray, a half a block up, start across the street, stop, half turn to go back. He turned around and around, as if befuddled. Helen straightened slowly as the car hurtled closer and closer. She could hear George still babbling shrilly. The motor roared

louder and louder in Helen's ears and the glaring headlights seemed to be swinging to hold the man pinned in the white light. She leaned forward in her seat, her lips half parting. The car headed straight for the man.

"George!"

Even as she was screaming, she could see that the man in gray wouldn't get away in time. There was a slight, almost imperceptable bump. A dark object whipped across the fender. Helen closed her eyes, screamed again.

The throbbing of the motor never faltered. Helen was rigid with fright, every nerve trembling. Then, slowly, gradually, the roar of the motor began to diminish. Helen's mind thawed and she found her voice again.

"George, you hit a man! I saw it. George, you've got to stop. You hit a man!"

George sat like a graven image, his knuckles white against the wheel.

"George, you hit a man!"

He started, shook himself as if awakening from a deep sleep, glanced into the rear view mirror.

"I didn't see him," he mumbled.

"You must have seen him. I saw him a full block ahead . . . George, you've got to go back . . . Leaving the scene of an accident, it's a criminal offense . . . the police—"

George stared straight ahead as if he hadn't heard.

HE didn't slow down until they reached the turnoff to their home. They lived three blocks in from the boulevard, the second house from the corner on the tree shaded street. Helen felt numb inside. George seemed icily calm. But he wasn't. He swung a little too sharply into the driveway and the right front wheel hit the curbstone, bouncing, sending Helen lurching into him. He swore softly as he pulled up at the path to the front door to let her out.

Her lips felt wooden. "George — it isn't too late. We can explain. That bump—it was so slight we hardly noticed—"

"We can't go back," he said quietly, on a hint of strain in his voice. "My breath. I only had two drinks, just two drinks—but there's alcohol on my breath. The police—they'd crucify me."

Helen felt a little ill as she got out. She paused, looked at the fender. There wasn't a sign of a dent in it. There shouldn't be, for Helen had clearly seen the body slide over the smooth surface. But she did see a streak of something moist. She knew it was blood.

She turned away sharply and ran up the front steps, fumbling in her bag for her keys. The car remained where it was, the motor ticking over softly. She found her key. She had a hard time opening the door, she was trembling so. She slipped inside, stood there, confused, frightened. This didn't happen to ordinary people like the Turners. This always happened to other people, people to be pitied for their foolishness or condemned for their cowardice.

Her eye rested on the telephone for a long moment. That accident should be reported. It must be reported. The man might be alive. There were few pedestrians along that stretch of Central Avenue at this time of night. If he didn't get help he might die.

But she couldn't force herself to go to the phone. A soft sob escaped her as she ran up the stairs.

She heard the car go up the driveway to the garage. She hadn't expected that. She had expected George to adhere to the pattern of incidents like this. She had expected he would go off for a drive by himself. Then she realized. This was not the usual way the pattern had worked out before.

Quickly, she went into the back bedroom and looked down to see what George was doing. The Garage door was swinging up and the light flashed on. George came out, stood very still for a long time, staring at the front end of the car. Then, he went around and got his flashlight from the dash compartment. He had a piece of cotton waste, too. Carefully, he wiped off the blood.

Using the flashlight, he went over the whole of the car, inch by inch. He lay down on the concrete apron and crawled under the car, examining every square inch of the underside. She wanted to open the window and tell him not to go crawling around like that with his good clothes on. She found she couldn't move.

At long last, he was finished. She

could see there was a faint smile on his lips as he went around to the driver's seat. She knew then that he was not going to go back. She felt weak and exhausted as she went back to the master bedroom.

She didn't remember undressing and getting into bed. She lay there, wide eyed, listening for his footsteps on the stairs. But he didn't come up. She could hear him prowling around the living room, pacing up and down, up and down.

She jerked convulsively, her eyes snapping wide open. She saw that daylight had come. It was hard to believe she had been sleeping. She saw that the boudoir lamp was still burning. It was seven o'clock. From downstairs came the sound of soft music. George was pacing —perhaps still pacing. Quickly, she slipped out of bed and got her robe.

She stopped short as she reached the staircase. The music was off, and, after a moment's silence, the beep of the time signal sounded. Then an announcer came on with the news.

She stood there, listening intently, not catching the individual words, only the sense. The foreign and national news was first. There was little new in it. There seldom was on a Sunday morning. Finally, the announcer came to the local items. And the first was a report of the hit and run accident on Central Avenue the preceding night at about twelve-thirty.

The victim was a young man about thirty, Arthur Rennick by name. The police estimated he had been lying in the street fifteen minutes before a passing motorist stopped. He had been lying in the gutter and others must have passed him by as a drunk. He was rushed to the hospital. He was dead on arrival.

The radio snapped off.

HELEN started down, step by step. She felt like laughing, checked herself, wondered if she was on the verge of hysteria. She paused in the living room doorway. George had his back to her. He was staring at the silent radio.

He turned suddenly. "Oh, good morning, Helen."

Her throat felt tight and dry. "George, what are you going to do?"

"We can't go back now, Helen." His voice was calm and matter-of-fact. "He's dead. If we go to the police, I'll be charged with homicide—and sent to prison. Everything we have will be swept away, my business, our home, our social position."

"You can't get away with it, George."

His lips tightened. "I think I can. I know all about the way the police catch hit-and-run drivers. I know police methods. They'll never know about this —unless you tell."

She shivered slightly. "I won't tell, George."

He stared at her for a long moment, then nodded. "I'm going out. I have the perfect excuse. You told Ed last night I was going fishing this morning. I want some old rags, a pail, a broom, and that long handled stiff brush you use for cleaning radiators. I have to give the car a thorough cleaning, the body and underneath the car. I have to be especially careful to get off all the mud and dirt from the underside of the car. There may be blood, a thread, dirt on the man's clothes that would match the dirt underneath the car. . . . "

His voice trailed off and he stared into space, as if visualizing the work to be done. She wanted to tell him she had seen the man go over the fender, not under the car, so the work of cleaning underneath was useless. But she couldn't find her voice.

"I'll do the job out at Bailey's creek—that ford. It's a foot and a half deep there and the bottom is gravel. Don't expect me back until this afternoon sometime, Helen. I have to be very thorough. After I finish at the creek, I'll have to ride over some dusty roads to put back the dirt I removed from under the car. We can't take chances, Helen. No, we can't take chances. No one will ever know what we've done."

"What *you've* done," Helen corrected coldly. "Please have the decency to keep me out of this, George."

His head came up sharply and he stared at her for a long moment. "You're forgetting something, aren't you, Helen? At the time of the accident, we were quarreling. You drew my attention from the road. If it hadn't been for you—"

Helen gasped. "Stop it!" She could

feel herself stiffening, anger welling in her breast. "That's the most despicable thing I've ever heard—blaming *me* for what happened. God help me, I thought I had married a man. Now, I can see I married a coward."

He went white. He snatched up an ash tray, cocked his arm. She stood fast, a loathing and contempt filling her.

"Go on, throw it. Throw it, you coward!"

He flung the tray. Helen winced, but she saw immediately the tray had gone wild. It hit the opposite wall and shattered. George was standing very still, shaking a little, his eyes bleak. After a long moment, he shook himself, like a dog trying to dislodge a heavy burden clinging to his back.

"You shouldn't have said that, Helen."

She shrank back as he came toward her. But he went right by and hurried upstairs. He stumbled on the steps twice, as if he had suddenly gone blind.

She didn't hear him go out. She sat in the big wing chair facing the window, numb, stupified, as if in the grip of a hideous nightmare. She saw the car come down the driveway, a fishing pole conspicuously visible across the rear window. Tears welled up in her eyes as she gazed around the living room. She felt suddenly like a stranger in her own home.

IT WAS almost three o'clock when George finally returned. She was in the kitchen, finishing dinner preparations when she heard the car come up the driveway. She pulled the platter with the roast from the oven, set it on the table and went to the back window.

The car didn't look much different than it had before he went out. She could see that it was dusty. George came out of the garage, set his fishing tackle over to one side, started to haul down the sliding door. He hesitated a moment, then went back into the garage. He examined the car again, even getting down on hands and knees to look under the car. The underside of the car almost seemed like an obsession with him.

There was a smug, pleased look on his face as he came out and pulled down the door. Helen turned away from the window. She was beginning to feel ill again. She wasn't hungry. She felt she couldn't stand sitting across the table from him. She gave way to her impulse. She took off her apron and hurried upstairs and locked the bedroom door.

He called her once from the bottom of the stairs. But he didn't come up. She heard the water running in the kitchen and guessed he was washing up. She heard the rattle of silverware. He was having his dinner without her.

The doorbell rang. Helen stiffened, every sense suddenly alert. She went to her own door, listened intently. She heard George come across the carpetless foyer. For one foolish moment, she wanted to run into the closet and hide herself like a little girl afraid of the thunder. She was trembling a little as she opened the door a crack.

"Charley!" she heard George say heartily. "Well, well, Charley Corbett. Come in. What brings you out this way?"

Helen felt a curious swirling sensation in the pit of her stomach. Charley Corbett was a detective on the Homicide Squad.

"I suppose you heard about it," Corbett said. "That hit-and-run accident on Central Avenue last night?"

"Yes, I heard it on the radio." George was certainly cool and sure of himself. "Shocking, terribly shocking. I heard the young man was alive when he was found. Did he say anything?"

"Not much. He was pretty far gone. All he could tell us was that the car was a sedan—a post war Dodge. So, we're checking every Dodge in town. It's quite a job."

"I know, I know. I suppose you want to look at my car. Wait, Charley, I'll get the garage keys."

Helen came into the hall as the voice faded a bit.

"What time did you get in last night, Mr. Turner? Routine check, you understand."

"I understand. We got in about midnight, I'd say. You can check with the Mansfields. We were at a party at their place last night. We left rather early.

"Rennick was killed around twelve-thirty." There was a pause, then, "Is Mrs. Turner around?"

"She's upstairs—lying down," George

replied. His voice lowered a bit. "We had a little spat. I went fishing this morning. She made quite a fuss about being left alone. Do you want me to call her?"

"No, no, that won't be necessary."

"Here, let's go out the back, Charley."

Helen heard the two men go through the kitchen and out the back way. She slipped out of her shoes, ran to the rear bedroom and watched from behind the curtain.

George unlocked the garage and rolled up the door. More than ever, Helen was impressed by how little she knew about what her husband was really like. He was a fine actor. He didn't overdo the part he was playing. He chatted easily, seriously, without any attempt to make light hearted jokes. He brought the car out. Helen watched tensely, nervously, as the detective went over the car. Corbett ran his finger over the fender, glanced perfunctorily underneath. The whole examination took only a few minutes, though the two stood out there, talking, for quite a while.

At long last, the two men walked down the driveway. Helen relaxed slowly, a deep, sobbing sigh escaping her. Until this moment, she hadn't realized she'd been hoping that Corbett would find something suspicious, that Corbett would put an end to this horror. Now, her hopes were dying. It seemed certain that George was going to get away with his crime.

WEARILY, she returned to her bedroom, walked over to the window, watched the two men standing out on the sidewalk, still deep in conversation. Finally, they shook hands and George came back to the house. His face was placid. He was a good actor to the end. Helen knew he was feeling smug, pleased with himself.

She heard the downstairs door shut, but no footsteps. Which meant George was standing by the closed door, watching Corbett through the small grilled pane. Her heart suddenly stilled. The detective had stopped and was staring at something near the driveway. He walked on toward his car, paused, came back for another look.

He glanced up at the house, tipped back his hat, a frown plainly visible on his face. After a moment, he stepped off the curb, taking out a white envelope. He knelt down, scooped up something, sealed the envelope and dropped it in his pocket. Then, he walked over to his car and drove off.

Helen gasped as she remembered. George had missed the driveway when he was swinging in last night. The tire marks across the grass plot must be visible. Perhaps some of the mud had been knocked off the underside of the car. But then, as she thought of it, she was sure it couldn't mean anything. The body hadn't passed under the car. There couldn't be any blood or hair or threads mixed in the mud. It just wasn't possible.

She whirled as she heard George come up the stairs. He was white and he looked frightened, but not rattled or nervous. His mouth was a thin, tight line.

"Pack up, Helen," he said tensely. "You're going home to your mother's for a while. We'll leave as soon as it's dark."

"But Ed and Agnes are coming at—"

"I'll take care of them," he broke in sharply. "I'll tell them you're leaving. They won't be too surprised. I've already told Corbett you might go."

"He—he suspected something?"

"I'm not sure. But I can't take chances. Frankly, Helen, I'm afraid of you. If you lose your nerve or let something slip to one of your friends, we'll be ruined. So, it's best if you're out of the way for a while. Get packed, Helen."

"Yes."

She hoped her voice showed none of the elation surging through her. She was going away—from this house, from him. She was determined she would never come back.

He returned downstairs and left her alone while she got ready. The time flew. She rushed from closet to drawer, selecting only the most essential of her things, the things she didn't want to leave behind. She could hear him prowling around in the living room. She heard the rattle of glasses and the fizz of soda. His smugness and conceit had crumbled. He was afraid.

Helen lingered until it was fully dark outside. Her heart was beating a little faster as she picked up her bags and took a last look around the room. A feeling of regret caught at her throat. It was hard to leave the house that had given her so many memories. It was hard to say good-by to a life that had been comfortable and secure.

He hadn't put on the lights downstairs. As Helen snapped on the hall light, she could see he was waiting for her at the bottom of the stairs. He was still in his old clothes. He wasn't going to dress. Silently, he took her bags and led the way out the back door.

The car was still half out of the garage, so Helen got right in. He put her bags in back, settled behind the wheel, slammed the door. Not a word passed between them as he backed out and headed down to the boulevard. He drove slowly, as if conscious of the need for extra caution.

The traffic on the highway was heavy. Helen felt vaguely restless, her nervousness growing as she noticed George was watching the rear view mirror at frequent intervals. She wondered if they were being followed. It seemed highly unlikely. He drove along at a moderate pace.

Then, with a twinge of annoyance, she remembered she had neglected to call her mother. There would be questions, questions. For the first time, she realized she was only leaving behind an empty house. She was not leaving behind those gnawing fears that would be with her from now on, day into sleepless night.

They rode for over an hour in dead silence. Several times, Helen was on the verge of asking him to stop so that she could call and warn her mother of their coming. Each time, she was unable to find her voice. She was growing more and more uneasy.

AT LONG last, they turned off the highway. Helen's eyes widened slightly as the car picked up more and more speed. The night was pitch black around them. Their headlights cut a sharp path through the darkness and emptiness ahead of them. They were on a dirt road, a lonely road, only an occasional faint yellow light from a distant farmhouse visible. She looked back. There was no one behind them.

"George, where were we going? This isn't the way to mother's."

"I know. We're going by a different route. I have my reasons."

She tried to settle down, but couldn't. She noticed George kept watching the rear view mirror. There was nothing but blackness behind them. From his actions, she felt sure he had an obsession that they were being followed, an obsession as groundless as the one that some trace of the dead man had been left under the car. She settled back in her corner. But she couldn't relax. She noticed that George was driving much too fast.

He braked suddenly, swung the wheel over hard. Helen stiffened as the bright headlights shot up a lane that was no more than tire tracks through a tangle of woodlands. She could hear the low branches scraping along the side of the car and was tossed from side to side as the car lurched wildly over exposed rocks and deep ruts. She remembered vaguely having been here before—on a Sunday early in the summer. They had picnicked out here. This was the road to the old quarry.

A nebulous suspicion formed like a gathering black cloud in the back of her mind. She could feel a vague terror slowly fastening itself on her heart. This road had a dead end. But it wasn't possible—George couldn't be thinking of— No, he wouldn't dare. He wouldn't have the nerve to—

The woods thinned and flattened into a wide clearing that stretched out for a few hundred feet, then stopped abruptly. There was only emptiness beyond in that blackness, for it was the edge of the cliff that dropped fifteen feet into a bottomless lake that had formed in the abandoned quarry.

The car swung. Helen's mouth opened and a scream froze as the car headed down the slight incline to the edge of the cliff. The wheels stopped ten feet from the edge.

George switched off the lights. The click of the doorlatch on his side was like the sound of a distant rifle shot over the soft ticking of the idling motor.

Her hands were suddenly damp and her heart beat violently. She had been a fool. She had been blind. She had misjudged the depth of his rottenness. She could see now what was in his mind. He was going to run the car over the cliff. He was going to kill her.

For a fleeting moment, she thought of pleading with him, of begging him for her life. She couldn't. If she died for it, she couldn't force herself to grovel at his feet. But she wasn't going to sit supinely by and let him have his way without a struggle. She wasn't that kind. She snapped open the door on her side, slid out and started running.

"Stop! Helen, come back or I'll shoot. I have a gun."

She stopped short, a curious crawling sensation along the small of her back. She swung around quickly. She could see him dimly, standing by the car, his arm upraised. He was holding a long barreled .22 target pistol.

"Get back in the car," he ordered softly.

"No." Her voice was low and husky. "You can't make me, George. I can see through your little scheme. You want me to drown in that car. And if it's ever found, you want it to look as if I committed suicide. Well, it won't work, George. If I'm found dead in that car, it will be with a bullet hole in me to prove I was murdered."

FOR a long moment, they faced each other. Helen was rigid with fright, wondering, wondering if he had the nerve to shoot. Her eyes had adjusted to the darkness now and she could see she had upset him a little.

"You can't get away with it, George," she went on in a strained voice. "Corbett suspects you killed Arthur Rennick. You told me you know police methods. You know no matter how hard you try to remove all the traces, some are bound to be left. That's why you want to get rid of the car. But those traces will be there, George, even if it's months from now when they fish the car out of the quarry."

"No." His voice was hoarse. "They can't tell a thing from the car. They can't this time, either. No, Helen, you're the danger to me. You're the weak one. I can't take any chances."

She blinked. For a moment, she groped for the meaning in his words. Then, like a searing white light, the truth burst over her. She understood now. She laughed, a bit off key.

"So, that's it. You killed a man before—before you married me—while you were still a salesman on the road. That's why you kept going into those tantrums and rushing off for long rides. You were trying to escape—escape from a guilty conscience that never gave you any peace. That's why you kept looking under the car, even though there was nothing to look for. That other time—you knocked down a man and dragged him under the car."

His voice was shrill, taut, faint, as if it came from a vast distance. "How did you know?"

She saw his gun waver. She took a step forward. "I know, all right. I'm not stupid, George. Who paid for that other murder? Whom did you blame? Or did you run that time, too—run and hide like the sniveling coward you are."

"I warned you, Helen—" he began huskily.

She took another step toward him. "Coward!" she taunted. "Go on, shoot. You haven't the courage of a mouse. You're a coward, George, a coward."

He shot—and missed, just as she knew he would. The bullet had gone over to one side, just as that ash tray had missed her when he flung it at her in his blind rage. She surged forward, seized his arm, sank her teeth into his wrist. He screamed, a high, shrill shriek like an animal in pain and panic. The gun dropped. She pushed him away, snatched it up, backed off quickly.

George turned from side to side, as if befuddled. He spun around suddenly, ran back toward the car. He jumped in and crabbed over behind the wheel. The motor roared and the car bucked forward.

"No!" she screamed. "George—!"

It was too late. The car was moving ahead faster and faster. It shot off the edge of the cliff. For one long horrible moment, it seemed suspended in midair. Then, it was gone. There was a loud splash that seemed to echo and re-echo through the still night.

"Watch out! She's got a gun!" someone called from behind her. "Drop that gun, Mrs. Turner!"

She turned and saw that another car had come out of the lane. The brilliant headlights flashed on, pinned her in its glare. She let the gun drop from her listless fingers.

Her eyes grew misty as she recognized Corbett.

"It was George—George was the hit and run driver."

"That's what I suspected," Corbett said in a low voice. "I noticed the underside of the car had been washed clean. George told me he had fished in Willow Creek and had forded it with his car several times. I couldn't figure out why he made such a point of it. Then, I noticed he was watching me from the front door after we had parted. So, I decided to make motions as if I suspected something."

"That mud you picked up—it didn't tell anything?"

"I delivered it to the lab, but I doubt if it will show anything. But I figured if we worried him, he might do something rash. We followed you, but we lost you for a while. I'm sorry we couldn't get here in time. But then," Corbett added, "perhaps it's best this way."

Corbett's partner came back from the edge of the cliff. "We'd better call a wrecker, Charley. There's nothing we can do here. It's a hundred feet deep if it's an inch." He glanced at Helen. "He was insane, wasn't he?"

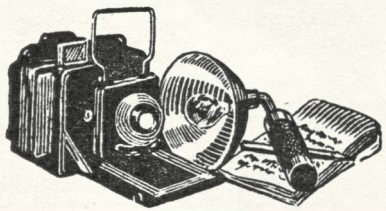
Helen hesitated, then shook her head. "No, not any more than hundreds of others walking around right now. He had a mental quirk—caused by a previous hit and run accident he'd been in. It probably would never have done any damage if he hadn't been involved in that second accident." She was silent a long moment. Then, quietly, "No, the real trouble with George was that he was trying so hard to hide what he really was. That, I think, is what drove him to his death. He couldn't stand it when I finally found out what he really was—a weakling and a coward."

Death With Pictures

By JOHN L. BENTON

A press photographer gets some camera angles on murder

DAN WATSON is the name, and I'm the press photographer on the *Clearview Morning News.* I'm young, tough and willing to barge in where a newspaperman is likely to get socked in the eye. If you think that a newspaperman and a press photographer are not the same thing you would be right in most cases—but not in Clearview. When the city editor sent me out



to get the pictures I was supposed to get the story, too.

Which is why when I stopped at the desk on showing up for work at three one afternoon Jeff Dawe, the city editor glanced up at me with his usual blank wall expression.

He was thin, bald and wore shell-rimmed glasses, and I suspected he tried to act like city editors he'd seen in the movies.

"Got a story I want you to cover, Watson," he snapped, in his snapping-turtle way. "Big feature yarn. Get plenty of pictures."

"Of what?" I asked. "I gave up mind reading last week. Found it embarrassed the neighbors."

"Very funny," Dawe said. "But I want a story on Martin Rawley."

I just looked at him. In my estimation a story on Martin Rawley would be as hot as last week's potatoes. In a city the size of Clearview—population 96,000 the last census—we had a few quaint characters, and Rawley headed the list.

"Not another feature yarn on Martin Rawley, the millionaire recluse of this fair mountain city," I said. "The one we did on him last year was received by our readers with sensational apathy."

"Rawley is a year older now," Dawe said.

"So are we," I said. "And I hoped that much wiser—but I seem to be wrong."

"Don't argue," snapped Dawe. "Go see Rawley. Talk to him, get him to tell you the story of his life—"

"He did last year," I interrupted. "And it sure was dull."

Dawe looked as if he was going to make some pungent remarks when the phone rang. He picked it up.

"Dawes, *Morning News,*" he said over the wire. "Oh, hello, Farley. . . What!. . . When did it happen? . . . Sometime early this morning or during the night. I see. Thanks for letting us know. I'll send a man right over there." He hung up and looked at me.

"Never send a man to do a boy's job," I said.

"I wouldn't if there was one around," he said. "We've got five reporters on this paper, and when we get a murder there is no one around but you."

SUDDENLY I was all interest. "Who was murdered?" I asked. "Wasn't that Pete Farley calling?"

"Martin Rawley was murdered," said Dawe, "Yes, that was Pete Farley. He gets two dollars for tipping us off. You take it from here on in."

"I will," I said, grabbing up my gadget bag with my camera and all the rest of the stuff in it. "Where did it happen?"

"At Rawley's house," said Dawe. "The police are there now. Phone in what you get on it, Dan."

I blinked. I had worked on the paper for over three years and this was the first time Dawe had ever called me by my first name. Could it be that beneath that hard shell there beat a heart of hammered brass?

"Why, Jeff," I said. "I didn't know you cared." He threw a hunk of lead he used for a paper weight at me as I went out of the door.

For a small city Clearview had quite an efficient police force. Chief of Police Ed Ryan, had risen from the ranks and he knew how to handle his men.

Martin Rawley lived out at the south end of the city in an old house that was pretty much of a wreck. Even if Rawley was supposed to be a millionaire, he certainly hadn't spent any of his money for repairs on the old homestead.

When I reached the place in my old coupe the police were all around. There were cops on guard in front and back of the house, and Chief Ryan met me at the front door. We were good friends.

"Hi, Dan," he said. "Hoped that you'd be the one Dawe sent. Just got the call on this about half hour ago. We're waiting for the coroner."

He led me into the house. When I had been out here a year ago to interview Rawley the place had been a mess. Old newspapers and magazines stacked up in every room, dust and dirt all around, and furniture that was falling apart.

Now the junk was all gone. The house had been cleaned and most of the furniture had been repaired. In what had been the parlor of the old place Martin Rawley was sprawled back in a chair, dead from a bullet in his heart. He was thin, white haired and had been close to seventy. Usually he looked like an old bum, but now he was clean shaven and wore a neat blue suit.

"Mind if I get some pictures, Chief?" I asked.

"Go ahead," said Ryan. "They might be useful."

I got out my camera and flash gun and took some shots of the corpse from different angles. By the time I had finished Doctor Grayson arrived. He was the local coroner, and a man who knew his business.

"Who found Rawley?" I asked Ryan as he moved away and I started packing up my stuff. "Far as I know he always lived all alone here."

"Tom Blake, the letter carrier who has this route, found him," the chief said. "Blake had some mail for Rawley this morning, so he stopped at the house. The front door was standing open, which was unusual, since Rawley always kept it closed. So Blake rang the bell. When no one answered he went in, and found the body, then phoned the police."

"Any suspects?" I asked. "And how about a motive, Chief?"

"Haven't found any suspects or motives yet," said Ryan. "But somebody must have had a reason for killing Rawley."

"I'd like to know why Rawley suddenly either had the house cleaned up or did it himself and got all slicked up," I said. "When I interviewed him for a feature story for the paper a year ago he told me he didn't have a relative left alive, and that he hated everybody. Why the sudden yearning for neatness."

Ryan looked at me thoughtfully scratched his head. "I've been wondering about that myself, Dan," he said.

I was in no hurry to phone the paper until I had a complete story of the murder, and perhaps the identity of the killer. Since the *News* was a morning paper we wouldn't go to press until evening.

"Blake asserts he was bringing mail for Rawley," I said. "Have you checked on that?"

"We checked it," said Ryan. "According to Blake, the postman, Rawley has been getting a letter in a woman's handwriting every two or three days for the last three months. At first the the old man didn't seem particularly interested, and then he got excited about those letters."

"In the spring an old man's fancy, often turns romancy," I cheerfully misquoted. "That it, Chief?"

"That's it," said Chief Ryan.

HE DREW a letter out of his pocket. "Here's the letter that came for Rawley this morning. The one that

Blake brought when the postman found the body. Read it, Dan."

I opened the letter and read:

Darling Cuddles:

You are so, so wonderful. You can never imagine how happy that crisp new thousand dollar bill made your little Bright Eyes when I opened your last letter and found it in the envelope. You are so darling and reckless the way you send me money like that. Never a check or a money-order but always cash, and of course it does make it much easier for me.

I can hardly wait until Thursday April 14th, when at last I will be with you. Just think then we will actually see each other for the first time—but I am sure neither of us will be disappointed. I am sure you look just like your picture, as I do mine. Always your

Bright Eyes.

"So that's it," I said as I finished reading the letter and handed it back to the chief of police. "Pardon me if I feel a little seasick."

"This is Thursday, April the Fifteenth," said Ryan. "I suspect that 'Bright Eyes' is not going to be very happy when she arrives."

I was beginning to understand a lot of things now. Obviously Martin Rawley had started corresponding with some woman. They had sent each other their pictures, and apparently had fallen in love by mail. Evidently Rawley had been sending her quite a lot of cash, though there was no way of knowing exactly how much.

"I'd love to see a picture of 'Bright Eyes," I said. "She must be quite a gal. When I talked to Rawley a year ago, he boasted that he hadn't left this place in ten years. Never went calling on anyone or to the movies. Had all his groceries delivered and paid cash for everything."

"I know," said the chief. "There a big steel safe in one of the other rooms where he keeps all his cash. The safe is locked now. We did find an additional clue. It was this." He showed me a little silver plated whistle. "I found it beside Rawley's chair."

Doctor Grayson finished examining the body, went over to Chief Ryan and gave him his report.

"Death was caused by a bullet, apparently a twenty-two lodging in the brain of the deceased," said the doctor. "Rawley must have died instantly."

They talked a few moments longer. Grayson gave his permission for the body to be removed. Some of the men from a local undertaker had arrived and they took the corpse away in a basket. The doctor left.

CHIEF RYAN led the way up to the second floor of the house and I followed him. We were looking for a picture of 'Bright Eyes.' On the old fashioned bureau, in what was apparently Rawley's bedroom, we found a big picture. It was the picture of a very pretty girl, and scrawled across one corner of it was written in ink, *To Cuddles, with love from Bright Eyes.*

"A little young for him, wasn't she?" asked Ryan dryly as he looked at the picture. "Strange—she seems rather familiar."

"You've probably seen her before," I said. "That's a picture of Rita Hayworth, the movie actress. Looks like somebody has been taking Martin Rawley for a sleigh-ride." An idea struck me. "Let's go see, that postman, Tom Blake. Maybe he can give us some more information, Chief."

Ryan agreed to that. We drove to Blake's house on the other side of town. The mail carrier had just come in from his route. He was a stocky, dark haired middle-aged man. A widower who lived alone. I knew he had a sister who lived in big city a hundred miles from Clearview.

"Why, hello," Blake said when he saw us. "Want me to tell you some more about the way I found Martin Rawley, eh?"

"That's right," I said. "Tell us why you killed him and put an end to such a good racket, Blake. You dropped your whistle when you shot him."

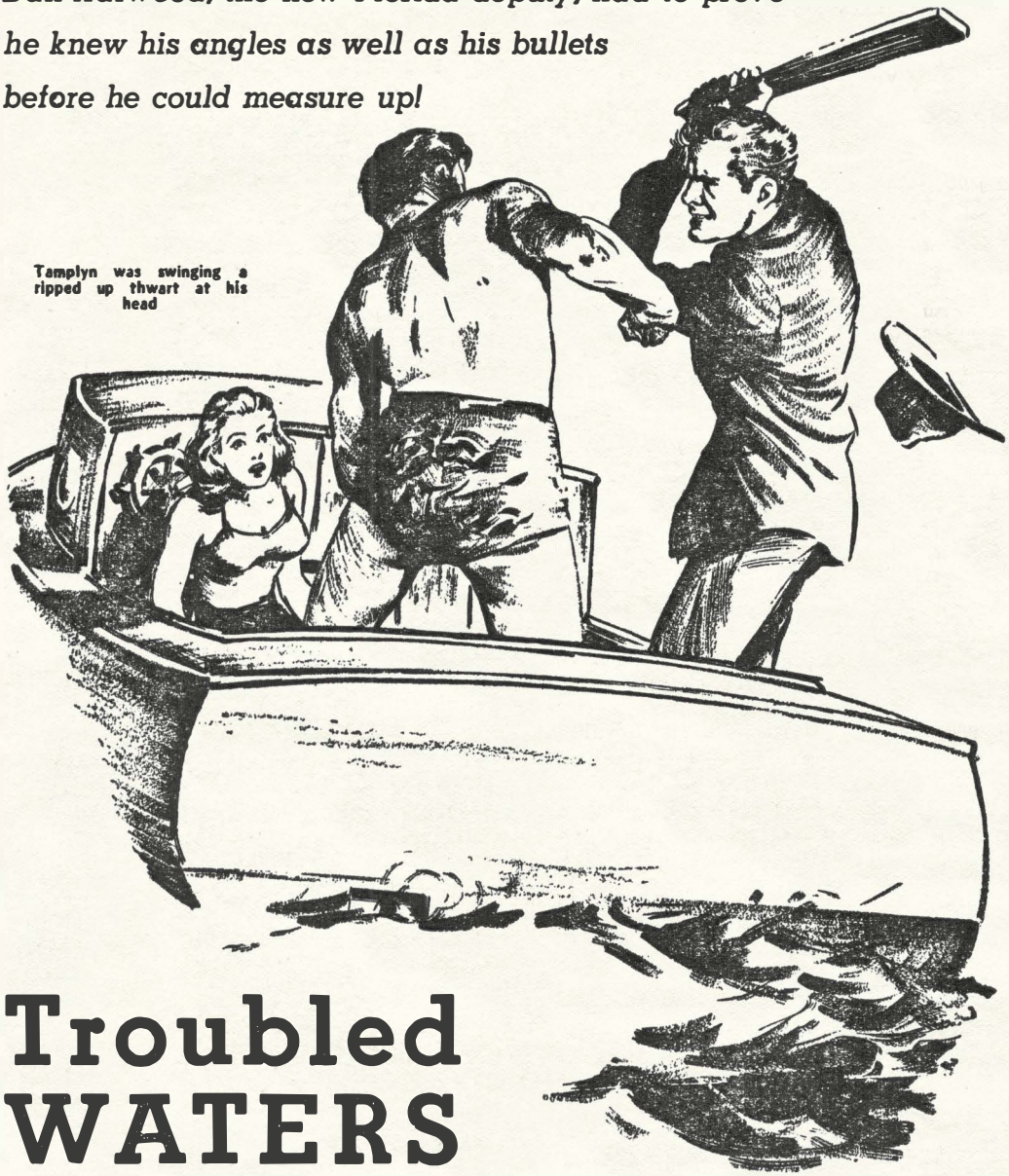
"Huh?" Blake stared at me, an expression of surprise on his face. "What are you talking about, Watson?"

"The 'Bright Eyes' gag," I said. "Evidently Rawley got lonesome some months ago, and wrote a letter to some correspondence club. Since you collect the mail on that route as well as deliver it, you must have seen the letter. You got curious and opened it, and it gave you an idea of a way to get dough out of Rawley."

"Go on, Dan," said Chief Ryan as I paused. "This is very interesting."

(Continued on page 95)

Dan Harwood, the new Florida deputy, had to prove he knew his angles as well as his bullets before he could measure up!



Tamplyn was swinging a ripped up thwart at his head

Troubled WATERS

by DAVID X. MANNERS

IF YOU wait long enough, things are certain to work out. Dan's father always used to say that when he was alive, but for a while Dan himself had begun to doubt it. Yet now he saw it was true. If you held on unquestioningly, almost anything you wished for might come to be. Wasn't that the way things were happening with him now?

"Do you think it will be all right?" Lynne asked him.

They were walking down the crushed-

shell path to Dan's boat, idly riding the sapphire-blue waters of the cove. The January sun was settling toward the west, but it was still bright and clear. It could be especially clear at this hour of the late afternoon Dan always thought —with the pier, the fish shacks, the bowed palms, and even Great Key standing out in a clarity and a three-dimensional reality that they had at no other time.

"Sure, it'll work," Dan said. "Why not?"

Lynne shrugged her slender shoulders, looking at the ground, her toes curling up from the sharp edges of the shells. "I don't know. It's just that people talk so."

She was walking ahead, and he observed that she was just a bit too frail in that clinging, black swim suit. She turned her head to glance back at him over her shoulder with her large, gray eyes. Lynne always seemed slight alongside of Dan Harwood. She was shy and inclined to be introspective, and more than anything else it made Dan determined to look out for her, protect her, and make her happy.

When he had come back from the war he had found her faithfully waiting for him, the same as he'd always remembered her. But other things in the world about Dan seemed to have changed. Dan's black hair was as thick and curly as ever, but now there was an inch-wide streak of pure white parting it at the middle. And the little lines at the corners of his eyes were deeper. For nearly two years he had been trying to find a place for himself in the scheme of things so that, with decency, he could ask Lynne to be his wife. And now, back at her house a half hour ago, it had happened.

"I've been offering it to you a long time," Lynne's father had said. "I ain't been pressin' it on you because it ain't much."

"It's enough all right," Dan had said. "Between it and charter fishing, Lynne and I could get along fine. But I'm thinking about Chick Malin, and what people will say—about you."

Old Ed Bowen snorted, and his eyes flamed up just the way Lynne's could on occasion.

"I wouldn't have Chick Malin for a deputy even if he were qualified—which he ain't. It's the sheriff's right in this here county to appoint whoever he wants. If he happens to want his future son-in-law, and if his future son-in-law is the best man for the job, why it's nobody's blasted business!"

Dan smiled wryly.

"But some folks don't think his son-in-law is the best man for the job." He remembered how it had been pointed out it was not a physical wound but "battle fatigue" that had hospitalized him overseas. "Some folks set a heap of store by Chick Malin."

"Well, will you take it or won't you?" Bowen blustered impatiently. But Dan knew that his irascible manner was only a thin, outward defense—like his saying that he didn't mind what people would say.

"When do I start work?" Dan said. "Monday?"

"What's Monday?" Bowen snapped. "You start right now! Why, by time Monday rolls around I expect to have you an experienced deputy. Get the Bible, Lynne. Oh, here 'tis. Raise your right hand, Dan."

THAT was a half hour ago. Lynne had kissed Dan when the brief ceremony was over and herself had pinned the deputy's star onto his belt. But he sensed that she was not as happy as she might be about it. She was too quiet, and when he followed her into the kitchen, her eyes hadn't looked at him. She seemed remote and preoccupied.

"Maybe I'll go down now and spear those fish for supper," Dan had said.

Lynne looked up at him then. "I'll go with you."

Dan walked to the water's edge now, and dragged his goggles in an incoming swell. Lynne was doing the same, as he had taught her. It cleared the glass and made the goggles adhere with a sealed fit. Underwater, by removing the pressure from the eyes, goggles made visibility almost as good as in the open air which made it perfect for spear-fishing. But as Dan stepped close to Lynne, he could tell that her thoughts were still elsewhere.

"Unhappy?" he said.

She looked up, and smiled, shaking out her shoulder-length hair that the sun had bleached partly to almost a tow color.

"I was just thinking. Fifteen hundred a year as a deputy isn't much. But if you could double it by charter fishing, it might not be bad at all."

"It would be good," Dan said.

"Good enough to get a house?"

"If we can up it to thirty-five hundred or four thousand it might." There was a little CBS bungalow set back up among some pines on Blossom Street that was offered at only six thousand. Lynne had been crazy about that concrete-block-stucco job. "And I don't see why I couldn't make that much if I set out to—maybe printed more advertising circulars and cards."

"But would you have the time?"

"Being deputy isn't going to take much. This isn't Bay City. Nobody shoots policemen here, or robs banks, or even steals a car." Exactly that had happened in nearby Bay City only yesterday. "If there's a lost dog to check on here, and a couple grass fires, it's a busy day."

"I know," Lynne said.

Dan threw his four-pronged fish-spear out toward deep water. Pulling on their goggles, they swam out toward it. Dan had never got beyond the first lesson in teaching Lynne about spear fishing. The first lesson was holding the spear half in and half out of the water to show how the spear appeared bent where it met the water.

Dan had tried to explain that because of the way water refracted light rays objects were not what they appeared. Thus, in spearing fish, you always had to drive your spear ahead of where you thought the fish were, or else you were likely to strike far behind them. But he'd given up when he realized Lynne would much rather watch than do.

Fish seemed a little elusive today, and, using his boat as a base, Dan had to take no less than a dozen long dives before he succeeded in landing a sizeable yellowtail. When he and Lynne made for shore, finally, daylight was fading.

Curiously enough, a sudden shift of the wind was bringing in fog, and already Great Key was a shadowy smudge in the distance. Fog made a solid line at the base of the key, so that the island appeared actually to be floating above the water instead of resting on it. Looking out at the fog and talking about it was probably why the two didn't notice the car on the beach until they were almost up to it.

"It's got a Bay City sticker on its windshield," Dan observed. "I didn't hear it drive up, did you?"

"There's a man sitting on the running board on the opposite side," Lynne said. The foggy breeze was cool, and she was beginning to shiver.

As they circled by the car, the man stood up and smiled. His face was darkly tanned and the brim of his panama was turned down all the way around. His suit was a neat, carefully tailored gray, and under his arm he held a businesslike briefcase. He pointed.

"That your boat?"

The question was unnecessary, Dan thought. The man was one he had taken out in a mixed party only the week before.

"Back again?" he said. "I remember you. You're Mike Tamplyn."

The man seemed neither impressed nor flattered that Dan had remembered his name.

"I've got to get over to Great Key," Tamplyn said. "I'll pay well for it. But I've got to get over there right away."

"Sure," Dan said. "Can do. But if you're really in a hurry, there's a bridge that connects to the key."

The man's thoughts, however, were intent on another point. "Great Key's the place, isn't it, where the fellow has that charter plane?"

Dan felt Lynne's hand loop through his arm, and suddenly he became aware she was afraid of this man. And, abruptly, that feeling of wariness, of withdrawing from Mike Tamplyn began creeping into himself.

"Sure, that's the place," he said. "Remember, we went right by there when I took you out the last time? I remarked that he was just taking off for Havana."

"I remember. I want you to take me to his dock. Right now."

There was no inquiry as to how much Dan would charge to cross the three

miles to the key, nor did Dan feel it was his business to press the man for his reason for wanting to go there in such a hurry. If a man would rather go by boat and pay the cost than take the simple, direct method of using the highway, who was he to argue?

Dan turned to Lynne with a shrug. "You take the fish up to the house. I'll be there just as fast as I can make the run over the key and back."

"No!" It was the man who voiced the objection, and it was sharp and decisive. His free hand went to his coat pocket. "This is a gun. The girl goes too."

DAN heard Lynne gasp. He heard her quick, frightened whisper of the name, Mike Tamplyn, and suddenly the name, the Bay City sticker on the car, and the bulging briefcase the man clutched, all fell into one clear, unmistakable picture.

Dan glanced briefly out toward his boat, the fog sweeping across the water like white smoke and beginning to curl about the hull and cabin.

"Come on, Lynne," Dan said. "We'll take him. It's all right."

But it wasn't all right, and Dan knew Lynne realized it as well as he.

He tossed the fish down and started toward the boat, but the man picked up the yellowtail and threw it into the water, far out. He took off his shoes and socks and carefully rolled up his pants legs while Dan towed the boat closer to the shore. Then, after first ordering Dan and Lynne aboard, he waded out and hoisted himself up onto the deck.

He put the briefcase down beside him on the stern thwart and put his gun on top of it. Then, without bothering to put his shoes back on, he nodded to Dan to get under way, and made himself comfortable.

The motor coughed and caught, and Lynne settled down beside Dan as the ship pointed its prow and started heading across the water which had grown perceptibly rougher. The fog was rapidly closing in. While there was fair visibility for a hundred feet in any direction, both the shore and Great Key were completely obscured.

[*Turn page*]

"Dan," Lynn whispered, the first moment Tamplyn's eyes were averted. "You know who he is?"

Her tone was a plea that told she knew Tamplyn was the man who had robbed the Bay City bank yesterday and shot the policeman, and that Dan must not cross him.

Dan nodded. He wanted to answer: "But I can't take him over to Great Key." But Mike Tamplyn was watching now and Dan couldn't risk it.

"I'm thinking what people will say," he answered instead.

The throb of the motor and the slosh of white water along the sides of the boat completely dissipated his words so that he realized anything he said scarcely would carry beyond Lynne's ears. He glanced back at Tamplyn and the man smiled with a sort of careless impudence, as if to say, "Go ahead and talk all you like. But you won't try to pull anything. Because I have this gun, and this gun makes me worth a half dozen like you right now."

Dan knew Mike Tamplyn had a reasonable right to be smug and confident. That gun made him master of this situation. And because of that gun Dan Harwood was finished.

" 'Dan Harwood had the Bay City bank robber right in his fingers, and let him slip through.' That's what they'll say, Lynne. What kind of a deputy sheriff will they think I am?"

"But you know who Mike Tamplyn is?"

"Sure I know who he is. He used to be a big-shot racketeer up north. But that was ten years ago, and it didn't even occur to me when I heard his name, even though I knew he was living down here now."

"That's not all I'm thinking."

Lynn was looking at the gun lying on the briefcase, and her eyes were sort of glazed over. That gun, probably, was the one that had killed the policeman with a single shot. With another single shot it had shattered a burglar alarm system. With still another single shot it had blown out one of the front tires of a pursuing car just after the robbery. The man was deadly accurate with a gun.

"But I can't let him get across," Dan said. "They'd say I helped him escape. And on my first day in office. Wouldn't that be a laugh for Chick Malin's friends?"

"But they wouldn't have to know."

"As if you could keep it quiet. I suppose the fellow with the charter plane won't say anything either, about who brought Tamplyn over to his place."

"But he'll kill you, Dan. You can't fight him with a—a club, or a wrench. Not when he has a gun."

"I can't let him use the gun," Dan said. "I can't risk your life, Lynne. And I don't kid myself that when bullets would start flying, Tamplyn would know where all of them were going."

He didn't like to say things like that. But there was no escaping the fact of that .38 revolver lying within such easy reach of Mike Tamplyn's expert grasp.

Part of what he must do, Dan already knew. It was only the big, insurmountable, remaining problem of how to reduce Tamplyn down to size, so that Lynne would be free of danger. And time was running out. In a minute—hardly more than that—the shoreline would be in sight.

But the problem was tricky, elusive, like some of those fish he tried to spear, striking at them where they weren't.

Dan's hands suddenly gripped the wheel so hard his knuckles became white knobs. His breath grew harsher.

"Dan?" Lynne whispered.

"Sit tight, Lynne." He said it so imperceptibly beneath his breath that Lynne scarcely caught it. "Sit tight." It was more like a prayer than a statement.

"Dan!"

"Stay back, Lynne. Right here. I'll be all right."

"No, Dan, please!"

Mike Tamplyn stood up suddenly, his face darkening. He looked toward the shore that had suddenly been revealed through the parting fog and then back at Dan.

"Why, this isn't the key." He grabbed for his gun, swearing. "You fool! We're back where we started!"

Dan's face grew paler, tauter. He

[*Turn page*]

stepped from behind the wheel toward the port gunnel, looking off into the fog.

"But that's impossible, Mr. Tamplyn," he said. "No, you're wrong. Look over there. There's the dock and plane field we want."

Dan's eyes were fixed on the gunman's head. On the instant that head turned, Dan's feet thrust against the deckboards.

THE first warning Tamplyn had was the splash. Dan heard his shout of alarm and anger even as his head and shoulders knifed through the water in a nearly vertical dive. He saw, rather than heard the first bullet. It cut through the water like a carbonated pellet, not a foot from him.

He waited, holding his depth, but no more bullets came. He twisted and scissored his way out into the open then, away from the boat. He had to make himself a fairer, more enticing target.

Two bullets came quickly now. Then, another single shot. Dan watched their streaming paths. That was four shots. Tamplyn would have two more before stopping to reload. His lungs were straining. Blood was throbbing in his ears. There was the dark, looming bottom of the boat, but without watergoggles he saw it only as a vague blur. Even the water itself, without a sun above, was black and murky.

Those two last shots—when were they coming? Dan couldn't hold his breath any longer. His head was a bursting shell, his arms and legs constricted and numb. He'd have to break water and come to the surface while Tamplyn still had two bullets left.

Suddenly, the underwater was illuminated as if by torch, and Dan knew it was the sun. The sun had come out, making the water into transparent glass. The bullets came quickly then. Dan was heading to the surface even as the last one came toward him. He felt the tug as it struck his arm. Then he was up and grabbing hold of the boat's side.

He saw Tamplyn's arm swinging down at him, gun clubbed, and Lynne grabbing him from behind. He didn't try to avoid the blow. Instead, he caught

the wrist and twisted. He put all the power of his back and shoulders into it. The gun dropped from a suddenly limp grasp.

And then Dan was aboard. Tamplyn straight-armed Lynne aside and lunged at Dan, swinging a ripped-up thwart at his head. Dan dropped his head, and grabbed for Tamplyn's body. Then he brought up his knee. When Tamplyn doubled over, Dan drove in with a jaw blow that traveled no more than six inches.

The next thing he knew, he was standing over Tamplyn, looking down at the gunman's prostrate body, and Lynne was clutching his arm and sobbing softly. "Dan. Dan."

"You'll have to help me," he said. "We'll have to get him ashore."

She looked about in the direction of the beach. A half dozen men were wading through the shallow water toward the boat, and as many more were on the sandy strip. A familiar-looking building with a spire was not far behind them.

"Dan—you pulled up right behind the City Hall!" she said. He had never seen her eyes larger.

"I meant to."

"Dad and others are coming. They must have heard the shots." She shouted toward them, "It's Mike Tamplyn! Hurry!"

Dan picked up the gunman's briefcase and opened it. The men were crowding around the boat, holding on to its sides as it rode gently on a swell, and looking inside at the gunman who was just rousing now. There was Mike Howard of the *Daily Sentinel*, Frosty Yates, the druggist, Ed Wilkerson who ran the local busline, and Mr. Bauer, the banker.

Old Ed Bowen snorted in amazement. "Mike Tamplyn. Why, we just got the flash that he might be heading this way."

"And here must be the money he stole from the Bay City bank." Dan held open the briefcase for them to see. "He had this with him."

"Yeah. But we didn't figger he'd be in no boat," someone else said, and Dan recognized the voice as Chick Malin's.

Quickly, breathlessly, then, Lynne

[*Turn page*]

was telling how Dan had leaped overboard, so that Tamplyn would empty his gun at him while he was in the water, and then had returned to tackle Tamplyn on equal terms. She discovered the flesh-gouge on Dan's upper arm then and began working at it worriedly.

"I don't know how I missed," Tamplyn was muttering. "It was a plain target. I never missed a plainer target in my life."

"I figured you'd be shooting behind me, Tamplyn," Dan said. "I figured you might not make allowance for the way water distorts things. You see, I happened to think how a person who wasn't familiar with it, always was way off trying to spear fish underwater."

Chick Malin made a derisive sound.

"You mean you made yourself a wide open target just hoping for him to miss that way? Sounds like a good way of committing suicide."

"Oh no," Dan said. "I wasn't depending on just that. I was really depending on what water does to any bullet." And he couldn't help smiling. "How it slows a bullet down. Now take a .22 highpower. If it's jacketed, it will go through two inches of steel. But that same bullet wouldn't kill a fish in three feet of water."

"I've seen it tried," put in old Ed Bowen, who knew guns as well as anyone. "And bigger caliber bullets are even worse. Water slows them down even more. But, who'd want to make himself a target to try it out?"

"Not me," agreed Chick Malin, and Dan thought there was just a hint of admiration in his glance.

Getting Mike Tamplyn ashore was no easy job. No less then eight men were holding him when they finally marched him in and got him safely locked in a cell.

"You know what the FBI does for any national bank robbers that get turned in?" Bowen asked when he at last got Dan and Lynne alone.

"I was thinking of it on the boat before I tackled Tamplyn," Dan admitted, and he squeezed Lynne's hand. "But in this county, isn't it true a police officer can't accept any reward money? You know I'm a—"

Bowen cleared his throat importantly.

"Think there's going to be a new swearing in," he said. "Forget that other nonsense of this afternoon. Many folks hereabouts would give their right arms rather than miss seeing a fine new deputy sworn in. And, Dan, you wouldn't want to cheat them of their little celebration, would you? Their fun?"

And Dan, thinking of what five thousand dollars would mean toward that bungalow up on Blossom Street, held Lynne's hand even tighter and said, "No, I guess we wouldn't."

DEATH WITH PICTURES

(Continued from page 85)

"Just how you worked the correspondence I'm not sure," I went on. "Maybe your sister in Philadelphia helped you out on that. But I'm willing to bet that every time Rawley got reckless and sent money—always cash—to Bright Eyes, you got it."

The postman's face had changed. It had grown grim and unpleasant.

"Oh, yeah," said Blake, his voice harsh. "You can't prove any of that stuff. And if I was working a racket like that, why would I kill Rawley?"

"Probably because he suspected you," I said. "Yesterday Rawley got all spruced up because he expected Bright Eyes to arrive—didn't she have any other name but that?"

"Miss Mary Marshall," said Blake, before he thought.

"All right—Mary Marshall. And where would Rawley go to get all spruced up? A barber shop, of course. Maybe he had to wait his turn in the chair, glanced through a movie magazine and saw a picture of Rita Hayworth. Remember he never went to the movies and seldom read papers and magazines. The ones he used to have stacked around his place were all old." I glared at Blake. "But your biggest mistake lay in killing him when he refused to open his safe last night so you could get the rest of his money."

"I've got a letter here that proves I had nothing to do with it," said Blake, reaching into his mail bag. "I'll show you."

At the same time I reached into my

[*Turn page*]

gadgetbag, which I was carrying strung over my shoulder, and grabbed my camera and flash gun.

Blake's hand came out of his mail pouch and he was covering Ryan with a .22 automatic. My flash gun went off. The bright light blinded Blake for an instant and the chief flung himself at him and brought Blake down in a flying tackle. The gun went flying out of the postman's hand and I grabbed up the automatic.

"Foolish move, Blake," I said. "You were right. We didn't have any proof against you, but the picture I just made of you threatening us with the gun won't help you a bit in court."

It didn't, and Blake finally broke down and confessed the whole thing. He had worked it just the way I had said.

As a city editor Jeff Dawe is getting to be a pest. He actually expects me to discover and solve a murder every day!

HEADQUARTERS

(Continued from page 10)

proverbial hot cakes. This only proves for the 'steenth time how up-and-coming is the old adage: "Truth is stranger than fiction." This one is called CORNISH GETS HIS MAN by Jackson Hite—

The incredible, yet true account of one Frederick Field, electrician, guilty of the brutal murder of young and beautiful Nora Upchurch in a deserted store in busy Picadilly Circus, the Times Square of London, and the equally brutal slaying of the comely matron, Mrs. Beatrice Sutton, in the quieter suburbs of Clapham.

In *both* cases, the killer confesses, then repudiates his confession.

In the first case, the murderer actually gets away with it and although tried, with the evidence of his own confession against him, is freed by a jury of his peers. But the man's unmitigated brass got him in a bit too deep. He almost outsmarted himself by the second confession and repudiation.

Here's where The Yard and Superintendent George Cornish steps in. The doughty super,-who always wore a "bowler" hat and carried an umbrella, felt in his bones that Field was guilty. How Cornish proved it and "got his man" makes swell reading.

In addition to these exciting headliners, the next issue will feature our usual group

of distinguished short crime and mystery stories. Look forward to a grand number.

OUR MAIL BAG

READING over our own stuff, as we sometimes do, we see that we keep promising to print more of your letters and postcards. But THRILLING DETECTIVE is always so chock-full of gripping fiction that we can seldom find room to quote from more than a few typical letters.

Here's one from a gentleman in one of the pleasant Maritime Provinces of our Good Neighbor to the North:

As you ask for your readers' opinion of how they like their private eyes, my own opinion is that neither of the two types you mention is my idea of a private detective who is able to ask (and sometimes receive without asking) the enormous fees that in the fiction world are asked and awarded to these fictitious detectives.

My idea of a model detective is of a man who is very like other men, who is quiet and gentlemanly in both appearance and speech, who is well built and is easy to look at without being handsome, who conducts his inquiries in a quiet manner until he runs into trouble, when he proves himself a regular he-man, but uses neither the slinky, furtive way of a sneak, nor the strong arm of a bully. One who has seen much of the world and is at home in society as much as in the company of hoodlums of the underworld.

I think I will have to create such a character and get him to act in a few cases. I wonder if you'd look a case over if I was to record one of his cases? I like your magazine and always buy it.

—*Arthur D. Hall, Great Village, Nova Scotia.*

All we can say, Arthur, is take off your coat and go right to work. Stories pour into our magazines, by the hundreds, every day, from all over the world. We read them all. If we think they're good, we buy them and print them. We sometimes use stories by people who have never written before. The same could happen to you. But we warn you—it isn't nearly as easy as it looks. Thanks anyway, for a swell letter.

Lady in the Sunny South says:

I very seldom read a story in your THRILLING DETECTIVE magazine that I do not like. I like

[*Turn page*]

all your detectives, whether they are roughnecks or slick workers. I like the short stories much better than the long one. Good luck to you. I will always buy your magazine.

—*Martha G. Tompkins, Tarpon Springs, Fla.*

Thank you, Ma'am, and good luck to you, too!

Here's a gentleman from the City of Brotherly Love with a very slight peeve. His point is well taken however, and we shall look into the matter. Here is his letter:

I see you are beginning to boast now that your stories have a so-called "psychological twist" and looking one or two over—I can't recall the names now and I wouldn't bore you with details—I find they have a "mental angle."

All I can say is—keep it out of your type of magazine, for heaven's sake! The movies and the radio are full enough of people with all kinds of psychoses and neuroses, not to speak of the alleged "high-toned" magazines. There's enough Ibsen-like gloom in the world. Everybody seems to be going around with some kind of a "frustration" of some kind. There's too much stress placed on it in Art, Literature and the Drama. Everyone seems to be going around in a fog. Keep your magazine the breath of fresh air it has always been.

—*Dick Nelson, Phila., Pa.*

My, my, my! What started out as a mild knock, turned out to be a sort of a left-handed boost—didn't it, Dick! Like the big tycoons in the movies, we can only sit around and wait for a "trend." Anyway, thanks for all of "them kind words," friends, and we shall endeavor to try and please as many of our readers as we can.

Just keep those letters and postcards streaming along in. Our shoulders are broad to carry the burdens and we're always equipped with an elastic hat, in case of too much swelling of the head.

Kindly address all communications to the Editor, THRILLING DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Your letters and postcards are all welcome—and every one is carefully read and studied, whether selected for quotation or not.

Before signing off, I can't resist telling you about a swell picture I've seen. Called WHISPERING SMITH, and starring Alan Ladd, this Paramount Picture in Technicolor is a yarn of the crimes committed during the railroad era of the West in the 1890s. It's a grand bet for both Western and detective fans!

So long until next issue, folks!

—THE EDITOR.

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