

THRILLING DETECTIVE

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A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

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AND STAMPS
FOR VICTORY!



Death DRIVES A BUS

A Baffling Mystery Novel

By JAMES P. WEBB

MURDER SETS THE STAGE

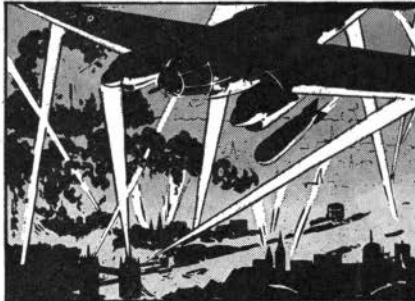
A Cal Zeiglar Novelet

By W. T. BALLARD

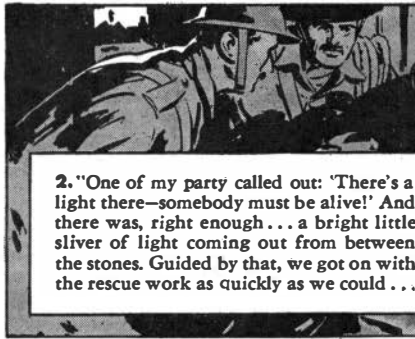
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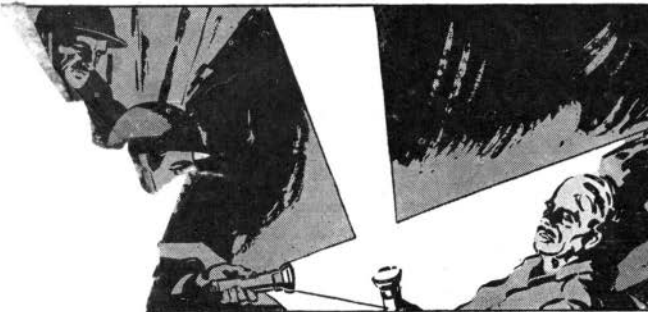
This true story of the blitz was told to a war correspondent by Michael Davies, Chief Shelter Marshal, London Area. Mr. Davies is famous as the smallest Air Marshal in England; his height is 3 ft. 6 in. Mr. Davies was a practicing optometrist before the war, was active in organizing youth camps, is now in charge of one of the largest air shelters in England. The shelter extends 4 acres and includes 4 miles of underground corridors. Complete with interior radio communications and sixty-five large sleeping bays, it can normally house 10,000 people—in a pinch, 14,000. Over one and a half million bricks were used to build the shelter wall.



1. "Jerry had been giving it to us in fine style that night. We were out on our usual 4 A.M. patrol, picking our way between craters and smoking piles of rubbish, when we passed the ruins of a small house that had received a direct hit . . .



2. "One of my party called out: 'There's a light there—somebody must be alive!' And there was, right enough . . . a bright little sliver of light coming out from between the stones. Guided by that, we got on with the rescue work as quickly as we could . . .



3. ". . . and found our man, half dead from injuries and bomb shock, his hand still gripping his flashlight like a vise. Seems he'd grabbed his flashlight to show others to the basement when the bomb fell. And that—plus having fresh batteries—was what saved his own life!"

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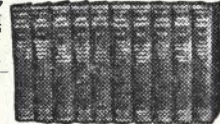


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THRILLING DETECTIVE

Vol. XLIX, No. 1

EVERY STORY BRAND NEW

October, 1943



A Baffling Mystery Novel

DEATH DRIVES A BUS

By JAMES P. WEBB

When Pilot Ed Yandell has death for a passenger, he steers right into a confusing maze of murder, intrigue, romance and danger that keeps him in high gear! 15

Two Gripping Complete Novelets

MURDER MEAT W. R. O. Gwinn 40
Viking Swenson takes on three sizzling hot jobs at the same time— and has to move fast to satisfy all his clients!

MURDER SETS THE STAGE W. T. Ballard 66
Publicity man Cal Zeiglar battles to unravel the tangled skeins of a grim mystery that stalks Hollywood!

Thrilling Short Stories

EYE-WITNESS TESTIMONY Dixon Wells 55
A girl's eloquence puts the spotlight on a murder frame

ASHES OF HATE Norman A. Daniels 59
The dead hand of an executed killer seeks revenge

THE MOTIVE GOES ROUND AND ROUND . . . Fredric Brown 82
A carnival concessionaire sacrifices a zebra and solves a mystery

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A War Bond message for all Americans

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HEADQUARTERS

Where Readers, Writers and the Editor Meet



DOWN here at Headquarters we meet all sorts of people. An old police officer becomes rather mellowed and tolerant in the course of many years of watching humanity come and go—from night-court trials and courts of domestic relations to felonies and murder trials. For instance, there was Mr. Blett.

Mr. A. Bromley Blett was a columnist on the staff of the *New York Daily Record*. Mr. Blett was also an unpleasant person. He poked his richly matured nose, the result of many years' earnest effort, into all sorts of affairs which did not concern him in the remotest degree.

Perhaps he was not wholly to blame for this regrettable practise. When he had first taken over his desk in one corner of the city room his editor had said: "Give 'em scandal." And Mr. Blett had been industriously digging up the dirt ever since. That is, up to the night we are thinking of.

You see, Mr. A. Bromley Blett is now, quite suddenly, dead. He lies cold and stiff in the morgue. And the boys of the department are working feverishly to run down his murderer and solve this killing.

Enter—Norman Conquest

But there is another angle to this business—an international angle. And into the picture steps Norman Conquest, the famous private investigator who is in America at this particular time.

With his companion, Joy Everard, Conquest is hard at work on this perplexing crime. And all indications are that Gerald

Chester and his secretary, Molly Langford, are being drawn into the affair as victims of a vicious blackmailing ring.

Just how do things work out? We expect to have all the facts for you in the case of the **BLACK RING OF DOOM**, by Berkeley Gray, in next month's issue of **THRILLING DETECTIVE**. This featured novel is going to give you one of the most enjoyable evenings of reading entertainment that you will have experienced in a long while.

BLACK RING OF DOOM promises to be one of Norman Conquest's most exciting cases, and Headquarters invites you to mark the date on your calendar, making the November issue of **THRILLING DETECTIVE** a must!

A Willie Brann Novelet

In going over the blotter to see what other cases are scheduled for trial in this November court, we find that Author-detective Benton Braden has booked a highly interesting affair for you judges and jurors to pass on. This is the complete novelet for next issue. He has called it **THE MURDEROUS MERMAID**, and it is the case of deadly sabotage and intrigue on the Mississippi River, starring one of your favorite characters, Willie Brann.

It's an exciting yarn with a sweep and scope and change of locale that is calculated to put you on the edge of your seat like nobody's business.

Think of what mighty damage could be done to the entire mid-West when treacherous villains go to scheming vast things of

(Continued on page 12)



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CITY STATE



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Drinking water is scarce in North Africa. And what there is, is likely to be bad.

So before our soldiers landed there, they were weaned away from water. A dash of iodine in their drinking water served the double purpose of disinfecting it, and making it taste awful. By the time the boys landed in Africa, they'd lost all taste for water.

The favorite prepared drink is lemonade. Field Ration K provides it—along with veal, pork, sausage, coffee, bouillon, malted milk tablets, biscuits, chocolate and chewing gum—all in a 33-ounce pack.

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good care of our boys, doesn't it? And that's right. American soldiers are the best-fed, best-equipped, best-cared-for in the world.

But keeping them that way takes money. So much money that Uncle Sam asks us to invest not 10% or 15% or 20%, *but all we can in War Bonds.*

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YOU'VE DONE YOUR BIT...

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NOW DO YOUR BEST!

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When closed, this handsome Billfold has the soft velvety feel you find only in select quality Leather. Your choice of Emblems and Initials are beautifully embossed in 23 karat gold on the face of the Billfold. Due to difficulty in obtaining choice leather because of war conditions, the supply of these Billfolds is limited. Remember if you send your order promptly, we will include absolutely FREE, a beautiful Identification Key Tag and Gilt Chain to match, all hand engraved with your Name, Address, City and State. If after receiving your Billfold and Free Gift, you don't positively agree that this is the most outstanding bargain you have ever come across, return them to us and your money will be cheerfully refunded in full. Send your order today, without fail, so you won't be disappointed.

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City State

Social Security Number Army Draft Number

Please ship the above C.O.D. for \$1.98 plus a few pennies postage and C.O.D. charges.

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HEADQUARTERS

(Continued from page 8)

evil on the bosom of the Father of Waters. Recent newspaper accounts have given us a graphic picture of the damage which can be caused by raging floods which are more or less in the nature of an act of Providence. Add to this peril the vile machinations of criminals, and the prospect is indeed calamitous.

A fisherman's midnight vision of a siren rising from the sea sends our peanut-eating and intrepid detective off on a danger trail that leads him to Nazi killers—just in time. **THE MURDEROUS MERMAID** is a fast-paced novelet that will hold you enthralled to the last page and make you proud that you are a loyal American!

Thrilling Short Stories

Besides the two long stories listed above, there will be a number of rapid-action short detective stories next issue which are packed with thrills and chills. No fooling, the harness bulls and the plainclothes dicks have certainly been industriously weeding our National Victory Garden of the nettles and tares of crime.

Meanwhile, how about you judges and jurors and armchair detectives reporting in on this October issue of **THRILLING DETECTIVE**? Headquarters is never too busy to read mail from readers and to select excerpts from letters to print in this department when we deem the topic of general interest.

Reports from Readers

Here are a couple of comments on our August issue.

A word from Georgia:

Your August issue of **THRILLING DETECTIVE** is just about tops. "The Plans of Murder," by D. L. Ames, was really a good mystery novel—too short by far. As for the novelet, "Death in Oklahoma," by Allan K. Echols—well, that fellow can write. I like, too, the way you balanced your swell war and sabotage yarns with short detective stories which are not filled with Nazis and Japs, but which are regulation detective stories. Good luck to you.—*John Vale ce, Atlanta, Ga.*

Thank you for the kind words, Mr. Valence. We always try to make up a balanced



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issue, but readers' opinions as to how well we succeed sometimes vary. Have a look at this gripe from an admiring fan:

Well, you didn't ask for it (not like this, anyhow) but you're going to get it. In my opinion, the last two issues of THRILLING DETECTIVE were punk. You are loading a simple detective field with yarns about war and spies and saboteurs until I'm sick of it. Sure, there's plenty of spy work and plenty of counter-activity on the part of law enforcement agencies and the F.B.I., but we can read about that in the newspapers. Give us straight detective and mystery stories! Sincerely,—Fred Jamison, Roanoke, Va.

And there you are. Fred doesn't like war angles in his detective yarns. Okay, Fred, you read the other stories you'll find in each issue of THRILLING DETECTIVE, and let folks like John Valence read the spy yarns. Remember, we are trying to please both of you—and thousands of other readers, also.

Here's a flash from an admirer of Murray Leinster:

To my delight and amazement, I found a short story in August THRILLING DETECTIVE by that old stand-by writer, Murray Leinster. Was I glad to see his name again. "Indiscretion" was a fine character-detective yarn, too, by the way. My bonnet is off to you, sir—and let's have more stories by Leinster.—Mrs. A. J. Daughton, Ft. Worth, Texas.

Thanks, Mrs. Daughton. We'll pass the word on to Mr. Leinster.

Now, how about others of you readers dropping Headquarters a line of comment or criticism? Just address your postcards or letters to The Editor, THRILLING DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. We are always glad to receive word from you.

So, until next issue, good reading!

—THE EDITOR.

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lucky hits and one can see no way for guessing to have accounted for the results." *Have you* that open-minded attitude of today which warrants a clear, positive revelation of the facts of mind which intolerance and bigotry have suppressed for years? *Advance with the times*; learn the truth about your inherited powers.

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Ruby Vincent pointed the automatic and said: "What are you doing here?"

Death Drives a Bus

By JAMES P. WEBB

When pilot Ed Yandell has death for a passenger, he steers right into a confusing maze of murder, intrigue, romance and danger that keeps him in high gear!

CHAPTER I "SHELL-SHOCKED"

ED YANDELL drove a big bus along Sandstone Street, in Middle City, in the midst of Kentucky's Blue Grass region, on his way from the company garage to the terminal on Main Street. He was a tall young man, Yandell, and loose-jointed. His nose had

once been broken and was pushed slightly to the left. This merely gave his face an added individuality without destroying its good looks.

His blue eyes frequently—as now—had a quizzical expression which matched the sometimes playful tone of his voice, and his somewhat gangling figure eminently fitted a driver's uniform. For the past seven years he had

A BAFFLING COMPLETE MYSTERY NOVEL

been driving for Mid-America Bus Lines, and he would hardly have looked natural without that blue-gray uniform.

He was in a cheerful mood this morning, and despite the raw March weather, he had the window open beside the driver's chair, and he was singing softly:

Where the brush was thick and thorny,
The Turner brothers took their stan',
And when the moon rose over the mountains,
They killed another man.
Oh, the Turners with their rifles,
They killed another man.

A pretty girl in a brown cloth coat with a brown fur collar, both of which matched her eyes, emerged from a brick house on the left side of the street, and Yandell quit singing. He grinned and brought the bus to a stop. He would stop anywhere for Arlene Obie.

The girl smiled, waved, crossed the street in front of the stopped bus, and came up to the door. Yandell opened the folding panels, and the girl got in.

"Thought I'd bum a ride downtown, Ed," she said complacently, and sat down on the front seat beside the door.

"What you up to, Arlene?" Yandell asked.

"Just shopping a little," she said carelessly.

Yandell, having closed the door panels, meshed gears and let the big coach roll on along the wet pavement. Arlene Obie watched him, but now there was a shadow of worry in her gray eyes.

"I wish you wouldn't always carry a gun, Ed," she said suddenly. "You've got it now, I'll bet. You'll get in trouble on account of the company rule against it."

"They don't know I carry a gun," Yandell said, a little gruffly. He glanced at his wrist-watch. "Ten-forty-five. On time, and nothing to worry about."

"You never worry about anything, do you?" she asked in a grieved tone.

Yandell grinned. "Not in public, honey."

"Nasty day for driving," Arlene said, after a pause. "You'll be careful, won't you, Ed?"

HE NODDED, watching the street and the traffic. But he was thinking that it was nice to have somebody worry about him, especially Arlene, because it

was understood between Yandell and Arlene that some day they would be married, either after the war or when his status in the draft was more definitely settled. Despite the fact that he was a cog in a vast and vital transportation system, Yandell was expecting a call to military service.

"They used to say you drove too fast, anyway," Arlene added hesitantly.

"Can't now," he said. "There's a national speed limit now, account of the war." He turned his head and glanced quickly at Arlene's sober face. "I'm not going anywhere very fast," he assured her. "Don't worry."

The bus was nearing Main Street before Arlene spoke again.

"I saw Karen Carr in town yesterday," she said then, in a carefully casual voice.

Yandell made a clucking sound with his tongue. "Come, come. I haven't been married to her for five years now. Forget it, kid."

"I just said I saw her," Arlene retorted. "She was dressed all in black."

"Well, and that's okay," Yandell said. "Arthur Carr's been dead only a week. Maybe she liked him." He ^{is in the} ~~is in the~~ hand from the wheel to greet ^{an} ~~an~~ acquaintance on the sidewalk. "Hi, Bill!"

It was always like that for Ed Yandell in Middle City; always greeting someone. The Blue Grass town had been his home for seven years, and he was sure he knew the majority of its sixty-five thousand inhabitants.

Yandell swung the bus around the corner into Main Street and stopped. He opened the door. Arlene Obie stood up.

"Shall I see you tonight?" she asked.

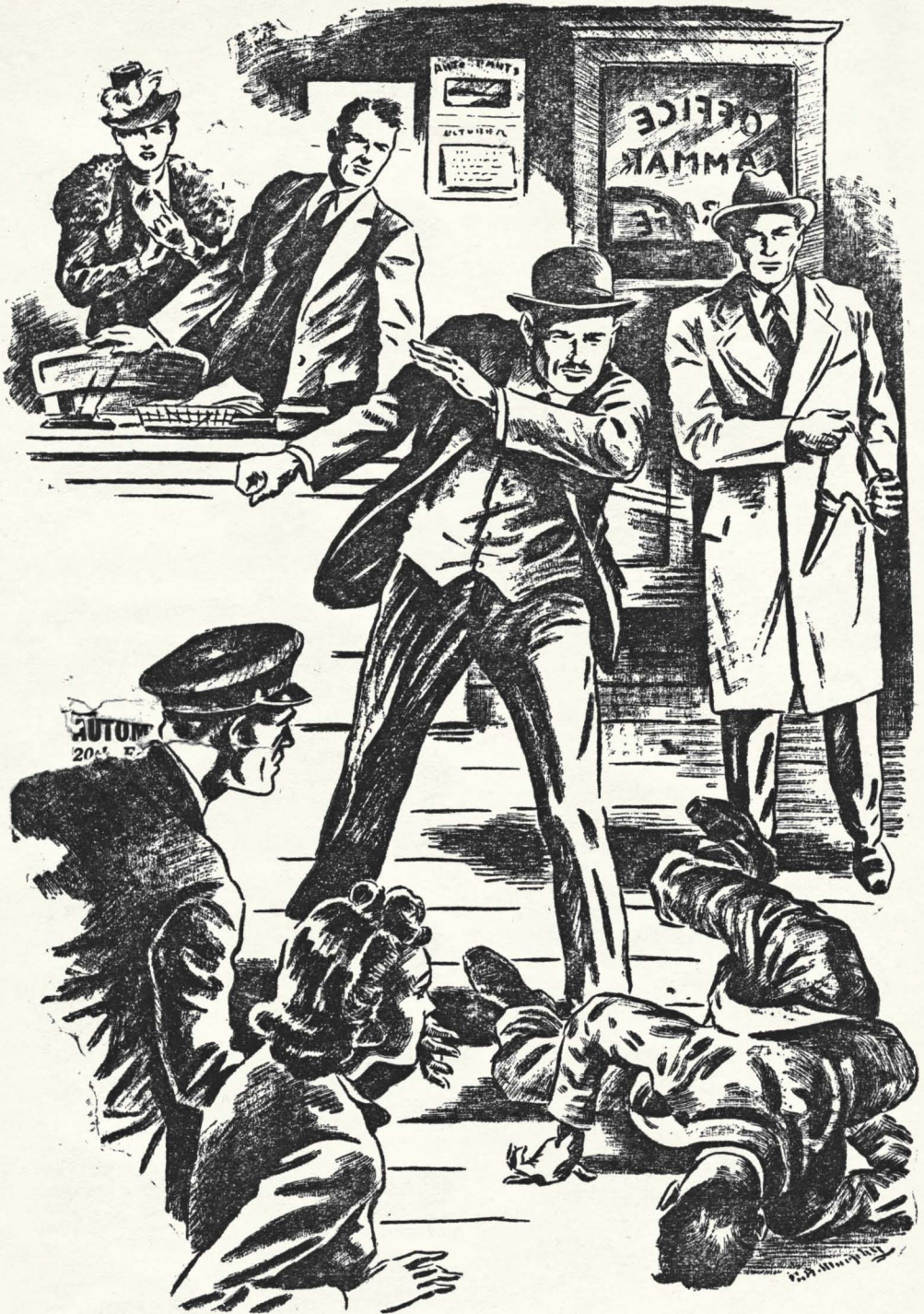
Yandell grinned. "You'd better. I'll be around."

Arlene wrinkled her nose at Yandell and stepped down to the wet pavement.

"I wish you'd stop carrying that old gun, Ed," she said, "before the company finds out about it."

Yandell chuckled. "Sure. See you about seven tonight."

Two minutes later, Yandell rolled the big bus into the loading shed at the terminal and stopped beside Door 3. He twisted his long, lean body out from under the wheel, picked up his zipper bag and dropped it on the seat which he had just vacated. It was the bag in



Oliver Kane's fist came up and he smashed into Lawson, hurling him to the floor

which he carried tools, cash fare receipts, report blanks, and odds and ends.

Yandell removed his cash-receipt trap and dropped it on the seat beside the bag. Then he leaned across the seat and threw a tiny lever which opened the door.

A small man emerged from the waiting room at Door 3, a man with a sharp nose and dull eyes, and whose right cheek bulged under the pressure of a huge quid of tobacco.

"This bus go to Cincinnati, driver?" he asked. "At eleven o'clock?"

"Yes, sir," Yandell, standing, on the doorstep of the coach, glanced at his wrist-watch. "It's ten-forty-three now. You can get aboard in about five minutes. They'll call it pretty soon."

"Okay," the little man said amiably. "You're Ed Yandell, ain't you, driver?"

"Yes, sir," Yandell said indifferently.

"I've heard of you," the little man said. "My name's Chesley Ramsey. I—"

He stopped, for he saw that Yandell's attention was on a bus driver named Oscar Shingle who came out of Door 3 and leaned against the wall. He was starting back toward the express office, beyond where the loading shed curved around behind the ticket office.

"Looky, Ed," Shingle called, pointing. "John Shelly."

"Who's John Shelly?" little Chesley Ramsey asked curiously.

"Anybody who's drunk," Yandell answered, with a grin, and looked in the direction indicated by Shingle's pointing finger.

A WELL-DRESSED man in a loose brown topcoat, dark-gray suit and Homburg hat was weaving around in the wide space between the waiting-room and the express office. Staring at the man, Yandell's face went tight. His eyelids flickered.

"That man ain't drunk," Chesley Ramsey said importantly. "I know about him, sir. He was shell-shot in the last war."

"Looks drunk to me," Oscar Shingle said.

"He ain't, though," Ramsey insisted. "They just act that way when they're shell-shot. I used to be employed at a veterans' hospital, and I've seen lots of guys like him." He shifted his quid of

tobacco. "He's been shell-shot."

The tightness and wariness went out of Yandell's face and eyes, but inwardly he remained cautious and uneasy. He was thinking of that reeling man, too—what he was thinking was:

"I didn't know he ever got that drunk. Maybe he's just pretending to catch me off guard. I'd better watch him."

Yandell unbuttoned the second button below the collar of his shirt and said lightly:

"Looks half-shot to me."

He glanced around. There were few people about, and as far as he could see through the waiting room windows, there were few people inside. Usually, even on Tuesdays, there was a crowd at all hours. Since Pearl Harbor.

The man who had attracted the attention of the bus drivers and small, tobacco-chewing passenger had staggered up against the wall at the far end of the waiting room. He stood there unsteadily, with one hand moving over his face, as if to clear his vision.

Yandell pushed through Door 3 and entered the waiting room. The loudspeakers began calling the C bus, and the ten or twelve people in the waiting-room began gathering up baggage. Colored porters bustled around. Yandell glanced at the clock in the ticket office. His first call was five minutes late.

A bus was unloading at Door 1. Probably a connection. Yandell glanced through a side window, but the apparently drunken man had moved. Oscar Shingle was inside now, straddling a stool at the lunch counter.

Yandell walked to the rear corner, near the ticket office, where the telephone booths stood. Behind the booths, in the corner beside Door 1, a built-in stand held a large, open book. With a pencil taken from his shirt pocket, Yandell signed out his run. Then he stepped over to Door 1 and spoke to the station dispatcher.

"Connections all in, Brack?"

The dispatcher nodded. "Just now. Lightest hauls we've had in a year. Since Pearl Harbor."

About a dozen people, more or less, had gone out to Yandell's coach, and two more were hurrying from the ticket window. Yandell went back to Door 3.

Three porters were making short

work of loading baggage and express into the inside baggage racks. Twelve or thirteen passengers were already seated, as near the front of the coach as possible, and Chesley Ramsey was getting off the bus.

"You can stay on now," Yandell said. "We'll be pulling out as soon as I sign for the freight."

Ramsey spat a brown stream. "Oh, I ain't going on the bus. I just didn't have anything to do right now, so I came down to watch the buses go out and come in."

He thrust out a hand, palm upward, and jerked his head toward the rear of the coach.

"I helped that poor shell-shot guy on. Here's his ticket. I wouldn't bother him if I were you, 'cause he don't feel so good."

YANDELL frowned down at the white oblong of cardboard which lay on Ramsey's moist palm.

"So he's going with me?" the bus driver thought. "But he can't afford to sit at me with all those people on the sleepers. I have to watch him."

But aloud he snapped:

"Listen, Ramsey, I can manage this bus all right. I don't need help."

Ramsey's eyes opened wide. "Oh, it ain't that. I just wanted to help the lady. That's all."

"Lady? What lady?"

"A lady," Ramsey explained patiently. "The poor guy's sister," she said. "Asked me to help him get on the bus. She said put him on the back seat and give you this ticket."

Yandell picked the piece of cardboard from Ramsey's hand and turned it over. It was a ticket to Cincinnati. Yandell's frown deepened.

"What did the lady look like?" he asked.

"She was kind of young, and mighty pretty," Ramsey answered. "Had bright hair and blue eyes and—"

"Where'd she go?"

Ramsey looked around. "I don't know," he said at last. "She stepped up in the bus while me and one of the porters was helpin' her brother back through the aisle. I never noticed where she went." His dull eyes brightened with inspiration. "Maybe she's still on the bus."

"Well, skip it," Yandell growled.

The loud-speakers were giving the last call. Yandell hurried back to the express office and signed bills for seven pieces of freight. Then he went back to the bus, and glanced through a side window as he passed the rear of the coach. The man whom Chesley Ramsey had helped on the bus was sprawled on the back seat.

Yandell scowled. He didn't make a practice of carrying drunks, and he didn't want that particular man in any case.

Yandell swung up into the coach. He picked up his cash-fare trap and hung it by its ring on a hook beneath the driver's window. Then he rolled the window up, took his open zipper bag from the seat and lifted it into the baggage rack. Drawing his ticket punch from its little holster on his belt, he stepped into the aisle.

The passenger in the front seat behind the driver's chair was a young woman. A blonde. She wore a black cloak, and the fur collar, also black, contrasted pleasantly with her pale-gold hair. She smiled with scarlet lips, but the smile did not reach her blue eyes. Yandell had not expected it would—for him, for this blonde was the young widow, Karen Carr, the woman who once had been Yandell's wife.

"Hello," he said to her gruffly.

"Hello, Ed," she greeted him, cool-voiced. "I didn't know this was your run, or I wouldn't have—"

"It's a public bus, Karen," Yandell said. "You got a ticket?"

She handed him a white oblong of cardboard. He drew a long breath, snapped three holes through the ticket with his punch, and glanced at its face. Cincinnati, Ohio.

Yandell went quickly from one passenger to another, taking tickets. Midway of the bus, the job was done. There were no other passengers, except the man crumpled on the back seat, and Yandell already had his ticket.

"That man's drunk, isn't he, driver?" a woman asked anxiously.

Yandell glanced at the man and made a wry mouth.

"Some call it shell-shock," he said. "I ought to dump him off, but—"

He passed on, with a shrug.

"Shell-shocked or drunk—who knew?"

CHAPTER II
DEAD PASSENGER



ED YANDELL hurried up the aisle, slid into the driver's seat without glancing at Karen Carr again, threw the ignition switch and stepped on the starter.

The powerful motor churned and caught.

With the engine running, Yandell turned in the seat to glance back through the coach for a last-minute inspection. And then he noticed Karen Carr's face. She was looking, almost glaring toward the waiting room. And her expression, despite the natural delicate beauty of her face, was harsh and angry. In the gleam of her blue eyes and the set of her scarlet lips was dislike, even hatred.

Yandell tipped his head and looked toward the waiting room. Through a window, he saw a red-headed girl staring into the coach, and he knew her well enough. She was Ruby Vincent, the stepdaughter of the late Arthur Carr who had been married to Yandell's divorced wife. Ruby was the daughter of Carr's first wife, and Yandell never saw the girl without a feeling of distaste, if not actual dislike.

He drove out of the terminal and turned west on Main Street. In the middle of the third block, the familiar figure of Detective Sam Cloud stepped out from behind a parked police car. He held up his right hand.

Yandell stopped the coach and opened the door.

Sam Cloud was an average-sized man with sharp eyes and a dark complexion. His suit needed pressing, and his gray topcoat, unbuttoned, hung in folds. A pleasant, mild-mannered man, he was on friendly terms with many of the Mid-America employees.

"I got a report there's a dead guy on your bus, Ed," Cloud said quietly, "and that you killed him."

Yandell's heart began beating faster, but he said lightly:

"Don't be funny, Sam. I don't haul my victims away. I just leave 'em where they fall."

"Maybe," Cloud drawled, "you varied from your custom this time, Ed. Anyway, I'll take a look."

"Okay." Yandell twisted his long body out from behind the wheel. "All I've got is either a drunk or a shell-shock victim. Whichever he is, you can have him, friend."

Cloud had opened his mouth to make another remark, but no words came. For halfway back in the bus, a woman screamed piercingly. Immediately she screamed again, and then again. She kept on screaming as Cloud followed Yandell to the rear of the coach. Then she collapsed into the seat from which she had risen.

The man on the rear seat was sprawled drunkenly, with head thrown back. Yandell stared at him.

Cloud moved up, touched the man's shoulder. The man leaned slowly sideways and fell into the aisle on his face. There was a jagged hole in the brown topcoat, between the man's shoulder blades.

Cloud took the tail of the brown topcoat between the thumb and fingers of his left hand and peeled the coat over the man's head. He pulled up the tail of the suit coat.

The man wore no vest. The white shirt was crimson.

There was plenty of blood, and the man was dead.

"Stabbed," Cloud said softly. "Hasn't been dead long. Who is he, Ed?"

Yandell stared down at the bloody shirt. His eyelids drooped. Slowly, he shook his head.

"I don't know." But he was thinking grimly, "Maybe I ought to tell him. It's all foolishness, anyway."

"If you don't know him, why'd you kill him?" Cloud said, low-voiced.

"I didn't kill him," Yandell said firmly. "How did you get that report, anyway?"

"Telephone," Cloud said. "I was on my way to the terminal when I saw you coming."

"Who called?" Yandell stared down at the murdered man's back. "Man or woman?"

"A man." Cloud glanced sharply at Yandell. "Why?"

"I don't know—just wondering. I reckon," the bus driver said. "I didn't kill him, Sam. I saw him slumped here, but I thought he'd been drinking too much, just as I thought when I saw him outside."

IN A few words, he told Cloud what he knew about the events of the past few minutes. Cloud listened attentively, while his eyes ranged over the people seated in the coach.

"This Chesley Ramsey," the detective said. "Where's he?"

"Not aboard," Yandell said. "Something funny about that guy. He didn't know how to say shell-shock, but in some ways maybe he isn't so dumb."

Cloud nodded. "Take this bus back to the station," he ordered.

Cloud stood beside the door while Yandell drove.

In the wide space directly behind the ticket office, Yandell stopped the coach and looked up at Detective Cloud. A police car pulled in behind the bus and stopped. Two men in uniform got out.

"Open the door," Cloud said.

Yandell opened the door, and Cloud leaned out.

"Get the coroner and the wagon," he called to the policemen.

The two men in uniform went into the waiting room, where one of them used a telephone. The station dispatcher, white-faced, hurried out at once.

"What's this, Sam?" he asked the detective.

"Just what you heard," Cloud said. "Get another driver and another bus down here for this schedule, Brack. Ed won't be working today."

"Have a heart, Sam," Yandell said. "I didn't kill him."

"Maybe not," Cloud said. "We'll see."

Karen Carr, still in the seat behind the driver's chair, asked:

"Do I have to wait, Mr. Cloud?"

Cloud glanced at her. "Were you here when the man got in, Mrs. Carr?"

She shook her head. "No, I was coming in from the street when they helped him on."

"You saw him then?" Cloud pursed his lips thoughtfully. "Sorry, Mrs. Carr. I guess you'll have to stick around a while." He glanced at the other passengers. "That goes for everybody."

The next hour or so was an uncomfortable time for Ed Yandell, taken to the police station and having endless questions hurled at him. The inquisition was over at last, though it was 2:15 that afternoon when he finally wandered back into the bus station. The



There was a jagged hole between the man's shoulder blades

fourteen passengers also had been questioned, and had gone on their way. Yandell had been told to stay in touch with Sam Cloud, though not necessarily in sight all the time.

About fifty people were in the waiting room now, but no policemen were about. The body of the murdered man had been taken away more than an hour ago.

Arlene Obie rose from a seat near the middle of the waiting room and hurried toward Yandell, her heels clicking on the hard floor. Her gray eyes were clouded, and her face showed worry.

"I've been worried to death about you, Ed," she said.

YANDELL took her arm and steered her to the lunch counter.

"Let's have a ham sandwich. What were you worried about?"

"About that murder, of course," Arlene murmured. "Who in the world

"I'll admit that ex-wives are sometimes like that," Cloud said mildly, "but I'm afraid you're a prejudiced woman. It begins to look as if Ed did kill that man."

"Says you," Yandell drawled.

The waitress brought two ham sandwiches and two cups of coffee. Yandell jerked his right thumb at Cloud.

"Another of the same for the cop."

"Thanks," Cloud said, and smiled at the waitress. "Don't put any sugar in the coffee. I'm patriotic, and anyway I don't like sweet coffee." He looked at Yandell. "Who was the man that got killed, Ed?"

Yandell rubbed a forefinger up and down his slightly crooked nose.

"I don't know," he said, as he had before.

"I'm going to pin this murder on the guilty party," Cloud said slowly. "You and I have known each other for years, Ed. I wouldn't try to put anything over

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could have accused you of—of killing him?"

Yandell straddled a stool. "I keep thinking about Karen, but I can't quite believe she'd—"

"I can," Arlene snapped.

"Sam Cloud says the call came from a man, anyway," Yandell argued.

"I'll bet she was behind it!" Arlene said indignantly. "How long was it she was married to Arthur Carr?"

"Ham and coffee for two," Yandell said to a waitress. Then he said to Arlene: "About two years. I heard she was pretty much shocked when he got killed."

"Motor accidents are messy things, and sudden," Sam Cloud, standing directly behind Yandell, said. "That kind of death would shock a woman whether she cared much for the victim or not."

Yandell turned his head. "You watching me, Sam? Here's an empty stool."

Cloud sat down on the stool at Yandell's right. He leaned forward and looked across at Arlene.

"So you think Karen Carr may have found out about the wounded man and decided to dump a murder in Ed's lap?"

She nodded. "It would be just like her."

on you. The truth from you ^{and the} ~~was~~ ^{was} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~rest~~ ^{rest} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~truth,~~ ^{truth,} and ~~it~~ ^{it} ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~up~~ ^{up} ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~you~~ ^{you} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~long~~ ^{long} ~~run,~~ ^{run,} even if it happens to sound bad at first. Do you still insist you don't know the dead man?"

Yandell frowned and stirred his coffee thoughtfully. Maybe he ought to tell Sam. After all, Cloud was not the blustering or hard-boiled type, and he had always seemed a decent, fair-minded man. Still—

Yandell shook his head. "I don't know who he was, Sam."

Cloud smiled. "Oh, well, we've identified him, anyway."

"Who was he?" Arlene asked quickly.

"I happen to know that you always carry a gun, Ed," Cloud said. "The boys have talked about it. I wonder why you do? You're not the sort that—"

"Just a fool notion," Yandell said.

"Who was the man?" Arlene asked again.

"His name was Steve Jannings, and he was an investigator for an insurance company." Cloud drew a notebook from one of the pockets of his topcoat and opened it on the counter. "Stephen Jannings. Thirty years old. Born somewhere in the Cumberland Mountains. Had held this job for about a year."

CHAPTER III
A BLOODY KNIFE



THE waitress brought the detective's sandwich and coffee, but Cloud did not seem to notice. He flipped the pages of the notebook.

"Karen Carr," he read aloud musingly. "Twenty-nine years old. Married to Edward Yandell a couple of years. Divorced five years ago. Married Arthur Carr two years ago. Carr was a banker. Plenty of money. Killed in an auto accident a week ago, when his car plunged through the railing on the river hill. Karen was originally from Ohio."

Cloud shut the notebook and put it back into his pocket.

"I think you're dreaming things, Arlene. Karen isn't that vindictive, and anyway she wouldn't have been likely to know that Jannings was dying unless she stabbed him herself."

"Maybe she did," Arlene said shortly.

Cloud drew the coffee cup and the sandwich closer to the edge of the counter, looked at Arlene and smiled. He wagged his head.

"Don't be like that, young lady. Those freckles on your nose are too cute for a spiteful woman to wear. I say it looks distinctly as if Ed killed Jannings, thought I've still got to unearth the motive."

Yandell realized that his heart was pumping too fast. The motive! When Sam Cloud found out—

"That's where you'll hit a snag, Sam," Yandell said lightly. "You can't find any motive."

Cloud bit into his sandwich. Chewing, he said:

"I found the knife that killed him."

Yandell, his mouth full of ham and bread, looked at the detective obliquely.

"Where?" he asked indistinctly.

"You know those zipper bags all you bus drivers use?" Cloud said. "I found the knife in the bottom of yours, under all that junk. You left the bag in the express office, and I went back there and looked through it. There's blood on the knife."

Arlene stopped eating, her face washed white. The freckles on her nose stood out sharply, and she trembled.

"How did it get there?" she demanded.

"That's what I want to know," Cloud said softly.

"Somebody put it there," Yandell said, "and it wasn't me. What kind of knife is it?"

"A thin-bladed bowie knife with a white, bone handle," Cloud said. "I've sent it down to the fingerprint man, but there won't be anything on it, I guess."

"Listen!" Arlene said fiercely. "Ed didn't kill that man."

"I hope he didn't," Cloud said, "but if he did, I'll prove he did." He lowered his voice. "That gun you carry, Ed. When a man like you carries a gun everywhere he goes, it usually means there's something in the past. . . . Every man has a past of some kind, Ed."

Yandell grinned. "The past is dead Sam—completely."

Cloud drained his coffee cup and set it down.

"Got a permit?" he asked.

"Sure," Yandell said promptly. "From the police, but not from the company. If you give it out, Sam, they'll probably threaten to fire me."

Cloud spread his hands. "I won't give it out just yet. Where was it you were born and raised, Ed? Somewhere up in the mountains, but I forget just where."

YANDELL sighed, drew some coins from a trousers pocket, dropped a half dollar and a dime on the counter, and put the rest of the money back into the pocket from which he had taken it. He was thinking, with a growing uneasiness, that detectives seemed to remember casual remarks for a long time.

"Lonesome Hollow," he said, and then intoned in a rapid, singsong voice: "Where the brush was thick and thorny, the Turner brothers took their stan' and when the moon rose o'er the mountains, they killed another man." He added in a more serious tone: "But I haven't lived there for upward of ten years, Samuel."

"Lonesome Hollow," Cloud said, and smiled. He put his feet on the floor and stood up. "Stick around town, Ed. I'll be seeing you."

"Okay," Yandell drawled. "I wasn't planning any trip."

Arlene Obie stared at the detective's

retreating back. Her eyes were narrowed and bright. When Cloud had gone out of the waiting room, she turned and looked at Yandell.

"That man's up to devilment, Ed."

"He usually is," Yandell agreed.

Arlene's face was still pale. She put a hand on Yandell's arm.

"They're trying to say you killed that Jannings, Ed. How can you help being worried?"

"Right now," Yandell said, "I'm scared to death. Nobody's going to save me but me, and I've got to get busy. Sam won't frame me, but he'll take things at face value. He'll soon find—"

Arlene stared at him, wide-eyed.

"Find what, Ed?"

Yandell moistened his dry lips with his tongue. "Something to use for a motive." He stood up suddenly. "You're a smart child, honey, and you always know things. Who pulled up the remains of Arthur Carr's auto after it went over the bluff?"

Arlene's gray eyes were puzzled. "The Lammers Motor Company. I think it's still there."

Yandell reached out a hand and patted her arm.

"There ought to be a bus going out to the garage about now. Come on. I'll catch you a free ride home."

At 3:20, Yandell walked into the driveway of Nick Lammers' garage, on West Main.

In the shop at the rear, a mechanic in greasy coveralls was lying half under a car. Automobiles lined both side walls of the storage room. A used car stood inside the glassed-in showroom opposite the office doorway.

The upper half of the office door was glass, and Yandell could see the rear portion of the little room. Nick Lammers, his back to the door, sat at a desk on the corner.

Yandell unbuttoned his short blue overcoat and opened the door. Warmth from a gas heater swept against him pleasantly as he stepped inside.

Nick Lammers, with a pencil poised in his right hand, twisted in his chair for an over-shoulder glance. He was a big man, but his body was not fat, and he had a smooth, lean face. His nose was long and thin, his eyes were gray and opaque and shrewd, and his mouth was like a sprung trap.

"Hello, Yandell," he said, without cordiality. "Come in."

"Nasty weather," Yandell remarked.

Lammers swung the chair half around, leaned back and looked at Yandell.

"Raw," he said. "You want something?"

Yandell shook his head. "Just dropped in to get warm. How's business?"

"Have a chair," Lammers invited, still without cordiality. "Business isn't so good now."

Yandell took two steps forward, turned, and dropped into an old leather chair in the front corner. His hands were in the pockets of his overcoat.

"Gas rationing hurts, eh?" he remarked.

LAMMERS looked at his desk and rocked slowly in his swivel chair.

"Gas rationing didn't hurt so much. It's the tires and accessories and new car trade that's put this business on the bum." He looked at Yandell. "Still, we got to win the war."

Yandell nodded. He was thinking that Lammers looked hard—hard and tough enough to engineer a murder. He was remembering that Steve Jannings had been an insurance investigator, and that Arthur Carr had carried heavy insurance in the company for which Jannings had worked.

"What's this I hear about a dead man?" Lammers said.

"They found one," Yandell answered carelessly. "He was on my bus."

Lammers' opaque eyes opened a little wider, but no expression came into them.

"That so? I hadn't heard that. I just heard a man had been stabbed."

"He had been stabbed all right," Yandell said. "They're trying to prove I stabbed him."

Nick Lammers raised his eyebrows politely. "Not seriously, I hope. Who was the dead man?"

Yandell shook his head. "Name was Jannings."

Nick Lammers' eyebrows lifted again. "Not Steve Jannings? I knew Steve slightly. He came here the other day to look at what's left of Arthur Carr's Buick." He picked a pencil off the desk and tapped it thoughtfully against his

knee. "Wonder why anybody'd bump Jannings?"

Yandell did not seem to hear the question.

"Was the Buick torn up pretty badly?" he asked.

"What do you think?" Lammers said impatiently. "It hit the railing, which is too low, took a header, and went end over end fifty feet or more down the bluff. Carr must have been driving fast, and that sort of puzzles me. He didn't make a habit of speed. We had one sweet time getting the Buick back on the road."

"Where is it now?"

"Out back with the other junk."

Ed Yandell nodded and stood up. "Well, I've got to get out in that wind some time. Might as well be now."

"Drop in again," Lammers said. "I hope the police don't give you too much trouble, Yandell."

Yandell grinned lopsidedly. "I guess they won't."

He went back toward the terminal, ~~took~~ ^{got} a ride on a garage-bound empty bus, and alighted at the rear of the company garage. The cold rain, so fine that it was almost a mist, put a heavy dampness into his muscles.

Yandell crossed Sandstone Street and entered London Court, where he inserted a key in the door of the fifth house from the corner. He went into the living room, lighted the gas heater under the mantel, shed his short overcoat, and tossed it with his cap on a divan. He dropped into a chair, stretched his long legs toward the fire, and stared up at the mantel.

ON THE right hand end of the mantel stood a framed picture of himself, taken six years ago. In the middle of the mantel was a framed photograph of Karen, taken six years ago when Karen had been Mrs. Edward Yandell. On the left hand end of the mantel was a framed photograph, slightly smaller than the other two, of Arlene Obie, taken three months ago.

Yandell felt as if he were caught in a net, like a fish, and mentally he was floundering around, trying to find a means of escape. The thought persisted in his mind that there was some connection between the death of Steve Jannings, insurance investigator, and the

supposedly accidental death of Arthur Carr, the heavily insured banker. And Karen was the person who would profit most, financially, from Carr's death. This thought was bitter to Yandell.

He stared with sleepy-lidded eyes at the picture of Karen. After a moment he arose, walked to the mantel, picked up the photograph of Karen, and turned it face down. He uttered a soft-voiced oath.

CHAPTER IV WRECKED JALOPY



IT WAS dark when Yandell, wearing a black leather windbreaker, parked his car just outside the loading shed at the bus terminal. He walked into the wide space between the ticket office and the closed

express office. A bus stood at Door 1, and another at Door 2. A third was just pulling away from Door 3. Porters were bustling about, and Yandell spotted one who had been present when Jannings' body was found. Yandell tapped the porter's arm.

"George," he asked, "you saw that dead man today?"

The porter stopped walking and turned, his eyes rolling.

"Yassuh, Mistuh Ed, I sho' did."

"Think right hard, George," Yandell said. "Where was he when you first saw him—before he died?"

The porter's brow wrinkled. He lifted his cap and scratched his woolly head.

"Why, Mistuh Ed, I see him when he got out o' dat car, suh."

"What car?" Yandell said quickly. "Where?"

The porter pointed across toward the edge of the loading shed, where Yandell's car stood.

"Right there at dat corner, suh. It pulled up there, and dis man got out. Fell out, fo' a fact, suh. The other man got out and helped him up and then got back in the car and backed out, suh."

"Who was the other man?"

"I don't know, suh. I didn't give him no never-mind, nohow. I was watchin' de drunk man, suh. Lawdy, but he sho' was drunk."

"Was this other guy a little fellow?"

"Big fellah, suh."

"Who was with him, besides the drunk man?"

"Nobody, suh, far's I seen. The car was just barely in sight, there at de corner, suh, but—"

Yandell gave the porter a quarter. Then he stood on widespread feet and stared thoughtfully at the concrete wall in front of him. His brows drew down, and his tight lips made a thin line under his nose.

Suddenly, Yandell turned and ran to his car. He backed under the edge of the loading shed roof, drove out to the street, and turned left across the line of traffic. He broke the city speed limit to the next stoplight, waited impatiently for the green, and shot across the intersection. He parked the car far out Main Street, directly across from Nick Lammers' garage, which stayed open all night.

The lights inside the garage were dim. There was no light at all in the office.

Yandell got out of his car, walked across the street, and peered into the dark office. Light from the street seeped through a front window. An attendant in gray coveralls sat in the leather chair which Yandell had occupied when he had visited the garage that afternoon.

Yandell opened the office door and stepped inside. The attendant, who was sprawled in the chair with a cap over his eyes, sat up suddenly.

"Hello," he said. "I didn't hear you drive up." He got out of the chair and settled his cap on his head.

"That's all right, friend," Yandell said pleasantly. "I don't need any gas." He grinned. "If I did, I couldn't get it. Left my ration book at home."

The attendant grunted.

"Nick around?" Yandell asked.

"Naw. He's home."

"Well, and that's all right," Yandell said. "Did he tell you I might want to look around in his junk yard a little?"

"Naw. He didn't tell me that."

"Forgot it, I guess," Yandell said.

A CAR pulled up at the gas pumps, and a horn sounded. The attendant jerked open the door and went out to see what was wanted.

Yandell crossed the room. A tele-

phone stood on top of the closed desk. Yandell went to the light switch, flipped it on, picked up the phone and dialed a number.

After a brief wait, he said quickly:

"That you, Slim? This is Ed. Listen, Slim, I'm in a hurry. I was afraid you wouldn't be home, and I need a favor. . . . It may not be exactly legal, but it isn't a crime, either. They won't hang you for it. . . . Yeah, grab up a few tools and a flashlight and come to the Lammers Motor Company on West Main. . . . Yeah. . . . Make it fast, will you, friend?"

He replaced the phone on the cradle, but immediately picked it up again and dialed another number.

"Listen, Sugar," he said, "I can't get there this evening. . . . Well, not right away, anyhow. . . . I'm busy, honey. Maybe I can drop in later. . . . No, not yet, but he soon will, if I don't— Yes, think so. I hope so. . . . I'll see. . . . That's a good girl. . . . Oh, no. . . . Well, be good."

He cradled the phone again, just as the attendant came back into the office. Yandell grinned and said:

"Nick says it's all right. He don't have to be here."

The attendant nodded. "There can't be much harm in it, anyway. Just junk, in any man's language, and not much of that. We don't keep the stuff long nowadays. They make tanks out of it."

The attendant took a flashlight off the desk beside the telephone and went back through the half-dark garage toward the shop at the rear. Yandell, after making certain that the attendant was out of hearing, picked up the phone again. He dialed the number of the Carr residence, and a male voice answered.

"Is Mrs. Carr there?" Yandell asked, and in a moment: "No, just a message, please. You're the butler? . . . Well, tell Mrs. Carr that this is her friend. Just say her friend, and she'll know. Tell her I said it was important for us to talk right away. Tell her I'll be waiting at the Palace Bar in an hour, and it would be well for her to get there just about exactly an hour from now. . . . Thanks."

A car purred past the garage and stopped just beyond. Yandell, suddenly alert, stared through the front window.

The attendant came up through the garage and opened the office door.

"Nasty night," he said. "Want me to show you the junk yard?"

Yandell moved to the door. "Is the back door unlocked? Can I get out that way?"

"It's a night lock and a bolt," the attendant said. "You can get out all right."

"Okay, I'll make it. You stay here where it's warm."

"Only," the attendant warned, "don't carry off anything. You'll have to wait and see the boss if there's anything you want."

"Oh, sure," Yandell said.

He went out, closed the door, and walked toward the storage room.

A man as tall as Yandell, and even thinner, walked into the garage, caught sight of the bus driver and hurried toward him. The thin man carried a small bag in his right hand. He wore a reversible raincoat over a brownish suit.

"Right this way, Slim," Yandell said.

"What's cooking, Ed?" the man called "Slim" asked.

THEY walked back toward the shop. "There's a busted Buick back here," Yandell said in a low voice. "I need an expert mechanic to look it over, and it's a time-honored maxim that the Mid-America family sticks together. That's why I called you out in the drizzle, Slim."

Slim grunted. As they walked into the darkened shop, he asked:

"Hasn't Lammers got any mechanic? Where did you get a Buick, anyway? And who busted it?"

Yandell thrust his fingers into the

slanting pockets of his windbreaker. He grinned.

"This isn't my car, Slim. It's the one Arthur Carr drove over the river bluff last week, you know."

He paused at the rear door, slid back the heavy bolt, and twisted the knob of the night lock. The door opened, and the two men stepped out into a small enclosure which was surrounded on three sides by a high board fence.

"I don't want this Buick fixed," he said. "I just want it looked at."

Slim stopped. "Wet night to be looking at a wrecked car. What do you expect me to find?"

Yandell peered around in the rainy darkness. "There's only three or four cars here. Maybe that's the Buick over there."

"Now, look, Ed," Slim said peevishly. "I like you all right, but I want to know what's cooking before I go ahead."

"Sure," Yandell agreed. "You'd have to know that, Slim. You're going to look for some sort of evidence that the accident wasn't an accident. Somebody doctored that car so it *would* be wrecked. That's what I think."

Slim's voice was sharp. "Hold it, Ed! I'm day foreman of the Mid-America Bus Lines. I can't go prowling around in the dark pulling off illegal stunts."

"I haven't asked you to steal the car, Slim," Yandell argued. "All I want you to do is look at it. Look at it good. Look at it at the places where things could be messed up so Carr would lose control of the jalopy. See?"

"Yeah, I see," Slim mumbled. "What if somebody calls the cops and they—"

"The man in the office up there told

[Turn page]



me I could go ahead and look at the junk heaps back here." Yandell said, with grim patience. "What more do you want?"

Slim peered hard at Yandell's shadowed face.

"What's it to us, Ed, if somebody tinkered with the Buick?"

"You and me are friends, aren't we, Slim?" Yandell said softly. "You like me all right?"

"Sure."

"Did you hear about a man named Steve Jannings being found dead on my bus today? Did you hear they sort of think I stabbed Jannings and aimed to dump him somewhere? All Sam Cloud wants now is a motive, and I'm pretty sure he's going to get one."

"Is there a motive?" Slim asked. "Or something that looks like one?"

"There's something that looks enough like one to scare me half to death, and Sam's going to find it as sure as death and taxes," Yandell said earnestly. "They've got an electric chair at Eddyville, Slim, and I don't want to sit in it. You going to help me?"

Slim stared. "You mean—you mean *this* has got something to do with *that*?"

"That's what I'm hoping," Yandell said.

Slim turned abruptly away from the shop door.

"Well, if you put it like that, Ed, I'll look."

"What things would a guy mess up that would be likely to cause a wreck like Carr was in?" Yandell asked.

SLIM was moving away into the gloomy enclosure.

"I'd say the brakes or the steering apparatus."

"All right," Yandell said cheerfully. "I'll hold the light while you look at the brakes and the steering apparatus—go over 'em with a fine-tooth comb."

Slim snorted. "Whoever heard of looking at something with a comb?"

He snapped on a big flashlight. The beam swung around and flooded the twisted, crumpled wreckage of a car near one of the high board walls of the enclosure. "There it is," he said. "That used to be a Buick."

"Gimme that flashlight," Yandell said. "Look hard, Slim."

Yandell was holding the flashlight,

and Slim had his head down close to the floorboards under the bent steering column when Yandell discovered the garage attendant standing in the back doorway of the shop, watching them.

"Don't talk, Slim," Yandell muttered. "Just look."

Slim was looking. Apparently in no hurry, he probed among the working parts of the car. He took the light from Yandell and peered at the motor and the steering column. He dragged the seat cushion out of the tonneau, shoved it beneath the remnant of the left hand running-board, and crawled under the car. Lying on his back on the seat cushion, Slim sprayed the light on the bottom of the steering column, then turned the torch farther back.

"Hand me a little screw-driver," Slim ordered.

Yandell complied. For nearly five minutes afterward Slim lay there, saying nothing, with the strong electric torch spreading a glow around the demolished car. The screw-driver made faint scraping sounds against metal.

The attendant stepped out of the shop doorway and moved toward Yandell.

"You fellows'll have to get out of here. I don't want no trouble, but—"

"Why?" Yandell asked. "We're not harming anything."

"Maybe not," the attendant said gruffly. "But I don't like it. I called the boss about you, and he didn't know what I was talkin' about. Said for me to run you out right now, and no foolin' about it. What you tryin' to pull, anyway?"

"Nothing," Yandell said, noting with satisfaction that Slim was still working industriously. "I just didn't want to wait for Nick. What's the difference? No harm in looking at some old junk, is there?"

Yandell knew that he must manage to give Slim time to finish his inspection. Inwardly, he cursed the attendant for being a busybody, but he kept his voice cool and friendly.

"Maybe there ain't no harm in it," the attendant said. "But the boss said you couldn't do it. He'd fire me if I—"

"Nick's line is on the bum, anyway," Yandell said. "Maybe he'll have to close the garage till the war's over. Maybe I could get you a better job. What's your name?"

"Name's Ned Lawson, and I may need a job," the attendant said quickly. "But that don't mean you don't have to get out of here. You got to get out right now."

At that moment, Slim crawled out from under the car. He did not bother to put the seat cushion back where he had found it, but left it lying half under the wreck. He dropped the screwdriver and electric light into the bag, closed it, and picked it up.

"Nothing we can use," Slim said, and started briskly toward the rear door of the shop. "Come on, before we catch the flu."

NED LAWSON followed them into the semi-dark shop and locked the door. He was muttering to himself.

"You think Nick will have to close up?" Yandell said conversationally.

"May have to do all the work himself," Lawson said dourly. "That's what he says."

"Nick's no mechanic," Yandell said offhandedly. "He couldn't fix a bicycle."

The mechanic laughed shortly. "That's what you think. Nick's a good mechanic. Used to do all his own work. Only he ain't had to for a long time now."

Slim stopped, turned. "That Buick out there sure is busted up. What happened to it?"

"That's the one Mr. Carr drove over the bluff, you know," Ned Lawson said quickly. "Funny thing. That mornin' Mr. Carr phoned the garage and said his car wouldn't start. Me and the boss went battin' out there and got the motor to runnin'. Mr. Carr started to town right after that and—now he's dead."

Nobody spoke for a moment. Then Yandell asked softly:

"What was wrong with the motor?"

"I don't know exactly," Lawson said hesitantly. "The boss done most of the tinkerin' himself."

Outside in the windy street, Yandell said to Slim:

"Well?"

"I don't know about the steering apparatus," Slim said. "It wouldn't matter, anyway, if the driver of a car started down that river hill thinking he had good brakes when he didn't have any brakes at all."

"What do you mean?" Yandell

clutched Slim's arm.

Slim pulled his arm away. "Unhand me," he growled. "Somebody bored a tiny hole and let the brake fluid drain out. I found the hole. Looked as if just the tip of a bit had gone through, leaving a pin-hole. The fluid would drain out slow, and wouldn't be noticed for a few minutes."

"What happens when the fluid drains out?"

"The brake pedal goes flat," Slim said. "If there's only a little fluid gone, you can kick up some pressure by pumping the pedal up and down, but as soon as you release the pedal, the pressure's gone again. If all the fluid's gone—" Slim shrugged his thin shoulders expressively.

"And Nick Lammers went out and started the motor that morning," Yandell mused.

CHAPTER V

A BIT OF HOUSE-BREAKING



YANDELL brought his car to a purring halt directly in front of the Palace Bar. He set the hand-brake, left the motor running and the car double-parked and walked through the drizzle to the sidewalk. More than an hour

had passed since he had telephoned the Carr residence.

Yandell did not enter the Palace Bar. He peered through the glass front and spotted Karen's blond head in a booth. He was sure that she would remain there for some time. Even if she had thought she knew who had telephoned her butler, she could not be certain, and when no one approached her in the Palace Bar she would continue to wait.

Yandell drove eastward along Main Street, the tires singing on the wet pavement, and started down the river road. Arthur Carr had lived about eight miles out.

The road slanted, and went winding in long, graceful, downward curves toward the white bridge which spanned the river. Beyond the stream, the long, graceful curves led up and up, with a steep bluff towering on one side of the road, and a steep bluff dropping down on the other. A heavy wire cable, strung through short, white posts, followed the

outside edge of the road. It was here that Arthur Carr's automobile, headed toward town, had somersaulted the low cable.

The Carr home was a white Colonial type building set well back from the highway. A gravel drive led from the road between two rows of stately trees. Arthur Carr had possessed a lot of money, and he was one of the few men in the county who had employed a butler.

Yandell drove past the entrance and stopped a hundred feet beyond. Leaving the car standing with two wheels on the hard surface of the highway, he walked back to the stone gateposts. There was no gate.

A light showed in a downstairs window of the house. The rest of the front windows were dark. The graveled driveway was shadowed by the trees, and the rain dripped from the branches with a lonesome sound.

Yandell walked between the stone posts and went swiftly toward the house. Gravel crunched under his shoes, and there was nothing furtive about his approach. The driveway led along the side of the lawn and into a garage beyond the house, but Yandell cut across the wet, winter-deadened grass to the steps which led up to the porch between the two tall white pillars.

Yandell tried the front door; it was locked. He stared at the bell button, made a dissatisfied sound with his tongue, and stepped back to the top of the steps. He had never had any experience at house-breaking; until a few minutes ago, he'd never expected to practice the arts of a burglar. He was a law-abiding man, but at the moment he was a desperate man. Thoughts of Steve Jannings' dead body on the bus, and of the murder knife in the tool bag, made him cast aside his scruples.

To Yandell's right were French windows. He crossed to them and pushed. The panels were unlocked, and they opened without a sound.

Without hesitation, Yandell stepped into a large living room. He listened, heard nothing but the drip of the rain outside, and took a fountain-pen flashlight out of a shirt pocket. He sprayed the stream of light quickly around the room.

Yandell went to the door which gave

into the hallway. He peered out. The light he had seen was in a room on the opposite side. The hall itself was in gloom, but the solid bulb of a stairway was dimly visible. Yandell moved swiftly to the foot of the stairs, paused to glance around cautiously, then went up fast and without sound. At the top of the flight, he paused again to listen.

Yandell went softly to the nearest door, opened it and shot the thin shaft of light into a man's bedroom. Nobody was there. Yandell went on to another door, opened it, flashed his light briefly, closed the door and went on to another. He opened this door, flashed the light, and grunted with satisfaction. This was a woman's bedroom.

Oddly enough, Yandell was unafraid. The nervous uneasiness he had expected to feel was absent. He wondered if a professional burglar, bent upon theft, was able to proceed with the same calm deliberation, the same lack of fear.

Yandell went into the room and eased the door shut. He swung the tiny light beam around, letting the glow across dressing-table, bed, and night table. Then he steadied the shaft of light on the dressing-table.

There was nothing on top of the table to interest him. He pulled out a drawer, stared into it, then began rummaging among bottles and jars.

A jar of cold cream was holding down a plain white envelope. Yandell moved the cold cream, picked up the envelope, one end of which was torn off, and drew out the enclosure.

It was a sheet of paper, folded. The sheet was an odd size, and the upper edge was jagged and uneven, as if a letterhead had been torn off. The writing it contained was in pencil:

Dearest:

Just take things easy, and don't worry. Everything is going fine. I'll see you as soon as it can be arranged.

N. L.

Yandell put the sheet back into the envelope, then put the envelope into a hip pocket and buttoned the flap over it. He told himself that this brief message was not positively incriminating, but it showed a connection between Nick Lammers and Karen. Yandell realized that he had been hoping Karen was innocent. He had hoped to clear himself and his former wife at the same

time. But if she was guilty— Well, this was no time for weak sentiment inspired by old memories.

Yandell spent a minute or two trying to replace all the jars and bottles exactly where he had found them. His eyes lifted to the mirror, and he turned suddenly toward the door.

Ruby Vincent, Arthur Carr's step-daughter, stood in the bedroom doorway. She was a vague shape in the gloom until Yandell pointed his little flashlight at her. She wore a clinging, blue dressing gown, and her pale red hair gleamed like polished brass. She held a small automatic pistol in her right hand.

Yandell's heart pounded. Wildly he looked for a way of escape. There was none. The next instant, he knew that flight would not serve his purpose, anyway. He was wearing a bus driver's cap—wearing a full uniform, except for the leather windbreaker. Ruby Vincent had probably recognized him, and if he succeeded in getting away, they could ~~take~~ ~~him~~ arrested. That, on top of the suspicion of murder, would help to cook his goose.

RUBY VINCENT'S left hand slid along the wall and flipped a switch, flooding the room with rose-colored light. Yandell, slightly pale but composed, put his little flashlight into his pocket.

Ruby's lips were tight, and there was a hard light in her eyes. Obviously, she was not afraid.

"What are you doing here?" she said.

Yandell stepped away from the dressing-table, but he did not approach the girl. He stared at the automatic uneasily. He wet his lips with his tongue.

"I must have blundered into Mrs. Carr's room," he said.

The girl's eyes narrowed. "Blundered, eh? Well, I don't think so. I'm guarding the house tonight, and I've caught a prowler. What were you looking for?"

"Nothing," he answered, and took a step toward her. "I'll be going now."

Ruby's knuckles whitened on the handle of the gun, and he stopped. It looked as if this girl might shoot. He realized that he was on the wrong side of the law in this situation.

"I suppose Mrs. Carr isn't home?" he said.

"What business did you have stumbling around in the dark looking for her?" Ruby asked tartly. She stared at him, and suddenly her eyes widened a little. "Was she expecting you?"

Yandell forced a laugh. "No, nothing like that." He looked at the girl's gun with distaste. "She wouldn't be happy to find me here. How about letting me go before she comes home?"

In the brief silence, an automobile made a faint sound in the driveway below. The girl looked at Yandell and worried her lower lip with her upper teeth.

"Here she comes now," she said. "I guess we'll wait for her. I wish I could find out she *was* expecting you."

Ruby's voice had turned vindictive. Yandell remembered the look of hate which he had seen on Karen's face that morning when she had looked at Ruby through the waiting room window.

"She wasn't expecting me," he said.

Ruby worried her lip with her teeth again, and asked a question.

"You killed Jannings, didn't you?"

"I never killed anybody," Yandell said. "Quit pointing that gun at me."

"I think I'll turn you over to the police," she said grimly. She moved aside from the doorway and motioned with the automatic. "Go on down. I'll be right behind, and don't think I won't shoot if you try to get away."

Yandell walked past her. He was convinced that the redhead would shoot, as she threatened, if he tried to make a break.

Karen was entering the front door when Yandell started down the stairs. The butler was not in sight. The lower hall was lighted now, and Karen stared up at him. Just behind, Ruby still held the gun leveled. Yandell went down the stairs.

"I'm sorry about this, Karen," he said. "I sort of got mixed up, and walked into the wrong house."

He knew that neither of these young women would believe that. He did not know what Karen would believe, but he was more worried about what Ruby Vincent would think.

"Horse feathers!" Ruby said inelegantly. "He wanted to search your room, I think, Karen."

Karen seemed to recover from her amazement.

"Search my room?" She turned worried blue eyes on Yandell. "What on earth for?"

SHE didn't seem especially frightened, Yandell reflected. Maybe she had forgotten about leaving the note from Nick Lammers in her dressing-table drawer.

"Miss Vincent," Yandell said calmly, "is talking nonsense, Karen. Did you meet your friend?"

Karen's eyes widened. Yandell grinned.

"I was the friend who called you. I came by the Palace Bar and you weren't there, so I came out here. Burned up a gallon of my gasoline, and this is what I get."

"I capture a prowler," Ruby Vincent said, "while you gad around—and my poor step-father not dead ten days yet."

Karen flushed. "Don't talk to me like that!"

"It's the truth," Ruby said sharply.

"Ruby doesn't seem to like you much, Karen," Yandell drawled.

"Why should I?" Ruby's voice was unpleasant. "My step-father's money would have come to me if she'd let him alone."

"He left one of his insurance policies in your name," Karen said sharply. "You've no right to talk to me that way."

"Yes," Ruby cried. "A five-thousand-dollar insurance policy. And he had twenty-five thousand more that you'll get. And all his property. That's what you married him for, and I hate you!" She came on down the stairs, her eyes glaring at Karen. "If you'd . . . Oh!"

Yandell reached out, grasped the automatic and twisted it out of her hand. He moved past Karen to the door.

"I'll let you two fight it out," he said. "I'll leave the gun outside."

Yandell put the automatic on the edge of the porch and went down the steps. He crossed the wet lawn to the drive and strode swiftly toward the entrance. He felt that now he might be able to clear himself of the murder charge which was coming, but he was not happy. He did not love Karen, but he realized, even so, that the past was not quite dead. Presently, however, the

thought that she was a murderess, even a double murderess, hardened his heart.

The same thought was with him as he went on home and to bed. It was still with him as he dropped off to sleep. . . .

The doorbell rang. It rang long, with the persistence of a fully-wound alarm clock. Ed Yandell opened his eyes, turned on his right side, and reached with his left hand to the night table. He picked up his strap-watch, glanced at it, put it down, threw back the covers, and sat up.

Yandell picked up a book of paper matches, crossed to the gas heater, lighted it, and tossed the match book back to the table.

The doorbell, after a short pause, rang again. Yandell frowned. Bare-footed and still wearing his green pajamas, he went out of the bedroom and along the hallway to the front door. He peered out through the curtained glass and muttered a mild oath.

Outside, Sam Cloud was holding a patient forefinger against the push button.

Yandell unlocked the door and pushed it open. The rain had stopped, and the air was clear and cold. The morning sun made a pale, yellow glow in the street.

"Fine time to be waking a man up," Yandell said. "Come on in."

Cloud entered, waiting while Yandell closed the door.

"Time you was up, anyway," the detective said. "It's after eight."

"What of it?" Yandell retorted. "You won't let me work."

"I want to talk to you, though," Cloud said pleasantly.

"Okay." Yandell frowned. "Wait in the living room till I get some clothes on. Light the gas in there."

CHAPTER VI

KENTUCKY HISTORY



HURRYING to the bedroom, Yandell dressed quickly. With shirt in hand, he looked at the holster and gun hanging on the headpost of the bed, shrugged, and put on his shirt. In the bathroom, he lighted the heater, turned on the cold water, doused his face, and combed his hair.

This done, Yandell went into the

kitchen, lighted one of the jets of the gas range, put coffee and water into the percolator, and set the percolator on the stove. Then he went to the living room.

Sam Cloud was sitting close to the heater, his loose gray topcoat hanging down the sides of the straight chair. A cigarette hung between the detective's lips.

"What do you want to talk about, Sam?" Yandell asked, and sat down. He looked at the detective quizzically, trying to conceal the worry that nagged at his mind. "It must be something important."

Cloud turned his head and looked at the bus driver.

"I'll talk the most," Cloud said, "but you'll have to talk the fastest, Ed."

Yandell sighed, leaned back in his chair, and said nothing at all.

"A friend of mine out at the college," Cloud went on, "teaches history. For several years, he's been making a hobby of Kentucky history. The unusual kind of history, you know. Things that aren't in the school books."

Yandell nodded. His blue eyes looked sleepy now.

"This friend makes a special study of feuds," Cloud said. "I went out to see him last night."

Yandell nodded again. He thought he knew now what was coming.

"You got your gun on you?" Cloud asked.

"No. It's in the bedroom."

Cloud looked at the blue flames of the heater. He was leaning forward in the chair, with his forearms braced against his thighs.

"I want to tell you a story, Ed," he said slowly.

Yandell blinked sleepily, nodding his head.

"Go on, Sam."

"I had a hunch," Cloud said, "but I hardly expected it to work out as well as it did." He looked at Yandell and smiled. "So you didn't know Steve Jannings?"

Yandell shook his head. His lean face was washed clean of all expression, and he looked as if he were about to fall asleep.

Cloud looked at the heater again.

"About Eighteen-forty," he said, "a man named William Jannings moved into the Kentucky mountains from

somewhere else. He settled near a God-forsaken place called Lonesome Hollow. He was married and as time went on, there was a large family."

Cloud arose, stepped over to an ash-tray and dropped his cigarette. He did not return to the chair, but stood on wide-spaced feet, his hands deep in the pockets of his loose topcoat.

"In the same neighborhood, Ed," he said, "there was a guy named Thomas Yandell, and he also had a large family."

"Nearly everybody did," Yandell drawled.

"One day," Cloud went on, "Yandell's cow got into a corn patch belonging to Jannings. Jannings chased the cow out, and then he went over to Yandell's house and told him he didn't want the cow in his corn patch any more. I think they had a few harsh words, perhaps. Tom Yandell had a temper."

ED YANDELL was still slouched in the deep chair, his long legs thrust out. He looked at the detective sleepily.

"A few days later," Cloud resumed, "the cow got into the corn again. This time Jannings didn't drive the brute out, nor did he say anything to Yandell. He just got his old Daniel Boone rifle and shot the cow dead."

He paused, as if waiting for Yandell to speak, but when the bus driver remained silent, Cloud went on:

"To make a long story short, Yandell got his own Daniel Boone rifle and went over and shot William Jannings when Jannings stepped out of his house the next morning. Shortly after that, somebody killed Thomas Yandell from ambush, and there there was pitched battle between the two families. Several were killed."

He paused, took his left hand out of his pocket and braced it against the mantel.

"Killings occurred till well into this century," he said, "when hostilities gradually stopped, so far as shooting was concerned. But the two families don't like each other yet, and sometimes a member of one of the families is murdered. Yesterday a Jannings was bumped off, the body was found on your bus, the knife in your tool kit. Steve was one of the later members of the Jannings clan—and you, Ed, are a great-grandson of old Thomas Yandell!"

"Okay," Yandell said. "I knew you'd get wind of that feud business sooner or later, but I hoped it'd be after you nailed the murderer of Steve Jannings." He sat up straight in his chair. "Look, Sam, that feud's been dead for years. It's old stuff. The Yandells don't hardly know now what the trouble was about in the first place. Maybe your college pal's right about it. Maybe it was a cow, maybe not. I don't know."

Cloud's dark, sharp eyes studied Yandell's face.

"You said yesterday the past is dead completely, Ed. I wonder. I happen to know that you mountain people are proud, and that you have long memories for enemies. You've been out of the mountains ten years, Ed, but you're still a Yandell. Why do you carry a gun all the time?"

Yandell stood up. "Because I'm still a Yandell," he said. "I've never really expected a Jannings to come gunning for me, but I can't be sure they won't. I carry the gun just in case. I knew Steve was around, and he was always a mean cuss."

Cloud took his left hand away from the mantel and put it back into his pocket. He teetered back and forth on his toes.

"I'd never have thought you'd stab anybody, even a Jannings, but I know that the code of the mountains might make you do the unexpected," Cloud said slowly. "I'll have to hold you, Ed. Sorry."

Yandell frowned. "I've got something to tell you before you snap on the handcuffs," he said. "I wish you could find Chesley Ramsey. I think he could help me."

"You think he could, eh?" Cloud said quietly. "Well, we've found him."

Yandell's eyebrows jumped. "You have?"

Cloud nodded. "For about three months, Ramsey has been working in a liquor dispensary out in the south end. Near as I can learn, people thought he was kind of dumb but harmless. The people I've talked to say he's always had a way of acting important, but—"

"Where did you find him?"

way," he said then. "We found him lying at the head of an alley near the whiskey store. He'd been shot through the heart with a thirty-two slug, and he was deader than four o'clock."

Yandell groaned.

"He closed the dispensary at eleven," Cloud said. "It looks exactly as if you killed him to keep him from talking, Ed." He held out his right hand, palm upward. "Let's have that gun you carry. We'll want to check it against that bullet."

Yandell opened his mouth and laughed without sound.

"That's one notion that won't work," he said. "My gun didn't kill Ramsey."

"We'll see," Cloud said softly. "Give, Ed."

Yandell's face became grim. "It's in the bedroom." He thrust his hands into his trousers pockets and walked around the room scowling. "Look, Sam, I didn't kill Jannings, and I didn't kill Ramsey, but I think I know who did. I think I know who killed Arthur Carr, too."

Cloud looked at Yandell shrewdly. "Arthur Carr? Haven't you got your wires crossed a little, Ed? Carr went off the river road in his Buick."

"I've got a man who'll swear that somebody fixed it so the brake fluid would leak out," Yandell said. "Somebody the same as murdered Carr, Sam. Look. Do you want the real killer of Jannings, or do you want to throw a friend to the wolves?"

Cloud's voice was quiet. "I'll take the real killer. One of my men tailed you out to Carr's last night, Ed. Why did you go out there?"

"I thought I could find out something. I didn't know what."

"Did you find out something?"

Yandell nodded. "Where did Steve Jannings live?"

"In a room on South Sandstone," the detective answered. "Why?"

"I want you to search the place," Yandell said.

"We have."

"You didn't know what you were looking for then," Yandell said. "Steve was secretive. Maybe he wouldn't be above a little blackmail." He lifted one eyebrow and smiled crookedly at Cloud. "Or maybe he was strictly honest. Anyhow, he worked for an insurance company. I've already found out it's the

CLoud looked at Yandell steadily for a moment.

"Funny you'd ask that, in just that

same company Arthur Carr carried his insurance with. Double indemnity for accidental death."

"Talk on," Cloud said.

"The people who killed Steve," Yandell said, "had first arranged for Carr to die in an automobile accident. Steve got suspicious and began poking around. Maybe he found out just what I've found out—that somebody messed up the brakes. The people who killed Carr found out that Steve knew something. They got him into a car and stabbed him, and then dumped him out at the terminal. They had to take their chance when they could get one, and the chance came yesterday morning."

"Go on," Cloud said.

"It happened to be a dull, rainy day, and that helped," Yandell said. "Well, they took him to where the buses drive into the terminal. One of 'em stabbed him. The woman got out of the car and walked back to the street. The man drove the car to the edge of the loading shed, dumped Jannings out and backed the car to the street. There weren't many people around. Jannings was tough, and he didn't lie down and die right away. He tried to go somewhere, but his mind was in a fog, and he was dying on his feet. He acted drunk."

"It could just possibly have happened," Cloud said thoughtfully.

"It did happen!" Yandell said fiercely.

"How did he get on the bus?" Cloud asked.

"Chesley Ramsey and a porter put him on," Yandell said, "because a blond woman asked him to. Then this same person who had been in the car when Steve was stabbed, stepped up into the bus and stowed the knife in the bottom of my bag. The bag was in the driver's seat, and she could have done it without anybody noticing. She got off the bus till Ramsey left, then got back on again."

HE MOVED nervously around the room. He stopped at the mantel, picked up the face-down photograph of Karen, glanced at it, then set it upright.

"The man who helped the woman," he said, "must have shot Ramsey last night, because both of them knew he could identify the woman who claimed to be Jannings' sister. The one who told Ramsey to put the wounded man on the

bus. Steve hadn't been drinking, had he?"

Cloud was staring thoughtfully at the rug.

"No." He glanced up at Yandell quickly. "Who do you think did it, Ed?"

Yandell's face was gray. "Nick Lammer and Karen," he said hoarsely.

Cloud nodded. "I supposed you meant Karen, but how do you figure Nick into it? Do they mean something to each other?"

Yandell frowned. "I don't know, but I've been sort of guessing they do. I figure Nick into it because . . . Well, I got the idea at first because he's got the wrecked car."

"Nuts, man!" Cloud growled. "Nick runs a garage. He's always done Carr's work. Naturally he'd have been called to rake up the pieces."

"I know it," Yandell said. "That wouldn't mean a thing, but it did give me my first hunch. Well, Nick's mechanic says Carr's motor wouldn't start the morning he was killed. Nick and the mechanic went out there. Nick tinkered with the motor and got it started. Then Carr went over the bluff, and I've got a man who'll swear the brakes were put on the blink—slowly."

Cloud stared at him and said nothing. Yandell, as if driven by some inner desperation, went on:

"Nick's business is on the bum. He may have to close the garage till after the war. Maybe he's in hard circumstances. Maybe he needs money. Maybe he needs a woman with money. Double indemnity insurance helps a lot."

Cloud shifted his feet uneasily. "It sounds like it might be the way you say, Ed. All the pieces fit. But there's a case against you, too. Feuds last a long time after the gunsmoke clears away. You didn't like Steve Jannings—"

"No," Yandell said, "but I didn't kill him. If he'd tried to kill me, I'd have fought back, but that's all."

"Anyway," Cloud said, "I'll call one of my men to stay here with you a while. What shall I look for in Steve's room?"

"Documents," Yandell said. "Notes he'd made about Arthur Carr's accident. Probably be in an envelope, and it'll be hidden away. Maybe stuck on the bottom of a drawer, or somewhere like that."

"I know how to search a room, Ed," Cloud said softly. "If it's there, I'll find it. Where's your phone?"

"Over there in the corner," Yandell said. "But before you call anybody, here's what convinced me for sure that Karen and Nick killed Jannings. It isn't proof, but it shows a connection between them." He drew the envelope out of his pocket and tossed it toward Cloud. "Hang on to that, Sam."

Cloud stooped, picked up the envelope from the rug, turned it over, glanced at the address, frowned, and took out the folded sheet. He read the penciled message, put the sheet back into the envelope, and thrust it into a pocket of his topcoat. He looked at Yandell quizzically.

"Where'd you get this, Ed?" he asked.

"In the dressing-table in Karen's bedroom."

Cloud frowned. "Breaking and entering," he said softly.

"Entering without breaking," Yandell said. "That doesn't worry me. I want to get clear of this murder mess."

Cloud smiled, his sharp eyes watching Yandell.

"Maybe you'd make a good detective, Ed, but I don't believe it yet."

"I don't claim to be a detective," Yandell retorted. "But I think I have figured this out right."

A faint, sizzling, sputtering sound came from the kitchen, and the strong odor of coffee filled the house. Yandell muttered indistinctly and started forward.

Cloud chuckled. "Your coffee ought to be strong enough now — my dear Sherlock Holmes."

CHAPTER VII

A MATTER OF INITIALS



OLIVER KANE, plainclothesman, was thick-bodied, red-faced, bull-necked. He rolled the stub of a black cigar between his lips and said argumentatively to Yandell: "If you didn't beef the guy, Ed, you got nothin' to worry about."

"I'm under arrest right now," Yandell said, "even if I am still in my own house. The hot seat—"

"They won't burn you if you ain't

guilty," Kane said. "What you got to worry about?"

"Steve Jannings has some ~~brothers~~ and uncles and cousins," Yandell said. "Their way of looking at things is something you wouldn't understand worth a cent, Ollie."

Kane frowned. "How do they look at things?"

"Sam took my gun," Yandell said. "The news gets out that I'm accused of killing Steve Jannings. His folks up in the mountains get the word. I don't say they'll be sure to do something about it, nowadays. All I say is they might not wait for any proof, or a trial. One of 'em might come down and try to get me." He leaned back in his chair and grinned crookedly at Kane. "Maybe they won't. Then again maybe they will. See, friend?"

Oliver Kane laid the cigar butt on an ash-tray.

"Maybe I see. You ever been shot at by a Jannings?"

Yandell shook his head. "There hasn't been much shooting in my day. ~~Some~~ times an election squabble or some ~~one~~ thing. I left the mountains at eighteen. Thirteen years ago. I don't really expect any trouble with the Jannings boys. It's just something I can't ever be dead sure of."

"Uh-huh." The plainclothesman pulled a watch from a vest pocket and glanced at it. "Sam's been gone three hours. I'm gettin' hungry, sort of."

"We can dig up some grub," Yandell said.

The telephone bell rang, and Kane got up quickly.

"Maybe that's Sam now. Anyway, he told me not to let you use the phone till he got back, so—"

Kane went over and took the telephone off the cradle.

"Hello . . . No, it ain't . . . What? . . . Wait a minute." He said to Yandell: "It's your girl friend. Wants to know if you're coming down to her house tonight."

"Tell her I will if I can," Yandell said.

Kane repeated the message and hung up.

The door opened suddenly, and Yandell jerked his head around. Then he relaxed. It was Sam Cloud.

Cloud shut the door behind him. He

stood with his hands in his topcoat pockets and looked at Yandell quizzically.

"Congratulations, Sherlock," he said. "Steve's room had been searched by somebody after the police went through it the first time, but I guess they didn't find what they were looking for. But I did."

"What did you find?" Yandell asked quickly.

"A brown envelope full of data on the Carr business," Cloud said. "It was stuck to the bottom of a drawer with adhesive tape, just as you thought it might be." Cloud smiled. "Jannings had found out about the brakes. Had a lot of dope. You didn't kill Jannings, Ed, nor Chesley Ramsey, either. And here's

you and Ollie time to eat."

Yandell stared. "Why did you do that?" He frowned. "Maybe they won't come."

"They'll be there," Cloud said confidently. "I didn't tell 'em I aimed to arrest anybody. I just said that the police and the insurance company wanted to clear up a few details before the insurance money was paid." He grinned at Yandell. "I'm going to call Arlene Obie and ask her to be there, too."

"Why?" Yandell said.

Cloud chuckled. "I want to let her see what a great detective she's about to marry." His face assumed a quizzical expression. "You've really worked this case out, Ed, but if you were working

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COMING NEXT ISSUE



your gun." He put Yandell's gun on the table and chuckled. "I still say you're one grand detective."

"Well," Yandell growled, "things are working out the way I figured it, aren't they?"

CLOUD nodded, a little reluctantly.

"Well, yes," he said, "in most ways."

"Nuts to you!" Yandell clasped the fingers of his two hands together and stared down at them. "Have you arrested—Karen and Nick yet?"

Cloud sat down. "Not yet. There are still a few points to be cleared up, Ed. I phoned everybody to meet us at Lammers' garage at two o'clock. That'll give

under me, I'd give you a swift kick in the pants, just the same. There's at least one way in which you and Sherlock Holmes aren't alike. . . ."

At two o'clock, the little office of the Lammers Motor Company was crowded with people. Nick Lammers, Karen Carr, Ruby Vincent, Arlene Obie, Sam Cloud, Oliver Kane, Ed Yandell, and the mechanic, Ned Lawson were there.

Nick Lammers fixed Yandell with a cold stare.

"What's the idea of bringing that guy around here to look over that Buick last night?" he growled.

Yandell leaned against a wall in a lazy attitude.

"It didn't do the car any harm. Lam-

mers," he drawled.

"I ought to—"

But Nick Lammers did not say what he ought to do to Yandell, because Arlene Obie, standing beside Yandell, made a face at the garage man, which seemed to startle him.

"Let's not have any harsh words," Cloud said mildly. "We're here to clear up the mystery of Stephen Jannings' murder. Also the murder of a man named Chesley Ramsey. Also what now seems to have been the murder of Arthur Carr."

Karen Carr, sitting in a chair beside the door, threw a hand over her mouth. Her blue eyes, white-ringed, stared at Cloud, and the color drained out of her face.

Cloud looked at Yandell.

"Ed, you put a lot of faith in Nick Lammer's initials, didn't you? But this guy"—indicating the mechanic—"has the same initials. His name's Ned Lawson."

Ned Lawson was standing back in a corner beside the desk. He stared at Cloud.

"What's that mean?" he demanded.

Cloud removed a hand from a topcoat pocket and held up a narrow leather sheath, fitted up with a shoulder harness.

"This sheath, Lawson, was found in your room. It fits the murder knife. You, and not Lammers, are the murderer. You shot Chesley Ramsey, too, didn't you? You shot him so he couldn't identify your girl friend."

Lawson lunged forward. "That's a lie!" he shouted.

Oliver Kane's fist came up and caught the mechanic on the point of his chin. The blow hurled him back into the corner.

"The data we found in Steve Jannings' room," Cloud went on calmly, "says you fixed Carr's brakes so he'd have a wreck. Those notes will convict you, Lawson."

LAWSON showed his teeth. He was trembling, and his eyes shifted like those of a cornered animal.

"The motive was insurance," Cloud said. "If you want to come clean now—"

Lawson lunged forward again, but Oliver Kane's big hands stopped him.

"She made me do it!" Lawson said in

a shrill, frightened voice. "She said we'd get the insurance and I could start my own garage. She—" He stopped speaking abruptly as Kane snapped handcuffs on his wrists.

"He'll tell the rest of it," Cloud said. He looked across at Yandell. "I can't find that there's ever been anything between Nick and Karen. But Lawson has been—"

Ruby Vincent, staring at Yandell, said through stiff lips:

"I ought to have shot you!"

"One more murder wouldn't have made much difference to you, Miss Vincent," said Cloud. "The five thousand dollars insurance which Carr carried in your name was Lawson's motive, but you had still another reason for wanting Carr killed. You'd counted on being his heir, and when he married again, you hated him. So you talked your boy friend into doing something to Carr's auto. You pulled a wire loose so the motor wouldn't start that morning, didn't you?" He pointed a finger at the girl sternly. "When Steve Jannings uncovered your little plot so neatly, you drove the car while Lawson stabbed him in the back. It was you who told Chesley Ramsey to put Jannings on the bus. You planted the knife in Yandell's bag while everybody in the bus was watching Ramsey and the porter put Jannings into the back seat."

Ruby Vincent's red lip curled scornfully. Her face was pale, but otherwise she seemed composed.

"You're not as smart as you think you are," she sneered. "I put the knife in the bag after he left it in the express room, while everybody was outside gawking at the dead man."

Karen Carr stood up. "You little devil!"

"Devil, yourself!" Ruby Vincent snapped.

"Phone for help and take these two away, Ollie," Cloud said.

Kane phoned for help and took Lawson and Ruby Vincent away.

Nick Lammers looked at Yandell. "I guess it was all right, what you did. At first, it made me sore because you didn't ask me."

Yandell nodded. He was looking at Karen, who was sitting in the chair in the corner. She was staring straight ahead, and two tears welled into her

eyes and rolled down her cheeks. She rose and stumbled blindly out of the office.

Arlene Obie put her hands on Yandell's chest. She slid her fingers under his arms and quickly pulled her right hand away.

"Oh!" she cried. "You've got that hateful old—"

Yandell grinned down at her. "Gun," he finished for her. "Yeah, I've got it, Arlene."

"Why don't you leave it at home?" she asked. "You've got no more use for a gun than—"

Sam Cloud, standing beside the door, drawled:

"You can go back on the job, Ed. It's a sure thing you weren't cut out for a detective."

Yandell frowned at him over Arlene's shoulder.

"All right, Samuel!" he growled, good-naturedly. "I'll admit I ought to have noticed that Nick Lammers and Ned Lawson had the same initials, but I figured out the murder scheme, anyway. I guess Sherlock Holmes wouldn't have much room to crow over him."

"Oh, no?" Cloud said amusedly. "Look at this." He drew from a pocket the envelope which Yandell had taken from the Carr home and handed it to Yandell. "Sherlock Holmes would have read the address on the envelope to see who the message was intended for. You didn't!"

Yandell took the envelope, looked at it, and grinned sheepishly. It was addressed to Miss Ruby Vincent.

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CHAPTER I

TWO WRONG JOBS



SITTING there with my feet up on the desk and hoping the telephone would ring, I took a good long look at the cuffs of my pants. Those frayed cuffs were like a mirror partly reflecting me—tall, blond, thirty-nine years old, and broke. Mostly the latter. Me, the great Viking Swenson, the eat-seldom chief and entire male working personnel of the Viking Detective Agency, Cases Strictly Confidential.

I looked over at the other desk and said:

"Dixie, why don't you join the Waacs or the Waves? They eat regular and meet many nice boys."

"Because I love you madly, sir, she said," Dixie stated. She was gazing into a compact-kit mirror, contemplating the splendors of her creamy Southern complexion. "Somebody has to stick around here and protect you. You're too old for the Army, but, in my opinion, too young to die of your own folly as you most certainly would were it not for my great capability. Period."

I gloomily picked up the half cigarette which I'd punched out ten minutes ago. I blew through it a couple of times to get the stale smoke out; a relighted cigarette tastes terrible unless you do that. It's a valuable trick.

"All Chicago except this specific part of it," I said, "is making money and looking for caviar in a black market. Why don't I just—"

At that moment the phone rang. I almost fractured three ribs lurching for it in vain. Because Dixie calmly wagged an index finger at me and said:

"Tut! Maybe it's only a bill collector. Anyway, remember the dignity." She picked up the extension on her desk.

Well, she was right again. You have to give them the dignified hard-to-hire stuff, at least at the beginning of a case. After you've nailed the opening retainer and have set a price, you can relax and be your own coarse natural self.

"Why, yes, madam," Dixie was saying, "I believe that our chief, Mr. Swenson himself, could make himself available for a woman of *your* social standing. Of course, our agency is rather solidly occupied and our fees are not of the cut-rate variety. If you'll inform me exactly what and when, Mrs. Lambert—"

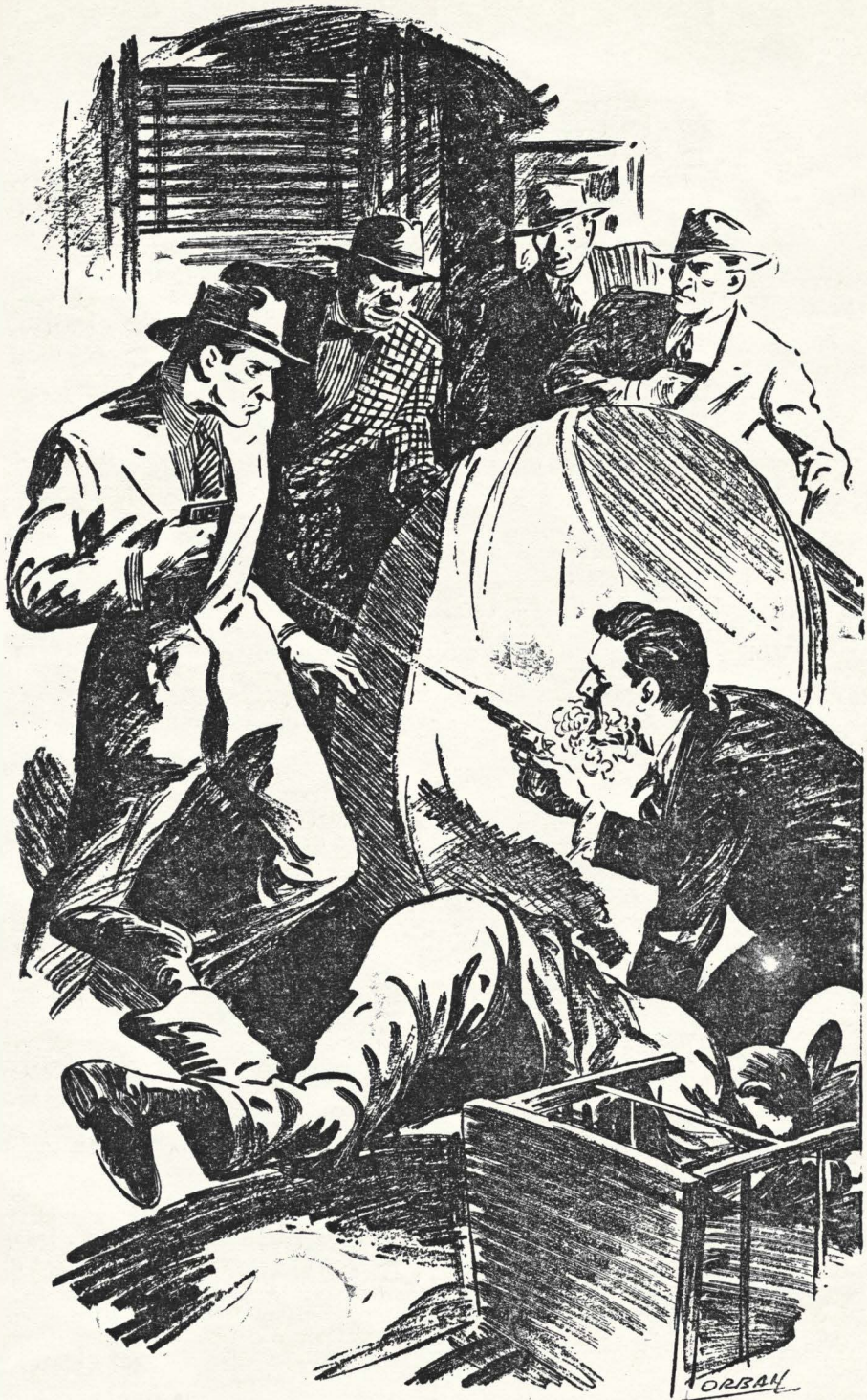
It sounded like a fat fee from the way Dixie was approaching it. I was purring like a tomcat and thinking how nice food would taste again.

THEN my office door opened and a guy came in. My door is marked Private and there's a little sitting room out there with a buzzer button to push for Mr. Swenson's secretary. But this guy, I could see right off, was one to ignore all formality.

His entrance startled me with its quietness—the quietness of a hungry leopard moving in on a fat zebra, except that I was much leaner than a fat zebra.

He was sleek, too, but it was mostly the eyes that nailed you. Feral, that's the word. Untamed savagery but with a

AN EXCITING COMPLETE NOVELET



I squeezed off three quick shots down Spatori's arm

jungle shrewdness away back in the tawny depths.

"You're a private dick named John Swenson, are you?" he began.

I nodded. Maybe I gulped a time or two. It's possible.

"My name's Spatori," he said.

"Well, well." I was going to make light-hearted mention of the fact that buzzer buttons are for pushing, but something in the way his eyes looked made me decide to take it easy.

"I got a job for you," he told me in a voice that didn't have much expression. "Here's fifty bucks as a retainer." He tossed a piece of green onto my desk.

I hadn't seen a half-C note for so long that it must have been my greedy, hungry soul that spoke for me. Because I heard my fine, fresh, lyric-tenor voice saying:

"Satisfactory so far. Tell me more."

At the same time I sounded off thus, I could hear Dixie speaking somewhat dimly into her phone: "Mr. Swenson will be there promptly at seven-thirty this evening, Mrs. Lambert, and the hundred-dollar fee will be satisfactory. Thank you."

This interesting trifle of Southern dialogue didn't even give me the shudders, either; not at the moment. I was slightly dizzy from the proximity of that half-C note. That's another bad thing about poverty.

"You got a permit to carry a rod?" Spatori was asking.

"Sure." I nodded. "What kind of a job is it?"

"Snoop a little, gumshoe a little, guard a little," he said. "You'll get another fifty when the job's done, no doubt within the next twenty-four hours. Meet me at this place at eight o'clock tonight and don't be late."

Spatori handed me a slip of paper. He turned around and walked out.

Dixie had just planted her hand-set phone back on its cradle. She was staring at me, while the door closed behind Spatori.

"So now," said Dixie, "you're twins. You can be two places at the same time, because that's the way this firm does business."

"Huh?" I glanced up from the slip of paper, which read, "Northwest corner of Clark Street at Madison—eight o'clock."

Dixie's next statement was icily prim. "I guess you don't know what you've done."

I BLINKED, scowled in thought, and then looked startled.

"Well," she asked, "which job do you cancel? The Mrs. Lambert who desires your services is *the* Mrs. Gotrocks Lambert, wife of the meat packer. She's giving you a hundred seeds just to stroll around through a party she's giving tonight. You'll see to it that nobody lifts any of the rocks she'll be wearing on her fingers, in her ears or around her neck."

I concentrated on the problem. Then: "Are you to come along?"

"Naturally. You're to pose as a company salesman and I'm to be your fiancée."

"Then it's easy!" I said, relaxing. "We're to be at Madam Lambert's at seven-thirty. So we get there. But about seven-forty I get chills and fever, or something and have to go home. But you remain and watch for light-fingered guests or party crashers. After all, you've worked on that sort of job before, even if you are officially only my secretary. After I'm away from Lambert's I suddenly get well and go to keep my appointment with Spatori at eight o'clock on the nose."

"John Viking Swenson, where did you whip up these ethics?" Dixie gave me the stern Southern-schoolmarm eye along with the tone, which usually made me nervous. But not this time.

"There's nothing on my conscience," I told her, with considerable honesty. "I wasn't listening closely to what you were saying on the phone, and you weren't listening to the dialogue between Spatori and me very closely, either. Besides, I don't think it'd be healthy for me to miss that appointment with Spatori after he's paid me fifty retainer. As for Madam Lambert of the meat-and-jewelry Lamberts, nobody's going to try to snag her rocks—especially not if you're around."

She just continued to look prim.

"Anyway," I added, "this Spatori intrigues me. Did you notice that set of threads he was wearing? Plenty expensive and plenty new—and there were *cuffs* on the bottom of the pants. A guy who'll go to the trouble of looking up a

cufflegging tailor when cuffs're strictly against wartime rules—well, he's a wrong guy to begin with. Even if his eyes hadn't told me so, the cuffs would have. I don't like wrong guys in wartime, because likely they're up to the hips in something farther out of line than pants cuffs."

"Very interesting as an alibi for your conscience, sir," Dixie stated stiffly. "Will there be anything else, sir?"

CHAPTER II

GUNS SHOULD DO DAMAGE



THE cab containing Dixie and me pulled up in the dooryard of the Benjamin Lambert estate at seven thirty-four. It was one of those mid-West-empire show places. The house was three stories high and appeared to cover at least two acres.

I paid off the cab driver and took a good long look at the place.

"It wouldn't astound me to learn that the guests'll have plenty of choice cuts of meat to gnaw on, rationing to the contrary notwithstanding," I commented. "Madam Lambert, I hear tell, is one of those rich who can't be annoyed by war regulations; it's everybody's war but hers."

"Indeed?" said Dixie coolly. She was still stiff-necked.

We went in through the big doors and I gave our names to the footman, or whatever he was. It was plain enough why Mrs. Benjamin Lambert wanted a shamus or two to circulate: there would be more than a hundred guests, no doubt, including some whom Madam Lambert would know faintly if at all.

I was about to lead Dixie through a couple furlongs of hallway in search of our hostess-employer when I saw a big, rugged, red-haired gent striding toward me. It was no trouble to recognize Benjamin Lambert, meat packer. From the stories I'd heard, he was a right guy who shot square enough in business, and who was allergic to parties at every opportunity.

He stopped, grabbed my arm and looked at me. "Are you that detective my wife hired? Swanson or something?"

"Swenson," I told him. "Glad to know you, Mr.—"

He cut in: "And this young woman? She your assistant?"

"Yes," I said. "Dixie Donovan, the greatest female shamus in Chi."

"Fine," said Lambert in a sort of pleased surprise. "Then she can handle this party herself. I've got something more urgent on the hook for you. Come on."

I blinked. A slight sickness hit me in the pit of the stomach. "Eh? How's that?"

"I've got a real job for you and no time to lose," he said. Then, seeing my—to put it mildly—awkward hesitation, he pulled out a roll of long green, peeled off a C note and jammed it into the left pocket of my tuxedo.

I could see Dixie laughing away down in her cute little stomach.

"Mr. Swenson was examined by his doctor this afternoon, Mr. Lambert," she said. "He's in perfect health and he likes excitement. I'll be happy to handle the party alone."

Lambert was propelling me toward the front door. "Got a gun?" he asked.

That was twice today I'd been asked that. "Yes," I said.

"Fine."

By that time we were outside and a sleek limousine—gas rationing to the contrary notwithstanding—was pulling up in front of the steps. Lambert shoved me toward the rear door.

It was not a nice situation. Dixie could enjoy it, because no woman ever has much conscience. But they expect men to have consciences because men *do* have 'em. I had. The best I could do was make a half-hearted attempt to pull away from my host-employer and mutter something about just remembering that I had another appointment for right away.

Lambert's best was much better. He roared: "Nonsense!" and shoved me into the limousine. He lurched in beside me, sat down and banged the door shut.

"Hightail it!" he ordered the chauffeur.

That chauffeur was a drivin' man, and he set that sedan rolling all right.

MEANWHILE, Lambert was talking to me in that lion voice.

"I reckon you know I was born and raised in Wyomin'?"

"I've heard that, yes," I admitted.

My pipes were weak and I was paler than even my Nordic background, including the Scandinavian, justified. I was thinking about how vexed one Spatori was going to be when I failed to show on the corner of Clark and Madison at eight o'clock, especially after he'd put a fifty retainer on the line. The other dim fragment of my psyche was thinking how solidly this Benjamin Lambert, a very prominent gent in the moneyed Chi set, would write my name in red ink on a blacklist if I suddenly managed to duck out of this limousine and do a fade-away.

"Out in Wyomin' we learn to handle trouble on our own hook, with maybe a little private help if it looks like a tough job," Lambert went on.

"This looks like a tough one, eh?" I asked.

"Wouldn't be surprised." Lambert reached inside his coat, got an old .45 Colt double-action six-shooter. His red brows beetled and he stared at the gun butt, where there was one filed notch. "I keep old Betsy oiled and polished. Mighty handy weapon. And if there's anything I'd enjoy shootin', it'd be a meat hijacker!"

"Hijackers? Black-market stuff, eh?"

He nodded. "My watchman phoned me a few minutes ago. Told me a car full of tough-lookin' galoots have driven past my storage plant slowlike three different times today. Said it looked like they were casin' the place."

"You had any previous trouble?" I asked.

"Not since meat rationin' went into effect last spring. But some other packers have been clipped. Sometimes the hijackers steal the packers' loaded trucks. Sometimes they hold up the packers' trucks out on the highway and shift the meat to the hijackers' own trucks. Either way, the regular city and county cops haven't done much good at catchin' 'em. I reckon the dirty hijackers have a plumb profitable racket these times.

"There're plenty retail butcher shops which'll take meat on the quiet and sell it to hoggish women like my wife, also on the quiet and without ration-book point coupons." He stared at the gun, muttered: "If it wasn't I've got the habit of bein' married to my old woman, and if she hadn't helped me get started

in business twenty-five years ago, I'd boot her out. She's done her share of chiselin' on food. I was in the Argonne Forest durin' that other war. The least we civilians can do is brand honest on the home-front stuff."

I nodded full agreement.

PRESENTLY that middle-aged chauffeur turned off and headed down South Clark Street. I glanced out the window in a manner not exactly wistful. I didn't need to be told that I wasn't going to keep that eight o'clock appointment with Spatori to the north. I glanced down at that little trick-box ring I always wear on the second finger of my left hand; I almost felt like swallowing the contents of the little box.

Don't get me wrong. If I were spineless, I wouldn't be a private detective. There are plenty of softer and safer ways to pay the rent. But one thing I do like is a fairly level chance in a fracas. And right now I was thinking that the Spatori guy's plans, whatever they were, might be upset by my failure to keep the tryst at eight o'clock. And he might get so vexed that he'd catch me by surprise and take me for a stroll in the woods some night, maybe to slip a shiv between my ribs.

"Where is your storage plant?" I asked Lambert.

"A ways beyond the stockyards," he replied. "You're not afraid to use your gun if it comes to a showdown?"

"Best way to find out is to try me," I grunted.

The early-autumn twilight was settling into darkness as we approached the stockyards. Nobody with only part of a nose could possibly miss identifying this area even on a very dark night and several miles away.

"You've got some loaded meat trucks moving out tonight?" I inquired.

"Yes. Three. Loaded with beef. They're scheduled to head east about eight-thirty. Make better time at night on the highways."

I glanced at my wrist-watch. Owing to the stoplights and danger of traffic cops in the city proper, the chauffeur had been easing down the pace. It was now eight-twenty. I took my .32 automatic out of its shoulder holster, looked it over and put it back.

"What could you damage with that

pea-shooter?" Lambert asked.

"It bites hard enough," I said.

That was what I thought. I was wrong. And I found it out soon enough to suit anybody.

CHAPTER III

THREE-WAY HOT SPOT



OUT beyond Garfield Boulevard the chauffeur turned left down a side street toward Lambert's storage plant—and into heavy trouble.

I've been a Chi shamus quite a while, and when you're one of us you get to learn the difference between the sound of an automobile's exhaust and the sound of shooting guns.

Well, I heard both kinds of sound as we surged down that street in the limousine. And I saw plenty, too—in front of Lambert's storage plant.

There were three big refrigerator van-type trucks moving away from the storage plant toward the other end of the side street. Shielding himself behind the open rear door of the last truck was a guy who was banging away with his roscoe toward the flat roof of the two-story plant. There was a two-foot wall upthrust above the top of the roof and the man up there, whom I rightly guessed to be a watchman, was shooting down from the protection of that little false-front wall upthrust.

But the watchman got too eager. He raised up for a better aim and he got himself perforated right through the head. His dying reflexes made him lurch up and sprawl forward, head, neck and shoulders hanging out over the little two-foot parapet, and the red wine of his life went dripping down, spattering on the concrete runway below. It wasn't a pretty sight in the half-glow of the sheltered lights in the wall above the plant's truck exit. And it stirred up the spirit of my Viking ancestors.

I grabbed for my roscoe with the right hand while I rolled back the window in the limousine's left door—I was sitting on the left side—and took a quick gander ahead, shifting the .32 roscoe into my left fist. I'd learned to shoot passably with either hand.

The first two meat trucks had already turned right into the next cross street

and the third truck—the one with the gunman in the back door—was about to make the turn. I leaned out the limousine window, snapped off the safety catch of my automatic and squeezed off two quick shots.

They bored into the back of the truck, but they missed the watchman's killer. Because at the moment I started to shoot, one of the gunman's bullets hit the limousine's bullet-proof windshield right in front of the chauffeur's face. The glass didn't break, but the chauffeur jammed on the brakes in such quick reflex that the limousine came to a jolting stop and threw off my two shots a little.

The same thing happened to Lambert. He was leaning out his window and pulling the trigger on that old double-action .45. It roared like a cannon, but the shot whined harmlessly off the cab of that third truck. Whoever was driving that truck knew how to make the exhaust pop to cover up the shooting, because the exhaust still was sounding off. So was Lambert.

"Iggy, you loco shepherd," he yelled. "Hightail after those coyotes! What the devil you mean stoppin'?"

The chauffeur gulped a couple of times and rolled his eyes, but he gamely started the limousine forward again. By that time Lambert and I had regained our balance, but the third truck was disappearing around the corner onto the cross street.

Lambert fired another .45 slug at the tail of the truck and hit it, but he didn't hit the gunman.

"Stop a minute in front of the plant's truck exit!" Lambert roared to Iggy.

IGGY did. Lambert jumped out of the car, pulling a push-button jack-knife out of his pocket. The big sliding doors, which let the trucks in and out of the plant building, were open. Lambert galloped inside for some reason not entirely clear to me at the moment.

While we waited, I stared up at the guy hanging down over the false-front little roof wall two stories above. He was dead, sure enough. Right through the forehead. I confirmed it with Iggy.

"He was a watchman here at the meat plant, eh?"

Iggy nodded nervously. "Wife and two kids, Mister. I don't like this business. I hired out to be a chauffeur, not a

jeep driver in a private war. Mr. Lambert's a headstrong man. He'll chase those killers."

The chauffeur's diagnosis proved absolutely correct. After a total absence of about ten seconds, my red-haired host galloped back out of the plant, snapping his jack-knife shut, and flung himself into his sector of our limousine jeep. Again he employed one of his favorite Wyoming words.

"Hightail it, Iggy! Keep those trucks in sight and I'll give you an extra fifty bucks!"

Iggy put the car in high, muttering something that sounded like: "What kind of funeral can I get for only fifty bucks?" But he didn't try to weasel out on us. He rounded that corner on two wheels.

"What was the jack-knife for?" I asked Lambert.

He looked at me and snorted. "Some detective you are! I went in there to cut a couple of my seven men loose. The couple can cut the remainin' five loose. I didn't have time for it."

"Seven men?"

"Sure. Driver and a helper from each of my three trucks, and one watchman. Those beef thieves tied 'em all up and stole three trucks loaded to the roofs with beef. Is that plain enough, or do you need some more clues?"

I took a deep breath as I watched Lambert slip a couple of replacement cartridges into his old Colt.

The three trucks were two blocks ahead of us and turning down a side street, hoping to lose our fancy trail car. Lambert threw another shot at the third truck as it was rounding the corner. His red-haired impulsiveness had cooled down a little, for this time he was rational enough to shoot at the left rear tire of the truck. But it was a long shot in these circumstances, and it evidently missed.

"The men you cut loose back at the plant'll call the regular cops, eh?" I asked Lambert.

"Yeah, but that won't help us," he snorted. "These thievin' coyotes pulled every plant phone out by the roots. My men'll have to look around for a phone. By the time they make contact with the cops and explain things, we'll be clear out of town. And there's plenty side roads out in the sticks."

Cheerful item of information. I like a good honest fight, even with guns, if the conditions are right. But the conditions in this case didn't seem especially conducive to longevity. We weren't up against just plain beef-stealing hijackers, but hijackers who now had a murder rap against them.

MAYBE the hijackers hadn't intended to do any killing. After all, a painfully high percentage of wrong guys are also bright guys, and one rap a bright wrong guy doesn't like to have chalked against him is murder. It's quite a serious offense, even in Chi where it's nearer to being a commonplace than it is elsewhere.

But one of the hoods had knocked off the watchman either by mistake or frenzied bad judgment. And now they *all* could be tried for that killing if they were caught. Which meant they wouldn't hesitate now to kill anybody else who tried to stymie them; the hot squat isn't any hotter for two or three murders than it is for one.

"How many hijackers are there?" I asked Lambert.

"Four, accordin' to what my men told me. One to drive each of the three trucks, plus that gunman in the rear of the third truck. He's supposed to pick off anybody tailin' 'em."

"Yes," I said. "You're no cluck, Lambert. The bullet-proof glass in this society jeep tells me that. But I know about bullet-proof glass. After it's been banged in the same spot several times it's not bullet-proof any more. The lead starts coming on through at you. So if you're depending on that windshield glass to keep us alive—well, what I always say is don't burn all your bridges in one basket."

"What I always say is you got to take chances to get ahead in this world," Lambert snapped right back.

"I've heard tell of guys who lost their heads by taking the wrong kind of chances. This appears to be—"

He turned and roared at me. "If you're gettin' nervous I can let you out at the next corner!"

That riled me. "I'll bet you five hundred I nail more of those hoods than you do!"

"It's a bet—and I'm not kiddin'!"

"Me either!" I yelled.

So now I was in a three-way spot proper: killers ahead of me, a non-backed bet on my cuff, and a guy named Spatori to look me up some time in the future if I happened to survive *this* jig.

CHAPTER IV

SLUMBER BLACK



DIXIE had told Lambert, with fine feline irony, that I liked excitement. Regardless of how much I liked it, Lambert was getting more blood-thirsty and Wyomingish with each passing block—and the gunman ahead in the rear of the last truck had plenty of ammunition to appease his own craving for target practise.

It was perambulating hide-and-seek with the probability of a morgue windup for the losing team. The gunman stuck his head cautiously out that rear door and cut loose whenever we offered a fair target. One of his shots put more cracks in the limousine's windshield, but a few inches away from where his earlier shot had hit the glass. But this second one caused Iggy to build up more of his cautious background; he dropped back gradually until about two and a half blocks separated us, in spite of Lambert's orders to move in closer.

At that distance, the hood gunman didn't have any more chance to be accurate than we had. It's difficult to hit even a big target when both target and marksman are moving and in no straight line. Besides, it was dark out there in Chi's outskirts. Sure, there were a few street-lights, but the trucks and we were never in a good light at the same time; most of the time it was pretty dim and blurry.

You might wonder how it was that all the shooting didn't attract the attention of cops on patrol, or citizens who might call the cops. Well, Chicago is a peculiar place. Most of the citizens are content to assume that any banging sound they hear is being made by a backfiring motor; it's safer to assume that. As for the cops, there aren't many floating around the outskirts and, anyway, we *did* meet up with some.

It was just a few blocks before we got out into the jack-rabbit country.

Lambert leaned out and took one of

his periodic shots at the dim rear wheels of the third truck. He could afford to do that because, like a true Wyoming-bred man, he'd brought along a coat-pocket-ful of extra .45 shells. Me, I had only five shots left in the clip of my automatic and I wasn't wasting any at that range.

The gunman returned the fire, his slug whining off the fender of our car. And just at that moment, from a side street only a quarter block or so back of the third truck, a fresh gun spoke—from a police-patrol car.

That cop's shot came close to the gunman, evidently—for the gunman shifted targets in a hurry. He cut loose at the police car's tires just as the cops started around the corner.

Faintly, I could hear the peculiar whistling sound a tire makes when suddenly deflated. The right front side of the police car sagged down a few inches and both cops started banging at the truck. They hit it, too, but they didn't hit the gunman. He'd closed the truck's rear door hastily, and those refrigerator-truck doors are thick. The trucks ducked around a corner clear out of sight.

In very brief seconds we were passing that cop car and they were plenty sore. They yelled:

"Halt! Halt or we'll let you have it!"

Of course, the cops couldn't know what the score was, either. If anything, they probably figured we were would-be hijackers and that the honest truckers were making a clean, pure, defensive getaway!

In any case, we sure weren't in any position to stop—not traveling at a sixty-mile-an-hour clip, as we were. Anyway, Lambert didn't want to stop.

"Never mind haltin'!" he roared at Iggy. "I don't want those coyotes to lose us! Anyway, all the glass in this car is bullet-proof."

"The tires aren't," I told him. "If they hit a tire at this speed, it will be curtains."

BY THAT time the cops were shooting at us. But we were well past them and it was a tree-shaded street, without much light filtering in from the next street-lamp. I heard the rear-window glass cracking right behind my head and I got down, spiritually at least, on my

soupbones and offered thanks to the gent who had invented bullet-proof glass.

Other slugs were bouncing off the rear axle and through the fenders. I tried to estimate how many times our car would turn over if those cops connected with a tire. Then we were around the corner and still alive.

"Lambert smiled at me like a triumphant horse. "See!" he said. "What'd I tell you!"

I sank back in the seat and took a couple of gallons of oxygen into my lungs.

Those two cops couldn't follow us, of course, not with a tire gone. I don't know for sure whether it was a radio car. No doubt it was; they nearly all are. But if it was, the fact didn't mean anything so far as we were concerned.

We met no more cops of any kind. When we hit one of the express highways a short time later, there was certainly no sign of a traffic cop. I knew the county had cut down on the traffic-cop personnel because of the greatly decreased traffic resulting from gas rationing.

There was little traffic indeed out there on that winding highway. And less light. But there was enough traffic coming toward Chicago to make it unsafe for the trucks to turn out their lights for any length of time. They tried it briefly, experimentally, a few times, but they didn't risk it long.

We could have caught up with the trucks easily enough, but Iggy was a middle-aged conservative who had not yet had his fill of earth's splendors and, despite his valor, wished to stretch his span as far as possible.

"Close in on 'em, Iggy!" Lambert roared. "I'll knock 'em off one at a time!"

"This boat's doing all she'll do, Boss," the chauffeur called out. "Besides, if we wreck, your meat and trucks are long gone."

I never saw a gent like that Lambert. He should have been a general in Tunisia, alongside Patton and Montgomery; he sure believed there was only one direction—ahead—and only one good kind of climate—hot.

Of course, we were a good target still, but I think the gunman in the back of that third truck was running short of

ammunition. He must have emptied three automatic clips at us in the course of the travelogue thus far—and I never heard of any hood carrying more than three or four clips with him unless he expected to wind up in a siege with G-men surrounding his nest.

I didn't know how far out in the country we were. In emotional moments—of which I was having a continuous string—the human mind has a curious habit of not registering details clearly. But I guessed it was ten or twelve miles. There were quite a few branch roads leading off on either side, at varying intervals. A few of them were macadam side roads, others were plain dirt or graveled, no doubt leading off to farms.

SUDDENLY the second and third trucks swerved off onto a dirt road leading to the right. The leading truck kept right on down the highway.

"Which do we follow, Boss?" Iggy inquired over his shoulder.

"Follow the two that're goin' to the right! It's a cinch we'll corner 'em back on that dirt road." Lambert scowled ferociously.

Well, somebody would likely be cornered, all right, but I wasn't sure it'd be the hoods in those two trucks.

Iggy slowed a little for the turn and barely made it. The dirt road wasn't too wide and it was plenty rough, leading out into country that was more scrubby than lush. There were clumps of willows, ratty-looking groves of trees, along with dips and swales.

I didn't like it. Ideal terrain for an ambush. The hijackers were one step ahead of me on that thought.

We were a mile or more away from the main drag and our dirt road was curving around through the bushes and trees and up and down through the swales. There was a sharp turn ahead and a dip just ahead. Iggy had to slow the limousine down to a walk. It was his next-to-last act.

We'd barely got around the corner when the hood gunman—who'd jumped out of the back of the tail truck while it moved on—yelled: "Freeze that car and drop those rods!"

Iggy took one look out his left-door window and got rattled. He stepped on the gas—and the gunman cut loose at him with a .38 automatic. The window

was closed, but bullet-proof glass is not proof against repeated hits in the same spot. It was the third or fourth bullet that got through and took Iggy through the head.

The gunman had the jump on us, of course. By the time I got my rod focused out the window, our car was lurching forward because of Iggy's having stepped on the gas. I shot, but missed. The gunman turned his .38 toward my open window. I jerked my head back in reflex, squeezing the trigger of my .32 again.

His slug ticked my black hat and creased Lambert along the top of his red-haired skull just as he was lurching toward my window to cut loose with that old .45 six-shooter of his.

Lambert combined a grunt and a groan and folded forward down onto the floor in a heap.

A couple more .38 slugs hit the rear side glass opposite the spot my head was now located, but the limousine was lurching ahead and the slugs didn't hit the glass in the same place. The car hit the bottom of the gulch and a small tree off the right side of the road at the same moment. I was watching the gunman, not the road, and I was off-balance. The impact threw me forward and my head struck the back of the front seat.

I saw a flash of lightning in black velvet. Then all there was was the black velvet.

CHAPTER V

MEAT FOR THE MORGUE



THE moralists will tell you that there comes always an awakening. There came one to me, John Viking Swenson.

I opened my eyes and everything was still black, so I automatically assumed for a moment that the collision with the tree had blinded me permanently. It wasn't that simple.

Then I sniffed, and the net achievement was distinctly musty. I moved my hands and feet, which weren't tied, and discovered that I was in a closet. Also that I had awakened facing the rear wall, because when I turned my head around the other way I discerned some light filtering in through a large old-fashioned keyhole of the closet door.

The reason there was no key in the keyhole was as follows, as I discovered a little later: this was an old abandoned farmhouse, a hideaway where these truck-and-beef heisters repainted the trucks, changed the engine numbers and license plates. But the closet door's key had been long-lost and the closet door was fastened outside with an old wooden drop bar.

Naturally, I'd been searched thoroughly. The closet was completely bare and I had no weapon except head, hands and feet.

I took a look through the keyhole. All I could see was the lower part of the front door and two hoods. One of them was the killer gunman. He was a medium-sized lug, with a face built somewhat on the order of those cavemen you see in museums. The second guy was leaner and looked to be a smart wrong guy, no doubt, the leader. He was pacing slowly, and I got a couple of quick takes at his face. I couldn't see the third lug.

But I could hear all three, and evidently they'd just started talking it over.

"We'd better doctor these trucks and get clear out of Illinois," the leader was saying. "That double-murder rap is bad stuff. I didn't want you to knock anybody off, Ord, but it's worked out that way, so that's the way it is. We can doctor the trucks in a hurry, get out the back roads into Indiana, unload the meat to a black-market wholesaler and get on down into Kentucky by morning. We can hide out in the Kentucky hills with the trucks till the heat blows off. I know a place down there."

"What about the limousine?" inquired the lug who was out of my vision. He sounded fairly smart, too. "It's too hot for us to handle, and Lambert's a big-shot. He's still unconscious out there in the limousine, along with the dead chauffeur. Why don't we put that yellow-haired shamus in the limousine with Lambert and the chauffeur and run the whole thing over a bank into a river?"

"Might be best," the chief said. "Never give the cops anything to work on."

"I'd still like to know why Limpy didn't show tonight to work with us," said the second lug. "He was sore because you didn't give him a bigger cut on that last job. You figure he's ratted on us?"

The chief nodded slowly. "It's a possibility—and another reason why we'd better scram out of these parts."

"Well, let's get to work on those trucks," said the gunman. "Joe ought to be gettin' in from the back road with that number-one truck. It's a good thing the limousine followed us instead of him."

"He'd have lost 'em if they'd followed him," the chief stated.

"You want us to load that Swede dick into the limousine now and take care of that first?" inquired the second lug.

"Not till after he's woke up and I ask him some questions," the chief said. "I don't think they had a chance to get any cops to tail along after the limousine, but I want to be sure. The Swede'll give out if I handle him right."

"I'll see if he's come to yet," the gunman said.

The chief nodded. "Go ahead."

I GUESS they'd put me in the closet figuring I wouldn't overhear their plans in case I woke up and played foxy, but the keyhole was big and I have good ears.

The gunman was starting toward the closet and I decided to lie back and make with the unconscious act.

But just then there was a thoroughly unexpected interruption.

The front door opened and a cold voice ordered:

"Lift your hooks, chums! I've got an itchy finger."

As I always say, what good's a detective without a clue? I'd been longing for one all night and now, taking a quick fresh gander through my keyhole, I got one.

There wasn't just one newcomer, there were two. By twisting my neck, I could manage to see the lower halves of them, and there's where I got my clue.

The guy who had just spoken was wearing a nice new checked suit with cuffs on the bottom of the pants. I'd seen those cuffs earlier in the day and I'd heard the voice. Now you could have knocked me over with a 75mm. gun.

Plainly enough, even though I couldn't see all three of my meat heisters, my trio was caught flat-footed and with their roscoes in their pockets.

My pal Spatori had them covered all right and so did the guy who was stand-

ing beside him. This second guy had a gimpy left leg; it seemed to be shorter than the right leg. I soon learned his moniker. He was Limpy, and he *had* ratted on his three regular chums.

"You boys muscled in on a soft racket I had two years ago, so now I'm muscling back at you," Spatori went on. "I want all three of those meat trucks, chums. There's only two out here in the barn. Limpy says you were heisting three tonight. Where's the third?"

"Try to figure it yourself, Spatori," the hijacker chief snarled. I could feel him murdering Limpy with his eyes.

"I got no time to kid around," Spatori said. "Maybe you want a slug in the stomach. Is that it?"

The chief hijacker snarled under his breath. And the number-two hijacker suddenly got a bright idea.

"If you want to know where the other truckful of meat is, ask our new brains. He's in that closet."

"New brains? In the closet?" Spatori puzzled.

"Look and see for yourself," said the number-two hijacker. "He tried to pull a fast one on us so we conked him lightly on the sconce and dumped him in the closet to think it over and change his ways."

Spatori was wary. He didn't quite believe it. But he said:

"Take a look in the closet, Limpy, while I watch these crooks."

I was still peeping through the keyhole in astonishment at seeing Spatori, of all guys, out here at the payoff of my number-two detecting job. I did a little fast celebrating and decided it would gain me naught to play unconscious now. So I stood right up long and lanky. When Limpy lifted the wooden drop bar and jerked the door open I walked out, fresh as a garbage-dump daisy in frost time.

Spatori wasn't the sort of guy whose jaw would drop or whose eyes would pop. But he came as near to it then as he ever would come. He stared for a few seconds and then he spoke.

"Holy cucumbers! The no-show Swede shamus! What the blazes are *you* doing out here?"

THE number-two hijacker blinked and looked crestfallen. "You guys know each other?"

"Just coming to keep my appointment with you, pal—the long way around," I answered Spatori. While I was talking I sauntered over toward an old dining-room table on the right side of the room. I did it slow and easy, forcing a nonchalant smile so Spatori's trigger finger wouldn't get nervous.

"So you took my fifty retainer and then ratted out on me?" Spatori said between his teeth. "How're you tied up with these lugs?"

"By a short, beautiful friendship," I told him. And then, because there's a trace of ham in every shamus, I continued: "A detective's no good unless he deduces a little, pal. I deduce that you're a hijacker of hijackers and that you'd as soon knock a guy off as not, so long as you can get away with it."

"You deduce good, Swede, but I don't like you," he said.

"I'll take a side dish of same." I smiled, with a sort of sad, bleak desperation. "Today you hired me for a mysterious job. I know now about what the job was to be. I deduce it. See? Well, you wanted me along so if there was any trouble with the cops along the route out here or later on I could show the nice policemen I was a private detective hired by you to pursue the bad, bad men. Also, as you figured me for a down-at-the-heel shamus, you thought I'd drive one of the trucks for you to wherever you wanted to take it after you'd heisted all three trucks from these lugs and left them dead here."

"So?"

"When you'd disposed of the meat and the trucks," I said, "you could then dispose of me—permanently. Who'd ever miss an obscure private detective? You'd be away clean, with these dead hijackers taking the rap on a mystery the cops never would solve completely."

"You're a smart deducer, Swede," Spatori admitted grimly.

"Best of all," I continued, letting a little trace of hysteria slip into my voice, "you and Limpy would have to make only a two-way split on the plunder. Meat, trucks and all should add up to around twenty Gs or so. Maybe it was Limpy's idea. From what I've gathered about him, he likes a big split on every job. That's why he ratted on his three hijacker pals here and went over to you, Spatori."

"Four hijacker pals," corrected Spatori, between his teeth. "The fourth guy has that third meat truck. Where's it and him?"

I didn't answer right away.

Instead, I stared down at that little box ring on the second finger of my left hand. I stared at it with a sort of hypnotic fascination, you might say. I had to build it up right.

I looked up presently, tearing my eyes away from the ring with an effort.

"Why should I give you any more profit?" I said. "You're going to knock me off along with these hijackers. You've got to, to make the job fool-proof."

"Maybe I won't knock 'em off," Spatori said. "If they do a good job doctoring and disguising the trucks, maybe I'll just tie 'em up. But I want to know where that third truck is. Maybe I'll let you drive it, if you tell me where it is."

It was then that I took another long, despairing look at my box ring. I stared at it for seconds. Then, with that suicide gleam in my eyes, I pushed the little button.

CHAPTER VI

DEATH FIT



PUSHED the little button and the top of the little box flew open. I stared at the big fat white pill inside for several seconds—long enough for them to see it was a pill.

With a quick, despairing gesture I flipped the back of my left hand against my opened lips and popped the pill into my mouth. I made a couple of gulping, swallowing motions. Following which, I squared my shoulders bravely in resignation and looked Spatori squarely in the eye.

His jaw almost dropped. "What was that?" he demanded in a taut tone. "What did you do?"

"Spatori," I said, "when I got into this private-detecting business, I did it because a guy theoretically gets paid big money for easy work and not . . . not much risk. But I knew, too, that sometime I *might* get my back to . . . to the . . . wall, with some guy going to . . . burn me down."

I was gasping a little now, and my neck muscles were beginning to twitch.

"We Swedes are moody people. I . . . I made up my mind if this . . . this sort of thing ever came up, I'd knock myself off . . . swift . . . and clean. I . . . I wouldn't lie around and . . . and suffer for hours from a . . . a slow wound or . . . or anything . . . like that"

They were staring now. Even Spatori. It's a funny thing about a poison suicide. He sort of paralyzes the spectators for a minute. I saw one once, and that's what it did to me. It's chilling, that's what. It was seeing that, as a matter of fact, that originally had given me this idea of the pill and the ring.

By now my face was contorting hideously and I was foaming at the mouth like a hydrophobia skunk. Much more foam than anybody could fake. I gasped out a final few words.

"So . . . this . . . is . . . it, Spatori! It . . . works . . . fast!"

I was too far gone to say more. My face horribly contorted, I clutched at my throat with both hands.

Then, in a final convulsive spasm I lurched back onto the old dining-room table, shuddering across it and flopped down onto the floor—upsetting the table toward me but between the hoods and me, as I fell.

Spatori and Limpy and the three hijackers didn't make a sound for at least eight or ten seconds. I guess this had come as quite an unexpected shock, the last sort of thing they might have anticipated. Undoubtedly they were just staring. It was quite a different thing from just seeing a guy shot.

But presently Spatori muttered in a hoarse, dried-out tone:

"Go feel his pulse, Limpy." And as Limpy came across the room toward my table, Spatori was muttering: "That dirty yellow Swede!"

"Yellow, nothin'!" said the number-two hijacker "It takes nerve to go out that way. I couldn't do that!"

Limpy came around the end of the table. He saw my horribly wide-open, staring eyes, my stiffly open, foaming mouth, my terribly contorted face, my hands stiffened above my chest like a dead eagle's claws.

So Limpy knelt down, gingerly, reached out with his left hand to take my pulse.

It was then that I took Limpy. I came suddenly to life. I grabbed his gat with

my right hand and heeled him hard under the chin with my left. Duck soup. He jolted back hard onto the floor.

I flopped over fast, his gun in my hand, and I took one quick gander around the edge of the table. It was Spatori I wanted first.

AND it was Spatori I got. Again a split second of unexpectedness was in my favor. I squeezed off three quick shots and I routined them down Spatori's right arm, starting at the shoulder. At close range in a fair light I'm a handy man with a rod. It's something a shamus has to learn if he wants to write his memoirs at a ripe old age.

Spatori emptied his automatic, but he emptied it into the floor—just reflex from the pain. Then he dropped the rod and reeled back against the closed door.

I heard Limpy getting to his feet and starting to lunge at me, so I rolled over quick and put a slug into his shoulder. It knocked him back on his haunches and I knew he wouldn't try for me again.

All in the same motion I looked around the top edge of the table, and threw a quick slug into Ord, the hijacker gunman. He was just getting his rod out of his pocket. He dropped the gun and folded over quietly.

The other, who was just reaching, decided he didn't want any. I'd have killed him if he'd come out smoking and he knew it. They all knew I had the edge. He and Spatori lifted their three good hands.

So did Limpy, when I gestured with my roscoe.

"Get the holstered gats from your exchums," I told Limpy. "Get 'em easy, with two careful fingers, by their butts. Drop 'em onto the floor. Then kick all four rods across the floor to me."

Limpy did as bid. When he'd kicked all the guns across to me, and I had a fully loaded one in each hand, I gave further orders.

"Tie 'em up, hands and feet." And to the other four, including my pal Spatori: "You lugs lie down on your faces, apart from each other, while Limpy ties you."

They got down, and they didn't like it. But Limpy tied them up, with their neckties and shoelaces. Then I tied Limpy.

That done, I headed for the door to take a quick gander at Lambert. I liked the guy and I hoped he wasn't dead, even though he was too impetuous for my normal taste.

I'd no more than got out the door and onto the broken-down porch when a forward-moving voice spoke out of the darkness nearby.

"I just got in with the third truck. What's all the noise up here? Sounded like—"

"Like this?" I asked, stepping forward and clipping the guy alongside the ear with the barrel of my right-hand gun. I couldn't see him very clearly, but I knew who he was—the driver of that

Keeping an eye focused in through the open door of the farmhouse to see that none of my tied-up hijackers were trying to get loose, I cut Lambert free. He was moaning, coming to. The bullet back at the ambush had just creased his skull.

Presently I had him wide-awake and cussing.

"Can you drive this limousine back to the highway and find a phone somewhere in a gas station or a hamburger joint?" I asked.

He nodded.

"Then do so," I told him. "Get a county cop. Tell him to bring along a big police ambulance and plenty of first-



"Another Black Ring Murder—and There's No Clue—"

IT WAS the third mysterious crime committed at the behest of the unknown "Voice"—and the police were at their wit's end!

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COMING NEXT ISSUE!

lead truck, which had kept on down the highway, to come in here by their secret back road. I guess they'd prearranged that, so if they were chased, they could split up and not all be in danger of getting trapped together.

He fell down, out cold. I searched him, found a flashlight in his pocket. With aid of the flashlight I spotted the limousine nearby under some trees and went over to it.

Just to make sure Lambert wouldn't wake up and drive off, the hijackers had stretched him out with his feet on the rear seat and his hands tied to the right front outside door handle, with his back stretched across the top of the front seat.

aid gear. I'll stay here and watch the quarry. We ought to be able to get 'em all into town, and your meat trucks, too, within two or three hours."

We put Iggy's corpse into the back seat of the limousine, and Lambert turned it around, headed for the highway and official help.

I went back to the farmhouse, dragged in the still unconscious beef-heisting truck driver and tied him up. I did what I could to fix up the wounds of the three whom I'd shot. Then I sat back and waited, while they glared at me.

IT WAS about eleven-thirty when I called the Lamberts' house and got Dixie on the phone.

"Well," she asked, "aren't you dead yet? Where are you?"

"In jail," I stated, "trying to explain why our limousine didn't halt when ordered to do so by two patrol-car policemen. And our host, Benjamin Lambert, is trying to explain how come he never bothered to get a permit for his .45 cannon."

"What!"

"Yes. But I guess they won't make it too tough. I nailed a total of four hijackers and two hijackers of hijackers, for a gross score of six." I stopped, suddenly remembering. My eyebrows elevated.

"And I just now recall that by so doing I win a wager of five hundred seeds from Benjamin Lambert. Also, I'm informed the Chicago Packers' Association has a standing reward of one thousand seeds on tap for information—from any non-policeman—for information leading to the arrest of meat hijackers. How did you make out? Anybody heist any jewelry on you?"

"No," Dixie said. "Tell me more."

I outlined it. Then I said: "Look! I've grossed sixteen hundred and fifty bucks today, counting Spatori's retainer. That's a vast sum of money and now seems a splendid time to ask—will you be my officially betrothed, Dixie? I'll even give you my box ring for third finger, left hand. For more than two years I've had that ring and the foam pill for an ace in the hole. I thought I'd never get a chance to try it. But it saved my pelt today. As a mark of my high romantic esteem I shall present it to you to seal our engagement. Huh?"

"No," said Dixie, after brief thought. "With your great frustrated love to spur you on, you may really amount to something later on. Leave it as is. Besides, we'll need most of that money to catch up on the beefsteaks we haven't been eating for months."

"Beefsteak?" I yelled. "Don't ever mention meat to me! I've played tag with the Reaper over so much hot meat tonight that from here on out and forever I'm strictly a vegetarian!"



Grant Trevor is a smart sleuth—much too smart for a clever killer—when he and his invisible alter-ego go into action in DEATH AND THE DUMMY, a gripping mystery story by ROBERT WALLACE coming next issue!

"THAT'S FOR ME FOR ENERGY"



A bread knife, one of the props in the show, was sticking up out of Tophet's chest

EYE-WITNESS TESTIMONY

By **DIXON WELLS**

Circumstantial evidence puts the finger on Johnny Balkan, until a girl's eloquence in court puts a bright spotlight on a murder frame!

THE whole thing might never have happened if I'd controlled my rotten temper. But Harlan Tophet made me see red. There he sat behind his big desk, like a toad swollen with prosperity, telling Cookie she was out of the part.

"Sorry, Cookie," he said, avoiding her eye. "You've worked hard, but Gloria Wendel has the experience, the stage presence—and the big name. Sorry."

"Sorry!" I said, leaning over his desk. "You're sorry! That's a hot one!"

Cookie put her hand on my arm.

"Johnny, please," she said. "It's all right."

"It's not all right!" I shouted. "I'm tired of seeing you be so blamed sweet and good and unselfish and everybody

trampling all over you to get what they want! It's time somebody talked up for you."

"I know all about it," Harlan Tophet said, raising a hand to cut me off.

"Well you're going to hear it again!" I yelled. His door was open and it was pretty dumb of me to yell, but that's the way it was. "Cookie slaved over this dead-end show when everybody else was ready to call it a corpse!" I told him, not gently. "She worked for weeks without pay! She sat up nights with your writers and composers trying to get a decent routine, some half-way good gags into it. She stayed with it when everybody else gave up and she—more than anybody else—deserves credit for whipping it into shape! And now that it is

in shape, do you think you're going to ease her out with a "Sorry?" Think again, Mr. Tophet!"

He looked at me with those little eyes half sunk in creases of fat.

"Do you want the show to make money?" he asked. "Then Gloria Wendel goes in. Her name will make it. Cookie Miller's won't. That's all."

Cookie had my arm again.

"Johnny, please."

"All right," I said bitterly. "But don't think you're getting away with this, Tophet."

"You know, Johnny," he said, with his first trace of anger, "I can get somebody for your part, too."

I turned around and looked at him and searched for something good to call him. I couldn't think of any names that would fit.

"Some day," I said, "somebody is going to kill you, Tophet. And when he does, he ought to get a medal."

I TOOK Cookie's arm and hauled her to the door. We came through so fast that we nearly bowled over Tophet's secretary, Miss Condon, who had her ear practically glued to the opening. She jumped back flustered.

As she barged out, Bill Akers, the stage director, came bustling in, with his hands full of scripts.

"Hey, you two, wait!" he called. "I've got some scripts for you!"

"You know what you can do with them," I snapped.

My last glimpse of him showed him standing there with his hands full of papers, looking after us with his good-looking jaw hanging down in surprise.

Over coffee and wheats, I calmed down. Cookie's face was enough to make me a better man anyway. Just sitting across the table from me—well, it was like going to church. Cookie had that clear blond loveliness, the kind you see once a year in *Life* magazine and everybody falls all over himself writing in to ask for gosh sakes who was the girl. There's no describing it. And she was just as good and sweet and patient as she was beautiful. And smart. She had a good education and a good head. That's what made me so murdering mad at Harlan Tophet.

"Putting that clothes horse in your part!" I snorted. "Everybody knows

what Gloria Wendel is to Harlan Tophet!"

"Eat your wheatcakes," Cookie said.

"I'll think up some horrid fate for that guy," I muttered. "I'll hex him."

"You'll hex yourself out of a job."

You couldn't rile Cookie. I never saw such a girl.

When we finished eating we made plans. I'd go back to the theater because I had to rehearse. Cookie was out of the part. But she said she'd go home and change and then come back for me. With that cock-eyed loyalty of hers, I knew she even had an idea of giving Gloria Wendel some tips about the part.

I went back to the theater and barged back-stage, stamping my feet to show how sore I was. There was a little crowd of actors and stagehands collected around Harlan Tophet's office. They jumped when they saw me and their eyes popped.

"What gives?" I asked.

Nobody answered. I heard voices in Tophet's office. I came closer and the gang melted away in front. I saw blue uniforms—cops. I walked right into the room.

"Well, I'll be— There he is!" a voice said.

Everybody was staring at me. I saw Bill Akers, his face pale.

"That him?" a cop said to Akers. The stage director nodded.

The cop came over to me.

"You Johnny Balkan? You're under arrest."

"For what?"

They moved aside and I saw Harlan Tophet, flat on his back on the rug. He looked more like a toad than ever, with his arms and legs spread wide. There was a bread knife, one of the props in the show, sticking up out of his chest. It was just like a play. . . .

In a play the third act comes on in a reasonable time and the mystery is solved. But with bars all around me and no bail, I got over the play feeling pretty soon. There is something about a cell that is more sobering than a cold bath. I was plenty scared.

Who could have killed Harlan Tophet? Somebody had heard me shooting off my big mouth and had thought this was a lovely time to fix his clock and let me take the blame.

COOKIE came to see me later. She kissed me through the bars.

"This horrible place," she said, shuddering. "Don't let it get you, Johnny. Don't be depressed."

"What is this all about?" I asked. "Did you find out?"

"Yes. About half an hour after we went out to lunch, Miss Condon says she saw you hurriedly leave Tophet's office, alone. When she went in a few minutes later he was dead. She fainted and Bill Akers found them both."

"Very nice," I muttered. "How could she see me when I was with you?"

"I don't know, Johnny. Listen. We have no money for a lawyer. Do you want to take your chances on some shyster the court may appoint, or—do you want me to handle it?"

"You? Cookie, you're no lawyer."

"I studied psychology in college," Cookie said. "And I once played a lady lawyer in Hartford, Connecticut, with a road show."

"Fine thing," I groaned.

But you know, I had more confidence in Cookie than in some ambulance chaser the court might palm off on me. So I went on trial defended by Cookie Miller.

It started off with a bang. Miss Condon, her voice so low and shaky that it could hardly be heard past the third row—that was the actor in me, noticing a thing like that at a time like this—told her story about seeing me flee from Tophet's office at the time I was sitting with Cookie in Childs.

"Can you positively identify the defendant as the man you saw?" the D. A. asked.

"Yes," she whispered. "Nobody else wears sport jackets like this. They are very loud. Mr. Tophet often asked him not to wear them, but he always got angry and shouted that he'd wear anything he liked, no matter what anybody thought."

"Then Mr. Balkan has a violent temper?"

"Oh, yes. Very."

That brought up the scene in Tophet's office and my stupid threats. I expected Cookie to protest, but she didn't. All she did was ask Miss Condon if at any time she had seen my face.

"Oh, no," said Miss Condon. "I only saw his back as he came out. But I'd

know that jacket anywhere."

The day dragged to an end in a lot of bickering. Then Cookie came backstage to my cell.

"Johnnie," she said thoughtfully. "Where'd you get that jacket?"

"In Stoopnagle's basement. They had a sale—"

"Good-by, darling," she said kissing me. "See you tomorrow in court." And she was gone before I could even yell.

Next day, Cookie called Miss Condon to the stand.

"I want you to identify the jacket you say Mr. Balkan wore," she said.

Then at a signal, a strange thing happened. No less than a dozen men, all wearing the exact sport jacket I'd worn, marched down the aisle, turned their backs on the witness stand and formed a line. The eyes of the judge and jury bugged out. Cookie waved her hand at the line, then turned and pointed at Miss Condon.

"One of those jackets is the one Johnny Balkan wore yesterday. Can you pick it out?"

You know how a gag sometimes brings down the house? Well, that little act nearly stopped the show. When the judge had restored order by pounding himself black in the face, the D. A. had thrown up his hands.

"Wait," Cookie said. "That isn't all. I'm not interested in clearing Johnnie Balkan alone. I'd like to hand the man who murdered Harlan Tophet over to this court!"

THE place became as quiet as a cat's footsteps.

"Somebody," Cookie said, "heard Johnnie shouting at Harlan Tophet and realized that it gave him an opportunity to commit a crime he'd been planning for a long time. If you'd lived backstage with the troupe as we have, you gentlemen of the jury would know that there was only one man to whom all the little psychological threads of this case point.

"Harlan Tophet gave the leading part to Gloria Wendel because he was in love with her. The man who wanted to get Tophet out of the way was also in love with Miss Wendel. But killing Tophet would apparently ruin the show—would spoil Miss Wendel's chances for a hit, and thus hurt his own chances with her.

"That's what would normally happen. But not in this case. Because the murderer of Harlan Tophet wanted not only Tophet's girl, but his job. He wanted to take over complete control of the show. There is only one man who could do this."

She swung around and her arm darted out, finger pointing.

"Bill Akers!"

Later on, Cookie told me she didn't have any real evidence against Akers.

"It was psychology," she said. "That build-up, that principle of creating the right atmosphere and then striking quickly—that's what made Bill Akers crack. Oh, he'll deny it now, but they saw him jump, saw him start to run like a trapped rabbit and they'll keep after him now until he admits it. It's pure psychology."

"Shut up with the psychology," I said, "and give me a kiss."

There is nobody like my Cookie.



Follow the exciting exploits of the Phantom Detective as he battles against the sinister might of a master criminal whose diabolical crimes spell danger and death to every American household—in THE BLACK MARKET MURDERS, a baffling complete mystery novel by ROBERT WALLACE in the October issue of

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The dead hand of an executed killer seeks grisly revenge on a district attorney!



The thug bowled Jerry over with a vicious flying tackle

ASHES OF HATE

By NORMAN A. DANIELS

JERRY GREY, young and able district attorney, put down his cigar and rose to answer the doorbell of his home. He was unmarried and his housekeeper worked only by day. Jerry Grey was usually alone nights.

His house was ample, for Jerry happened to be fairly wealthy in his own right. He walked across the big living room, a slender, good-looking man of about twenty-nine. Some said he was the youngest—and best—district attorney the county had ever had.

At the door was a thin-faced, bird-eyed little man with a bulky package under his arm. He was badly dressed and had a foolish smirk on his face.

"Remember me?" he asked.

Jerry squinted at him. "Yes—I seem to. Someone I sent up, probably?"

"Then you don't remember me," the little man said. "Swell. You never sent me up and you never will. Anyway, I got a message for you and a present. From a friend of yours. He died last night."

Jerry winced. "You must mean Neil Merrick, who went to the chair at State's prison. Why should he be sending me a message and a gift?"

"On account of he liked you. Sure—Neil never had it in for anybody who got the best of him. Look—Neil wanted me to tell you that the two guys you sent up a year ago for swiping sixty grand in diamonds never did the job. Neil did

it. He says you should let those guys out, see? And here is the present."

Jerry took the bulky package with a frown.

"How did you see Neil to get his message and have him arrange for this gift? Neil didn't have a visitor except Symonds, his attorney. Prisoners aren't allowed to come into contact with condemned men."

"Never mind how it was worked," the little guy smirked. "What I told you proves it was. I guess that's all. So long—pal."

"Wait a moment," Jerry said. "How do I know there isn't a bomb in this package? You can't make me believe that Neil never hated me right up to the instant that charge of electricity surged through him."

"Open it," the little guy said. "I'll stay right beside you. That ain't no bomb. Neil just wanted to let you have something to remember him by."

"Come inside," Jerry said and led the way to his living room. He opened a drawer and took out a large pair of chromium-finish shears. Holding the package, he tried to cut the cord. He couldn't do it. The bundle was too large.

"Take these." He handed the shears to the little guy. "Cut the cord, will you?"

THE visitor did and laid the shears on a table after he was finished. Jerry unpeeled the paper and exposed a large carton. He opened this and drew out a fairly large, light blue vase. The lid was sealed with some kind of transparent substance.

"Well," he grunted, "this is a surprise. That vase is expensive. I know pottery and porcelain. I don't get it, my friend. Neil hated me and if he had a chance to get even, he'd take it in a moment. Say—there's something inside this vase."

When Jerry shook it, small objects rattled intriguingly against the sides.

"It couldn't be the diamonds Neil confessed swiping and for which he claims two other men are locked up? Those diamonds never were found."

The visitor was slowly edging toward the door. Jerry followed him. When the door was open, the ratty-faced man darted out to the porch.

"There ain't diamonds in that vase. It's just ashes. Neil Merrick's ashes. He was cremated this morning."

Jerry tried to stop the messenger but failed, mostly because he was so surprised that he didn't grab quite fast enough. All he heard was a mocking laugh and the man faded into the night. Jerry held the vase at arm's length and shuddered.

Neil Merrick's ashes. This was just about the kind of revenge that killer would have thought up. His own ashes, meant to haunt the man who had sent him to the chair.

Jerry couldn't just hurl them out. That wasn't quite the proper thing to do, but he couldn't place the urn on a mantel and stare at it either. After all, what it contained represented the remains of a man he'd been instrumental in punishing with death.

Jerry placed the urn on a table, grimaced at it and picked up his telephone. He called Symonds, who had been Neil Merrick's attorney.

"This is Jerry Grey," he said over the phone. "I just received a rather ghastly gift from Merrick. It's an urn containing his ashes. I don't know what Merrick hoped to gain by such a wild scheme, but, as his attorney, I think you ought to help me. I want this urn taken to a cemetery and given a decent burial. I'll pay the expenses if necessary, but I'll be damned if I'll keep the ashes of an executed criminal in my home."

"An urn?" Symonds gasped. "His ashes inside? The poor fool must have been half crazy when he made those arrangements. I know he was cremated this morning. Yes, I'll take the ashes off your hands. See to a proper burial, too. Be right over."

Jerry hung up with a deep frown creasing his forehead. Symonds had never liked him. He was an out-and-out shyster who should have gloated over Merrick's weird form of revenge. Yet he had agreed to take the urn almost too quickly. Jerry shook the vase again and heard that tempting clatter inside. He inspected the seal and wondered if he could break it open. Then he shrugged. It was enough to know the urn contained the ashes without actually seeing them.

He carefully dry-washed his hands after he set the urn down and waited

impatently for Symonds' arrival. From time to time he glanced at the urn as if he expected a wraith to materialize from it and wreak some form of vengeance upon him. Neil Merrick's hatred has been virile and genuine. He hated with the mind of a professional killer.

The doorbell buzzed half an hour later and Symonds entered. He was a pompous individual, dressed in the height of fashion. He had a glib tongue and a way with juries—until Jerry Grey had stepped in to oppose him. Jerry had a way with juries, too, and his was an honest, open way. It got results.

"There it is." Jerry pointed at the urn. "Take it away. If I had that thing in my house overnight, I'd get the heebies."

SYMONDS chuckled. "Perhaps that is exactly what Merrick hoped for. Childish gesture on his part, Mr. Grey. But then, he had a childish mind. All killers have minds like that."

"You ought to know," Jerry grinned. "Bury the darned thing. And Symonds, do you know anything about that diamond robbery of last year? The one for which two of your clients are serving time now? Merrick claims he did it."

Symonds gasped. "Is that so? I'll ask for a reopening of the case. Or, no, what's the use. Merrick was just pulling another stunt, that's all. Confidentially, Mr. Grey, the two mugs serving time for that job confessed to me they did it and, like the stupid boobs they are, lost the loot somewhere when they were running away. Let's forget all about it. I'll take the vase and get going, if you don't mind."

"Help yourself," Jerry said, but he was puzzled. Symonds should have stuck to his guns and demanded a new trial on the basis of fresh evidence. He'd tried tricks like that on lesser motives.

Symonds tucked the urn under one arm, thanked Jerry and hurried to the exit. He seemed to be very anxious to get away before Jerry changed his mind. Perhaps the vase was more valuable than Jerry figured.

Before he could stop him, Symonds was outside the house and walking briskly down a rather long path to the street. Jerry shrugged, started to close

the door and heard a muffled yelp. He looked out. Three men were struggling frantically just off the path.

He ran down the steps. One of the men saw him coming, broke off his part of the scrap and charged at Jerry. This man held a knife high and ready for a murderous thrust. The other had Symonds on the ground and he also held a knife.

Jerry ducked under the blow intended to carve him up. He jolted two very hard punches to the abdomen of the killer, drove him back and then grabbed his knife hand. He gave it a savage wrench and the blade fell to the lawn. Jerry lowered his head a bit, closed in and weaved like a fighter. The killer backed up, turned and started running. Jerry caught him before he took half a dozen steps, dragged him back and knocked him down with a punch to the face.

Then he turned and looked back to where Symonds and the second killer were battling. The fight seemed to be just about over. Symonds gave a long, dismal groan and lay still. The killer arose, yanked a knife free of the wound he'd made in Symond's chest and then scurried around in a search for the urn.

Jerry charged at the man. The grass was damp and slippery. He almost reached the killer without giving away his approach when both feet went out from under him and he landed with a thud that jarred the ground.

The killer whirled, ground out a curse and, still holding the knife, made a savage dive toward Jerry. The young D. A. raised both legs suddenly, drew them close to his middle and shot both feet out again just as the killer got within range.

The murderer went hurtling back, but he didn't lose his balance nor his wits. He must have sensed that Jerry could outfight him, so he pivoted and streaked madly into the darkness. Jerry chased him a short distance, gave up and returned to look for the second thug. He was gone, too.

Symonds was there, though, and Symonds was finished. That knife had penetrated his heart. Jerry groaned, headed for the house to give an alarm and suddenly thought of Merrick's ashes and the light blue urn in which they were contained. By using matches, he located

it intact, in a clump of brush where Symonds must have thrown it when the attack began.

Twenty minutes later, the yard swarmed with police. Symond's body was taken away and Jerry talked to Captain Arno. He pointed to the urn. "Well, Neil Merrick's ashes are inside the vase. Symonds was to have arranged for a burial, but it seemed to me he was too darned anxious to oblige. Symonds wanted that urn and not because of sentimental reasons either. The two monkeys who battled with me and who killed Symonds also wanted the urn."

CAPTAIN ARNO picked up the grisly thing and shook it. He glanced at Jerry with a quizzical expression.

"I know what you're thinking," Jerry said. "Those may be the diamonds we never found and which Merrick claims he swiped. I think Merrick lied. The men serving time for that job never knew Merrick and they pulled the job."

"Sure they did," Arno agreed. "But why would Merrick confess to it?"

"Merrick hated me—and you—and anyone else who represented the law. He hoped to create confusion between us, but that doesn't explain why Symonds wanted the urn nor why those two gorillas were after it and were willing to commit murder to get the thing. I'm almost willing to commit murder to get rid of it."

"I'm going to have a look inside," Arno declared. "My idea is that Merrick had somebody put something valuable in with his ashes. Those monkeys know it and want the thing."

"Wait a minute," Jerry said. "Don't open it, Captain. We want the man who killed Symonds now. They'll probably come back and try again. This time I'll be ready for them. You and your men go away. Just leave me your gun, like a good fellow. Perhaps I'll have a pair of murderers for you by morning."

Arno shrugged. "As you say, Mr. Grey. It might work, but just the same I'll post a man around the house. Grady is pretty good and won't fall asleep."

"Good," Jerry agreed. "I know Grady. He's all right. Thanks—and wish me luck. I may need it."

Jerry sat in a comfortable chair staring at the grim urn. Perhaps Captain

Arno was right and the urn contained something very valuable. Merrick had been a crook for years and could have hidden certain loot. Yet to offset this was the fact that Merrick couldn't have put the loot and his own ashes in this vase. He relied on a friend to do it—the skinny little rat who'd delivered the thing.

Jerry shook his head solemnly. If he knew his crooks, that little rat would have taken anything valuable for himself, hurled the vase and the ashes over a bridge somewhere and gone on his merry way.

There was more to it than that. But what? Jerry's head ached as he tried to figure it out. Several times he heard Grady patrolling the yard and felt secure. Grady was no exceptionally brainy man, but he was faithful.

When the doorbell buzzed again, shortly after midnight, Jerry thought it must be Grady. He hurried to the door but on impulse glanced through the small window set in the door. It was Grady all right. His bulk filled the whole window frame.

Jerry released a burglar chain, slid back the bolt and yanked the door open. Grady slowly tilted forward. His face was ghostly white except for a tiny red streak out of the corner of his mouth. Jerry grabbed the detective with both arms and started to ease him down. Then he looked up—and into a pair of guns, with masked men behind them.

"Go ahead—drag the stiff inside," one of the crooks ordered. "Pretty good way to make you open up, huh? Pull the copper in, pal, or we'll do it and stack him in a corner with your body, too."

Jerry said nothing. He was trapped and knew it. Furthermore, there didn't seem to be a single way out. He pulled Grady's corpse well into the hallway and made sure he was dead. This pair certainly knew how to use knives. One stab had finished Grady. Jerry could hardly hope for any break. Not with these two.

He arose and a gun was jabbed into the small of his back. He had time to study what was visible of the two faces. Not that he expected it would do him any good. Dead men can't talk and Jerry had a deeply seated notion he'd soon be nothing but a memory.

"We want Merrick's ashes, pal," one of the thugs said. "We'll get them, too, and if you are smart, you'll show us just where they are. Or do you want us to get tough?"

"No," Jerry said. "The ashes are of no interest to me. I wish Merrick had never thought of a grisly idea like this. I've been trying to get rid of them. They're in this room. Help yourself."

ONE of the men preceded Jerry into the living room which was exactly what he wanted. The second thug stayed right behind Jerry and the gun was jammed against the small of his back every moment.

Jerry came to a stop just inside the door. He saw the thug pick up the vase and rattle it. Jerry shrugged and leaned against the wall. His shoulder was against the light switch. The crook who guarded him was watching his friend and the vase.

Jerry moved his shoulder and felt the light switch start working down. He gave an additional bit of pressure and the lights went out. At that precise instant, Jerry let himself fall to the floor. The thug who had been guarding him fired at what he thought was a point-blank position, but Jerry was well below the level of the gun.

As it went off, Jerry reached out, grasped the thug's ankle and gave a yank. The crook yelled, lost his balance and fell heavily. Jerry was on him in a second. The other killer, with the vase, was trying to reach the scene of battle and he called encouragement to his pal. Jerry rapped home a punch aimed at the man's jaw, but it only glanced off his cheek. Then Jerry was heaved backward as the thug made a flying tackle at him.

He rolled over, and they grappled. The man had regained his fallen gun, and Jerry grabbed him by the throat with one hand and tried to hold his gun-wrist with the other. The killer clung to the gun and sought to turn its muzzle for effective use. His finger pulled the trigger twice and the roar of the gun echoed through the house.

Then, just as Jerry believed he had the man where he wanted him, the second thug fished a flashlight out of his pocket. Its beam centered on the struggling pair. He stepped close, swung

the flash and it hit Jerry squarely on top of the head.

He started to fall. Dimly, he heard the piercing whistle of a policeman close by the house. The shots had attracted attention as he hoped. The two thugs scurried toward the front door, saw a patrolman running to the house and changed their tactics.

As they passed by the entrance to the living room, one of them fired at the spot where Jerry had fallen. The bullets smashed into the floor a couple of feet from where Jerry lay. He'd managed to move a little in anticipation of this attempt at murder.

Then he heard the back door slam. For a moment there was silence, broken by the pounding of the patrolman against the front door. Jerry managed to get to his feet, let the policeman in and tell him what had happened.

A cordon of radio cars were thrown out, but there was little use. The thugs had the vase and would be well out of any trap by the time the radio cars were in position.

Captain Arno clucked his tongue in sympathy.

"Those monkeys certainly want that urn. Poor Grady—never had a chance, I guess. They must have slipped up on him from behind and let him have it. We made a mistake, Mr. Grey. A strong guard should have been posted."

"I know," Jerry groaned. "Only I didn't expect them to be—well, so smart about it. I'm going to get those rats, Captain. Somehow I'll round them up."

He stopped, staring at the chromium-plated shears still lying on the living-room table. The little mug who'd delivered the urn had used them. There would be fingerprints.

Jerry picked up the shears with his handkerchief.

"Rush these to the fingerprint bureau," he said. "You'll find my prints, which are on record—and another set. The man who left them must have been in prison recently. Call me back. I want his name, address and description. Hurry, Captain."

Arno sped away. He called twenty minutes later. The prints were those of Alex Dodd, a cheap little grifter who had finished serving a three-year stretch only a week ago. His address was downtown.

Jerry borrowed a police car and this time he made sure that Captain Arno's service pistol was in his pocket and not in a desk drawer. Under one arm Jerry carried a package made up of a cheap vase from his own house, the carton in which Merrick's urn had been contained and even the paper which had wrapped it.

ALEX DODD lived in a cheap rooming house. Its halls were dismal, evilly lit and the rooms were not much better. A suspicious building superintendent mellowed when a five-dollar bill was slipped into his palm. Alex Dodd, it seemed, lived on the top floor back.

Jerry went there, as fast as he could travel. The door was shut and locked. Jerry tapped on the panels softly and he heard the ratty guy's voice call out a peremptory challenge to identify himself.

"It's Jerry Grey, the district attorney," he called. "I've come to bring back the urn of ashes. I don't want them."

"Go away," Dodd replied. "I don't want them either. They're yours. Get out of here."

"In one minute," Jerry said, "I'll heave this urn on the floor right in front of your door. Then I'll bust in and break your miserable neck."

A gasp of horror came from inside the room and the door was promptly unlocked. Jerry stepped in and kicked the door shut. He put the carefully wrapped package on a table and then sat down.

"Suppose we talk about this crazy idea," he suggested affably.

"There's nothing to talk about." Dodd eyed the package and gulped. "I—I'm superstitious. I—I can't stand having a dead man's ashes around. Take 'em away. Please!"

"Not until you tell me what this deal is about," Jerry said calmly. "I'm staying and so are the ashes."

"All I know is that Neil Merrick paid me fifty bucks to see that his ashes were delivered to you. That's all I know about it."

"But, Dodd," Jerry argued, "weren't you once involved in a little counterfeiting racket. The Secret Service, at that time, said your work was excellent, especially the dye stuff you used on the

paper. And didn't you once work in a chemical factory as a lab assistant before you decided working for a living was a sucker's way? Come on—we might as well get acquainted."

"I'm not talking to any D. A.," Dodd snarled. "You got no right to stay in my room when I tell you to scram. You need a warrant—"

Jerry dragged out the heavy service pistol he'd borrowed from Captain Arno.

"This is my warrant, Dodd. Good enough for you? Or should I display an example of the kick this warrant has? Like putting a hole through the package, for instance, and spilling Merrick's ashes all over the place."

"No," Dodd half screamed. "Don't do that. Don't! It ain't—it ain't right. Merrick is dead. It's like digging up his coffin—if he had a coffin. You—you can't do that. Don't point the gun that way."

"I think I'll break that vase just for the fun of it," Jerry said and his gun came level with the package.

Dodd headed toward the door and the gun swung to cover him. Dodd stopped, groaned and mopped his face which had grown moist with perspiration.

"It's no use," he said. "I told Merrick it would never work. You're too smart. Listen. If you promise I don't go back up the river for this, I'll talk."

"You're going back," Jerry said smoothly. "I think we can say you violated parole. Well, do I break the vase?"

"No—no, please don't do that. I'll talk. I was crazy to do this anyhow. Merrick never swiped any diamonds. The two mugs doing time for that job are guilty. Merrick told me to put a few small stones in the vase with his ashes so they'd rattle and sound like diamonds."

JERRY nodded. "Ah, yes, let me go on from there—and correct me if I stray off the path. Merrick then ordered you to bring the vase to me. He told you to tell Attorney Symonds that the vase contained diamonds. You did and Symonds came after them.

"You also told a couple of particularly tough gutter rats the same thing and they came, too. Merrick knew this pair would stop at nothing to get the

diamonds. He figured that no matter what happened, I'd get the dirty end of the deal. I was bound to resist any attempt to steal the urn and in doing so, Merrick hoped I'd get killed."

"What are you asking me to talk for?" Dodd groaned. "You know everything."

"Everything but what really is in that vase besides Merrick's ashes and the pebbles that rattle like diamonds."

"It's cyanogen gas, under pressure. Enough to kill you and me in less than two minutes. Enough to kill fifty guys if they are in a room when this vase bursts. Now I've told you everything. Just take that thing out of here. Throw it into the river."

"Not quite yet," Jerry said. "Who were those two hot shots you sent after the vase? Where would they be right now? I mean where do they hang out?"

"I won't talk. They'd cut my throat," Dodd whimpered.

"Would you rather risk a slit throat or breathe in some of the gas." I think you're lying and I'm willing to shoot that vase to prove it."

"The two guys were Mike Parker and Timmy Blake. They—they been wanted for months and they hide out over an abandoned garage at the end of Carmody Street. That's why they wanted the rocks so bad. They needed a stake for a getaway."

Jerry arose and put the gun into his

pocket. Dodd suddenly raced for the door. Jerry stopped him as he got it open, shoved Dodd back into the room and knocked him cold with a short jab to the chin. Then he rushed downstairs and called Captain Arno.

A squad car picked him up in ten minutes. Meanwhile, radio cars were converging on the abandoned garage. All men had orders not to enter the place under any circumstances. A police emergency squad, equipped with gas masks, also raced to the scene.

Jerry and Captain Arno got out of the squad car and gave orders. The gas-masked policemen broke down a door and entered. In a moment or two windows were smashed on the second floor and faint wisps of white smoke curled out.

Later, Jerry and Captain Arno entered the premises when it was proclaimed safe. They looked at the two murderers. Both were seated at a small table on which rested the urn. Its lid had been removed. The two men were stone dead.

"Okay," Jerry turned away. "Merrick's ashes are really in that urn. I want them buried in the prison cemetery. We owe Merrick that much. This is the first time he ever helped the law get rid of two mad dogs. But then, it was their own fault. Avarice is a bad thing, Captain. What you see at that table proves it."

Next Month's Headliners: BLACK RING OF DOOM, a Norman Conquest Mystery Novel by BERKELEY GRAY—THE MURDEROUS MERMAID, an Exciting Willie Brann Novelet by BENTON BRADEN—and many other mystery thrillers!

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The wrestler's dull eyes widened at sight of the

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MURDER SETS

CHAPTER I NEW LEADING MAN

ATLAS STUDIOS was beginning to show the effects of the war. A lot of familiar faces were missing around the big lot as Cal Zeiglar moved toward his office in the publicity building. Zeiglar wished fervently that he too was in the Armed Forces.

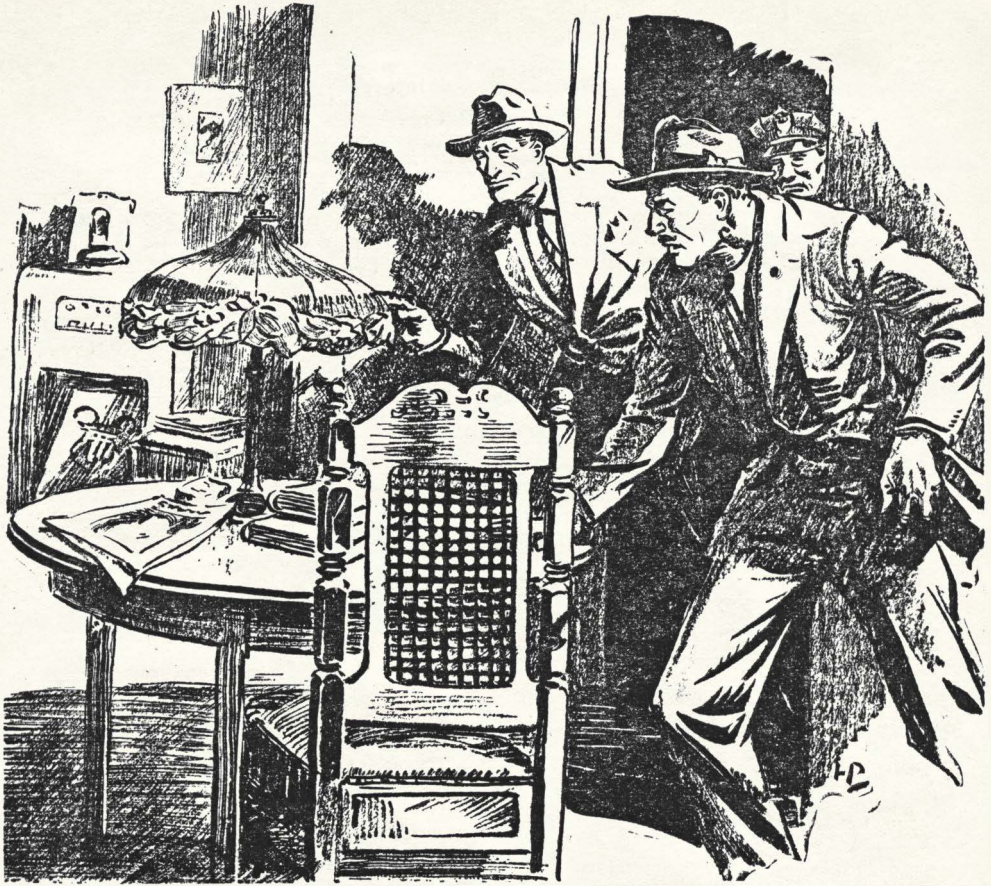
But Army doctors said no. A killer's bullet had once torn its way through his

thick body and the medicos viewing the wreckage had shaken their heads.

Shortly, Zeiglar was in Samuel Braun's expensive office talking to his small chief. The little producer was sympathetic, which was always a bad sign. Zeiglar had learned that when Braun wanted something, he always listened to Zeiglar's ravings, so the big publicity man said:

"Okay, let's have it. What's eating you, pal?"

Cal Zeiglar Battles to Unravel the Tangled



police, and he let his big hands relax

THE STAGE By W. T. BALLARD

Samuel Braun looked hurt. He fondly believed that he was the most misunderstood man in the picture business, and it always bothered him that Zeiglar seemed to understand him.

"Look, Cal," he said. "Thirty pictures we have contracted to make, and unless I play the lead in half of them, I don't know what we will do for actors."

"I always have said that you were the best actor on the lot," Zeiglar grinned, and it softened the lines of his face.

He was not quite thirty, not quite six feet, and he wore horn-rimmed glasses. The glasses were fakes. He wore them merely to make him look studious. He carried a gun because when he had done publicity for fight clubs, race tracks and hot spots, he had made enemies among the easy-money boys.

"So I've found a star!" Braun was triumphant. "Last night, Lida Thomas takes me to a place where this guy is hoofing, and not only can he dance and

Skeins of a Grim Hollywood Mystery!

sing, but he photographs. We make a test last night. Would you like to see?"

Zeiglar followed his small boss into the private projection room and watched while the test was run. When it was finished Braun turned to him in excitement.

"See? Didn't I tell you?"

ZEIGLAR was frowning thoughtfully. The guy on the screen was dark-haired, good-looking, and he seemed to be able to handle himself in front of a camera, but something bothered Zeiglar. He was haunted by the feeling that somewhere, some place, he'd seen the guy before.

There was something funny here, something which he couldn't quite put his finger on, but his quick brain was giving him a warning.

"Luck, huh?" Braun was bubbling with excitement. "We'll put him into 'King's Harvest' with Lida Thomas, and then 'Battle in the Sky' with June Fredricks. You go out and talk to him right away and start sending out copy."

"He's already signed a contract?"

"In these days there is no time to be wasted," the little producer reminded him. "Certainly I signed him. His name is Fred Davis, which we will change to Hunt Dawson, and here is his address." He drew a slip of paper from his pocket and handed it to Zeiglar.

Cal Zeiglar did not go directly to the address his employer had given him. Instead he crossed the lot to Lida Thomas' dressing room and knocked.

She answered the door herself, a tall girl with light wavy hair and clear, friendly blue eyes. Of all the stars on the big lot she was one of Zeiglar's favorites.

"Cal, darling!" Her voice was warm and vibrant and friendly. "Come in."

He came in. The small living room was simply furnished with chintz curtains and light, bright-colored furniture.

"What are you cooking up now? Another bond drive or a show for the USO?"

"Neither." He was watching her carefully as he spoke. "I understand that Sam found himself a new star last night, and that you were with him when he made the discovery."

"That's right." Her voice was casual, almost too casual. "We dropped into

this funny little club, and this Fred Davis was just starting his number. As soon as Sam saw him, he grabbed my arm. You know how he is when he gets excited."

"I know," Zeiglar admitted. "And you just happened to drop into this joint?"

Her voice lost some of its friendly tone.

"What are you getting at, Cal?"

Zeiglar shook his head. "I don't know. But I've got a hunch I've seen this Davis guy somewhere before, and I can't remember where."

"Give him a break." Her voice had a lot of feeling in it now. "He's got talent, and we need leading men so badly."

He looked at her directly. "Come on baby," he said. "Tell me the score. Tell me who this guy is?"

She shrugged. "You've got it wrong, brother. I never saw the lad before last night in my life, but I know how hard it is to get a start in pictures."

He stared at her, then rose, and moved toward the door.

"Okay, pal. I've still got my hunch, and I still don't like it."

He shut the door softly behind him.

THE address that Samuel Braun had scribbled turned out to be a small house at the head of one of the canyon roads which wound up out of Beverly toward Mullholland Drive.

The house was surrounded by a white picket fence, and inside was a little green lawn and a row of flower beds. Zeiglar clicked the gate open, and a police dog came charging around the house and jumped at the gate.

The dog did not bark. He simply came racing up and put on the brakes, eyeing Zeiglar as if he hadn't had a full meal since the beginning of meat rationing.

Zeiglar pulled the gate shut and stood eyeing the dog thoughtfully. Then he raised his voice and called. But the words brought no action from the house.

Zeiglar swore under his breath. He wasn't going to waste the time he'd used coming up there, not for an army of dogs. Pulling his gun, he reversed it. If the hound charged him, he meant to crack its skull. He pushed open the gate and tried to walk through it casually, having heard that the best way to treat

a strange dog was to ignore it.

But the police dog refused to be ignored. He didn't charge. He moved forward deliberately and fastened his teeth in the cuff of Zeiglar's topcoat.

There was nothing vicious in the gesture and no indication that he might take a bigger bite somewhere else. But he hung on and growled deep in his throat when Zeiglar tried to shake free.

"Okay, chum," Zeiglar said, "keep hold if it makes you happy, but don't tear that cloth. You can't get tweed like that nowadays."

He took an experimental step forward and the dog moved with him, still maintaining its grip.

They moved forward toward the house. The front screen was closed, but the door behind it was open, exposing a long living room.

Zeiglar raised his voice, calling Davis. He got no answer. The dog made deep whining noises as if trying to tell Zeiglar something. Cal hesitated. He took a step backward, but the dog refused to budge. Zeiglar stopped and the growling stopped. It was obvious the dog had no intention of permitting him to leave.

"Treed, by a hound."

Zeiglar was disgusted. He balanced the gun thoughtfully, but he liked dogs, and couldn't bring himself to strike this one. Tentatively he pulled open the screen door, moved forward as if to enter. The dog released his grip and stood, watchful, its tail a slow moving plume.

"So that's what you want?"

Zeiglar stepped into the house, and the screen banged. Zeiglar called again. He didn't like walking into a stranger's house, even if his hand had been rather forced.

But there was no answer. He walked around the corner of the sofa and understood why. A man lay on the light green carpet, lay on his back with the handle of a knife protruding from the left side of his chest. He lay very still, and the blood which had soaked the vest around the knife was dark and dried into a hard cake.

ZEIGLAR knew that the man was dead before he stooped and put one finger against the wrist. The skin was cold, and the arm stiff and unyielding.

The man had been dead for some time.

Zeiglar looked around the room. It was a cheerful room, with sunlight making a sort of ladder pattern as it came through the partly opened Venetian blinds and fell upon the green carpet. But it was a man's room, making it fairly certain that Davis had batched it.

And then he saw the leather handbag. It was almost the size of a small suitcase and there was a long strap, intended to be worn over the shoulder.

It lay partly under the edge of the couch, and as he crossed to pick it up, he had a feeling that he had seen it before.

He had. The brass initials pinned to the leather were L. T. Lida Thomas. It was her purse all right. He had seen her carrying it, many times.

Cal Zeiglar swore. Murder was bad enough, but to have Lida involved was much worse. Never had there been the least breath of scandal connected with her name. His first impulse was to leave with the purse, and let someone else find the body and report the murder. He moved almost to the screen door before he remembered the dog.

It stood beyond the screen, watching him. It growled, its lips drawing back to expose the long, white teeth.

As plainly as words, it was telling him that it did not want him to leave the house. Zeiglar wished that he could see into that dog's mind. In some way, it sensed that its owner was hurt, that something was wrong, but also it was evident that the dog thought everything would be all right as long as Zeiglar remained where he was.

He could shoot the dog, of course. The chances were that the shot might not be noticed, here in the hills, but strive as he might, he couldn't bring himself to put a bullet cold-bloodedly into the animal.

There was only one other thing to do—to summon the police. Not until after he had made the phone call did Zeiglar remember the purse which dangled from his arm. Then he looked at it with horrified eyes. It would never do if the cops found Lida Thomas' purse in the house.

He turned, looking for a hiding place. There was a small attic over the whole single-storied house, reached from a trap-door in the hall ceiling.

He got a chair, pushed open this trap,

crawled through and made his way across the open rafters to where the brick chimney rose to disappear through the roof. Into an angle made by a joist and the chimney he forced the purse, then climbed down, replaced his chair and washed off the attic dust.

That done, he sat down to wait for the cops.

CHAPTER II

DEAD MAN'S FACE



DETECTIVE - LIEUTENANT HOSTEMAN was almost as big as Zeiglar, but where the press agent's arms were banded with corded muscle, Hosteman was fat. He stood for a long moment looking down at the dead man, then

turned to Zeiglar.

"So if the dog hadn't penned you in here, you probably would have gone away and forgotten all about this?"

"Why not?" said Zeiglar. "Look at it from my angle, Al. We're desperate for actors. They'd probably even put you into a comedy if they caught you on the lot."

"Where do you get that comedy stuff?" Hosteman growled.

"Okay," said Zeiglar hastily. "Forget it. I didn't mean a thing. We're so short of actors that Braun might put even me in front of a camera. He goes to this night club, sees this man, drags him over to the studio and runs a test, but he's so certain, that he signs him to a contract without even waiting for a look at the test.

"The test is swell, so I'm sent out to find out all I can about the guy and start the old publicity mill grinding. He doesn't mean a thing to me. I'd never seen him in my life. I've got troubles aplenty without mixing up with murder."

The detective had been watching the police medical examiner, working on the body.

"What about it, Doc?" he asked.

"He's been dead six hours or more, probably more," the medico said. "And take a look at this."

Hosteman leaned down. "What?"

"These little scars. If you want my opinion, this bird had had his face lifted."

"You don't say." Hosteman swung around to face Zeiglar. "Just who is this guy anyhow?"

Zeiglar spread his hands. "I've told you everything that Braun told me."

"Then let's go talk to Braun."

He gave his orders to his men, then led the way to the door. The dog had been captured by three husky cops and chained in a corner of the yard. . . .

Samuel Braun was definitely not pleased to see them. The little executive had been eating in the small room off the commissary, and at sight of Hosteman he laid down his fork slowly.

"Don't tell me," he said, holding up both hands. "Wait till we get to my office." He rose and led the way.

When he had settled himself comfortably in the chair beside the big desk, he nodded.

"Okay, so tell me now. What have you done?"

Zeiglar lost his temper. "Since when have I ever done anything?" he demanded. "The only jackpots that I ever land in are when I'm on studio business. This new star of yours—"

Braun held up a hand warningly. "I won't hear one word against him."

Zeiglar was disgusted. "I don't talk about the dead."

"Dead?" It took a full moment for Braun to understand, then all color faded from his round, good-looking face. "Dead, already, and we haven't made one picture yet!"

Zeiglar told his chief what had happened, not forgetting to mention the dog.

BRAUN'S face was white, set, as he listened.

"Honest, I don't know a thing about him," he said. "I caught his act at this club and he was swell, so I rush him right to the studio. Hall Tempke is shooting the Rosemont picture on Stage Five, so we use the set, and Lida Thomas plays a scene with this guy. You saw the test."

"Not bad," the big publicity man admitted. "Somewhere this bird had learned to act."

"Which tells us nothing!" Hosteman exploded. "Who was he? Where'd he come from? Where was he working when you saw him?"

"At the Scotch Cellar—Provo Wil-

liams' spot," Braun said. "You could ask him."

"I will," said Hosteman, and left.

Zeiglar went with him. He did not want to be left alone with his chief. But he did not leave the lot. Instead he wandered down to Stage Five.

When he pushed open the heavy door and entered, Hall Tempke was talking with the director. They had a camera on a dolly and were shifting it around, testing the different angles.

The director wandered off to discuss the next shot with his principals and Tempke saw Zeiglar.

"Hi, sweetheart."

"Hello, Hall," Zeiglar said, and accepted a cigarette from the cameraman.

"Seen the test we made last night?"

Hall sounded interested. He was a tall man of about forty with hair which was showing a little gray at the temples, a deep-lined face and thoughtful black eyes.

Zeiglar nodded. "Not bad."

"I hear Braun signed him without waiting for the result on the test."

Zeiglar nodded again. "He signed him all right, but he'll never make a picture."

"You always talk around a subject without saying anything," Hall Tempke said, a hint of irritation in his voice. "What are you talking about now?"

"The guy's dead," said Zeiglar. "Someone opened up his side with a knife."

The cameraman was silent a moment, chuckled a little.

"That's just Braun's luck. The first possible leading man he gets his mitts on in months and he turns up dead. It certainly looks as if murder sets the stage around this lot."

"Doesn't it?" Zeiglar was watching the director show the leading man how to make love. The director was short and fat and fifty, and a shot of the rehearsal would have made a good comic sequence. "You saw this bird last night," Zeiglar went on. "You didn't recognize him or anything?"

"Recognize him?" Tempke looked startled. "How would I recognize him? I never saw him before."

Zeiglar looked unhappy. "I've seen him somewhere," he said as much to himself as to the cameraman. "And I can't remember where. The police doc-

tor thinks he had his face lifted."

"So what?" Tempke said. "Half the hams in this town have had their features tinkered with in one way or another."

"That's right," Zeiglar agreed. "Anyone else around while that test was shot?"

"Just some grips and a couple of juicers. Why?"

Zeiglar shrugged. "Still following my hunch. I think I've seen that guy before, somewhere."

He left the stage and walked over to the dressing rooms, only to learn that Lida Thomas had gone home. He left the lot then, deciding to pay her a visit.

THE actress lived in a small white Colonial a block off Sunset in Beverly. She owned a twenty-room house in Bel-Air, but with gas rationing, the lack of servants and the statutory limitations on high salaries, she had closed the big house for the duration.

A dusky maid in a neat black and white uniform showed him out onto a small tiled terrace where Lida lay stretched out in a deck chair. She smiled her greeting without bothering to get up.

"What do you think of our new star?"

"I don't know," he said, sitting down on the railing. "That's what I wanted to talk to you about."

Her eyes were wary. "Why me? I don't know anything about him."

"Don't you?" His eyes were steady on her face. "That's what I wondered."

"What's eating on you, chum?" she demanded.

"Murder," he said flatly.

"Murder?" She caught her breath, and her face went white. "What are you talking about, Cal?"

"I went up to this Davis' house," he said, "and the guy was dead when I got there. Someone had poked a knife between his ribs. You wouldn't know anything about that, would you?"

Her lips were pressed together, and it took a visible effort for her to steady her voice.

"Dead! But this is terrible."

"You wouldn't know anything about it, would you?" he repeated.

"Cal," she said, "we've been friends for a long time. I told you before that I know nothing about this Davis man."

"Then what was your handbag doing under his couch?"

They stared at each other in strained silence. Finally she spoke.

"The police—did they find it?"

"No," he told her. "At least they hadn't when I left. I hid it in the attic."

She drew a long, shuddering sigh. "Thank you," she said. "I don't know how my handbag got where you found it, but I've still told you the truth. I lost it last night, perhaps at the Scotch Cellar." She brightened a little. "I probably left it at the night club and Davis took it home with him, intending to return it to me this morning."

Zeiglar could tell that she was lying, and it made him angry, but he held his tongue.

"If that's the way you want it, pal-o."

She flushed a little, then said in a level voice:

"You—you aren't going to tell the police about finding my handbag?"

"I'm still working for the studio." His voice was almost curt as he rose. "If you change your mind, you know where to find me."

When he left the house, the sun was dropping into the western sky, and he judged it must be almost four o'clock. If he were smart, he'd go back to the studio and forget it. He had enough trouble as it was.

But the knowledge that there was something familiar about Davis kept haunting him, and the remembrance of the actress' handbag drove him on.

CHAPTER III OUT OF THE PAST



ZEIGLAR'S next stop was at the Scotch Cellar. From the outside it looked like a hole-in-the-wall place. You went down half a dozen steps from street level and along a brick-walled passage which had no decorations of any

kind.

The little foyer with the check-room opening off to the right came as a distinct surprise. The dining room was not open now, and looked like a dark cave, filled with tables on which chairs had been piled.

But the bar was doing business. Zeiglar went into the bar. It was long and

narrow and poorly lighted. Only one man was on duty, and the sole customers were a couple of sailors who were talking in low voices over their beer.

He slid onto a stool, ordered gin and tonic and when the man brought his drink asked for Provo Williams.

The bartender had a sad expression, as if he was grieving over his misspent life.

"Who wants him?" he demanded.

Zeiglar gave his name, thinking how much Hollywood was changing. Once, no bartender in the movie capital would have needed to ask who he was.

The man's dark eyes ran over Zeiglar's thick-knit body as he half expected to see a sawed-off shotgun under the tweed overcoat. Then he jerked a thumb toward a door in the rear of the long room.

"He's in the office."

Zeiglar picked up his drink and moved toward the door. He knocked, and when a voice answered, he entered.

Provo Williams was of medium size, fairly chunky. He had black hair, black eyes, a square jaw that gave his face a saturnine expression, and a tight-lipped mouth.

He had been looking through the contents of a steel file, and turned, a manila folder in his hands.

"Hello, Cal." There was no pleasure in the greeting, no emotion of any kind.

Zeiglar shut the door and stood watching the man. At one time, Provo Williams had run a fight club on the east side of Los Angeles, and Zeiglar had handled some of the publicity. They were not friends, but knew each other well.

Williams ran through the file in his hand, returned it to the steel cabinet and pushed the drawer shut. Then he walked over to his desk and sat down, tilting his chair back and putting his feet on a pulled-out drawer.

A door beside the file cabinet opened and a huge man with wide shoulders and a little round head came in. The head seemed to set directly on his shoulders as if he had no neck at all, and one of his ears was twisted and puffed to almost twice its natural size, and his face had been scrambled.

Zeiglar grinned as he recognized the man. As a wrestler, the fellow had achieved some local fame aided by Zeig-

lar's publicity. He was known as "The Terror," and he looked it.

He saw Cal, and his thickened lips drew back in what he may have thought was a grin.

"Pal-o! It's a long time no see."

Zeiglar's shoulders were still against the wall, his drink still in his hand.

"Hi, Terror," he said. "How goes it?"

"Solid," said the Terror. "Right in the groove."

HE HOOKED twice with his right hand and shadow-boxed, looking like a turtle which had suddenly learned to stand on its hind legs.

"If Provo would get me a match I'd moider them, simply moider them!" he said.

"Sure," said Zeiglar, and looked again at the man behind the desk.

Provo Williams was watching, his eyes as unmoving as black marbles set in concrete.

"What's on your mind, Cal?"

"You had an entertainer here, hooper named Davis," Zeiglar said. "Braun gave him a test last night."

"So?"

"So, the guy's dead. Someone run a shiv between his ribs and I find the body. The cops are asking questions I can't answer."

"They were here." Only Williams' lips moved. His eyes remained hard and watchful and wary. "They didn't find out a thing."

"Why not?" Zeiglar appeared at ease, but he was a little tense, and he kept an eye on the Terror, for that wrestler's big hands could break a man in two.

Provo Williams shrugged. "Because we didn't know a thing. The guy was a stranger to us, see. He come in here a few weeks back and asked for a job. We gave him a tryout, the crowd liked him, so he was working. As simple as that."

It sounded simple, but there was something here that was not as simple as it sounded. Zeiglar had caught sight of the Terror's eyes. The man was half punch-drunk, walking on his heels, as the saying went, but he was not as stupid as his scrambled features made him appear.

His eyes were round and black, and when the dancer had been mentioned, something which might well have been hate was in them. He opened his mouth

as if to speak, but Provo Williams moved his hand and the big man lapsed into uneasy silence.

Zeiglar shrugged. "Well, if that's the way it is—" He made his voice sound uncertain.

"That's the way it is." There was nothing uncertain about Williams' voice. It was plain that the interview was over, and the only thing the nightclub owner wanted was for Zeiglar to leave.

Zeiglar grinned a little, waved his hand at the wrestler and left the office. Outside the Scotch Cellar he walked down the block to a sheltering doorway.

Five minutes later, the Terror came bounding into the street, looked both ways and then hurried to a parked taxi.

Zeiglar found a cab himself and told the driver to follow the wrestler. They wound in and out of Hollywood traffic, following Sunset into Beverly. Fifteen minutes later the Terror parked in front of Lida Thomas' white house and hurried up the walk. The door slammed behind the man's big back, and Zeiglar frowned, then told his driver to take him back to Hollywood. . . .

ZEIGLAR was having dinner by himself in a booth at the Derby when Hall Tempke came in and sat down. He ordered, then looked across the table.

"You know that guy you were talking about this morning?" he said. "The one who got himself dead after we gave him the test?"

Zeiglar nodded.

"I've been trying to remember ever since I talked to you. I'd seen him before somewhere, but I couldn't remember where. I've got it now."

Zeiglar laid his fork down slowly. "You have? Who was he?"

The cameraman shrugged. "I don't know his name, but he used to be a fighter. I watched him walking around last night, and something in the way he walked made me think of fighters."

Zeiglar swore under his breath. "You've got it, keed."

Tempke looked expectant. "You know who he was?"

Zeiglar shook his head. "No," he admitted slowly. "I don't know who he was, but I remembered where I saw him. He was fighting at that club Provo Williams used to run on the east side.

And I know another thing, if it matters. Provo is the biggest liar in the territory. The so and so told he that he didn't know who the kid was. Come on, let's get going."

"Where?" Tempke was just starting his dinner.

"Down to that gym on Main Street. They've got pictures of every guy who ever worked there, and the chances are that this kid did. Pretty near everyone who ever fought in L. A. worked there at one time or another."

"Wait till I finish this." Tempke was attacking his steak. "You can't waste meat these days."

He ate hurriedly, while Zeiglar watched. Thirty minutes later they were in the office of the Main Street gym and "Pop" Bellows was showing them his pictures.

There were thousands of them, but they narrowed their search. The murdered man could not have been over thirty, and as Zeiglar recalled, had been a preliminary boy when he'd seen him, eight or nine years before.

It took half an hour before Tempke picked up a picture and passed it to Zeiglar.

"Here's your man."

Zeiglar looked. The picture was that of a black-haired kid whose nose had been broken in two places, and who had a lot of cartilage over his left eye plus an old scar. He stared at it for some time, shutting his eyes part way. Then he nodded.

"I guess you're right, but the plastic surgeon certainly doctored that puss until no one would recognize it."

He turned the picture over. On the back, in faded ink was written:

Kid Hanna, 1929

Zeiglar handed the picture to the old man.

"Know who that is?"

The gym owner squinted at it. "Seems like I recall. He was a good game boy with a nice left, but he got into trouble."

"What kind of trouble?"

The old man scratched his head. "Don't exactly remember. Bad rap as I recall. He took it on the lam."

"Local rap?"

Pop scratched his unshaven jaw.

"Seems like. Don't recall."

"We'll soon find out," Zeiglar told his companion as they left the gym. "If it was local, he'll be in the records."

They headed toward the court-house.

"Kid Hanna's name appeared in the records. He had been booked as John James Hanna, charged with the murder of an extra girl. He had managed to escape from the old jail while awaiting the preliminary hearing, and had never been caught."

"Funny," Zeiglar said, as he led the way back toward Hosteman's office. "The cops should have recognized him by his fingerprints."

He said the same thing to Hosteman fifteen minutes later. The detective-lieutenant ran his blunt fingers through his thick hair.

"I didn't tell you," he said in his rumbling voice. "You're so smart it don't pay to tell you nothing, but his fingerprints had been operated on, and other skin grafted over them. Some doctor took a lot of trouble to make certain that kid wasn't recognized. But what I want to know is, who killed him and why?"

Zeiglar didn't know. What he wanted to do was to talk to Lida Thomas. But he didn't want the cops nor Tempke, nor anyone else knowing that she was involved. It took him the better part of an hour to lose the cameraman and start off for the actress' white house.

CHAPTER IV

MISSING DIAMONDS



LIDA THOMAS was not glad to see Zeiglar when the maid ushered him into the long living room. She had been alone, staring at the fire on the hearth, and she barely turned her head when he came in.

Zeiglar waited until the maid had gone, then walked to the girl's side and said in an undertone:

"Hadn't you better tell me everything you know about Kid Hanna?"

She started as if he had struck her with a red-hot poker, and the hand which held her cigarette trembled.

"Who?"

"You're a swell actress," he said, "but you aren't good enough to play this part. You know who Kid Hanna was."

and the time's come to lay your cards face up on the table. The only reason I'm in this mess is because of you. Now I want the answers or I'm going to tell Hosteman about that handbag of yours and let him come out and ask the questions."

"You wouldn't dare!"

"Oh yes I would." He was suddenly angry, angry with her, with the studio, with the whole business. "Who was he?"

"My—my brother." The words came from her unwillingly.

Zeiglar had expected almost anything, but not this.

"Your brother? How come? Why'd he have his face doctored?"

"It's a long story," she said, slowly. "Mother and Dad were in vaudeville and we kids were practically raised on the stage. After they were killed in an auto accident, I got a job dancing in a New York night club and Jack—that was the kid's real name—started fighting. I tried to talk him out of it, but he wouldn't listen. Then I got acquainted with a cameraman and he introduced me to a producer. I got a test, clicked, and was in pictures."

"Who was the cameraman? Tempke?"

She nodded.

"Then he knew all the time who Hanna was, even while he was making the test?"

She shook her head. "No, he didn't recognize him. He and the Kid had been friendly in the old days. He'd have said something if he'd recognized him. That was the real test we wanted to make. We thought if Tempke didn't recognize him, no one else would, and it would be safe for him to have a try at pictures."

"And this girl he killed—"

"He didn't kill her!" Lida said sharply. "It was all a frame-up. That girl stole a hundred thousand dollars' worth of diamonds from one of the producers. He had her killed, and framed my brother."

"And the producer?" Zeiglar was beginning to get the angle. "You know who he was?"

She nodded. "I know, but it doesn't matter. He died six years ago. Ran his car into a tree."

Zeiglar whistled softly. "That doesn't

help us much. I was hoping you knew who killed your brother?"

"I know all right." She sounded angry. "It was Provo Williams. That wrestler of his was here this afternoon, making threats. He said that if I didn't turn over the diamonds they'd throw acid in my face."

Zeiglar stared. "This is getting involved. What makes them think you have the diamonds?"

"At the time of the murder," she explained, "Provo helped my brother get out of the country. I furnished the money and he went to South America, then to Australia. Somewhere he found a doctor to operate on his face and alter his fingerprints. Then he came back here."

"That was a fool thing to do," Zeiglar said.

She nodded. "I tried to tell him that. I said I wouldn't help him unless he agreed to leave town. So he went to Provo. He told Provo some story about knowing where the diamonds were, and offered to split with him if Provo gave him a break at the night club."

"After I heard that he was dancing there I tried to get him to leave. He said that the safest place in the world was right in L. A. We argued, but I finally decided that if he were going to stay in town anyhow, he might as well be in pictures, so I arranged the test."

ZEIGLAR had listened with attention. "But why should Provo kill him?" he asked.

"It's simple," she explained. "After the test, I went up to the house with Jack. He was laughing. He said that as soon as Provo had heard about the test to be made, he had demanded his share in the diamonds. Jack told Provo to wait, said he'd give him fifty thousand in cash instead as soon as he could earn that much."

"But the diamonds?"

She lost her patience. "Jack never had them! His talk about them was just bait to get Provo to help him. I can't prove it, but I know what happened. After I left, Provo went up to Jack's to demand the diamonds. They had an argument and Provo killed him."

Zeiglar wasn't convinced. "What makes you so sure?"

"You saw Jack's dog," she said. "You

realize that he would object to a *stranger* doing anything to Jack?"

Zeiglar had a keen remembrance of the dog and nodded.

"There you have it," she explained. "That's why I know that Provo Williams killed my brother. Keep out of this, Cal. Let me handle it in my way. I'll take care of Mr. Provo Williams."

Cal Zeiglar was far from happy when he left the little white house. His years with the studio had given him a personal interest in the affairs of the sprawling lot which could not have been greater had he been the owner.

He walked slowly down the street, buried in thought, and was not conscious of the dark shadow behind the row of palm trees until the gun spat its threat of death. The bullet tore away a chunk of his hat-brim, passing close to his ear.

HE PLUNGED headlong toward the shelter of some trees, tugging at his gun in his shoulder holster as he jumped forward.

The second bullet made a pinging noise as it plowed along the bark of one tree, and black rage almost blinded Zeiglar.

He crouched, circling the trees, intending to come around on the killer's flank. But the man must have guessed his intention, for by the time that Zeiglar had completed his circle, the line of shadow cast by the palms where he had been was undisturbed, the unseen killer was gone.

Zeiglar stood watching, waiting, listening for movement across one of the dark yards which flanked the quiet street. With the dimout, it was hard to see anything. The lawns were deep-shadowed, and the windows carefully curtained. The killer might have slipped into one of the neighboring houses, between them, or into Lida Thomas' house.

This last thought made Zeiglar frown deeply. Had Lida been telling the truth? There were certain parts of her story which were hard to believe. He stood a moment longer, staring at her shaded windows, then the sound of a siren brought him into action.

Not a single door or window had opened along the street, following the shots, but someone had evidently called the police.

He sped down the street, knowing that there was a possibility that his flying figure might draw a shot from one of the houses. But none came.

Rounding the corner, he ran on and on. Not until he had traveled half a dozen blocks of the dark streets, and rounded three corners was he certain that the cops were not following. Then he hailed a cruising taxi and headed for home.

The apartment in which he lived was a quiet house off Franklyn. He paid the taxi driver, went around to the rear of the house and climbed the back stairway without going through the lobby.

As he walked along the hall toward his door, shoving into his pocket the horn-rimmed glasses from which he could take a rest now, a frown was on his face. There was a little crack under the door through which a thread of light showed. He had visitors, and he was not at all certain who they were.

With his right hand, he loosened the gun in the clip under his arm. With his left he twisted the doorknob and shoved it open.

Provo Williams was across the room, his back to the door. He had pulled the cushions from Zeiglar's couch and was running his fingers down into the edges around the upholstery.

"Find anything?" Zeiglar said, his gun in his hand.

The fight manager swung around, staring at Zeiglar and the gun. He did not seem perturbed.

"Put it away, Cal," he said coolly.

"No," said Zeiglar, anger in his voice. "Put those cushions back, quick."

Provo made no motion to obey. Instead he said, "Take him, Terror."

The big wrestler had been concealed behind the open door. He bounced into view as Zeiglar started to turn, but Cal's movement was too late.

The Terror moved with speed surprising in one of his size. His big hands shot out, caught Zeiglar's shoulders and spun him around so that the gun was pointed the other way, then the wrestler kicked the door shut, holding Zeiglar as if in a vise.

"Break his back, huh?" he asked, and sounded like a pleased child.

"Not yet." Williams had not moved. "Drop the gun, Cal."

Zeiglar dropped the gun. It was ut-

terly useless to struggle against the grip of the big wrestler. He had seen the Terror operate. The man's strength was almost unbelievable.

He let the gun slide and stood quiet. If Williams ordered his death, there would be nothing that could save him, for the Terror lacked judgment as a child lacks judgment.

"All right," Zeiglar told Williams. "You're calling the play. What do you want?"

"The diamonds."

"What diamonds?"

"The ones Kid Hanna had hidden up at his place."

"You're crazy. I never saw any diamonds there."

Williams' eyes glistened. "Twist his neck a little, Terror, not too much. We want him to be able to talk."

THE big man's hands tightened around Zeiglar's throat. They felt like closing iron bands from which there was no appeal.

The press agent waved both arms wildly, for he could not speak.

"Enough," said Williams, and the grip lessened.

Zeiglar drew in a great lungful of air gratefully and it was a full moment before he could speak. When he could, he said levelly:

"I'm not lying, Provo. I haven't any diamonds. I never saw Kid Hanna alive. You're making a mistake somewhere, and it isn't going to do you any good for your strong boy to snap my neck."

Williams started to give the Terror a signal to continue, then hesitated.

"If I find that you've been lying—"

"Look," said Zeiglar. "I worked for you for years, and you never knew me to pull a fool trick of lying just for a few bucks."

"This isn't a few bucks," said Williams. "There's plenty of dough involved here."

"But not as much as I figure my life is worth," Zeiglar told him. "If I knew where those rocks were, I'd tell you in a hurry. I like to live, and when I die, I don't care to be choked to death by a human gorilla."

"Who's a gorilla?" the Terror tightened his hold on Zeiglar's throat.

"Look," said Zeiglar desperately. "A

gorilla is the strongest thing in the world, Terror. That's a compliment."

"Oh." The big man released his grip slightly.

Williams smiled, but there was no humor in his twisting lips.

"You think fast, Cal, but you don't think fast enough to get out of this. One more—" He broke off as someone knocked on the door, then said in a whisper. "Who's that?"

Zeiglar had no idea. He didn't care. The only thing he was afraid of was that whoever was outside might go away.

"Come in!" he shouted. The last part of his words were lost for the Terror shut off Zeiglar's wind.

Williams swore under his breath, motioning desperately for the wrestler to release his hold. But the Terror's dull mind was not geared to quick thinking. He merely kept staring at his boss without relaxing his grasp on Zeiglar's neck.

The door was thrown open and Detective-Lieutenant Hosteman thrust his way into the room, followed by two of his men. His quick eyes took in the couch, the disordered desk, and the Terror.

The wrestler's dull eyes widened at sight of the police, and let his big hands relax. Zeiglar was gasping for breath, but he managed to straighten his coat as he turned to face Hosteman.

"Hi, Lieutenant."

"It looks as if we just got here in time," the police detective said.

"Got here in time?" Zeiglar managed to get a faint note of surprise into his tone. "Oh, you think the Terror was choking me?" He laughed, the sound hoarse because of his damaged vocal cords. "You've got it wrong, Lieutenant. The Terror was just showing me a new hold."

HOSTEMAN'S face reddened with anger.

"What the devil! We get here in time to save you a broken neck, and you give us a run-around. Listen, Zeiglar, you aren't in the clear on this yourself. You wouldn't by any chance know anything about this?"

With a flourish he drew a package from behind his broad back, stripped off the brown paper wrapping and exposed Lida Thomas' handbag. Zeiglar stared

at it, his eyebrows lifted in a faintly inquiring frown.

"Whose is it?" he asked. "You don't think that it belongs to me?"

Hosteman swore. "We know who it belongs to. What we're asking you is how it happened to be poked into the crevice beside the chimney in the attic out at that murdered dancer's house?"

Williams had been watching from the far side of the room. He came forward now, trying to keep the eagerness out of his voice.

"Was there anything of value in it?"

Hosteman pivoted to face him. "And just what of value are you looking for?"

Provo Williams' face was an unreadable mask. "Me? You've got it wrong, Lieutenant. I'm not looking for anything."

Hosteman gave the apartment another sweeping glance.

"That's what you say. All right, you two. You're going to ride out to Lida Thomas' house while I question her about this handbag. Someone's lying here, and I want to know who it is."

Zeiglar pulled him off to one side and spoke earnestly for a couple of minutes. The police lieutenant listened, his face reddening.

"You'd better make it good," he said finally, and let Zeiglar cross the room to the phone.

CHAPTER V TRIED ON THE DOG



AMUEL BRAUN did not like to be called from his bed. The small producer operated for fourteen hours each day with the speed of a dynamo, and the other ten hours were reserved for rest. So he was in a peevish humor when he met Zeiglar in the hallway of Lida Thomas' home.

"Was it necessary that you should call me?" he demanded.

"Look, Sam," Zeiglar said wearily. "I've managed so far not to drag the studio in, but I needed yours and Tempke's help if I was going to keep this quiet any longer."

The cameraman had accompanied Braun and he looked as if he had also been called from sleep.

"What's the score?" he asked.

Zeiglar shrugged. "Ask Hosteman. It's his party, not mine. I'm no detective. I just write lies about the great and make them sound as nearly like the truth as I can."

"Now listen!" Hosteman sounded beligerent. "The trouble is that none of you Hollywood people ever play fair with the cops. You're always talking about wanting publicity, but when there's been a murder around, you want to keep as far off stage as you can."

He turned to face the silent actress. Lida Thomas' face was white, and her fingers drummed nervously on the arm of her chair.

"This is your handbag," he said. "We found it in the attic of the house in which this Kid Hanna was murdered. Do you mind telling me how it got there?"

She shot a look of deep resentment at Zeiglar. He stirred for a moment under her gaze, then he said:

"I put it there, Hosteman. I found it under the couch the morning that I found the body."

Hosteman swung about with the speed of a cat pouncing on a mouse.

"So you admit concealing evidence in a murder case!"

"The studio has a million dollars tied up in Lida's latest picture," Zeiglar told him in a tired voice. "We simply couldn't afford to have her involved in a murder, especially since she didn't kill Hanna."

"She didn't, huh?" Hosteman was raging, but he kept his voice under close control. "And just what makes you so certain she didn't kill Hanna?"

"For one thing, a sister doesn't usually murder her brother."

"A sister?" The detective showed his surprise.

"Look," said Zeiglar. "At the rate that we're going, we'll be here for a week. Suppose you let me tell you what happened."

"For years I've been trying to get you to talk," Hosteman grunted, "and now you're asking my permission. Go ahead. But you'd better make it good."

Zeiglar's neck was still sore and his voice hoarse from the effect of the Terror's fingers. He looked around at the group gathered in Lida Thomas' living room. Provo Williams was watching

him with suspicious black eyes. The Terror was puzzled, Braun excited, and Hali Tempke managed to look faintly amused.

ONLY Lida showed any sign of fear. The bit of lace which was her handkerchief had been twisted into a little damp ball which she kept moving from one hand to the other. Zeiglar felt sorry for her.

"We all know who the murdered man was," he said. "An ex-fighter who's name was John James Hanna. This Hanna was accused of murdering an extra girl with whom he had been friendly. This murder took place in Nineteen-thirty. Hanna was arrested and managed to escape. He was not recaptured, and the police lost all track of him."

"Get on with the story," Hosteman said heavily. "We all know that."

"What you don't know," said Zeiglar, "is that Jack Hanna was Lida Thomas' brother and that she furnished the money for him to get out of the country."

"If the papers find out—" Sam Braun groaned.

"They probably will," said Zeiglar, "but we're more concerned with something else at the moment. We want to know who killed Hanna, and why. To figure that out, we have to go back for a moment to the other murder, the murder of the extra girl in Nineteen-thirty—thirteen years ago. From the records I learned that her name was Peggy Cunningham and that she was supposedly killed in young Hanna's apartment.

"A leading producer had loaned her some diamonds to be worn to a première. But the girl slipped away from the theater, wearing the diamonds, and she didn't have them when her body was discovered. The diamonds were never recovered."

At mention of the diamonds, Provo Williams' black eyes had brightened a little with renewed interest.

"So what?" Hosteman said.

"So we skip thirteen years," Zeiglar said. "During those years, Hanna had been to South America and to Australia. Somewhere along the line, he had his face operated on and his fingertips altered. He was certain no one would recognize him, so he returned to this

country and appealed for help to his sister.

"She was afraid he would be caught. He was certain of his disguise and laughed at her. But she wouldn't help unless he agreed to go away. He refused and went to Williams under whom he worked as a fighter. He told Williams he knew where the missing diamonds were, and offered him half the stones in return for help. Williams agreed."

"You can't prove any of this, you know," the little fight manager said sharply.

"Maybe I can." Zeiglar was unperturbed. "Williams gave Hanna a job, dancing at his club. When Lida heard that her brother was still in town, she decided that he might as well be working in pictures. She therefore took Sam Braun to the Scotch Cellar and Sam was so impressed by the man's work that he took him back to the lot where Hall Tempke was shooting a picture, and they gave Hanna a test. After that, Lida went to her brother's home, they talked awhile and she left, forgetting her handbag. The next morning I found his body."

"Well?"

"Hanna had met an old friend at the studio," Zeiglar said, turning to look at Hall Tempke. "It was quite a shock for Tempke. He had almost forgotten Hanna."

TEMPKE had ceased to smile.

"I told you I didn't recognize him," he snapped.

"But you did recognize him. It gave you a start, didn't it, because Hanna had agreed to let it be believed he had killed that extra girl, if you would arrange his escape and help him out of the country."

"You're crazy!"

"No," said Zeiglar. "I checked with an old friend of mine, a reporter who has covered this town for years. He remembered that you were friendly with Peggy Cunningham—that was the extra girl's name—and at the time, you were friendly with Hanna. You killed that girl for those stones. You were broke, and out of a job. You killed her at Hanna's apartment, and he came in and caught you.

"He agreed to take the blame if you

would help his sister in pictures. You sold the diamonds and helped Lida, then rose to be one of the town's leading cameramen. Everything was swell, and suddenly a ghost out of your past, a ghost with a new face, rises before you for a screen test. So you trailed him home, waited until Lida left, then went in and killed him."

"Prove it," said Tempke. "You haven't any evidence."

"Yes," said Zeiglar. "You were seen. A dog saw you. He let you go after the killing, because he had seen you with his master, recognized you as a friend, and thought that everything was all right. But he knows differently now. He would recognize you at once, charge you, if he had the chance. I'm going to make the test."

"No!" said Tempke. "No!"

"Yes."

Zeiglar made a gesture with his hand and one of the policeman opened the door. Zeiglar stepped over behind Tempke.

The dog came in. Every eye in the room was on him. He stood in the entrance for a moment as if uncertain, then his eyes seemed to center on Tempke and he advanced stiff-legged.

Tempke watched him, his face dead-white, his eyes staring. The dog growled a little, then he jumped, his forepaws striking the cameraman and knocking him backward to the floor.

TEMPKE squealed in terror, trying to protect his throat.

"Get him off! Keep him from killing me!"

Two of the policemen dragged the dog back. The animal acted as if it had gone crazy, trying to get free of their restraining grasp.

"Will you talk," Zeiglar said, "or shall I tell them to release the hound?"

Tempke was almost babbling in his fear. "I'll talk!" he shouted. "I killed him! I killed him!"

It was some time later when Lida Thomas asked Cal Zeiglar:

"What made you suspect Tempke?"

"Several things," Zeiglar told her. "First, he denied ever having seen Hanna, then said that something had

seemed familiar about the man from the first. I think he intended to try to throw the blame on Williams and the Terror. They knew nothing about the killing. They were only after the diamonds, which had been sold years ago.

"I called up a newspaper man and asked if Tempke had ever been friendly with Peggy Cunningham. The answer was yes. It was well-known that Tempke had helped you in pictures. Since he had never shown any romantic interest in you I guessed he might have made a trade with your brother."

"You mean that actually you had no evidence?"

"The murder of your brother wiped out all evidence. When murder sets the stage, you have to use your head to try and force a confession. I figured that Tempke was worried, and that his conscience rather than the dog would actually scare him to the point of talking. It worked."

LIDA'S voice was accusing when she answered.

"If Hall Tempke ever finds out that you were holding a piece of meat behind his head and that the dog was interested in getting at the meat, not in attacking him, he'll repudiate that confession."

Zeiglar shrugged. "At least the studio came out all right. But we still haven't found a leading man."

Sam Braun's small round face was wreathed in smiles.

"Don't let that trouble you," he told them. "I have just had a stupendous idea. Every time we find a new leading man, the Army puts him into uniform. So we won't use a leading man. We will make a dog picture. That is a smart dog, even if it was meat he was after instead of a murderer. Another Rintin-tin has been found, and no one can take him from me."

Zeiglar started to laugh. Braun looked offended.

"What is so funny, please? It is a good idea."

"It's a swell idea," Zeiglar admitted. "The trouble is the government thought of it first. They're training such police dogs for military work. That hound has been in the Army since noon today."

Watch for More CAL ZEIGLAR Stories by W. T. Ballard



CORTLAND FITZSIMMONS

A Toast to Victory

By CORTLAND FITZSIMMONS

Author of "Tied for Murder," and Other Mystery Best-Sellers

She is old, eighty-three her next birthday. She lives just around the corner in a little house and each day until the sun gets too high she works in her Victory Garden.

She came with a tray of blackberries picked from her own vines. Her eyes twinkled merrily as she offered them for sale at ten cents a box.

She often came after that, selling apricots, delicious ripe figs, persimmons and avocados. Late in November we paid her a dollar for six blooms of Bird of Paradise. She was taking orders for Christmas decorations—wreaths at fifty cents each.

Some of our neighbors said we were foolish to encourage her, that she had plenty of money, but we liked her visits, liked her bright chatter and boundless energy. She was

always in a hurry, but on Christmas Eve she came in and had a glass of wine and a piece of fruit cake.

"I want to thank you folks, you've been good to me." Her bright eyes danced. "I expect you've heard stories about me, since you're new here."

We smiled.

"I'm not rich. I have a pension and I've always managed to make it do until the war came. We've all got to do our part to beat the Japs and that old Hitler. There isn't much I can do but I've tried and thanks to you and some other people I've been able to buy a hundred and fifty dollars' worth of war bonds this year and, if God keeps me healthy, I'm going to double it next year." She raised her glass. "To victory."

We drank with her and to her.

A WAR BOND MESSAGE FOR ALL AMERICANS



Nick's mind whirled in merry-go-round circles as the music played on and on

THE MOTIVE GOES ROUND AND ROUND

By FREDRIC BROWN

Nick Razatsky, carnival concessionaire, sacrifices a zebra on the altar of devotion, and solves a baffling death mystery!

THERE was something standing by Mr. Nicholas Razatsky's bed. In the shadowy dimness of light coming through canvas, it might have been anything. It might have been a lavender antelope with gilded hoofs. In fact, it was.

Knowing that it was, Mr. Razatsky didn't worry about it. He rolled over and the canvas cot shivered under his weight, but didn't collapse. He opened one eye sleepily.

Something had awakened him and it couldn't—on second thought—have been

The lavender antelope. For the antelope was made of wood. It stood there motionless and silent. It suggested motion, for its gilded hoofs were raised in a running position, and its body was supported by a brass rod running up from the flooring through its stomach and out its back into the darkness above.

Mr. Razatsky opened his other eye and raised himself up on one elbow.

Beyond the antelope was a laughing zebra, but its laugh was set in silent plastic. It was a good-looking zebra, though, much shinier and handsomer than the wooden animals, and Mr. Razatsky wished he could replace all of his menagerie with the new-fangled plastic ones.

Beyond the zebra was a horse with a silver mane, and beyond the horse the canvas sidewall that hung around the merry-go-round's circumference at night.

But whatever Mr. Razatsky had heard, it could not have been one of his animals. Nor could it have been a noise from the carnival lot outside. There was noise outside, for a few of the concessions were still running to late hangers-on. Lots of noise out there, and the sound of a strong wind thumping canvas, too. But Mr. Razatsky had turned in early tonight, and his ear had been attuned only to sound within the circling sidewall of his merry-go-round. The sounds outside he heard, but they would not have awakened him.

He cleared his throat and asked, "Is anybody?"

There wasn't any answer. Mr. Razatsky sighed and got out of bed. He walked around the platform, shining his flashlight first into the swan-car and then into the baby-elephant-car. There was a drunken rideboy asleep in the latter.

MR. RAZATSKY sighed again. Those nicely upholstered spots were magnets, it seemed, for drunken rideboys, the ideal place for them to sleep off a jag. But a drunken rideboy can make an awful mess of a merry-go-round float.

He said, "Pete, wake up, no?" and shook the rideboy's shoulder until the fellow's eyes opened.

"Aw, Nick," mumbled the sleeper. "Let a guy sleep."

"Somewhere else, yes," said Mr. Razatsky. "All night, somewhere else.

"Good-by now." Gently but firmly he ejected the rideboy and then went back to sit on the edge of his cot alongside the engine-housing in the center of the merry-go-round.

Outside was the sound of stakes being driven. That meant it looked like wind coming up, and they were double-staking the bigger tops. No danger to his merry-go-round, of course; no ordinary windstorm could bother *that*.

But the sound of staking made him restless. Instead of lying down again, Mr. Razatsky pulled on his shoes and trousers—the latter having been hanging over the lavender antelope—and went outside.

The Great Hernando, who ran the illusion show, was standing there leaning against the merry-go-round ticket booth, watching the canvasmen ring a stake.

Spang. Spang. Then faster, *spang, spang, spang.* Then merging into one continuous sound as the stake went into hard-packed ground as though into butter.

"Wind coming up, Perfessor?" Mr. Razatsky yelled over the sound.

The Great Hernando turned. "Hi, Nick," he said. "Don't think so, but it might. They're just playing safe."

Mr. Razatsky nodded. "Time is it?" he asked.

"Little after midnight. I'm going to the cookhouse for java. Come along?"

"See you there later, Perfessor," said Mr. Razatsky.

He took the Great Hernando's place against the ticket booth as the illusionist went on up the midway.

It was good to feel the wind in his face and to hear the rhythmic spang of sledge on stake-head. But he wasn't thinking about either of these things, nor yet coffee with the "Perfessor."

For Mr. Razatsky's mind was in the ticket booth against which he leaned. Not, however, on the subject of tickets and profits. Tickets and profits took care of themselves when you had a merry-go-round concession with a good solid carney, and when you ran it faithfully and lived economically.

It was not for financial reasons that the booth against which he leaned was to Mr. Razatsky a shrine. True, in afternoon and evening, the booth held tickets, but it held also the seller of those tickets, Margie Evans.

Young and beautiful was Margie Evans. Ever since, at the far-distant opening of the season, Mr. Razatsky had hired her to sell tickets, he had been on the merry-go-round figuratively even more than literally.

Not that he had ever said anything to her, or ever would. It was too ridiculous to think of a slob like him winning a girl like Margie.

For Margie was young and beautiful. She had blond hair that was like corn-silk and eyes that were brown and bright, but soft like her hand when—once in a long while—it accidentally touched his.

OH, YES, golden Margie was too good for a fat-and-almost-forty Rooshian carney who could not even speak too-good English yet. Well, maybe he wasn't fat, Mr. Razatsky solaced himself, but anyway stocky and plump, which was even worse because it was funnier.

And then there was the fact that Margie worked for him and if he ever said anything to her or tried to take her anywhere or anything, she'd think he was trying to take advantage of the fact that she worked for him, wouldn't she?

Yes, it was hopeless. So hopeless that he was glad that young Mr. Nesterman had been hanging around the ticket booth of late. Toby Nesterman was the nephew of old man Burman, who owned the carney. Maybe some day Toby would own it, or anyway a slice of it.

And Toby Nesterman was a nice young feller, too. It would make a good match for Margie.

The canvasmen had worked their way around back of the illusion show top now, and the midway was deserted. Mr. Razatsky sighed and turned to head for the cookhouse at the back end of the lot. All the fronts were dark except the office wagon, out in the middle of the midway just past the bingo top, and the cookhouse. It had been a pretty good day, and Walter Schmid, the bookkeeper-paymaster, must be working late checking in the receipts.

Jay Coulin, the watchman, was sitting on the tongue of the office wagon, leaning back against it. Mr. Razatsky said, "Hullo, Jay," and the watchman started, and nearly fell off the wagon tongue.

He grinned sheepishly. "Hi, Nick. Musta been asleep. Good thing it was

you come along, and not the boss."

Mr. Razatsky shook a stubby finger at him, and walked on. The boss *was* coming, as a matter of fact. Asa Burman and his nephew, Toby Nesterman, were cutting across the midway toward the office wagon. Mr. Razatsky waited to pass the time of night with them.

"Hi there, Nick," said the carney owner, and then yelled in the direction of the office wagon a few paces away, "Hey, Schmid, you through yet?"

Toby stopped beside Mr. Razatsky. He said, "Nick, you'll see Margie tomorrow, and I'll be out of town. Will you tell her—"

Asa Burman had walked up to the door of the office wagon and opened it. A sudden, not quite articulate, sound from him made Toby Nesterman and Mr. Razatsky turn to see what was wrong.

Burman said, "Get Doc," and climbed quickly into the wagon.

Past Burman, Mr. Razatsky could see little Walter Schmid, the accountant, lying doubled up on the floor in front of the iron safe. The safe was open.

Mr. Razatsky swung around to head for Doc's trailer, but Toby had seen, too, and Toby was younger and had faster reflexes. He was already dashing across the midway back in the direction from which he had come.

So Mr. Razatsky turned back to the door of the office wagon. He said, "Toby's gone to get him, Mr. Burman. I can do anything?"

Burman had been bending over the accountant. He straightened up and turned around. "He's dead, Nick. And the money's gone—today's receipts."

Then Mr. Razatsky jumped, because a voice said, over his shoulder, "Then it's murder." The Great Hernando was standing there, although Mr. Razatsky hadn't heard or seen him coming.

"Better not touch anything, Asa," the illusionist added. "And better phone the police."

Asa Burman was already backing out of the office wagon. "Didn't touch anything," he grunted. Then, his feet back on the lot again, he turned toward the white-faced watchman.

"You, Jay," he said. "Where the devil were you?"

Jay Coulin licked his lips nervously. "I—I guess I was dozing, Mr. Burman.

It was early, and there were people going by, and I thought—”

“When did you see Schmid last?”
Hernando demanded.

“M-midnight. I heard a clock strike uptown. He—he was all right then.”

Asa Burman raised a wrist to look at his watch. “Only half-past now. Run over to that all-night drug store and phone the coppers. Tell ‘em our money-car got hijacked. Don’t mention murder.”

As though glad of a chance to escape, the watchman turned and ran toward the front end of the midway.

HERNANDO stared curiously into the open door of the brightly lighted office-wagon. “Why not, Asa?” he wanted to know. “It is murder, isn’t it?”

“There’s no mark on him that I can see. And he had a bad heart. Had a couple of attacks last year. My guess is he keeled over naturally, and somebody came by and found him that way, and Jay asleep, and walked off with the cash.”

Mr. Razatsky nodded soberly, and hoped that Mr. Burman was right. Mur-

der, maybe by one of the carneys, wasn’t nice to think about. Robbery was bad enough.

A curious crowd, almost all carneys, was gathering around the wagon now. Somehow, word had got down to the cookhouse where most of those who were still awake and on the lot had been gathered.

There was excitement in the crowd and curiosity, but no grief. Walter Schmid had been a crabbed little man, with an acid tongue, and hadn’t joined in the easy friendships of the lot. He had been just an office-machine, as far as the carneys were concerned. Not one of them, really.

And then there were sirens wailing in the night, and policemen pushing through the crowd around the office wagon.

Mr. Razatsky went on to the cookhouse and ordered coffee and, as afterthought, a hamburger steak. While he ate, others of the carneys drifted back. Some of them with morsels of news.

The police had set up shop in the penny arcade, and were questioning carneys. The police had decided it was mur-

[Turn page]

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der. The police had found it wasn't murder. There wasn't a mark on the body. The police had found the gun he'd been shot with, lying on the floor of the office wagon where the killer had dropped it. They'd found some short ropes the killer had brought to tie up Schmid with. The coroner had told the police Schmid had died of heart failure.

The money had been found. There was a goose-egg on Schmid's head where the killer had hit him. The money was still missing. Nobody knew exactly how much, but it was about a thousand dollars in currency and two hundred in silver.

The police had arrested Toby Nesterman for murder, having found some of the money under his bed.

"You're kidding, no?" Mr. Razatsky asked. He put down his knife and fork and looked up at the Great Hernando, who had brought that last item of news. There was a worried look in Mr. Razatsky's eyes as the illusionist shook his head.

"No," said Hernando, "I'm not kidding, Nick. They took him down to the station house and booked him."

"But that is very silly," said Mr. Razatsky. "He was with his uncle when Asa looked in and saw Schmid."

Hernando shrugged. "Sure, but he'd just met Asa a few minutes before, and he didn't have any alibi for the half hour before that."

"Neither have I, Perfessor," said Mr. Razatsky, "but they didn't arrest me."

"But they didn't find the money under your bed."

"Phooey," said Mr. Razatsky. "Somebody could have put it there to put the blame on him."

"There's more evidence than that, Nick. I don't know just what it was, but the police seem pretty much satisfied with it."

"Phooey," repeated Mr. Razatsky firmly. "Toby Nesterman is nice young feller. He'd no more kill anybody than—than one of my merry-go-round horses would bite me."

"They're not sure he intended to kill Schmid," explained Hernando. "He was going to tie him up. But the shock of being held up scared Schmid and his weak ticker went bad. Maybe it'll be only a manslaughter rap."

"Is silly," said Mr. Razatsky. "By

morning they find out they made a mistake and he'll be back."

BY MORNING, they hadn't. Nor by one o'clock in the afternoon, when he was getting ready to start the merry-go-round, had Toby returned. Rumor around the lot had it that he was now formally charged with armed robbery and that the police were using the threat of a manslaughter charge to threaten him into a confession.

Mr. Razatsky shook his head slowly and went up to the ticket booth.

"Margie," he said.

"Yes, Nick?"

"He didn't done it—do it. Toby is nice young feller, not thief. They find out they make mistake."

He didn't look directly at her, but down at the roll of tickets lying on the ledge. He asked, "You'd like day off, maybe? I can get somebody sell tickets."

"N-no, Nick. Thanks. I'm afraid there's nothing I could do."

"Go see him, maybe. It would make him feel better. He—he likes you, Margie. If he knew you knew he didn't done—do it—"

"He does, Nick. I saw him a few minutes this morning."

"Oh," said Mr. Razatsky. Then: "How was he feeling, Margie?"

"Pretty blue, and bitter. He says somebody framed him, but made it a tight case. He's afraid they'll convict him."

"They won't, Margie," said Mr. Razatsky. He put conviction into his voice, more conviction than he felt. He kicked at the sawdust in front of the ticket booth a while, not quite daring to look up into Margie Evans' face.

Then he looked around as though counting the people on the midway, and said, "Don't sell no tickets, just yet, Margie. I got to see Asa about some business."

Asa Burman was struggling with the books in the office wagon when Mr. Razatsky knocked. He looked out the door and then said, "Come on in, Nick." His voice sounded tired, and old.

Mr. Razatsky went in. "Mr. Burman," he said, "Toby didn't steal that money. He's a good boy."

"Wish you could prove that, Nick. It looks awful black against him. I don't

think they'll push the manslaughter business, though."

Something in the carnival owner's tone made Mr. Razatsky look at him very closely, and what he saw in Asa's face worried him. It was uncertainty. The case against Toby must be very bad indeed, he thought, if the boy's own uncle wasn't completely sure of his innocence.

"But why, Mr. Burman," Mr. Razatsky protested, "would Toby want money that bad?"

Burman shook his head. "He shouldn't have. But he gambled some, so that's the way the police figure it."

"The stories around the lot are mixed up, Mr. Burman. What have the police got against him?"

"Pretty black, Nick. They found a gun in here with his fingerprints on it. It was Toby's gun, all right; he had it for target practise. And they found the bag of silver hidden in his car. Not the paper money; they haven't found that yet."

Mr. Razatsky screwed up his face thoughtfully, trying to make sense out of it. "How do the coppers figure it?"

Asa Burman leaned back in the chair. "They say he came here with the pistol and with ropes. He was going to stick the gun in Schmid's back and then tie him up and walk off with the money. Maybe, they say, he had a mask on or a handkerchief around his face so Schmid wouldn't know him, or maybe he just figured on never letting Schmid get a look at him. Schmid's chair here had its back to the door, and he could have opened it quietly and stepped in without being seen."

"Ah!" said Mr. Razatsky. "The police think the shock of having a gun stuck in his back—"

"Yeah. Walt was lying just about where he'd have been if he'd fallen out of this chair, so that makes sense. They say Toby took the money, but got excited and forgot the gun and the ropes. He put 'em down to feel Schmid's heart to see whether he'd have to tie him up, and then he got scared and forgot 'em after he'd taken the dough."

"But anybody," protested Mr. Razatsky, "could have put the money in Toby's car, and they put only the silver. How much paper money was there?"

"About nine hundred and sixty. Walt

[Turn page]



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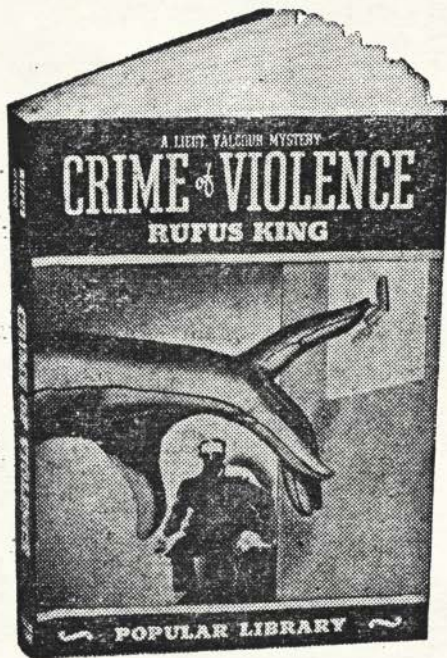
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had entered the total as eleven twenty-three, the rest being silver. They think Toby maybe mailed the paper money to himself somewhere, but couldn't do that with the silver."

MR. RAZATSKY frowned. "That is silly, no? If he took risk of keeping silver, why mail the rest?"

Mr. Burman sighed. "They got an answer for that, too. If the silver was found, he intended to claim it was planted there. If it wasn't, he'd have it, too. If he hadn't forgotten the gun with his prints on it!"

"But somebody, he could have planted the gun, too."

"Yeah," agreed Burman. "Somebody could have."

Mr. Razatsky saw that the carney owner wished he could believe it.

Sadly Mr. Razatsky returned to his merry-go-round. He avoided the ticket booth. He threw the switch, and the organ started tinkling "The Merry-Go-Round Broke Down." It ran all afternoon and evening, and Mr. Razatsky's mind, as well as his body, went in circles with it.

It seemed to him sometimes, and it seemed so today, that the merry-go-round was an oasis, a stationary point in a midway and a world that spun around it.

After a while, he managed to resemble his usual cheerful self, and smiled at the children and joked with them, and sometimes forgot to collect tickets for the second ride.

In the lull between the afternoon crowd and the evening crowd, Hernando came by. He leaned against the swan-car, and shook his head unhappily.

"Looks bad for Toby, Nick," he said.

"Something new, it comes up?"

"Nope. But tomorrow's tear-down."

"So what has that got to do with it being worse for Toby?" Mr. Razatsky wanted to know.

"We move on. Look, assume for a minute that Toby didn't do it. Well, the coppers are sure he did. They're still hunting the rest of the dough, but if they don't find it by the time the carney moves, they'll give up. And Toby'll be convicted sure, when they try him."

"Ummm," said Mr. Razatsky. His eyes strayed to the ticket-box. Margie had just left, but the booth was still warm with her presence.

"You mean that Toby, he's got no chance at all?" he asked.

"Not unless they can pin it on somebody else. I mean, unless they can find out who really did it—if Toby didn't."

Mr. Razatsky sighed.

He thought about it while he ate his supper, and thinking about it didn't make it any better. Toby Nesterman hadn't done it. Toby wouldn't have done a thing like that, a nice young feller like Toby. But then who did? Who else could have?

Mr. Razatsky wished that he was a detective, but he knew that he wasn't. He didn't have even the faintest glimmer of an idea as to what had really happened last night. Somebody had got away with nine hundred and sixty dollars, and had framed Toby for it. But by now the money would be in some safe place, off the lot. That money was somebody's winter stake, and the thief wouldn't touch it, probably, until the season was over.

Then as it was getting dark, he went back to the merry-go-round. Margie was already in the ticket booth. Mr. Razatsky rested his elbow on the sill, [Turn page]

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and kicked at the ground in front of the booth.

"Margie," he said troubledly.

"Yes, Nick?"

"He—he didn't do it, Margie."

"I know he didn't, Nick. He told me he didn't."

Mr. Razatsky said, "Uh—" and couldn't think of anything to add to it, so he turned and walked away quickly.

The weather was threatening that evening, and not so many people came to the carney grounds. Business was bad, and the merry-go-round was still most of the time. Mr. Razatsky had a lot of time to think, in the intervals when there were no tickets to collect.

He kept the music going, though. His mind worked better when the organ was wheezing out "If You Knew Susie," or "There's an Old Spinning Wheel in the Parlor." And once, when he thought he was on the verge of an idea, he started up the merry-go-round with no customers at all and let it go round and round, while he leaned on the shiny new zebra he'd bought to replace the horse that had broken. He'd bought that zebra from Walter Schmid, the now dead bookkeeper, and that gave him his idea.

ROUND and round went Mr. Razatsky and the zebra, his mind looking at all angles of the idea, and he knew that it would work. At any rate, there was only one possible hitch to it, and he could find out about that by asking Asa Burman. Mr. Burman would know.

At ten-thirty he said gently to the girl, "I think we close up, Margie. With so few marks, just costs money to keep running."

He put up the canvas sidewall around the merry-go-round, and then went back to the office wagon.

"Asa," he said, "you knew Walter pretty well, no?"

"Schmid? Well?" The carney owner looked at Mr. Razatsky curiously. "I knew him pretty well, no. That about covers it. He was a funny duck."

"He married? Have family?"

"No. No relatives at all. There wasn't anybody for us to notify. I looked up the records on him to make sure. Why?"

"I was just wondering who got his money."

"Didn't have any to worry about. He bought up that old top from the Sullivan Shows and was gonna sell it to a

revival outfit. Turned out the canvas hadn't been stored right, and it rotted. And he couldn't sue Sullivan, because Sullivan went bankrupt."

"Umm," said Mr. Razatsky thoughtfully. "That makes it even better, no?"

"Makes what better, Nick?"

"Nothing. Just I was thinking to myself out loud."

Mr. Razatsky thought it over a bit before he slept, and then he slept very soundly.

He rose early and went into town. At the local bank he showed his letter of credit from his own bank and proceeded to cash a check for a thousand dollars.

Back in the privacy of the curtained merry-go-round on the lot, he divided the money into two rolls. The forty-dollar one, he put into his pocket.

When, at one o'clock, Margie Evans came around to open the ticket office, he'd thought the idea through, and it was foolproof.

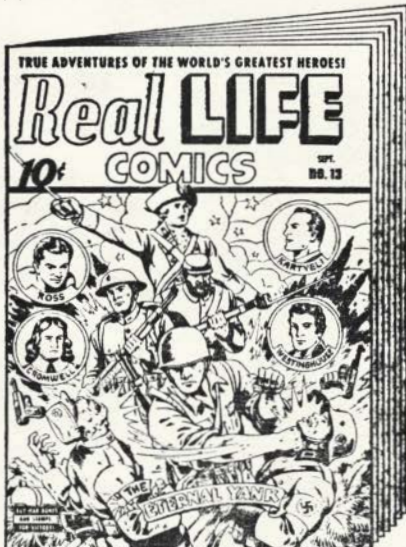
"Margie," he said in a trembly voice.

"Yes, Nick?" The young woman smiled at him.

"Look, Margie, before you open the booth, will you go to the drug store and phone the police? Tell them that a suggestion I would like to make about—about the robbery."

[Turn page]

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Her eyes were curious, but she didn't ask what the suggestion was. "Why, certainly, Nick, but Captain Burdick, who was in charge of it—I think he's on the lot now. I saw him walking toward—wait, I'll go see."

Mr. Razatsky watched the swing of her skirts as she ran toward the other end of the midway, and he sighed. But he said to himself, "Don't be a fool, you Nick."

He was smiling when she came back with the law.

"Yeah, what?" demanded Captain Burdick.

"Just an idea," said Mr. Razatsky. "Maybe it don't mean nothing, but then again if it don't mean nothing, it's me that's out twenty-five dollars."

"Twenty-five dollars for what?"

"For the zebra," said Mr. Razatsky.

"Huh? What about a zebra?"

"We would have to break it," said Mr. Razatsky.

CAPTAIN BURDICK took off his hat to scratch his head. He turned to Margie, and said, "Lady, is this guy crazy?"

"No," Mr. Razatsky answered for himself. "I am not nuts, no. It is an idea that maybe the money could be in the zebra. The money that was stolen from the office wagon."

Captain Burdick tried to scratch his head again, but discovered he'd put his hat back on.

"Mister," he said, "For all I care you can break as many zebras as you want, but what makes you think the money's there? Who'd have put it there? Nesterman?"

"Nesterman, Toby, didn't know the zebra was hollow. Schmid."

"Schmid? The dead guy? You're nuts!"

"No," said Mr. Razatsky firmly. "I am not nuts. Look, this Schmid, he was broke. He made money dealing around in carney props on the side, but he had bad luck and went broke. You knew that, no?"

"Sure, but—"

"So the end of the season is coming, and he has no stake for winter coming up, and he wants money. So maybe he could rob himself. Is easy. He wanted somebody else to take the blame so he would not be suspected, so he could pick on Toby, no?"

"He could pick on Toby, yes. But how did he—"

"To that I am coming. He could leave the wagon when nobody was looking and hide the money—the paper money. And he could put the silver money in Toby's car and take Toby's gun, holding it so Toby's prints from his fingers would still be on it. The ropes he would already have had in the wagon."

"Then why didn't he tie himself up?" demanded the captain. "Look, that could be, all right, but it was the scare of being held up that stopped his ticker."

"Could have been, yes. But excitement makes the heart beat fast, too. Too fast. A man with a weak heart should not try to do anything criminal, no? Back in the wagon, he gets ready to tie himself up. It's in the bag already. He's ready to tie himself up, but his heart is pounding with excitement. It pounds one pound too hard. And before he was ready, maybe, he heard somebody coming."

"Who?"

"Me," said Mr. Razatsky. "Just a little while before I have been waked up by somebody coming into the merry-go-round. That would be Schmid, hiding the money in the hollow zebra that is

[Turn page]

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made of plastic. All my other animals, they are wood. The zebra's mouth it is open and the money could push down in."

Captain Burdick's eyes ran the gamut of animals until they came to rest upon the shiny zebra. "It sounds screwy to me," he said dubiously, "but—"

"But maybe, no," said Mr. Razatsky. "I had just bought the zebra a little while ago from Schmid. He knew a man who had a broken merry-go-round and when my horse came apart, he offered to get me one for twenty-five dollars. So he knew it was plastic, hollow. Nobody else, he would not have known. Not Toby. But to Schmid, it would be a perfect hiding place, no? You see?"

Captain Burdick shrugged. "It's your idea," he said.

"And it's my zebra. But I thought you should be here when I break it." Mr. Razatsky sighed. "I get a hammer."

He got one from the engine housing at the center of the merry-go-round, raised it, and took a last regretful look at the zebra. Undoubtedly, it was the shiniest and best-looking member of his menagerie.

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He swung the hammer, hard. It was a heavy hammer, almost a sledge, and Mr. Razatsky's first carney job had been driving stakes. He still had muscles.

The zebra shattered, and fell in chunks from the brass pole. Together they peered down into the debris.

"Well, I guess you're out a zebra," said Captain Burdick.

"Wait," said Mr. Razatsky. "The legs, they are hollow."

He picked up one hind leg and shook it vigorously. Then the other.

"Wouldn'ta gone back there," said Burdick, "if it'd been poked in the mouth."

OBVIOUSLY expecting nothing, he picked up a fore leg and shook it. Out dropped a sheaf of bills with a paper band around the middle, the kind of band that was used in the office wagon—and also a fat roll with a rubber band around it.

Captain Burdick uttered a startled exclamation and reached down to pick

[Turn page]



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both rolls up, thereby missing Mr. Razatsky's wide-open mouth and eyes.

He rifled through the sheaf of bills first. He said, "What the devil? There's over nine hundred here, in this one."

He peeled off the rubber band, unrolled and quickly counted the other. "And about the same amount in this one. I thought nine-sixty was all that was gone."

Mr. Razatsky opened his mouth and, since nothing came out, he closed it again. He gulped, and tried again.

"I—uh—well, I—" was the best he could do.

"Nick!" It was Margie's voice, and he dared look at her face, to find it was golden-shining like her hair. "Nick—I—I see what happened. Let me explain it to him, please. He might get—oh, go wait for me outside."

Glad to escape, Mr. Razatsky ducked out under the canvas sidewall and went to lean against the ticket-booth.

In a few minutes Margie came. She held out the roll of money to him.

"You—you *sap*, Nick," she said. But the tone of her voice made it all right by Mr. Razatsky no matter what she'd called him.

He grinned sheepishly and shrugged his shoulders as he took his roll of money. "But, Margie," he said, "I only wanted to help."

"Nick Razatsky, are you *in love* with me?"

He didn't dare look at her now. He cleared his throat of something that made it hard for him to speak. He nodded blindly. "But, Margie, I wouldn't dream of pestering you. I want it you and Toby should be happy."

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He spread his hands helplessly. "I'm too old for you, Margie. I'm thirty-seven, and you're only twenty-one or two, and I'm just a big—"

"Dope!" she finished for him. "I'm twenty-nine, Nick. And free and white. And—and I think you're a swell guy."

Still not daring to believe, he made himself look up, and he met her eyes. He put out a hand, unbelievably, toward her, not remembering or caring that he stood in the middle of a midway. But she eluded him, for women are always more practical about such things. And, from the safety of the ticket-booth, she smiled at him.

"The crowd's coming, Nick. Better get the merry-go-round going."

He stood there for a moment, just looking at her, and then turned and walked, almost blindly, to take down a sidewall curtain of silk brocade to reveal a carousel of solid gold whose glittering menagerie was of jade and lapis lazuli horses with rubies set for eyes.

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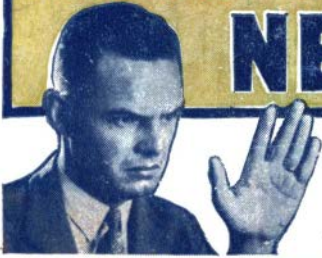
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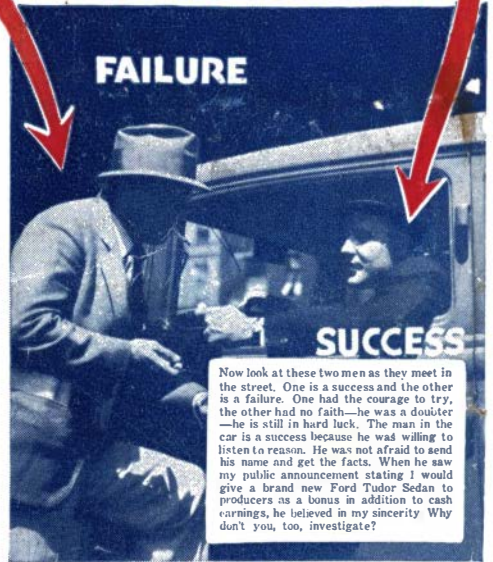
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 6 1/2 Months Later Was Worth \$1,200
 "Only six and a half months ago I started with your company without a penny to my name, and today (I just finished my balance) I am worth a little more than \$1,200.00. I can hardly believe it myself—such a success in so short a time! But it's the truth. Many a day I made from \$15.00 to \$20.00 clear profit. Your Happy Hustler, Hans Coordes, Nebr."



NEW FORDS
 Given as a Bonus