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# DETECTIVE

**12  
STORIES**

# TALES

**10  
CENTS**

## DEATH COMES IN CODE

*A GRIPPING NOVELETTE  
OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE*

*by* **EDWARD S. WILLIAMS**

## THE GHOST OF COCK ROBIN

*SUPERLATIVE MYSTERY NOVELETTE*

*by* **DAY KEENE**

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by S. J. E.  
(NAME AND ADDRESS SENT UPON REQUEST)



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Radio broadcasting stations employ operators and technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and servicemen. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, Police, Aviation, Commercial Radio; Loudspeaker Systems, Electronic Devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N.R.I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

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# DETECTIVE TALES

February Issue  
on Sale Dec. 24



VOLUME SEVENTEEN      JANUARY, 1941      NUMBER TWO

### Four Superlative Detective Novelettes

1. **THE GHOST OF COCK ROBIN** . . . . . *Day Keene*      8  
Even as they slipped the noose around Cocos' neck, Bart Scarlett's devoted darky still trusted his master to save him. He couldn't know that Bart was at that moment forfeiting his life to a sightless torture expert who demanded that Bart produce a ghost!
2. **CORPSE ON THE GRILL** . . . . . *Stewart Sterling*      30  
Fire Marshal Ben Pedley took one look at the torso hanging in the charred refrigerator, and decided that cremation was too good for the Butcher of Broadway.
3. **HOMICIDE FOLLOWS THE PRINCE** . . . . . *William R. Cox*      54  
When dog racing came to Midburg, the Hounds of Death came too!—and drove ex-conman John Wade to accept a fixed bet with Murder's private bookie!
4. **DEATH COMES IN CODE** . . . . . *Edward S. Williams*      88  
The cryptic flash "Ky2z" told "ham" operator Jimmy Lacey that a dreaded terror of the past was to be reborn in the Land of Freedom!

### Four Short Stories of Crime Fighting

5. **SOW MURDER, REAP MURDER** . . . . . *Dane Gregory*      25  
Ken Riddle rigged up a time-honored murder machine for his trusting partner—but forgot a time-honored proverb!
6. **MORE DEADLY THAN THE MALE** . . . . . *Cyril Plunkett*      47  
Would you risk your life to save from the chair the man you have most reason to despise? Read this vivid story of a man who did!
7. **CLUE IN THE NUMBERS** . . . . . *Don James*      72  
I tried to prove that little Joe Temple was no killer. I didn't know I was swapping my press card for a death-certificate!
8. **YOU CAN'T BUY GUTS** . . . . . *Wyatt Blassingame*      79  
Because of fear, Dick Arnold let a man die—and became a souse to forget. When the chance to redeem himself came along, Dick had a bottle of whiskey in his fist!

### A Short-Short Detective Story

9. **TWO-IN-ONE MURDER** . . . . . *Edward J. Donovan*      86  
Too many killers spoil the coup!

—And—

10. **THE CRIME CLINIC** . . . . . *The Editor*      4  
Introducing Miss Tiah Devitt—in person.
11. **ODDITIES IN CRIME** . . . . . *A Feature*      71  
Little errors fill big prisons.
12. **HISTORY OF THE N. Y. UNDERWORLD** . . . . . *A Feature*      96  
When cops walked beats in pairs.

THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU  AGAINST REPRINT FICTION!

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Audels New Automobile Guide is New from Cover to Cover. Contains all you need to know about the 1. Construction, 2. Operation, 3. Service, 4. Repair of Modern Motor Cars, Trucks, Buses and Diesel Engines. It contains Practical Information in a Handy Form—1540 Pages—1540 Illustrations. Written by an engineering authority and presented with forceful directness in PLAIN LANGUAGE and SIMPLE TERMS, generously illustrated. It is an up-to-date authoritative Book of Complete Instructions for all service jobs giving a New Vision of the automotive field. Covers the Entire Subject in Every Detail. Does Not Deal in Idle Theories, but gives Definite Directions telling Exactly What To Do and How To Do It. It is Packed Full with Important Information. Indispensable to Auto Mechanics, Service Men and Owners.

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The 1540 Illustrations in this book are photographs of modern cars and mechanical drawings giving details for guidance. They explain all working parts and their functions. Alphabetical Index lists 55 interesting and instructive chapters—a big time saver.

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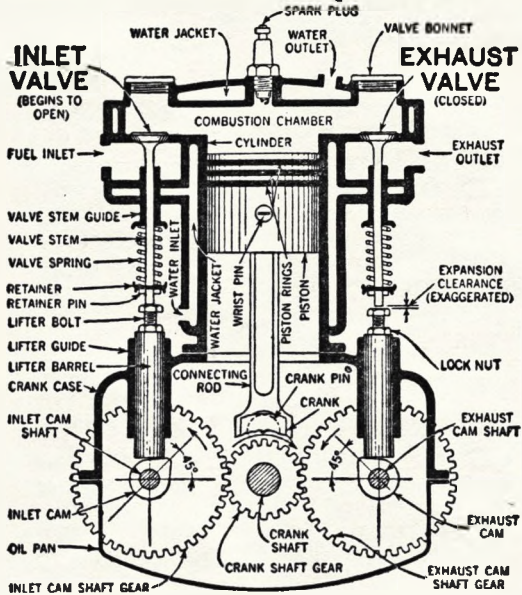
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Please send me postpaid AUDELS NEW AUTOMOBILE GUIDE (\$4) for free examination. If I decide to keep it, I will send you \$1 within 7 days; then remit \$1 monthly until purchase price of \$4 is paid. Otherwise, I will return it to you promptly.

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PER

### ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS



SPECIMEN ILLUSTRATION—INSIDE VIEW OF MOTOR

# THE CRIME CLINIC

**M**ISS TIAH DEVITT is one of our favorite authors, and it is with pleasure and pride that we announce her newest detective novel—**MANHATTAN MURDER NOCTURNE**—as the lead-off story in *Detective Tales* for February. It is appropriate, we feel, to publish an autobiographical Thumbnail Sketch which Miss Devitt recently wrote for us to pass along to you readers. Here it is:

Dear Mr. Editor:

I'd rather thumbprint arch criminals than thumbnail sketch myself, but if you think your readers would be interested in T. D.—it's all right with me!

I was born in Oskaloosa (Mahaska County) Iowa (honest!) when my father was prosecuting attorney. My earliest ambition, disconcerting in a small girl, was to be a policeman. The red-letter day of my youth was the day I persuaded my father to take me through the local jail. I had an exciting time visiting with the prisoners, and I haven't missed a chance to talk to a criminal or a detective since. Father's erring clients were a delight. I remember particularly a lady who shot her husband (acquitted), and a gentleman who poisoned his wife (now doing life). Brother Jim helpfully introduced me to a successful bank-robbing client, some of whose exploits I have used in "Manhattan Murder Nocturne."

My fond parents sent me to boarding school in New York, but the crime wave followed right along. I'd hardly unpacked before thieves got in, blew the safe right out of the wall and carted it off. The darned thing contained all the girl's jewelry! Considering there were a hundred teachers and girls asleep upstairs, and a night watchman supposedly patrolling the building, it was a slick job! To have slept peacefully through the biggest jewel robbery of the year was a blow I have never gotten over.

When I finished school I went on the stage. In my first good part I played a chorus girl who shoots the gangster who knocked off her sweet-

heart. The gun was a snubbed-nose automatic. We shot blanks and talcum powder, but I never fired without a ghastly feeling in the pit of my stomach. A stage murder is too like a real murder! You aim directly, mentally projecting the passion to kill, pull the trigger, and watch your victim stagger and crash to the floor. For me there was always a second of gripping horror—suppose the gun were actually loaded!

Having proved my proficiency with a gun, Hollywood decided to test my ability with a knife. I was to play the jealous native girl who stabs the faithless white man. I studied up on knifing but never put the knowledge into practice. The studio found my hair was too dark to photograph well and put me in a blond wig. Then we learned a thing every smart woman crook knows—a fact that probably drives detectives crazy. If you change the color of a woman's hair, and the style of wearing it, you have a new personality. A totally different person!

I left the stage and started writing because I am losing my hearing. Crime stories, of course, and I love them! I certainly am indebted to the theatre, though. Along Broadway, in the prohibition era, we met every type and kind of crook. I met everybody from Arnold Rothstein to Al Capone, and I wasn't impressed. A big time crook has a wonderful sense of theatrical effect; he always gives a show, which makes him swell copy, but underneath he's such a rat! He rarely has brains; he buys brains. He rarely has courage; he buys protection. I wish the well-meaning people who petition courts and governors to show leniency to criminals had known some of the boys I used to see about town. They'd never sign again.

Sure, there are crooked cops; there are crooked clergymen, too. But I wouldn't trade a hair of the head of any cop I know (I know lots of 'em) for the freedom of any crook.

(Continued on page 6)



# Will You Let Me PROVE I Can Make YOU a New Man?



## LET ME START SHOWING YOU RESULTS LIKE THESE

<p><b>5 inches of new Muscle</b></p> <p>"My arms increased 1 1/2", chest 2 1/2", forearm 7/8"."—F. S., S., W. Va.</p>	<p><b>What a difference!</b></p> <p>"I have put 3 1/2" on chest (normal) and 2 1/2" expanded."—F. S., N. Y.</p>
<p><b>Here's what ATLAS did for ME!</b></p> <p>John Jacobs <b>BEFORE</b>      John Jacobs <b>AFTER</b></p>	<p><b>For quick results I recommend CHARLES ATLAS</b></p> <p>"Am sending snapshot showing wonderful progress."—W. G., N. J.</p> <p><b>GAINED 29 POUNDS</b></p> <p>"When I started, weighed only 141. Now 170."—T. K., N. Y.</p>

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This is a recent photo of Charles Atlas showing how he looks today. This is not a studio picture but an actual untouched snapshot.

## Here's What Only 15 Minutes a Day Can Do For You

**DON'T** care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add **SOLID MUSCLE** to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system **INSIDE** and **OUTSIDE!** I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

**What's My Secret?**

"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The identical natural method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming

marvelous physical specimens—my way. I give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool with. When you have learned to develop your strength through "Dynamic Tension," you can laugh at artificial muscle-makers. You simply utilize the **DORMANT** muscle-power in your own God-given body—watch it increase and multiply double-quick into real, solid **LIVE MUSCLE.**

My method—"Dynamic Tension"—will turn the trick for you. No theory—every exercise is practical. And, man, so easy! Spend only 15 minutes a day in your own home. From the very start you'll be using my method of "Dynamic Tension" almost unconsciously every minute of the day—walking, bending over, etc.—to **BUILD MUSCLE** and **VITALITY.**

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**"Everlasting Health and Strength"**

In it I talk to you in straight-from-the-shoulder language. Packed with inspirational pictures of myself and pupils—fellows who became **NEW MEN** in strength, my way. Let me show you what I helped **THEM** do, see what I can do for **YOU!** For a real thrill, send for this book today, **AT ONCE, CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83A, 115 East 23rd St., New York City.**



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**115 East 23rd St., New York, N. Y.**

I want the proof that your system of "Dynamic Tension" will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength"—and full details of your **TRIAL OFFER.**

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(Continued from page 4)

Which ends more like a sermon than an autobiography.

Please give my best to all the staff.

Sincerely,

(Signed) Tiah Devitt

Well, one need not be a psychologist to discern Miss Devitt's qualifications to write stories of cops, crime and crooks. She has known in real life the counterparts of the characters she imbues with stark reality in "Manhattan Murder Nocturne." She understands why Myra ran away from Officer Tough Tim Grady, to live with "glamorous" Benny Jordan, bank heister. She understands, too, how Benny's unbearable abuse and the death of Myra's little girl changed Myra's mind, causing her to turn that last alibi set-up into a murder frame of vengeance; why she played the alibi phonograph record and got down the bottle of poison Benny had threatened to use on her. And why she put in the call to Tim. Let Miss Devitt give you one short scene:

A bottle of gin, as smeared with Benny's prints as the poison bottle, stood on the table in the shabby flat. Still using the handkerchief, she poured gin into a glass and emptied the poison into the gin. She then dropped the phial into Benny's over-

coat pocket. She got her bag, made sure the money and railroad ticket her sister had sent her were in it. She took out the picture of herself, Tim and the baby. She wanted to look at it before she went on her last trip.

She ran over the details of her careful plan to frame Benny—the man who had ruined her life. She smiled with ghastly joy. "You killed me, Benny," she whispered, "you really killed me—and you'll fry for it!" She drew the poison glass to her. "Maybe you'll forgive me, Kewpie," she said to the baby in the picture. "Maybe. . ."

Myra didn't hear the door open softly behind her. She didn't see the gloved hand, nor the barrel of the gun. She never knew who fired the bullet that plowed through the back of her head. . . .

There's the situation. It is only the beginning. Tim Grady got there, all right—at the wrong moment. Which made him a hunted lawman—all for the sake of a dead woman he hated and loved at the same time. But who shot Myra? What of Benny, who was robbing a bank at the moment Myra planted a poison-murder frame for him? How could the frame hold Benny when the slug in Myra's brain came from—well, that's enough!

The Editor.

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Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of Detective Tales, published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1940. State of New York, county of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Harold S. Goldsmith, who having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Detective Tales, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Editor, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Managing Editor, none. Business Manager, Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. 2. That the owner is: Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y., Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y., Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: none. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner, and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. Harold S. Goldsmith, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 2nd day of October, 1940. Eva M. Walker, Notary Public, New York County Clerk's No. 26, Register's No. 2-W-178. (My commission expires March 30, 1942.) [Seal]—Form 3526—Ed. 1933.



what will you be doing



**MEN**, there's no *sense* in drifting along at the same old dull, drab job! You've got one life — that's all. What you make of it is your business — but if you want to make a *success* of it, it's time to *get going!*

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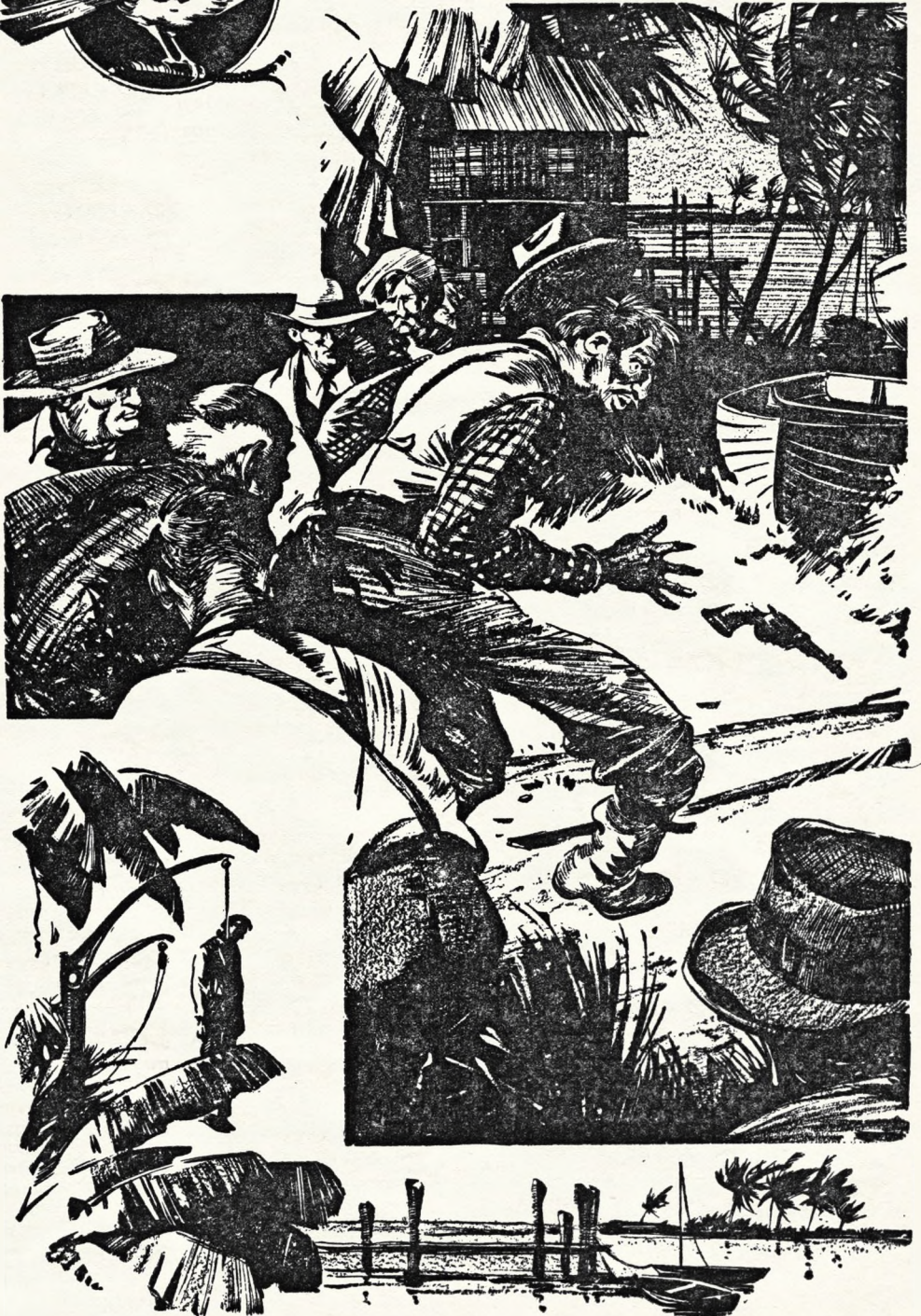
★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X: ★

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# The Ghost of



# Cock Robin

*A Mystery  
Novelette*

By **DAY KEENE**



"Oh, my God!" said Benson. A bloody froth oozed from his lips, and he slumped slowly sideways.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Homicide Homecoming

**T**HE night was hot and quiet, even for a Florida night in mid-July. And if Bart Scarlett had driven directly home from the government hospital at Bay Pines he might never have heard that Bessie and Sam Robin had been murdered until after Cocos was lynched. As it was, he decided to drive on up to the Heron Point drug store for some cigarettes and a pint of ice cream

for Myra. He arrived just as the crowd was beginning to form in front of the flimsy jail.

"I told you that darky was bad," said Benson, the fishing guide. His voice was ugly.

Scarlett turned off his ignition and his lights and sat eyeing the growing crowd of sun-blackened men in front of the jail. "What darky?" he drawled.

"Your darky," Benson said shortly. "Cocos done it this time. He killed both Sam an' Miz Robin with one of them bow an' arrows from that archery place up on the beach. Sheriff Tate caught him dead to rights wipin' his fingerprints off the bow."

Scarlett said nothing. Limping slightly, as he favored the shrapnel shattered knee cap for which he had just undergone his annual operation, he stepped into the drug store and bought two packs of Camels and a pint of ice cream. Then he limped in silence past the groups of clustered men who averted their eyes as he approached. No one spoke to him, or even nodded. He climbed the stairs leading to the sheriff's door and knocked.

Sheriff Tate opened it himself. A sal-low-faced old man with a scraggly white mustache, he carried a double barreled shot gun in the crook of his arm. A grim-faced deputy stood on either side of him.

"Oh, hello, Bart. Come in," the sheriff said. "Your Miz told me you were over at Bay Pines."

Scarlett limped on into the office. John Mason, the Miami lawyer who had come to the Point for his health and remained to hang out a shingle, was sitting in the sheriff's chair.

A hawk-eyed, darkly handsome man in his early forties, Mason's past was obscure. But he was known to be a ladies' man. He seemed surprised to see Scarlett. "Well," he greeted him. "It's a good thing you got home sooner than you were expected. That black boy of yours has sure raised hell this time."

"Yeh," Scarlett nodded. "So I heah tell. But why should Cocos do what it's claimed he done?" he asked the sheriff.

The sheriff mopped at his perspiring temples with a faded blue bandanna. "I'll be blamed if I know, Bart. An' Cocos won't say a word. If he'd just

killed Sam the boys wouldn't feel the way they do. Sam Robin was a rat. But, well, Bessie was well liked."

"What's your proof that Cocos killed Bessie Robin, Sheriff?" Scarlett asked.

"I caught him standin' over her pullin' the arrow out of her an' wipin' his fingerprints off the bow."

Mason examined his cigar, put it between his teeth, and with narrowed eyes, smoked thoughtfully. "What I can't understand is why if Sam—or Cock Robin, as Sam practically claimed to be—was as handy with a gun as legend has it, he'd let an old gray-haired darky kill his wife and him with just a bow and arrow."

THE sheriff admitted that was a puzzler. And it was. For years it had been openly hinted along the coast that Sam was the fabulous Robin; Cock Robin, the outlaw whose incredulous career had included the framing of Big Boy for murder when both the Coast Guard and the F.B.I. had tried for years, in vain, to get Big Boy on any charge. And if he wasn't the Robin, Sam had never denied the implication. He had swashbuckled. He had blustered. He had used the general public's unreasoning fear of the legendary outlaw in his business. On the strength of Cock Robin's name he had robbed, cheated, and close-dealt with almost everyone on the Point. And now he was dead, killed by a gray haired negro, so the sheriff said, with a symbolic bow and arrow.

"You all think Sam was the Robin then?" Scarlett drawled.

"I know he was," Mason told him crisply. "Why?"

"Just wondered," Scarlett drawled. "I see a poster several times that Cock Robin is still wanted—wanted ten thousand dollars worth daid or alive."

"But there weren't no picture of him on that poster, Bart," Sheriff Tate protested. "That's why Sam was so bold like. I've heard it told that no one but Big Boy ever positively saw Cock Robin an' lived." He sighed. "Well, you want to see Cocos, I suppose." He led the way back to the lock-up.

When Cocos saw his Cap'n in the passage his skin turned three shades blacker with relief. He grinned through the bars.

"Ol' Cocos knowed you'd be along, Boss."

Scarlett lighted a cigarette, said nothing.

The old Negro sobered. "You know I never killed no woman, Cap'n Bart. I jist foun' Miz Robin with dat arrow stickin' in her an' pulled it out t' see how could I aid her."

"Then why were you wiping your fingerprints off the bow when I walked in?" Sheriff Tate demanded.

"Was Sam Robin shot with an arrow, too?" Scarlett wanted to know.

"We ain't found Sam yet, Bart," the sheriff admitted. "But the way I got it figured, Sam must have surprised Cocos killin' Bessie, so Cocos killed Sam, too—mebbe jist mashed him in those big hands of his and threw him in the Pass. Shucks. We may never find Sam. He's probably out in the Gulf by now. But I did find some blood on the sand, an' Lait Benson found Sam's watch an' wal-

done it," he said simply. "I jes say, I ain't."

Scarlett released his hold. Even at the hospital rumors had reached him of the affair that Myra, his wife, had been carrying on with Sam. And Cocos was protecting, shielding Myra. He was certain of that now. Not that Cocos liked Myra. On the contrary, he knew her for the cheap white trash that she was. Still, Myra was Mrs. Bart Scarlett. And Cocos was old fashioned Georgia Negro.

Back in the sheriff's office Scarlett wasted little time. "How long can you stand off the boys?" he asked.

The sheriff shook his head. "It's our bounden duty to do our best. But that's hard tellin', Bart. Why?"

"'Cause Cocos didn't kill Bessie," Scarlett told him. "An' what's more, Sam ain't daid. I aim to prove it."

One of the deputies, his rifle cocked, let Scarlett out the door of the sheriff's

*They were hanging Bart Scarlett's devoted darky for a kill he didn't pull; some one shot Bart's two-timing wife to death just as she was about to talk; and, to make matters complete, a brutal, sightless gang chief promised Bart death by torture unless he could turn up Cock Robin, an outlawed crime fighter who lived in a fabulous legend!*

let. That's how come we know Sam's daid." He turned back toward his office. "But go ahead. Mebbe you can make Cocos talk if you're alone with him."

Scarlett smoked in silence until the door banged shut. As he started to speak there was a pad of feet in the alley in back of the jail. A moment later a vile smelling conch shell hurtled through the barred window.

"We'll get you, black boy," Benson's hoarse voice shouted. "Just you wait till a few more of the boys git heah."

He was echoed by a series of jeers and cat-calls.

Scarlett ignored the interruption. He thrust a long, slim, brown hand through the bars and pulled the Negro up to the steel. "You're lyin' to me, Cocos. I don't believe she done it."

The colored man regarded the dripping container of ice cream in his Cap'n's hand, then looked away. "I ain't say no one

office. Mason walked out with him. At the sight of the two men on the jail stoop, the sun-blackened men clustered under the Royal palms that lined the single street of Heron Point grew momentarily silent. Most of them knew Scarlett and liked him. To them he was just a quiet-spoken, lean-flanked, leather-faced, world war veteran who had bought a beach home on the Point for his health, and to be near the government hospital at Bay Pines. But they didn't like his Negro or his dog. Both took orders from no one but Scarlett.

Mason eyed the somber faced men moodily through his cigar smoke. "No, sir," he said. "I don't think I'd want to be in that black boy's shoes. Take a fool's advice, Scarlett, and don't try to interfere. You'll see trouble if you do."

The leather-faced veteran smiled wryly. "Mister man, you all might be amazed if you knew half the trouble I've seen."

He strode down the street to his car, his limp forgotten. The clusters of silent men opened a lane for him to drive through and then closed in again around the jail.

**H**IS eyes glued on the road ahead of him, Scarlett slackened his speed slightly as he neared the huge, white Gulf Vista Hotel. Deserted but for a watchman, the big hotel loomed black against the night. Beyond the hotel was the Gulf of Mexico. In front of it, forming the stem of a T, was the crushed oyster-shell lane that led to the home he had bought for Myra. Bringing the car practically to a stop, he swung in the turn to the house. Seconds later he coasted to a stand-still behind Myra's yellow convertible coupe. There was no moon and his house stood in darkness. There was no sound but the distant pound of the surf and the immediate rustle of the palm fronds in the light wind.

At first he thought Myra wasn't at home and he began to fumble for his keys. Then the screen door opened and Myra's arms were around his neck as he stepped up on the porch.

"Sweetheart," she breathed. "I thought you were never coming." She kissed him passionately—then screamed.

Scarlett's groping hand had found the porch light switch and clicked it on.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Wasn't I the sweetheart you expected?"

She laughed at that, too brightly. "Why—why don't be silly, darling. I—I've been standing here waiting for you for—for hours."

"So?" he said curtly. He walked past her into the house. "Strange. You didn't expect me home until next week." It was then he saw her traveling bags. They were a matched set of three that he had given her. And they were waiting by the door.

He turned on the living room light and stood looking at her. She was as daintily blonde and beautiful as ever. But absence from her had somehow cooled his blood and given him a new perspective. She was cheap and she looked it.

"Cocos has been right all along," he told her. "You're nothing but a cheap little tart." He slapped her, lightly. "An'

where's my dog? If you've harmed Jeanie, s'help me God, I'll kill you."

Jeanie heard him as he raised his voice. She barked from the bedroom closet. He let her out and looked at her. Her fur was as sleek as ever and her eyes were bright. Cocos would have seen to that.

The girl stepped back as the dog bared her teeth in a snarl. "I was afraid of her," she faltered.

"You should have been," her husband told her. He unlocked the top drawer of his dresser and took out two bone handled .38 caliber Colts swung on .45 frames for better balance. It was the first time the girl had seen the guns. She sat down on the bed abruptly. "What are you going to do?"

Scarlett made certain that both guns were loaded, broke them and peered through their barrels intently. "Why, I aim to find Sam Robin an' take him back to the jail for the boys to lynch instead of Cocos. 'Cause Sam ain't daid, not even if the sheriff thinks he is. Cocos thinks it was you who killed Miz Robin when she caught you cheatin' with Sam. But it was probably Sam who done it. An' you two were fixin' to light out of heah, leavin' Cocos to be lynched for what Sam done."

The girl got to her feet, indignant. Her husband barred the door with his arm.

"Oh, no. You don't leave heah until Sam calls."

Myra Scarlett stared at her husband, puzzled. This wasn't the man she had married, the man she had wound around her finger for two years. This was a deadly cold and capable stranger whom she had never known. She ran a pink-tipped tongue around her lips. "And what—what if Sam doesn't call?"

Scarlett said nothing, merely stood regarding her thoughtfully.

"No, Bart. Please," she pleaded. "Don't kill me. I'll talk. I'll tell you who killed Bessie Robin. I'll tell you everything I know." Her words tripped over each other in their haste to be out of her mouth. I have been seeing Sam, yes. But I didn't kill Bessie Robin. And I wasn't going to run away with Sam to-night. Honest, I wasn't. I—"

What she was going to do, Myra Scarlett never said. Jeanie, the dog barked

sharply, lunged at Scarlett's knees. The 'pling' of a bullet from a silenced gun spat outside the screening and lead slapped the wall where Scarlett's head had been. Scarlett fired, off balance, at the flashes. Then all was silence but the muted chirrup of a robin and the sound of running feet. Bart Scarlett was alone with his dead. Cheap, blonde, pretty Myra Scarlett had double-crossed both her husband and her lover for the last time.

CHAPTER TWO

Big Boy's Private Party

SCARLETT looked up from the figure on the bed to the bullet-shattered screen and mentally counted the flashes he had fired at. The man's gun should be empty. "Get him, Jeanie!" he ordered.

There was a blur of fur as the dog leaped through the window.

Scarlett straightened the torn body on the bed. He crossed his wife's hands on her bloody breast and covered her with a sheet. There was nothing more he could do for her. There wasn't even any use of

'phoning the sheriff and telling him that she was dead. The sheriff had his hands full.

Out in the night that crowded against the screens, Jeanie howled just once—in disappointment. The sudden roar of a car motor split the night, then faded rapidly.

Scarlett stood for a moment as if lost in thought. Then he slipped out of his linen coat and laid it on the twin of the bed that held the bloody corpse of Myra Scarlett. From the dresser drawer he took twin shoulder clips and strapped them to his body. Then he reloaded his guns, slipped them into the clips and put his coat back on.

Without a look at the sheet-covered body he closed the door and limped into the living room. The three traveling bags that had stood by the door were gone. He limped on out to his car and meshed it into gear. Jeanie was waiting for him at the head of the T formed by the lane and the highway in front of the big hotel. Her muzzle was pointed up the road toward Heron Point.

Scarlett whistled her into the car.

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"No," he told her. "Sam wouldn't dare go up to the Point. An' he won't dare try the roads across the causeways. There's only one way Sam can go, an' that's by sea."

As he spoke he swung his car down the road away from Heron Point toward Sam Robin's home and boat slip on the Pass. The dog whined, looked up at her master, then settled back on the seat.

Scarlett drove in silence, his bitter thoughts making poor company. He had tried to be an average man with a wife, a home, one servant, and a dog. All but the wife had been average. And now she was dead.

**S**AM ROBIN'S ranch-type house was built on a filled-in spit of sand between the Gulf of Mexico and the deep water channel of Blind Pass. It was in darkness but for a light in what Robin called his den. A car stood in the driveway.

Scarlett picked up the car with his headlights as he crossed Robin's private causeway across the Pass. He snapped them off and cut his motor.

"We'll walk the rest of the way," he told the dog.

He got out of his car and limped through the sand to the bank of the Pass in order to approach the house from the rear. The moon was beginning to rise, a wind had sprung up, and Scarlett noted with grim satisfaction that Sam's boat was still in its slip.

At the kitchen screen door he paused to listen. The night was alive with sound. There was the putt-putt of a kicker in the Pass, the pound and surge of the surf on the beach, the screaming of the night birds and the rising howl of the wind.

He opened the screen door carefully, held it for the dog and stepped inside. Jeanie wrinkled her muzzle, sniffed. There had been death in the house but it was gone.

Moving cat-like through the dark despite his limp, Scarlett wove his way through the kitchen to the hall, paused outside of the door of the one lighted room. There he thumbed back the hammer of one gun, turned the knob, and kicked open the door.

"Hello, Cock Robin," he greeted.

But he was talking to air. There was no one in the room. And it looked as if a hurricane had blown through Robin's desk. Its drawers were hanging askew and the floor was littered with papers.

Scarlett stooped and picked one up. And then another and another. Most of them were duplicate sales contracts, and Scarlett recognized that the prices were too low. Their meaning was plain. Sam Robin had converted everything he owned both on the beach and the mainland into cash. And he had done so in a hurry. The cash, Scarlett thought grimly, had probably been waiting for Sam in Myra's three traveling bags.

Still Scarlett was puzzled. Sam had sold valuable tracts of land for whatever he could get. And he had sold most of them to Mason. And that wasn't like Sam Robin. He loved women, but he also loved money. A growing suspicion began to form in Scarlett's mind.

A low warning growl from Jeanie turned him to the window. The lights of another car were coming across the causeway. He considered turning off the light, frowned instead and drew his other gun. Sam's car was already in the drive. And it couldn't be the sheriff. He was fully occupied up at the Point.

The car drove up behind Sam's car and stopped. Two men got out and both looked back suspiciously at Scarlett's car. Scarlett stepped behind a door and waited. They lumbered on to the porch, through the front door, and into the lighted room still arguing about the car.

"See! Just as we left it," the first man crowed. His voice was harsh, metallic. His clothes were expensively flashy. He looked like a city hood. "I told you them were petters in that car."

And then they saw the dog. Both men drew their guns.

"Jeez! A wolf!" one said.

"A chow!" the other corrected. He slipped the safety off his automatic.

Scarlett stepped out from behind the door. "I wouldn't if I were you," he drawled. "Start reachin', an' start talkin'!"

**O**NE of them reached. The harsh-voiced hood whirled and fired. His bullet chipped plaster off the ceiling. He



looked incredulous, fast glazing eyes at the wisp of smoke curling out of Scarlett's gun barrel, then crumpled to the floor.

"He hadn't ought to have tried that," Scarlett said.

The remaining hood was wizened and shrewd. He spoke with a Cockney whine and Scarlett thought he had seen him before.

"S'y! 'ow the 'ell do you figure in on this? Who the bloody 'ell are you?"

Scarlett shook his head. "Who are you? An' where's Sam Robin?" he demanded.

The little Cockney triggerman grinned widely as Jeanie growled deep in her throat at the sound of feet scrunching up the path from the Pass. "Hi don't know 'oo you are, mister. But Hi do know that you've walked right into a jam! In 'ere, boys!" he called.

The snout of a machine gun ripped through the screening of the window. Scarlet fired a shot at the light and stepped back through the door to the kitchen as the gun began to chatter. As he moved he tossed a parting slug at the rug where the Cockney had dropped his gun, and shot him through the hand.

The hoodlum swore. "In through the back way, fellows. There's a rube John Law in 'ere and 'e's looking for Cock Robin!"

Bart Scarlett grinned wryly in the dark. He had been called a lot of names, but this was the first time he had ever been mistaken for the law.

In addition to the two gunmen who had come across the causeway by car, one of whom was now dead, Scarlett decided by the intensity of the gunfire that at least four other torpedos had come down the Pass in a boat propelled by the kicker he had heard. And at least two of them had sub-machine guns. But who they were, or why they were there, he hadn't the least idea. And he hadn't the time to reason it out. He was too busy dodging lead.

"Down, Jeanie! Down!" he ordered.

The gunman who first had fired through the window moved around to the back. From the shelter of a huge stone urn in the patio he poured a murderous streak of lead that searched out every

corner of the kitchen but the one where Scarlett crouched.

Coldly, without haste, Scarlett waited until the gunner's head showed above the urn in the moonlight. Then he fired just once. The machine-gunner staggered to his feet, took two steps backward off the patio, and fell. The machine gun hurtled over his head and fell into the sand.

A fleeting shadow snatched it almost as it touched the sand. But not quite soon enough. The sand had clogged the feed pawl and it jammed. The man threw it from him in disgust and jammed a fresh clip in his automatic. But he had stayed framed against the new moon for too long. Two .38 slugs from Scarlett's Colts smashed his Adam's apple.

There was a sound of frantically ripped screen wire from the room where the battle had begun.

"Come on, fellows," the little Cockney screamed. "Let's get out of 'ere and back to the 'otel! That rube John Law is poison. 'e just got Jake and Lew!"

Bart smiled grimly but stayed right on the floor where he was. The second machine gun was spraying through the front of the house, searching for him in short, vicious bursts.

"Howl, Jeanie!" he ordered.

The dog lifted her muzzle and howled.

"That got him," the gunner on the front porch exulted. He stepped in through the door and was silhouetted for a moment against the skyline by the moon.

Scarlett fired. The machine gunner grunted and his knees buckled under him. He slid down the door jamb to the porch, his hands clawing at his belly.

Scarlett got quietly to his feet and stared out of a window. Of the six unknown gunman who had attacked him, four were dead. The other two were running for their lives. But he had yet to find Sam Robin. And time was growing short. Still, the wizen-faced little hood had mentioned the hotel. And there was only one hotel he could have meant.

Then suddenly Scarlett grinned. It all was very clear. "Well I'll be damned," was all he said. "Well I'll be damned!"

**P**ARKED in the palm-lined circular drive reserved for the guests of the Swank Gulf Vista Hotel, Scarlett studied

the big, rambling building through the rustling fronds of the palms. It looked like a huge white octopus sprawled on the beach in the moonlight. He was back almost from where he had started—not three hundred yards from his house and the sheet-covered corpse of his wife.

He thought, but he wasn't certain, that he could see a ray of light through the tightly shuttered windows of the ballroom on the second floor. If it was a light, he could imagine the ball that was going on in there—a devil's ball, with Sam Robin as chief dancer. If Sam hadn't wanted to meet Cock Robin's obligations, he shouldn't have openly boasted that he was Cock Robin.

Scarlett started to get out of his car and stopped with one foot on the running board as the bright lights of a Ford chugged up the highway. It came to a stop when it saw him.

"Need any help?" one of the sun-blackened passengers called out cheerfully.

Then the driver saw who it was. "Hi, Scarlett," he scowled. "This true what Lait Benson tells us about your darcy?"

Scarlett said nothing. Nor did he tell them of the murder of his wife. He knew that it was useless, or worse. In the mood they were in they were capable of blaming him. Myra, too, had been well liked. Too well, by some.

"Hell, yes. Of course it's true," one of the other men drawled. "But you don't expect Scarlett to admit it, do you? That old black devil is his darcy." The speaker nudged the driver. "Come on, Sash. Let's git on up to the Point or we're goin' to be too late to help lynch him."

The driver kicked the ancient model T into high and it chugged on up the highway.

Scarlett stared after it. There was still a lot he didn't understand. Why was Benson, the fishing guide, so anxious to get Cocos hung? There were still some points, important ones, that needed clearing up.

A sudden howl of wind caused him to look out at the Gulf. The riding lights of a yacht bobbed on the swell just off the bars. A bad place for a yacht, he thought, with a blow quickening from off

shore. He looked back at the hotel, then slipped one of his bone handled Colts from its clip and snapped it into a specially constructed buckle riveted on to the collar of the dog. The big gun hung low in the fur of her belly and out of sight.

"You wait heah until I whistle for you, Jeanie."

The dog growled, her eyes bright with understanding. She sat in the car, her eyes following him in the moonlight as he walked openly up to the front door of the hotel.

The door was open a crack. Scarlett opened it more with his foot. Even in the wan light of the moon the rope mat inside the door held two distinctive sets of footprints. Both were wet, and one of them was bloody. He inched the door still further open and stepped inside.

"Okay, sucker. Hold it!" a girl's voice ordered pleasantly.

Scarlett "held it" as the hard, round snout of a sub-machine gun bit into the small of his back. Then a soft white hand with crimson nails that looked like splashes of blood in the silver of the moonlight reached out of the shadows and tugged his remaining gun from its holster.

"Just couldn't let well enough alone, eh?" the girl's voice jeered. "You rube John Laws are all alike. But come in. You're just the man we want. Big Boy would like to see you."

Scarlett smiled wryly in the darkness. It was common knowledge that Big Boy couldn't see. The once famous, still-powerful gangster who owned the Gulf Vista Hotel had gone stone blind during his twelve years in prison.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Sam Robin Pays Up

**B**IG BOY belied his name. He was small, dark, and lean. And he was bad. During the prohibition era when he had ruled the underworlds of Chicago and Miami, he had killed without compunction. His was the sound and legal theory that dead men tell no tales and where there is no *corpus delicti* there can be no trial for murder. One man alone had bested him. That man had been Cock

Robin. And now Big Boy had the Robin where he wanted him, as he had dreamed for twelve long years in Atlanta, Leavenworth, and Alcatraz. He had him strung up by the thumbs. And on either side an impassive faced gorilla poked lighted pine slivers under the soft flesh of Robin's toe nails to make him dance in the devil's ball that was but the prelude to his death.

Scarlett heard Sam Robin's screams before the door had closed behind him; heard screams and the sounds of clapping.

The girl turned the flashlight in her hand up to her face. He saw she was both beautiful and smiling. "We're giving a little party," she explained.

Scarlett nodded soberly. "Yes ma'am. So I heah."

"Get going." The hoodlum with the machine gun prodded him toward the stairs. "Just follow Doris. And don't make no bum moves."

The girl led the way up the stairs. The carpets were rolled back. The chairs and tables were so many shrouded ghosts. Even the wind was silent here. There were no sounds but the screams of pain from the ballroom. It was like walking through some giant, fantastic tomb peopled by living dead. Even the air had the dry and musty stench of death.

"You the law?" the girl asked.

"No, ma'am," Scarlett told her. "Just a neighbor. I live down the road a piece from heah."

Even the hoodlum with the machine gun laughed at that. "Then you're just in time, neighbor," he chuckled. "Like Doris said, we're giving a party tonight. A coming out party for Big Boy."

Behind its drawn shuttered windows the white and gold ballroom of Gulf Vista was ablaze with light. Only the windows opening out upon the Gulf were open. Big Boy sat on the raised dais at one end, his blind eyes peering avidly in the direction of the screams. A dozen assorted minor gunmen and their molls in formal summer dress stood in a semi-circle clapping drunkenly to the tortured convulsions of the screaming figure in the center of the circle.

Scarlett looked at Robin, then turned his head away. They had stripped the big

man to his shorts. He hung by his thumbs from two ropes so suspended from the ceiling. His toes barely touched the floor. Under each toe nail burned a sliver of resinous pine. He was smeared with honey; he literally crawled with ants which explored the cavities of his mouth, his nostrils, and his ears. When his eyes were open, they held the light of madness.

"But I'm not Cock Robin," he screamed endlessly. "Oh, God, don't do this to me! I'm not Cock Robin! I'm not! I've just been trading on his name!"

**T**HE clapping stopped when the boys and girl saw Scarlett. But the screams went on unending.

The lean-faced little gunman's nostrils tightened as his blind eyes sought the door. He had a dry and brittle way of speaking.

"Yes?" he demanded.

"It's just a man named Scarlett," Scarlett told him. "I live right down the road a piece, an' I'm lookin' for Sam Robin."

Big Boy turned his blind eyes on the speaker. His tone was an accusation. "I've heard that voice before!"

"Probably," Scarlett admitted. "I've been both heah an' there."

The girl, Doris, laughed shortly. "It's that rube John Law who shot up Sam Robin's cottage."

"Describe him."

She did. Scarlett realized with a start how similar both he and Sam Robin were. The girl's description would have fitted either man. Or Benson, the fishing guide. Or Mason, the lawyer, for that matter. They were all tall men, gaunt, weather-beaten, with aquiline features. The blind eyes stabbed again in his direction.

"What did you want of Robin?"

Scarlett told him the truth. "I wanted to take him up to Heron Point for murder. Sam killed his wife this afternoon an' blamed it on my darcy. An' the boys are fixin' to lynch him any minute."

"He's talking straight, Chief," one of the gunmen offered confirmation. "You can hear the mob shouting from out on the sun deck."

Big Boy waved him to one side. "I'm not interested in anyone but Robin." His sightless eyes turned toward the sagging figure in the ropes. The screams had

ceased when the tortured man had fainted. "Pull out the splinters, wipe off the ants, and pour some whiskey down his throat. I don't want him to die until we learn where that money is."

Two of his hoodlums did as he ordered. They lowered the unconscious body to the floor, released the thumbs, wiped off the ants, and forced the neck of a whiskey bottle in between Sam Robin's teeth. He choked, spat it out, and sat up weakly.

"Where," Big Boy demanded, "is the money you got from the forced sale of your properties when you heard I had been released?"

Robin stared at him dully with lack luster eyes. It was Bart Scarlett's private opinion that the man was dying where he sat.

"I've told you," Robin said slowly, "I gave it to a woman—Myra Scarlett. We—we were going to run away tonight."

Big Boy faced Scarlett. "This Myra Scarlett is your wife?"

"She was," Scarlett admitted. "But she's daid."

"Dead?"

"Yes, sir. Sam heah shot her, must have been just before you got him."

"What time was this?"

"Not quite an hour ago."

Big Boy smiled wryly. "Then it wasn't Robin who shot her. We've had him here since five."

"No," Robin said uncertainly. "I—I didn't shoot Myra. An' I didn't kill Bessie with an arrow." It seemed difficult for him to breathe. "And I'm not Cock Robin. I—I'm just a loud mouthed fool who—who . . ."

He slumped against the legs of the hoodlum who stood behind him.

"More whiskey," Big Boy ordered.

Scarlett shook his head. "That won't do no good." He stooped and raised one of the slumped man's eyelids. It stayed open. "Robin's daid."

**BIG BOY** lighted a cigarette, his lean face unperturbed. "All right. Then we'll go to work on you. Where's the money that he gave your wife? Sixty thousand dollars, he said it was."

Scarlett backed a step and the snout of a sub-machine gun stopped him.

"Not so fast, John Law," the man be-

hind it ordered. "The Boss asked you a question."

Scarlett stalled for time to think. "But I'm not the law," he protested. "I'm just a man whose wife's been killed, an' whose darcy's bein' lynched for a murder that he never done."

As he talked he considered the spot into which he had walked of his own volition. No matter what he said or did, he was marked for death. He considered making a break for the comparative safety of the staircase, and whistling for Jeanie as he ran. Then he looked around the circle of silent, staring faces and knew he would never make it. Even with a gun in his own hand, not counting the machine gun at his back, or the possibility of the women being armed, it would be twelve against one. He'd be dead before Jeanie was half way up the stairs. Besides, if it hadn't been Sam Robin who shot Myra—a wry smile flicked across his weather beaten features as he thought of a fantastic possibility. Still, stranger things had happened.

"Talk," the man with the machine gun said, and prodded.

"I don't know where the money is," Scarlett admitted. Then he threw out his bait. "But I do know this much. If it wasn't Sam who shot my wife—"

"Yes?" Big Boy demanded.

"Then it could be you've been torturin' the wrong man," Scarlett told him. "Could be Sam wasn't Cock Robin. Could be Cock Robin's still alive an' laughin' at you."

The girl, Doris, balanced Scarlett's own bone handled Colt in her hand. "That's a lie." She looked at the dead man on the ball room floor and then back up at Scarlett. "He boasted all up and down the beach he was Cock Robin. And as soon as he heard Big Boy was out he converted all his real estate into cash so he could scam."

"Might be he was advised to," Scarlett told her. "From what I've heard, Cock Robin is a whole lot smarter than Sam acted."

"That," Big Boy admitted, "has been worrying me."

"What's more," Scarlett continued in his easy drawl, "I don't think the real Cock Robin would call hisself that name. They just call him that cause someone

heard him whistling just like a bird."

The blind man on the dais nodded curtly.

"You seem quite well informed. Go on. What else do you know of the Robin?"

SCARLETT mused on what he did know. It was his personal opinion, and always had been up until that night, that Cock Robin was a much maligned and wrongly accredited man. Cock Robin's methods were ruthless, true. Ever since he had seen his young, idolized brother—an Ensign in the Coast Guard—mowed down by the murderous bullets of a rum runner's crew, he had lived to stamp out vermin of the type of Big Boy. He had made a fortune at it, too. Still, his methods were outside the law and it wanted him dead or alive—wanted him ten thousand dollars worth.

"Just what I read in the paper," he drawled. "An' I don't recall I've read much 'bout him for two years."

The circle of unsmiling, staring faces closed in even tighter. They were growing impatient.

"Keep on talking," Big Boy ordered sharply.

Scarlett drew a deep breath and continued. Briefly, but well, he told everything that had happened since he had driven into Heron Point to find Cocos accused of murdering both Sam and Bessie Robin. He omitted nothing. He invented nothing.

"And you think Robin's money was in the three pieces of luggage by the door?" Big Boy demanded when he had finished.

"I do."

"And you say the man who shot your wife through the window whistled, or chirruped like a robin?"

"He did. What's more," Scarlett added, "my dog Jeanie was right an' I was wrong. I found her sittin' where the road forks, with her muzzle pointed *up* the road toward Heron Point."

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Big Boy sucked deeply at his cigarette, then his thin nostrils tightened. "And just who are you?" he demanded.

"My family name is Scarlett," Bart told him. "An' I originally come from Georgia." He tapped his shattered knee cap. "I been in the government hospital at Bay Pines an' I just got out this evenin'."

"Cripes," said the little Cockney gunman who had been in the battle at Robin's cottage. "It's a bloody shime it twarnt your arm what's sore."

Scarlett ignored the interruption. He was talking for his life.

"An' I live three hundred yards down the road in that little white Spanish house. Just me an' my wife, an' my dog, an' my darky, Cocos. Only now my wife's daid."

The gang leader pursed his finger tips against his lips.

"Check on that," he ordered.

The girl, Doris, who had become his eyes, left the ballroom with the wizened-faced Cockney gunman.

"We'll wait until Doris gets back," was all the gang leader would promise.

She came back shortly, puzzled.

"There is a woman there, and she is dead," the girl admitted.

"And there is plenty 'appening up at the Point, too," the Cockney gunman added. "We could 'ear the sound of shouting and gun fire."

Doris touched the corpse on the floor with the toe of her open work sandal. "But my advice is for us to get on the yacht and scam on back to Miami. You've done what you came here for, Big Boy. You've killed Cock Robin."

The evil faced little gang chief waved her to one side. "I must be certain. You have something in mind," he told Scarlett. "Go on. Let me hear your proposition."

The ring of silent, staring faces surrounding Scarlett moved in even closer. His proposition had better be good, and he knew it. They were growing impatient for the kill.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## Big Boy Makes a Deal

THERE were four men in the sheriff's tiny office: Sheriff Tate, Mason the lawyer, and Sheriff Tate's two deputies. But the room was so filled with gun smoke, they could hardly see each other.

From the lock-up cell in the rear, Bart Scarlett's darky Cocos, prayed aloud.

"Oh, Lawd, doan let 'em hang me," he prayed. "Doan let 'em hang me. I ain' neber kill no woman, Lawd."

A burst of shots that hemstitched a pattern through the upper panel of the office door cut short his prayers. They began again in increased fervor with the thump of a battering ram against the door.

"Don't be a fool, Sheriff," Benson called from the outside. "You'd better open up. Because we're goin' t' git that darky if we have to burn the jail."

Mason put down the hot and smoking rifle he had been firing over the heads of the mob.

"I quit," he told the sheriff. "I'm not going to kill a white man for the sake of any Negro and I'm not going to be killed."

The two deputies looked dubious.

One of them mopped the perspiration from his forehead with a sweat-soaked sleeve.

"We jis' cain't hold out no longer," he protested. "Not lessen we shoot right into the mob stead of over their haids. An' I feel like Mason does. Some of those boys out there is kin t' me, an' I ain't goin' to kill 'em for no black man."

"All right, then. Stop firing." Sheriff Tate admitted he was licked. He made one concession to his pride. "But I'll be blamed if I'll open the door. Let 'em bust it down if they kin."

They could. Once the firing from inside had stopped, the battering ram smashed against the heavy door with rhythmic blows that sprung it on its hinges, then cracked the huge cross bar and wrenched it from the hasps of iron that held it.

There was a moment of silence as it gave. Then the mob of sun-blackened fishing guides, bait camp proprietors, and the more riotous element of the Point swept on into the jail led by Lait Benson.

"Just stay out of the way, boys, an' you won't git hurt," Benson warned the men in the office. "You fellows done your duty like you seen it. Now we aim to do ourn."

Cocos didn't have a chance. They hauled him fighting frantically but vainly from his cell and tore the clothes from his back.

"Oh, Lawd, doan let 'em hang me," he kept screaming. In the same breath he wailed, "Oh, Cap'n Bart you betteh hurry or you gwine be too late."

Benson cuffed him into moaning silence and slipped a noose around his neck.

"Haul him over to Pete Sheldon's Ways, boys. We'll hang him from that big boat davit."

The crowd trailed whooping and shouting to the Bay. The Sheriff and Mason followed. Cocos had grown silent. But his skin was gray. With the rope around his neck, he shuffled gravely through the dust, only the whites of his rolling eyes and the grayness of his skin mirroring his terror.

Benson threw the free end of the rope over one of the big steel davits that swung out over the water.

"Any last words, black boy?" he demanded.

Cocos shook his head. The whites of his eyes rolled wildly as he looked around the circle of grim and scowling faces.

"No, suh. But you all hadn' better do dis. My Cap'n gwine have yo' hide fo' dis."

A roar of laughter swept the beach.

"'Sides," the colored man protested "I ain' never kill Miz Robin. I tol' de truth on that."

"Who killed her then, Cocos?" Sheriff Tate demanded. "Mebbe if you tell me I still can stop the boys."

The old colored man licked his lips. "I—I ain't sayin'. I—I jist say I ain't killed her."

"String him up! String him up!" the crowd roared.

Benson drew the rope taut on the davit. Two dozen pair of eager hands reached out to help.

"I wouldn't if I were you," a voice warned slowly.

"Bart Scarlett!" Benson roared with surprise.

THE whites of the old colored man's eyes receded slowly. He even smiled when he heard the sharp bark of a dog. His Cap'n and Jeanie hadn't forgotten him after all.

"That's right, Benson," Scarlett told him. He made his way slowly through the crowd limping slightly under the weight of the body that he carried on his shoulder. On either side of him walked two well dressed, hard-faced strangers, their right hands in their coat pockets. Behind them walked Big Boy himself his hand clutching the arm of the girl. Behind them, in the shadows, a half dozen similar strangers stood waiting, their hands also in their pockets. Big Boy had listened to Scarlett's proposition, but he wasn't taking any chances.

The crowd on the beach grew silent as Scarlett eased the body off his shoulder and they saw that it was Sam Robin.

"I wonder," said Scarlett, facing them, "could I say me a few words before you boys go on with this heah lynching?"

"You'd best not interfere with this, Bart Scarlett," Benson scowled.

The sheriff touched the body.

"Sam Robin's dead?"

"Robin's daid," Scarlett nodded. "But he wasn't daid when I first found him." The roar of the mob had quieted to a whisper. "In fact," the lean, gaunt, leath-  
-faced veteran lied, "Sam told me quite a few things I think that you boys ought to heah."

"We don't want to heah 'em," Benson shouted. But he shouted alone.

Scarlett stood up on an empty oil drum and looked around him.

"But before I start to talk," he said, "perhaps there's some of you who recognize the man heah with me."

A ripple of comment circled through the crowd. Most of them knew Big Boy by his pictures. Those who didn't, knew his yacht and knew it had been anchored off Gulf Vista since some time that afternoon.

The dapper little gunman, smiling sightlessly, bowed to the crowd in the moonlight.

"I'm just one of you tonight, boys," he told them. "I'm here in the interest of justice."

Mason edged his way to the front of the

crowd, his eyes glaring at Bart Scarlett.

"Well, go on and make your talk, Scarlett," he said. "We tried to save your darcy for you as long as we could. If there's any more can be done, you'll have to do it."

"Take the rope off the colored man's neck," Big Boy ordered one of his men who was guarding Scarlett.

The gunman did so but his eyes never left the man whom he was guarding. Scarlett had been promised his life if he could prove that someone other than the dead man was Cock Robin. If he couldn't, well, he was riding with Big Boy part way to Miami.

Sheriff Tate licked at his scraggly mustache uncertainly.

"Er—Sam Robin told you who killed his wife?" he demanded.

"Yes," Scarlett lied, "he did. He named a man up at the Point heah. An' he said that man was the real Cock Robin."

A ROAR went up from the crowd. John Mason, the lawyer, held up his hand for silence.

"That's a mighty deadly accusation you've just made. Are you certain you can back it?"

"I can," Scarlett told him.

"Which is the fishing guide called Benson?" Big Boy asked.

The girl placed his thin white hand on the bronzed arm of the fishing guide.

"Whistle like a robin," Big Boy ordered.

The fishing guide shrugged the hand off his arm. "Why should I? I ain't one of your gun-toters. You cain't tell me what t' do."

"You're stayin' right heah," Scarlett told him. He lifted his voice. "You boys want t' heah what Sam Robin had to say before he died?"

They roared back that they did.

"You all know," Scarlett began, "that for as long as Sam Robin was heah at the Point he practically admitted that he was Cock Robin, the outlaw, an' traded on his name."

The massed faces in the moonlight nodded affirmation.

"But tonight, before Sam died," Scarlett drawled, "Sam told me that he wasn't Cock Robin. An' this was what else he

told me." He paused and they waited breathless. "Sam said that a certain man right heah in Heron Point, the man Sam figured was the real Cock Robin, came to Sam an' told him that Big Boy was out of jail; told Sam that Big Boy would never believe Sam wasn't the real Cock Robin and the best thing that Sam could do was to sell off all his property for what he could get—and skip."

"That part must be true, boys," Mason addressed the mob. "I know, because I bought a lot of Sam's real estate myself at give-away prices. Sam seemed desperat."

Benson started to say something, then changed his mind.

"That man," Scarlett continued, "wrote to Big Boy oveh in Miami an' told him that Cock Robin was oveh heah at Heron Point. An' if any of you boys out there was Cock Robin an' knew Big Boy was after your hide, could you think of a better idea than of blaming everythin' on to Sam? He'd boasted that he was the Robin." His voice lowered slightly. "An' Big Boy as you see is blind, went blind in prison. He's the only man who's ever really met Cock Robin face to face an' lived."

"But who is Cock Robin?" Sheriff Tate demanded.

"Who," Scarlett countered, "is one of the boys who wanted most to see my darky hung?"

"Now wait a minute," Benson scoffed. "You ain't going to try to say that I'm Cock Robin."

"You could be," Scarlett told him. Point by point he drove the known facts home. "You look a lot like Sam. You wanted mighty bad to have my darky hung. It could be that Sam found you out an' that you killed both him an' Bessie when he did."

A roar went up from the crowd.

"I never!" Benson shouted.

Scarlett lighted a cigarette and his face was grim in the match flare.

"Yet you're mighty handy with a bow an' arrow, Benson. I've seen you shootin' mullet. An' you were the one who found Sam's watch an' wallet. You were the one who drove the sheriff over to Sam's this afternoon just in time to find Cocos wipin' off the bow. Could be you were the man who shot at me through my window

after I left heah t'night—an' killed my wife Myra instead."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Who Killed Cock Robin?

THE growing murmur that had rippled through the crowd of sun-blackened men ceased abruptly. It was replaced with an ominous silence.

"Myra—Miz Scarlett, your wife—is dead?" the sheriff asked.

Scarlett nodded. "That's right. She was killed to keep her from talkin'. Killed to keep her from telling me the name of the man she was plannin' on runnin' away with—the same man who framed Sam Robin, tricked him into Big Boy's hands, and was intendin' to run away with Sam's money and my wife."

The crowd closed in around Benson.

The fishing guide poised as if for flight, then changed his mind. He turned, a scowl on his face and a long barreled pistol in his hand.

"It's a lie. I'm not Cock Robin," he protested.

Big Boy tugged at his ear lobe.

"Yet you drive a thirty-six Ford convertible coupe with a rumble seat?"

"I do," the fishing guide admitted.

Big Boy nudged the girl. She motioned to one of the hard faced men on the outskirts of the crowd. He strode into the knotted center of the crowd with three pieces of smart, matched luggage in his hands.

"Then suppose you tell us," Big Boy asked the fishing guide, "what this luggage was doing in your car? It is Mrs. Myra Scarlett's luggage and it held Sam Robin's money."

Sheriff Tate, Mason, and the two deputies crowded forward to look at the cases.

"I'm waiting," Big Boy said.

Benson shook his head. His voice was surly, bitter.

"I don't know nothin' about the cases or Sam's money, but if they were found in my car I know who put 'em there." He paused, then continued grimly. "All right. If that's the way he wants to play I can play that same way, too. I know who wrote Big Boy an' told him Sam was the



Robin. I was paid plenty to help him. But I wasn't paid to help him kill Myra Scarlett an' I didn't know that she was daid until jist now." His voice rose to a pitch of fury and his red eyes gleamed with hate. "An' now he's tryin' to frame me, make out like I done it all. Well, he won't. If *he's* Cock Robin, I'll kill him, that's what I'll do—an' I collect me that big reward!"

Before Scarlett or his gunman guards could stop him, the fishing guide whirled toward the spot where Sheriff Tate, Mason and the deputies were stooped over the suit cases on the beach, his long barreled pistol spitting fire.

Then he said, "Oh, my God!" He put both hands to his chest and sat down on the sand. A bloody tooth oozed from his lips and he slumped slowly sideways.

Mason blew the smoke from the barrel of the gun in his hand and dropped it back into his pocket.

"The man was mad," he said coolly. "He was aiming right at you, Sheriff. And I know you're not Cock Robin."

The crowd clamored noisy approval but Scarlett held up his hand.

"Before we thank Mr. Mason," he drawled softly, "might I ask him just one question?"

Mason rolled his cigar in his mouth and grinned.

"Sure. Why not? Go ahead."

"How come," Scarlett asked him, "that one of Big Boy's men saw *you* put those traveling cases into Benson's car?"

The silence was deathly. Even the wind seemed to pause.

"That," Mason said finally, "is a lie. You can't trip me like that. Those weren't

even Myra's cases. Her traveling bags are—" He stopped short when he realized what he had said.

Scarlett snapped, "How do you know? And how," he shook his fist under the lawyer's nose, "did you know I got home from the hospital tonight sooner than I was expected? No one knew what time I was expected home except my wife! And tonight when you were afraid she would expose you, you shot her—shot her from outside the window and then whistled like a robin, still trying to put the blame off on to Sam."

"Cock Robin!" Big Boy exulted. "The *real* Cock Robin this time!"

**H**IS groping hands felt for the lawyer's neck, but they were only two of many. The duped crowd of fishermen closed in silently this time. There was no shouting and no hurry, but there was a hanging. They hung Mason with the rope that he had expected would swing Cocos into eternity. They did allow Big Boy one privilege that Scarlett begged for him. They let him pull the rope.

Except for the sheriff and his deputies, Scarlett, Cocos, Jeanie, Big Boy, the girl Doris, and those few of Big Boy's men who had not gone back to board the yacht, Heron Point was asleep and deserted. The crowd of sun-blackened men had slipped away.

In the sheriff's battered office, Scarlett cleared up the last few remaining points on which there still was any doubt.

"Mason," he drawled, "saw a chance to clean up, and he did. Sam Robin had boasted for two years he was Cock Robin. So when Mason heard Big Boy was out

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of prison he schemed with Myra, my wife, to git both Sam's money an' his land. Sam thought he was runnin' off with Myra, but she'd been two-timin' both him an' me with Mason right along. She was runnin' off with Mason an' Sam's money."

"An' Benson?" one of the deputies asked.

Scarlett dismissed him contemptuously.

"Mason hired him to do his dirty work like gittin' Cocos hung, for little or no money. An' when Benson thought Mason had framed him, he ups an' tries to shoot him."

"Meanwhile," Big Boy added, "several of my boys had—er—met Sam Robin and asked him up to the hotel to answer a few questions." He sighed. "In a way, it's a shame Cock Robin's dead. At least he was smart, and he almost fooled us all."

The blind gunman nodded to the four hoodlums who were his constant body guard and the two who still guarded Scarlett. He got up still holding to the arm of the girl.

"Well, we must be getting on back to Miami."

The girl reached for one of Myra Scarlett's bags that they had found in Mason's car.

"I'm sorry," Scarlett said, stopping her, "but I'm afraid that money stays right heah. It might just be Miz Robin had some kin folks."

The blind gangster's thin lips twisted in a bitter smile.

"Don't be a fool, Scarlett," he ordered. "You have your life. You should be grateful that I kept my promise. Remember that you're still unarmed and at one nod from me, you'd be dead."

Scarlett's right hand caressed the soft fur of his dog, stroked the long fur of her belly.

"Perhaps. But I wouldn't nod if I were you, Big Boy. Because we'd die together."

As he spoke, he levelled the bone-handled Colt that had swung from Jeanie's collar directly at the heart of the blind gangster.

The girl smiled openly and in admiration.

"Well, I'll be. If you aren't a rootin', tootin', shootin' son-of-a-gun."

THE sheriff, forewarned by Scarlett, drew back both hammers of the double barreled shot gun in his lap. He nodded toward the gunmen, and their hands froze just above their pockets.

"I'd be obliged," he smiled, "if you boys would raise your hands. Bart Scarlett tells me that it might just be that you are wanted. So we'll take you in to town to see."

The blind gang leader smiled his contempt.

"But this is ridiculous, Sheriff. You haven't a thing on me or any of my boys!"

"We have murder," Scarlett told him, and his voice was bitter. "Besides, rats like you should stay in jail."

The little gang leader smiled his bitter, twisted smile.

"All right, double crosser. But I'll see that you're gotten for this. They can't hold me. And they can't make a murder charge stick. You've admitted openly in front of witnesses that Sam Robin died of fear."

"Yes," Scarlett admitted, "I did. But John Mason died of a rope. You pulled that rope. Lynchin' is against the law in this state now. You know," he smiled, "I wouldn't be at all surprised if, what with your record, you went right back into a cell for life."

"Damn it! I've heard that voice," the blind man fumed. "Just who the hell are you?"

"Just a man named Scarlett," Scarlett told him. "I guess we'll be gettin' on," he drawled. "Come on, Cocos."

"I'll see you in the mornin', Bart?" the sheriff asked.

"Perhaps," was all he said. "But I don't think so."

The door closed softly behind him.

Big Boy stared with his blind eyes at the door, shook his manacled wrists in fury—then shrugged.

"Well, let's go into town and get this over with," he said. "I got one consolation. Cock Robin is dead. At least—" He stopped, his evil face fierce in its fury.

Clear on the quiet night air outside the jail came the cheerful chirrup of a robin. At least it sounded like a robin. Or it might have been just a man whistling to his dog.

THE END

# Sow Murder, Reap Murder

By

**DANE GREGORY**

*Ken Riddle figured there were two ways to use lead for spraying: Liquid for apple trees, and solid for his trusting partner. He forgot, however, a saying as old as Truth itself!*



**V**ERBALLY and unwittingly, Marshal Clive Wayne was signing a man's death warrant. One foot planted on the running-board of the big Mack truck, he looked gravely at Lon Plemmons and said: "They're gonna let Moreno out of the county hospital tomorrow morning, Lon. I thought maybe I better tell you, about it."

Kenneth Riddle casually snapped his cigarette through the open right-hand window of the truck and waited for his partner to speak. A light summer squall

Riddle stood there motionless and looked down, satisfied. . . .

was romping down main street, snatching with sly elfin fingers at the skirts of a pretty girl, and Riddle was outwardly absorbed in the comedy of her distress. Actually, his thoughts revolved around melo-

drama rather than comedy. Unlike the slow-witted Plemmons, he knew that Clive Wayne was not making idle conversation. What the marshal had said was in the nature of a warning.

Riddle watched his partner's reaction to that warning. A great blonde giant of a man, burned copper-brown by sun and wind, Plemmons squirmed uncomfortably in his striped coveralls and looked down at the two powerful hands splayed on the steering-wheel. Though normally as passive and good-natured as a faithful draught-horse, he could be terrible in anger. It was only when faced with visual evidence of his strength that Plemmons sensed the full measure of it, and then he was invariably remorseful. He was remorseful now as he gazed at the hands that had put Antonio Moreno in the hospital.

"Why, I'm glad to hear that, Marshal," he said. "I'm glad Tony's gonna be up and around again. I guess maybe he deserved a poke or two, but I sure didn't mean to break his jaw thataway. Just couldn't seem to hang on to myself when I seen old Belle laying there in the road." The big hands hardened on the wheel. "He knew that old pointer was deaf and half-blind, damn it! I saw the whole thing. It looked to me like Tony drove his flivver two-three feet out of the way to run over her."

The marshal nodded, his sheep-like face wrinkled in a solemn frown. "Hopped up on marijuana, I guess. How you gonna keep that cockeyed loco weed away from a Mex like Tony when the stuff grows wild on every ditch-bank in the country? Well, I thought maybe I better let you know he was getting out of the hospital, Lon. Can't never tell—he might have it in his mind to do you a hurt. . . . Man can get over a busted jaw, but that ain't saying he can forget one."

Riddle still watched the harassed girl, his thin dark face denying any interest in the conversation. A man who had played many thousands of poker hands, he could dissemble the laughter that was bubbling in his brain. It was laughter inspired partly by the sudden tremendous upsurge of his spirits, partly by the utter absurdity of Wayne's comment. Riddle had witnessed that spectacular encounter between Plem-

mons and Tony Moreno, and the memory of the little Mexican's gibbering terror was still fresh in his mind. No; Moreno would not challenge the lightning twice.

Plemmons echoed the thought. "Oh, I ain't scared of Tony, Marshal. He's a good enough Mex, I guess. Ken and me even give him a job of work now and then when he needs some salt for that stringy rabbit meat he eats. I'm sorry as hell about busting his jawbone thataway. I'll slip him a little pocket money next time I see him."

Rabbits—those gaunt and dull-eyed jackrabbits that infested the sagebrush land above the irrigation canal. . . . Tony Moreno, faring out of his one-room shanty to blaze away at them with an ancient shotgun. . . . *Pay to the order of Kenneth Riddle the sum of ten thousand.* . . . In Riddle's mind the scattered parts of the picture dropped magically into their ordained places. He had known for months that some day he was going to kill Lon Plemmons, but not until this moment had he known how.

Marshal Clive Wayne voiced another terse warning and then stalked gloomily away. He had done his work. The death warrant was signed, sealed, and virtually ready for execution.

"GUESS Tony must've got out of the hospital today, all right," Lon Plemmons said. He crouched at the oil-cloth-covered kitchen table, elbows flanking his third plate of succotash and potatoes. "Saw smoke coming from his shack this afternoon when I was looking over the Jonathans in the upper orchard. Nice stand of Jons, Ken."

He spooned a huge helping of sour cream onto the potatoes and garnished the mixture with chopped green onion. Faintly queasy, Riddle turned his eyes to the open window. Dusk lay blue and sorcerous over the Yakima valley, hazing the faraway crest of Mount Adams so that it seemed as one-dimensional as a cardboard mountain. Heavy upon that dusk was the smell of burgeoning fruit—Jonathans, Winesaps, Yellow Newtons.

Damn them all! Riddle thought savagely. What difference did it make whether the Jons were good or bad? This year it would be as it had been in years past. The

growers would sweat and pray and suffer—and finally see the profits go to a compact little bloc of fruit-brokers who'd done nothing but sit on their hind ends. The hell with apples! After this was over, he'd sell the Plemmons-Riddle ranch for whatever it'd bring on the open market. With ten thousand dollars in his pants, he wouldn't need to worry. . . .

"Funny," Plemmons was saying. "Funny we ain't heard Tony blazing away at them mangy jackrabbits. Guess maybe they fed him so well at the hospital that he's sort of hibernating like an overstuffed Indian, huh?"

"Yeah," said Riddle. "Yeah, I guess that's about the size of it."

He knew that there was sounder reasons for Tony's lack of interest in rabbits. For one thing, Tony had no weapon—his cherished scatter-gun was at this moment concealed under a pile of old box-shook not fifty feet from here. For another thing, Riddle had left a gallon jug of applejack on Tony's doorstep when he appropriated the weapon late last night. He had been sure that the little Mexican, who clung to a child-like faith in the benevolence of all *mananas*, would look without suspicion upon this gift from nowhere. More, it would divert his mind from the puzzle of the missing gun—if, indeed, he so much as noticed its absence.

Riddle said casually, "They've got a swell Joan Crawford picture at the Egyptian, and here it is Saturday night. Suppose you'll be running into Fairsite to take it in, huh?"

Plemmons was burnishing his plate with a slice of bread. He nodded, blue eyes mildly enthusiastic. "Just got time to make the first show. You fixing to come along, Ken?"

"Oh, I don't guess so. I'll stick around a while and do up the supper dishes. Might drive down later for a few hands of poker at Shannon's, though. You take the truck and let me have the coupe, will you?"

"Sure, Ken. Sure, I will." Plemmons clumped to the kitchen sink and laboriously began to groom his hair. "Uh—I hope you won't be losing a lot of money at them card tables tonight, Ken. Money's pretty scarce right now, you know."

Riddle smiled faintly. *It won't really*

*matter to you, Lon—not after tonight.* Aloud he said, "I'll take it easy."

"Uh—I've sort of been thinking about them policies we're carrying, Ken. You figure we ought to have so much insurance on each other? Insurance is a fine thing and all that, but the payments on a couple of ten-thousand-dollar policies is pretty damn' steep. Besides, we're both able-bodied men. Even if one of us did happen to die, t'other could get along all right."

Riddle said, "We can talk that over later, Lon." *But we'll have to use a Ouija board.* "Better get the lead out or you'll be late for your show."

"Sure. Got no time to talk about it now." Plemmons turned to the door. "Be seeing you, Ken."

A moment later Riddle heard the Mack truck roar to thunderous life and go galloping down the long, shadowy driveway that gave on a town-to-market road. The deepening dusk rippled to the sound and then closed over it like water over a stone. Riddle's eyes were faintly pensive as he rose from the table. It was too bad, in a way. He'd never been able to dislike Lon Plemmons, and for the lotus-eating Tony Moreno he had always felt an obscure sympathy. Yet both of them must die by his hand, Moreno less directly but no less certainly than Plemmons. Well, there was no help for it. They were simply the stepping-stones between himself and a ten-thousand-dollar prize. . . .

Half an hour of work brought Riddle's death-machine to completion. There was nothing either complex or original in the structure of that machine. The parts consisted of Tony Moreno's shotgun, two shells, a length of thin copper wire, and a stout carpenter's bench equipped with a vise. Fitted together, they formed a mechanism almost as ancient as the guillotine—and certainly as infallible. It was one of those shotgun-traps sometimes employed by ranchers to protect their henhouses against marauding stoats.

So simple, so sure. Riddle's plan was predicated on an absolute knowledge of his partner's habits. At 9:15 the first show would be out. At 9:35 or thereabouts Lon Plemmons would bring the truck to a halt in the driveway. He would march straight to the front door of the darkened house—the place was never locked at night—and

give it a jerk. When the door was half-way open, the taut copper wire would trip both triggers.

At about 9:37 the gun would belch its double-barreled cargo of death full into Lon Plemmons' face.

**N**INE o'clock. "Three aces," Riddle said, fanning his cards across the felt-covered poker table in Shannon's Billiard Parlor. . . . *Nine o'clock. The show's almost over now. In about thirty-seven minutes . . .*

The house man stared at Riddle, his sallow face twisting irascibly under a green eyeshade. "Well," he said, "you won the pot. For God's sake, rake in your chips so we can have another hand."

Half-past ten. *It's over now. It's been over for almost an hour. Riddle's palms began to sweat. Could anybody have heard the blast and stopped in to investigate? Oh, no—not through all those apple trees. I'm safe enough. I—*

"You dealt yourself six cards," said the man at Riddle's left, "and that fouls your hand. Just try and remember that you ain't playing with amateurs, dearie."

Eleven-thirty. *The body must be almost cold by now. I've got my alibi and I can go home any time. That'll be my last hand. I've got to get the thing over with or I'll go screwy as a peach-orchard bore.*

"Aces and eights," the house man said. "You're holding the graveyard hand, Riddle. Well, it was nice to've known you."

Riddle looked down at the spread cards, a reasonless panic catching at his breath and brittling his face until it was like a death's-head. He palmed his last tier of chips across the table. "You know what you can do with 'em, damn you to hell! I'm sick of playing cards with a bunch of ham comedians!"

Their eyes and their curious, intent silence seemed to push at him as he batted his way through the swing-doors. Not until he was within a mile of the ranch did some semblance of ease return to him. Crazy, he thought; why had he acted that way? They'd remember it, some of them. Oh, hell, it didn't matter! Anybody could have a fit of nerves.

His narrow hands tight-locked on the wheel, Riddle twisted the coupe to the

right and nudged it into the long, tree-walled driveway. It climbed heavily up the rutted grade, the headlamps laying flat wedges of light against the dark. Riddle watched, waited; and suddenly felt a great sense of relief pour into his veins. There was the truck, parked where Lon Plemmons always parked it. There was the house, utterly lightless and still. Nothing could have gone wrong.

He braked the coupe and fumbled a flashlight out of the door-pocket. Its pale beam filtered ahead of him under the trees and piloted him up a sagging flight of steps to the porch. And then was still, aimed like a thin yellow finger at the macabre thing sprawled in the open door.

Blood made a crazy arabesque against the weathered boards. The huge figure of Lon Plemmons lay prone in that smear, right arm crooked awkwardly under his face as if to mask the horror of it. Riddle did not touch the body. Held by a queasy fascination, he simply stood there motionless and looked down, satisfied. It was a full minute before the suggestive ticking of his wrist-watch cut through his abstraction. Time, time—it was so essential now. His every moment might have to be accounted for.

Riddle skirted the porch and entered the house through the north door, clicking on lights as he made his way to the living-room. Nerves and muscles steeled to a cool efficiency, he began to dismantle his death-machine. At the end of five minutes it was done; the carpenter's bench had been restored to its place in the tool-house and nothing remained of the gun-trap except the gun. That would be wiped clean of fingerprints and restored to Tony Moreno . . . now.

Now? Riddle paused, teetering indecisively on his heels. No; the sooner he telephoned Marshal Clive Wayne, the greater his margin of security. True, he had an almost holeproof alibi—but nowhere between his departure from Shannon's and his report of the murder must there be an ugly hiatus to explain away. . . . Clive Wayne could scarcely cover the distance from town in less than twenty minutes. That would give him time—plenty of time—to plant the damning evidence under Tony's doorstep and get back to the house.

Riddle crossed the room to the old-fashioned wall telephone and lifted the receiver from its bracket. He gave the magneto crank a whirl . . . and it was then that Clive Wayne's voice came to him. "You wanted to talk to me about something, Ken?" the marshal asked softly.

**T**HE receiver dropped out of Riddle's hand. For a measureless interval he stood there tranced and unmoving, his empty eyes on the telephone. There was not yet fear in him, nor horror—nothing but the giddy sense of unreality that comes

wall. He tried to scream, but the sound died somewhere back of convulsed throat-muscles. At that moment the door had scraped outward to admit the terrible figure of Lon Plemmons—a blood-stained Nemesis who hunched his great shoulders and looked at Riddle out of smoky blue eyes.

"Keep him away!" Riddle whispered. "God, don't let him—"

Marshal Clive Wayne chuckled softly. "He ain't a ghost, Ken—not Lon. Fact of the matter is, he ain't hurt a mite. We kind of run a shindy on you. Figured if

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to one who cannot accept what his brain has told him.

"You wanted to talk to me, Ken?" the marshal repeated gently.

Riddle turned.

Solid and factual and terrifying, Clive Wayne was framed there in the doorway that gave onto a darkened hall. He stood spread-legged and looked at Riddle, the turned-down brim of a Stetson cutting all light away from his knobby cheekbones. There was no expression in his eyes.

Riddle's dry lips stirred. "When did you—how long have you—"

"I been here long enough, Ken." The marshal took two steps toward him. "Plenty long enough to see you knocking that gun-trap to pieces. 'Fraid my testimony's gonna sound kind of bad in a court of law."

Riddle whispered, "I didn't kill him, Marshal. You can't really believe I—" His voice lifted. "I know it was a crazy thing to do, but I guess I sort of lost my head when I saw Lon lying there on the porch. I was going to take that shotgun up and blow Tony Moreno to hell with it. It must've been Tony that set the gun-trap, Marshal. I—"

"It ain't good enough, Ken. It's fast thinking, but it just ain't good enough." Wayne's eyes swung to the open door. "All right, Lon—you can come in now! He's cooked his goose."

Riddle flattened his body against the

you thought your gun-trap had done its work, you'd get right busy and take it apart. . . . Wait a minute, Lon! I know how you feel, but don't bother to mess him up. The law'll take care of him soon enough . . ."

Riddle said, "But there's blood on his clothes! There's blood on the porch! For God's sake, what hap—"

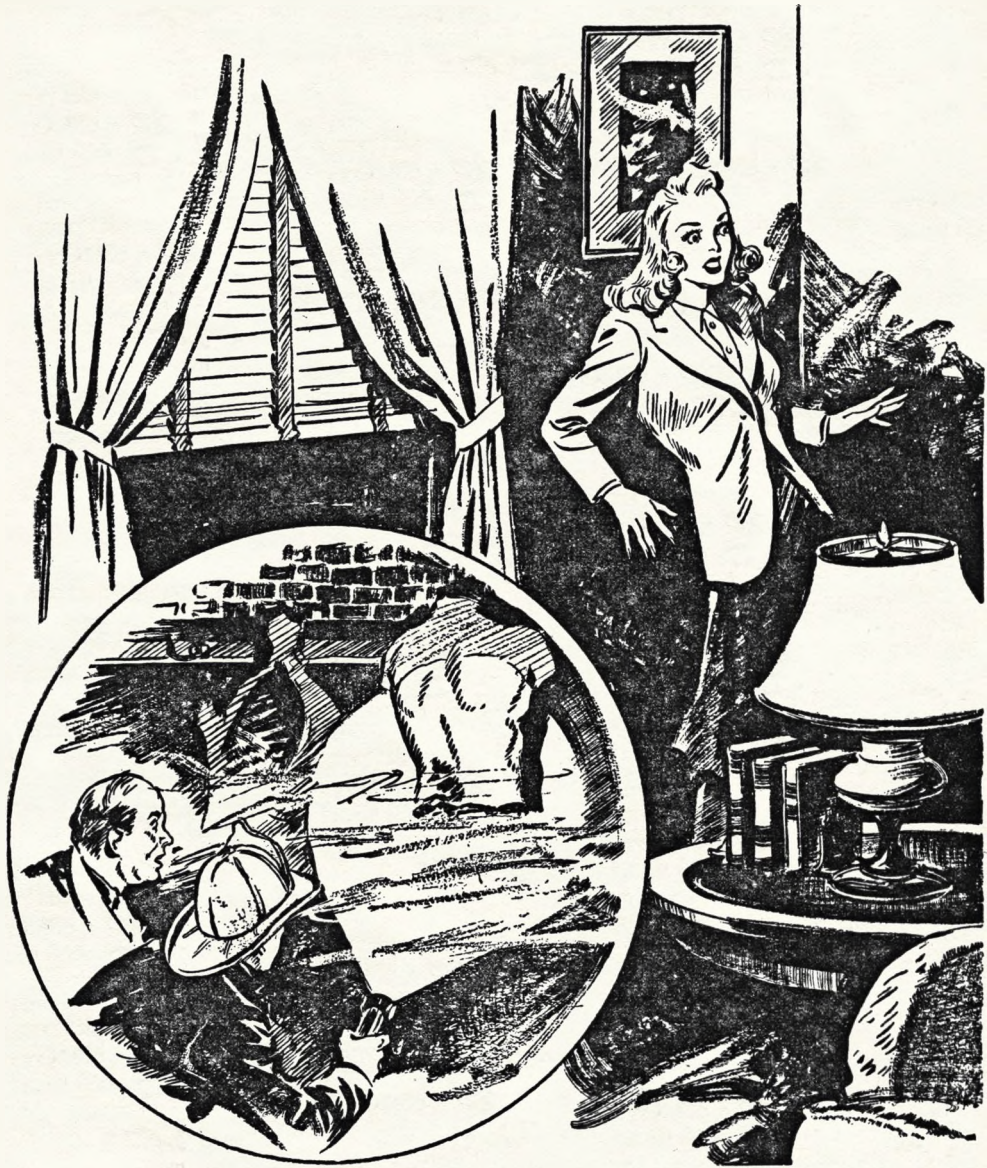
Marshal Clive Wayne nodded. "Yep, Ken, there's blood on the porch. Only it didn't come from Lon—it come from a body that we carried out to the back of the truck. . . . There's kind of a ticklish point of law involved, but I guess a jury'll figure you're guilty of first-degree murder. You built that trap with felonious intent, and even if it did happen to get a trespasser—"

Riddle swayed. "Who? *Who?*"

"It was Tony Moreno," the marshal said. "From the smell of him, he was hog-wild on loco weed and applejack—a mighty mean combination. He had a nice sharp hand-axe with him, and it looks like he was planning to hide there behind the door and bury the thing in Lon's skull."

Clive Wayne began to laugh then—great, booming laughter that hit Riddle's ears like a volley of blows. That seemed to fill the room and the world beyond the room. "Yep, Ken," the marshal said, "it sure looks like Lon owes you a favor. Looks like the only thing that saved his life was that death-trap you set for him."

# Corpse on the Grill



*Fire Marshal Ben Pedley was a veteran at double-crossing Death. But this time, with his finger already on the firebug who had hung the butchered torso in Biddonay's charred refrigerator, Ben didn't have any more chance than the object that was Suzie's only prop for her Snowball*

*Dance in Hell!*



*A Fire Marshal Ben Pedley Novelette*

By  
**STEWART  
STERLING**



There wasn't time to draw his gun. The Marshal felt another terrific blow on the head—and that was all he knew.

**CHAPTER ONE**

**Medals for Corpses**

**T**HE Fire Marshal groped his way through the labyrinth of round tables on which were stacked a forest of upturned chairs. His electric torch penetrated only a few feet into the swirling fog of thick, cream-colored smoke. His feet slipped from under him; with an ef-

fort he managed to catch his balance.

The beam of his flashlight, turned down, disclosed a sheet of ice rutted with the marks of many skates. The marshal had known they put on a skating floor show here, but hadn't been sure it was real ice or the imitation stuff that didn't require freezing. He mumbled a curse through his smoke mask; this discovery didn't make him feel any easier!

From the floor above him came the hoarse thunder of lancing streams from high-pressure nozzles; from the wintry street outside came a fury of noise—throbbing pumpers, motors shrieking sirens and the excited clamor of people being hustled out of their beds in the tenements to the west. But here, in the

tremendous dining-room of this Broadway cafe, was neither flame nor the crackling of fire—only a soundless menace lurking in those oily wreaths of smoke.

His foot bumped a pulsing serpent of canvas. Marshal Pedley stooped, followed the hose with his hand until it snaked suddenly down a flight of stairs into darkness. A blast of icy air swept up the staircase and the smoke suddenly cleared. In its place a fine mist of cottony white floated lazily upward. Ben Pedley shifted his gas-mask, listened. The hiss of rushing water from the nozzle somewhere below was deep and steady, not the fierce, rushing roar of a bar-rigid stream played on wall or ceiling. He turned, ran back to the street.

A rubber-coated man in a black helmet was kneeling in a pool of water and broken glass, wrenching at a hose coupling.

The Marshal called sharply: "Hey, Eighty-six! Where's Wilmot?"

The man lifted smoke-reddened eyes. "Down cellar, Marshal . . . refrigerating plant . . . boys having . . . little trouble." He grunted with each turn of his wrench.

"I'll say they're having trouble. Got any extra waders on your wagon?"

"Nope." The fireman moved away through the coiling clouds of smoke. "Only had two pair. Boys thought they might get a taste of that damned ammonia, so they took 'em."

Pedley scowled at the apparatus down the block. The police emergency truck would be parked there, but the men on that squad would be busy getting the women and kids out of the tenements.

There might be an extra pair of hip-length rubber boots on one of the other hose company trucks—but there might not be—and now, when seconds might mean life or death for those men down in that ominously quiet basement, Pedley didn't dare risk it. Still, he had seen the effects of ammonia fumes too often to think he could descend into that white inferno with nothing but wool and cotton on the lower part of his own body.

Across the street was a garage; Pedley sprinted for it. A shirt-sleeved man outside the office gaped up at the mushroom of sooty black blossoming from the top of the four-story restaurant building. Pedley yelled at the top of his lungs.

"Grease! Quick! Heavy grease! Snap it up!"

The man pointed to a pyramid of red and green cans. "Help y'self."

"Open 'em up! Fast!" Pedley slid out of his coat, then slipped off his pants and shirt. He dug his fingers into the can the goggling garageman held out. Rapidly he smeared the buttery substance over his entire body. Grease might do the trick, if it was thick enough; if the heat of his body or the fire itself didn't melt it too quickly. He got back into his clothes and dived back across the street, yelling to the engineer on the big sixteen cylinder pumper:

"Hey, Ninety-one! Round up a couple from the Emergency Squad; hustle 'em inside here, first floor!"

"Okay, Marshal."

"And get an ambulance here by the door!" Pedley plunged into the cafe. Instantly the blanket of smoke cut off the sounds of the street, giving him an uncanny sensation of being all alone in the burning building. He cursed beneath his mask; maybe he was alone at that!

**T**HE cottony vapor was a little higher up the stairs now; the marshal jabbed his big electric torch at it; the light was reflected as from a whitewashed wall. There wouldn't be much seeing through *that!* But he could still follow that hose downstairs. Wilmot and his men would be near the nozzle.

Half-blinded by the luminous mist, Pedley tripped over a pile of debris—brick, timbers, broken planking. He knew then how the firemen had been trapped. Those high pressure lines, throwing better than a ton of water a minute, had poured enough dead weight up into the upper floors to weaken the structure; a retaining wall had given away and four good men and one of the best Deputy Battalion Chiefs in the department were probably pinned here under a four foot area of corrosive fumes!

He struggled desperately with the tumbled wreckage; found the first fireman face down with his hands around his groin. Pedley used his axe like a man gone berserk, tugged the unconscious victim loose, staggered back to the staircase.

A huge mountain of a man in one of the emergency squad all-purpose helmets

came down toward him ponderously, poking the beam of a powerful battery lamp ahead of him. Pedley got close to him, lifted his mask an inch; shouted: "Wall down on the right. Four more men there." The big cop nodded his helmeted head his waders vanished in the steaming vapor. The Marshal lugged his burden as far as the door, turned the fireman over to a white-coated interne, slogged back to the fume-filled cellar.

Three back-straining, heart-breaking trips he made, while the giant from the emergency squad was making two. In the end they had all five firemen up on the pavement. There were more doctors there now; one of them gave Pedley first-aid for ammonia burns.

"Take a good slug of vinegar water every five minutes for a while, Marshal." The surgeon doused him with a neutralizing liquid. "Thing like this is damn dangerous. You ought to get over to the hospital for a going-over."

"Yeah. Sure, Doc. I'll take care of it." The Marshal looked over at Deputy Battalion Chief Wilmot, who was trying to hoist himself up on his elbows, gasping

and waving feebly at Pedley. He said, "Got a job here to look after first." He reached Wilmot.

"Ben," coughed the battalion chief, weakly, "There's a body . . . down there." "Another one of your boys?"

"No . . . no. A dead body. It was dead . . . when we . . . found it."

"Hell, you can't be sure," Pedley growled. "That's up to the doctors. I'll—" he started for the smoke-clouded door.

"Wait, Ben. This one's dead, all right."

"Where is it?"

"In that big ice box. Reason I know it's dead, Ben . . . the damned thing didn't have any head!" Wilmot coughed up a thin trickle of smoke. "Or any legs or arms!"

THE recall sounded; reserve apparatus clanged brassily away to their stations; the hose companies began taking up. A faint smudge, drifting up out of the gutted building through the cold night air was reddened by light spilled over street and sidewalks from hook and ladder head-

## MR. BOSTON SAYS: "HAPPIER HOLIDAYS WITH MY APRICOT NECTAR!"



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lights. Pedley slumped on the curb; an interne finished swabbing out the Marshal's eyes with acid solution. The moisture streaming down the big man's weathered cheeks was not tears, but might have been. He kept his head averted from the three figures lying motionless under rubber blankets beside the smouldering structure.

Wilmot and one other member of Company 86 had been rushed to the hospital; with breaks, they'd live. But those three were ready for the undertaker and a posthumous citation for bravery in line of duty. Three good men gone to their graves, Pedley thought bitterly, because some nameless maniac had used arson to hide a murder. For, murder it must be if Deputy Chief Wilmot was in his right mind.

An enormously stout man with a round face that was white with misery shuffled past the police lines. He wore shabby slippers, striped pajamas and florid bathrobe. He pointed at the blanketed figures.

"They . . . dead?"

Pedley nodded.

"Dreadful!" The fat man stared miserably up at the smashed windows, the smoke-stained brick. His eyes came to rest on the neon sign which the hose-streams had miraculously left intact. The tubing, under the bloodshot eyes of the fire engines, glowed faintly:

**ICE-TAURANT**  
**Skate as you Dine**

He turned sadly to the marshal. "Wipes me out. Yeah. I'm Bill Biddonay."

"Own this joint?"

"Most of it. With this," he gestured, wearily, "I'm washed up. But God's sake," he pulled his bathrobe tighter, "I can start again. Those poor guys—" his voice was harsh—"they don't get another chance."

Pedley got to his feet, painfully. "D'you live over the cafe?"

"Sure. Third floor. Fixed up a couple rooms there. I don't guess there's much of my stuff left. I was asleep when I heard the engines roll up."

The Marshal eyed him, coldly. "Covered by insurance, weren't you?"

Biddonay shrugged. "*We* weren't. Banks were. Ought to get nearly enough to pay off our notes. Herb Krass or I

won't get a lousy dime. Besides, it'd take us a month to get going again, somewhere else. Then the season'd be shot. Hell with it. I'm okay; plenty of people be glad to back me again if I want to start. It's these men losing their lives that matters."

"That's the way to look at it," Pedley agreed. "Bad enough to lose men as the result of carelessness. But when the fire was set—"

"*Huh!*"

"Yeah." Pedley went toward the building. "C'mere. Want to show you something."

Biddonay followed, snuffing and puffing, through the dining-room. They crossed the ice covered dance floor past the orchestra dais, on down the stairs to the basement.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Snowball in Hell

**T**HE portable suction fan which the emergency squad had hooked up in the adjoining building by now had cleared the basement of the deadly white fumes. But the acrid bite of ammonia still gnawed at their nostrils.

"For God's sake, what happened?" the *restaurateur* wheezed. "Pipes bust?"

"No. Somebody used a hammer on one of the compression valves. Opened it up so it couldn't be shut. Nice idea. Like to have that slug stripped naked in a roomful of ammonia for about ten minutes."

"*Je-zu*. Who'd do a thing like that!"

"That's what I got to find out." Pedley stalked to the tremendous cold room, occupying the far end of the basement. The heavy glassed-in door was closed tightly, but one of the glass sides of the big ice-box had been shattered by the force of the hose. The floor of the refrigerator was piled with tubs of butter, cloth-wrapped hams, buckets of lard. A few racks of lamb, some loins of pork and one quarter of beef hung on meat hooks. The Marshal stepped through the aperture in the smashed glass.

"Boys broke in here to find that ammonia leak, Biddonay. They found something else." Pedley pointed to a piece of meat which was almost concealed by the

beef carcass. It was gray-fleshed and smooth-skinned, with raw, red stumps where the legs and arms had been hacked off. The torso was impaled on a steel hook just above the breast-bone. Blood had congealed in a purple-black clot across the open wound that had been a neck.

"Almighty!" breathed the cafe owner. "That . . . was a . . . a man! Ah—" he made a strangling noise, looked away.

"Nothing to put on the front page of the papers. No." Pedley swung the grisly object on its hook. A chunk of flesh had been cut from the back of the corpse, about three inches above the waist; the white cartilage of the ribs had been bared. "What you make of this?"

Biddonay groaned; his face puckered up as if he was suffering from toothache. "Somebody . . . cut a piece of meat right out of that thing!" He leaned against the wall and covered his face with his hands.

"Looks like a butcher had gone after a piece of sirloin." Pedley's mouth tasted as if he'd been chewing old pennies. "Come on, let's get out of here. Air's bad." He led the cafe man out; Biddonay sagged heavily against him, stumbled drunkenly.

"What on God's earth," the restaurant owner mumbled thickly, "would anyone do a thing like that! Even a crazy man wouldn't . . ."

"Not likely." The Marshal swept his flashlight around the cellar. "In all the years I've been doing the detecting for the Fire Department, I've never run across a blaze set by a lunatic. Children, yes. Dimwits, sure. And pyromaniacs might be cracked, according to these psychoanalysts, but in court, they're just plain criminals. Anyhow, no pyro ever set a fire to hide a corpse."

Biddonay mopped sweat off his moon-face with the inside of his sleeve. "That . . . thing . . . wasn't in the cold box at nine o'clock tonight. I was down here with my wholesaler; he dropped in for dinner."

"What time'd you leave the cafe?"

"'Bout one. We close one-thirty."

Pedley grunted. He stalked back upstairs, the fat man moaning along behind.

In the kitchen Pedley paused in front of the wide brick grill. "Cook over charcoal, eh?"

"For steaks an' chops, yeah. The range is for roasts and bakework." Biddonay wet his lips and swallowed hard.

The Marshal put his flash on the water-soaked and blackened mess in the fire pit. Charcoal gave a terrific heat, Pedley realized; it would crisp any flesh to a black and brittle ash in a few minutes. Even bone would be consumed to a warped and twisted bit of char. But those things on top of the drenched coals still held the shape and semblance of human bones. The Marshal picked them out, laid them on the stainless steel surface beside the grill.

"Somebody," he said grimly, "has been having himself a cannibal barbecue."

**B**IDDONAY shivered, bent over the blackened objects on the dresser. "Legs an' arms, huh?"

"I'd say so." Pedley fumbled in the wet, gritty mess of the fire pit. "But no skull."

"Holy mother!!" The restaurant man got sick to his stomach.

"Well, the guy must have had a head. Where is it?" Pedley climbed up on the iron grating, peered behind the bricked-up grill. There was nothing there that could have been a human head. But the boarding of the wall directly behind the fire-box was an ebony cinder. This was where the fire had started, then; someone had left too hot a fire in the grill—probably left the electric bellows turned on to give an extra intense heat in order to reduce the bones to ash. The brick wall at the rear of the grill had become red-hot; the sheathing had ignited and the flames had gone up inside the walls to the higher stories. The Marshal clambered down.

"Who'd have access to this joint after closing, Biddonay?"

"We don't permit anybody back here in the kitchen except the chefs and the waiters."

"Well, you had a key to the front door, didn't you? And this partner you mentioned a minute ago?"

"Herb Krass? Sure. We both got keys. But I was in bed and Herb went home around midnight . . ."

"Which one of your employees is supposed to lock up after the rest've gone?" Pedley snapped, irritably.

"When me or Herb ain't here, Pete

Donnelly closes up. He's cashier. 'Course, he's got a key, too."

"Where's a phone? Give this Donnelly a bell. Tell him I want to see him down here right away."

"Sure." Biddonay looked away. "But Pete ain't the kind of lad to harm a flea, much less chop up a guy."

The Marshal followed to the office, a little water-soaked, soot-stained cubbyhole off the corridor leading to dressing-rooms for the entertainers. There were a couple of ash-smearred desks, swivel chairs, a black iron safe piled high with old and soggy *Racing Forms*; a glass-front bookcase filled with a row of *Moody's Manuals*, some small silver cups, a few paper-covered Spalding pamphlets on bowling and two round, black leather cases for carrying bowling balls. Biddonay sagged into one of the padded chairs, dragged a phone across the desk toward him, dialed.

"Pete? Hello, Pete? This's Bill . . . yeah . . . all hell's bust loose. We hadda fire, Pete . . . The whole shebang's burned down . . . just now. . . . They only put it out a few minutes ago. And that ain't all. There's a—" the cafe owner glanced up at Pedley's outstretched palms.

Pedley said, "Shush on the killing, Biddonay."

The fat man nodded, unhappily. "Listen, Pete. There's a guy from the Fire Department down here with me now. He wants you should get down here right away . . . I don't know what for; I suppose he wants to ask you some questions. Hurry it up, now, Pete." He hung up, as a blue-uniformed man in the regulation cap of the Fire Department came into the office and saluted Pedley.

"E. T. Jewett, fireman, first class. Company Eighty-six. Inspection duty, sir." The man's narrow, tight-lipped face was tense with worry.

"These premises on your beat, Jewett?"

"Yes, sir." The fireman rubbed his chin, uneasily. "I checked the floorshow here, tonight. About eleven-thirty, wasn't it, Mr. Biddonay?"

The cafe man sighed. "Guess it was. Seems a year ago."

Pedley took out a notebook. "What time'd your tour end, Jewett? Twelve?"

"Yes, sir. Everything was okay here,

then. How'd she start, do you know, sir?"

"Overheated wall behind the charcoal grill. Hike out and tell that cop to ring his station. We'll need the medical examiner, homicide boys, and one of the lads from the Bureau of Identification. Then come back down cellar."

Jewett's eyes opened wide. He saluted again and hurried away.

The Marshal said curtly: "Let's go down to your private morgue, Biddonay. See if we can put the finger on that corpse."

THE fat man labored to his feet, mumbling something about not wanting to set eyes on the damned thing, much less a finger. They went downstairs, into the nose-tingling ammoniacal vapor. They searched the rest of the refrigerator first, for the missing head. They had found nothing when Jewett rejoined them. The fireman expelled his breath in a long whistle of repugnance.

"Somebody had a screwy sense of humor, huh?" he said. "To hang that thing in here like a chunk of mutton? He was a big guy, wasn't he!"

"Big," Pedley answered, "and powerful as a bull. Look at those shoulders. Don't see chest muscles like that very often."

Biddonay pointed to a number of garnet-colored scars on the back of the torso, about the level of the shoulder-blades. "What were those marks?"

Pedley's mind went back through the years to a body that had been fished out of the ashes of a great conflagration; the cadaver had been marked in the same peculiar way. And that body had been identified.

"Mat scars," he suggested. "They might be scars from a canvas-covered mat. Sort a wrestler gets from having his shoulders scraped by some two hundred and fifty pounder on top of him."

"A wrestler!" Jewett frowned. "Say, Mr. Biddonay—"

"I don't know any wrestlers," the cafe man muttered, hastily.

"That big black-haired guy who comes in two, three times a week and tries to date Snowball Sue," Jewett cried. "Looks like an ape who needs a shave."

Biddonay shut his eyes, shook his head.

"I don't notice every customer in the Ice-restaurant. I couldn't remember 'em *all*—"

Pedley went close to him, grabbed the fat man by the back of the neck, pushed his face within an inch of the gruesome thing on the steel hook. "Don't hold out on me, mister! Not when there's murder and arson involved and three of my department buddies are sleeping on a slab! You talk! You talk straight and quick—or I'll put you where you'll be glad to have even this bloody hunk for company!"

Biddonay stammered. "It's only I don't want to give you a wrong steer. I'm not certain—"

"Who's this wrestler Jewett described?"

The cafe man shuddered. "An ugly lummock they call Gorilla Greg. I don't know who he is. I don't know anything about him except that Sue kids him and calls him Gorilla."

"Who's this Sue?"

"Our snowball dancer," Biddonay moaned.

"You know," Jewett put in, "she comes out after them chorines do their strip tease on skates; she ain't wearing a stitch except she's holding this big snowball, and of course while she skates around the snowball begins to melt—"

"Shut up," barked Pedley. "What's her name?"

Biddonay looked at the floor. "Name is Sue d'Hiver. She's a swell kid. She wouldn't harm a flea."

"Where's she live?"

"Over on the East Side somewheres. The address'd be up in the cashier's ledger."

The Marshal got his arm, shoved him toward the stairs. "Let's get it, fella. I might want a word with this mouse."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Gorilla Greg

**T**HEY went up to the office. Biddonay opened the safe with fingers that rattled the combination dial. He pulled out a black and red ledger. "Here y'are."

Pedley read: *Suzanne d'Hiver, 12 Griswold Place*. He checked down the list of employees until he came to: *Peter Donnelly, 966 West 51st Street*.

"This cashier of yours lives just around the corner, eh?"

"That's right."

"Funny he hasn't showed up."

"Is queer." The cafe man snuffled dismally.

"Give him another buzz," Pedley suggested.

Biddonay stuck a pudgy forefinger in the phone dial, spun it seven times. There was an odd, puzzled look in his round eyes; after a bit he held the receiver away from his ear so Pedley could hear the operator ringing. "Nobody home."

The marshal growled: "Give him another couple minutes. If he doesn't show up, we'll have to go after him."

"It would be a dumb trick to lam out, Marshal. An' Pete ain't dumb, at all."

A black limousine slid to the curb in front of the restaurant. Four men got out, carrying valises, camera cases, tripods, flash guns.

Pedley said: "Homicide boys'll take over here, but you better come with me, Biddonay. I'll put you under technical arrest as a material witness."

"For the Lord's sake—"

"Hold on, fella. Material witness arrest means the cops won't be able to drag you downtown for a day of questions and answer stuff while I need you to run down this arson business."

The stout man seemed relieved. "It's just I don't like the idea of being arrested, is all. Besides, I won't be much use as a witness, will I? I don't know anything about the fire. And I've only seen this Gorilla lug a couple times here in the restaurant. I never talked to him—"

"Don't worry about your testimony." The Marshal opened a closet door, peered inside. "This is your joint; you hire the help; you were first on the scene after the crime was discovered. That'll be all I'll need. Except I'll want you to shag over to Donnelly's with me, if he doesn't get here directly."

"I can't go like this." Biddonay wiggled his toes in the slippers. "My clothes is upstairs—" he gestured, palms out.

Pedley tilted his head toward the closet. "Who belongs to those duds?"

"The tux? That's Herb's. I couldn't get into that."

"Try it. Better than going around like

you are." The Marshal went out to meet the headquarters men. He explained the setup briefly and wound up, "All that's left of it in the ice-box is the torso. Arms and legs went on the grill. Might look around for the skull. I'm going over to the cashier's; he's supposed to be the last man here, the guy who closes up." He didn't go into detail about the wrestler or the snowball dancer; Jewett would do that, anyhow, and the homicide squad liked to do things its own way. And they made a fetish identifying corpses before rounding up suspects. . . .

**T**HE murder experts trooped down to the basement; Pedley went back to the office. Biddonay was dressed. The pants were skin-tight and an inch too long. The coat wouldn't button, but there were shiny patent leathers on his feet and a soft dress-shirt under the coat.

"I buzzed Herb," the fat man frowned. "He wasn't home. Mrs. Krass was there. She don't know where he is. I told her to have him come right over soon's he shows up."

"That's right. Thought you said your partner went home early."

Biddonay pursed his cupid-bow lips, comically. "Herb likes to buck the tiger, once in a while. Prob'ly where he is now."

Pedley was noncommittal. "He's lost his shirt, anyway."

They walked a block and a half, found 966 a shabby redstone rooming house. An angry woman in a bedraggled dressing gown answered the bell after a while, subsided after a glance at the gold badge in Pedley's palm.

"Second floor front is Mr. Donnelly. I hope there ain't anything wrong?"

The Marshal didn't satisfy her curiosity. He borrowed her keys and went upstairs.

Biddonay panted: "Hell of a place to live. Pete can afford better'n this."

Pedley knocked, without result. Then he used a key.

By the light of a cheap lamp on a center table, they saw the cashier lying face down on top of the bedclothes. He might have been asleep, save for the wedge-shaped wound on the back of his head. A thin red ribbon trailed down the back of his neck, across his pajama coat.

The Marshal barked: "Stay outside, Biddonay. Don't want you smearing up any prints in here." He gave the room a rapid once-over. Nothing seemed to be disturbed; there were no signs of a struggle, and no indications that the bureau or the wardrobe in the corner had been ransacked. The man's clothes were neatly piled on the back of a chair by his bedside; the suit had been hung on hangers in the wardrobe. He put a hand on the dead man's wrist. It was cold, but not yet stiffened in *rigor mortis*.

He lifted the head. Donnelly's eyes were open; the man hadn't been killed in his sleep. By the placid expression on the corpse's features, Pedley guessed that the cashier hadn't even known he was going to die.

Pedley knelt, looked under the bed and behind the wardrobe. No sign of a weapon. He went to the bureau, opened the drawers with his hand covered by a handkerchief. He found shirts, sox, underclothes; a bank-book with eleven hundred dollars as the last balance; some old baseball scorecards and theatre programs. There were gloves, handkerchiefs, cuff links—stuff you'd find in half a million rooms like this. —

Under a folded sweater in the bottom drawer, Pedley found a photograph. It was a glossy print of a nearly nude girl, with a figure that could stand that kind of photography. She wore only a white fur cap, white mittens and skating boots with wooly socks. She was poised on skate-toes; she held in her mittened hands a white ball about the size of a basket-ball. The Marshal took it over to the door and asked, "This the mouse who does the snowball dance?"

Biddonay exclaimed, "Why—why sure! That's Suzie. But I never saw this. What would Pete be doing with her picture?"

"Maybe he went for this mouse."

Biddonay gaped. "I'd never dreamed. . ."

Pedley picked up a newspaper from the table, slid the picture in between the folds. "The guys who go for Suzie seem to get treated pretty rough, mister. Suppose we ask her why."

**D**OWNSTAIRS in the hall, Pedley used a slot phone to call Biddonay's office. To the plainclothesman who an-



swered, he said: "When you've finished at the *Ice-restaurant*, there a job at Ninety-six West Fifty-first. Second floor front, name of Peter Donnelly. Cashier at Biddonay's place. Back of his head split open with a cleaver or something like that. Hurry it, will you?"

He hung up. He questioned the landlady as to possible visitors to Donnelly's room; got nowhere. She couldn't keep track of everyone who came in her house at that hour of the morning, could she?

Biddonay said: "I think Pete's mother lives somewhere upstate. We better send her a wire."

"Up to the Bureau of Identification," Pedley replied. "They'll find her address in his things, probably. Here comes the death watch; let's grab a cab."

They went out as the Homicide Squad came in. Ten minutes later a taxi dropped them in front of 12 Griswold Place. A new apartment with a river view, it boasted too much chromium and

in." She seemed shocked at Biddonay's news. Still, she was in show business, the Marshal realized—she might be putting on an act. The cafe proprietor introduced them.

"Better give out with the answers, Suzie," Biddonay counselled. "The truth, the whole truth, you know."

She said she understood. She watched Pedley warily as he gazed around at the ultra-moderne furnishings of the apartment.

"Someone here with you? Thought I heard voices," he inquired.

"I had the radio on. I turned it off."

"Oh, that was it." The Marshal thought she was lying. "You know a big guy they call Gorilla Greg? A wrestler?"

"Gregory Scanopolous? I ought to." She nodded calmly. "He's my husband, you see?"

Biddonay cried: "You said you weren't married. That's what you told me and Herb!"

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**If you enjoyed this story, don't fail to buy *Strange Detective Mysteries* for January and read "CASE OF THE GROWING CORPSE," by the same famous author—Stewart Sterling!**

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plate glass and stainless steel for the Marshal's taste. Miss Suzanne d'Hiver occupied Apartment 7B. They used an automatic elevator; there was no night man visible in the lobby.

Pedley listened at the door of 7B for a minute, and heard voices. They ceased abruptly when he buzzed, but it was a full minute before a girl's voice called:

"Who is it?"

"Fire Department."

The door opened, revealing a flax-haired, pleasant-faced girl with wide-set mint-green eyes and sensuous lips. The negligée she wore hadn't been designed to conceal her curves.

"Mr. Biddonay! Is something wrong?"

"Yeah, Suzie." The fat man sighed. "A lot is wrong. The spot burned down tonight; three firemen lost their lives. And—"

"I want to ask a couple of questions, Miss d'Hiver," Pedley cut in.

"That's perfectly dreadful. Come right

"Sure I did. A wedding ring wouldn't go so good in the snowball dance business, Mr. Biddonay."

Pedley interrupted: "You're not living with this Gorilla gent now?"

"No. We called it a day. Been separated for two years now. He used to beat me up." She said it quite without venom.

"Why's he keep going to the *Ice-restaurant* to see you?" Pedley asked.

She rubbed thumb and forefinger together. "He's broke. Greg used to make fair dough out of circusing with one of those cross-country wrestling troupes. But he strained his back; he couldn't wrestle one of the Quints, now. So I give him a few pieces of change, now and then. I hate his guts, but I wouldn't want to see anything happen to him."

"No?" The Marshal heard a scraping noise from somewhere outside the living-room; it sounded like a dog scratching at a door. "Somebody did—. And gave your

husband a workout on a butcher's block. With a cleaver."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Skull Container

SHE didn't scream. She put the back of one hand to her mouth and squinted as if the light hurt her eyes. "Killed him?"

"Dismembered him," Pedley said. "Burned his arms and legs in the charcoal fire at the restaurant. You wouldn't know anything about that?"

"No." She turned her back so they couldn't see her face, but the Marshal didn't miss her glance toward the bedroom. "Not a thing."

Pedley palmed his automatic and approached the bedroom, cautiously. Five feet away he paused; a roomful of men were stepping toward him in the darkness. They were all alike; they were all like Pedley himself. Suzie's bedroom was walled with mirrors. He switched on the light; saw his own reflection from a dozen angles. But there was no place to hide in that room. He stepped into the bathroom, shoved back the shower curtain. Nothing. There were two closets, both empty. He swivelled quickly to find Suzie watching him with fascinated intentness.

"I give you my word there's no one hiding in my apartment," she said, unsteadily. "And unless you want to ask me some more questions about Greg . . ."

Pedley tried the kitchenette. No dice. But there was another door opening out of the kitchenette. There was no keyhole under the knob. A fire door. Opening onto a flame-proof stairwell; a door knobless on the outside, so no intruder could get into the apartment from the internal fire escape. He yanked it open.

There was a movement in the gloom outside. The Marshal reached out, grabbed a coat lapel and jerked into the room a thin, bony man with pinched and harassed features set in hairless skull.

"Yeah?" growled Pedley. "And who in the hell are you? What are you doing out there?"

Suzie spoke up, sharply. "He's my brother."

The bald-headed man snarled. "I'm

Jimmy Yalb. This is my sister's home; I gotta right to step out on the fire stairs if I wanna."

Pedley slammed the fire door, pushed Yalb roughly into the living-room. As he shoved the eavesdropper past Bidonay, the cafe man yelled:

"Suzie's brother! He's a lying so-and-so, Mr. Pedley. He's the bake-chef at my restaurant, that's who he is."

Yalb tugged away from Pedley's grasp, rushed belligerently at Bidonay. "Yes and no thanks to you, either, you big tub of lard."

"Jimmy!" Suzie screamed.

"If it hadn't been for Mr. Krass," Yalb spat out, "I'd have been bounced a dozen times."

The Marshal watched Bidonay redden with rage. "You bet you would, Yalb; I've never trusted you. And now I know you're Suzie's brother, I'll trust you even less."

Yalb rumbled hoarsely, deep in his throat; he twisted swiftly out of his coat, eluded the Marshal's grip, lunged fiercely at Bidonay. There was a short-bladed knife in his hand. He struck once at the cafe owner before Pedley could stop the blow. Bidonay screamed fearfully, reeled back. He struggled desperately to defend himself with his bare fists. The blade of the knife licked out like a snake's forked tongue. Bidonay clutched at his side, stumbled, pitched sideways against a heavy center table, went down to his knees and stayed there, squealing like a stuck porker. Pedley closed in on Yalb.

The girl kept shrieking at the top of her lungs: "Don't, Jimmy, don't! You can't fight the law."

But Yalb tried. He butted the Marshal's chin with his hard bald pate; he kicked, gouged, used a knee where it would maim a man most easily. He dropped the knife and clawed at the Marshal's eyes with vicious talons. Pedley clipped him across the side of his face with the barrel of his automatic. He had to hit the chef five times before Yalb let go his teeth-grip on the Marshal's wrist. He sagged to his knees, clutching at the detective's coat to keep from falling to the floor.

The Marshal gave him one extra belt with the gun-barrel, to make sure the

man wasn't possuming. Mr. Yalb wasn't.  
 "Now then," Pedley gritted. "Get up on your feet and let's level on this."

**B**IDDONAY rolled over on his stomach and got his knees under him, but remained with his head down, his chin touching the carpet.

"He cut me!" the fat man moaned. "He stabbed me. Look!"

Pedley got his arms under the *restaurant's* shoulders, hoisted him onto one of those underslung chairs. He ripped open Biddonay's vest, pulled up his shirt. There was a crimson line about an inch long but the blood was merely oozing from it.

"That's a belly wound," the plump man blubbered. "I'll get blood poisoning—"

"Stop squawking. That's a flesh wound. Couple of stitches and you'll be good as new." He motioned to the girl. "Ring the *Ice-restaurant*."

She nodded silently.

The Marshal turned to Yalb, who was crouched on his haunches leaning against the wall. "You didn't hack your sister's husband to pieces with this thing." The Marshal picked up the knife at the spot where the blade entered the handle. "What'd you use?"

Yalb snarled: "I never touched the lousy ape. I had plenty of reason to, but I never touched him."

Suzie held out the phone receiver. "Here," she said dully, and when Pedley took the phone, she knelt down on the floor beside her brother, caressed his face with her hands.

The man on the phone was Jewett. He said the homicide boys had taken all their pictures and powdered everything for prints and removed the remains. They had left a patrolman on guard, and the fireman was awaiting Pedley's instructions.

"You run my car over here." The Marshal gave him the address. "And then you can take a guy to the hospital."

Biddonay snuffed, "Jeez, I'll bleed to death before then."

Pedley racked the receiver, went over to the girl and pushed her away from Yalb. "Nothing wrong with your brother; he'll have a jaw ache for a while and his face'll be black and blue, but—"

"Sure." The chef bared his teeth.

"Beatings don't bother me. I'm used to 'em. That big Gorilla used to beat me, way he beat Sis."

She said: "Hush, Jimmy—don't!"

The Marshal got hold of Yalb's collar, yanked him to his feet. "Stand against the wall; fold your arms on your chest . . . that's the idea. Now, what time did you leave the *Ice-restaurant*?"

"Twelve o'clock. I ain't s'posed to work after twelve. Ask him," Yalb sneered at the restaurant owner.

"Where'd you go after twelve?" Pedley wanted to know.

"I come over here."

"Jimmy has a key," Suzie corroborated.

"You been here ever since?"

"Yair. Maybe you think you can prove different?"

Biddonay twisted his face up in a lopsided grimace. "Ask him where he hid down cellar."

Pedley turned on the stout man. "I'll manage to figure out my own questions, Biddonay. While I'm at it, how come you got such a grudge against your star's brother?"

Biddonay told him, sitting there hunched over with his hands pressed tightly to his midriff like a Buddha with a bellyache. He didn't like Yalb because he made lousy pastry; also, he was dirty looking and insolent. Sure, Biddonay'd tried to fire him, but he didn't hold any grudge against him, or hadn't until he'd learned Yalb was Suzie's brother. He didn't mind Suzie; she was a swell kid and a good draw at the cashier's desk. The snowball gag was a good moneymaker. He didn't even mind Suzie's playing around with anybody she wanted to, including Herb Krass. Sure, his partner was probably footing the bills for this apartment they were in right now.

**T**HE girl didn't try to interrupt; she merely watched Biddonay with fear and disgust in her eyes. But Yalb unfolded his arms and, with his hands hooked in that curious, talonlike attitude, started for the restaurant man. Pedley lifted the muzzle of his gun, said:

"Do I have to put you out of commission, fella, or will you be nice?"

Yalb retreated to the wall again. Bid-

donay went on, eyeing Jimmy Yalb.

"What Herb does is his business; what Suzie does is strictly up to her. But when I find out that Herb has hired one of Suzie's relatives to work in my kitchen, to spy on me behind my back, I don't like it. So I wouldn't trust Yalb and I aim to have a showdown with Krass, believe you me."

There wasn't any need for Pedley to check the story with the girl. She didn't attempt to deny it, but she didn't seem ashamed or embarrassed, either.

There was a buzz at the front door. Pedley answered it. Jewett stood there, gawking in at the tableau: Biddonay hunched over, idolwise, the girl slouching on the arm of a divan, and Yalb rigid against the wall. Pedley pointed with his gun:

"Take this gent down to City Hospital; tell 'em to post a cop over his room. I'm holding him as a material witness."

"Yes, sir."

"And then run this lug down to my office in the Municipal Building. Tell Barney to keep him in the cooler till I get there."

"Right."

Pedley said: "Take a cab. I'm going to need my car to hunt Krass."

"Sure, Mr. Pedley. Say—" Jewett spoke in an undertone, held the door open while Biddonay walked with short, toed-in steps to the elevator. "They didn't find that skull, but they found the thing it was carried out in."

"Yeah?"

"'Member those leather cases for carrying bowling balls? It was one of them. They opened it up, found a lot of blood and stuff inside."

"But no head?"

"Un-hunh. The butcher must've delivered that somewhere else."

The door closed behind Yalb and Jewett; the elevator hummed down. Pedley turned to the girl. He said, "Biddonay doesn't look like he'd be much good on a bowling alley. How about your friend, Krass?"

"Yes," she said, harshly. "Herb is a kegger. He's nuts about it. That don't make him a murderer, does it?"

"It might," Pedley said. "You get some duds on; we'll go find out."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Pedley Looks at Death

SHE didn't move. "Listen, Mister Wise. You don't want to make me go to Herb's. What have I got to do with it?"

"You're in it already, babe. Climb into your clothes and make it fast!"

She stared wildly at him, ran into the bedroom, slammed the door.

She came out in five minutes, pert and trim in black skirt and scarlet sport jacket. She didn't seem to want to talk. They went downstairs, climbed into his car.

On the way over to Krass, she said, dully: "You can horse me around all you want to, but I wish you'd leave Jimmy alone. He hasn't done anything!"

The Marshal grunted. "He wouldn't be the guy who sliced a steak off your husband's body and cooked it on that charcoal grill then."

She whimpered as if Pedley had struck her; he'd wanted to jolt the truth out of her, at that. "I wouldn't believe it," she cried, "if I hadn't told Herb about Gregory threatening to expose us—Herb and me—unless he got a wad of money."

"What'd Krass say?"

"Herb said that if my husband tried blackmail," she shuddered, "after abusing me for years, he'd carve Greg up and serve him to me . . . on toast."

They pulled up in front of a half-timbered double house; Herbert R. Krass occupied one wing. He was home; he let them in. He was a tall, gaunt-framed man with iron-gray hair and steel-gray eyes; there was apprehension in those eyes.

He wasn't surprised to see the Marshal, but Suzie's presence startled Krass.

"I heard about it, Suz."

"You did?"

"Yuh. Guy phoned here about five minutes ago. For you," he scowled at Pedley. "From a hospital. Said his name was Jewett." He handed the Marshal a slip with a ward number on it. The detective got on the phone, while Suzie and Krass whispered together in the living-room.

JEWETT answered in a voice thick with pain and rage. There'd been an accident on the way to the hospital. That rat,

Yalb, had started a fight in the cab; a window had been smashed back of the driver's head and the glass had cut the taximan, making him run into a parked truck. In the confusion, Yalb had got clean away. The fireman had notified the police. He, himself, had a broken collar-bone. Bidonay had gone to the hospital with him; Jewett was ready to go up to the operating room to have the setting. . . .

Pedley frowned; this whole case stank to Heaven. Things kept slipping out of his fingers: Donnelly dead; Jewett hurt; Yalb taking a powder! One thing was sure: the next lead Pedley got his hands on, he wouldn't let go of!

He had hold of Krass, now. He put the fat man's partner over the jumps. Krass had no alibi; he'd been in New York from the time he left the *Ice-restaurant* until an hour ago. Where? In the lobby of one of the off-Broadway hotels. No, he hadn't talked to anyone; he'd gone there to meet this Gorilla Greg. Why? Because the wrestler had phoned to him and said that unless he came through with some important dough, Mrs. Krass would know all about Suzie's little apartment. Well, Mrs. Krass knew the whole thing now, anyway. He'd made a clean breast of it; his wife was a good trouper who understood that a man can step over the line once in a lifetime without having it break up his home.

Mrs. Krass was there to back him up. She was a good looking woman with henna-dyed hair and a figure that might once have done for the front line of the chorus, but was now too buxom. She appealed to the Marshal:

"You've got to believe Herb. If he'd wanted to put anything over on the law, he could have said he'd been home here with me, ever since leaving the restaurant, don't you see?"

Pedley said: "He might not have dared to, Mrs. Krass. If he'd established a phoney alibi like that and then someone showed up on the witness stand who'd happened to spot him on Broadway, or say over at West Fifty-first, it would be a one-way ticket to Sing-Sing sure."

"What," asked Krass, "is all this malarkey about Fifty-first Street?"

"Your cashier got himself murdered tonight, too. Sometime after the fire

broke out. So you see," the Marshal reached for his handcuffs, "I'll have to take you along."

Mrs. Krass buried her face in her hands, rushed sobbing from the room.

Suzie got between them, held onto Pedley's arms. "You're making a mistake, mister. Don't arrest Herb. You'll only get all this in the papers. . . ."

The Fire Department's chief investigator shoved her aside, gently. "That'll be the least of it," he agreed. "And the less fuss you make about it now—"

There was a *whish* of motion behind the Marshal; he ducked, but not in time to avoid a crashing blow from a heavy iron griddle swung by a frantic woman. Pain rocketed through his brain; he made a lunge for Krass, got hold of him.

The part owner of the *Ice-restaurant* struck at Pedley savagely; Mrs. Krass smashed him again on the back of the neck with that lethal kitchen utensil. Somebody tripped him.

He fell heavily, keeping his grip on Krass and sending home one bone-crushing blow to his prisoner's jaw. There wasn't time to get out his gun; the Marshal felt another terrific, nerve-numbing blow on top of his head—and that was all he felt.

**I**T WAS dark and damp and cold. Pedley's whole body ached so that it was torture to move. When he did attempt it, he found his movements were tightly restricted. His right arm was strapped to his side with surgeon's tape; his mouth had been plastered up with the same adhesive and his feet bound together. His left wrist was locked in one half of his own handcuffs; the other half of the bracelets had been snapped around a two-inch water-pipe running from floor to ceiling.

There was a cement floor under his feet and a rock wall at his back; he knew he was in the basement garage of the Krass house, even before he distinguished the low purr of the motor.

So that was the idea: the locked, unventilated garage; the running motor. . . . Easy, painless death! And there wasn't anything to do about it, except take it. Krass' wife had begun that attack on him because she must have suspected her hus-

band was guilty. Once they'd started it, Pedley supposed they could think of no alternative course than to put him out of the way. And yet. . . .

He strained at his bonds. It was hopeless. There was no way of telling how long it would take for the CO to take effect. He had heard that the only warning you got was a splitting headache; but he had that already. And he couldn't guess how long he'd been down here.

A drop splashed down on his face. It felt cool, refreshing. He looked up. Dimly, he could make out a faucet in a T joint on the riser above his head. Water! If he could get that faucet open, there might still be the slimmest chance.

He slid his handcuffed hand up the pipe, stood on tiptoe. He could just touch the lower rim of the faucet wheel. It was rusted! It stuck! It took him an eternity to force it open enough to permit a slow trickle down on him.

Pedley shifted so the water would drip on the tape at his right side. He squirmed and wriggled with every ounce of effort he could command. At first he thought it would be useless, but gradually the adhesive began to give.

## CHAPTER SIX

### The Man with the Key

**T**HE purr of the motor was louder now, or it seemed so to the Marshal. By the time he had managed to wrench his wrist free from the gummy tape, the pounding in his ears was thunderous, either from the motor or the thumping of his heart.

He tore at the bindings around his ankles, ripped the sticky bandage loose. He let the water splash on his upturned face a second, then shimmied up the pipe, using his feet and left hand to grip the metal, until he could turn the faucet on full force.

He got it wide open. Then he gripped the T pipe with the fingers of his right hand, got the ball of his thumb across the jet of the stream. Would it reach?

*It would!*

The spurt of water hissed out in a thin fan, toward the hood of the sedan. Pedley jockeyed it so the jet hit the side

louvres. The sound of the stream hitting the metal of the hood was music to his ears.

But there was no certainty it would reach a vital connection, dampen the wires, get to the distributor. It might . . . and that was all the chance he had.

He felt himself getting noticeably weaker. It took strength to maintain his grip on that pipe; he couldn't last much longer. The motor droned away, unconcernedly.

He altered the angle of the jet. There was a sputter, a miss. He clung to the pipe with the grim determination of a drowning man clutching a branch. Finally, when his hold was loosening and he was beginning to slip down the pipe, there was complete silence.

He'd done it! The invisible, death-dealing fumes wouldn't come pouring out of that exhaust any longer. If there wasn't already too much poison in the air. . . .

He climbed up with a final effort and shut off the water. Puddles on the floor gurgled as they ran to the drain.

The Marshal left the tape on his mouth, rearranged the bindings around his feet so they wouldn't seem to have been disarranged, at first glance. He turned over on his side, so that his right arm would be against the wall.

Then he waited. Hours it seemed. . . .

**T**HE footsteps came slowly down, grating on the cement floor of the garage. Pedley could just make out a vague shadow moving in silhouette against the deeper blackness.

Pedley kept his muscles limp, relaxed; simulating as nearly as possible the lifeless corpse which he should have been. The fire detective could hear the murderer's stertorous breathing, could feel fingers probing his throat for his pulse. Then the Marshal snapped into convulsive action.

His right hand shot out, clutched the shadowy figure fiercely by the neck. At the same instant, using his steel-locked left hand as leverage, Pedley threw his legs around the man's body in a scissors grip.

Blows rained on the Marshal's face and neck, fingernails clawed viciously at his

eyes. But he held on to the windpipe in his grasp, squeezed the murderer's midriff punishingly with his leg-hold. It was over in less than sixty seconds. The man went limp. Pedley let the deadweight sag to the floor, crouched down beside it. He fished through the man's pockets, found the key to the handcuffs, let himself loose. Then he ripped the tape from his mouth, jumped for the faucet, turned it on and drank from the icy cascade that poured down on him.

First, he locked the killer's wrist to the pipe from which he, himself, had just won release. Then he dragged the unconscious figure under the shower. There was a deep groan; the man opened his eyes and stared up with a mixture of cold malignity and shocked astonishment.

"This is where we came in," Pedley growled, "with me damn near out on my feet and you wandering around like you'd lost your best friend."

"What's the matter with you?" snarled the man on the floor. "I come down here, find you kayoed and wonder whether I ought to call a doctor. And you tear at me like a wildcat. What's the idea?"

"Idea is, it's all over, Biddonay. All except the little room where they sit you with your back to a switchboard."

"Because I tried to save your life?"

"Because you tried to kill me, you pot-bellied buzzard. And tried to make it look as if your partner fixed my wagon, instead of you. How the hell did you get out of the hospital?"

"What difference does it make whether I stayed in the hospital?" The fat man walked on his knees around the water pipe the way a dog roves on a chain. "I been takin' it, all night, now. From the fire, from that louse, Yalb. And now you. I'm the big loser in this thing—"

"I thought you were, until I got my gray matter going. You said you were all washed up. Remember?"

"Well. . . ."

"You were. Only before the fire. Not after. You're practically broke, way I figure it. You mentioned the take was okay at the restaurant. But you didn't seem to be spending much dough on wine, women or such. And when I saw that row of Moody's Manuals there in the bookcase in your office, I should have known."

"I've had 'em for years," Biddonay protested.

"You got the 1941 edition damned early, then. The guys who use Moody's much are generally stock-market brokers or suckers who think they're wise boys."

"Is it a felony to own securities, now?"

"Your trouble was you didn't own 'em. Maybe you had 'em, but you lost 'em."

"Okay, crystal gazer. Suppose I am strapped. What of it?" Biddonay nursed his wrist, where the bracelets chafed it.

"**W**HY, you might have tried to get more dough. The logical place for you to try and get it would be to gyp your partner. And if you figured you'd gone as far as you could, along that line, without being found out, you might try to get out of your fix by putting Krass out of the way."

"I never even saw Herb," Biddonay jeered, after he left the place at midnight.

"You wouldn't have to. You could get Krass in a jam by killing that wrestler in such a way that everyone would pin the blame on your partner. That would send Krass to the burner and leave you to take over the *Ice-restaurant*. Including any funds of Krass's which you may have stolen, to date."

"You fat-headed fink!" the restaurant man yelled. "I never knew anything about this Greek wrestler!"

"Oh, sure. Sure you did. Jewett knew you did."

"You couldn't even get Herb to believe a frame-up like that."

"Maybe I could, fat boy. I could point out to Krass that you'd heard him talking on the phone to that wrestler. That would have told you where your partner was supposed to meet the Gorilla and cross his palm with silver."

"Ha!" Biddonay chuckled hoarsely. "And again 'Ha!'"

"You like it? Here's more. You beat it over to this hotel where they had the date. You got there before Krass did, maybe quarter of twelve or so. The Greek was there; you gave him some song and dance about Krass meeting him in your rooms above the restaurant. Right?"

Biddonay stared at him, slack-jawed. "You son of a—"

"Well, it's close enough. Anyhow, you got Gorilla Greg to come back to your rooms. After the joint closed you got him to come down to the cafe, prob'ly on a pretext of meeting Krass then. When you got him there, you killed him, chopped him up into soup meat, put the legs and arms on the fire so it would look as if the murderer was trying to conceal his crime—though *you* weren't—and then hung the torso up in the coldbox. That's the story, isn't it?"

The light in the garage was stronger, now, but Biddonay's face seemed to be still gray, like the sky at false dawn.

"I suppose I cut that steak out of the wrestler's back, too?"

"Who else, Biddonay? You heard about the threat Krass made, about serving Suzie's husband to her on toast, if he caused too much trouble."

"Hell! If you ain't just been hitting the pipe and dreaming this up, whyn't you slap me in a cell?"

"I want to get a coupla things straight first, fatso."

"No kidding! Just ask me. Anything at all," the prisoner sneered. "Be glad to oblige."

"Okay. About that phone call to Pete Donnelly. I know you killed your cashier. I suppose it was because he was wise, or getting wise, to your financial finagling. You must have killed him before the apparatus got to the blaze, because you'd have to have time enough to get back to your rooms from Fifty-first Street and change out of street clothes into pajamas. Then you came down into the street, looking all worried and upset and I don't wonder, with that evening's work behind you."

"You'd have to go on the witness stand and testify that I talked, in your presence, to Pete after the fire was over. And that I was with you all the time from that moment till we found poor Donnelly's body."

Pedley shook his head. "All I could swear to is that you called a number and talked to somebody. It might have been a Chinaman at a Chopsuey joint for all I heard. It wasn't the cashier."

**B**IDDONAY beat his head against the iron riser. "Listen to the lunatic! He don't even believe his own ears."

"Yeah. I do. When I hear something. I didn't hear the guy on the other end of your wire, then. And I can't prove that you dialed a different number the second time you called Donnelly. But I know you did."

The restaurant man began to sob great gusty sobs that shook his tubby figure like jelly. "Couple of hours ago, you weren't talking this way. You put the pinch on that rat-faced Yalb. And now—"

"Now I think just the same about Yalb as I thought then. Suzie's brother is scared, dumb and rattled. He got sore at you for throwing off on his sister, and cut you for it. We'll get him for that; he'll probably still be serving time when you're waiting for the reprieve that won't come. But Yalb isn't a wholesale butcher, like you."

"Why me? Why not Krass? Why not?" the fat man shrieked. He was pouring cold sweat.

"Krass wouldn't have used that bowling ball case to carry the Greek's head out of the cafe, for one thing. It would have been too much of a giveaway. By the way, what'd you do to scare Herb off?"

Biddonay shook his head, without answering.

"You'd want him to take it on the lam because you'd need somebody to act as fall guy, and Krass had to get the chair if you were to come out ahead on the money end."

The fat man broke down and blubbered piteously, pawing the air with his free hand as if he was trying to beat off a wasp.

The Marshal started for the stairs. "Say, there's always a little silver in the lining. . . ."

The proprietor of the *Ice-restaurant* looked up, soddently. He was drenched with tears and perspiration.

"You won't have to worry about that new wardrobe, Biddonay. You wouldn't want to spend a lot of dough on a suit they're going to rip up the legs and arms in a few weeks."



# More Deadly Than the Male

By  
CYRIL PLUNKETT



*To young Detective Joe Carlin, the exoneration of Griff Garrison as Avis Larkin's murderer was all-important—even though success meant happiness for Linda . . . and the dark road of solitude for Joe!*

**H**IS first thought was of the shock this would be to Linda Allister. And then he knew a fierce elation, for young Griff Garrison was saying hysterically, "I did it. I shot her. There isn't any argument—so what more do you want?"

Joe Carlin took a very deep breath, and somehow it swept his mind free of all emotion. It left him aware only that here was murder, a job of work. He moved

from Lieutenant Pressly's side and walked around the center table to where Dallas was standing, near the body.

Dallas said, "I—I think I'm going to be sick, officer."

Dallas had found the body. Dallas was a chubby man, dark, perhaps thirty-five. And flashy, from his glistening and pomaded hair to the two large diamonds on his trembling hands. He ran a booking agency, and glamour and girls were his

specialty. According to him, Avis Larkin had been his friend and he'd visited her often. He'd dropped in to see her this evening, a little after ten. Having a gun with him he'd not only surprised Griff Garrison, but held him and phoned for the police.

"May I sit down?" Dallas continued weakly.

Carlin said, "Of course," and stared at the corpse of Avis Larkin.

She was beautiful, even in death and despite the look of horror death had stamped upon her face. Her hair was platinum blonde, long and silky, and her skin had a soft, satiny sheen, like the petals of a pale pink flower. She'd been shot in the heart, twice.

Lieutenant Pressly wasn't wasting any time. His voice, quick and precise, cut into the tension of the room.

"You make this statement voluntarily, Garrison?"

"Yes! I came up to see Miss—I mean Avis. We quarreled. I don't know how it happened, but it did happen. I—shot her."

Carlin swung around, "Where's the gun, Griff?"

"Gun?" Garrison sounded startled. He was about twenty-five, four years younger than Joe Carlin. He was tall and husky and blond. And drunk. But it showed less in his speech than in the way he stood, swaying, and in the glassiness of his blue eyes. "I threw it away."

"Where?"

"Damn you, Carlin, what are you trying to do? I said I killed her, didn't I? Isn't that enough?"

"Where?" Pressly echoed flatly.

Young Garrison wet his lips. "All right. I went out. I went away. I threw away the gun. I don't remember where."

"And then you came back?" Carlin asked, frowning.

Garrison stared at the wall, his lips pressed tightly shut. And Pressly shrugged.

"Like that, eh? Okay, boys, take him downtown. One of you drive his car down also." He motioned Carlin to remain, released Dallas, minus his gun which was held for examination. The Coroner came—and went, and the wind whispered in the trees around the bungalow, wistfully,

with melancholy. Joe Carlin sighed. He began to think of Linda Allister again, and this time he couldn't put her from his mind.

"Tough on the Garrisons," Pressly said. "A shock like this might take the old lady. But he *could* have come back, at that. The Coroner says the condition of the body indicates he'd have had time. And we didn't find a thing. He could have been after letters or something and disposed of them in the bathroom."

Carlin said, "Yes." Vaguely, absently. "You've got something on your mind, Joe?"

"I'm wondering why young Garrison had anything to do with a girl like Avis Larkin."

Pressly said, "She had everything, Joe."

"So did Garrison," Carlin replied queerly.

When he reached his rooms, long after midnight, he found Linda Allister huddled on the stairway, waiting.

**H**ER dark eyes were haunted, a little red from weeping. She was tall and slender; her beauty, Carlin thought, wasn't at all like Avis Larkin's. It wasn't shallow and simply sensuous.

She came to her feet, and her hands, quick to grasp his, were cold, trembling. She said, "Joe!" But all her anguish, her fear, her plea for help and understanding were in the word.

"You shouldn't have come here, Linda."

"I couldn't wait for morning. The minute I heard I tried to contact you by phone, but you weren't at headquarters, and you weren't at home—there was nothing else for me to do. Joe, tell me it isn't true!"

"It's true. He's booked for murder, Linda."

He thought for a moment that she would faint, and more than ever before he wanted to sweep her into his arms, to tell her that with him she would have no fear, ever again. But her hands were holding tightly to his, and the reason for their tension would not let him speak.

He said, "Come inside, Linda. We can't talk here."

Her face was a mask now, dead white

beneath her auburn hair. He led her to a chair, and then poured her a whisky and soda. She drank obediently, like a child, and putting the glass down finally, shuddered.

"He's so good, so honorable and fine. Griff didn't do it, Joe."

"You feel that, dear—or know?"

She didn't answer right away, and the nearness of her, her agony and the void between them, tortured him. Six years he'd known Linda Allister; six years he'd loved her—from the night they'd met at the dance upstate, at Northern U. They'd discovered they were from the same city, and he had visualized at once a new and exciting world. He hadn't foreseen then the world's realities.

She lived on Bexley Drive, well beyond the town; the Allisters had money and position. She moved in a different social sphere—like the Garrisons who lived next door to her. She'd seen Joe Carlin less

had coffee together in Griff Senior's den, and once their voices were loud. It was then—Joe, Mrs. Garrison told me."

He stared. "Mrs. Garrison?"

"Avis Larkin had been to see her early in the afternoon. She didn't care that Mrs. Garrison was so emotionally distraught, an invalid. She was cruel. She was concerned only with getting money."

"Because of Griff? To avoid a scandal?"

"That's right. Mrs. Garrison thought I should know. Mrs. Garrison asked that I forgive Griff and not complicate his problems, not ruin his life. I—I was shocked."

He could understand that; she'd been through hell this night. He knew that she wasn't the girl, either, to bow humbly before disaster, and this thought left him suddenly cold, afraid. The question tormenting him was one that would not be put aside.

**Remember John Hawkins' Pop Eagan stories? Look in the next issue for a dramatic novelette called "WE DIE TONIGHT." It's the first story in a brilliant new series by this famous author!**

and less after he'd joined the Force—and Griff Garrison more and more, after his return from an Eastern university. Her betrothal had been inevitable.

"I feel it, Joe," she said finally. "But I know, too, because I love him."

CARLIN nodded grimly. She was like that. She'd stand by Griff whatever the sordid implications. She would believe in him. He had a brief flash of what might happen, Griff Garrison's conviction—of a clear road thereby for himself. But he put the thought away, worriedly, angrily.

"You'll have to tell me all you know, Linda. Everything, no matter how it hurts. You were aware of Avis Larkin?"

"Not until tonight, but—"

"After the murder?"

"Before," she admitted. "I dined with the Garrisons."

"And there was tension, a scene?"

"Oh no! Not that. Tension, yes. It was between Griff and his father. They

"The gun, Linda. Where does the gun fit in?"

"Gun?" She said the word with the same quick tautness he remembered seeing in Griff Garrison.

"You knew Griff carried a gun?"

"No! Joe, *no*. I—we went outside, Griff and I. We sat in the dark, in Griff's car."

"And you mentioned Avis Larkin?"

"I couldn't! I didn't know what to do or say. After a while he parted. He went back into the house and I—"

"You'd quarreled?"

"Yes," she said faintly. "In a way, not terribly. But Griff was going into town, and I was frightened—" She hesitated, began to sob. "I'm spoiling it, Joe. I'm making it sound bad, when it shouldn't be bad at all."

"And you got out of the car finally and went home?"

"Yes. Joe, please believe me, please understand he wouldn't commit murder. Joe, please help prove him innocent."

"You know that he confessed?"

"But Joe! Can't you see? He—he's shielding someone!"

He sent her home in a cab, alone, and when she had gone he sat gazing at her chair. After six long years Fate had given him the opportunity he asked most of life—a vulnerable Linda, free of the one man who stood between them. But the gods had made the gift while laughing. They had left him duty. To himself and the Law he served.

Yes, Griff Garrison had seemed anxious to confess. The question had to follow: Why?

THE morning was clear and warm, but once past the stucco bungalow of Avis Larkin, setting alone and lonely just within the city limits, Bexley Drive curved its way through a tunnel of leafy green. A cool white concrete ribbon, wide lawns on either side. On either side security and peace.

There was no peace in Joe Carlin's heart. The night had not lifted its dark grasp. The night had augured only dread. He drove with an intense frown, his grey eyes thoughtful, speculative—and inquiring. When he approached Bexley Run he slowed his car. Stopped just across the cement bridge and got out.

The Run was wide for a creek, clear and bluish in the shade, its rippling song naive and sweet. Carlin stood watching it a moment, gnawing his lip, and then he bent to examine the mark that had first attracted him. A gouge, a four-foot scar on the cement bridge rail. It was on the left side, facing away from town, and it seemed fairly new. It puzzled him because the gouge appeared quite sharply on the town end of the scar, as though the car that presumably had made it had been traveling on the wrong side of the road.

Carlin returned to his coupe presently and drove on to the service station a little down the road. Here he called headquarters, talked to Pressly. Pressly said, "It's worth a try, at that. Okay, Joe, right away. Coming in?"

"I'm going to the Garrisons," Carlin said.

The white house, very white, with its three car garage, its green roof and shutters, a half mile farther on . . .

There was a sleek black business coupe parked in the half-moon drive; a silence beyond the screen door to the hall. The bell rang sharply, and then from the rear of the house came the patter of high heels, a maid. Mr. Garrison was in, *just* in. He was going to town at once.

He came down the wide stairway, blond, broad-shouldered, like his son. And like Griff Jr., the man was disturbingly handsome. But his blue eyes were shadowed now. He looked tired and apprehensive.

Carlin introduced himself, and Garrison said jerkily, "I can't give you much time, officer. I've an engagement with my lawyers. Couldn't you stop at my office later in the day?"

"That may not be necessary," Carlin said. "I've only a few questions. It's really Mrs. Garrison I wish to see. About Avis Larkin's call here yesterday."

"Here?" Garrison echoed sharply.

"Mrs. Garrison didn't tell you?" Carlin wondered, surprised.

Garrison said, "Really, I've got to run along. I'll call on Lieutenant Pressly later, if you wish."

"Wait a minute. Do you own a gun?"

"Well—yes."

"Does your son own one?"

"I—damn it, I wouldn't know."

"I'd like to see your gun, if you don't mind."

Garrison said, "As a matter of fact, I don't know exactly where I've put it, and at the moment I haven't time to hunt. Sorry, officer."

"One thing more. Were you at home last evening, between nine and eleven?"

"Well—frankly, no. I left shortly after dining. But look here, it's my son who is in trouble, not I. I shan't discuss this thing further until I've consulted with my lawyers. Such were my instructions."

He swung around and stopped, and there in the archway was Mrs. Garrison. Garrison said, "Adele!" as though startled to find her so unexpectedly behind him. He introduced Joe Carlin, and hurried away. The coupe spun gravel in the drive.

"Won't you sit down?" Adele Garrison invited softly.

SHE was a strange woman. She had a bouquet of flowers in the crook of one arm; a pruning shears and garden gloves

clasped in the other hand. She wore white, a longish, flowing dress that left her a little like a window maniken draped with someone else's garment. There was a wax-like quality about her, in the serenity of her pale face, the white transparency of her hands, the vague blue-gray of her eyes.

Carlin was at a loss how to begin. He knew that she was ill, that she suffered from anemia. That she'd led a life ingeniously remote these many years. Linda had told him that. "She's fragile, like lovely old lace," Linda had said. "She lives for her home and her garden, and walking in her garden evenings she's as delicate and ghostly as the lilies all around her. Sometimes she doesn't seem of this world at all; she has the faculty of seeming to rise above it." And indeed, her composure now was amazing.

"You wished to question me?"

Carlin cleared his throat. "About last night, a certain tension—"

"There's nothing to tell."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing," she repeated quietly.

He gnawed his lip. "Avis Larkin called on you yesterday. I want to know exactly what she said."

"Only that Griff was—involved."

"She wanted money? She made threats?"

She betrayed no surprise that he knew this. She smiled vaguely and said, "You are well informed."

"Come, come, Mrs. Garrison!"

"Do you wish quotations? Very well. I think her words were that unless I applied proper pressure toward a quick and substantial settlement she could become quite nasty. That was the word she used. She said she had both the right to remuneration and the connections to get it."

"Connections?" Carlin murmured. "You applied pressure to your son to pay and get out from under?"

"Griff is old enough to work out his own destiny, don't you think? You mustn't worry, officer. I'm sure everything will be all right."

*All right—!* He couldn't help shivering, once again outside. And driving past Linda's home on the way back to town, he slowed and wondered if she were there

now, alone in her desolation. But he didn't stop. Not until he'd reached Bexley Run.

There was a fire truck parked near the bridge, and police and firemen wading in from the stream. A cop called, "Joe, we got it! We started dragging, and by gosh there it was—a .32 Colt revolver. Two fired shells. We just sent it in to Pressly."

Carlin continued on to headquarters. It was the murder gun; ballistics settled that. And young Griff Garrison's fingerprints were on it. But they were not the only ones. Two additional and conflicting patterns appeared there also.

FOR a long while Joe Carlin sat at his desk. He knew what he had to do, the thing his trained mind demanded, but he couldn't bring himself to rise and act. He knew he was afraid, and his fear, like last night's emotion, was powerful and demoralizing.

Lieutenant Pressly bustled in. Pressly looked happy.

"We're set, Joe. At least the kid *had* the gun. We'll determine ownership—"

"I think I can answer that now," Carlin interrupted slowly. "Garrison's. Griff Garrison, Senior."

Pressly frowned. "His prints, do you suppose?"

"I don't know. We'll have to find that out."

"Logical, if so. The kid borrowed the gun."

"I don't know," Carlin repeated.

"What the hell's the matter with you, Joe?"

Carlin said, "Didn't you have Dallas in this afternoon?"

"He's here yet, waiting in my office."

Carlin sighed and got up, and when he entered Pressly's office Dallas came bouncing out of his chair like a rubber ball. A worried smile scurried over his chubby face.

"The Lieutenant's through with me?"

"Not quite. Sit down, Dallas. Cigarette? Not jittery are you?"

"Thing like this makes anyone nervous," Dallas said.

"Particularly when you're involved."

"Eh?" Dallas paused, lighting the cigarette. The match dropped to the floor.

"Let's put the cards on the table, Dallas. The girl was a tramp."

"Why, she—she—"

"Don't sputter. You were her friend, and you visited her often, by your own admission. I think you were in on the take."

Dallas had no answer.

"No comment? Okay, stand on your rights, but Avis made one little slip, Dallas. She said she wasn't alone on the deal that actually provided motive for her murder. She thought she'd pressure the Garrisons by playing up her strength. So—" Carlin shrugged—"we each have an avenue out. You come clean and tell everything you know. Or we put the bug on you. We say: *Why* were you there so opportunely, with a gun, to capture Garrison? How do we know you didn't kill Avis Larkin, and Garrison actually surprised you?"

"But that's insane!" Dallas cried.

"Is it? Scandal is a terrific lever on a family like the Garrisons. We don't know what happened before the arrival of the police. Suppose you and young Garrison made a deal? He takes the rap, in return for your silence and for the material which you and Avis Larkin planned to use for your blackmail scheme.

"Dallas, make up your mind. Is it blackmail, or murder?"

Dallas said, "You can't do this, Carlin! Avis was within her rights. Just because a married man has wealth and position he can't make a fool of a girl. I don't care who he is, how big, he can't just up and walk out. Demanding a settlement doesn't make it blackmail, either, and by George, you'll not prove that it was!"

Carlin said harshly, "A married man? Garrison *Senior*?"

"What's so surprising about that? He'd been keeping Avis for the past two years."

"So that's the key," Carlin murmured. "Ambiguity." But there was no satisfaction in his voice; there was only despair.

He swung around, left the office, and now he walked to his car and drove slowly to his apartment. He'd chosen once to sublimate emotion to duty; how could he have foreseen then that the path was to be lined with Gorgon heads? Her glass, Linda's glass, was still on the stand beside the chair. Where she'd placed it after drinking the night before. The blood pounded at his temples while he packed it.

He marched back to the street then, back to headquarters and the laboratory.

The shadows were bowing over Bexley Drive when he turned into Linda's yard.

SHE was in her room; her mother called her. She came into the library with a faltering, uncertain step, her dark eyes very wide. She shut the door and leaned against it, and she said, "Joe—? You look so strange."

"I asked you to tell me everything," he began slowly. "You didn't. It—"

He couldn't go on. His heart was choking him. He knew he'd lost her, the girl he loved more than life.

"Joe, what is it?"

"The gun. You said you knew nothing of the gun."

"And you think I—I did?"

"Your fingerprints were on the gun."

"But Joe, don't you see? I couldn't tell you that! It would have made the circumstantial evidence complete and horrible!"

"I see."

"You don't!" The words poured from her lips, wildly, frantically. "We came out to the car, Griff and I, just before Mr. Garrison drove away. When Griff kissed me I felt the gun in his pocket. He was so—so *tense*. He said he was going to town to get drunk. His attitude and the gun in his pocket alarmed me. I took it, unknown to him. Joe, truly I did."

She stopped for breath. "And then, he left me and went back into the house, and before going home, I stuffed the gun into the back seat pocket. Joe, it was in his car, but he didn't know it was there. He couldn't have known. Joe, you believe me? Say you believe me!"

He didn't answer.

"Joe, is everything—lost?"

"Everything. For me," he added queerly, and she turned and ran, sobbing, from the room. He followed into the hall, went on outside. He could see the Garrison house through the trees, its windows softly alight in the dusk, and he found himself moving towards it, and then sheering away from it, toward the garage.

When he rounded the house finally, and rang the bell, only silence answered.

The door was unlocked. He went in. Both front rooms were dimly lighted.

He heard no footsteps on the stairs, but

there suddenly Adele Garrison was, as ghostly in the stairway's dusky void as Linda had once described her.

She came on down, her head held stiffly. She said, "Good evening, Mr. Carlin." She seated herself on a lounge, poured a glassful of water from a thermos on the table. But she didn't drink.

Carlin said, "Is your husband at home, Mrs. Garrison?"

"I'm alone, but I often am. I like the servants to be free evenings."

"As they were away last night?"

She smiled, and her eyes showed a mounting excitement. "Yes, they were away last night. Did you wish urgently to see my husband? He's at the office—"

"Mrs. Garrison, I didn't know you had a car."

"Didn't you?" She smiled again, as if she had an amusing and exciting secret. "I seldom, almost never drive it. Having the car at all was—was whimsy."

"Why did you talk to Linda as you did last night?"

"Was there any choice?" she answered simply. "Had I at any time—tonight, seeing you enter the garage—a choice?"

"But it wasn't Griff Jr., who was involved with Avis Larkin, Mrs. Garrison. She presumably didn't even know your son. It was Griff Senior, your husband."

"No," she said sharply. "No!"

And like tearing a veil from his mind he saw the truth. "A ghostly woman, not of this world and seeming to rise above it . . ." She'd lived apart, and when reality came to her she could not face it! She'd *chosen* to believe Avis Larkin's "Griff" had been her son! She'd talked to Linda to convince not Linda but herself. And yet she'd realized, in her peculiar way, that while Avis Larkin lived the threat to her security lived also.

**H**E SAW it all in that moment. The elder Garrison's conflict in the emergency he, through Avis Larkin, had created. Confronted by, or confiding in, his son. *There* was the cause of the tenseness between them at dinner; and afterward in the den, when young Garrison had taken the gun, alarmed doubtless lest his father use it on himself. There was the reason for young Garrison's curious

depression, his wish to get drunk; and later his decision to see and talk to Avis.

Carlin found himself talking, harshly, depending upon it for his strength. "Your husband did not have possession of the gun, and because he was the first to leave after dinner, no opportunity to regain it. Your son did not know where it was, but only that Linda must have taken it from him. It will be simple to prove that Linda was in her home at the time of the murder. But you, Mrs. Garrison, had been in your garden, as was your habit evenings. You saw Linda hide the gun in Griff's machine. You were wearing your garden gloves and thus it was that you left no prints on the gun. You waited until Griff drove away, and then with no one at home to bear witness to your actions, you got out your car and followed.

"Down the darkest road, Mrs. Garrison. To murder Avis Larkin while your son was stopping somewhere on the way to get drunk. And when he arrived and discovered Avis Larkin dead, and feared that his father had been there ahead of him, you were already on your way home. To stop on the bridge and throw the gun away, unseen. To scrape the bridge rail in your inability to drive well. To mar your left front fender and leave ground into the paint the unshakable evidence I discovered there tonight—particles of cement."

She reached for the glass beside her.

Carlin managed to touch the glass, to dash it from her hand before it met her lips, and for the second time then he was aware of her head. Back now, the arms too tight as they drew in and across her chest. Her smile had become a curious grin.

"Too late," she whispered. "Arsenic for anemia. I—I had it handy—took it when I saw you going into the garage."

The phone was dead. He heard her dry cackle, and he cursed and threw the phone to the floor; returned, running up the hall. But her frail body had sidestepped reality once more . . .

The night, later, was hushed and very dark, but off through the trees Linda's house glowed with light. The new light to her happiness—and Griff's. Joe Carlin sighed and walked down the shadowy road to his car, alone.

# Homicide Follows the Prince

*A John Wade Novelette*

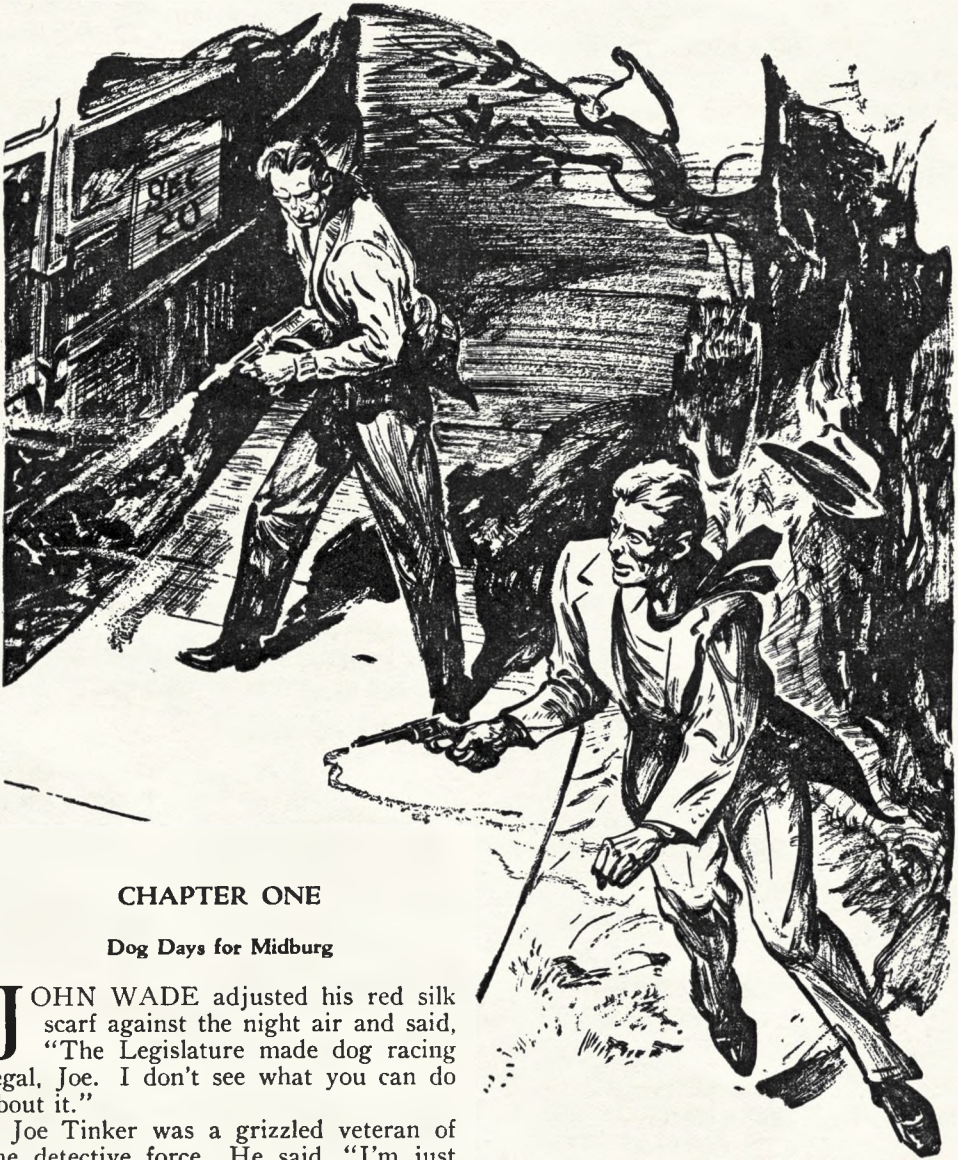
By  
**WILLIAM R. COX**



Ricky raised the machinegun. He yelled, "Make your break, pal! I've got you covered. . . ."



*When John Wade won a long shot on Plack Prince, he knew that trouble was brewing at the dog track. It was a bribe, John recognized, and with it came an order that he had to obey—or else condemn the fighting Governor and Jean Morrow to certain death!*



## CHAPTER ONE

### Dog Days for Midburg

JOHN WADE adjusted his red silk scarf against the night air and said, "The Legislature made dog racing legal, Joe. I don't see what you can do about it."

Joe Tinker was a grizzled veteran of the detective force. He said, "I'm just on the lookout for suspicious characters, John. There is always a tough mob around these dog tracks. It's a sorry day they brought them to Midburg."

"They slipped it over on the Governor," nodded John. "There was plenty of

money spent to put it through, you know."

"If I ketch sight of any big-time crooks," declared Tinker, "I'll throw 'em in the can like they were herring. These little petty crooks—we can't hold 'em."

They're all here—Mustard Bane, Pete Gary, Ginney Firenza and muggs like that. But it's no use to pinch them; they'd be out by morning."

John said, "Who is running the thing?"

"Remington J. Redley," said Joe Tinker disgustedly. "That old con guy."

John winced. He murmured, "I know Rem. I'll see him. It's tough to be a cop sometimes, Joe."

He walked down past the newly finished grandstand. The plant was well built. Someone had put a lot of money in dog racing, all right. The long line of parimutuel windows were being stormed by Midburgians with two dollars and more to bet.

A little man in a black and white checkered suit and a large, peak-visored cap slid out of the shadows. John's taste in clothing, ever fastidious, curled and writhed within him. He could not take his eyes from a horrid green and pink necktie around the creature's neck.

A hoarse voice said, "Bet the quinella in the sixt', pal, Numbers One and Seven. Don't forget, pal. One and Seven in the sixt'."

John said, "Wait a minute, Pitiful. Where did you get those clothes?"

The man scurried away, like a small animal, into the crowd. He was gone before John realized that his face, obscured by the cap and overshadowed by the loud clothing, had never been plain to John's vision.

John went on. A stout man strutted up and said, "If there is anything I can do for you, Wade, let me know. I am running things here, you may have heard."

He was a well-turned out fat man, with pink cheeks and freshly-shaven jowls. He had pale eyes and wore his nose glasses on a black ribbon.

"Well, Rem!" John exclaimed. "Gone legit in your old age?"

Remington J. Redley bridled as only an indignant stout man can bridle. He said, "Now look here, Wade—"

John cut in, "When I was a con guy, you were small fish, picking up petty larceny from nickel machine sports. You got up pretty high for a drug store cowboy. Who really owns this joint, Rem?"

Remington Redley deflated. He said, "Look, Wade. I wanta talk to you."

John said, "I have to be careful. I'm on the side of law and order now, you know."

Redley had him by the arm. There was an office built into the side of the grandstand. There were steps and then a door labelled plainly, "Midburg Dog Racing Association. Remington J. Redley, President."

**T**HERE was a large desk, very heavy. The room was furnished luxuriously, with large chairs and in the center of the floor was a fine, Oriental throw rug. A bronze lamp of curious design with a large button switch gave a dim light.

Redley sat behind the desk. His jowls sagged a little. He said, "Wade, I'm in a jam."

John said, "No!"

"I got this job, see?" said Redley. "There's a man named Olaf Pinega. He runs the place. I'm only on salary, Wade—a pittance."

"Aha. You've been clipping, eh, pal?" grinned John.

"Well, a certain trainer is in my—confidence," said Redley. "I—er—have manipulated a dog or two. I had my bets cashed by an out-of-town friend. I thought I was safe. This Pinega is smart, Wade."

John said, "So they are crooked. The races. I mean."

"Not all of them," said Redley defensively. "If there is a chance for a betting coup—you understand."

"They can be fixed," nodded John. "I thought so. So what?"

"Pinega—I am afraid of him," said Redley candidly. "Before you leave tonight, could you see that I get out of here? I've got plenty of money. If you are meeting Boles—I thought maybe you two could protect me. I'm leaving, Wade, for good. I have a stake. I could give you a thousand dollars for getting me out of here."

"A thousand dollars," said John slowly. "You must have cleaned up, Rem."

The fat man leaned forward eagerly. He said, "Ricky Boles could get me out. I know he's your man. How about it, Wade? Will you do it?"

"Why, yes," said John. "For a grand, I will be glad to do it."

"After the races," said Redley eagerly.

"I'll meet you right in here. O.K., Wade?"

John said, "Sure." He got up, leaned against the desk. It did not move. He glanced down and perceived that it was bolted to the floor. This, he thought, was a strange office. Almost like a fortress built into the concrete.

He nodded to the relieved Redley and went out. It was past time to meet Ricky and Jean Morrow. He almost ran into a very tall man as he descended the steps. The man had flat cheekbones and wide-spaced eyes. He was big; bigger than Ricky, even. He had an Oriental air about him. John was sure he had never seen him before.

He would have spoken to the tall man, but he espied a short figure in a checkered suit beyond. He wanted to speak to the little man who had touted him. He started forward, but the check suit vanished again. John shook his head and went up into the grandstand.

Ricky Boles was waiting for him and Jean was beside the big bodyguard. She was very lovely in a dark suit which set off her blonde hair. She gave John her blue eyes and said:

"The dogs are beautiful, John."

She was the smartest young girl in Midstate. She was Governor Fortney Castle's secretary. She had been associated with the Governor since leaving college, and the crime laboratory in the Governor's house was her playground.

When John Wade had deserted his profession of separating gullible fools from their money and turned straight, it had been largely because of this girl. True, he had tired of paying tribute to crooked politicians, to police with their hands out, to crime overlords and go-betweens. And the forceful personality of the crusading Governor had influenced him. But had Jean Morrow not been in it, he could not have told what he would have decided.

Ricky said, "And can them mutts run! Pal, they are quicker than phoney dice!"

**H**E WAS a big fellow with scar tissue over his eyes, a jaw like a battleship's prow, and hands like small torpedoes. Ricky Boles looked as though he had been a professional boxer, but he had never been that stupid. He had been a profes-

sional gunman for a good many years.

He had been bodyguard to some important bootleggers and then he had been John Wade's man. When John had turned straight, it had been no wrench for Ricky to go along. Ricky did not love cops, but he loved racketeers and criminals less. He was himself an honest man. He would kill in the interest of his boss—but he never took a dishonest penny on his own hook. John always referred to him as "the only completely honest man in Midstate!"

John said, "The sixth race! Ricky, go buy a quinella ticket on Numbers One and Seven."

"You got something?" asked Ricky.

"I got touted," said John. "By the only man I ever saw who really looked like a tout."

Ricky said, "I'll buy six of 'em. They're only two bucks a crack."

He went down towards the windows. Jean said, "It's a fine plant they've built, John."

He tore his eyes from her blonde beauty and looked around. The stands were compact and well built. The small, circular track with its mechanical arm to which the rabbit was fastened, its boxes from which dogs would leap and run, its uniformed attendants, the band playing smartly, made a colorful scene. There were plenty of people around. Midburg seemed to like dog racing.

"It's bad," said John. "Not the gambling, for people will always gamble. Not that, but the mob which always follows racing. There will be hoods and dips and heisters all over the place. They'll come from out of the state and we'll be lousy with them."

Jean said, "I know. It's a shame. Who owns it, John?"

"I can't find out," admitted John. "There's a corporation, of course. And a man who seems to be named Olaf Pinega. Here comes Ricky with the tickets. . . ."

Ricky said, "What's this 'keenella', anyway? The guy gimme a funny look when I bought these things."

"We are betting that Numbers One and Seven dogs finish first and second," explained John. "Either Number One or Number Seven can be first, so long as the other places."

"That's a sucker bet," said Ricky. "This guy touted you wrong."

"Let's be suckers, then," said John. "Look at the fun you're having."

"I thought we might cop some lettuce," mourned Ricky. "I thought you had something."

Jean cried, "They're ready! They are going to run!"

Despite himself, John was excited. He watched intently as the handlers lined up behind the boxes ranged across the track. He picked out the boxes which held Number One and Number Seven. The gun cracked, the dogs tumbled out. A shout went up, "They're off!"

## CHAPTER TWO

### A Stitch in Time—

**T**HEY were all sizes, all colors, those dogs. But they had one thing in common. They could run. John Wade leaned forward, intent upon the bounding speed of the canines.

The very tall man stood apart and looked at John Wade. In the shadows another figure peered past the big man. They watched John's sharp, intelligent features, taking in his always impeccable garments, the sports jacket, the loose muffler about his strong neck, the ease of his carriage, the deep ellipses at the corners of his mouth. They did not watch the dogs running about the track.

Number Seven was a big, tawny hound. He was far in the lead, a running fool. They reached the turn and John could see them plainly. It was better than horse racing, that way. You could see every piece of the race.

Seven was away out in front. The others strung along. He searched for Number One, found him. He was a little black dog. He was in the ruck, hopelessly out of it.

"Come on, you One! Get up and chase 'em!" Ricky yelled.

The black dog hung close to the ground. At the second turn he began to lengthen out. He was swift as dark light, coming around. He moved through the pack as though they were standing still.

They came into the stretch. It was a short distance. It did not take the dogs

long to find they could not catch the rabbit. The tawny hound lost ground, but was still in the lead. The little black dog ran like the wind.

Ricky said, "Come up, you hound!"

They came down to the finish. There was only a red dog fighting off the black one, now. Number One seemed to lengthen out like a piece of animated rubber. They flashed to the finish line. The black dog stuck out a sharp nose.

"He come in!" said Ricky. "We win!"

The numbers went up, first Seven, then One. John said, "My checkered tout knew something."

Jean said, "They're beautiful. That black dog! He's a darling. I wish I owned that animal!"

They went down to the window to collect. The clerk handled a roll of bills lovingly. He said,

"Seven hundred dollars. You had all the tickets on that combination, Mister."

Ricky said, "Come to papa!"

He divided the bills with John. The clerk said, "Nice going. Come back!"

John said, "Who owns that Number One dog?"

"Black Prince?" asked the clerk. "Nice lil animal. Man named Pinega owns him."

Ricky stopped stuffing money in his pockets. He said, "Uh—how much would they want for a dog like that?"

"Maybe a thousand dollars," said the clerk.

Ricky took the money and looked at it. Then he looked at Jean. He said, "Uh—here. Easy come, easy go. Buy yourself a hound, Jean."

**J**OHAN said, "Keep your money, pal. Something tells me Mr. Pinega won't sell his dog. We have a small job to do, incidentally, which will make us some more money."

Ricky said, "A job?"

"Yeah," said John. "Would you mind going home alone, Jean? There is a man who fears for his safety. A man named Redley. You can report to the Governor that I will have Redley at Twenty-two Avery Place tonight for questioning. If the Governor will be there at eleven, we may learn something of this race track setup."

Jean said, "Thanks for the offer of your money, Ricky. You're the swellest man I know. I'll get a cab, John."

She smiled at them and went out of the gate. They watched her get into a cab, looked over the driver with great care.

Ricky said,

"Sweet! She said I was sweet!"

"Go on, you big tramp," said John. "Go look in a mirror!"

Ricky said, "I bet she never told you you was sweet. I bet you never told her anything pretty. I bet you are a big sap."

John said sharply, "Never mind that! We've got work to do."

Ricky made a derisive noise with his tongue, but he said nothing more about Jean. He knew about John and Jean. He knew that John suffered for his past, that he would never tell Jean what was in his heart. It worried Ricky's simple soul. They walked back into the park. The races were over and the crowd was leaving.

The door to Redley's office was open. John and Ricky came to the foot of the steps. A voice called, "Wade!"

John stopped. Joe Tinker came toward them. The detective was vastly excited. He said, "The Chief told me to work with you. He said you were investigating for the Governor. I got something, Wade."

John said, "Okay, let's have it."

"You know me," said Joe Tinker. "Ole Camera-eye. I never forget a crook. I got my own rogue's gallery—up here."

He beamed at them, touching his head with a thick forefinger. John said impatiently, "I know. Who did you see?"

Joe Tinker opened his mouth. The sound of the shot and the closing door came so close together that John could not tell them apart except by instinct. Joe Tinker gasped and fell over backwards. There was a hole in his forehead and blood ran on the ground.

Ricky said, "From the office!"

They both turned and went up the steps together. Ricky made pawing motions and two large .45s were in his hands as if by magic. The office door swung ajar.

They plunged inside. The smell of cordite was plain. Rem Redley lay across the desk. The revolver was at his right hand. There was a terrible wound behind his

ear. Rem Redley was very, very dead.

Ricky said, "He shot Tinker, then bumped himself. It must of been him that Tinker saw. Hell, everyone knew Rem was an old con guy."

JOHN was going over every inch of the room. Hard surfaces everywhere gave him no clue. Redley's hand was resting on a piece of paper. John pounced upon it. He read:

*"I've been clipping the track. Joe Tinker found it out and recognized me as a man with a record. I always hated Tinker. He sent me up the only time I was convicted. I'm taking him along with me. . . ."*

The note was typewritten, unsigned. John said, "A lousy frame. A stinking frame, if I ever saw one."

He went through the drawers of the desk. There was a black bag in the corner. He went through it.

He said, "Rem had some dough. He hasn't got it now. I know he had it here because we were to see him out with it."

Ricky said, "Suppose you didn't know he had it? Suppose he hadn't asked us for an out? Would it be such a lousy frame then? I bet you his prints are on the gun."

John said puzzledly, "The shot that killed Joe came from this direction. There's no other door to this office. There must be another place for someone to get to. . . ."

They went out, leaving Redley's body undisturbed. A park policeman was bending over Tinker. John said, "You'd better call Headquarters."

The cop said, "Hey!" but Ricky elbowed him aside and they went on around the edge of the office building. There was no other door, no other place for a man to escape.

John said, "We'd better get out of here. Something tells me this is not a healthy place for us."

They went to the parking lot. Their big coupe was standing alone, most of the other cars having departed.

John said, "Wait!"

He went boldly to the door with his keys. He rattled them, then swung around and ducked low, running to the other side of the car. Ricky's guns came out again.

Someone in the car was pointing a weapon where John had first been.

Ricky lowered the guns. There was plate glass in those windows. He stepped forward, bending. He used a key on the other side, quickly, expertly. He jerked open the door.

A shot sounded. Ricky reached inside the car. He grabbed a wrist and held it tight, lashing onto the trigger of the gun. He hauled a man out into the lot.

He said, "Limpy Gannon. Hopped to the eyes, or he would never have tried it on us."

The man was small. He had eyes like ferret's eyes, and he was obviously doped. He screamed, "We'll get you. We'll show you stoolies! You can't come in here and push us around."

Ricky disarmed him. John said, "Go back to your boss, whoever he is, Limpy. Tell him we'll be back. Tell him we're coming to kill him. Tell him that, Limpy."

Ricky turned the small man around, gave him a slight push. He drop-kicked sharply, catching him in the seat of the pants. The little man flew through the air, landed on all fours. John and Ricky climbed into the car and drove away.

Ricky said, "Someone don't like us."

"Someone who thinks maybe Joe Tinker told us who he was," added John.

"I think we had better find this gee," said Ricky.

"Before he finds us," nodded John.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Ricky Makes a Date

**J**OHAN said, "So whoever this murderer is, he killed both Rem and Tinker. But how he did it, I don't know. The newspapers will make a murder-suicide out of it. On the face of it, that is the logical conclusion. That is exactly what the murderer wants. But he is afraid we know too much."

Governor Castle's face was tired. The handsome Chief Executive had vetoed the dog racing bill, fought it at every stage. Dishonest legislators, and honest ones who believed the revenue from gambling would pay taxes and relieve their constituents, had beaten him.

"A man named Pinega called me," he

said. "He claimed to be acting for the Dog Racing Association. He said that everything was under control, that he was sorry Redley had proven dishonest. He promised co-operation."

"I would like to meet this Pinega," said John slowly. "Redley mentioned him."

They were in the little house on Avery Place. It was a white house on the quiet street in the midst of respectable suburban dwellings. Next door, at Number 22, John owned an identical small house. There was a garage between them, and a tunnel and an iron door on greased slides. It had been a cloak of respectability and a fort against the world when John had been a confidence man.

The Governor said, "It seems that there is a clever mind behind this, John. We are up against something ruthless and smart."

John said, "The dog track must go, Governor. There are mobsters all over the place. Touts, too. A little man in a checked suit—"

He stopped. He wondered about the little man. Touts usually are ubiquitous—you can see them here and there, muttering their tips to prospects. But this tout had not even appeared to collect his percentage when they had won the bet. That was not reasonable.

"I could close the track, pending the investigation of this thing," said the Governor.

"No," said John. "Don't close it. Leave it open. There are some things I must learn and I couldn't get to first base if the track was closed."

The Governor arose. He sighed, "Try not to kill too many people, John. Try to make it legal."

It was exactly midnight. The Governor's big car purred outside the door. He slipped out of the house and was gone. The case of the Dog Racing Association was in the hands of John Wade and Ricky Boles.

John said, "If I knew where to find this Pinega—"

The doorbell rang.

Rick said, "Hey! Nobody ever rings that bell at night!"

The big man's guns were out again. John said, "Keep them steady on it, pal."

**H**E CROSSED to the door, which was cunningly reinforced with steel plates. He unlatched it, opened it with a smooth pull. It swung wide. The tall man stood, looking in at Ricky's guns. He said, "Please! I am not looking for trouble."

John said, "Walk in. If anyone tries to follow you, they will get shot."

The man came in. He was tremendous in the small room. He was certainly of oriental extraction. His skin was smooth and yellow. His voice was smooth and there was a slight impediment, almost a lisp, in his speech.

He said, "It is known to me that you are in the confidence of Governor Castle. That you are under instructions to make trouble for the Dog Racing Association. I will come directly to the point."

John said, "Yes, do."

The man said, "I am Olaf Pinega. I am now running the track. We do not want any trouble. The Governor is a good man, but he can do nothing about our track. The people have voted. The track will run."

Ricky put away his guns. He said disgustedly, "This guy is an apsay, pal. Let me chuck him outa here."

The big man turned his gaze upon Ricky. His slanted eyes seemed almost sleepy. He said, "I do not know what you say. But I do not like the tone of your voice."

"So what?" chortled Ricky. "You want to make anything out of it?"

John said, "Not now, Ricky. Go on with your proposition, Mr. Pinega."

The tall man did not turn from his regard of Ricky. He looked almost hungry. He lisped, "I have not used force upon a brute like him for a long time, now. It would be a—diversion."

"I'll mow you down," Ricky roared. "I'll tear off your arm and sock you with the bloody end of it!"

John said, "Is this a brawl or a conference?"

Pinega faced him. He said, "Excuse me, Mr. Wade. I want peace with you. This man—he is merely stupid, no?"

"No," said John. "But go on with your spiel."

Pinega said, "You won some money tonight. You were informed how to bet. You could easily win every night. It

would be very profitable. Even if you won some money for your Governor's campaign chest, we would not care. We will give you a marked program. You will follow our advice. You cannot lose, if you stick with our markings."

"You got every race fixed?" asked John.

Pinega made a foreign gesture with his hands. They were tremendous hands, with long, tapering fingers. "Not so. We are merely well-informed."

"Especially when Black Prince runs," said John contemptuously.

The man's eyes narrowed to slits. He said, "I do not understand."

"Black Prince is your dog," said John. "Will you sell him?"

Pinega said, "No! I will not sell him."

There was feeling in his eye for the first time. John taunted, "The little animal can't run very well. Come—I have a friend who would like him. How much?"

Pinega said stiffly, "I do not sell my dog, Wade. Do you accept my proposition?"

John said, "What if we don't?"

Pinega was calm, unruffled. He said, "We would rather you accepted it."

John said, "No threats, eh?"

"Of course not." Pinega smiled faintly. He bowed and turned to the door.

John said, "Supposing we don't let you out of here?"

**P**INEGA spread his long hands. "There will be reprisals if I do not leave here in five minutes. The Governor—Miss Morrow. . . . Ah! You do not like that, eh? We are well-organized, Wade. Politicians about the State keep us informed. We know where to strike. The dog track must keep running."

John said, "I see. We'll think it over. Let me unlock the door."

Pinega stopped upon the threshold. He turned and addressed Ricky. "My uncouth friend, maybe we will meet some day. Perhaps I can teach you savatte—or the judo!"

"G'wan," snarled Ricky, "before I teach you the swat and the kayo!"

Pinega nodded briefly. He stepped down and walked slowly up the path to the street. A large, dark car picked him up. There were four men in the car, John

thought. Pinega was very well protected.

Ricky said, "What the hell was he talking about, sawat and judy-o?"

"Savatte—la savatte—is the French method of boxing," grinned John. "It is done with the feet. Kick your teeth out. Judo is a form of jiu-jitsu. Break your arm or something."

"And what will I be doing?" demanded Ricky. "Letting this guy kick me? Or bust my arm? I'll murder him!"

"Okay," said John mockingly. "Go ahead. But don't scream at me about it. Anybody would think you were afraid of him because he's bigger than you are."

"Afraid," roared Ricky. "Scared? I'll tear him apart! I'll rip him to pieces. I'll—I'll . . ."

"Calm yourself, pal. This guy is a dog lover. A man who loves his dog cannot be wholly bad. I read it in a book," grinned John.

Rick was speechless with rage. John sat upon the low divan, elbows on knees. He was thinking about Olaf Pinega. The man knew much. He was evidently at the head of powerful interests in Midstate.

Yet, was he a man to kill in cold blood? Somehow, John could not believe that this suave giant, evidently fearless, could shoot down old Rem Redley and a policeman in cold blood.

Who else was behind the Dog Racing Association? How to find them?

Pinega had threatened the Governor, Jean. But John was not worried about that. He was only perturbed that so much was known to the Governor's enemies in the political arena. He said, "The answer is at the track. We will have to go to the track to get anywhere with it."

"I'll track him. I'll mow him down," Ricky snorted. "Kicking people! Breaking their arms! I'll learn him. . . ."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Murder Won't Wait

**J**EAN said, "I do love to see them run. They are the most wonderful animals."

The three were in the stands. Ricky was nursing a grouch, incubated since two days ago when he had encountered

Pinega. Restless hatred smouldered in him.

John said, "The next race is the last. Black Prince is running. I bought fifty dollars' worth of tickets on him."

Jean said, "He'll win. I know he'll win."

John referred to the marked program. It had been slipped into his pocket on the way in, and he had not known who had done it or when the act had been accomplished. Undoubtedly there were pick-pockets on the Pinega payroll, he reflected, who could fill pockets as well as empty them. Black Prince was not marked to win.

He knew now that the black dog was the best at the track. He had inquired about town. He had asked some acquaintances of his old, underworld life. He had been in Pete's Place, a barroom of ill-repute. Old one-eyed Pete could always dig up something on the mobs. Pete hated the police, but he would tell John any time.

Every mobster in town had flocked to the banners of this new gold mine of dog racing. Pete had said, "There's an organizer at work. Some gee with an in, some ex-con. I can't find out who he is."

"An ex-convict, eh?" said John. "That's about what it would take. If I could find somebody with a record bad enough to get Joe Tinker excited. . . ."

So they were at the races. Jean had insisted upon going and it had seemed safe enough with the two men to protect her. There had been no sight of Pinega as yet. Remington Redley's old office was closed and dark when they came in.

The dogs were being brought out for the last race. Black Prince was Number Four.

"He'll win. He runs like a deer," Jean said.

She was tremendously excited. Her red lips were parted and her eyes sparkled. John tore his gaze away from her. There were moments, like this, when he could scarcely refrain from touching her, from telling her. . . .

The dogs tumbled out onto the track. The band speeded up. The crowd yelled.

A dun-colored animal broke into the lead. Black Prince ran furiously. The dun dog bumped him. He rolled on the track as Jean screamed dismay, got up



and ran gamely on. He did not limp, but there was something wrong. He ran in the ruck. He finished next to last.

Jean said, "It can't be. John—he did not run fast!"

John said sharply, "Ricky! Get down there to the kennels, or whatever they have. Get hold of that black dog. Look at her legs. See if something hasn't been tied tight to a hind leg—you might even find it still on her."

Ricky brightened. He said, "That's Pinega's dog. . . . I'm on my way."

He was gone more swiftly than any man of his size could be expected to move. John took Jean by the arm and led her down out of the stands. He said, "I've spent good time checking on this racket. That black dog can win until the big money goes down on her. Then she can't even run. It is too convenient."

"I can see how they do it," she nodded. "But what about the State Inspectors?"

"Two hundred dollar a month political appointees," scoffed John. "Either on the take—or just plain dumb. . . . Ricky will get something. He always does."

Pinega came towards them, moving slowly. The big man nodded and said in his strange voice, "Good evening, Wade. I have not met the lady."

He waited. John said deliberately, "You are not going to meet her, Pinega."

He wanted to stir the race track man out of his calmness. Pinega's lips twitched. His eyes for a moment turned loose a bright gleam which could have been hatred or rage. Then he bowed and said humbly, "Whatever you say, Wade. I will see you—later."

**H**E WALKED on, towards the office which had been Remington Redley's. John said, "We'll go down towards the kennels. The crowd is practically gone. Ricky should be along any moment."

Ricky came around the edge of the long, low building which sheltered the dogs. He was walking fast. Under his arm was a squirming, yapping dog. A few bystanders gawked.

John said, "Quick! Out this gate!"

A man yelled. John thrust Jean ahead. Ricky said, "They give me an argument. I belted a guy and scared a couple more. But I couldn't examine the mutt with the

mob ready to climb me. So I brought him along."

The big coupe was parked nearby. John took the dog and got in. The black animal whimpered and licked his hand.

"Look at him!" Jean exclaimed.

"I am looking at him," said John.

The black thread was almost imperceptible. It was wound tightly around the dog's leg.

"You were quick, Ricky," John said. "This is proof. Don't cut it off until we have time to find out some more."

Jean said, "He's the nicest thing. Look how good he is."

John said, "Yes. He likes you."

No one had followed them out of the park. John said, "They must be watching. I have an idea. Jean, you take the dog. Take him to Avery Place—my house. Take that hack over there."

Ricky said, "That is not one of our hacks, John."

"That is the idea," said John grimly.

"They will know where the dog is," objected Ricky. Then he said, "Oh! I get it."

"You'll be in no danger," John told the girl. "Ricky and I will be close behind."

"I'm not afraid," said the girl.

The dog went willingly with her. The taxi drew off. Ricky said, "Now what do we do? They'll be after her in half an hour."

John said, "We get nosy. I would like to see Redley's office again. I have been thinking about closing doors."

"I don't get it," said Ricky. "But I would like to see Olaf Pinega—any time."

They went boldly back through the gate. There were lurking figures in the semi-darkened purlieus of the track. There was a light in the office. They walked boldly up to it. Pinega came out the door.

He was very pale. He said, "You stole my dog."

"He was fixed," said John. "We just borrowed him."

"You stole him," said Pinega. There was no doubt about the flame in his eyes now.

Ricky said quickly, "There's someone behind him. In the office." He held his guns tight in his big hands. He warned,

"I'll shoot the guts out of you, Pinega, if there's a bad move."

"There are ten guns trained on you," said Pinega softly. "If I were you I would leave, now."

"How about a truce?" asked John. "Let us sit down in your office and talk this thing over."

His eyes were darting from the big man to the door of the room behind him. He thought he caught a glimpse of a checkered cap, a pair of sharp eyes. He saw the gun muzzle but he could not be sure of the man.

Pinega said, "You had better go, Wade. I do not wish to have you killed."

"It would ruin your track," grinned John.

"If you force me to do that, I will take my chances," said Pinega. He had complete control of himself now. "I advise you to go. We will talk another time."

Ricky growled, "Lemme take him."

"No," said John. "It would be suicide. Let's go."

Ricky said, "Let this mob run us off? What am I, a pantywaist?"

"Come!" said John sharply. "We have other things to do."

**T**HEY retreated. Ricky swore softly at every step. John said, "We've got to cover Jean. Don't be a sap."

"I'll sap them," said Ricky. "I'll make them pay for this. There's Mustard Bane and that dopey little Limpy Gannon. They're laughing at us!"

There were other gunmen around the place, leaning against the fence, deployed strategically to see that they left the park.

John said, "So what? It isn't hurting me a damned bit. Let them laugh. We have work to do. Jean is home by now."

They got into the car. Ricky drove, muttering. They cut across town and out to the respectable suburb which contained Avery Place and the two white houses. They drove the car into the garage.

"We'll wait here," John said. "Jean heard us come in. They should be after the dog almost at once. We'll nail a couple of them."

They waited. There was a cleverly concealed entrance to Number 22 from the garage, a tunnel which ran under the lawn and up into the living room of the

house which Jean used upon occasion. They waited in the concrete-lined tunnel.

Ricky said, "There's something I don't get. That Pinega—he stalls. But Limpy Gannon was planted to kill us that night. You said it was because somebody thought he was recognized by Joe Tinker. Pinega don't seem to be afraid of being recognized."

John said, "You're getting awful smart, pal."

Ricky said, "I was just thinking. . . ."

The moments went by. John said uneasily, "They should be here by now. Maybe. . . ."

Ricky said absently, "That suicide trick with Rem Redley was not so smart. This Pinega, he seems smart. This is a funny thing. This Pinega, he offers us dough—but somebody tried to get us killed. I don't get it."

John said, "I'm going around front. They should have been here by now. Something has gone wrong. . . ."

He went back through the garage, into his own house. He strolled out the front door and sauntered up to the entrance to Number 22. Ricky would be ready to cover him if anything popped, he knew. He rang the bell ostentatiously in case anyone should be watching. There was no answer.

He went back into his place and tore down into the tunnel. He said, "Open it up. Press that button!"

Ricky pressed a button and the section of wall rolled back. The living room of the house was on the other side. John leaped across the threshold. The room was empty.

His heart stood still. He said, "Jean!"

There was no answer. A light burned in a bridge lamp. A throw rug was disarranged and a small table was upended. There was no sign of dog or girl.

Ricky said, "They beat us to it."

"They surmised we would come here," swore John. "Pinega knows too much. He had men here before we could get organized."

Ricky said, "I wonder why they didn't bump her and leave it go at that." He took a look at John's face and shut up abruptly.

John said, "Get the car started. What the hell are you waiting for?"

## CHAPTER FIVE

All, or Nothing. . . .

THEY did not drive up to the track. They were beginning to respect highly the acumen of their adversary. They parked on the far side of the premises, under a tree. There was a fence. They followed it to a spot behind the kennels, a distance removed from the grandstand.

It was a high fence. John said, "Give me a leg up." The thought of Jean in the hands of the sloe-eyed Pinega was harrowing. Ricky seized his heel and lifted vigorously. John caught the top of the board fence. He drew himself up with ease and great caution. He got astride.

Ricky whispered hoarsely, "Here. Grab Thomas."

John could just reach the sub-machinegun. Ricky said, "Take good care of Thomas. He's got a date with some people."

John slipped down into the park. He put the machinegun on the ground. He looked about in the dimness between the kennels and the fence. He found a piece of two-by-four and re climbed the fence. He said, "Watch your head."

Ricky caught the stick and leaned it against the boards. Then he measured his distance and gave a little leap. His left foot reached the top of the leaning two-by-four. He rose amazingly, so that his big hand clamped on the top of the fence. John reached down and in another second they were both on the ground—inside.

Ricky said, "That gym work comes in handy. Where is my Thomas?"

He fondled the machinegun. It was a relic of the old Prohibition days. It was oiled and wiped and shining like a polished mirror. Ricky could write his name with a burst of fire from Thomas.

John said, "Slow and quiet does it."

They turned the end of the kennels. They ran smack dab into a man in the gloom.

John hit out with licking fist. He got home on the bone behind the ear. Ricky slapped with the muzzle of the machinegun. The man hit dirt without a sound.

John said, "You got your tape?"

Ricky produced a roll of adhesive. They bound and gagged their first victim and

rolled him like a log into deep shadow.

There were lights over near the grandstand. John whispered, "They'll be in the office Redley had. But Pinega is smart. They'll expect us. We don't know how many men are out here in the grounds."

"We can take care of plenty of them," said Ricky. "Just let 'em get within range. We will rap them off as they come."

"There might be noise," said John. "Noise would be fatal—to Jean."

Ricky said, "We got to get over there."

"I'll go ahead," said John. "If they raise the alarm, I'll fight them off while you make directly for the office. You can mow them down with that gun. Shoot anyone you see. But get Jean out, whatever happens."

Ricky said, "Now wait a minute—" but John was already gone. He knew better than to argue with Ricky, knew that the big man would obey instructions if left alone.

OUTSIDE the rim of light surrounding the office under the stands it was very dark in the grounds. John kept in the darkest spots, edging his way forward. He dared not move too swiftly. It was a desperate sortie he was making.

Good sense would not dictate this sort of raid, he knew. He should have called the Governor, notified the police. But where Jean was concerned, he could never wait for reinforcements. He was, he admitted for the thousandth time, not a good detective. He was, like Ricky, a direct actionist.

He had one advantage. If there were men on the lookout, they could not be sure of him in the dark. He could slug anyone he encountered, his enemies could not. He saw a form against the end of the grandstand.

He called softly, "Hey, Mustard!"

"I ain't Mustard," came the cautious answer. "What you want?"

John bent his spare, tall form a little, moving close. He said, "Got a match?"

"No matches, you damn fool," said the man. "You think Wade and Boles will try it?"

John said, "Who knows?"

He got close enough. He struck with the muzzle of one of Ricky's .45s. He hit

the man on top of the head and the breath whooshed out of him as John's hand covered his mouth. The roll of tape did good service again.

He went on. There seemed to be plenty of outposts. There was scant hope of getting by them all without sound. Pinega would safeguard his retreat thoroughly, John knew. The only chance lay in getting as many of them as he could, and giving Ricky the biggest possible advantage for his fight.

Above all things, John knew, he could depend upon Ricky, his bravery and his marksmanship. Whether the big man could overcome the terrible odds was another thing, a matter upon which John did not care to dwell. Action was more important than thinking now, and action he would have.

He saw the second man almost as soon as he came under the concrete stand. The sentinel was leaning against the wall opposite the far gate. He had a gun in his hand, all ready for a frontal assault. John edged along, finding less and less shadow. He wormed his way within five paces of the man. Then his foot loosed a stone.

The man came around with the gun. John made a prodigious leap. He struck up with flying knee. He clutched for throat and gun. The ferocity of his attack must have frightened the man to speechlessness.

John struck again with lifting knee. The man went limp. Once more he struck, against the jaw. He was without pity, knowing Jean was in danger. He worked rapidly with the tape. It was a matter of moments, now.

He was within a hundred yards of the lighted office. He was twice that distance from where he had left Ricky. The big man could be of no help to him now. There were a half-dozen men hanging around. They commanded the entrance to the office. It was impossible to gain the door without being seen.

John clung to the wall, thinking furiously. He should retreat and call the police. He knew it. It was suicidal to go on. He had not a chance in a thousand to do anything but get killed.

There was one thin, suppressed scream on the night air. It was Jean's voice. Police, guards, danger, death rode out of

John Wade's mind in that instant.

He drew both of Ricky's guns. He, John Wade, confidence man in the old days, who before his enlistment under Governor Castle had never shot off a gun, went straight ahead, to face certain death at the hands of expert marksmen of Midstate's underworld. . . .

**R**ICKY BOLES frowned in the darkness. The gun, his adored Thomas, was smooth and handy in his grasp. He did not like the situation as it stood. Ricky's mind was sometimes slow, but it was a good mind.

The odds against John were too great. Pinega, with his precise speech and slanted eyes, was clever. Standing in the night, waiting for John to get killed, was not pleasant.

He heard someone moving. A voice said, "Hey, pal!"

Ricky growled. "Amscray. I'm watching here."

The voice said, "Aw—they ain't coming over no fence. That Boles—he'll come poppin' with that tommy-gun of his'n."

The man came closer. Ricky said, "There'll be people hurt if he comes."

"I ain't gettin' into it," said the man cheerfully. "You and me are the last guards out thisaway. I'm stayin' here, come what may."

Ricky said, "Nobody out yonder?"

"Nobody. The Boss expects them in the front door. He's got ten men between here and his precious office. He's smart, that guy."

"Yeah," said Ricky. "He's smart. Look at this."

The man bent as Ricky held out his left hand. The tommy gun came down almost gently. It cracked against the man's skull. He went promptly off to sleep.

Ricky said, "You ain't hurt bad. You gave me the dope, and I was easy with you. But you got to be tied up."

He accomplished this task deftly. He arose and cradled the machine gun. He walked briskly towards the grandstand.

It was great to be moving. It was certainly all right to go ahead now, thanks to the talkative sentinel. There was no threat from behind. John would take care of anyone ahead—and if John missed one, Ricky reasoned, it would be best for him

to mop up any attackers from the rear.

He was not, he told himself, disobeying John's orders. Circumstances alter cases. That was a neat phrase. He repeated it to himself so that he should remember to tell it to John. Because if anything went wrong, John would surely give him hell. And he did not like for John to give him hell, even though John was the rightest guy this side of those regions.

"Circumstances alter cases," he said virtuously and almost fell flat as his toe hit the body of the man John had first encountered. Well, that was fine. He was on John's trail.

Now, he thought, if there were not too many of these jerks in the way, and John could get close enough to the girl to hold down on the party, Ricky could close in and clean up. Then everything would be all right. He almost felt optimistic.

He went on. Suddenly he could see within the radius of light from the office door and window. He saw the six men spread about the edges of that light. That was careless of them, he thought, to stay in sight. There might be brains at the head of this outfit, he thought, but the hoods were still heels. That, he thought philosophically, was the trouble with all these master minds. Smart as they were, they could not hire brains to do their bidding. He unlimbered Thomas. . . .

He saw John, then. He saw John going forward, the two guns in his hands. He espied John before the lurking hoodlums saw him.

He yelled, "Make your break, pal! I got you covered!"

Ricky's mind might be slow, but his instincts and reflexes were perfect. Every gunman turned at the sound of his voice, none looked at John.

## CHAPTER SIX

### The French Have a Word for It

**R**ICKY lifted the machine gun as revolvers spat and lead shrieked around him. He did not handle his gun carelessly, recklessly, like a rum-running cheap chopper with a lead-slinging fire hose. He poised the awkward weapon lightly in his big paws. He shot from the hip, but he called every shot.

John, too, was quick. John made his bid at the sound of the first gun. He ran straight for the door of the office, holding his fire for fear of hurting Jean, but ready to cut down anyone who showed any signs of fight.

Ricky picked off the first man to see John. The others were gradually getting into line. Ricky moved the muzzle of Thomas. He chose his victim in a split second and in another infinitesimal space of time, he dealt death.

Men fell and flopped, lead in their bellies. Men dropped in their tracks, or leaped into the air and went over backward with lead in their brains. Like an avenging angel, Ricky stood firmly planted on his two feet and took them, knocking them over in their correct order.

An unbelievable uproar descended like hell on wheels. The echoes under the concrete stands gave forth replicas of each resounding shot. Men screamed. Flying splinters of cement missed Ricky's head. The big man just stood there—and picked his shots.

After an unbelievably short time there were no more targets. Then Ricky went faster than light across the intervening yards to the office which had been that of Remington Redley. A man fled from the side of the door, aiming back with shaking hand, trying to get one shot. Ricky pressed the trigger once more, pausing to take aim. The man toppled over.

The door to the office opened. Ricky jumped and landed on the threshold. He balanced there, the tommy gun ready.

There were four people in the room. There was Pinega, behind the big desk, there was Mustard Bane, Limpy Gannon—and a small man in a checkered suit. There was no sign of John Wade or Jean Morrow.

Ricky backed off a step. He stood on the top of the stairs leading up into the office.

He said, "I got it. There's a trap door. There's a place underneath the floor. You dropped John in there. One of you shot Redley. Then you shot the copper, Joe Tinker. The door John kept talking about—it was the trap door."

Pinega said, "You are a fool. Boles."

Ricky leaned forward, carefully holding the machine gun in his hands. All the men in that office bore weapons in their grasp, but none offered to fire. Ricky stared at the little man in the checkered suit.

"Yes. I see the whole thing," he said slowly. "I'm stupid, am I, Pinega?"

He stared about the office. The rug on the floor was awry. Ricky said, "Under there, eh? You dropped John down there. Open it up, Pinega."

The tall man scoffed, "You'll never find it. Kill us, and in half an hour your friends die. There is no air down there. It is a concrete vault."

**T**HE little man with the checkered suit moved uneasily. He was careful with the gun he held, careful not to point it other than at the floor. The machine gun turned his way. Ricky said, "Okay, rat. I know you. Open that trap!"

The little man jerked out in a rasping voice, "He'll kill us, Pinega! I know him! He'll kill us all!"

Pinega said, "Wait."

He stood up behind the desk. He said, "You could not find it in half an hour. They would be dead. I will fight you for it, Boles. For the right to get out of here, with my dog, with my men."

Ricky said, "You'll fight me?"

"Man to man," said Pinega. "Nothing barred."

Ricky said, "Do tell!" He beamed and said, "Come out of here, all of you. One at a time, now."

He held the machine gun in his right hand, disarming them from behind as they came out. He said, "Tape them up, Pinega. Tape them good."

The big man taped his three friends thoroughly. Ricky said, "Ah! I like this."

He put the machine gun carefully on the steps. He slipped out of his loose jacket. He said, "Come and get it, wise guy."

Pinega came. He swung forward with his left foot, catching Ricky at the knee. Ricky went down. Pinega came up and over, seeking a hand hold on Ricky's arm.

Ricky rolled. He rolled very swiftly. Pinega missed his hold. Ricky came to his feet, crouching like a great bear.

Pinega placed both powerful hands on the ground. He flipped his long legs. Both heels pointed for Ricky's chin. The blow would knock the head off a man.

Ricky jerked back his head. The wind of the flying feet almost knocked him over. He said, "So that's sa-watt!"

Pinega had recovered with remarkable agility. He was standing straight, waiting Ricky's attack now, more cautious. Ricky moved in slowly, his left hand low. Pinega kicked.

Ricky grabbed a heel. He threw it upward. Pinega dropped to the ground and again mule-kicked. Ricky move out of range.

Then Ricky came back. He moved in and down. His right hand struck at Pinega's groin. His left sunk into the hard middle of the big man.

Pinega groaned, but his vise-like grip clamped down on Ricky's wrist. He moved and Ricky flew through the air. The wall was in the way. Ricky crashed. Pinega came hopping, limping, trying to get in one more kick.

Ricky shook his head. He was dazed, partly benumbed. He watched Pinega come in. He waited as long as he dared. Then he lowered his head and drove his two hundred odd pounds forward, butting with his head.

Pinega's knee came up, but Ricky expected that. He brushed the knee aside with a forearm nudge he had learned from an old wrestler. His hard head made contact. Pinega went down.

Ricky was on him. He seized a shoulder. He dragged Pinega to his feet. He slapped, once, twice. He got the head of the big man going back and forth. He kept slapping with his hard, heavy palm. He whipped Pinega to semi-consciousness with those steady, drumming slaps.

The slant-eyed man's mouth opened, his bleeding swollen tongue protruded. He was choking for breath as his head revolved on his shoulders without cessation.

**R**ICKY shifted his grip. He got the seat of Pinega's pants, the scruff of his neck. He rushed him up the stairs. He bounced him into the office. He slammed him onto the desk which was bolted to the floor. He grated, "Pinega! Pinega!"

Work that damn thing. And get my pals out of there or I'll beat you to death. You hear me? I'll beat you to death, bit by bit, slap by slap!"

Pinega was only half-conscious. His jaw sagged. He mumbled, "Lamp. Got to reach lamp."

Ricky manhandled him to within reach of the lamp. The switch was larger, he noted. Pinega manipulated it. The trap door swung slowly open. Ricky started down off the desk into the hole yawning under him.

There was a whirr. The trap was coming back! It had opened so far, and now it was coming back fast.

Ricky got back up on the desk like a large cat. Pinega was trying to brain him with a paperweight. Ricky threw the straight right off his chest.

It crashed against Pinega's jaw. The flat-faced man crumpled in a heap. Ricky picked him up bodily, pitched him. Pinega flew out the door, lit on the steps and rolled.

Rick worked the switch. It went around uselessly in his hands, which were clumsy

from slapping Pinega about. He sweated over it, trying it this way and that. He pushed on it, then twisted. The machinery whirred once more.

The door was of wood. It slung back. Ricky bent over the desk, reaching down with his great hands. He took hold of the edge of the moving trap. He exerted the sinews of his giant's body.

Something cracked. There was no further sound of machinery. Ricky grunted, "Huh! The hell with tricks! John! hey, John! Jean!"

He climbed down and gazed into the black hole. There was an iron ladder. Ricky said, "Can't you move? Are you hurt? Come on up?"

His eyes grew accustomed to the dimness below. He said, "Hey! Stop that clowning and come up outa there! You can do that later."

John Wade released his grip on the blonde girl. She clung the tighter to him, saying softly, "Oh, John!"

"It's all right," he said. "We're going to live. Ricky fixed it somehow."

She said, "John!"



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They were unafraid, Ricky saw. Jean said, "John—I love you! If I tell you before Ricky, maybe you'll believe it. I love you, John!"

John said, "Jean—I . . . it's different now. We're going to live. I've been a crook, Jean. . . ."

Ricky said, "You're whacky as a bed-bug. So she loves you. So come on up here. I got a murderer."

They had to laugh. They came up. John blinked about and said, "They were laying for me. I rushed in and fell into that hole. Jean was there. They were crazy to kidnap Jean. It was on account of that dog. Pinega sent a couple of them after the dog, and they brought Jean along because she gave them a battle. They couldn't do anything but keep her after she got here. They were figuring to dicker with us to lay off."

Ricky said, "John, this is once I got the thing figured. Look."

He led them past the unconscious Pinega, who lay sprawled at full length. He picked up a small, trussed figure and stood him upon his feet.

John stared. He said, "That's my tout. The guy in the checkered suit."

"That's Sad Sam Sadderlee," grinned Ricky. "I knew him before he got that book thrown at him for knocking off Tim Toomey. He crushed out of the big house five years ago. Joe Tinker would know Sad Sam, I'm sure of that."

John said, "Pinega picked a wrong one, eh?"

Sadderlee whined, "You got nothing on me. I ain't done nothing but tout you."

**P**INEGA awoke. He started to get up. He saw Ricky, hesitated. He said thickly, "You fight pretty good, Boles." "Yeah," said Ricky. "Sa-watt and that other stuff of yours is old stuff. I learned that stuff on the docks when I was fifteen. We just called it dockwalloping."

Pinega leaned against the wall. His head was still canted to one side, where Ricky had slapped it.

He said, "This is the end, eh?"

"Yeah," said Ricky. "The chair is the real end for you."

John echoed, "The chair is right. You can't murder cops—nor even poor old

Rem Redley—and get away with it."

Pinega said, "I am not a murderer."

Sam Sadderlee yelled, "If anyone done it, it was him. He's the smart guy. He's the brains!"

Pinega raised his hand to his mouth. He coughed and said, "I told you, Sam. I told you that if you killed anyone and we were caught—that you would pay."

John said, "You killed Redley because he had the money and was getting away. You killed Joe Tinker because he had seen and recognized you and was about to tell me. Then you dropped into that trap until the hue and cry was over. Then you had Limpy make a try for Ricky and me. That was your part in it, Sadderlee."

Pinega said, "That is correct."

"But *you* had Miss Morrow kidnapped. You were willing to let us die in that hole," said John.

Pinega said stonily, "But of course."

John said, "The cops will be here soon."

Pinega said, "I am ready."

The black dog came up hesitantly, as if he were not sure of his welcome. He went straight to Jean. Pinega watched for a moment. Then he said,

"You will keep the dog, Miss Morrow?"

Jean said, "Oh, yes; I'd love to!"

Pinega said, "That is good. The dog is—my friend."

He slipped down against the wall. He sat on the ground. He said, "You were too—what you say—toff?"

Ricky said, "He took poison!"

"Oh, yes," nodded the tall man. "It would not be good for me—to live—now."

John eased him to the ground. He died. John reached inside his pocket for a wallet he saw protruding. There were two messages in code.

John said, "I get it! This guy is no ordinary crook. He is one of the fifth column of another country! He was gathering funds from the race track—and crooks for other purposes! Sabotage! Or whatever!"

Ricky said, "He was pretty tough, himself, at that."

They went out to call the police. The black dog went along, close to Jean.



# ODDITIES IN CRIME



A burglar dropped several pieces of a window pane into a barrel of water in the belief that his fingerprints would be washed clean. But even after 24 hours of submersion the pieces of glass yielded perfect fingerprints.



A desperate gamble, with the life of his son at stake, was won by Oscar Ball, a farmer. In the farmyard, a criminal, holding his revolver against the head of Ball's son, demanded that Ball turn over all his money. Ball retreated to his house, presumably to comply. Instead, he got down his light .22 rifle, and taking aim from a second story window, 200 feet away from the hold up, Ball fired. The extortioner's gun went off, but the shot was wild, for, shades of William Tell, Ball had drilled the bullet through the villain's head!



J. D. Bland thought it was "in the bag" when, holding up a California cafe, the waitress blandly handed over the money. Suddenly, however, she gave him a push. He fell over backward—right into a laundry bag held by the chef who promptly tied it up! The police were called and were "blandly" surprised. That hold up certainly was in the bag!



In the dead of night, two crooks slipped into a factory building, tied up the watchman and went to work on the safe. The watchman, somehow, managed to trip the alarm. Both crooks turned their guns on him and each fired one shot. One slug killed him as it plowed through his spine and buried itself in the wall. The other slug went wild. The police nabbed one bandit, the other escaped. At the trial, the captured man claimed that it was his shot that had missed its mark, and alleged that the bullet of the escaped gangster was the lethal slug. He might have got away with it, but for a scientific detective. Both slugs were retrieved. A minute speck of bone, chipped from the spine of the watchman, was found imbedded in the death bullet. The comparison microscope proved it came from the gun of the captured crook.



# CLUE IN THE NUMBERS

*If I guessed wrong about Joe Temple, the poor little guy would burn for murder. And me—I'd merely get my head blown off!*

**J**OE TEMPLE was the most accommodating guy who ever worked for *The News*. He was small and slim and had a wisp of a mustache. His hair was getting thin and he wore glasses. He'd developed a stoop from bending over books in the auditing department and, contrary to most guys in the business department, he worshipped the mugs who covered the news. He confided to me once

**By  
DON  
JAMES**



I stepped inside and let go a fast one.

that he wished he had nerve enough to be a newsmen.

"Would your wife let you?" I grinned.

He looked even more mouselike when I mentioned his wife, and smiled sheepishly.

"I guess she wouldn't," he said. "She doesn't like any of my ideas. Don't ever get married, Si."

For him, this was a pretty strong statement. His battle-ax of a wife even robbed him of his own opinions.

One night a month later I remembered that as I stood in his apartment and looked down at what once had been his wife. Joe Temple was a widower now. Someone had smashed in Mrs. Temple's head with an electric iron. She was very messy.

I was with the police car that answered the call and we had just entered the apartment. It was about eleven o'clock and Joe Temple was in the front room.

The landlord, a thin, lanky man named Hedge, crowded in behind me to take a look. He gasped and suddenly looked ill. In spite of covering police for several years, I'm that way myself about particularly messy jobs.

We both looked at the bathroom door. Two cops were in there. The landlord saw the distress on my face and nudged me. We crossed the hall to a doorway where a tall, hatchet-faced man with black eyes and hollow cheeks watched proceedings.

"Can we use your bathroom, Mr. Glaze?" Hedge got out between gags.

Glaze stood back and let us through. We got to the bathroom in a hurry and I felt better when we returned to Temple's apartment.

The kitchen was a shambles. There was a mess of broken dishes scraped into a pile on the floor near the sink. Near the pile was something white that appeared to be a butcher's apron. A pan of dish water was in the sink. The door to the dumb waiter was open and a full garbage pail stood beneath it.

Detective Brian of homicide was pugnaciously smoking a cigar and had his crew at work. The medical examiner had arrived and was completing his examination. He rapped out the usual comments. Young Alex McLeod, Brian's

assistant, gave me a friendly nod. We shared a mutual dislike for Brian, only it was tougher on McLeod. He had to work with Brian.

"How long's she been dead?" Brian asked in his guttural voice.

"I suppose you want it to the minute," the M. D. snapped sarcastically. "I'd say between three-and-a-half to four hours."

I followed Brian into the living room where two cops watched Temple.

Joe looked white and washed out. He was scared and dazed. You could see it in his eyes; the way he nodded to me absent-mindedly.

"Why did you kill her?" Brian barked.

Temple shook his head. "I didn't," he whispered.

Brian took the cigar from his mouth and shook ashes on the rug.

"Listen," he said. "A guy next door named Morton says he heard dishes breaking at about seven. Right afterward you slammed the door and went out. He saw you."

"Mrs. Temple and I had a quarrel," Joe said lifelessly.

"You killed her with the iron!" Brian accused.

Joe Temple shook his head again. "We quarreled, but I didn't kill her. She was alive when I left her."

"Where you been?"

"I went to my lodge. I found her this way when I got back."

"What lodge?"

Joe told him and Brian ordered Alex McLeod to check it.

"All right," Brian said. "Tell us about the quarrel."

"**IT WAS** about my going to lodge meeting," Joe said. His eyes darted toward the kitchen door and back to Brian. "She didn't want me to go. She never wanted me to go. I was installed as an officer tonight and she didn't want me to be there for the installation."

He stopped speaking and you could see him trying to get control of himself. "I never crossed her before," he said. "But tonight was different. I've waited a long time to be elected an officer. I've worked for it and it means something to me. When she said I couldn't go, I lost my

temper. I was wiping dishes. I've always hated to wipe dishes. And I had to ask her for money tonight. She took the check every week and gave me small change. I just got fed up on it all."

"So you brained her," Brian said.

Joe recoiled, but his voice was steady when he answered.

"No. I didn't kill her. I lost my temper. I picked up a pile of dishes and smashed them to the floor and ripped off the apron she made me wear. I told her I'd do what I wanted; I told her to shut up. I got my hat and coat and went to lodge. She was dead when I returned. I called police headquarters right away."

"You lost your temper all right," Brian said grimly. "Only you did more than smash dishes."

I saw Brian's reasoning and it made sense. Plenty of men have killed in a fit of rage. They've done things as natural as going to lodge afterward. Maybe they get in a daze and don't know exactly *what* they do. I could see how the nagging Joe Temple took from his wife over the years could make a man lose that much control. At any rate, Joe might have a chance of pleading temporary insanity. Going to lodge after a murder would help.

I called the city desk and told what had happened. For once the city editor was jarred out of his habitual lack of surprise at any news. He asked me if I was sober and then to repeat what I'd said. He ended up by telling me that he still didn't believe Joe Temple could kill anything and for me to get word to him that the paper would back him up as much as possible.

At headquarters Joe was booked and afterward I got him alone in a cell for a few moments.

"We'll do everything we can, Joe," I told him.

"You don't think I killed her, do you, Si?" he asked.

"Did you?"

"No. I'm telling the truth."

He looked at me with his weak, blue eyes and suddenly I found myself believing him.

"Who did kill her?" I asked. "If you didn't, who did?"

He shook his head slowly. "I don't know, Si. But there's something I better

tell you. She drew our money out of the bank last week."

"Why?"

"I don't know. She wouldn't tell me much. In fact, everyone in the building knew more about our affairs than I did."

That didn't surprise me. In some ways I thought Joe might be relieved now that the old shrew was gone.

"Did you have much in the bank?" I asked.

Joe did some mental arithmetic. "She saved a hundred a month for nine years," he said. "About eleven thousand dollars."

I made a mental note to speak to the editor about auditors' salaries and looked thoughtfully at Joe Temple.

"Look," I suggested, "maybe that dough is around the apartment."

"I've been thinking about that," he admitted. "I wonder if you'd go there and look for it, Si. She kept her valuables in the top dresser drawer. The key is hidden under the clock."

"I should do that and have Brian on my neck!" I said.

Joe's face fell and he looked away. "I guess you couldn't," he said. "I guess there isn't much that anyone can do to help me."

That dame had sure taken the guts out of Joe Temple. Even the fight he'd shown when he smashed the dishes was gone. But then, he was facing a murder rap. That takes the guts out of most people. And that hunch that he was telling the truth was growing stronger.

"I don't like Brian, anyhow," I said. "I'll take a chance."

The jailer showed up and I had to leave. Joe shook hands with me solemnly.

"I hope I'm not putting you to too much trouble, Si," he said apologetically. "I don't want to bother anyone."

"Nuts," I said and tried to grin. The poor guy was still partly dazed. It wouldn't be until morning before he'd realize fully what was happening. Maybe he wouldn't then if Brian really started to work on him in the meantime.

**T**HE landlord Hedge let me into his basement room and took some magazines off a chair so I could sit down. I

shook cigarettes out of a package and offered him one. He propped his feet on a scarred table and inhaled.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

"I work for *The News*," I explained. "I thought maybe you could give me some dope on the murder."

"I used to think I'd like to be a reporter," he said. "But if you have to look at messes like that, I'll stick to this job! Do you heave every time?"

"Only on the bad ones," I said. "Who's this guy Morton who lives next door to them?"

"He just went out for some beer," Hedge explained. "He'll be back in a couple of minutes. He's kind of on the violet side, but he's okay."

A moment later the buzzer sounded.

"That's him now," Hedge said and pressed the release button for the outside door. A moment later a short, middle-aged man came in with a package. Hedge introduced us and went into the pullman kitchen to open the beer.

"It's terrible! Terrible!" Morton said.

"You think he did it?" I asked.

"Positively! I saw him hurry out right after the quarrel. But I can't understand why he returned."

Hedge poured three glasses of beer. "They say a criminal always returns to the scene of his crime," he observed.

"Nuts!" I thought, but nodded gravely in agreement. We tasted our beer.

"I seldom drink," Morton explained. "But there are times when I feel one needs something. I came down to discuss the crime with Mr. Hedge and he suggested the beer. I don't mind admitting it was a very good suggestion."

"Have the cops left the apartment?" I asked Hedge.

He nodded and drank some more beer.

"Look," I began, thinking of the money. "I want to get a picture of the dame and one of Temple. Mind letting me have the key? I'll probably find pictures in the apartment. I'll be right down."

"You're out of luck," Hedge demurred. "They left orders about letting anyone in."

I winked broadly. "You know something about newspapers," I said. "I'm allowed expenses. Supposing Mr. Morton goes out and gets something a little

stronger than this. If I have some pictures, the desk will okay the expense."

Hedge's face lighted up and he looked at Morton, who hesitated and then nodded in agreement.

Hedge gave me a key and Morton departed for stuff stronger than beer. I suggested that Hedge stay in his room and tip me if the cops returned.

I WAS glad that Joe Temple's door didn't open on the bloodstained kitchen. I turned on the lights and went through the living room to the bedroom. There was a small key under an electric alarm clock.

The only trouble was that I didn't need a key. Someone had neatly jimmed the drawer. It had been ransacked and its contents were in disorder.

I found three things that interested me. One was a large jewel case lined with black velvet. The second was a receipt from Heinzelman and Son, Jewelers, for \$10,000 worth of diamonds. The third was a small notebook filled with numbers. One of the first entries read like this:

7-3-99    7-3-18    19    1

Underneath it was the alphabet in rows of ten with numbers over each column of letters. Then, "Mathilda Sarah Jones" and "Mathilda Sarah Temple" with a number under each letter. All of that added up for me.

I went to the house phone and buzzed Hedge. He answered at once.

"Listen," I said. "Are there any numerologists in the place?"

"If you mean a guy who works things out by dates and numbers and names, there's one. That fellow Glaze who lives across from Temple's."

"Incidentally," I asked, "where does Morton work?"

"For Heinzelman and Son. They're jewelers. But I thought you were looking for pictures."

"I am," I told him and hung up.

The phone was beside the door and as I hung up, someone knocked. Whoever it was had heard my voice. I debated a moment and decided to open the door. It was the tall, dark man named Glaze. He didn't look very friendly.

"I just heard you ask about a nume-  
rologist. Do you mean me?" he asked.

"I might," I said.

Suddenly his eyes narrowed. "Don't  
try to drag me into this," he said. He  
reached out and grabbed my coat lapels  
and jerked me forward. "You get that,  
buddy? I don't know anything about it  
and I don't want cops asking questions.  
If you know what's good for you, keep  
out of this!"

I jerked his hand down. I've got a  
temper. "You get tough like that again  
and I'll take a sock at you," I snapped.

Glaze let me go.

"What'd you do?" I asked. "Talk the  
dame into buying diamonds? Advise her  
to invest her dough that way? It's an  
old racket."

"Okay, smart guy," he growled. "You  
got a good imagination, but I was down  
playing rummy at a joint on Sixth Street  
and there are four guys who can say I  
was there from six until ten. Her hus-  
band conked her, anyhow."

"Who said he didn't?" I asked.

He turned without answering and went  
into his apartment. I went back into  
Temple's. There was only one joint on  
Sixth where they played rummy. I knew  
the guy who ran it and called him. I  
didn't get an answer. The place was  
probably closed and I'd have to check  
Glaze's alibi later.

I looked absentmindedly at the key  
Hedge had given me. It was worn smooth  
and there was no apartment number  
stamped on it. Evidently he'd given me a  
pass key.

**I** WENT out into the hall and tried it  
on Morton's door. It turned the lock  
and I went in. The apartment was as  
neat as a new car and there even was a  
touch of femininity to it.

In the kitchen there was a case of  
whiskey on the floor. For a guy who  
liked only beer, Morton was doing pretty  
well. Or maybe he had something to wor-  
ry about for a long time. Something like  
stolen diamonds or a murder.

At least I had two possible suspects.  
Glaze and Morton could know about the  
diamonds. Both of them could have heard  
the quarrel, gone in after Temple left,  
killed Mathilda Temple and got away

with the diamonds. That was, if Joe  
Temple hadn't killed her. And I was  
more certain than ever that he hadn't.

I was about to leave the kitchen when  
I noticed the scratches on the floor. Mor-  
ton was one of those fussy male house-  
keepers. Everything in the place looked  
polished, including the linoleum floor.  
He'd used varnish on it that made it  
look as polished as if it were wet. But  
over near the case of whiskey were deep  
scratches.

Down on my knees, I inspected the  
floor more closely. The scratches appeared  
all the way to the door, only they were  
more like pockmarks everywhere except  
around the case.

I returned to Temple's apartment and  
inspected the floor. I found the same kind  
of scratches on the hardwood at the en-  
trance to the room where Joe's wife had  
hidden the money, or whatever she had  
bought with it.

In the hallway I hesitated long enough  
to inspect the floor at the edges of the  
carpet. There were a few marks in the  
entrance to Glaze's apartment.

Morton and Hedge were still drinking  
when I got back to the basement. There  
was about one drink left in the bottle and  
I took it.

"You find any pictures?" Hedge asked.

I shook my head and looked at Mor-  
ton. He wasn't showing his drinks, al-  
though Hedge was getting a little bright-  
eyed. I remembered the case of liquor  
in Morton's kitchen and decided the guy  
was in training for heavy drinking.

The end of the bottle seemed to be the  
signal for Morton to leave, which was  
exactly what I wanted. I waited until he  
was gone and then looked at Hedge. I  
came to the conclusion that he was sober  
enough.

"I need some help," I said. "Maybe  
there's something in it for you."

"Glad to help you," he told me.

I thought it over and decided to shoot  
the works. It was the only way I could  
see to save Joe.

**"I'M ALMOST** sure I can prove that  
Joe Temple didn't kill his wife," I  
stated.

Hedge stared at me. "The hell you  
say!"

"The old girl had about ten thousand dollars worth of diamonds up there. She'd been listening to that guy Glaze who was peddling numerology to her. Probably faked advice—I think the guy has a record—and persuaded her to buy the stones. Is Glaze friendly with Morton?"

Hedge nodded slowly. "Yeah. They spend quite a bit of time together. Maybe Glaze fixed it so that the old lady bought the stuff from Morton. That what you mean?"

"Exactly."

"But how do you know one of them killed her?"

"This is the way I see it," I said and explained about the scratches. "Whoever killed her," I concluded, "stepped in the mess of broken dishes. Some pieces of crockery stuck on his shoe soles and he left scratches wherever he went. They're in the bedroom where the stuff was hidden; they're in Morton's kitchen—and you say Morton and Glaze were friendly—and there are marks at Glaze's doorway."

"Maybe some of that stuff is still on his shoes," Hedge said. "That it?"

"I doubt it," I admitted.

"Then what you going to do?"

"I'm going to call Alex McLeod, a detective on Brian's squad. He'll play ball with me. Then I want you to go up and get Glaze and Morton together and talk to them, keep them in the building, until I can get McLeod here. He can look for the diamonds. And knowing that guy, I know he'll find them if he has to search everyone in the building and tear the walls down!"

"You mean I got to keep those two birds from going out?"

"That's right," I said. "Where's the phone?"

He directed me to a booth in the foyer and I put my call through to McLeod. He listened to all I had to say and finally grunted.

"You're crazy," he said. "If I pull a stunt like that and Brian finds out, I'll be out on my ear."

"Joe Temple didn't kill his wife," I insisted. "He hasn't the guts. Look what it means to you if you solve this case. The paper will make you into public hero num-

ber one! Don't forget that Joe works for us!"

"Okay," he sighed. "Only I still think you're nuts."

I went back to Hedge's one room apartment and sent him upstairs to hold Glaze and Morton until McLeod arrived. While I was waiting for him, I lined up my method of attack and was ready when he got there.

"We've got to pull this as a surprise," I said. "Wait here like I said."

"You're in for a good sock if you're wrong," Alex warned me, and settled down to wait.

HEDGE was doing a good job of it. They were all in Morton's kitchen and the case was open. So was one of the bottles. I could hear them before I reached the apartment. Hedge was doing most of the talking and, I judged, a good deal of the drinking.

When I walked in he winked at me, Morton smiled, and Glaze clouded up.

"What's this guy doing here?" he growled.

"He's a friend of mine," Hedge explained. "He's interested in the murder. Maybe he just wants to talk with you guys about it."

"He can get the hell out of here as far as I'm concerned," Glaze erupted.

Morton help up a soothing hand. "Now that's no way to talk," he remonstrated. He turned to me. "Mr. Glaze is a bit upset about it all. I'm sure you'll forgive him. I suggest we all have a drink!"

"Swell idea!" said Hedge. He went to the cupboard for another glass and suddenly stopped dead still and stared at the opening to the dumbwaiter that ran down to the basement.

Talk and motion in the room froze as we heard his yelp and followed his stare. Smoke was coming out of the opening in a black, threatening eddy.

"Fire!" Hedge cried and sprang for the doorway into the hall. He disappeared in a flurry of motion.

Glaze and Morton started to follow, but I blocked the way. Morton cursed.

"You talked Joe Temple's wife into buying those diamonds," I said.

He nodded. "But I didn't have anything to do with killing her," he gasped.

I looked at Morton and then at my fist. It was large and I folded it into a tight knot.

"You sold her the diamonds," I said. "Right?"

Morton looked at my fist. He stepped back a pace.

"Yes," he whispered. "But I didn't kill her. Joe Temple killed her. I heard them fight. . . ."

The buzzer interrupted him. It was Alex McLeod.

"Bring them down," he snapped. "The fire's out."

I replaced the receiver and looked at the two men.

"There's a cop downstairs who wants to talk with you," I told them.

Morton's eyes became wide and Glaze went white as bond paper.

ALEX McLEOD met us in the foyer. "Have a couple of cops taking care of things in the basement," he explained. "Now supposing you master-mind this out for me. I'm inquisitive."

"In my own way," I said. I turned to Morton.

"What time did you get that case of whiskey?"

"Why, why about twenty minutes after the quarrel between the Temples."

I looked back at McLeod. "Glaze here is a numerologist. He talked the old lady into buying diamonds with ten grand she had in the bank. Morton sold them to her. She used to tell everything she knew, so probably everyone she talked with in the building knew where she kept them. Joe was the only one in whom she never confided."

"I'm still waiting," McLeod said.

"It's simple," I said. "Last night someone went in the Temple kitchen right after the quarrel, killed her with a convenient electric iron, and got away with the diamonds. But the murderer stepped among the broken dishes, picked up some chips on his shoes, and left marks wherever he went."

"You can't pin this rap on me!" Glaze shrieked.

Morton didn't say anything. His hands were trembling as he lit a cigarette.

"I'm not trying to," I said. "Hedge

delivered the whiskey to you, didn't he, Morton?"

Morton confirmed this with a voice that trembled a little.

"Ten minutes before," I explained, "he got a call from Mrs. Temple to take away that pile of broken dishes. That must have been the way it was because *they're partly scraped into a pile*. A dead woman couldn't do that after her husband had killed her and walked out!"

Morton stared at me.

"He killed her, all right," McLeod said. "He's confessed. He went back down and then brought the case of liquor up to Morton's and made the marks on the kitchen floor then."

"And made marks into Glaze's apartment," I continued, "when we both rushed for Glaze's bathroom. I was really ill. But Hedge just gagged. Anyone can do that any time. But it looks good."

"I'm still listening," Alex said.

"I saw the chips of plate on his feet when I first came in his basement hang-out. He put his feet on the table and I *had* to see them?"

Morton suddenly came to life. "I don't like to interrupt," he whispered. "But is the fire out? I have some valuable things in my apartment and—"

"It's out," McLeod assured him. "That's the rest of it." He motioned to me. "Si fixed up a smudge of oiled rags and I burned them to send smoke up the dumbwaiter shaft. Hedge did what most guys would have done under the circumstances. He rushed down here to get those diamonds before the place burned down!"

"I told him Alex would probably search everyone," I added. "That made him hide them down there."

Two cops came up the stairway. Hedge was between them looking green around the mouth. No one said anything as they took him out.

\* \* \*

Joe Temple is still quiet and accommodating. He still worships the mugs on the news side, and he seems to be much happier since his wife is gone. Occasionally one of us takes him home to dinner if he isn't busy with his lodge work.

But we never ask him to wipe the dishes!



# You Can't Buy Guts

By WYATT BLASSINGAME

*Dick Arnold knew that Harsh and Giraud would kill the half-breed to cover another murder. But there was a tough battle Dick had to win before he could help the breed—his old battle with J. Barleycorn!*

Through the gloom Dick Arnold saw the body, saw the dark form crouching over it. . . .



**W**HEN the conductor came through the car and said, "Eyeglass River next stop," Dick Arnold stood up and began to pull on his overcoat, hunching his wide, bony shoulders as if already he felt the outside cold. His face was pale with the skin stretched tight over jaw and cheekbone. There were dark circles beneath his eyes.

Arnold was the only passenger to disembark. Two men came forward to meet him, both of them wearing boots, woolen trousers, bright colored mackinaws, and caps with fur lined flaps over their ears; but there the similarity between them ended. One was huge, fair and blue-eyed, with a face that was neither very intelligent nor very stupid—the face of a man who could use his hands better than his head.

The other man was short, thick shouldered and quick moving. His face was swarthy with dark eyes and a thin, colorless mouth. He said, "Are you Dick Arnold?"

"Yes. You're from the McGill Lumber Company?"

They shook hands. "I'm Pete Giraud. I'm to drive you up to the camps tomorrow." He nodded toward the big, blue-eyed man. "Blake Harsh, foreman at Camp Thirteen."

Arnold shook hands with Harsh, the big man saying, "Pete says you're to be my new clerk. Pete is the bush walker."

"The what?" Arnold asked.

"The foreman of all the McGill camps. We have five operating now. I run one of them. Pete's the big boss in the bush."

He carried one of Arnold's bags as the three men walked across the small, ice-coated street and along the narrow sidewalk. The cold was beginning to eat into Arnold now. He shut his jaws to keep his teeth from chattering.

Giraud said casually, "If you're cold we'll stop in here at Bub's for an ale."

"No thanks. I—I don't drink."

"Ale never hurt anybody. Come on."

"No. Thanks, but I—" His voice trembled a little. His mouth and throat felt dry. "I'm on the wagon."

Harsh was looking at him now, but Giraud said only, "If you don't want it, I'll show you on down to the hotel. We won't be leaving for the camp until tomorrow morning."

Before leaving him at the small hotel, warm from the big, wood-burning stove in the middle of the lobby, Giraud said, "If you need any clothes for the bush, there's a place right across the street can outfit you. Better get what you want this afternoon. Tomorrow's Sunday and there won't be a chance."

"Thanks."

Up in his room Arnold sat on the bed and stared at his unopened bags. His hands were trembling a little. He clenched them and then made himself busier than necessary by bathing and shaving. Dressed again, he went out and across the street. He was half way across before he noticed that the store toward which he was going was the Ontario official package goods liquor store. The clothing store was down to the left. But Giraud had certainly said. . . .

Arnold hesitated. The muscles in his throat twitched. Then he turned and went into the clothing store.

Later he went back to his room and tried to read. The words blurred and he could not force his mind to follow them. Once he stood up and went half way to the door—and stopped. He said aloud, "I won't do it. I came all the way up here for this chance. If I break now, I'm whipped forever." He went back to his chair and picked up his magazine again and held it so tightly his knuckles turned white.

**P**ETE GIRAUD came for him at a quarter after nine the next morning and as they drove out of town Giraud explained, "It's about a hundred miles to the camps and the going is slow."

"How long will it take?"

"A good part of the day. And if the snow sets in we may not make it at all today."

Arnold shivered. "Is it always this cold?"

"Not always. And my car heater isn't working very well. Maybe you better take a swig of this." He pulled a half pint bottle from his pocket and offered it.

Arnold had taken it instinctively. He tried to hand it back to Giraud, but the driver had both hands on the wheel. "No, I—"

"Go ahead. There's enough for a couple of drinks apiece."

"No." He looked at Giraud, breathing slowly. "Didn't they tell you . . . anything about me?"

"They told me there was a man coming up from the States named Arnold and he was to be the new clerk at Thirteen."

"I came up here because I was trying to get away from whiskey."

Giraud laughed shortly. "You'll stop up here! There's no liquor in the bush and you won't get out more than once this winter, if at all."

"You mean—"

"This is the last chance you're going to have. So drink up. If you're an old drunk, there's not enough there to keep you warm, much less hurt you."

Arnold's hand was shaking. He lifted the bottle and took a long pull. Giraud had a short drink, corked the bottle and put it on the seat between them.

Where they left the highway Giraud stopped and phoned ahead to the first house, some fifteen miles up the road, to ask if anything was on its way down. "The road's not wide enough for anything to pass," he explained to Arnold. "I don't expect any trucks, but if any are on the way down they'll be held at Werber's until we get by."

The country grew wilder. The snow had been piled high by the last snowplow. Trees closed the road in, spruce and balsam at first, then pine. The hills grew larger also, with great bare faces of rock sometimes rising out of the snow.

At Werber's they phoned ahead again, then went on. "Let's polish off that bottle," Giraud said. "Then you better get in the back and hold that crate of eggs steady. The road's pretty rough after this."

Arnold sat in the back and felt the liquor inside him breeding its fierce craving for more. All the old horrible pictures which he had tried for so long to wash from his mind came back—hot and clear. In some remote corner of his brain he was glad he was out of all possible reach of more whiskey and that he must undergo this pain and win over his weakness through sheer necessity; but all the nerves of his body quivered and his mind felt as though it would burst if he must go on remembering. . . .

He saw again the dark, cruel faces of the men who had kidnaped him, heard their threat. He heard the click of knife blades and saw the fire reflecting into the eyes of his captors. He seemed to feel again the agony of the thought of his fingers without nails and his eye sockets bleeding and eyeless. And there were those other pictures which had never left him

except when his mind was drowned in liquor: himself lying face down and sobbing out the numbers of the bank's combination; not because he had been tortured, but because he feared the torture promised him; the old watchman who lay on his back with the blood oozing from the bullet holes in his chest, his glazed eyes seeming to follow Dick Arnold no matter which way he turned, saying silently, "I thought you were my friend. But you turned yellow. You told them the combination and fronted for them so I would open the door. You are the one who killed me. You turned yellow."

**H**IS hand touched something smooth and hard behind the crate of eggs. He pulled it out and sat there holding it, looking at the quart whiskey bottle two-thirds full.

He began to cry in silent, terrible, shaking sobs before he lifted the bottle toward his mouth. And after the first drink he leaned face down upon the crate of eggs, still holding the bottle, crying without sound. Gradually, as the car rolled on, the blessed numbness began to fill his mind.

From the front seat Pete Giraud had watched in the rearview mirror. The shadow of a smile touched his thin, colorless mouth.

Within Arnold's brain time darkened and died and came slowly to gray life again. He sat upright, swaying. He was in a murky world that made no sense at all. He was in the car and it was warm and the motor was running, but the car sat still. Pete Giraud was gone. Snow, like a thin gray mist was swirling at the windows.

There was still a good two fingers of whiskey in the bottle beside him. Arnold drained it and leaned his head back upon the egg crate. The darkness closed in again.

When he moved again it was because of the cold. His body was stiff with it, and he made a long, painful effort before he could sit up. His eyes were bloodshot, dazed, and moments passed before he realized that the car was moving again. Giraud was driving slowly because the snow had increased and it was impossible to see more than a few yards ahead.

"We'll have to stop down here at Stander's," Giraud was saying. "We won't be able to make it any farther through the snow."

They went on for another five minutes. Arnold's head was clearing a little and he had found that the window beside him was down an inch from the top. It hadn't been when he left town. He closed it but the cold was still intense. He tried to stamp his feet and move his arms.

The car swung a little to the right, stopped with a jerk. Giraud said, "We'll have to leave it here and walk down to Stander's; it's about a hundred yards."

Getting out, Arnold stumbled and sprawled in the snow. He got up shakily. Giraud said, "What the hell's wrong with you?" Then he saw the empty whiskey bottle on the floor of the car. "Where'd you get that?" he demanded.

Arnold said thickly, "It was on the seat."

"Blake Harsh must have left it there last night. Well, I hope you enjoyed it, because you'll be a long time getting any more. Come on."

The snow was piled a foot or more deep. Someone had passed recently in both directions on snowshoes, but the tracks were filling now. They went on and suddenly a house loomed out of the snow. "This fellow Ed Stander lives out here alone," Giraud said. "Traps a little in the winter, guides fishing parties in the summer. We were lucky to get here." He knocked once on the door and without waiting for an answer pushed the door open and entered.

He went one step across the sill and stopped. Arnold, stumbling behind, almost ran into him.

A little of the gray afternoon light seeped through the windows, a little red-gold light shown from the door and draft openings of the big stove against the wall. And through this gloom he and Dick Arnold saw the body sprawled near the far window, saw the man crouched above it.

IT WAS like a scene in some dimly lighted waxworks: the big room with its unsealed walls from which hung a half dozen calendars of varying years; the table littered with coverless magazines;

the washstand with its bucket and basin, the scattered chairs. Beyond the stove was a Krag 30-40 Sporter rifle hanging across two nails in the wall. The two men were near the still-open door, stopped in awkward attitudes; and in the pale gray light beneath the windows was a bearded man flat on his back, his beard thick with blood. Beside the body was the other man crouching, his dark, half-breed face looking startled and furious.

The half-breed and Pete Giraud moved at the same instant as though the snapping of a wire had released them both. The half-breed came from his knees to a crouch and his right hand went back and the pale light glimmered along the blade of his knife. He hesitated—and Pete Giraud did not hesitate at all. The released jaws of a steel trap could have moved no faster. When the half-breed decided to throw the knife he was too late. As his hand started forward, Giraud hit him. The blow knocked him back against the wall and for an instant he stood there, upright. Giraud hit him again, hit him a third time as he was falling. And when he was stretched out on the floor, Giraud kicked him with savage carefulness upon the jaw.

Dick Arnold was dimly aware of the action which had taken place. He stood rigid, staring at the dead man upon the floor. He had never seen but one dead man and now for a terrible minute he thought that memory which he had tried over and over to drown in liquor had formed once more into actuality.

Giraud came past him and closed the door. Arnold said huskily, "What—who—"

"That damn half-breed killed Ed Stander. I knew he had threatened to. They had a fight up at Camp Thirteen last week. But I didn't have any idea he'd do it."

Arnold put his hands over his face, held his face so that he would not turn and look at the corpse again.

"One of those feuds that goes on and on," Giraud was saying. "John Buck's not much better than a half-wit. He kept claiming that Ed robbed his traps. He must have counted on this snow storm to get in here and away without leaving any tracks."

Arnold got up and opened the door and stumbled out into snow. The need for a drink was like fire within him.

The bottle was on the car floor, but it was empty, and though he searched he could find no more liquor. He stood there, holding onto the open car door, reluctant to give up the search, and it was then he noticed that the snowshoes, stuck behind the crate of eggs, had snow clinging to them.

Far back in his whiskey soaked brain something stirred a little—and was still.

He went into the house again. Giraud had just finished tying the half-breed's wrists and ankles and had spread a blanket over the murdered man. Arnold averted his gaze and said, "I—I need a drink."

"You can look around, but I don't think you're going to find any."

Arnold went into the bedrooms, into the store room at the back. He searched every possible corner, but found no liquor.

Nailed to the wall of one bedroom was a small map of the country north of Eyeglass River. Dick Arnold had always liked maps. He stood in front of this one, looking at it with blood-shot eyes.

The map showed Stander's cabin on Lake Chibuti. Eyeglass River was a quarter mile to the west and the lumber company's road made a long U turn here to avoid a gorge and a bend in the river. At one point the road was little more than a mile as the crow flies (or as a man on snowshoes might travel) across the river from Stander's cabin; but the road made a loop of nearly twenty miles to get there.

**A**GAIN that thought plucked for a moment at the back of his aching mind. But he didn't want to think. He wanted a drink and forgetfulness.

As he went back into the living-room the door opened and Blake Harsh came in. Snow stood deep on the man's huge shoulders and on his furlined cap. Where his face showed between the flaps of the cap it was bright red with the cold. "By God! It must be thirty below out there. I stalled a half mile up the road, and—" He stopped, staring at the body of Ed Stander.

Giraud said, "That breed John Buck killed him. We got here just in time to catch him doing it."

"You mean you actually saw—that he really—"

"He was kneeling over the body when we came in," Giraud said quickly. "And you heard him threaten Ed up at Camp Thirteen."

"Oh, yeah," Harsh said. "Sure, he musta killed him."

The half-breed was conscious now. He lay looking at them with eyes as savage as those of a trapped animal, but he did not speak.

Arnold said huskily, "Mr. Harsh, do you—did you bring any liquor with you?"

Harsh hesitated, looking at Pete Giraud. When Giraud nodded, Harsh said, "I got a half pint." He took the bottle from a hip pocket and passed it over.

Giraud said, "Sit here and drink it, Arnold, and keep an eye on this half-breed." He and Harsh went out of the room together.

Arnold wanted to gulp the liquor down in one long fiery swallow and wait for the oblivion that would follow. But there was only a half pint, or less, and he wanted to make it last. He took a short drink and put the bottle on the table in front of him, holding it with both hands.

Tiny and persistent as a mosquito that will not let you sleep, the thought kept whining at his brain. He took another drink, but the thoughts came back again, little things flying one after another through his memory; a car heater that wouldn't work so that the car was cold and there was an excuse to offer a drink, and then the heater did work and the car was hot and he passed out quickly, and then the heater didn't work and the cold revived him; the bottle of liquor on the back seat; the car parked in the falling snow, and Giraud gone; and the tracks of the snowshoes leading up to this house and away again; the map on the wall in the bedroom; the blood dried and clotted beneath the victim's throat while the half-breed still knelt beside him.

Arnold was trembling worse than ever now. He lifted the bottle and as he tilted his head back he saw that the Krag 30-40 which had been above the mantle was missing.

John Buck kept staring at him with silent hatred. "Not much better than a half-wit," Pete Giraud had said. Then

what difference did it make what happened to him.

He stood restlessly and started toward the window. He was never sure of why he walked on tiptoe. As he passed the bedroom door he heard Giraud saying in a hoarse whisper, ". . . pure bloody luck that half-breed stumbled in and . . ."

Arnold leaned against the window, feeling sick. He was sure now. The whining thoughts had grown and matured within his brain. He knew that Pete Giraud had killed the trapper and had planned to use him—Dick Arnold—as an alibi. Probably Giraud and Harsh had planned the murder together from the moment they learned of Dick Arnold and what he was. A full account of Arnold's personal history had been sent to the McGill Lumber Company owner, and in all probability that account had been shown to Giraud: the record of a man who would empty a liquor bottle with the single purpose of passing out. If it had not been for those few moments of recovered consciousness on the road when he realized the car was parked and Giraud gone, if it had not been for the chance discovery of the map showing how the road looped to get here, he would have believed it impossible that Giraud could have committed the murder.

**T**HAT way the case might have been an unsolved mystery. But now the half-breed had blundered in, and he would be hanged. And only Dick Arnold would know the truth.

But what could he do? If Giraud and Harsh realized he knew the truth, they would kill him. If he tried to leave, to get help. . . . He thought of the storm and the vast lonely country.

Then the idea came to him and it was such a simple idea that he knew he would have thought of it immediately if his brain had not been sodden with whiskey. All he had to do was keep quiet until the police arrived, and when they were there, when he was safe, he could tell them. It was so clear and easy that he began to laugh drunkenly with relief and was still laughing when Giraud came back.

"That liquor seems to have improved your spirits," Giraud said.

"I feel better."

"That's good, because it looks as if we are going to be here a long time."

"How long?"

"I don't know. Even if the snow stopped now it would be two days before the plows could get down from the camp. And until then we can't reach a phone to call the provincial police."

The fear began to form inside him again. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to untie John Buck. He can't get away and there's no need of keeping him roped up like a pig." He went across the room and knelt beside the half-breed.

And instantly Arnold knew what was going to happen. Giraud and Harsh were going to take no chances on what a trial might bring out. They were going to release the half-breed so he would try to escape—then they would kill him.

In the deep shadows beyond the kitchen door he saw Blake Harsh watching, the 30-40 rifle in his hands, his eyes hard on Arnold's face. Arnold's cry broke to a sob. He stumbled forward, sank into the chair, and drew the liquor bottle to him.

And with the bottle at his lips he paused. It was suddenly as if all his future and past were mirrored in the amber liquor. He saw himself face down, sobbing out the combination of the bank's vault. He saw himself on a hundred binges trying to drown out that memory and the memory of the watchman who had died in a futile effort to stop the bandits. He heard the doctor's voice saying, "I can't cure you, Dick. No one can cure you but yourself. You shamed yourself, you disgraced yourself by giving away before the threats of the men who kidnaped you." And he had whispered, "They never even hurt me! It was just what they threatened to do. I couldn't stand it, though I knew old Tompkins would be there. I knew they might kill him!" And the doctor's calm voice saying, "Because you gave way under their threats you lost your self respect. You drink in an effort to escape. You are still being a coward. You are still trying to escape pain—the pain of your conscience now. You've got to win your own fight, and nobody can help you. You've got to regain your self respect—by yourself!"

And in the wavering whiskey he saw,

with a clairvoyance given to few men, the bleak stretch of his future. He was allowing another innocent man to die because of his cowardice.

He stood up. He said, "I'm glad you untied him, Giraud. But you're not going to kill him when he tries to escape."

The dark man whirled, eyes suddenly afire in his face. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"You didn't take much of a chance when you killed Stander. You knew I was passing out, and you had phoned ahead so any cars coming this way would have stopped until you passed and nobody would see your car parked on the road with your snowshoe tracks leading down to the river and across—the snow would cover them soon. Probably Harsh stopped at the last camp back, and if anyone had come that way he would have halted them on some pretext until you had time to finish the trip across the river and back. Anyway, the odds were fifty to one against anybody coming from either direction. I was to be your alibi."

**I**T WAS deadly still, so silent that the sound of the stove seemed to fill the room with a dull roaring. The untied Indian lay perfectly motionless.

Dick Arnold heard his voice going on, "John Buck blundered in and gave you the perfect set-up. But you're not—"

Pete Giraud leaped.

With his left hand Arnold flipped the table between them. It was still falling as Arnold spun. Beyond the kitchen doorway he saw Blake Harsh raising the rifle.

Arnold flung the whisky bottle with all his strength. The big man tried to dodge but the bottle glanced off his face and he reeled backward, hit a chair and fell. The rifle spun out of his hands.

Arnold got through the doorway a half instant ahead of Giraud, slammed the door behind him, heard Giraud crash into it. Then he was scooping up the rifle, spinning. Blake Harsh was charging to his feet.

The rifle still kicking in his hands, Arnold saw the gash appear along the big man's head, as the giant turned and fell.

The door crashed open and Giraud was

on him, knocking the gun aside as he fired the second time. Giraud's blow caught him high on the cheek, slammed him backward. His hands were suddenly numb and the gun slid out of them.

He was never to remember the minutes that followed. He felt no blows, no pain of any kind. He was aware of only one thought pulsing through the red mist within his skull: *I'll go down fighting. I won't stop fighting. I won't stop. . . .*

Full consciousness came to him slowly. He was standing in the middle of the room. His heavy woolen clothes were in tatters. Blood ran from his face and from his arms. It was almost dark and he could scarcely see Pete Giraud lying on the floor.

He found a lamp and lighted it. He found rope and managed to tie both Giraud and Harsh—the bullet had made only a deep scalp wound across Harsh's temple. He staggered into the front room and saw that the door was open and snowshoe tracks led away from it. The half-breed was gone.

Three days later Dick Arnold came out of the office of the provincial police in Eyeglass River. He walked along the sidewalk with a slight limp. His face still showed the effects of the fight.

In front of the hotel he paused. For a full minute he stood there, then turned and went across to the liquor store and bought a bottle of Perfection Scotch. He went across to his room and opened the bottle and stood for a long time looking at it.

He poured a drink and his fingers trembled a little. He put in ice and seltzer water. He drank slowly, and when the drink was finished he sat there, looking at the almost full bottle on the table beside him. For five minutes he sat, unmoving. Then slowly he began to laugh. He laughed louder and harder; he laughed until his body shook and he was exhausted.

Still chuckling, he stood up. He recorked the bottle and put it away in the dresser. He had made the test and knew now that he was cured.

There was no longer a sick loathing of himself which he could not face. He felt like a man who had regained sanity after a long and horrible period of madness.

# TWO - IN - ONE MURDER

*The case of a killer who found that  
the longest way to his victim was the  
shortest way to the chair!*

By

**EDWARD J. DONOVAN**



**F**RANK LUSTER began filling the little capsules with the white powder from the mixing slab. His cousin, Harry Smokely, stood by, a cigarette in his mouth.

"Uncle Norman's sleeping capsules?"

Luster nodded. "That's right. He gets a supply every Tuesday now."

Luster knew what his cousin was thinking. He himself was thinking how easy it would be to put cyanide in one of the capsules. In fact, only recently Luster had laughingly suggested it to Smokely. And sometimes there is deadly sincerity in jest.

Now, as he tamped the powder into the gelatine containers, he played with the idea. There would be no evidence to prove him guilty. The remaining capsules would be tested, of course. But they would be found to contain nothing but a harmless sleep-producing agent. And he could play up the angle that his uncle had been very despondent lately.

Behind him Smokely began pacing up and down in the jerky, nervous manner of one who has something on his mind.

"I quit my job," he blurted.

Luster's eyebrows went up. "Quit?"

Smokely ran his fingers through his hair. "Sure. You would have, too," he defended himself. "No little boob can treat me like a school kid. I told him off."

"Uncle Norman," Luster remarked soberly, "is just as tough on me here in his store as your boss was. Discipline, he calls it. Say—this was your last chance, wasn't it?"

"I know," Smokely exploded. "Why the hell should you and I have to work anyway? Uncle Norman has enough money. We could show him how to spend it. But no. The old mutt says we wouldn't appreciate its value if we got it too easily,

yet we'll get it when he dies. . . . Oh, hell! How the devil will I tell him?"

"That's your problem," Luster shrugged. "I haven't the least idea—"

A customer came in, and Luster hurried out front to serve him.

**H**E SERVED the patron mechanically, gritted his teeth. He hated this store and everything in it. But he managed to conceal his feelings better than his cousin, Smokely.

Back in the dispensary he bent over the remaining capsules. Smokely lit another cigarette and straightened his hat. "Well, here goes."

"Where are you going?" Luster asked.

Smokely laughed. "To get damn good and drunk. S'long."

Luster finished filling the capsules, hesitated suddenly as he dumped them into the box. He thought: Why not now? His breathing quickened. He picked up one of the filled capsules, emptied out enough powder to make room for the cyanide.

All he had to do now was wait until his uncle swallowed it. It might be tonight, tomorrow night. It must be within a week. He tossed the fatal pellet in amongst the others. Even his trained eye could not distinguish it.

He called the messenger boy, sent the medicine to his uncle's huge home on Marlborough Avenue. Then reaction set in and he grew frightened. By closing time he needed a drink.

He located Smokely half an hour later. His cousin was tight.

"Hullo, Frank ol' boy. Si' down. Tha hell with Uncle Norman. Hell with every-



body." He leered up at his cousin. "Whatsh wrong? You look white. Did ya p-put p-poishun in the ol' boy's p-pills?"

Luster gestured in alarm. "Shut up, you fool!"

Smokely laughed, wiggled his finger under Luster's nose. "I'll bet you did. Goo' boy. I'll buy you a drink."

As Luster sipped his drink he realized that his cousin was a menace—a danger he must eliminate. For he alone would know how the murder had been accomplished. And with Smokely gone, all Uncle Norman's wealth would be Luster's.

Smokely's elimination would be easy. He was summering at the Country Club. The road from the city twisted like a serpent. At one point a sharp turn in the middle of a steep down grade necessitated careful driving. A loosened steering gear would make this impossible.

Luster finished his drink hurriedly, stood up. "You're not fit company to-night," he snapped, and departed.

He found his cousin's car in an isolated corner of the parking lot and set to work.

The accident occurred in early morning. Smokely managed to crawl from the wreckage and reach a nearby dwelling. But he died before the doctor came.

Luster played his part well. "I'm not surprised," he told anyone who wanted to listen. "Harry was always reckless—especially while driving." Then he assumed an attitude of sorrow.

Mike Ahearn, a private investigator, appeared that afternoon. No one knew him, nor why he came. He started asking questions, with seeming disinterest. He visited the scene of Smokely's accident, examined the car closely. He had a casual chat with the owner of the bar where Smokely had been last seen, joked a while with the parking lot attendant who had been on duty.

And all the time Luster waited tensely for his uncle to die. Perhaps uncle Norman would take the fatal capsule tonight. Would Ahearn be interested in uncle Norman's death? Suppose he was—what of it? No one could prove anything.

That night Ahearn strolled into Luster's room. "Okay," he ordered quietly. "Get your hat."

LUSTER'S face changed color, then his eyes narrowed. "What's the idea? Where are we going?"

"You," Ahearn answered steadily, "are going to jail."

Luster's laugh was strained. "I don't like that kind of humor."

Ahearn sighed, pushed his hat back as if he loathed explaining something that was obvious. "There's a lot of things you won't like where you're going. Especially sitting in the hot seat for killing your cousin. You fixed the steering gear of Smokely's car so he would go over that cliff. The parking lot attendant was dozing in the next car. He saw you, but didn't think anything about it until I asked him a few questions. Besides, there are your fingerprints."

Luster started forward. "That's a lie. Furthermore, you have no authority."

Ahearn smiled. "That's where you're wrong. Your uncle retained me to investigate the accident."

"Uncle Norman! But why? He—he—"

"Because," Ahearn explained patiently, "before Smokely died he managed to phone your uncle. Knowing he was going to die filled him with remorse, I guess. He warned your uncle not to take those capsules because he had filled one with poison, while you were serving a customer."

Luster's features turned a sickly yellow, his breath quickened. He remembered last night vividly; Smokely in the back shop alone when he, Luster, had gone to serve that customer. . . . Luster sank into a chair. "But—but I didn't—"

Ahearn shrugged. "You did. Examination of the capsules proved it," he said. "You see, we found two poison capsules. Smokely made one, and—you can't kill a guy twice, so we knew you made the other. That meant you wanted to kill your uncle—which indicated that you wouldn't stop at murdering your cousin. That's what started the ball rolling. I nosed around a bit and—*no you don't!*"

Handcuffs clicked ominously, and Luster's attempt to flee turned into abject surrender. He gave a shrill cry of agony and pitched forward in a dead faint.

Ahearn grimaced in disgust as he picked up the phone.

# Death Comes in Code

They rubber-hosed him there in the garage, beat him almost to death.



*There was a place under the sun for "ham" radio operators, Jimmie Lacey felt. But when the chance to prove it came along, Jimmie's girl was a doomed hostage in the Fifth Columnists' camp; the War Department's blue-prints were gone — and Jimmie was anchored to a heap of scrap iron in thirty feet of water!*

*An Off-Trail Novelette  
of Baffling Intrigue*

By  
**EDWARD S. WILLIAMS**



**CHAPTER ONE**

**The Runt**

**T**HE driver of the station wagon turned into Orchard Street, slowed half-way down the block, and parked. Orchard was a typical small-business street in the typically small town of Linchester: population, four thousand, and still growing. In fact, the town had grown by another thousand citizens since the battery factory had been opened only a few weeks ago.

It was a plant to make storage batteries for submarines; a new type battery, just perfected, that would enable our subs to run submerged far longer than those of any other navy. The plant had been located in Linchester because the Allegheny

Mountains and some hundreds of miles lay between Linchester and the Atlantic coast. Now, the government was scattering key industries, sending them inland.

The driver of the station wagon wore a chauffeur's uniform. He drove for Conrad Forrester who, although he was a newcomer to Linchester, had arrived before the battery factory. All that Linchester knew about Forrester was that he had plenty of money and spent it freely; that a year ago he had bought the old Wilson mansion, a mile or so out of town, and rebuilt it into a beautiful country estate. When he wasn't traveling, he lived there quietly, hunting, fishing, and raising prize cattle. He was a handsome, pleasant man. He seemed to like Linchester, and Linchester liked Conrad Forrester.

Jimmy Lacey, however, didn't know whether he liked Forrester or not. It was on account of Enid Stevens. Because Enid, aside from being the most beautiful girl who ever lived, was the only girl who'd ever taken Jimmy seriously. And now it looked as if Enid Stevens was in love with Conrad Forrester. They were together all the time, riding in Conrad Forrester's fine cars, or in the speed boats on his private lake, or astride his blooded horses. It wasn't altogether fair, Jimmy thought. And it was quite natural for him to be jealous.

He was trying not to hate Conrad, when Forrester's chauffeur parked under the sign: J. LACEY, SPORTING GOODS & HARDWARE. Radio Sales and Service.

Jimmie looked up from the portable radio which he was repairing. The man in the chauffeur's uniform was framed for an instant in the shop's doorway, like a picture. He was unsmiling, and this thin, dark face seemed to reflect evil. The fragmentary thoughts about Conrad Forrester and Enid Stevens vanished from Jimmy's mind. Where had he seen this man before? He had been pondering the question ever since he had first laid eyes on the man. He still was unable to place the fellow. . . . The chauffeur strode into the shop.

"Hi, Lacey," he grinned. "How's tricks?"

"Okey-doke," Jimmie smiled because it was his nature to smile, to meet everybody halfway. "What can I do for you, Marker?"

"Some more o' that new nylon fish-line," Marker said, "like the boss got last week. He's going to rig up another set o' light tackle tonight. Guess he's takin' his girl-friend fishing again tomorrow." Marker laughed.

There was something in that laugh that made Jimmie Lacey's blood boil. For Enid Stevens was the only girl Conrad Forrester had been known to take fishing. Still, Marker had said nothing definite to which Jimmy could take offense. He turned to the shelf behind him and got down a box. He opened it and took out a spool of fishing line—fine, incredibly strong line made from the new miracle thread, nylon.

"One spool enough, Marker?"

"Yeah. How much?"

Jimmie told him, and Marker paid. He turned to go, then hesitated and asked, "What time is it, Lacey? My watch is stopped."

"Ten after nine," Jimmie said shortly.

"Thanks," the chauffeur grunted.

"You're open late . . . Well, so long."

MARKER went out and slammed the door. Jimmie Lacey said, "Yeah, I'm open late. What else have I got to do? The only thing I've got plenty of is time—and it's money that counts! It's . . . Hell!"

Abruptly he grinned again, and locked up the shop. Jimmy's grin was his nicest feature. He was a little man—a homely little man with a nose that was too short, a mouth that was too wide, hair that wasn't any particular color, and eyes to match. He was twenty-eight years old, but from the time he could remember, no one except Enid Stevens had ever taken him seriously.

That's the way it goes in a small town. You grow up, but everybody has known you since you let out your first squawk. You get pegged in a certain hole, early in life, and unless you become a celebrity there you stay. Your ancestry, your mistakes, and all the fool things you ever did are remembered.

Jimmie Lacey had been The Runt from the first. He had been the good-natured butt of the town's jokes, and his father before him had been the same: A handy-man-of-all-work, who could make anything from a willow-twig whistle to a three-story house. And who spent every cent he ever made on absurd mechanical and electrical gadgets that were ingenious as the devil—and no earthly good. He called them his inventions, and spent more money in taking out patents on them. So Jimmie Lacey's father had been dubbed The Inventor. And when he blew himself and his shop off the face of the earth with some new torpedo he was inventing, most people were more amused than shocked.

Jimmie had been twelve years old at the time; his mother had died long before. He had no other relatives. His father left him nothing save his innate love of mechanics. In Jimmie's case, that instinct had centered on one thing—radio. He

had begun with crystal sets and headphones, gone through the peanut-tube era, seen the old funnel-type loud-speaker develop into the modern type. He had built dozens of sets, for himself and others. People had laughed (remembering his father)—but Jimmie's sets worked. He made a little money at his trade. And finally, the town gasped to see Jimmie's shop open up on Orchard Street.

It gasped again when, after the disastrous flood that visited Linchester in 1932, Jimmie Lacey was awarded a medal for staying on the job—with his building shaking under him—and directing rescue work by radio. For Linchester actually didn't know that for years Jimmie had built and had been operating an amateur radio broadcasting station, and was a prominent member of the Amateur Radio Relay League.

Enid Stevens knew. Tomboy Stevens, they called her then. She was the daughter of the retired, invalid banker who lived on the farm adjoining the place Conrad Forrester had rebuilt. Enid, then, had been thin and gangling as any boy—and just as whip-lash tough. And from the time anyone could remember, Enid Stevens had been defender and champion of Jimmie Lacey.

Not, of course, when Jimmie was around. Then, he fought his own battles—be they with fists or tongue—with the same good-natured grin. And Enid marveled at his work, told him it was wonderful, asked questions eagerly. Later, she helped him build his broadcasting set.

**O**H, YES, Enid Stevens could have told them! But she didn't. She told only her father, after the illness that had left him partially paralyzed and had forced him to retire to the country. She got him interested in Jimmie Lacey, and in radio. Banker Stevens ended up by hiring Jimmie to build him a broadcasting set, and by becoming a member of the League, and a radio enthusiast. And Enid always believed that this new interest had saved her father's life.

She could have told them, too, where Jimmie Lacey went that year when the shop on Orchard Street was closed and deserted. Of course, Linchester found out, later. But Enid knew from the first that

Jimmie had gone to the front in the Spanish War as a Loyalist radio operator. She knew when he was wounded in action, when he was captured by the Fascists; when he escaped at the end of the Loyalist resistance and came home.

Enid knew why he went. She knew the intense hatred that had grown by slow degrees in Jimmie's heart against all oppression—against Fascism, Nazism, Totalitarianism of whatever sort. Until he felt he had to do something—had to go to Spain and fight it. And he went. He came back not much changed, outwardly—except for the slight limp from his wound that kept him out of a radio technician's job in our own army.

During that year Enid had changed, Jimmie found. The memory of Enid Stevens—small, freckled, plain little Enid—had kept him from giving up and letting himself die in Spain. The memory of her dark eyes had brought him out of a Fascist prison on the very eve of his scheduled execution.

Well, he could forget that now, he knew. He was in love with Enid, but he knew how foolish that dream had been. He was nobody—the son of a crackpot. Enid was the daughter of Banker Stevens, who had money, family, the respect of the town. Enid, in a year, had grown—as plain little girls sometimes do—into a startling beauty. The tomboy was gone, and in its place was a beautiful girl. No, she was not for him. . . .

All that ran through his mind—swiftly, starkly—as he shut his front door and locked it, as he turned to the rear of the shop, where stairs led to his living quarters and his beloved radio. All that had been brought on, he realized, by the mere sight of Marker, Conrad Forrester's chauffeur, who had come in to buy a spool of fish-line.

And where—damn it, *where!*—had he seen that man Marker before? And why was that elusive memory of the man so hostile, so spine-tinglingly menacing? Was he confusing Marker with someone who looked like him? Maybe. But Jimmie didn't think so.

He went upstairs to his transmitting key. He threw switches, turned knobs and dials that were as familiar to him as the features of his own homely face.

What Jimmie Lacey didn't realize was that his face was strong as well as homely; that it had character and force. Or that Enid Stevens knew that and wondered, while she accepted Conrad Forrester's invitations and attentions half-heartedly, what had happened to make Jimmie seem to avoid her!

## CHAPTER TWO

### Memory of Terror

**T**HE thin, sharp stutter of the signals on the amateur waveband filled his ears. . . . For a time, Jimmie didn't cut into the talk that flashed through the air. He merely listened, thinking his own thoughts of Enid, and of Conrad Forrester. Then those thoughts faded from his consciousness. It was impossible, he reflected, to remain lonely and bitter, among so many friends of the air.

It was astonishing, when he considered it, how many radio friends he had. He knew people—men and women and kids, hundreds of miles away, whom he had never seen. He called them by their first names. They were all amateurs, yet they were experts in their way.

He got to thinking, then, what a godsend it would have been to Loyalist Spain, to have had such an army of communicators—such a far-flung system of independent, and yet interlocked, communication. He thought what a godsend it would be to the U. S. if America were ever invaded by the forces of tyranny that were sweeping Europe. He thought how useful those amateurs could be, in reporting the landing of parachutists, for example, and in a thousand other ways.

And all the while he was listening to the talk that went on—ordinary, homey talk, as though the men who were doing it were all seated together in one room. Crops, politics, personalities, business—all were discussed by the "hams"—the amateurs.

There was Al Saunders, at Truxton, fifty miles east of Linchester. Saunders was jovially cussing Jeff Smith, at Eastbury, forty some miles north of Linchester. Jimmie grinned. Bill Nelson, at Winton, was throwing caustic comments to some other amateur at an unidentified station farther away.

Consider those three men alone, Jimmie thought: Saunders, Smith and Nelson. Linchester was the hub of a rough hundred mile circle that included Truxton, Eastbury and Winton—all smaller towns. But suppose, in war-time, all other communications were cut. He himself, with Saunders, Smith, and Nelson, could pretty well blanket that hundred mile circle. It would take considerable time and skill to locate and put out of commission all four of those stations! Provided, of course, that the damned Fifth Column hadn't already spotted them, and marked them for destruction first.

Jimmie felt anger rising in him again as he thought of Spain, and the Fifth Column tactics that had originated there. That was a dress rehearsal for all the treachery that had occurred since Spain. If there were only something he could do—personally—about it, here in America!

He knew that the Fifth Column was busy in the U. S. He knew it perhaps better than the average man, for Jimmie Lacey had seen it work in Spain. He'd traced its bloody hand over the map of Europe since then. It was the advance guard of destruction, and if. . . . He shrugged, and tuned in Harry Stevens' wavelength—Banker Stevens, Enid's father, who had learned his radio from Jimmie, and maybe avoided an early grave thereby. Stevens was broadcasting.

Jimmie listened, idly, at first—then, with a start, he tensed. He tuned in more finely—grabbed at pad and pencil that lay on the desk before him. And as he wrote, his brows furrowed, his eyes were puzzled.

"Ky2x," came over the air and, "Bhlsqw poltbv 2x73 2stivx gytzspot oelga." Then silence. It was code!

He stared at what he had written, half inclined to grin. But his experience with code, in Spain, and his knowledge of Harry Stevens' limitations, made him wonder. This, he recognized from what little he had, didn't look like a simple code. Rather, its apparent simplicity masked something else—and touched a familiar spot in Jimmie's mind.

Also, there was no answer anywhere on the waveband, no acknowledgement that he could pick up. Two amateurs, playing around with code, would at least acknowl-

edge each other; even though it would take a while for the receiver to decode the message and code his answer.

Jimmie probed the air in all directions—and got nothing. Then, on a hunch, he tuned back onto Harry Stevens' wavelength—into the middle of something else that brought him out of his chair.

He got, “. . . rry Jimmie hurry . . . dad unconscious . . . telephone wire cut. . . . Jimmie are you listening . . . come in Jimmie . . . hurry this is Enid. . . .”

In the silence that seemed to beg for an acknowledgement, he tapped it out tersely: “Coming now . . . phoning doctor but will beat him there . . . keep the chin up Enid . . . Jimmie.”

Then he snatched at his telephone, spoke briefly, picked up the paper that bore the few code words he'd heard from Harry Stevens' station, and lunged down the stairs.

**H**IS little Ford pick-up truck was parked in the alley behind the shop. It had his name painted on the side in

He saw the winking flash of a watchman's light on the far side of the buildings. The plant, he knew, was well guarded against possible sabotage.

But he wasn't thinking of that. His mind raced ahead to Enid—dwelt on the puzzle of that strange code, and on the cutting of the Stevens' telephone wire. He was almost past the end of the plant enclosure when his motor sputtered and died.

With a groan, Jimmie got out and yanked open the hood. He knew what was the matter. It was the carburetor; it had happened before and he'd meant to fix it. The float was jammed, and it had had to happen again, *now*, within a mile of the Stevens' farm.

Then he paused in his attack on the offending carburetor. A mile? Hell, no! By cutting across the factory yard, he could reach a woods road that would cut that distance in half. He could run it in less time than it would take to get the truck running again! Jimmie whirled toward the barbed-wire fence.

He wriggled through, caught a pants

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## HONOR OF THE STAINLESS SHIELD

*Another gripping espionage novelette by Edward S. Williams will appear in the current issue of Ace G-Man magazine!*

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six inch letters—J. LACEY, RADIO.

Her father was hurt, unconscious. Her telephone wire had been cut. And some sort of code had come from Harry Stevens' station only minutes before Enid's appeal had flashed through the air.

Jimmie couldn't figure it. Except for one thing, he'd have thought that Enid's father had met with some accident—maybe run his wheel chair off the front porch and upset with it, as he'd done once before. But the Stevens' phone wire had been cut! And the code that Jimmie had picked up—It had—like the man, Marker—touched a vague chord of memory in Jimmie's mind.

He forced the truck to the limit of its chattering speed. He took the short-cut that led out of town past the barbed-wire enclosure of the new Government battery factory. The buildings, not in operation yet, loomed large and dark on his left.

leg on a sharp barb, ripped a shirt sleeve and tore a gash in the back of his hand. But he paid no more attention to that than to the fact that he was trespassing on forbidden property guarded by men with guns. He sprinted for the fence on the far side, made it before any of the watchmen heard him.

Jimmie grinned and ran on, sure of his ground even in the dark. And he'd covered at least another hundred yards when it came. Even then, the force of the blast knocked him flat.

A gigantic, blinding flower of fire blossomed skyward from the very heart of the battery plant. The voice of the explosion deafened, dazed him. For a full minute, Jimmy lay where he had been hurled, staring at that lurid gush of fire-tinted smoke, uncomprehending. Then the shower of debris began. All around him was a hail of shattered masonry, twisted

fragments of steel, broken beams, ruined machinery. Finally, one awful thought filled his mind. The battery factory had been blasted to hell—blown out of existence. Even at the distance away from it that he had been, he'd been stunned. *But what of the men, the guards, who had been in the plant!*

Killed! Blown to bloody fragments—

That ugly word "sabotage" filled his mind suddenly.

Jimmie staggered to his feet, stood gripping the trunk of a sapling for support. What should he do? Some of those men in the smoking inferno that had been a factory might not be dead; might be saved by prompt first aid. But there were also Enid and her father, waiting for him.

And suddenly Jimmie's mind was a blazing turmoil of memory. Spain, and the hell of aerial bombardment; the sweeping onslaught of machine-gunning, cannonading tanks; the capture of a Loyalist defense point; his wound; his own capture—and a man in the gray-green uniform of a German officer. A man who took over Jimmie Lacey's portable radio set, whose expert hand on the key sent a message flashing through the air. That message had been in code—the same code that had come from Harry Stevens' radio tonight! He remembered one word of it, distinctly "ky2x."

Jimmie whirled, sprinting into the night.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Agent from Hell

CONRAD FORRESTER was at the Stevens' home when Jimmie arrived. Unconsciously, perhaps, he supported the girl with an arm around her waist. And Enid let his arm remain—even after Jimmie raced up the steps.

Then Enid spoke urgently, "Jimmie—Jimmie, what happened! Was it the—the battery plant?"

"It was," he nodded. "It's blown up, Enid—wrecked! I was right there!"

"You were *there*—at the plant?"

"My truck broke down," he explained. "I crossed the plant yard to take the short cut through the woods. But what happened here, Enid? Is your father—"

"I'm all right, Jimmie." Harry Stevens

spoke from the darkness of the porch. He wheeled his chair out of the shadow of a trailing vine.

"Compared to what's happened at the plant, my little adventure was nothing. Tell us, what—"

But Jimmie cut him off. "I don't know, Mr. Stevens. The plant's blown up. But I think what happened to you might have something to do with it! What was it?"

"You think—" Stevens began incredulously. Then he laughed. "But that's absurd, Jimmie! The house was burglarized. That's all that happened here. I was here on the porch, asleep. Enid had gone down to the lake for a swim—"

"With Mr. Forrester?" Jimmie asked.

Conrad Forrester replied, "Why, no, Lacey. I happened to be in my library, reading. I came out on my terrace for a breath of air and thought I heard a faint scream from this direction.

"Was Marker, your chauffeur, at home then?" Jimmie queried.

Forrester laughed easily. He said, "As a matter of fact, Lacey, I'm not accustomed to third degrees from—just anyone. But I don't mind telling you that Marker was at home, as were my butler and two other servants. You see, I'm well alibi'd. Now, may I ask what you're driving at?"

But Jimmie turned back to Harry Stevens. "And somebody got in the house, Mr. Stevens? That it?"

"Yes, Jimmie," the older man answered. "That was it. I awoke and heard a noise in the house. I knew it wasn't Enid, for she'd have called to me as she came in. So I wheeled myself in to investigate. The burglar must have heard me coming, for as soon as I entered something hit me—knocked me out. The next thing I knew, Enid and Forrester were drenching me with water. But what connection could that have with the plant explosion?"

Jimmie was silent, staring with narrowed eyes at nothing until Enid said, "I didn't tell you before, Dad—I didn't tell Conrad. Our—our telephone wire was cut. I was afraid it would upset you to know that, but after the explosion—Jimmie, what is it? Please tell us what you mean!"

"By all means!" Forrester rapped. "That telephone wire being cut puts a different light on it!"



## DEATH COMES IN CODE

Harry Stevens scoffed, "How so? Even an ordinary burglar would know that quick help could be summoned by telephone. Our thief just wanted to give himself plenty of time to get away. But he didn't know about my radio. Besides, the fact that some money and a few of Enid's trinkets are missing proves it was a simple burglary. I see no connection, unless..."

HE PAUSED, and all of them fixed questioning eyes on Jimmie. But Jimmie Lacey hardly saw them. Conrad Forrester—if he'd spoken the truth—had been in his home, well alibi'd by Marker and two other servants. This attack on Harry Stevens had all the earmarks of an ordinary burglary—and no one would question his account of it. Jimmie saw the diabolical cleverness of it, now.

Again Jimmie Lacey's mind was in Spain—in a ruined, shell-pocked Spanish town that had just been overwhelmed by the combined might of Germany, Italy, and Franco's mercenaries. In his mind he saw a man in the uniform of a German officer, who kicked a wounded Loyalist radio operator aside and sat down before the key of a portable radio set.

He could be silent no longer. No one would believe him—no one would take him seriously, for no one ever had except Enid. And she was in love with Conrad Forrester. She *must* be; she was with Forrester half the time. He couldn't tell her. But he could tell the FBI.

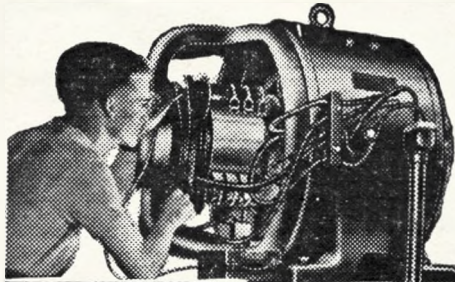
Jimmie said, "Well, I guess I've made a fool of myself—again. That business of the telephone wire being cut—it, well—when the factory blew up, I felt sure that . . . But I'll be going now. I'm glad you weren't hurt badly, Mr. Stevens. Good-night." He turned and departed.

Even Enid's anxious pleading failed to stop him. Even her friendly sympathy seemed more than he could bear. That, he thought, was all she'd ever felt for him. It was the same thing she'd feel for a hurt dog. He walked all the way home.

The fact that his shop door was ajar didn't register in Jimmie's mind. Vaguely he noted it, dimly conscious that he thought he'd closed it when he went out. But he dismissed it as he went in and

(Continued on page 98)

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# HISTORY OF THE UNDERWORLD NEW YORK



Yoske Nigger, Charley the Cripple and Johnny Levinsky specialized in stealing and poisoning horses. They divided the field and worked in harmony for two years, and the horse mortality rate was high. The number of sudden deaths among humans engaged in the trucking business increased porportionately. These were the average rates asked by Yoske and his cohorts in payment for the jobs:

Shooting, fatal .....	\$500
Shooting, not fatal .....	100
Poisoning a team .....	50
Poisoning one horse .....	35
Stealing a horse and rig .....	25

The shooting items referred to human beings. But these prices were extremely high. There were hired killers of the time who would "work" for as low as two to ten dollars.



When the politicians and the police began to withdraw their protection, gang leaders were forced to look for new revenue. They found a rich source in the industrial strife along the lower East Side. Dopey Benny was the most famous leader of these days. His men were hired by union officials to beat all strike breakers, who were known as "finks." For this Dopey Benny was paid a regular salary of twenty-five dollars a week plus the flat charges for the individual jobs. His methods are best described by Dopey Benny himself.

"I got my men together, divided them up into squads and armed them with gas pipe and clubs. When the workmen started home, my men beat them up. I told the men what to do, and I was near by, but I didn't take active part. Later, I saw the man I had made the agreement with and collected six hundred dollars in cash."

Joe the Greaser, finding that he was losing his best men to Dopey Benny, decided to ally himself with Benny. This fusion forced the smaller organizations out of union consideration. A man known as Jewback, an enemy of Joe the Greaser and Dopey Benny, called a council of all the other gang leaders—Little Rhody, Pinchey Paul and Billy Lustig, among them—urging war against the monopoly. Soon bullets flew and smoke choked the air. Miraculously, no one was killed or even wounded. But the incident incurred the wrath of Joe the Greaser who, knowing that Jewback was behind it, sent his henchman Nigger Benny Snyder to silence him. Nigger Benny met his enemy at Rivington and Norfolk street, but only had time to stab him before the police interfered. Joe the Greaser was not yet through with Jewback.



When he recovered from his wounds, Jewback proclaimed that he would prosecute Nigger Benny. Joe the Greaser decided to take action himself. Joe and half a dozen of his thugs seized Jewback one night and, while the gangsters held him down, Joe sat on his chest and cut out a large piece of his lower lip.

"Let that learn you," said Joe the Greaser, "not to talk so much."

Jewback was unable to speak for several days, and he failed to appear for the trial. Nigger Benny was discharged. But later, Nigger Benny was accused of the murder of Pinchey Paul and was forced to confess, pinning the blame on Joe the Greaser, who, he said, had paid him five bucks for the job. Nigger Benny was sent to prison for twenty years; Joe the Greaser got ten years in Sing Sing.



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(Continued from page 95)

locked it again. For a time he stood in the middle of his darkened shop, collecting his thoughts.

He was so sure, now, of what he knew, that he felt a sense of let-down. A fragment of intercepted code and the blast of an explosion had unraveled the tangled skein of an all but forgotten memory; had torn the shroud of secrecy from a Fifth Column cancer that had grown, unsuspected, under the eyes of everyone in Linchester. Washington was far away, but the arm of the FBI is long. The FBI, Jimmie knew, takes everybody seriously, where Fifth Column information is concerned.

He had only to tell his story, over the phone, to Washington, and the subsequent investigation would prove him right. And if it hurt Enid. . . .

**J**IMMIE shrugged wearily and went toward the stairs in the rear of the shop. He went up to his radio room. He was at the phone, with a hand outstretched to take it up, before he noticed anything amiss. But then he remembered, sharply, the fact that his front door had been open when he returned to the shop. For this room had been ransacked with hurried hands. Even as he whirled toward the other rooms of his living quarters he heard the grating harsh command, "Stay where you are, Lacey! Don't make a move!"

The man with the gun came from his bedroom door. Jimmie had never seen him before. He was tall, blond, with opaque, china blue eyes and a grim mouth. There was another man behind him, in shadow: short, squat, with eyes that glittered in the dark.

Jimmie barked, "What is this? Who the hell are you?"

The blond gunman smiled with no trace of humor. He came closer—but not close enough for Jimmie to grab his gun. He spoke in his harsh metallic voice.

"Lacey, there was an explosion at the battery plant tonight. Just before it happened a man was seen running across the enclosure. He wasn't identified. He got away through the fence—a barbed-wire fence. Your truck was found nearby. Your clothes seem to be pretty well snagged up. How d'you explain that?" His left

hand went into a coat pocket. He brought out a badge.

"Federal Bureau of Investigation," he said with finality.

Jimmie all but laughed. His tense muscles relaxed. He said, "I was just about to call you fellows. I can explain about the truck, about my being there. You see. . . ."

The grin faded from his lips as he talked, as he told them of intercepting the code message from Harry Stevens' radio, of Enid's appeal for help, and of the apparent burglary of the Stevens home.

The pale, cold eyes of the man with the gun and the FBI badge lighted fiercely as Jimmie went on to the end, to his finding of Conrad Forrester already at the Stevens house. And when he took the slip of paper from his pocket, on which he had taken down the fragment of code, the other snatched it from his hand.

The man's voice had a triumphant ring when he snapped, "And you say you *know* this to be a Nazi code? How? What makes you so sure?"

"Because. . . ." And Jimmie Lacey's own voice was hard and deadly when he told them of his Loyalist service in Spain, of his capture, and of the German officer who had kicked him back to consciousness long enough to get that one word of the code.

"I know it's a Nazi code," he finished. "I know the intruder in the Stevens house was no burglar, that he went there to use Mr. Stevens' radio. I know Conrad Forrester knows more about it than he's willing to tell, and that Forrester's house is a Fifth Column headquarters. I know it because Marker, Forrester's chauffeur, is the German officer who came into my radio shack, in that Spanish town—who kicked me and sent a code over my radio!"

And there was a stony silence.

The blond man stared with blazing eyes at Jimmie Lacey. Behind him the short man came forward slowly. Suddenly he laughed: a low, guttural, chilling laugh.

Jimmie's eyes shot to him—and his throat constricted, his whole body tensed again. This man, he knew now, was no FBI Agent! This man was Conrad Forrester's butler! Jimmie had seen him around town.

(Continued on page 100)



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(Continued from page 98)

His gaze cut back to the gun. It was rising, slowly, until the deadly muzzle of it was pointed full at Jimmie's head. He saw it steady, saw the hand that held it tighten. Then the short man spoke.

"No, Eric—no, not here! The body of the FBI agent is in the other room. It would be better, *nicht wahr*, if this one were simply to—disappear? Besides, Herr Hauptman Marker may want to question him further. There may be other information that we can—er—persuade him to divulge. Come. Bring him with us."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Trap

**E**ENID STEVENS turned her small coupe into Orchard Street and parked it in front of the radio shop.

The shop was in darkness, as were the windows of Jimmie's apartment. For a minute she sat motionless behind the wheel, staring at the shop, wondering.

She wondered if she'd been right in coming at all. It seemed almost as though, well, as if she were throwing herself at Jimmie's head. Tonight, with keen feminine intuition, she had realized suddenly why Jimmie had been avoiding her. Conrad Forrester was the reason. She had seen it in Jimmie's sharp question, "With Mr. Forrester?" when her father had said that she'd been swimming at the lake.

It was stupid of her not to have realized it before. Jimmie didn't—couldn't—know that even though Conrad was a swell companion, it was his saddle horses, his boats, his private lake, and the opportunity to use them, that interested Enid. She liked Con Forrester immensely. He was so handsome, so poised and cultured that his attention would have flattered any woman's vanity. But for sheer unselfish gallantry, for stark bravery in the face of any odds, there was no one she knew who compared to little, homely Jimmie Lacey.

He ought to know that, she thought. Then, instantly, she knew he'd never know it—would never be aware that he had heart and mind and courage enough for three Conrad Forresters. Oh, but she was foolish not to have known before what had ailed Jimmie all summer. He was

jealous, and he thought he simply couldn't compete with Con Forrester. . . .

Was she doing right, she wondered, to come tell him that?

Then she remembered Jimmie's grim questioning of them all. There was something purposeful behind what he had said to them. He knew something he hadn't revealed—something he'd deliberately held back. She made up her mind.

She got out of her car and crossed the pavement to the shop. She knocked, and waited. She knocked again, more loudly—surely loud enough to have wakened Jimmie, even if he'd been upstairs asleep. Still there was no response from within. She grasped the knob, turned it—and the door opened readily!

She hesitated on the threshold. Even though unlocked doors are usual in small towns, it seemed funny that Jimmie should leave the shop open. Then she thought that maybe he had forgotten to lock it when he answered her radio summons, and perhaps hadn't come home yet. . . . She would wait.

She made her way to the stairs in the rear, went up to Jimmie's radio room. Again she stopped in the doorway, her heart in her throat. The room in which Jimmie took such pride, looked as though a barroom brawl had been fought here! She switched on the light—and the sob turned into a stifled scream.

"Jimmie!" she husked, "Jimmie!"

But the man on the floor, who lay on his face half under the bed, wasn't Jimmie. She'd never seen him before, and he was dead—stabbed. A long-bladed pen-knife that Enid recognized as Jimmie's was sticking between his shoulder blades.

Enid was past rational thinking. What passed in her mind was instinctive. Jimmie hadn't done it, whatever the evidence of the knife. Or if he had, there'd been good reason. . . . Steeling herself to it, with her lower lip between her teeth, she pulled out the knife.

There was a newspaper lying on the table beside the bed. She wrapped the knife in it. Taking it with her, she turned and ran for the stairs, for her car.

**R**EACTION caught her before she'd got out of town.

Again she stopped her car, beside the

## DEATH COMES IN CODE

road, and sat shivering, sobbing.

Murder. . . . What did it mean? Who was that dead man in Jimmie's room? Who had killed him, and where was Jimmie. . . ? And now, what should she do?

She had taken the knife with the idea that, somehow, it must be hidden until the facts of the murder were known, and Jimmie beyond suspicion. But where was Jimmie? And how did she know that by taking the knife she hadn't destroyed some evidence that might have helped him? Finger-prints, perhaps. . . .

Should she go to the police at once? If she did, they might hold her. If she remained free she might locate Jimmie and find out what had happened. Should she—no, she couldn't tell her father. After what had already happened tonight, this new shock might dangerously upset him.

Then came sudden, desperate determination. She put the coupe in gear, shot out onto the road again. She'd tell Conrad. He'd advise her, help her; she could trust him.

It wasn't much farther to the estate, and Enid drove there swiftly. She turned into the long driveway which was lined by huge old trees. There were lights in the house—Conrad must be still up. There was a car parked in the circle before the front entrance—Conrad's specially built roadster. It was terrifically fast, she knew. But she didn't think of that, now.

Enid got out and started for the door. She stopped, her breath catching at the muffled, distant sound of a man's shout followed by a shot! It came from in back, somewhere. But it was not repeated, and after a moment she ran on up to the door.

Even before she rang, the door opened. The broad, bland face of Schurman, Conrad's butler, smiled at her. He said, "Ah, good evening Miss Stevens. You're calling late tonight. Nothing's wrong, I trust?"

"Hello, Schurman," Enid said. "I—I'm afraid something is wrong. I'd like to see Mr. Forrester."

For just an instant Schurman's heavy face lost its bland suavity. His mouth thinned, his eyes glinted with cold inquiry. But Enid didn't notice it.

"Certainly, Miss Stevens," he said.



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## DETECTIVE TALES

"Mr. Forrester is in the library. Will you go in?"

He stepped ahead of her, opening the tall, heavy door. And again Enid missed the cold narrowness of his eyes—the glance that flashed between him and Forrester. She saw only the obvious preparations that were being made for closing the house. She saw the luggage that was piled just inside the door—the dust covers on the furniture and books.

She said, "Conrad! You—you're going away? Tonight?"

"Why yes, Enid," he answered, and there was something in his voice, a sort of strain.

"Conrad, I—didn't I hear a shot and a yell just a minute ago?"

He laughed, easily. "Is that what brought you over, my dear? Each of us seems to be unduly concerned about the other, tonight. But you're right. There was a shot. Marker was packing one of my guns. He was handling it rather carelessly and I called to him just as the gun went off. Fortunately, no one was hurt. . . . But that's not why you came, is it?"

"Oh, no," she choked. "Conrad, you can't go away tonight. Please don't! Please stay—just until tomorrow—and help me. . . ." And in an almost hysterical rush of words Enid told him about the dead man in Jimmie's rooms; about the knife—Jimmie's knife—and how she had brought it with her.

**WHEN** she finished and stood breathlessly waiting for him to say something, to reassure her, there was again that curious, guarded tenseness in his eyes. But it was veiled swiftly. His eyes fell away from hers, turned toward the desk beside which he stood, and then cut away from it hurriedly.

Enid came close to him. She knew she'd failed. He didn't understand . . . about Jimmie. He didn't realize that Jimmie couldn't have done a thing like that. He was thinking what everyone else would think—of the evidence. The dead man in Jimmie's apartment; the knife; Jimmie's disappearance. . . . But she tried again, desperately.

"Please, Conrad—please believe me! Jimmie didn't do it! I know! Please say



## DEATH COMES IN CODE

you'll stay and help me! Just to find Jimmie. I'm afraid he's. . . ."

But still the man's eyes avoided hers, shifting back to the desk beside them. He took a sidling step in that direction. Enid's gaze followed him—and then she cried. "My ring! That's my ring! And my locket! They were stolen from our house tonight when—*Conrad!*"

There they were, in a small heap on Conrad Forrester's desk. And the man was no longer Conrad Forrester. He was a stranger—a cold-eyed, cruel-mouthed, stranger who suddenly had a gun in his hand.

Enid couldn't think, couldn't understand. Suddenly she remembered Jimmie's sharp questioning of this man, that she had put down to jealousy! She remembered the explosion, and Jimmie's appearance right afterward. She remembered his insistent questioning of her father about the burglary. And here was her jewelry on Conrad Forrester's desk. The thief had been Forrester! No wonder he'd appeared so soon after she'd found her father, and screamed!

Enid stared at him, fascinated, hardly aware of the menace of the gun, of his glittering eyes. With parted lips, wide-eyed, she listened to his grating voice. "You little fool! *Gott!* American men are bad enough, but their women! . . . Did you think it was your fatal charm, my beautiful idiot, that kept me dancing attendance on you?" He laughed. "*Herrgott*, no! It was your father's radio! I have used it half a dozen times! I have sent information to our waiting submarines under your very nose—and had it not been for that explosion I would still be sending. . . ."

And then Enid recovered her mind, her voice. "You're a spy!" she choked. "You're a Nazi spy!" And she was aware that two doors leading into the library were opened. Schurman, the butler, entered through one of them. Marker, still in his chauffeur's uniform, but with the air of command, came in through the other. Both were armed. Conrad Forrester's eyes blazed with triumph.

"Yes!" he said. "I am a Nazi! I have accomplished the mission I was assigned to accomplish. I have got complete plans of the new submarine battery that your



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factory was to make. I have them here." He tapped the pocket of his coat significantly. "I shall take them to—"

But Marker cut him off. He said, "That will do, Conrad. Your task is not yet complete—you still have to deliver those plans. After the explosion, this whole county will be full of their FBI agents. And, contrary to your opinion, Conrad, the FBI agents are not all fools! Get started now. Your car is ready. If you fail. . . ."

Forrester laughed again. "I shall not fail, Herr Hauptman!" He turned to go.

Marker smiled frigidly at Enid. "Unfortunately—for him, *fraulein*—your friend Herr Lacey intercepted part of the message that Forrester sent over your father's radio tonight—and recognized the code as one we used in Spain. He was dangerous, and so he had to be removed. The same applies to the dead man you stumbled on in Lacey's rooms. He was one of your FBI agents. And you, I regret to say, are dangerous also!"

Enid sobbed, "What have you done with Jimmie!"

Marker smiled. "Come," he said, "I will be glad to show you."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Last Ride

**J**IMMIE LACEY lay where they had thrown him.

At first, after he'd regained consciousness and was able to think anything, he'd thought he was in the rear of an automobile. He'd thought that that faint, uneasy rolling, rocking sensation was part of his own dizzy nausea—a result of the beating he'd got. Then he knew he was in a boat. He was on the floor of the rear cockpit of Conrad Forrester's double-cockpit, mahogany speed-boat.

That was his first conscious thought. His next was for the thing in his hand—that he'd risked immediate death to get. And his hands were so numb, with the tightly wound fishline that bound them, that he could hardly tell at first. But the movement of his fingers restored some circulation. In time, he knew the thing was there.

## DEATH COMES IN CODE

And by the time he'd made those two discoveries, his head was clear; the ringing clamor in it had dulled to a throbbing ache.

They'd brought him here in Marker's station wagon, he remembered. They'd driven it right into the big four car garage and closed the doors. Marker had been waiting there, and Forrester. The big blond man they called Eric had held his gun against Jimmie's head while Marker had tied his hands—with that same nylon fishline that he'd bought in Jimmie's shop, just this evening. And then it had begun—the beating.

They'd rubber-hosed him, there in that garage. They'd tried to get him to admit that he'd already phoned the G-men. They asked him who else he'd told about the "burglary" at the Stevens home. They asked him questions that Jimmie couldn't even remember now, because all he could remember was the swish and smack of that length of garden hose. All he could remember was the thud of fists, the bang of hitting the concrete garage floor, and the torture of being hauled to his feet again to take more of it.

And, strangely, he couldn't even remember when it was that he first saw the thing that was in his hand now. It was strange that he saw it at all! The thing was lying over in one corner, beside a workbench. He hadn't even known what it was, then; he'd seen only that it was metal, and thin, and that it looked sharp.

It was part of a broken hack-saw blade. It was gripped in his fingers now—fingers that were too numb to tell even which side of the blade the teeth were on, let alone turn it against the wire-like line that bound his hands. But he had it!

Vaguely he remembered collapsing in a heap to the floor when they'd finally got tired of beating him. Maybe they were convinced he was harmless—maybe, he thought, they'd had enough sport. But anyway, they'd quit, and all but the blond one, Eric, had turned to leave. And it was then that he'd staggered up, as though to run for the opening doors.

Eric had yelled and fired a shot. Jimmie had gone down again, rolling toward that all but invisible, three-inch piece of steel. He'd stopped rolling, on his back, his fingers closing over the blade. He didn't

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even know, then, that Eric's slug had grazed his ribs. But the others knew it. They all came running back. They saw the blood that was seeping through his shirt. Eric started to bend over him, pistol ready to finish the job. But Marker had barked. "No more shooting, you fool! If he isn't already dead he soon will be. Tie some of that old iron onto his feet."

And Jimmie knew now the meaning of that order. He had lost consciousness after he had heard Marker's grim command—had lost precious minutes. But he was in the boat, now, his feet weighted, waiting to be taken out and drowned.

The full realization of what was in store for him ran through his whole battered, aching body like an electric shock. He could feel the tingling of it in the tips of his numb fingers, and it drove him to frantic efforts with his hands. Time and again he dropped the fragment of the blade, wasted more seconds fumbling for it again. And even when he got it firmly between thumb and forefinger, with its teeth against the line, he found he could move it only a fraction of an inch in each direction.

It was maddening, terrifying! It would take him all night to cut the fishline at that rate. And already someone was in the forward cockpit of the boat! Jimmie froze at the sound of a match being struck. He saw the flare of it, smelled the aroma of cigarette smoke—then redoubled his efforts to cut the line at his wrists.

HE KNEW it was hopeless even as he exhausted himself in trying. Then, for a time, he had to stop. He lay quivering with the exhaustion that claimed his whole body. He heard the scrape and thud of footsteps on the small wharf.

Jimmie lay motionless, holding his breath. He recognized Marker's voice calling Eric's name. Eric replied. Marker said, "All right. We're ready. Conrad has already left. Schurman and I will leave in the sedan. After you have disposed of these two, you will follow in the station wagon. You know the plan, and the rendezvous. Very well, Schurman, put the girl into the boat."

The motor roared, then purred as Eric throttled it down. Jimmie was aware of someone's being half thrown, half laid on

## DEATH COMES IN CODE

the seat above him. And then, faintly, above the murmur of the boat's engine, he heard the thing that almost sent him berserk.

"It is too bad," Marker said, "about the Stevens girl. If it hadn't been for that explosion, I wouldn't have minded taking her with us! Eh, Schurman?"

Schurman laughed. The boat throbbed, slid out into the lake. Jimmie thought: *Enid! They've got Enid! They're going to drown her. . .*

Then the cold, calm fury of desperation flowed in his veins. There had to be some way out. He gripped the saw blade again, and again it slipped from his hands. But this time it slid edgewise into a crack in the floorboards. Jimmie's heart almost stopped—and then leapt!

The blade was firmly wedged, teeth uppermost, as in a vise! All he had to do was to saw his hands back and forth over it!

The engine purred softly. But it was enough to cover the faint ripping sound of the saw-blade on the line about his wrists. Jimmie felt a surge of fierce exultation when the line went slack, suddenly. He forced his numb hands apart. Frantically he fumbled for the blade. There was so little time, and there remained the cord binding a heavy, rusty lawn-mower to his leg.

He got the blade out of the crack. Swiftly he clawed off the oily cloth that gagged him. His hand groped upward toward Enid, touched her face, pulled her head down until his lips touched her ear. Jimmie whispered, "I've got my hands loose, Enid! Just a minute and I'll have this iron off my leg."

The boat lost way rapidly, swung around. The man at the wheel stood up, turned and clambered up over the engine hatch. He stood over Jimmie and Enid looking down. And that weight was still fast to Jimmie's ankle!

The Nazi saw his desperate movement. An oath was sharp in his throat—his hand stabbed at the gun in his pocket. He literally dived into that rear cockpit.

**H**IS feet hit the floorboards where Jimmie's head had been. Jimmie heaved himself up, caught the cowling and

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surged erect. The fragment of saw-blade in his hand slashed at the Nazi's face. He felt the teeth tear downward through flesh. But Eric's gun was in his hand.

It clubbed downward. Jimmie threw his body forward, straight at the bigger man. He got inside that blow. The descending gun-barrel hit his shoulder. His arm snaked up, coiled around the other's arm. Eric's fist smashed into Jimmie's face.

Frantically he held on. That iron—that damned weight at his feet! It was twisting his ankle with every movement of the dangerously plunging boat. Eric couldn't shoot—didn't want to shoot. But there was no need for him to. This one-sided battle could have but one end. Jimmie could do nothing but hold on. The Nazi knew it.

He dropped the gun. He tore his arm free. Both his arms circled Jimmie's body. Jimmie heard his grunting, whistling breath as the man lifted him. Frantically, piston-like, Jimmie Lacey threw his fists into Eric's face. But it was like pounding a stone wall. He felt himself lifted—felt the weight of the lawn-mower swung free of the bottom of the boat, over the side. And he knew he was lost!

But he knew, too, suddenly, that he could win—that Enid wasn't going to drown. Even if she drifted, bound and helpless, all night, someone would find her in the morning. Someone would see the drifting boat and come to investigate. . . .

With all his remaining strength Jimmie lifted his free leg toward the other's groin. His knee went home low in Eric's belly. His arms wrapped around the man's neck. Together they went over the side.

Eric had had no breath in his body when they went overside. Jimmie's knee had driven the air out of his lungs. Eric had had to inhale—and he had inhaled water. He was dead now. Enid was safe. Jimmie relaxed his grip slowly.

Eric was gone. Enid was safe. That was what mattered. Why prolong it? Why not release the poisoned air that was in his lungs? Why not draw in the clean, cool water, and make an end? Why endure more torture? . . .

He let it go. He felt curiously light and weightless, as though he were floating on air. He let his breath out, turned his head

## DEATH COMES IN CODE

toward the surface, again instinctively, and breathed in. He choked—and gasped. He'd drawn water into his nose—but *there was also air!* That feeling of lightness persisted. The weight on his leg was gone!

He'd come to the surface!

"Enid!" he tried to shout, but it was little more than a choking gasp.

And even though she couldn't answer through her gag, she heard him. And Jimmie heard the faint thumping of her feet on the boat's cowling—heard the rattle of the iron with which her own feet were weighted. He swam toward it. . . .

**S**PECIAL Agent Watson's keen young face was grim; his eyes were metal hard. He poised behind Jimmie Lacey as Jimmie bent over the transmitting key of Harry Stevens' radio. Stevens sat stiffly erect in his wheelchair, his face paler than usual, but his eyes were flaming, nostrils flaring with each indrawn breath.

Enid stood beside her father. His arm was around her waist. None of them spoke while Jimmie fingered the key, while he manipulated his knobs and dials. But when Jimmie sat back and took off the headset, Watson clipped, "Nothing yet?"

Jimmie shook his head.

Watson said, "Well, I guess they had too much start. But even if we don't get 'em right away, we'll get 'em sooner or later. You've done all you can. And man, that's been a lot!"



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## DETECTIVE TALES

Jimmie said, "But damn it, we've got to get 'em tonight! Forrester, or whatever his real name is, has the plans for that new storage battery. He's on his way to deliver 'em now. And. . ."

Then he stopped, jerked the headset to his ears, held up a warning hand. His eyes burned as he read out the message that came to him from Al Saunders, amateur radio enthusiast at Truxton, on the main highway to the Coast. . .

"Lacey," he repeated aloud, "Lacey, Linchester. . . Saunders calling Jim Lacey. . . Your men Marker, Schurman, caught by local cops in traffic trap here in Truxton. Have notified nearest FBI office. Will hold men on traffic charge until G-men get here. Told you we'd do it. Hooray for the hams! . . ."

And Jimmie's battered lips twisted in a grin. He thought, aloud without realizing it, "And now if they only get Forrester. . ."

Then, as though in direct answer to his fervent wish, the thin, sharp signals rang in his ears again. And again he spelled out the message aloud.

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# Classified Advertising

(Continued)

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from the State Cops. They ran that roadster down ten miles north of here. Chased him five miles, and he was getting away. But he blew out a tire at ninety-five and cracked up. The cops got that envelope you spoke of. The guy was dead. . . ."

Jimmie Lacey took off the headset. He sank back in the chair, too tired, now that it was over, even to hold himself erect. He looked at Enid, and then at Watson.

"That's it," he said wearily, but smiling. "The hams did it. I said they would."

And Watson nodded. "The hams," he smiled too, grimly. "And an explosion that Marker and Forrester couldn't figure out.

"Couldn't figure out?" Jimmie gasped. "You mean—"

"I mean," Watson said, "that they didn't blow up the plant. That was the last thing they wanted—now. First, they wanted the plans for that new submarine battery. Then, after the plant got into operation, they'd have done all they could to sabotage production. But anything as spectacular as blowing the place up would have ended in their discovery. They knew

that. That's why they got panicky after the blast."

Jimmie's brows furrowed; Enid and her father looked dazed. Watson said, "It's known what happened at the plant. The army, as you know, is holding maneuvers in this section later on this month. The plant buildings were finished, and empty. So the army used them to store a lot of shells and ammunition and explosives for use during their war-games. Nobody knew it except army officials; not even the plant watchmen. And one of them lived to tell us what happened. One of the guards was smoking. He threw away a cigarette—and it set off the blast.

"But now I've got to go. You'll hear from us later, Lacey. Meanwhile, let me congratulate you—and all the other hams—on a swell job."

The G-man left quickly.

From the front porch Jimmie and Enid watched his car disappear down the road. And afterward, Jimmie Lacey found that he was standing with Enid very close beside him—very close.

THE END

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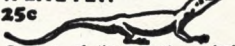
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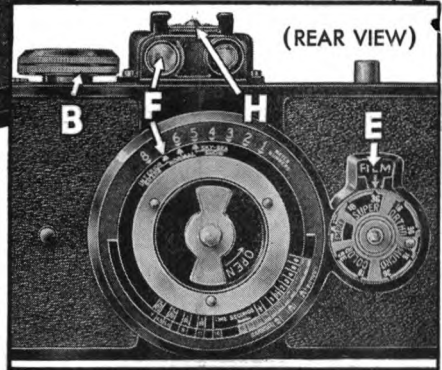
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