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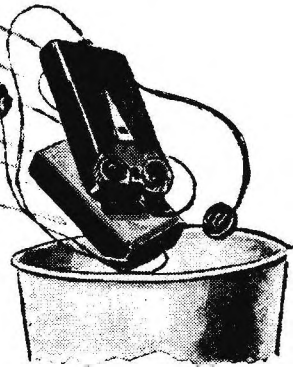


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# G-MEN DETECTIVE

Vol. XXXV, No. 2

A Thrilling Publication

Spring, 1949

## A DAN FOWLER MYSTERY NOVEL

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Dan Fowler and his aides cover the waterfront when a fearsome wave of murder creates deadly havoc and terror—while, with millions at stake, a criminal schemer plots to control vast shipping interests!

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# FEDERAL FLASHES



**A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET**

**T**HE man who walked into the swank Florida hotel was tall, slim and handsome enough. His face was inclined to be craggy, but he had frank eyes and a ready grin. He wore good clothes well and looked as if he worked out in a gym once or twice a week.

He was Dan Fowler, ace operator of the FBI.

Dan Fowler lost no time in getting down to business once he had registered at the desk. He looked up Jim Noonan who, by pre-arrangement, had taken a room at the same hotel. A very large, jovial man with a florid complexion, Noonan was an old friend of Fowler's, and the FBI files had him tabbed as the best sheriff in Florida.

Noonan had already been notified of the G-Man's mission in Florida. He knew Dan Fowler had come to pick up Bernie Dixon.

"Bernie Dixon is here," Noonan lowered his huge form into a chair that groaned in protest. "Been here for weeks. Comes and goes now and then. Hard to keep track of. Right now he's in his room. But why are you here? You can't tell me it's just to put the pinch on some cluck of a bank robber named Bernie Dixon."

## **Crime's Comeback**

Dan smiled. "You never were easy to fool, Jim. Of course you're right. To be brief, the old time gangs are coming back. New Capones, Kellys, Floyds and men of their ilk are beginning to emerge as leaders. The new day of the gang. The resurgence of all the crime and murder we had during prohibition. Only different this time. Smarter leaders with new ideas."

"Do you mean the men who led those

gangs years ago are back up in the saddle?" Noonan asked.

"They never climbed down," Dan told him. "They simply bided their time. Now things are ripe. We believe the headquarters of the gang leaders is right here in this hotel and that, possibly, there is one man heading the whole thing. My job is to identify him. I'm hoping I can do it through Bernie Dixon."

But Dan Fowler's hopes were soon to be blasted. Noonan went up to Bernie Dixon's room. When Fowler followed a few moments later, he found Jim Noonan, his sheriff friend, dead from a bullet that had smashed into his heart. Bernie Dixon was gone.

But Bernie Dixon hadn't left the place alive. Meeting the hotel detective, Dan Fowler learned what had happened to Dixon.

"The guy who lived in this suite just took a dive out of the window, chum," the hotel detective told Fowler. "They're sweeping him up now. Looks like he burned the sheriff first and then made like he was a pigeon. . . ."

## **Suicide—Or Murder?**

That seemed like a simple explanation. Only Dan Fowler wasn't buying any. He knew that Bernie Dixon had not committed suicide, but had been murdered so he wouldn't talk—just as Jim Noonan had been murdered.

Dan Fowler promptly got in touch with his loyal helpers—Larry Kendal and Sally Vane.

Dan drove his car out to the place where he was to meet Kendal. Within half a mile of the meeting place, he saw two trucks coming toward him. One was light, the other of medium size. Their headlights were very bright and dazzled Dan for a moment.

Suddenly, the rear truck pulled abreast of the other truck and stayed there. The intention of the drivers seemed obvious. Dan was there to be crashed into, or forced off the road into the lake that ran on both sides.

Dan Fowler realized then that his phone call to Larry had been overheard—and now this was the answer.

Dan tripped his headlights to the high beam. That would help blind the other drivers. He slid far over to the other side of the seat. He was about four hundred feet away now. Dan kicked the car door open, slid out onto the running board. Letting go of the wheel, he gave himself a tremendous shove and went hurtling out into space. It seemed as though he traveled a long distance before he hit the water with a great splash. At this same instant, his abandoned car met the other cars almost head on!

Dan stood up, questions rioting through his mind. Why had this desperate attack been made on his life? What did they hope to gain by such risks? There'd been a chance that everyone in those two murder cars might have been killed too. As it was, one of the cars had gone off the road and stood in four feet of water.

### Five Guns

There were five men in the group that piled out of the trucks, and each man had a powerful flashlight, as well as a gun. They were wading out and, hiding behind an aqueous plant, Dan caught glimpses of them as they worked around his own wrecked car. Then two or three of the flashlights centered on the rear of his car. He saw them open the trunk compartment and pull something free. It was a man's body! How had a body gotten into the trunk? Whose body was it?

That's the smash opening of the great, new Dan Fowler novel, **CRIMSON TOMORROWS**, by C. K. M. Scanlon, featured in the next issue of **G-MEN DETECTIVE**.

Thrill follows thrill as Larry Kendal and

*(Continued on page 129)*



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WITH THINE ♪  
EYES AND... ♪

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VOICE!  
WILSON! COME  
HERE, PLEASE!



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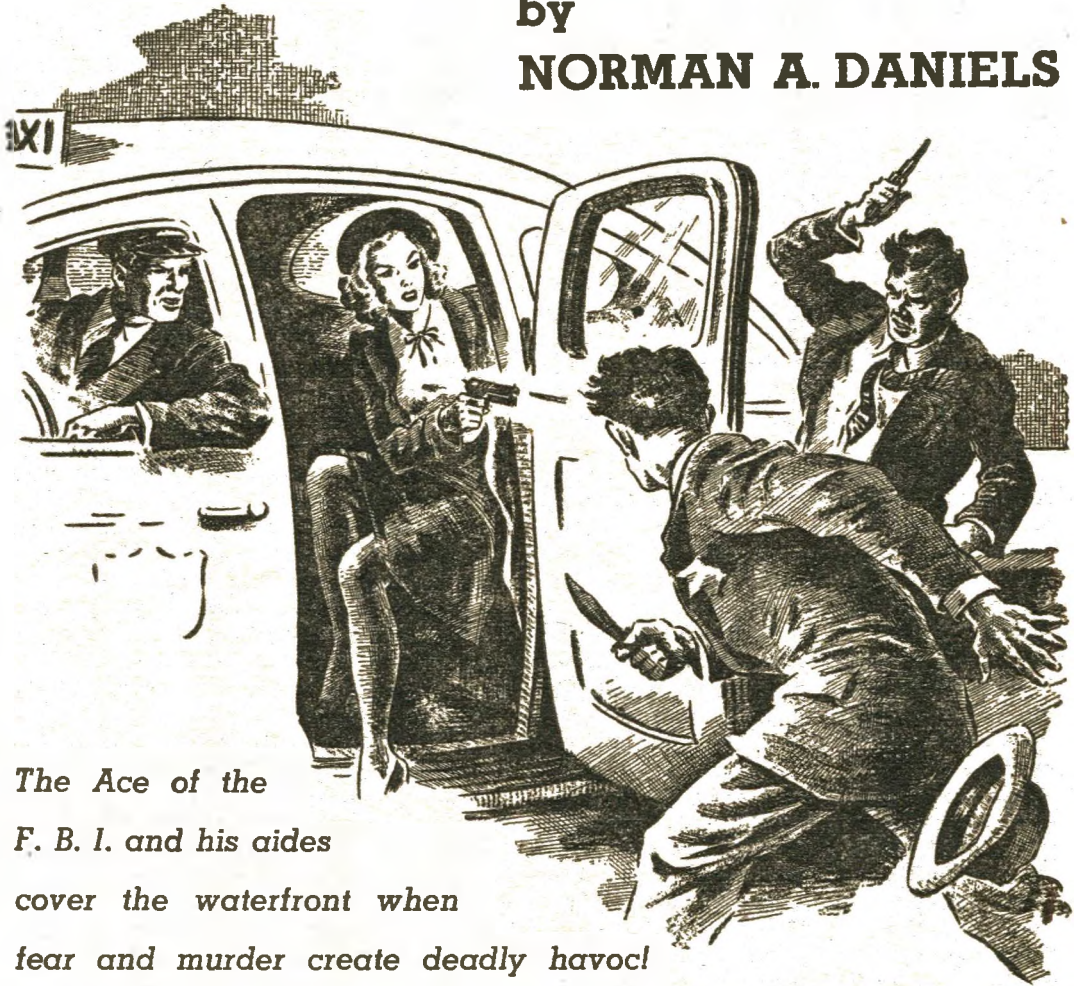
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# The Harbor of Death

by

NORMAN A. DANIELS



*The Ace of the  
F. B. I. and his aides  
cover the waterfront when  
fear and murder create deadly havoc!*

## CHAPTER I

### *Midnight Murder*

**A**ROUND the rim of the Island of Manhattan stretches the harbor and the dock area—from the Harlem River to Upper New York Bay at the Battery. Then along Brooklyn from the Narrows off 91st Street to Bush Terminal, the piers enclosing the docks point out into the bay and the rivers to

offer shelter-like fingers to ships from all over the world.

By daytime there could be a place hardly less busy than these docks. By night there are some sailings and the area is brightly lighted and noisy until the last ship is pushed into the harbor by the puffing tugs. Then an almost

**A COMPLETE DAN FOWLER NOVEL**

## **With Millions at Stake, a Criminal Conspirator**

erie silence comes over the section. The lights go out. Only the tread of patrolmen on the streets bordering the waterfront and the sound of pier watchmen break the stillness. Before dawn it is as quiet as a graveyard and then, with the sun, it bursts into activity again.

All manner of derricks and cranes sweep every conceivable type of goods from docks, over the sides of the ships and into their holds. Everything from food and clothing for the still war-stricken populaces of Europe to sleek, low built, gold and pearl embossed cars for some Eastern potentate.

Handling all these things are a breed of men who are reputed tough and are tough. They make many of their own rules and abide by them.

They are as temperamental as a head-achy opera star and unpredictable as a wild stallion.

The very nature of their work makes them tough and hard. No weakling could exist here, for the laws of nature would quickly weed out such a type. The whole waterfront is lined with stores of all kinds and cafes of mostly one type, catering to these men. They earn good money and they spend it fast as a rule.

Some of the men are brawlers by nature. The great majority of them do their hard work and then go home to their families where they live like other citizens. Among the latter type was Carl Roeder. Thick-necked, wide-faced and inclined to be somewhat stolid, Roeder had worked his way up to become pier boss. As such, he had to defend his position with his knuckles sometimes, but there were few challengers. He had thick arms and massive fists and he knew how to use them.

He also had a young, blonde, slim wife and two children of pre-school age. They were as proud of him as though he was superintendent of a great factory. Advancement along the waterfront is a real achievement. It takes tact and skill, brute force and quick thinking. It requires the handling of touchy men and touchier employers, unions, and the ever

present menace of organized gangland which preys on the area.

CARL ROEDER shook the folds of his evening newspaper into place, carefully opened it to the woman's page and placed it on the table. He stood up, stretched and yawned. His wife raised her head from her sewing, an anxious expression on her face.

"Got to go out," Roeder said. "Boy, I'd rather go to bed, but this is important."

"Carl—is it that important?" Mrs. Roeder asked nervously. "I don't like you running around the harbor front at this hour of the night. There are many of the boys who don't like you."

Roeder grinned. "Most of 'em do." His tone was casual. "The others can go jump off the end of a pier." He frowned and grew serious. "I'm not afraid of them, but lately—well, there's no sense bothering you about it."

"Tell me, Carl," she begged. "You know I'm interested. Is it more trouble about ships the men refuse to load because they don't trust the countries the goods are for?"

He stood there, the frown still on his big face. "I'm not sure I can tell you anything. Something is wrong, that's sure, but I can't put my finger on it. There are some new men—bums—in the shape-up gangs every morning. I don't like them or trust them. And whenever I'm around the big shots, like Mr. Porter, I half sense that he's worried sick."

Mrs. Roeder laid her sewing aside and looked at him pleadingly. "Carl, I wish you wouldn't go. I know the enemies you have made recently. They're bad. In the last six months there have been three murders of men like you. I get scared when you're out alone—sitting here and worrying. And tonight you act as though it's—almost some danger you're going into. If I know you—and I do—you are worried too."

He went over and put a hand on her shoulder. "My car is out front. I'll get in and drive straight to the

## Fights for Control of Vast Shipping Interests!

company offices. I won't be walking the streets and I won't stop in anywhere for a drink. So don't worry. Pretty good men have tried to take me before and never did. You don't have to be afraid."

"I don't have to be happy either." She looked up at him and smiled. "But I am—with you and the kids. That's why I don't want anything to happen. Carl—there's no union trouble?"

He chuckled. "They'll probably laugh me out of the place. But I'm to meet an important man. Mr. Porter arranged it. I don't know who this man is, but I've got a hunch about that too. I think it's a government agent."

Madge Roeder emitted a long sigh. "Then there is danger. Carl, be careful!"

He swung into his coat and reached for his hat. "I told you I'm going to



DAN FOWLER

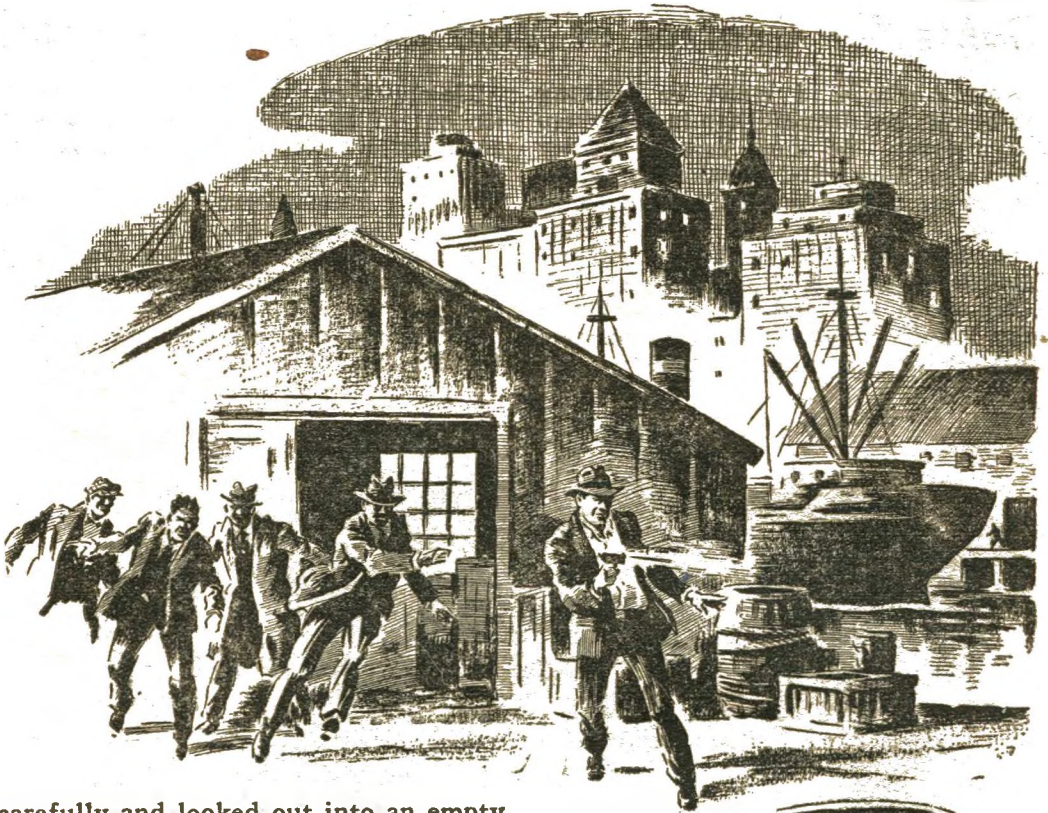
"Oh, no. Anyway that sort of thing can be handled easy. It's more than the union, Madge. I think they're trying to fight it too, but I doubt they know any more than I do about what they're fighting. That's what we've got to find out—what's behind this—this—whatever it is. So far, I think it's just a feeling, but when a man gets that on the waterfront, he knows something is going to pop."

"And you got ideas," Madge Roeder smiled. "You always have ideas, Carl."

drive all the way and if it makes you feel any better, I'll lock the car doors from the inside. Now stop worrying. Everything is going to be all right."

"I'll be here, waiting," Madge Roeder told him. "Good luck, Carl."

He closed the apartment door and walked fast down the corridor to the self-service elevator. He was worried too, and he felt badly about Madge noticing it. There'd been too much whispering, too many strangers around. He opened the elevator door somewhat



carefully and looked out into an empty lobby. It was ten of eleven, still early. There'd be plenty of people on the streets, plenty of traffic. He was worrying about nothing definite anyway, though far back in his mind he remembered the three men who had died by violence within the last six months. Men like himself, who would stop at nothing to keep the waterfront quiet and peaceful.

His car, a medium-priced eight-year-old model, was parked directly in front of the door. He unlocked it, climbed in and stepped on the starter. He began to pull away, braked and took the time to lock all the doors. Paul Bradley had been killed by two men who leaped on the running board of his car, yanked open the doors and shot him from two sides.

He headed downtown, took a cross street and was soon riding along the waterfront. The bars were open and going at full blast. Groups of men hung around the corners. At Pier 51 passen-

gers were boarding one of the luxury liners due to sail at midnight. There was the usual confusion at this point and Roeder had to weave in and out of traffic, mostly composed of cabs.

He traveled a little faster after he got through this maze and he was too intent upon trying to solve the puzzle of what was wrong with the docks to notice the old, heavy sedan that came out of a cross street just ahead of him.

He didn't see it until the big car was almost upon him. It hit his sedan on the left side, about midway. The sedan

rocked and almost toppled over. The engine died and he heard the hissing of air that escaped from a rear tire gone flat.

There was only one man in the big car and he got out quickly. So did Roeder, his thick neck slightly red in anger. He said, "What's the matter with you? Drunk or blind? You had plenty of room!"

my insurance card. Everything will be okay. Maybe you'll even get a new car out of it."

**R**OEDER looked at his own car and had to laugh. "It certainly looks like I'll need one too. Okay, accidents will happen, buddy. We'll exchange names and numbers and let the insurance companies argue it out. But step on it, will you? I'm in a rush."

Out of the corner of his eye Roeder noticed a taxi that rolled to a stop at a dark corner. Nobody got out and it



Fowler fired two more shots, and Kendal went plunging off the end of the pier (CHAP. VI)

The man blinked owlishly. "My brakes—they wouldn't work. I'm awful sorry, mister. I got insurance. I'll pay. I just don't want any trouble. Here—my license and registration card. And

was certainly no place to pick up a fare. Then he forgot that in copying down the other man's information about himself.

This done, Roeder helped push his

sedan to the curb where it would be safe until morning or until he could arrange for a wrecker to come and get it. He shook hands with the other driver, though he felt more like pasting him alongside the jaw. Roeder started walking. It was only a dozen blocks to the pier office.

The taxi didn't move. He made sure of that before he'd covered half a block. But another car was rolling up behind him. That one he didn't pay any attention to. He crossed the street beneath the speedway overhead. He began to whistle softly. Maybe there was nothing to this crazy hunch he had. He hoped not because if there was, it meant a lot of trouble and that comes by the bucketful on the waterfront when things break wrong.

The car was silently creeping closer to him now. Suddenly it stopped and two men got out. They were just darker shadows on the dark street. Roeder heard their footsteps and his heart did a double beat. He looked around. There wasn't much question about it. They were after him. Both men walked fast, had their hat brims pulled down and moved with the assurance of killers on a right and safe trail.

Roeder increased the length and speed of his steps. So did the men behind him. He broke into a run. So did the two men. He was burly, a bit overweight and a trifle soft. That came of bossing men instead of doing the hard work. He never realized his heart could pump so hard or his breath grow so short.

He covered three blocks at top speed. The slim, lithe men were right behind him. They didn't draw guns or knives, just kept on running and now more than ever, he knew just how serious his predicament was. They'd chosen their ground carefully. At this point there were no pedestrians and no traffic.

For a moment he considered coming to an abrupt stop, wheeling and charging as these men but he realized the uselessness of that. Certainly they were armed. They'd cut him down before he was within striking range.

**R**OEDER stumbled and almost fell. He was getting tired. His leg muscles ached badly, his lungs were raw

and strained. He thought his heart was going to burst its moorings. Roeder reeled to one side and his shoulder struck the wooden fence protecting one dock. His destination was only four blocks farther on. He had to keep going.

His brain told him that over and over again, but it wasn't his brain that was strained to the breaking point. He hit the wooden fence again and this time it threw him. He tripped, thrust out both hands and fell. He tried to scramble to his feet and had both palms flat on the sidewalk for an upward push when he saw the two pairs of legs.

He turned his head and looked up. A pair of guns were pointed at him. Behind them were cold-eyed, thin-lipped men.

"No, give me a break!" Roeder cried. "Give a man a chance!"

Neither killer uttered a word. Their guns flamed and kept on flaming until they had pumped four bullets each into Roeder's body and head. Roeder moaned once and grew still. The reverberations of the shots echoed and re-echoed along the canyons, but when that ceased, the silence became almost a dreadful thing.

The two killers were already at the curb and the car they had used was pulling up. They swung aboard fast and the car cut away smoothly. As it turned the next corner that same taxicab slowed with a squeal of brakes and before it came to a halt, the door opened and a man leaped out. He streaked down the street, onto the sidewalk and knelt beside Roeder.

Then he set his jaws firmly and straightened up.

**T**WO patrolmen were running toward him, but a radio car beat them to the scene. The man from the taxi stood there and raised his arms slightly at the sight of police service pistols. He was promptly seized and searched, then forced to face the pier fence and stay there.

More police cars rolled up finally. A detective lieutenant of Homicide took charge. He brought the stranger over to the police car and put him inside. He closed the door, peered intently at his prisoner and saw a man of athletic build,

a square jaw and very keen eyes.

"Let's have it," the lieutenant said. "You're a dock walloper. I can tell one of 'em a mile off. That dead man over there is Carl Roeder, pier foreman. But why am I telling you all this? You know more about it than I do. So start talking."

"No," the man said firmly. "I'm not saying a word, officer. Not one blessed word."

The lieutenant scowled. "Tough guy, huh? Maybe if I pin a murder rap on you, you won't be so tough. Listen, you'll talk. You'll tell us everything we want to know."

"Of course I will," the man replied. "But not to you. I only deal with big shots. Show me some real brass and I'll open up. I got a few things to tell, too. But not to anybody except a guy at the top."

"Maybe an inspector would be about your dish," the lieutenant said sarcastically.

The man seemed to mull that over. "Yeah. Yeah, an inspector would be just about right."

## CHAPTER III

### *Men of the F. B. I.*



INSPECTOR M A L - L O Y was gray-haired, efficient and a trifle impatient. He studied the man seated across his desk and then looked up at the Homicide Lieutenant.

"Here he is, sir," the lieutenant said. "We found him at the scene of the Carl Roeder

murder. Radio patrolmen saw him kneeling beside the body. He wasn't armed, no guns found in the vicinity and we did a negative dermal nitrate test on his fingers. He didn't do the shooting, sir."

"All right—it's routine, isn't it?" the inspector demanded.

"Yes, sir," the lieutenant agreed. "In all respects except one. This man refuses to talk. To say a word about anything unless he talks to an inspector.

He's stubborn, sir."

The inspector placed both hands on his desk, clasped them and leaned forward. "All right, you. I'm an inspector. What have you to say?"

"I'm a little bashful, Inspector." The stranger grinned slightly. "I don't like an audience. Just you and me, eh? Then I'll talk."

The inspector shrugged. He realized what he was up against. He signaled the lieutenant to leave. Then he settled back in his chair, annoyed and not caring who knew it.

"Very well," he said. "Now if all your demands are quite satisfied, I think you might begin. I'm listening."

The man's grin grew wider. "It's customary, Inspector, to ask a man's name first."

"What is it then? Look here, if you're wasting my time—"

"The name is Fowler. Dan Fowler, Inspector. And how is that rose bush you were growing the last time I saw you? That must be—let's see—two years ago."

The inspector pushed his chair back and arose. "Dan Fowler," he said in a voice of deep resignation. "How would you expect me to know you in that disguise?"

Fowler laughed. "Disguise? But, Inspector, the days of disguise are all gone. We of the F. B. I. don't believe in it. We simply adapt ourselves to a role and play it like an actor on the stage. I'm supposed to be a stevedore. Well, I am a stevedore. I actually work at it and I don't mind telling you a blacksmith has an easier job."

"I'm glad to see you again, Dan. But why all this fuss? What are you up to?"

"I wish I knew," Fowler said earnestly. "There's something radically wrong on the waterfront: We can't put a finger on it, but it's there. Gangsters have moved in. Crooks who never did an honest day's work in their lives are sweating like Trojans hauling and stowing cargo. I've been here about three days. Not long enough to even guess what goes on, but it must be important when Washington ordered me on the job and even sent me to the West Coast first to work there as a stevedore and get my card. Then I transferred here. It's a good set-up. They can actually check

me now, if they are suspicious, and I'll stand up under any ordinary scrutiny."

Inspector Malloy shucked cellophane from a cigar, bit off the tip and applied a match. When the cigar was going good, he spoke through a cloud of smoke.

"We've sensed trouble too, Dan. And when there's trouble on the waterfront, fireworks break loose. Haven't you discovered anything?"

Fowler shook his head. "Nothing. I've spent my time getting established. But there's another G-Man doing the same job. Bert Mandall has been on the docks for four months now. Even in all that time he's been unable to get a line on anything wrong."

"Then I feel a little better," Malloy said. "My boys have run up against a wall too. But look here, how come the F. B. I. is mixed up in it? You boys don't usually enter a case unless you have jurisdiction."

"Oh, we have, Inspector. Just before Bert Mandall went to work, somebody stole a Customs Department launch. That's government property and, of course, we want to find out who swiped it and why. That brought us in and we're staying."

**M**ALLOY nodded, then rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"What about this murder tonight? It's the fourth in six months."

"I know. Mandall got into contact with me earlier tonight. He was nervous and in a hurry. He told me that Roeder had some information and could be in danger. I was to pick him up and watch him. I did, not too successfully. He had an accident, which I think was rigged, and I have details enough to identify the other car—though I imagine it was stolen. Roeder set out to finish his trip on foot. I had a cab and a scary driver. I didn't have my credentials on me so I couldn't convince him and he refused point blank to continue after we spotted a pair of hoodlums trailing Roeder. I lost a couple of minutes. Just enough so I was unable to prevent the crime."

"Too bad," Malloy sympathized. "Who were the gunmen?"

"I don't know—yet. If they've been mugged, I'll recognize their pictures.

But even better than that, I have a two o'clock in the morning appointment to meet Bert Mandall at his rooming house. He may know enough so we can act. I want those killers, Inspector. I want them almost as badly as I do the men who hired them. They ran Roeder down as if he was a dangerous animal. When he fell, exhausted, they just stood there—the two of them—and pumped him full of bullets."

"I know. The same thing happened to the other pier foremen. Look here, you were so secretive about seeing me alone—do you think any policeman is mixed up in it?"

"I have no reason to suspect that, Inspector. Still, I couldn't take chances. This thing, whatever it may be, is very big. It smolders now, but when it breaks, we might not be able to control it. That's why I'm being so careful."

"I don't blame you. Say, Lieutenant Castle—the Homicide man who brought you in—will be working on this full time. You two should get together. That is, if you want to work with us."

"Of course I do," Fowler said. "The F. B. I. never turns down a chance to get help. I may need it. Suppose you send for Lieutenant Castle."

Malloy made a brief phone call. "How is Larry Kendal, by the way? And how come he isn't with you? You two work together like ham and eggs. Or always have."

"We still do," Fowler explained. "Larry is handling the open investigative end of it. I'm strictly undercover."

Lieutenant Castle came into the office and glared at Fowler.

"Did he open up, sir?" he asked Malloy.

"Take him out," Malloy instructed, "and let him go."

"Let him go?"

Malloy laughed. "Lieutenant, you put the elbow on Dan Fowler of the F. B. I. He's working undercover and naturally had to be careful. From here on he'll work with you. That hunch you have about trouble brewing on the waterfront seems to be pretty good. The F. B. I. has the same idea."

Castle grinned and shook hands with Fowler. "Of course I've heard about you, Mr. Fowler. It'll be a pleasure to



work with you. Maybe I'll learn something."

"And maybe I will too. Also, the name is Dan. I've got to get away from here. Lieutenant, I'll get in touch with you later on. Keep checking Roeder's murder. His car was deliberately wrecked by a driver whose license plates were three-Y-C-two-nine-eight-oh. You might go into that."

Lieutenant Castle showed Fowler a back way out and then returned to Malloy's office with a chagrined smile on his face. "He certainly fooled me, Inspector. I had him down for one of those wild longshoremen."

"Do tell." Malloy attacked his cigar again. "Don't feel badly about it, Mike. I didn't recognize him either, and I knew the man personally. See that the record of his arrest shows he was released after questioning."

"I'll do that, Inspector."

"Mike, you'll be working with Fowler and his side-kick, Larry Kendal. Maybe you know about those two and maybe you don't. They were with the F. B. I. before it became the mighty law enforcement agency it is now. They've grown up with it. Both are inspectors and aren't assigned to any special office. They take on hard and sometimes almost impossible cases and usually crack them. Sometimes a woman F. B. I. operative joins forces."

"A woman—in the F. B. I.?"

"Uh-huh. And don't start thinking she must look like some of our police matrons. Sally Vane could have gone on the stage if she liked. She's blonde, pretty and I once saw her snap shoot with a thirty-eight. She put all six slugs smack into the bull's eye. She's quite a girl, Mike. Oh yes, she's Dan Fowler's girl, too, just in case she turns your head a little."

Castle laughed. "I'm an old married man with a family, Inspector, but with the build-up you've given Miss Vane, I hope I meet her. How will they contact me?"

"Just wait. Keep working, naturally, but let them do the contacting. Now get on it, Mike. I really wouldn't mind very much if you brought in the murderers of Carl Roeder before Fowler did. In fact, it might even win you twin bars

instead of that single one you now theoretically wear. Good luck. Use all the legmen you need."

Castle gave him a snappy salute and went out. Inspector Malloy leaned back to enjoy his cigar. He had given Sally Vane quite a build-up. He wished he was twenty-five years younger. He closed his eyes to contemplate the idea and relish it. His phone rang. Inspector Malloy always maintained that a man's wife can make a phone ring in a manner peculiar only to her. And he had forgotten to bring home that pound of butter at dinnertime.

## CHAPTER III

### *Corpse Bait*



DAN FOWLER left Headquarters by a back door, went out to the street and paused to light a cigarette and study the area. He was positive that he couldn't be under observation. He threw away the match, walked briskly south and began crossing town.

He knew where Special Agent Bert Mandall lived while he posed as a longshoreman and he had a hunch Mandall knew a great deal. But he also realized that Mandall could be in deadly danger because Fowler knew that Carl Roeder and Mandall had been meant to meet one another tonight and Roeder had been murdered.

Fowler had already examined the neighborhood around Mandall's rooming house and he knew about a way to get in through a rear door. In fact, the key to it rested in his pocket at this moment. Mandall had supplied it with a written warning for Fowler to use all care in making the approach.

Fowler turned the corner beyond the house, went down the avenue a few steps and came to a stop. Again he looked around carefully before entering the service door of a corner apartment building. This took him to a courtyard and a six-foot wooden fence which he scaled

without much effort.

Now he was behind the rooming house. He took the key from his pocket, stepped softly to the rear door and inserted it. Mandall had seen to it that there'd be no key on the other side. Fowler let himself in, found the stairway and climbed it to the fourth floor. The house was very silent. He stepped up to Mandall's door and scratched on the panels. There was no answer after a two-minute wait so he tried tapping gently. That drew no one.

Fowler realized that if Mandall had gone to meet Carl Roeder and knew about the murder, he'd be mighty careful of his movements. Perhaps he hadn't returned yet. Fowler's watch showed him he was a trifle early anyway. He examined the lock. It was old fashioned, the kind a straight key would open.

Part of Dan Fowler's training had included the opening of locks and this one gave him a minimum amount of trouble. He swung the door wide and listened before snapping on lights.

There were two rooms, modestly furnished but very clean. He passed through the small sitting room, checked the bath and bedroom and then sat down while he waited for Mandall to show.

Ten minutes went by and now it was Mandall who was late. Fowler tapped the arms of his chair and became worried. He looked around the room, studying it carefully. There was a small bookcase with a score of dog-eared volumes on the shelves. Two of the books on the upper shelf were upside down. There was an ash tray on an old secretary. It wasn't full of ashes but some had spilled on the floor anyway. Fowler arose and went over to the desk. He pulled open a drawer. He felt certain it had been searched, though everything had been put back—just a trifle too carefully. The drawers of an average man's desk are mostly upset. This one was too tidy.

Fowler stepped to the window overlooking the rear court, and peered out carefully. He saw no one. Then he crossed the room to its single clothes closet. He turned the knob and yanked but the door was locked. The key was there though and he turned it.

Again he twisted the knob. This time the door opened easily for about an inch

and then there was a hard pressure against it. Fowler flung the door wide, stepped back and was set to attack as he caught a glimpse of a pale face and a shadowy figure inside the closet.

"Murdered!" Fowler muttered, his voice harsh in the silence of the room. "Bert Mandall won't be meeting me tonight."

The body tumbled out and lay in a grotesquely limp position that revealed the knife still sticking in Mandall's back. It had been buried hilt deep and death must have been instantaneous. Fowler examined the corpse and found the flesh was still warm. Mandall hadn't been dead very long.

"Killed because he'd learned too much," Fowler decided. "Roeder must have been on the same trail, and if they compared notes, somebody would have been in trouble. So both were murdered."

**M**ANDALL'S right fist was tightly closed as though he had clenched his hand against the pain of the wound that had brought him death. Fowler gazed casually at that hand, and then his eyes narrowed. He leaned down and succeeded in opening the fingers of the corpse enough to draw out a small slip of paper.

Fowler frowned as he found that the paper was wrapped around a semi-precious stone—a garnet. On the paper was written, "Check Mr. Mystery angle." He thrust the red stone and the paper into his pocket and suddenly a feeling of danger swept over him.

"Got you!" said a low voice behind him.

Fowler whirled to find a masked man standing in the doorway of the bedroom covering him with an automatic. The man was stocky and dressed in an ordinary suit. His hat brim was pulled down over his forehead so that it shaded his eyes and he wore a white handkerchief masking the lower part of his face.

"So you came back," Fowler said. "That was why you put the body in the closet after you croaked him."

He was thinking fast. The killer either had known or suspected that Mandall was in communication with another agent. The killer also had known that

this agent would sooner or later come to the rooming house and be spotted. Fowler was sure that was happening right now, and he had to do something about it in a hurry.

"What makes you think I killed him?" demanded the masked man.

"Aw, I was just guessin'," Fowler said. "It's none of my business. Because I'm a new man workin' on the docks this guy Mandall sends me word he wants to see me tonight. So I come here. He isn't around and the door is unlocked so I walk in."

"And why did Mandall want to see you?" the masked man asked. "That new man stuff isn't enough reason. Why?"

"How do I know?" Fowler shrugged his shoulders. "I got to lookin' around the place and found the body in the closet. Mandall didn't tell me nothin'. He was already dead!"

He casually stepped closer to the masked man and studied the initial visible on the handkerchief hiding the lower half of the man's face. It was a letter C embroidered in script.

"What made you look in the closet?" the masked man asked.

"I thought I heard a mouse in there," Fowler said. "So I opened the door and found the body." His eyes widened as he stared at something behind the other man. "Look out!"

He lunged forward and his right hand shoved against the masked man's chest as though Fowler was trying to push him out of the way of some danger behind him. The back of the man's head hit the wall at the side of the door with such force that it knocked him unconscious.

As the limp figure slid down the wall to the floor, Dan Fowler snatched away the handkerchief, took a look at his face, and then got out of Bert Mandall's apartment in a hurry. He closed the door leading into the hall of the fourth floor. For a moment he stood listening, but heard nothing that indicated there had been anybody with the masked man.

Then Fowler decided it was time to look for a phone. He saw telephone wires tacked to the wall near the ceiling of the hall. This was an old place and phone wires hadn't been run through



When Hazzard emerged, Dan Fowler followed him (CHAP. V)

the walls. He followed the wires to a room at the far end of the hall and put an ear against the door. There wasn't a sound.

Unlocking the door was no harder than Mandall's had been. Inside he moved quietly and slowly to avoid furniture in the middle of the floor. He heard no sound of anyone breathing in his sleep. The bedroom was unoccupied.

He found the phone and quickly dialed a number. A sleepy voice answered but it stopped being sleepy the moment he spoke.

"Mandall is dead—murdered," Fowler said. "I just knocked out a masked man who may be the killer. Get over to Two-Eighty-Five Oak Street. It's a rooming house. Pass the place a couple of times, act suspicious and then come in. Pretend to use a key on the front door. It is unlocked. Make it fast, Larry. I'm going back after the masked man. He should be coming out of it by now."

Fowler returned to Mandall's rooms. He found that the masked man had apparently regained consciousness and departed for there was no sign of him around. Since he did not know if Fowler had reported the murder to the police or not, it was not likely the masked man would linger at the scene of the crime.

As he waited for Larry Kendal to arrive Fowler searched the dead man's rooms—but found nothing important. Finally there was a discreet tap on the door. Fowler let Kendal in and explained the situation.

**K**ENDAL was about a year younger than Fowler, perhaps a trifle better looking and definitely sportier in his selection of clothes. They were both slimly built, of a little better than average height and there was an air of quiet confidence about them. They were thoroughly trained, beyond doubt the best-trained law enforcement officers in the world. During the years they'd developed the experience and know how which enabled them to combat crime and criminals so effectively.

Larry Kendal looked down at the dead agent. His eyes were hard, his lips tight.

"Another name for the bronze plaque

in Washington. Dan, no murderer of an F. B. I. agent has ever gone unpunished. This is not going to be an exception."

"It won't be," Fowler promised. "But merely discovering some paid killers won't avenge Mandall's death. We've got to get at the real motive behind it, learn more about this Mr. Mystery angle. Wreck whatever criminal plans required his murder. He knew too much, but unless he had time to file that information we must go over the same ground, determine the same information and live to act on it. In my opinion they suspect another agent is planted among the longshoremen. Perhaps they overheard Mandall phoning me or calling Roeder. At any rate they arranged things so if an agent did come here to meet Mandall he might not be warned away too quickly. That's why the body was stuffed in that clothes closet. The masked man may or may not be the killer; I'm not sure about that yet."

"I understand." Kendal nodded. "They're waiting to see who comes out."

"That's right. You were undoubtedly seen going in. Now, if you leave here in a rush, someone may follow you and if there is a tail, I'll be right behind him. We may be able to begin a chain reaction that will lead us to some of the big men behind this."

Kendal said, "It sounds good. And Dan, before we separate again, Sally has wangled a job at the Brightway Dry Cleaning Company on Eleventh Avenue, near Pier Forty. A block from the waterfront. She'll be on duty from noon until nine at night."

"Good," Fowler approved. "We'll keep in touch through her. Get going now—and watch it. Things may be a little rugged if they think Mandall and you were working together."

Kendal slipped quietly down the stairs with Fowler not far behind him. Kendal went out first, peering around the deserted street. Then he set out at a brisk walk for the next corner. Fowler, watching from inside the house, saw the figure emerge from a brownstone across the street. The man hurried down the stone steps and went after Kendal, keeping close to the shadows.

Fowler let him get almost to the next corner before he slipped out and began

trailing the shadower of his partner. It wasn't difficult. Kendal walked into an all-night drug store and actually reported the murder of Mandall to both the F. B. I. and the Police.

The man who trailed him stayed very close to the booth, pretending to look up a number in the phone book. It was evident that he'd heard practically all that Kendal said, for when the G-Man hurried away, the shadower made no move to follow him. Instead he emerged from the store, swung into the cross street and walked rapidly in the direction of the waterfront. Reaching Twelfth Avenue, he headed downtown for several blocks and then, with a quick look around, he entered a lunch room.

It was quite crowded. Fowler, from outside the place, saw the man nod to a short-order chef, keep on going and pass through a door which apparently led into the kitchen. Two or three minutes later two longshoremen, whom Fowler had seen around, came out that same door. Apparently all one needed for entry was the knowledge that such a door existed.

Fowler stuck a cigarette between his lips, ambled in and kept going. The chef glanced up, merely out of curiosity and then went back to his work. Fowler pushed the door open, found himself in a narrow hall and almost at once he heard the muted sounds which indicated what was at the end of the hall.

One of the poker and crap games, of which there were many, was in session here. Fowler opened the door at the end of the hall, quietly stepped behind a line of men at a crap table and closed the door softly. No one had noticed him enter.

**H**E SAW the man who had shadowed Kendal, kibitzing at a poker table. Fowler wandered around the end of the table and watched a short, cheerful dock wallop lose twenty dollars on one roll of the dice. The crap-shooter fumbled in his pockets for more money and didn't find any. With a chagrined smile he turned away.

Fowler said, "Tough luck, pal. I been watchin' you for the last hour. Nights as unlucky as this, you ought to stay home."

The dock worker laughed. "Words from a wise man. You're new around, ain't you?"

"From 'Frisco. My name is Cameron. Dick Cameron."

"I'm Culver. Everybody calls me Shanghai on account of I never been there. But I been everywhere else. Yes sir—Bombay, Trinidad, Lyons, Murmansk—brother did that place smell—during the war. I been around."

"But never to Shanghai." Fowler grinned. "You look like an honest man. If a fin would tide you over—"

"Thanks, pal," Shanghai said. "A fin don't go far these days. I'll see Uncle Bankrupt."

"Uncle who?" Fowler asked with a frown.

Shanghai laughed. He had pale green eyes that seemed to turn grayish when he was pleased. He was four inches shorter than Fowler, looked about forty and was probably thirty-five. His hair was a strange salmon color and he had the wide, muscular back of a man who works hard.

"Uncle Bankrupt," Shanghai said. "You must be a greenhorn if you never heard of him. He lends us guys dough. All he asks is we show our union card. Then we pay him back—a little at a time. He gets the name of Uncle Bankrupt on account of when he gets his hooks in you, you're busted for life."

"I know the type," Fowler said. "Every time you pay him you find out it's only interest and what you borrowed never seems to get cleared up."

"Yeah," Shanghai shrugged. "What's a guy to do when he needs dough? For me, I don't mind, but some of the boys with families have pretty tough goin'."

Fowler didn't comment. While Shanghai talked, two men had entered. They were obviously not longshoremen and they closely resembled, in build, the pair who had mercilessly gunned Carl Roeder to death. They were sure of themselves, even in this tough company, for they elbowed larger men aside and nobody showed any indication of resentment.

They went up to the man Fowler had shadowed and talked to him for a few moments. Then they spotted the G-Man and walked deliberately toward

him. Fowler half wished he had the .38 he usually carried.

One of the men said, "You're new here. How long you been around?"

"Little more than a week," Fowler replied.

"I don't mean that, you dope. I mean in this joint. Here—tonight?"

They were checking up. They were unsatisfied that Larry Kendal had been the only agent to visit Mandall's quarters. Fowler couldn't understand their importance or connection with the stevedores and he decided to feel them out a bit.

"Who wants to know?" he asked. "And why?"

The larger of the pair slapped him across the mouth once. It was not a hard blow and was meant for its demoralizing effect more than anything else. Fowler's eyes grew flint hard. His fingers curled into fists and he braced himself.

If they wanted to swap punches, he was quite willing to oblige them. Besides, it would be in character with his pose as a longshoreman. No stevedore takes a slap across the mouth.

Shanghai hastily stepped between the pair.

"Hold it, Boker," he said. "This guy is Dick Cameron. He's been here for more than an hour."

"Okay," the man called Boker spoke softly. "Tell your friend not to get so wise next time. It's not healthy."

**F**OWLER pushed Shanghai out of the way but the tough little dock walloper clutched at Fowler's arm.

"Nix, pal," he whispered. "Don't try it. They pack guns and they don't mind usin' them. It's no party for either you or me."

Fowler relaxed. Boker gave him a lopsided grin and went over to another man he didn't know. This man was rolling the dice, sweating out a big stake and in no mood to be interrupted. He brushed Boker's hand off his shoulder. Boker swung him around, drew back a fist and used it effectively. When the man went down, Boker's wide-faced friend kicked him once under the chin. Then the pair casually walked out of the place.

Fowler said, "Hey, why do the boys let them get away with this? Mugs like that!"

"Take it easy," Shanghai advised with a sigh of resignation. "There's fifty more like them, pal. If we took those mugs apart, it wouldn't do any good at all."

"I thought gangsters were on their way out," Fowler commented.

"You thought," Shanghai grunted. "Stop thinking, pal. There are more strong-arm guys around the docks than ever before. They run most of the joints. Like this one. They control the cafes—even a lot of regular stores. You get on their blacklist and you get heaved out of every one of those dumps."

"But there are other cafes, other gambling games—"

"Sure. But us dock walloppers get discounts and credit. They sell stuff cheap and they run honest games. Besides, you get along better if you don't buck 'em."

"All right," Fowler muttered. "I'll take your advice for the time bein'. This man—Uncle Bankrupt—is he one of them?"

"Who ain't?" Shanghai asked laconically.

"I'd like to meet this money lender," Fowler said. "Never can tell when I'll run short, too. A guy like that is handy to know."

"I'll see you tomorrow night. Pier Forty-three. We'll go put the bite on him together. He likes to meet new guys. Sometimes he even pays a fin or so to the guy who introduces a fresh sucker."

"I'll see you tomorrow then," Fowler told him.

"Sure. And you'll buy me a drink, pal. On account of you wasn't here for an hour before those birds came in. You wasn't here more'n ten minutes. Know what I mean?"

Fowler didn't—and he wondered about it. He went to his rooming house and practically fell into bed. He would need sleep, as it was bound to be a hard day tomorrow. In his books, no man worked harder than a stevedore. Fowler's back ached enough to keep him awake for at least five minutes.

## CHAPTER IV

*Pay or Die*

**L**ARRY KENDAL walked into the offices of the Porter Pier Management Corporation the following morning. He was ushered into the private quarters of Jabish Porter, head of the firm.

Porter was a lanky man who wore black suits and old fashioned wing collars. He didn't offer to shake hands, just indicated a chair. Kendal sat down.

"Your firm owns and operates one of our most important docks?" Kendal began.

"We operate it. An English firm owns it. We lease from them and make our money by charging ships for docking and loading and unloading privileges."

"I see. You operate only one dock, according to what I have been able to learn. Does it really pay off?"

Porter permitted himself a smile. "To the tune of several thousand dollars a day. I call that paying off. We operate only one dock now. We intend to lease more of them when the opportunity offers. It's a good business."

"These docks, then, are individually owned?" Kendal queried.

"Most of them. Some are owned by the city, some by the government. Those are rarely leased. However, fully half of the privately owned docks are under lease. It's a good way for the owner to make money without working. He simply invests, lets someone else operate the docks and sits back. He cannot lose. There are so many docks and no more and—frankly, the amount of shipping today strains each one."

"I see. Mr. Porter, have you noticed anything unusual going on lately? Perhaps uncalled-for strikes or other sorts of trouble?"

Porter looked across the desk straight at Kendal. His eyes were thoughtful, his manner somewhat hesitant. He began tapping the desk blotter with the eraser end of a pencil and his thinnish

lips grew even thinner.

Finally he spoke, "May I ask why the F. B. I. is interested in my dock, and the others of course?"

Kendal weighed the idea of telling this man the truth. It seemed logical that executives like Porter should be aware of what was happening so they'd be warned and ready for trouble. Perhaps such a warning might also remind them of items which would help in the investigation.

Kendal said, "For some weeks now, the F. B. I. has noted a gradual influx of well known crooks moving into the stevedore gangs, the waterfront cafes and stores. One incident involved government property and an agent was sent to check. That agent—named Mandall—was murdered last night."

Porter's jaw went slack. "Murdered! Why—I hadn't heard. It's as serious as that? An F. B. I. man killed! Of all the stupid things! Yes, Mr. Kendal, I'll tell you all I know. It isn't much but you're right about something being wrong."

"In what way?" Kendal asked him.

"In a number of small ways. There is no labor problem at the moment. The men seem quite satisfied with their lot. But many little things—like unexplained slow-downs, mysterious damage to dock equipment, accidents involving men and goods. Even the ships that are being loaded and unloaded are having trouble. Only yesterday a man named Bruce Robinson came to see me. He claims that he suspects sabotage because of the damage done to two of his ships in the last week."

"Sabotage may be at the bottom of it," Kendal conceded. "Not foreign sabotage but a domestic breed."

"I know what you mean," Porter said. "Pay enough and your ship and your dock function perfectly. Refuse to pay and many things happen."

"Exactly. Perhaps I should talk to this Robinson fellow. Where can I find him?"

Porter made a deprecatory gesture. "Frankly, Mr. Kendal, I don't like to get mixed up in this. At the moment my pier is running to full capacity. I can't afford trouble."

"How will trouble develop if you simply tell me where a certain man can be

found?" Kendal asked with a mild note of suspicion in his voice. "I'm not asking you to take any direct action against criminals of the type we've been theorizing about."

**P**ORTER's face showed his relief. He nodded vigorously.

"Very well. Robinson is a lazy man. He was once very wealthy but lost a great part of his fortune. His ships practically operate without his supervision and he spends most of his time at a cafe on Twelfth Avenue. The corner of Blane Street. He happens to be an indefatigable horse player and wastes his afternoons in the bar watching television of horse races or other sports on which he bets heavily. You will not, please, tell him I said this."

Kendal arose. "We don't reveal any sources of information, sir. Thanks for your help and if anything develops which you believe might interest me, call my office."

Kendal went out, slightly puzzled by Porter's rather strange manner. He hailed a cab and had himself driven to the cafe where this ship owner, Bruce Robinson, was supposed to hang out. Kendal drifted to the bar and ordered a glass of beer. The television screen was busy with horse racing and he watched it awhile.

He finished the beer and signaled for another. When the bartender came over with a fresh glass, Kendal spoke to him. "I understand there are men here who like hot tips on horses. I've got one. It takes dough to play it and I don't have that kind. I want someone with plenty in his kick. I'll cut you in if I'm steered right."

"You don't look like no tout." The barkeep was interested but wary.

Kendal gave him a crooked grin. "I'll go home and put on my checked suit and spats. You want to do business or don't you?"

The barkeep was very intent upon swabbing that section of the bar. He kept his head down so no one could notice his lips.

"Friend," he said, "in the last booth closest to the television set is a guy named Robinson. He's heeled and he's a plunger."

Kendal put down his glass. "Thanks, I'll size him up."

"Hold it," the barkeep warned. "At the moment he's a little busy with a man who wouldn't like you busting in."

Kendal laughed. "I don't mind and this tip can't wait."

"It had better on account of the guy I'm talking about is Vic Manning. You heard of him."

Kendal whistled. He had heard of Manning. Indirectly, and from a rather thick dossier at F. B. I. local headquarters. Manning was a crook with a long and involved record showing many arrests and almost as many dismissals. He was brainy, shrewd and—very dangerous.

Kendal turned, put his back against the bar and casually looked toward the last booth. He recognized Manning by his rogues' gallery photos. Manning was no broken-nosed, ham-handed thug. He was slim, dapper, wore two-hundred-dollar suits and twenty-dollar ties. His hair was light brown making him almost a blond. At the moment he was laughing and toying with a highball.

The man opposite him didn't look as if he wanted to laugh. Perhaps fifty, he was a trifle overweight and handsome enough to be called distinguished looking. He leaned across the table and spoke slowly. Kendal wished he could read lips.

Ten minutes later Manning finished his drink, arose and offered his hand to Robinson, who took it in a manner too casual to show friendship. Manning walked out, his eyes sweeping over the patrons of the cafe. They passed Kendal, came back and studied him for half a second. Kendal didn't think they showed any recognition though a man like Vic Manning would make it his business to know as many G-Men as possible.

Kendal ambled over to the booth and sat down. Robinson didn't even seem surprised. "What is this?" he asked. "Some form of protective custody?"

"Do you think you need protective custody?" Kendal inquired.

"Not from the likes of you," Robinson growled. "The only protection will be to your side. Tell Manning I haven't made up my mind yet. I don't need one



of his stooges camping on my doorstep."

"I think," Kendal said, "you're making a slight mistake." He reached into his pocket and handed over the leather wallet which contained his identification card. Robinson took it with a puzzled frown, opened the folder and snapped it shut again. He handed it back to Kendal and there were fine beads of sweat forcing their way out of the pores in his forehead.

"You fellows work like pure lightning," he said hoarsely. "How in the world did you know Manning was propositioning me?"

"I didn't—until you mistook me for one of Manning's boys assigned to keep you in check. Mr. Robinson, what kind of a deal did Manning offer?"

"I can't tell you. I won't be involved. I need time to think."

"You'll have it," Kendal said quietly. "Let's go, Mr. Robinson."

"Go?" Robinson was startled. "Go where?"

**K**ENDAL leaned across the table. "Acceding to any demands which Manning made upon you is tantamount to conspiracy, Mr. Robinson. If people didn't give in to Manning, he'd be the bum he was cut out to be. I think you'd be wise in talking. Here—instead of at my office. You see, Manning might be having you watched."

Robinson waved to a passing waiter and ordered another drink. Kendal rejected the offer of one for himself. Robinson attempted a smile. It didn't quite come off.

"You win, Mr. Kendal. I was an idiot to even tolerate the idea of keeping quiet. Manning reminded me of several accidents which happened to my ships while they were in port. Nothing big or sensational. None of them cost me very much and never received the slightest amount of publicity. Yet Manning knew all the details which is proof enough that he is responsible for them."

"How much did he want to have those accidents, so-called, cease?"

"Enough to make operating my ships almost unprofitable. And yet, what can I do? All I have is invested in them. I owe a living to many people who have been faithful to me. I'm afraid Manning may cause someone's death next. Maybe even mine, the way he hinted. Kendal, what am I to do?"

"Stall. If it becomes necessary, pay him off. Enough to keep him quiet for awhile. From here on every breath that Manning takes will be recorded. Don't give him the slightest hint that he is under observation. Play the game right, Mr. Robinson, and you'll eventually be free of this man."

"I'll do whatever you say, of course. I'm very grateful, too. If I can be of help in a direct sort of way—"

Kendal grinned. "You know horses. I just heard the video announcer say the second race was about to start. Now—in the third race, what horse is going to win?"

Robinson was startled and showed it. "Why—why I do know, but I didn't think G-Men were interested in racing."

"Not for me," Kendal told him. "I ex-

[Turn page]

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plained to the barkeep that I was a tout wanting a well-heeled customer. He named you, as I knew he would—or I'd have kept him naming men until he pointed you out. I promised him a tip in the form of a racing tip. I'd rather he kept on thinking I'm a tout."

"Whirlagig," Robinson said. "He's a sure thing at twelve to one. Tell me—if you didn't know who I was by sight, how did you know I'd be here?"

Kendal arose and chuckled. "Did I ask where you got the tip on that horse, Mr. Robinson? Thanks for co-operating."

Kendal returned to the bar, brought the barkeep leaning far across the mahogany and he dropped his voice to a bare whisper.

"Chum," Kendal said, "this is your cut. Whirlagig in the third. Play him heavy and retire."

Kendal went out, crossed the street and did a bit of counter-shadow work to insure the fact that he wasn't being tailed. Then he entered a drug store and phoned the Assistant Director in charge of the local office. He arranged to have Victor Manning watched day and night.

"And you might also keep a check on Bruce Robinson, a ship owner. He's been just a trifle too eager," he added.

## CHAPTER V

### *Window Signal*



**B**EFORE eight in the morning, Dan Fowler was in the ranks of the longshoremen waiting for the shape-up. The dock boss blew his whistle at 8:05 and Dan was assigned to a refrigerator fruit ship of the Robinson line. He quickly went aboard with the others, scrambled into the hold of the ship and took charge of the unloading net. His job was to arrange the heavy boxes of fruit in the net, see that they were balanced and enclosed well and then signal the deck men to start hoisting. It was a cream-puff job compared to what the others were doing and Dan

wondered why the dock boss had given him such a plum.

He shook out the net after the crane had sent it into the hold. Men piled it high with crates which Dan proceeded to arrange still better. When he had a load, he drew the net up and around the ton or more of freight, checked it and raised his hand.

The loaded net shot upwards at a fast speed. No time was wasted with these perishables. Dan paid no further attention to the swinging load. Not until he heard a yell from on deck. He didn't even take time to look up but did a fast sprint and then a nose dive that carried him beyond the hatch opening.

A ton of crates came down to smash and scatter not more than a dozen yards from where he'd hurled himself. If he'd been under that net he'd be as mangled as the Argentine peaches which were spattered on the deck.

Dan's throat had gone dry, his heart pumped madly. For a moment an overwhelming rage took possession of him. He even started for the companionway to seek out the boss who'd given him this assignment. Then he relaxed and permitted himself a chagrined smile. He was playing a part. A stevedore takes care of his own troubles—or he quits being a stevedore. Fowler stepped over to the badly littered deck and began cleaning it. Twice he managed to pick up strands of the broken net. These went into his pocket.

When a new net came down, he gave it a careful inspection. He said nothing about his suspicions to the men who crowded around congratulating him on his narrow escape. They respected him for it but he had an idea some of the boys were going to miss lunch today. These men thrived on excitement and there was plenty of it in the making.

At noon he went up on deck and hunted the dock boss. He found him aft, giving orders down another hatch. Fowler tapped the bulky man on the shoulder.

"Remember me?" he asked. "The guy who should have been swept up with the garbage down in hold C?"

The dock boss had a broad smile on his face. He towered four inches above Fowler and outweighed him by forty

pounds. He said, "Them things will happen."

"But always with a reason," Fowler said. "It begins by your handing me the net job. I didn't rate it. How come?"

The dock boss took a hitch in his pants and spat overside. "You trying to say I rigged that?"

"I'm not sayin'," Fowler replied. "I'm tellin'. I want to know why."

The dock boss suddenly brought up his right fist. He'd been priming it with what he hoped was enough secrecy to make the punch unexpected. But the tightening of his shoulder muscles was a dead giveaway and when the blow started, Fowler was already moving out of its path. He uncorked a punch that hit the dock boss just below the right ear. It staggered him but he came back swinging hard. He landed one blow and then a fury struck him.

First his stomach was tortured by a dozen short, fast blows. Then those same fists played havoc around his heart region, knocking the wind out of him. Finally two punches landed on his chin. The first rocked him back. The second lifted him off his feet and the fight was over.

Fowler applied a handkerchief to his bleeding upper lip and turned away. Nobody tried to stop him, none had offered any help, but they now had considerable respect for this dock walloper they knew as Dick Cameron. Like all the breed he was supposed to represent, Fowler made no effort to report the dock boss whose job it was to make certain the nets were in good shape before ordering them lowered. No one could say the dock boss had made a deliberate attempt on Fowler's life but he had exhibited enough carelessness to warrant a good beating up.

**A**LL this worried Fowler though. If this had been a genuine attempt and not a careless accident, they were still suspicious of him. At this stage of the game, when he didn't even know what it was all about, exposure would set him back to a point close to the beginning. Someone, he guessed, must have recognized him. Mere suspicion wouldn't bring on an act like that. They were quite certain of his identity. Fowler



LARRY KENDAL

had to find some way to offset those suspicions.

He did his afternoon's work without any further trouble, signed off and met Shanghai Culver at the prearranged rendezvous. Even Shanghai knew about the nearly fatal accident. Word passes swiftly on the waterfront.

"Saw that happen to another guy once," he told Fowler. "Boy, they had to swab up what was left of him. That was in—let's see now—Lisbon. Yeah, Lisbon. Great town that. Been there many times."

"You're spoilin' my appetite for dinner," Fowler growled. "Look, do you mind stoppin' at my place for a minute? I got a suit I want cleaned."

"Who's in a hurry?" Shanghai wanted to know. "All I got to do is borrow some dough. Go ahead and get your suit."

Fowler took him to the rooming house where he lived. He changed clothes there and while he washed up, he managed to scribble a note to Larry asking that the samples of enclosed netting be analyzed to see if they had been purposely weakened. He put this envelope deep in the pocket of the suit he draped over his arm when they left.

"I don't know much about dry clean-

ing places around here." He eyed several advertising signs. "Brightway Dry Cleaning. That sounds good anyhow."

They went into the place and a blonde and lovely girl looked up from her work at a small desk. There wasn't the slightest sign of recognition on her pretty face. Sally Vane could act her roles too. Fowler asked to have the suit cleaned, handed it over and as she reached for it, their fingers met beneath the garment for a second or two.

Shanghai was openly betraying his admiration. "Hey, Cameron," he said, "you can pick 'em all right. You know, come to think of it, I got a suit needs cleaning too!"

Fowler grinned. "Better get the money first. Come on, I'm hungry."

Shanghai led him to a walk-up office building above a greasy restaurant. Money-lenders require no atmosphere to draw their customers. Not on the waterfront. Shanghai betrayed considerable familiarity with the place and when they walked in he was greeted like an old friend.

There was only one man in the office and Fowler recognized him instantly. Uncle Bankrupt was more rightfully named than the jokester who'd pinned that tag on him knew. The grossly fat, four chinned, heavily jowled man who was squeezed into an oversized swivel chair, was better known to the F. B. I. as Lennie Hazzard, a confidence man of no mean reputation. A man who played nothing but sure things and left a string of bankrupt victims wherever he went.

Fowler had never come into direct contact with Uncle Bankrupt but he'd seen him in a line-up once and his face was familiar to all agents. He was shrewd and clever, trusting no one and suspecting everyone. Right now his pig-gish little eyes were studying Fowler.

Still looking at the G-Man, Uncle Bankrupt said, "Well, well, my old and good friend who travels the highways and byways of the world. How are you, Shanghai?"

"If I felt good would I be here?" Shanghai parried.

The enormous man had a mouth buried in those rolls of flesh somewhere and it showed now as he laughed good-naturedly. "How much do you want, Shanghai?"

And who's your friend?"

"Two hundred bucks," Shanghai replied promptly. "This is Dick Cameron—in case he ever gets so low he has to come here and put the bee on you."

**T**HOSE very shiny little eyes removed themselves from Fowler's face. Uncle Bankrupt opened the desk drawer, first rolling back his swivel chair for a considerable length. He took out a sheaf of bills and started counting.

"Shanghai, my boy," he said, "you're a good risk. I'll make it three hundred. You start paying next payday. Twenty bucks at a clip. If your friend wants any I'll be glad to oblige on your recommendation."

"Some other time," Fowler said. "I'm flush right now."

"You're new, aren't you?" the fat man asked.

Fowler nodded. "Yes. I worked in 'Frisco for awhile and figured New York was livelier. So I came here."

"Ah, yes." The fat man grabbed the edges of the desk and pulled himself close again. "San Francisco. Lovely place. Tell me—" he winked brashly—"are the girls as pretty as ever at the City of Paris? You know that place of course."

"Should I?" Fowler parried.

The fat man laughed with all four chins and his watermelon of a stomach. "Well, naturally," he said. "You boys enjoy those sort of places."

Shanghai finished counting his money, stuffed it into his pocket and gave the fat man a casual wave. At the door Fowler paused and looked back.

He said, "You really like 'Frisco, don't you?"

"Indeed," the fat man rumbled. "Everyone likes San Francisco."

"Then you ought to go there some time," Fowler said blandly. "The City of Paris happens to be a fancy department store on Stockton Street. See you, Uncle."

Shanghai was whistling gayly. "Well," he said as they descended the dirty stairway, "I'm heeled. Where do we celebrate?"

"On the level, Shanghai, I don't feel much like it. A guy with a long beard and a scythe stood right behind me this

morning and I haven't lost my jitters yet. I'm going to hit the hay early."

"And me with three hundred bucks," Shanghai argued. "Are you loony, pal? I said three hundred bucks."

"I know. I saw your friend count it off. That was some roll he had. He must do a pretty good business. How long has he been at it, Shanghai?"

"Two or three months. I'll give odds five hundred boys owe him dough. He's the easiest guy to borrow from you ever met. And I happen to know that some of the boys who couldn't pay him off on schedule are being carried without any trouble. Toughest place in the world to borrow dough is in Rotterdam."

"So long, Shanghai." Fowler stopped at the corner. "I hope you get four aces every other hand."

He walked off despite Shanghai's protests. Fowler needed time to think. He was getting a certain picture of this case but it was more of a frame than a portrait so far. First of all he knew enough about Uncle Bankrupt, alias Lennie Hazzard, to be certain the fat man could never have accumulated sufficient capital to run a lending business. The fat man had a reputation for easy and fast living and was perpetually broke. That needed checking but Fowler felt reasonably certain of the facts lodged in his memory.

If Hazzard was involved in whatever scheme was being hatched, it must be big for Hazzard bothered with nothing small. And Hazzard had suspected him. He'd propounded that silly question hoping to trap the newly arrived stevedore into a lie to show he'd never been in San Francisco. Perhaps the fat man had made this attempt purely on speculation and it was a trick he pulled on all newcomers. And yet, a man of Hazzard's crooked intelligence might have made it his business to know and recognize F. B. I. operatives.

Someone suspected Fowler very strongly, or perhaps even knew who he was. That attempt on his life would hardly have been made unless the man behind it realized the urgency, for the murder was worth the risk.

Fowler stepped into a convenient doorway. From this spot he could observe the lighted windows of Hazzard's

office and the dark doorway leading to it. Within five minutes Hazzard emerged. Following his elephantine figure was probably the easiest task Fowler had ever undertaken. Hazzard couldn't have lost himself in Times Square even on a New Year's eve, at midnight.

**W**ALKING slowly, the fat man waddled downtown. Apparently he didn't have very far to go otherwise he'd have taken a cab. Exercise wasn't one of Hazzard's best points. He covered seven blocks before he stopped and casually looked around. Fowler was well hidden. Then Hazzard turned down a side street, continued on as far as Eighth Avenue and after another look about, he entered one of the big hotels there.

Fowler waited ten minutes and Hazzard waddled out again, apparently bound for his office. Fowler didn't go after him. He entered the hotel, stalled until there was no one around the desk and then stepped up to the clerk. He opened the leather wallet he'd risked carrying for the evening, and showed it to the clerk.

"There was an enormously fat man here a few minutes ago," Fowler said. "Who did he ask for?"

The clerk smiled. "I wouldn't be apt to forget that tub of lard. He wanted to know the number of Victor Manning's apartment. I think he phoned him and went up."

Fowler snapped the wallet closed. "Thank you, and I'm sure there is no need to warn you to keep my visit here a strict secret."

He headed back toward the waterfront. It was only eight-thirty. He planned to pass the dry cleaning store where Sally worked, just to get a glimpse of her. Fowler had been in love with Sally so long that she seemed almost a part of his life. They planned to be married some day, when Fowler's more dangerous activities were ended. At present his life was too crammed with peril to ask her to share it. And yet, when he was at work on a case such as this, one and couldn't see much of her, there was an empty space in his existence.

He passed the store, continued on aft-

er a momentary glimpse of her and then came to an abrupt stop. In the window of the store hung one suit. It was supposed to be an exhibit of the quality of work the firm did but—that was his suit. The one he'd left with Sally not more than an hour ago. Fowler walked into the store.

## CHAPTER VI

### *G-Man Tactics*



**M** ECHANICALLY Larry Kendal, busy writing a report of his and Fowler's work, reached for the buzzing telephone. It was a clerk in the reception room. Bruce Robinson was there with an urgent request to see Kendal.

Robinson looked worried when he came into the office. He sat down, crushed out a half smoked cigarette and lit another before he got his breath back.

"Well," he said, "you asked me to inform you when something happened. It has. About an hour ago a man came to my apartment. He wouldn't give his name but he wanted to sell me some information. Vital stuff, he said. He sounded honest enough and was willing to talk just on my promise to pay him what I thought it was worth."

"And—was it?" Kendal inquired.

"I think so. I gave him a hundred dollars and he seemed delighted. What he had to tell me was this. Someone intends to set fire to one of my ships to-night."

Kendal whistled sharply. "Which one? What other facts do you know?"

"The *Santa Juanita*. She's due to sail day after tomorrow, as soon as her cargo is loaded. That's all this fellow heard. He claims he got the information from a member of the gang who had been drinking too much."

"Thanks for telling me," Kendal said. "I wouldn't worry too much about this. It may be simple propaganda, but whatever the motive, I doubt any harm is intended to your ship."

"But this informant swore they meant

to destroy it."

"I doubt it, Mr. Robinson. In the first place, no member of that gang would let such a thing slip, drunk or sober. And how would a casual listener know it was your ship and know where to reach you so quickly? And would he be content with a mere hundred-dollar reward for something worth thousands? You are being intimidated and this is the first step. But, of course, I'll act on this information anyway."

Robinson stood there, rotating his hat slowly around one finger. "I wish I could be as confident as you, Mr. Kendal. You make it sound all right too. Frankly, the loss of that vessel would just about break me. It's insured—oh, yes—but try and find another one in a hurry."

The moment Robinson departed, Kendal phoned the dry cleaning place where Sally worked.

He said, "It's vital that I reach Dan. Has he come by, Sally?"

"He was here half an hour ago and left some strands of rope for laboratory study. Perhaps he may come by again. I'll try to arrange some sort of a signal and also keep an eye out for him."

"Good girl," Kendal approved. "If you do get in touch with him tell him I'll be waiting in a car at Tenth and Sixty-third."

Kendal had an hour and a half wait at the designated spot until he saw Dan Fowler ambling casually along. Fowler stopped just beyond the car, lit a cigarette and studied the street. Then he quickly climbed in beside Kendal.

"I hope you've got something," Fowler said tightly. "I've made very little headway and only succeeded in making myself the target of a killer."

"As bad as that." Kendal exhaled slowly. "Dan, Bruce Robinson, who owns a ship now in dock, was given information that the vessel was going to be destroyed. Apparently because he was stalling about doing business with Vic Manning who, incidentally, has made a direct approach."

"The *Santa Juanita*," Dan said. "The same ship where I almost got myself squashed to a pulp. Go on."

"I think the tip was a phony, meant to be passed on to us, but I can't see any

reason why."

"I can," Fowler told him. "They found out that Mandall was a Special Agent. They know he communicated with some other agent and they still believe this second man is also working under cover. They want to smoke him out. Those men suspect me—or did at any rate. The attempt on my life was real enough. If I was killed, all well and good. Should I have been an agent, they were rid of me. If it was a mistake—well, just another dock wallop fell victim to an accident."

"Do you think we ought to act on this information?" Kendal asked.

**F**OWLER frowned slightly. His eyes took on a far-away look.

"Yes. We can't take any chances. I know that pier well. It's protected by a single watchman whom we shall have to dispose of. Larry, what of this Vic Manning business?"

"It looks to me as if he's beginning a gigantic shakedown racket, Dan. You know Manning. He's usually well supplied with money, about as relentless as a hungry wolf and organized to handle a thing of this kind. We could jump him, I suppose, though we've precious little to use as evidence."

"It's too early for that sort of action," Fowler agreed. "We're not even certain that Manning is actually behind it and even if he is, he may have an associate. This shapes up to something more than mere shakedown work, Larry. Every dock wallop who hasn't been working here at least a month or two is under suspicion. These men move slowly, carefully—as if they can't risk destroy-

ing something that will pay far bigger dividends than a shakedown."

"You've discovered nothing, Dan?"

"Very little. I believe some of the stevedores are being used. Probably tricked into gambling away their pay and being staked to more. Then this is taken away until they're under a gambler's thumb. There is a money lender who puts on the squeeze, a confidence man named Hazzard who never has fooled with small stuff. I'm certain he's in on it."

"I see the picture," Kendal said. "Get enough desperate men to pull small jobs of sabotage and the over-all result can mean bankruptcy to ship owners. That coincides with Vic Manning's methods."

"Except that Manning has always been more direct. This is being done through careful planning. Maybe we'll pick up Hazzard. I'm sure he's implicated. But first we have the problem of the *Santa Juanita*. We'll go over, sneak onto the dock and see if there is anything wrong. It may be a trap, so watch yourself."

Kendal drove over to the waterfront and parked the car several blocks from the pier where Robinson's ship was tied up. They formulated a plan, taking into consideration the fact that this could be a trap. Kendal went ahead first, openly approaching the pier gate. In a few moments he got the watchman to open it.

Kendal said, "I'm from the F. B. I. I want to look around that fruit ship."

The watchman, an unsavory character with an oddly stubborn nature, thrust out an arm to block Kendal's path.

[Turn page]

**Fast HELP for**  
**HEADACHE**

**UPSET**  
**STOMACH**

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"You ain't looking around no ship without permission of Mr. Porter who owns the pier. Not even if you're the whole Marine Corps. Beat it."

"But—" Larry protested.

The watchman cut him short. "I said beat it before I get sore and slug you one."

Kendal quickly saw the pattern of the plan. Any Special Agent who tried to reach the ship openly was to be delayed. Therefore, if another Agent was working under cover he'd be compelled to show himself. The threat to the ship was important enough to call for fast action.

Kendal and Fowler had made their plans accordingly and Kendal proceeded to put his part into operation. He laughed at the husky watchman and attempted to brush him aside. A big hand descended on his shoulder and he was yanked back and given a shove toward the open gate.

Kendal came back fast. He tapped the bigger man lightly on the chin, ducked a roundhouse that left the watchman wide open and finished him off with a straight punch to the jaw. It was delivered with enough force to jar Kendal's arm to the shoulder.

He dragged the watchman into a dark spot and then waited. In a moment Fowler materialized out of the darkness. They closed the gate, concealed the watchman behind a row of crates waiting to be stowed aboard the ship and then they proceeded to reconnoiter the pier.

There was a skeleton crew aboard ship, all probably asleep. Nothing moved on the pier, though the rows of crates could have concealed a small army of men.

Fowler said, "I'm going aboard and make my way forward to a spot where I can see over the pier fence. If anyone approaches, I'll signal. Meantime you explore the wharf. If we find nothing, you'd better wake the crew and have them help you inspect the ship. Be ready to act fast. My feeling that this is a trap grows stronger every minute."

**D**AN FOWLER reached a point well forward on the ship. There he couched and watched the cars and

pedestrians that passed along the street. He didn't have very long to wait. A sedan pulled up close by a street light and two men got out. They were the pair he suspected of being the murderers of Carl Roeder.

Fowler gave a low whistle which was instantly answered by Kendal. It was time to put their emergency plan into action. Moving very fast, Fowler left the ship, sprinted along the pier until he came to the watchman who was beginning to moan a trifle: Fowler raised his head.

"What's up?" he asked. "It's Cameron. I work on the pier. I saw the gate open and just stumbled over you."

"I—don't know. Crooks I guess. I was hit by a guy who never gave me a chance to swing on him. Help me up and I'll get the rat."

"You're still punch-happy," Fowler said. "Stay here until you feel steadier. I'll hunt the guy. If you want to call the cops, go ahead but I'd rather handle this my own way."

He hurried along the wharf again. Kendal was waiting for him but Fowler paused until he heard sounds of men reaching the other end of the pier. Then he gave a yell and charged at Kendal. Both G-Men met in what looked like desperate combat. There were blows exchanged, some of them much more real than were intended. Fowler took a punch that would blacken the side of his face by morning and he felt his knuckles rap against Kendal's jaw.

Kendal reeled back, tripped and fell. Fowler hurled himself upon him and they struggled ferociously.

Fowler whispered, "Good luck. This must look mighty real, Larry. Everything set?"

"Let's go," Kendal gasped.

Fowler reached under Kendal's coat and yanked the .38 free. He got to his feet. Kendal arose, lunged at Fowler and then turned and ran. He headed for the end of the pier, the part that juts out over the river. Fowler knew men were hurrying up behind him but he paid no attention. He raised the gun, sighted it and fired. Kendal gave a visible jerk as the explosion sounded but he kept on going. A trifle slower, but it looked as if he was going to get clear.



Fowler aimed and fired two more shots. Kendal was at the end of the pier now. He came to a stop, threw up both hands and spun around. He fell, gave a convulsive contortion and went plunging off the end of the pier into the river.

Someone grabbed Fowler's gun arm, twisted it and got the weapon out of his hand. It was the killer called Boker and with him were three men of similar type.

Boker said, "You idiot. That was a G-Man."

"And who are you?" Fowler demanded belligerently.

"Never mind that. We've got to get away from here. Those shots may attract attention."

Fowler made a grab for his gun. Strong hands pinned his arms back and held them there.

Boker put Dan Fowler's gun in his own pocket.

"Stop being a sap!" he warned. "We're trying to help you. Listen—I'll arrange with the pier watchman to say he fired those shots at a prowler. They won't find the G-Man's body until some time in the morning."

"Hey, Boker," someone whispered, "there's a radio car pulling up."

"Duck," Boker ordered. "The watchman knows what to do. Stay hidden, you hear?"

Eventually four patrolmen arrived on the pier and the watchman told them about his mythical prowler and how the man had swarmed over the fence and escaped. The cops left after a mild exploratory trip along the pier. They accepted the watchman's word because they had no reason to do otherwise and sneak thieves were common around the docks.

Fowler wasn't being held any longer. The watchman joined them and they proceeded to his little shed near the gate. A few sailors aboard the ship returned to their bunks, convinced the excitement had died away. None of the gang had been seen.

The watchman said, "Yeah, I know this guy." He indicated Fowler. "Not his name, but he works here. Nearly got killed this morning, just before I went off duty. He's okay."

**B**OKER was still to be convinced. "What were you doing around here?" he asked Fowler.

The G-Man answered gruffly. "A pal of mine and me had some business which we took care of. My pal was going gambling but I'm a little short and didn't want to chisel off him so I took a walk. I happened to come by here and saw the gate open. I know the rules about that so I figured something was wrong."

"The gate was closed when we arrived," Boker said.

"I closed it. Think I wanted a flock of cops barging around? How did I know what was going on? Anyway, I found the watchman and he told me somebody had conked him and there was a crook running loose. I spotted the guy—"

"Why did you shoot him?" Boker wanted to know.

"Maybe I like to shoot people," Fowler snapped. "And I'm getting sick of answering your questions. Oh, I know you guys are okay or I'd be handcuffed to a cop by now, but I still don't see how it's any of your business."

"It's plenty of our business," Boker said. "There's one thing you don't know and it puts you on a nice spot, my friend."

"You're going to tell me again the guy I plugged was a G-Man," Fowler said. "So what? I knew he was a G-Man. He told me so when he tried to scare me into quitting. I don't scare and I don't like G-Men. I haven't liked them for a long time."

"You're in good company," Boker said. "I don't mind telling you we figured you might be one of those snoops. Mr. Mystery doesn't like them either. One of our boys was pretty sure he recognized you."

"Me?" Fowler laughed harshly. "If there weren't so many of you, I'd smack your ears down for that crack."

Boker glanced at his sullen faced companion. "Looks like a man we could use. But first, let's go see about that G-Man. Maybe he's not dead though I'll swear our friend here winged him good."

"He plugged him—the G-Man is dead," the sullen faced man said. "I seen men die before. That one is dead."

They took Fowler with them to the

end of the pier. The other men stayed near the watchman's shack. Boker had a small flashlight and sprayed it around until the beam centered on a pool of blood.

"Look—there," he said. "Cameron, you got him good. He's dead all right. Nobody spills that much blood from a bullet hole and goes on living."

And Dan Fowler almost threw away all the advantages this act had gained him. He wanted to dive into the harbor after Kendal. That blood did indicate a bad wound. It was highly possible that he'd really hit the target he was trying barely to miss. Kendal might be down there, in the dark, swirling water, wounded or dead.

Then Fowler set his teeth tightly. He and Kendal had always maintained that if one died, the other would go on. There was nothing else to do. But Fowler could have taken it better if a gangster's bullet had killed Kendal and not one he had fired.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Assignment to Murder*



**T**O FOWLER, after that, the rest of the evening was mostly a nightmare. Predominant in his mind was the fact that Larry Kendal might be dead. It was a fight for him to shunt the thought out of his brain and leave room for thinking of how to end this case and

avenge Kendal if he was gone.

Things happened fast. Fowler was taken to a car parked on the street opposite the pier entrance. Boker and the somber-faced man got in with him and there was a driver who looked as if he was more at home behind a bar than a wheel.

"Where are we going now?" Fowler asked.

"To see the boss," said Boker. "I figure he'll be interested in a guy like you. Ain't that right, Stiles?"

"Maybe." Boker's sullen companion gave a grunt. "Hard to say."

The car started rolling across town. Fowler sat in the back with Boker on one side of him and Stiles on the other. Gradually Fowler's fear of having slain Larry Kendal was leaving him. He recalled how he had aimed and knew his bullet couldn't have made a hit. Not unless Kendal happened to move in front of it. This might have happened because Kendal had been hardly more than a blur at the end of the pier.

The car pulled up before a three-story private home in the East Sixties. It required wealth to maintain one of these places, and Fowler's hope of meeting Mr. Mystery grew stronger than ever. He felt certain they no longer suspected him. Kendal had put on such a good act—if it was an act, as Fowler prayed—that Fowler was now regarded as a ruthless murderer who didn't hesitate to kill an F. B. I. man.

"Go tell the boss we're here, Stiles," Boker said. "We'll wait and see if he wants us to come in."

"Yeah," Stiles said.

He got out of the car and went up to the house door and rang the bell. He was quickly admitted.

"Everything is okay, Cameron," Boker said. "Stiles is going to break the ice. We were suspicious of you and every other newcomer to the docks because we were tipped that an F. B. I. man was working under cover. Maybe he was the one you knocked off. Level with me now—how many other killings have you done?"

Fowler gave a raucous laugh. "Suppose you answer the same question first. How many have you killed?"

Boker chuckled. "Okay, friend. We'll let it go at that. Only when you knocked off that Federal man, you proved you can't stand up under a pinch."

"What makes you think that?" Fowler asked.

"He was going to take you in and that's why you let him have it," Boker said. "So you must be a right guy and I'm bringing you here to meet the boss. It will mean a lot of money to you. More dough than you ever dreamed of having. Sound good?"

Fowler nodded. "Enough to get me off them piers is all I ask. But I've got to know what this is all about before I

tackle any kind of job. I get the low-down or we might as well wash it all up right here."

"You'll be told when the right time comes." Boker watched a window blind being raised and then lowered again by someone in the house. "Okay, let's go in. And remember this—the man you are going to meet is a smart guy. I don't mean just some big shot mug. I mean he's educated and knows his way around."

Fowler wondered if Mr. Mystery would be Vic Manning, the racketeer now preying on the dock area. But Boker had practically eliminated him, for Manning was by no means educated. It could be Bruce Robinson, who owned the *Santa Juanita* and who claimed that Vic Manning was intimidating him. What Robinson's motives could be, Fowler didn't know. He reasoned that even Jabish Porter could be involved.

The operator of the pier also had no motive, but Fowler felt certain that so far no trace of the reasons behind the crimes had been set forth. Most of the trouble seemed to have centered on the pier that Porter operated, and Fowler suspected the whole thing might be the work of racketeers.

Fowler had never seen Porter or Robinson but Kendal had described the men. Vic Manning he would be able to recognize from rogues' gallery shots he'd seen. He followed Boker up the steps of the house. Stiles, of the inexpressive face, let them in.

"All right?" Boker asked.

"Yeah," Stiles said.

**B**OKER kept on going until they reached what turned out to be a small but beautifully appointed study. Here the blinds were drawn and the room was dimly lighted. Only one man was present. He sat behind a small desk, his face half hidden in the shadows. There was something mask-like about his features.

He had gray hair and a gray mustache and was quietly dressed. On his little finger on his left hand was what looked like a wedding ring. At least it was a gold band. Fowler wondered why the man would wear a wedding ring on his little finger.

"Here he is, boss," Boker said. "The

man I told you about. You said you wanted to see him."

"That's quite true." The man behind the desk studied Fowler for a moment. "I have heard quite a lot about you, Cameron." His voice was smooth, cultured. "And found it interesting, yes, very."

Fowler decided he should put on some sort of an act. He was supposed to be a dumb dock wallper and he had to act in a way that would convince the man he was a roughneck. He permitted a sneer to curl the corner of his lips.

"Who are you?" he demanded curtly.

"Suppose you just call me Mr. Mystery and let it go at that," said the man behind the desk.

"Oh, yeah," said Fowler. "You sound like one of them characters in a horror picture." He laughed. "Mr. Mystery—that's a hot one."

"I wouldn't advise you to find me too amusing," Mr. Mystery said coldly. "It might not be healthy."

"What's the idea of all this?" Fowler growled. "I been practically snatched and brought here. Why?"

"Why?" Mr. Mystery smiled, and in the dim light his face glistened like rubber. "That's quite simple. My dear fellow, we want you to kill someone for us."

Fowler's jaw dropped. It was no part of an act. He hardly believed that even Mr. Mystery would be so frank about it.

"Kill?" he said dazedly. "Look, you want a guy knocked off, get yourself some lug who makes that a profession. I knocked off the G-Man because I had to do it. That was different. But for me to just plug a guy because you don't like him—nothing doing!"

"You misunderstand us, Cameron." Mr. Mystery sounded deeply hurt and Fowler decided the man was an excellent actor. "The man you wish killed stands in your way, too."

"Yeah?" said Fowler doubtfully. "How come?"

"Because you are now one of us," said Mr. Mystery. "Yes, one of us with a share in the proceeds of a plan we cannot put into execution until this person is dead. To put it more plainly, there's big dough in it for all of us, Cameron."

"Oh, that might be different." Fowler walked over to a chair and sat down. "I told Boker I've got to know what it is all about before I get into any deals. First this Mr. Mystery stuff is a lot of bunk to me." He stared at the man behind the desk. "What's your name, and what's the deal?"

"But, Cameron, what you ask is impossible." Mr. Mystery's tone was impatient. "I have no intention of revealing my identity to you. Even my own men don't know that. Besides, the information would be of no use to you. And the less you know about our plans the better."

"Why?" demanded Fowler.

"Shall we say for our protection—and yours? If you happen to have a bit of bad luck and are arrested, you cannot talk about something you do not know. Isn't that true?"

"Count me out," Fowler said coldly.

"You're in, Cameron." Mr. Mystery's voice grew hard and menacing. "You can't pull out now. We needed you and took a chance bringing you here. You will work with us!"

"And if I refuse?"

"That will be unfortunate—for you. Then we shall have no alternative but to see that the Federal Bureau of Investigation finds you. With the gun you stole from the G-Man you murdered. It will mean the electric chair, Cameron."

Dan Fowler could also do a good job of acting when the occasion demanded. He seemed to wilt as he sat there in his chair, all the braggadocio gone.

"You—you wouldn't do that?" he stammered.

"We would," said Mr. Mystery firmly. "Unless you are willing to work with us and ask no questions."

"All right," Fowler said, the hardness returning to his voice. "I know when I'm licked. Sure, I'm just the guy for you. I'm a killer already so what have I got to lose?" He scowled. "You got enough on me to make me do anything you like. But get this—I come in on the cut. Either that or I'll gun up this place until there's nobody left—"

"Aw, shut up!" Boker snarled. "Maybe a good smash in the nose would stop all your big talk."

HE MOVED toward Fowler with sledge hammer fists lifted high. Fowler rose from his chair and stood tense and ready. He didn't want to fight Boker here and now, for he felt it would spoil things if he did. All the same he had no intention of taking a beating.

"Never mind, Boker!" commanded Mr. Mystery. "Let him alone. I like a man with spirit."

Boker cursed under his breath and moved away. Fowler again seated himself in the chair.

"Very well, Mr. Cameron," said Mr. Mystery in the tone of one arranging a business deal. "You will be told the name of the man you must kill." Casually he twisted the ring on his little finger and Fowler saw it had been turned so the top part of it was on the lower side of the finger. The setting of the ring was empty. "The deed is not to be done at once."

"Why not?" asked Fowler in surprise.

"Because it must be done right, with no slips. During the next twenty-four hours you will study this man, his actions, his home. Select the time and place so you can get away. You will have plenty of help. Is that clear?"

"Yeah," said Fowler. "Name him and you'll get yourself one dead man."

"He's a rather important person. His name is Jabish Porter."

"The man who owns the wharf where I work?" Fowler asked with pretended incredulity.

"That is the man," said Mr. Mystery. "Are you averse to killing him?"

Fowler rubbed his hands and gave what he hoped was a wolfish grin. "Why should I be? He's a tight, money-grabbing scoundrel. I saw him once and I didn't like what I saw."

"Good," said Mr. Mystery in a tone of dismissal. "Boker will show you out. From here on you're on your own, Cameron. Report for work on the pier as usual. Maintain the same friends but reserve the evenings for yourself so you may become very familiar with Mr. Porter's habits. When the time to strike approaches, you will be given ample warning."

"And I don't get a dime out of this now?" Fowler asked. "I could use some dough."

"I believe you have been rewarded sufficiently," said Mr. Mystery. "We gave you back your life, Mr. Cameron. Good night."

They really trusted him, for half an hour later Fowler was positive that he had not been trailed from that house. There wasn't time to seek a quiet spot and rest so he might try to think this out. Above all else, he had to know about Larry Kendal first.

There was no sense in hunting Kendal. Fowler didn't dare approach or even phone the F. B. I. offices. Always he believed in the theory that there might be a shadower smarter than any F. B. I. man and a slip now would ruin everything.

He wandered somewhat aimlessly, to all appearances, and got his first set-back when he found the dry-cleaning store closed. He couldn't find out from Sally what had happened. There was nothing else to do but go to his room and wait. Sooner or later contact would be made in some manner.

He let himself into the hallway, climbed the stairs quietly so as not to disturb the other roomers. He inserted his key, turned the knob and stepped into his darkened room. Instantly he was aware that someone lurked in that gloom.

"Dan—Dan," a familiar voice whispered.

He closed the door behind him quickly, snapped on the light and opened his arms for Sally Vane. He held her close for a moment, incapable of saying a word. If she was here alone it meant that Larry Kendal—

Then Fowler let go of Sally and stared at the man who came from the bathroom. He was grinning widely. There was a strip of adhesive on the side of his face and it threatened to crack off from the broadness of his grin.

"Larry!" Fowler exhaled the word. "I ought to take you outside and rub your nose in the dirt. Scaring me that way."

Kendal laughed. "It was deliberate. Of course, if it happened you didn't come home alone, only your girl would have been here to meet you but then—you deserved a scare. That last slug you pumped at me burned my ear off. And

that last punch—well, see for yourself. You opened up a beautiful cut and it bled like blazes."

"I know," Fowler said, still limp with relief. "I saw the blood and that's why I wondered if I had put a slug through you. How did it go, after you tumbled into the harbor?"

"Fine, Dan. I swam way under the pier, hung onto a pillar and stayed there until everybody went away. Then I swam up the river a bit, found a deserted dock and climbed up on it. I went to the hotel, got a change of clothes and reported to the office. I also telephoned Police Headquarters and tomorrow morning's newspaper will have a small item saying the body of an unidentified man was taken from the harbor. He'd been shot to death. Those gorillas will think the cops are trying to hide the fact that it's the corpse of a G-Man."

"And you?" Fowler turned to Sally and held her at arm's length. "How is your part of it coming?"

She said, with a sniff of derision, "What part? Working in a store and acting with no more intelligence than a mail-box?"

They all sat down and to be on the safe side, Fowler extinguished the light. "We've plenty to talk about. I need a sound briefing on events so far. Then I'll tell you all about the way I intend to murder Jabish Porter."

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Lie Detector Test*



WHEN Fowler had told Kendal and Sally of his visit to Mr. Mystery, the three F. B. I. operators discussed the case from all possible angles. The relief at finding Larry Kendal alive and practically unharmed left Dan Fowler feeling light-headed, so he let the

others do most of the talking.

"Of course this Mr. Mystery may not actually be the boss," said Kendal. "But merely a front for someone else. Vic Manning is only trying to take over the

rackets connected with the dock workers. It is possible he is behind the whole thing, but somehow, I don't see his heavy touch. Manning moves with all the grace of a rhino. So far, we've found little of that."

"What of Bruce Robinson?" Fowler wanted to know.

"I can't tell. He could be working with Mr. Mystery, or with Vic Manning. He claims Manning is demanding money in return for freedom from accidents and such, to his ship."

"The old protection racket," said Sally.

"Right." Kendal nodded. "But it could be a false lead. Robinson lives high and has always been a big spender. He needs money and some of his business transactions have smacked of tactics used by Captain Kidd."

"There's a good reason for a lot of the stevedores being gradually taken over—put in debt to a money-lender and to gamblers," said Fowler. "Somebody is selecting certain dock wallpers so that when the time comes, this man can wield a whip and force those boys into line. Maybe his original gang is small and he feels he may need more men later."

"Jabish Porter leases the dock where most of the trouble has happened and he stands to lose by accidents, work stoppage and the like," said Kendal. "But if he loses a little money temporarily and he gains possession of three or four more docks when absentee owners get sick of this trouble, he'll stand to profit handsomely. Besides, he told me frankly he wants to take over more docks and that running them makes him a lot of money." Kendal grinned at Fowler. "But then, you're going to kill him so we can rule him out."

"It seems so," Fowler said slowly. "Just the same, Porter isn't going to know one thing about the plot against his life unless there is no other way out. You'd better remove anyone watching him. I don't want to mix it with a G-Man."

Kendal shrugged. "We've had all of them covered without any results. That's the trouble with this case. They pull something like the murders of Carl Roeder and Burt Mandall and then they pull in their necks."

"But always they keep operating quietly, and there is one weak point," Fowler said. "A confidence man named Lennie Hazzard. He runs a money lending business two blocks east of the store where Sally works. Our best bet is to let the police handle him as a routine matter. I'll contact Lieutenant Castle of Homicide. He's on the Roeder murder. He can arrange to take Hazzard in. The man won't talk, he's too smart, but there is a way to make him betray himself."

"A con-man like Hazzard is pretty tough, Dan," Kendal commented.

"I'll have Lieutenant Castle pin a mythical charge on him. About a con-man who was fat enough to match Hazzard's description and pulled a fancy stunt on some citizen. Hazzard will deny it, naturally, and he won't be afraid of a conviction because he really is innocent. Therefore, if a lie detector test is suggested, he'll jump at it. A lie detector can't convict a man but it can just about establish his innocence."

"But how," Kendal asked, "is a lie detector test going to make him admit enough to help us?"

"I'll have him look through a batch of photographs. Included in them will be pictures of Vic Manning, of Robinson and Jabish Porter. Also shots of the two men who I know murdered Carl Roeder. One is named Boker—the other one's tag is Stiles. Hazzard's reactions to those pictures should tell us plenty."

"And where do I come in?" Sally asked. "Or do I spend my time hanging suits in the window of my store?"

**W**HEN Fowler answered her, it was plain he spoke with reluctance.

"I've something definitely dangerous for you. Carl Roeder was a happily married man with a young wife who happens to be as blonde as you and about your build," he said. "It's natural that if Roeder knew anything, he'd have told her. So long as Mrs. Roeder makes no move, she'll be quite safe but if some of the boys from the office go down and talk to her—take her to see the Assistant Director—all that sort of thing—it will seem as if she knows something. They may strike at her."

"Do you think it's safe, putting her in a spot that way?" Sally asked.

"No, I don't. That's why I'm asking you to take her place."

Sally's lips spread in a wide smile. "Now you're talking. It might work at that. What happens if they try to snatch me—or maybe take me for one of those little rides?"

Fowler said, "You pack a gun. Use it, Sally. Use it fast and shoot straight. Boker and Stiles are cold-blooded killers. Don't take the slightest chance with them or any of their breed. Larry, see that enough men are always planted around to pitch in and help if Sally gets herself in a jam."

Kendal arose. "I'll see about it right away. Tomorrow I'll have a full report in Sally's hands. That is, if she continues to work in that dry-cleaning store."

"She must," Fowler said. "You're our only contact, Sally. Handling Mrs. Roeder must be done after store hours. I'll be in tomorrow after that suit. If I have any news, I'll pass you a note."

"And meantime, how are you going to operate?" Kendal asked.

Fowler chuckled. "I have to kill a man, remember? Seriously, I'm going back on the pier in the morning just as if nothing has happened. I've got high hopes now that I'll get beyond the stranger who assigned me to murder Porter. I don't think that man heads the outfit. He takes his orders like everyone else, but through him I may reach the top."

Sally held his hand tightly between her own. "Dan, you're not fooling me this time. You're head over heels in one of the most dangerous cases you've ever tackled. Those men will kill you instantly if they find out who you are. Dan, be very careful. For me."

"For you," he assured her quietly. "I promise. Now you two slip out of here and be very careful about it. Don't forget, Larry, that you're a dead man. I doubt anybody recognized you last night but if they did—and you are seen—they'll kill me before I know what's happening."

Fowler gave them plenty of time to leave. Then he sauntered out himself and after a fifteen minute walk, entered a drug store and phoned Lieutenant Castle of Homicide. He identified himself.

"I need your help, Lieutenant. I want a con-man picked up by your Forgery Squad. Tag along with them because while I'm having this man presumably arrested for a con game, murder is really behind it. Have the Forgery Squad boys accuse him of some well known and unsolved confidence man crime. He'll deny it, because he'll be innocent. Get him to submit to a lie detector test. Can you do that?"

"I can try," Castle promised. "With the Larceny and Forgery Squad boys to help, it ought to work. Most of 'em can out-con a con-man. Who is the sucker?"

"Lennie Hazzard, an enormously fat man whom the Forgery Squad will know very well indeed. I'll get over to Headquarters somehow. I don't want Hazzard to spot me but I do want to watch his reactions."

Lieutenant Castle wasted no time. Within fifteen minutes he and two Forgery Squad detectives awakened Lennis Hazzard by pounding on his hotel room door. They were rather curt about it. Lennie could waddle under his own steam or be dragged, nobody seemed to care which. Hazzard went along.

At Headquarters Castle talked to him. "What's it going to get you, denying this gyp? The victim will finger you. He said he was taken by an enormously fat man. You know any other con-men as big as you?"

"No," Hazzard said, "but there could be such a man. I tell you I've been out of the line for months. I'm a respectable money-lender. I have an office—"

"You have to get money to lend it," Castle told him. "Look—maybe we can settle this thing. If you're innocent you should have no objections to taking a lie detector test."

**H**AZZARD became cagey at once. "I don't like those things. I don't trust them."

Castle laughed at him. "A lie detector test, no matter how it turns out, is not admissible evidence. We use the machines for one reason. To determine a man's innocence. If you pass it, we'll let you go. If you don't, we still have to pin the rap on you. What have you got to lose? We'll do our best to con-

vict you, anyway."

"I'll take it," Hazzard said.

He was led into a small room fitted with a large mirror—a two way mirror, though Hazzard didn't know it. On the other side was Dan Fowler, intently watching the fat man. He saw Lieutenant Castle pick up a stack of photographs while a technician clamped the electrodes in place. Hazzard still looked worried about the whole thing. Fowler could hear every word spoken in that room.

Castle laid the pictures in front of Hazzard. "I'm going to show you these, one at a time. Some of 'em are just shots of mugs, some from newspaper files; some are people who were involved in the con-game and whom we think you gyped. I want you to look at each picture and if you know the subject, say so promptly."

Hazzard licked his fat lips. "Very well. I'm completely innocent, so if this device is honest, it can't convict me of the crime. I'm—rather glad I'm taking the test. Go ahead."

The machine was started. Castle began holding pictures in front of Hazzard. Each time Hazzard denied knowing the subject. The pictures of Boker and Stiles, of Carl Roeder, Victor Manning, Jabish Porter and Bruce Robinson passed before his eyes. Finally Castle reached the last shot and again Hazzard vehemently denied knowing the man.

"Okay," Castle said. "We'll take off the electrodes and you can wait around a few minutes while we check the results."

Hazzard was led out of the room and as the door closed behind him, Fowler hurried in. He and the technician studied the tracks made by the stylus pens.

The technician explained them. "He answered 'No' to picture seven but you can see how his nerves kicked up. He knew that man."

Lieutenant Castle consulted his notes. "Number seven was Stiles, a hood whose mug you picked out of our files, Dan."

"Good," Fowler said. "He acted up again at number ten."

"Then he lied when he said he didn't know Ed Boker, the other gorilla," Castle advised.

Fowler studied the findings of the ma-

chine again. "How about Carl Roeder's picture? What number was that, Lieutenant?"

"Seventeen," Castle said. "Vic Manning was twenty-second."

"It seems that our fat friend knew neither Vic Manning nor Carl Roeder," Fowler observed. "What about Bruce Robinson and Jabish Porter?"

"Number thirty-two for Robinson. Twenty-four for Porter."

Fowler sighed deeply. "He knew neither one. Showed no reaction at all, Frankly, I'm surprised. Hazzard happens to be an exceptionally shrewd man. He lived by his wits for years, and it isn't like him to operate for someone he did not know. Of course, there is still another man involved, whose picture I couldn't furnish. And yet, I was sure he'd react to Manning or Robinson or even Porter."

Castle said, "What'll we do with him, Dan?"

"Hazzard? Let him go. Tell him the machine absolved him. There is one more trick I can pull. I'm supposed to be a killer. I visited Hazzard's place of business and I know he keeps a lot of money around. If I stick him up and he has been advised that I've joined the same gang he belongs to, he may spill something. It's worth a try anyway."

Fowler had to wait until Hazzard was a good distance from Headquarters before leaving. He glanced through the stack of pictures tried out on the con-man. Jabish Porter's seemed to have been taken a long time ago. It was merely a faded newspaper clip mounted on cardboard. Fowler hardly recognized the man himself.

Forty minutes later Dan Fowler moved quietly up the stairs to Lennie Hazzard's apartment. It was in a downtown building but quite modern. Hazzard still liked to live well. Fowler listened outside the door and then boldly rang the bell. He took a cheap nickel-plated revolver from his pocket and held it shielded against his thigh.

But no one came to answer the ring. Fowler tried it again, knowing that the fat man moved slowly. Finally the government agent made a quick examination of the lock. It was a snap spring and there was a space between the door



and its frame so that the brass tongue showed. Fowler drew a knife, inserted the plane through the door frame moulding and pried the snap back.

He made no sound during this little act of burglary but when the door opened before him, he had his gun ready. Nothing moved. Lights were on in a room down the short corridor. Fowler went to it, froze in the doorway and then bit his lip.

Flabby Lennie Hazzard wasn't going to be of much help after all. He lay in the middle of his bedroom floor, like a helpless balloon. There was a knife buried in his chest, the same type of blade which had been used on Bert Mandall of the F. B. I.

## CHAPTER IX

### *Change in Plans*



**H**ASTY investigation showed the body was still warm and Fowler estimated that the fat man had been dead only a matter of a few minutes. He straightened up from beside the corpse and checked the rooms thoroughly. There was nothing to indicate who the killer

might have been, though it was apparent that the fat man must have known and trusted the knife wielder. Certainly he'd let him in without any fuss.

Fowler went over to the telephone and dialed the F. B. I. office. There he gave Larry Kendal orders.

"I want men assigned to check on the following persons: Vic Manning, Jabish Porter and Bruce Robinson. I want to know if any of them received a phone call between two A. M. this morning and—" he glanced at his watch—"two-twenty-five. I happen to know they live either in hotels or apartment houses with switchboards so there will be a record of any such calls. Then I want two men assigned to cover a private dwelling at Six-Eighty-Seven East Sixty-Ninth Street. It is occupied by an individual whose name I don't know. He is about fifty, five feet six or seven, and

weighs approximately one hundred and seventy. Has gray hair and a gray mustache and he calls himself Mr. Mystery. Find out what you can about him but it's imperative that he doesn't realize he is under observation."

Fowler hung up. There wasn't much more for him to do. The fat man had been killed because his knowledge made him a dangerous man. Score one for whoever was behind all this—a man who guessed why Hazzard had been picked up. Hazzard had returned home in a slight dither over the arrest and his keen wits had told him there must be more to it than merely taking a lie detector test for a crime he hadn't committed. So Hazzard had communicated with the man above him and this man had instantly recognized the danger. To eliminate it meant eliminating the fat man and that had been done. Fowler possessed few doubts that the actual killers had been Boker and Stiles. One of them seemed to be very handy with a knife.

Fowler decided not to notify the police but slip out of here as quietly as possible. The body would be discovered in due course and the murderers and their mentor would believe they'd gotten away with it. Fowler went back to his own room. He had to continue his double identity for awhile and there must not be the slightest slip in the character he had assumed.

It was a long hike to the subway and he had time to do some thinking. Up until the moment when he'd been told he was to eventually murder Jabish Porter, he'd believed Porter to be the best suspect. He had the most to gain. The operation of docks and piers is a highly profitable business and if Porter could take over two or three of them, he'd make a fortune. Also he had money enough to finance such a deal by setting up a man like Hazzard in the money-lending business, so that certain dock walloppers would be under Hazzard's thumb and compelled to do his bidding.

With Hazzard dead, some provision must have been made to install another person who would handle the money-lending business and keep the stevedores subjugated. Fowler knew that Robinson, the ship owner, was practically broke

and certainly not able to finance a deal of this kind. Of course there was always Vic Manning, the racketeer. Nobody ever knew how much money a man like Manning possessed. Then too, a pair of assassins like Boker and Stiles were apt to work for someone like Manning, as well as for Mr. Mystery. Also, Hazard had gone running to the racketeer.

Fowler reached his rooming house, wearily climbed the stairs and headed toward his room. It had been a long night and he was tired. In the upper hall someone stepped out of the gloom and put a hand on his shoulder.

He spun around, fists doubled, but then he relaxed. It was Shanghai Culver who had moved up so quietly behind him.

"Kinda jumpy, Cameron," Shanghai observed dryly. "And here I thought you didn't have any nerves." There was a faint hint of mockery in his tone. "You never used to be jumpy."

"What do you want?" Fowler demanded irritably.

"Just a little talk. What's eating you? I'm your friend."

"All right, go on in." Fowler unlocked the door of his room and stepped back so that Shanghai could enter first. "You'll have to make it snappy. I'm tired."

**T**HEY entered the room and Fowler closed and locked the door. Then he sat down on the edge of the bed and lighted a cigarette. Shanghai Culver sank comfortably in the single overstuffed chair in the room. He drew a white linen handkerchief out of his pocket and blew his nose. Fowler stared idly at the initial "C" embroidered on Shanghai's handkerchief.

"Traveling in fast company, huh?" Shanghai said. "I saw you leave the pier with Boker and Stiles. How come you've teamed up with hard cases like them?"

"It happens to be my business," Fowler grunted. Casually he reached into a vest pocket and drew out the garnet that he had found with the note regarding Mr. Mystery on Bert Mandall's body. "What's on your mind, Shanghai?"

"Huh?" Shanghai was staring at the little red stone that Fowler was juggling in his right hand. "Oh, yes, I've been worried about you ever since I saw you

with Boker and Stiles. They got something on you. Nobody in his right mind would tag around with a pair of killers like those birds if he wasn't forced to do it."

"Maybe you better let me do the worry-in'," said Fowler. He stared at the stocky man's left hand. "You lost the stone in that ring you're wearin', Shanghai. Wonder if this garnet would fit it?"

"It might," Shanghai said quietly. "Let's try."

Fowler tossed him the stone and Culver caught it deftly. Shanghai tried the garnet in the empty socket of the ring. It fitted perfectly. Casually Fowler drew out an automatic and snapped off the safety catch.

"Mr. Mystery wears a ring like that," Fowler said. "So did the masked man who found me in Mandall's apartment with the body."

"Careless of them both." Shanghai Culver's voice grew more cultured than Fowler had ever heard it before. "They should have paid more attention to details. A ring with a stone missing would be noticed." He smiled. "In fact I think they hoped it would be."

"Why?" asked Fowler in surprise.

"It is something that was most likely to be noticed by some one trained to observe and remember little but important details," said Shanghai. "Such as a man suspected of being an F. B. I. man."

Dan Fowler realized that if Shanghai Culver also was Mr. Mystery, and the man had neither admitted or denied it, then he was extremely dangerous and equally clever. All the proof Fowler had that the two men were the same was the fact they both had been wearing a ring on the little finger on their left hand, a ring from which a stone had been missing.

"Let's consider the situation for a moment," said Culver. "Suppose that you were certain that I happen to be both Shanghai and Mr. Mystery, what good would it do you, Cameron? Save their names you know nothing about either of these men."

"I could claim that Mr. Mystery is the boss of a bunch of killers," said Fowler. "And my job is to kill Jabish Porter." He smiled grimly at Culver. "I suspect you of bein' the big boss be-

hind all the trouble on the docks—and evidently you suspect me of being a G-Man. Neither of us can prove a thing on the other as yet.”

“But trying should be interesting,” said Culver. “May the best man win.” His tone changed. “But as your friend Shanghai I planned to warn you to watch out for Boker and Stiles.”

“Your own men?” said Fowler. “And you warn us about them?”

“Are they my men?” said Shanghai. “You better be sure of that, Cameron. Maybe you haven’t been here long enough to realize what has been going on at the piers. You don’t remember Jerry Page. He was a dock walloper, too, and Boker and Stiles got something on him.”

“Maybe he shot and killed a G-Man,” Fowler said dryly.

“Perhaps he did. Anyway Boker and Stiles got Jerry Page to knock off another longshoreman who wouldn’t take any guff from those two gorillas. Jerry had a killing set up just right. He was a paid assassin with no other motive and the cops never would have tied him up with it. Only two minutes after Jerry pumped that guy full of lead, the cops started swarming down. Somebody had tipped them, and who else knew about the shooting except Boker and Stiles?”

“What’s all this got to do with me?” asked Fowler.

“Nothing, except to warn you to look out for Boker and Stiles,” said Shanghai. “I’ve got a job I’d like you to do for me, Cameron. Something right in the line of a man handy with a gun like you.”

“What is it?” asked Fowler.

Shanghai rose from the chair and walked over to the door. Then he turned to Fowler. “I’ll give you five thousand dollars in cash if you’ll bump off Mr. Mystery,” he said.

“But you’re Mr. Mystery,” said Fowler.

“Am I?” Shanghai turned the key in the lock of the door. “That’s your idea—not mine. The offer stands, Cameron. Five thousand for the death of Mr. Mystery.”

The door closed gently behind him as he stepped out of the room. Dan Fowler sat on the side of the bed staring at the door as he thought over every-

thing Shanghai Culver had said.

“Either I’m crazy,” Fowler finally decided, “or Mr. Mystery is the smartest criminal I have ever met!”

**I**N THE morning Dan Fowler paid a visit to the dry-cleaning store and found Sally on duty although she usually didn’t appear until noon. Sally accepted the clothing he presented for cleaning and handed him a folded receipt. Inside the receipt was a message from Larry Kendal.

Fowler winked at Sally but she appeared to be very busy. Her head down while she studied a ledger, she spoke without moving her lips very much.

“I’ve talked to Mrs. Roeder. Larry is having her taken out for questioning. I’ve arranged for her children to be removed. Later today I’ll set the stage in case any attempt is made on her life. Good luck, Dan. Please be careful.”

He walked out, found a quiet spot and read Larry’s message. It told how he had taken command of checking on any phone calls the fat man might have made to the various suspects. Only one had received a call at that hour. Jabish Porter’s hotel apartment had been called at 2:15 A. M., just about the time Hazard must have reached his own place.

But Jabish Porter was slated for death! Fowler himself was already delegated to kill him. Fowler smiled slightly at the thought. Kendal’s note also told him the loading net ropes had been deliberately weakened with an acid. Fowler destroyed the note.

That morning he was lined up at shape-up time, drew his assignment and went to work at the dock boss’ whistle. He kept alert and watchful. If Boker and Stiles had the vaguest suspicion he was not just some stupid roughneck who’d killed a G-Man and become their stooge, they’d see to it that he’d suffer an accident which would be certainly fatal this time.

At noon he spotted Boker swaggering along the dock. Many of the men waved to him. Some scowled and turned away. Fowler began to realize that practically all the men employed on Jabish Porter’s dock were under Boker’s thumb. Most of them hated him, all feared him.

Fowler, eating lunch out of a dinner

pail, didn't even look up as Boker approached. The hoodlum dug a toe into Fowler's ribs and grinned down at him.

Boker said, "We got a little change in plans. Tonight, after work, meet me at Eleventh Avenue and Thirty-sixth Street. Around six o'clock."

"Maybe I will and maybe I won't," Fowler answered.

Boker laughed at him. "You'll be there. Did you know there was an item in the paper about the body of an unidentified man being hauled out of the river? Funny thing—he'd been drilled before he went into the drink and the cops have the slugs that bumped him. They're not saying he was a G-Man and that will stay our secret as long as you do what I say."

"I'll be there," Fowler growled. "But not because I'm afraid of you. I'm looking for that easy dough your friend, Mr. Mystery, promised me. Who is he? What's his angle?"

"He'll tell you that personally, when he's good and ready. See you later."

Fowler went back to work, trying to puzzle out what caused this change in plans and what his new mission would be. The thing was quickly coming to a head. They'd order him to shoot someone, perhaps arrange it so he'd be caught. The risks he had assumed were now reaching the danger point.

After he finished work, he met Boker and Stiles at the appointed place and was told to get into their car. Boker handed him a snub-nosed automatic.

"You do what we say," he told Fowler, "and it'll pay off at ten grand. Besides, you'll get a chance at something even bigger. What do you think of that?"

"Sounds okay," Fowler said, exhibiting as much avarice for the money as he could summon.

Boker laughed. "I thought you'd like the idea. Got any objections to knocking off a woman?"

"Not for ten grand, I ain't."

"Good. This dame knows too much and the G-Men are getting too close to her. The name is Mrs. Carl Roeder. She's not a bad looking blonde number. I'll give you the address and the apartment. All you do is knock on the door, tip your hat when she answers and put three or four slugs through her. She's

got to die at once—so there's no chance of her talking. Is that clear?"

"You didn't even have to mention it," Fowler stroked the gun gently. "I don't like to shoot people and have them live long enough to describe me. When do I pull this job and when is the pay-off?"

"Tonight—around ten o'clock should be fine. In fact, make it ten o'clock on the button so we can arrange to have plenty of boys posted to help you get away. Set your watch with mine so there won't be any slip-up."

**T**HE pattern of the frame-up was very clear now. Fowler set his watch. "And the pay-off," he reiterated.

"Soon as you're sure nobody is on your tail, beat it to the house where we took you last night. You'll get paid and you'll learn all our plans. Ten grand is small compared to what you'll eventually get out of this."

Fowler nodded, shoved the gun into his belt and buttoned his coat over it. He got out of the car and started walking rapidly away. He had to work very fast now and a plan which had been turning over in his mind took definite shape. He headed for the dry-cleaning store where Sally should be.

She was there. He leaned across the counter and talked rapidly to her.

"Close up this place and get over to Mrs. Roeder's right away. Don't let anyone see you enter. Have Mrs. Roeder prepared to hide somewhere. At exactly ten o'clock the doorbell will ring. You'll answer it. I'll be there and I'm going to shoot you."

"Dead, Dan?" she smiled.

"That's how you'll have to look. Right afterwards a flock of cops will show. You'll be dressed in some of Mrs. Roeder's clothes. As soon as possible, you'll sneak out the back way. A cab will be parked on the back street waiting for you. Get in and let the driver take over. Meantime Mrs. Roeder, dressed almost as much like you as she can, will openly leave the building and enter another cab—exactly like the one you will use. It will be waiting at the curb."

"I'm beginning to understand," Sally said. "Mrs. Roeder will be followed. Somewhere along the route my cab will change places with hers and the men

after her will be chasing me."

"That's it exactly. What happens after that is mainly up to you. Those men will be killers. They'll realize they've been tricked somehow and they have to dispose of Mrs. Roeder. Your driver will be a G-Man armed with a tommy-gun, but he won't use it unless things get out of hand. Arresting the men who will try to kill you is your job. Sally, it's very dangerous. You can back out—"

"I wouldn't think of it," Sally said quickly. "Those killers won't suspect anything. They'll want to be sure Mrs. Roeder is dead so they'll come very close. And Mamma is going to pack a great big pistol, Dan. Besides which, Mamma knows how to shoot—very straight."

Fowler went to a cheap cafe, frequented by longshoremen. While he ate alone, he kept his ears open and heard a lot of talk about that ship which had tied up at Jabish Porter's dock. It seemed as though the cargo would be loaded though the longshoremen working on other piers seemed unable to understand why the crew working with Fowler was willing to load such a ship with such a cargo. Yet—no other crew would interfere.

At five minutes of ten, Fowler approached the apartment house where Mrs. Roeder lived. He patted the gun still stuck in his belt, looked around carefully and then entered the building. The last act of a dangerous game was about to be played with himself starring in the role of killer.

## CHAPTER X

### *Forced Confession*



**P**AUSING for a moment, Fowler consulted his watch, knocked on the door and when Sally opened it, he drew the gun and fired twice—into the floor. Sally screamed before the first shot was fired. Then she staggered back and fell heavily. She lay there, face

down, without moving. Any casual onlooker would be unable to detect the

slightest movement made necessary by breathing.

Dan Fowler turned and headed for the stairway. He opened the door, stepped through it and saw sullen-faced Stiles standing there with a clubbed pistol. It slashed the air. Fowler was prepared for something like that. He rolled with the blow and, while it stunned him and he dropped, he wasn't unconscious.

Stiles laughed harshly, pushed Fowler to the head of the concrete stairs and kicked him over. Fowler rolled down, barely checking a cry of pain as he thudded from one step to another. Now he really was on the verge of unconsciousness.

There were two or three minutes of intense silence and then he heard the muted wail of sirens. Soon uniformed patrolmen were hoisting him to his feet. Lieutenant Castle had him taken into Mrs. Roeder's apartment.

"You were right," Castle told Fowler while the G-Man thrust his aching head under the cold water tap. "There was an anonymous phone call saying that Mrs. Roeder was going to be killed at ten o'clock.

"Did Sally Vane get away all right?" Fowler asked.

Castle nodded. "Through the back door. I've already sent word through the crowd in the front of the building that the victim wasn't even hit. That she merely fainted. Dan, Mrs. Roeder is taking quite a chance going out there in the face of what may happen. Not that she isn't willing."

"We're all taking chances," Fowler snapped. "Mrs. Roeder will be covered every foot of the way. Now get me out of here without being seen." He smiled ironically. "I'm in a big hurry to kill a man."

"Huh?" Castle blinked.

Fowler did not explain, and he left a dazed police lieutenant talking to himself. There was a light car waiting for Fowler on the street behind the apartment. He reached it and knew he hadn't been seen. Stiles and Boker would certainly be among the crowd out front, waiting to make certain their plan and double-cross had worked.

Fowler drove straight to the apartment house where Jabish Porter lived,

parked the car and entered boldly. He rode to Porter's floor and rang the bell. Porter, he knew, was single and lived alone.

The door finally opened and Jabish Porter stood there—a lanky man dressed in an old bathrobe, trousers and slippers. His mouth opened and closed like a fish as he saw Fowler in the hall covering him with a gun.

"What—what do you want?" he asked nervously.

"Inside," growled Fowler. "And no noise. Move!"

Porter stepped back and Fowler followed him into the apartment and kicked the door shut. Then he forced Porter into the living room.

"I never keep much money around the apartment," Porter said. "But you can have all there is, of course. It is in my wallet in the coat of the suit I was wearing today."

"Never mind." Fowler made his tone cold and ruthless. "I didn't come here for your money—just your life."

"My life!" Porter's voice shook, and he grew pale. "What do you mean?"

"You can make this hard or easy on yourself, pal," Fowler said. "I'm going to bump you off. I got nothing against you personally but my orders are to kill you."

"But—but why?" wailed Porter. "You say you have nothing against me, and I don't want to die."

"This is business with me, see," said Fowler. "No use tryin' to talk me out of it. I already knocked off a G-Man and some dame. Now it's your turn. Back up a little. I'll make it sudden."

"But it is all a mistake," Porter protested. "I'm not supposed to be killed. That was just a gag. Mr. Mystery sent you here, after Stiles and Boker brought you to the house of Sixty-ninth Street. He ordered you to kill me—but it was just a gag. Having you plan to kill me was a test, to see if you'd do it."

"What are you tryin' to hand me?" growled Fowler. "Are you tryin' to make me think you know all the angles to this job? Oh, yeah! What's this stuff about some mug named Mr. Mystery?"

"You met him," said Porter. "He told me so. He is the brains in a big deal we have been working out. He didn't really

want you to kill me—it was just a test, I tell you. Why, we're partners. He doesn't want me dead."

"That's where you're wrong, Jabish," said a cold voice.

**F**OWLER glanced over his shoulder. Mr. Mystery stood in the doorway of the living room—stocky, gray-haired and with a gray mustache. The gun he held covered Fowler and Porter.

"Wrong?" said Porter as Mr. Mystery's words seem to linger in the tense silence that had hung over the room. "What do you mean?"

"I've been watching this building," said Mr. Mystery. "Waiting for Cameron to come here. I saw him enter a little while ago, and followed. I have been standing out near the front door listening to all you two have said." He shook his head sadly. "Too bad, Jabish. I didn't realize I had such a weakling for a partner."

"Weakling?" said Porter. "What do you mean?"

"I made you think it would be amusing if I ordered Cameron to kill you, Jabish," Mr. Mystery said. "But I knew what I was doing—I always do. I planned it as a test for Cameron, of course, but also for you, Jabish Porter."

"For me?" Porter said dazedly.

Fowler silently watched and listened. His gun was in his hand and he was willing to risk shooting it out with Mr. Mystery when he felt the time had come when that was necessary. But now he was learning a lot that he considered vital just by waiting and listening.

"For you, Jabish," Mr. Mystery repeated. "I was afraid that you would break under pressure, and so I thought a test might be wise. I was right. When you found your life was actually in danger, you became a frightened weakling willing to tell everything he knew in order to save himself."

"He didn't tell me much," said Fowler. "Just that he was your partner—and he didn't want to be killed."

"Men who break so easily are dangerous to have around," said Mr. Mystery. "You came here to do a job, Cameron. Do it!"

"You mean bump him off?" asked Fowler.

"Exactly!" Mr. Mystery nodded. "Now!"

"No, no!" Porter fairly shrieked the words. "I don't want to die." He gazed at Mr. Mystery tearfully. "Don't let him kill me, please don't! I'm your partner, your friend! You know that, Thornton Culver!"

A wave of elation swept over Dan Fowler as he heard the last two words that Porter had uttered. No longer was there any doubt in Fowler's mind that Mr. Mystery and Shanghai Culver were the same man. He was sure now that Shanghai's offer of five thousand dollars, if Cameron would kill Mr. Mystery, had been a gigantic bluff on Culver's part.

"All right, Cameron," said Mr. Mystery. "Go ahead and kill him." The gray haired man casually lowered his gun. "That's why you are here."

"I've changed my mind." Fowler's gun was suddenly covering Culver. "There's been a lot of talk about me getting a share of the profits if I bump off Porter—but that sounds like some of those someday maybe deals."

"Kill him!" snarled Culver. "If you don't you'll be turned over to the Law for bumping off that G-Man."

"Don't rush me," said Fowler. "Right now I've got a job that will really pay me dough. A guy named Shanghai offered me five thousand dollars to bump off Mr. Mystery." He laughed harshly. "All I've got to do is pull the trigger."

"That was just a trick on my part," said Culver quickly. "You heard Porter call me by name. You know that I am Shanghai Culver as well as Mr. Mystery."

"Sez you." Fowler sneered. "You two guys don't even look alike. I was offered five thousand to bump off Mr. Mystery and I'm going to earn that money." He raised the gun slightly and aimed carefully at Mr. Mystery's heart. "Here goes."

"Wait!" shouted Mr. Mystery.

He was clawing at his face with his free left hand, the gun still in his right. His features seemed to melt away as he drew off a skin-tight rubber hood mask that had completely covered his head. Gone was the gray hair and mustache of Mr. Mystery and in their

place were the smooth-shaven features of Shanghai Culver.

Suddenly Jabish Porter started to laugh hysterically as he gazed at Culver. "The great Mr. Mystery!" he said as he calmed down a little. "And he is so scared when his life is in danger that he pulls off his mask and reveals his real identity in nothing flat."

The gun in Culver's hand roared. Porter swayed as a bullet plowed into his chest.

"Couldn't have a man I can't trust around," said Thornton Culver.

"But you are coming with me, partner," Porter said.

**F**ROM the pocket of his bathrobe there came a roar and a flash of flame, and then Jabish Porter slumped to the floor to sprawl there lifeless.

"He—he shot me," Culver said in a voice filled with surprise. "And I thought he was a weakling." There was blood on the left side of Culver's coat, a little above his heart. He moved to a chair and sat down slowly. "You've been too smart, and too dangerous for a second-rate killer such as you were supposed to be, Cameron. You are a G-Man, of course."

"That's right. Dan Fowler, of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. But why the taking over the docks, Culver—and the killings?"

"Big money," Culver said. "We were going to—"

He shuddered and closed his eyes. Fowler stepped closer and examined him. Mr. Mystery was dead. The body in the chair was as much of an empty shell as the rubber mask lying on the floor.

Fowler went over to make sure that Porter was also dead. There was no doubt of it. An envelope sticking out of Porter's inside coat pocket caught Fowler's eye. He drew it out and hastily glanced at the typewritten page the envelope contained. Then he read it again more intently, and when he had finished he smiled.

"So that was it," Fowler said. "Porter would put everything down on paper."

He slipped the paper back into the envelope and thrust it into his pocket, and then went to the phone to report

what had happened in Jabish Porter's apartment to the police and the F. B. I.

Dan Fowler knew the case was not closed yet. That was clearly in his mind after he put down the phone. Boker and Stiles and perhaps other members of Mr. Mystery's gang were still around.

Just about now Sally Vane was probably stepping into danger in acting the role of Mrs. Roeder. Fowler decided he had better find Larry Kendal and be present when Sally got into the taxi that would be waiting in front of the apartment house where Mrs. Roeder now lived.

"The last act in this show, I hope," Fowler said as he left Porter's apartment. He thought of the two still figures he had just left behind him. "And with the rest of the cast intact."

\* \* \* \* \*

Sally Vane slipped out of the apartment house, where the Roeders had lived, without being seen. A taxi was waiting exactly where Fowler had said it would be. The driver greeted her with a nod and pulled away the moment she was seated in the back of the cab. He drove her around the block and pulled up at a point where they could keep the apartment entrance under close observation.

After a few moments, Mrs. Roeder emerged, moving fast and trying to cover her face. She'd been told how to act and she was giving a splendid performance. A taxi, the twin of the one in which Sally sat, was waiting and Mrs. Roeder got into it. As it pulled away, a sedan also left the curb across the street. In it were Boker and Stiles.

"This is the pay-off," Sally said. "You know what to do?"

"Sure," said the driver, patting the tommy-gun lying beside him. "We trail that sedan, and then you make the switch."

"Right," Sally said.

The taxi headed after the sedan. The taxi rapidly overtook the other car and before passing the driver signaled Sally. She quickly dropped to the floor of the cab where she couldn't be observed and an apparently empty taxi rolled by the sedan in which Boker and Stiles were riding.

They passed Mrs. Roeder's cab, too, and quickly neared the spot where things should begin happening. It was around a corner and out of sight of the two men in the sedan for the moment at least. Sally's cab pulled over to the curb. Mrs. Roeder's cab turned the corner, pulled in fast and stopped. Mrs. Roeder ducked down out of sight as Sally had done.

**W**HEN the sedan swung around the corner they found they were apparently still trailing the cab containing Mrs. Roeder, and the empty taxi was standing at the curb. Actually it was Mrs. Roeder's cab that was parked, and the sedan was trailing Sally's cab. Sally sat erect so that she could be seen through the rear window. She wore a coat and hat similar enough to Mrs. Roeder's. Thus the switch between the two cabs would never be noticed from any distance.

"We worked that slick," said the driver of Sally's cab. "Oh-ho! Look out for trouble. Those two birds are starting to edge closer to us."

"I'm ready," Sally said.

She opened her purse and drew out a .38 revolver. She spun the cylinder, smiled contentedly and waited. So far her part in this case had been much too placid to suit her. A little excitement was a welcome change.

With Boker at the wheel, the sedan was beginning to overtake the taxi. In a few moments the two cars were speeding along side by side. Boker deliberately yanked the wheel, so his front fender hit the cab, sending it to the curb, where the taxi driver brought it to a halt.

"Where in the blue blazes did you learn to drive?" he shouted at Boker as the two men parked the sedan behind the sedan and got out.

Sally partially opened the cab door, put the flat of her foot against it and waited.

Deliberately Boker and Stiles circled around so they approached the taxi from the left side. Both men had their hands thrust into the side pockets of their coats, and their advance was menacing.

Suddenly Sally gave the door a kick.



It flew wide and she leveled the gun she held.

"You can stop right there, boys," she called out. "This is the F. B. I."

Boker drew his gun. He was fast, incredibly fast, but Sally's bullet was much swifter.

Boker screamed and went down on one knee, his left knee cap shattered.

"I ain't scared of a dame with a gun!" roared Stiles.

He pulled his favorite weapon and leaped at Sally, knife held high. He came to an abrupt stop, too, and fell on his face as the .38 in Sally's hand barked again.

One leg remained buckled beneath him as he tried to get up. He reached for his gun.

"Now, now, be a good boy!" The G-Man cab driver stepped out, tommy-gun slanted down. "Both of you be good, or you'll get slapped with this!"

Stiles looked into the muzzle of the tommy-gun, shuddered and threw away his weapon. Boker was moaning and holding his wounded leg. Stiles' sullen face had changed. It was full of intense anguish now.

"Not a dame," he kept saying, over and over. "Not a dame. Oh, no, it can't be."

"It is," Sally told him cheerfully. "Now just be quiet until the ambulance gets here. And if you happen to have any other weapons concealed on your persons, don't go for them. There won't be much left of either of you if you do."

When Fowler and Kendal arrived on the scene a few minutes later Sally was guarding the two prisoners with the aid of the G-Man taxi driver. The local police were on the scene and an ambulance was pulling up to the curb. Sally was softly whistling, "Isn't This a Lovely Day." . . .

**L**ATER in Fowler's office, Dan told them about Mr. Mystery and Porter and how the two men had died.

"Thornton Culver was the brains of the whole thing of course," Fowler said. "As Shanghai he mingled with the men working on the piers and watched everything that went on. I first began to wonder about Shanghai when he took me to see the money-lender, Uncle Bankrupt. In his role of the money-lender,

Hazzard overplayed his part with me. He lent Shanghai three hundred dollars without any sort of an I. O. U. to prove Shanghai had ever received the money. Then I knew the two men were working together."

"Then Culver, Hazzard, Porter and Manning were all working together," said Sally as she and Kendal listened. "But why, Dan?"

Fowler took the envelope he had found on Porter's body out of his pocket and drew out the single sheet of paper.

"Listen to this," he said and he started to read:

"It is agreed that as partners we will do all in our power to take over the piers one by one—so that we can collect from ship owners who use the docks—for protection from damage to their ships, and demand the highest possible sums for the use of these piers.

It will be arranged that a man working for us will lend money to the men working on the piers so that, in the event of any trouble, we can force these men to fight for us, and hijack parts of the cargoes in unloading ships.

We will not shirk at murder if it proves necessary for us to gain our ends—and for this reason have hired Boker and Stiles as our strong-arm squad."

Fowler stopped reading and smiled at his two companions.

"It isn't signed," he said. "But the partners were Culver and Porter of course. In his job on the piers, Roeder must have discovered enough to make him dangerous—so Boker and Stiles killed him—just as I am sure now that they killed Mandall. The masked man I met at Mandall's room was Culver as Mr. Mystery, of course.

"And the whole thing was a giant racketeering scheme," said Kendal. "Extortion, protection stuff and, of course, murder right along with it."

"That's right," said Fowler. "And with Culver and Porter dead, and Boker and Stiles in the hands of the police—they are both being held on charges of murder in the hospital—I think the trouble on the docks is about over." He smiled. "I'm glad of that, for the men who work on the piers and the men who run them are usually honest."

They smiled at each other. Two men and a girl whose jobs were always dangerous—but they did them well and thoroughly. That was the way those of the F. B. I. always worked.

# The Kiddies

by  
ROBERT F. GERMANN



Roddy picked up a pair of scissors and grinned at Horace

*Roddy and Sonia were beautiful and clever, but—*

**O**UR children," said Mr. Worthington, sighing, "are perhaps a bit—difficult. High-strung, you know. But remarkably intelligent."

"Most intelligent children are naturally difficult," remarked Horace, trying to sound experienced.

"Of course, of course," said Mr. Worthington. He gave Horace a quick look. "That's why I wanted a tutor with athletic ability. Teach them games and things. Sublimate some of their energy.

Then, too, they need discipline—a firm hand. Frankly, I can't do a thing with them myself, and the tutors we've had before didn't seem to understand them at all. I do hope you'll be more successful than they were, Mr. Roberts."

"So do I," murmured Horace, reflecting that this introduction was anything but encouraging. "It's by no means unusual for children to disobey one of their parents, however. Perhaps their mother might—"

"Mrs. Worthington is—an invalid. She rarely sees them." He gave Horace another quick look and then stared out the window of the car. "But of course they are charming children—perfectly charming," he added insincerely.

The ride was continued in silence.

Horace was somewhat troubled over this position. He was, so far as he knew, the only applicant, despite a tempting salary and the prospect of living on a large country estate. "No experience or references necessary," the advertisement had said, and though Horace tried to explain this strange statement away as a whim on the part of his employer, who doubtless fancied himself a keen enough student of human nature to be able to judge a man's character and ability on the basis of a single interview, it nevertheless struck a definitely disquieting note. Horace Roberts was badly in need of a job, however, and when Mr. Worthington found his educational background satisfactory and his athletic capabilities of no mean sort, he had been accepted on the spot.

The chauffeur turned the car off the highway, past a gatekeeper's lodge, and they entered the grounds of Mr. Worthington's estate. Horace looked about in admiration: he had not anticipated anything so baronial. It was almost a mile from the lodge to the house, which was a low, rambling structure with Tudor pretensions. Horace felt, upon seeing it, that he had been rather absurd to suspect anything sinister about his new position. Anybody with as much money as Mr. Worthington obviously possessed had a right to whatever eccentricities he wished to assume.

"It's beautiful," he said.

**M**R. WORTHINGTON smiled, a little grimly, and muttered something that Horace was unable to hear.

At the main entrance of the house they were met by the two children. "Here they are," said Mr. Worthington, with assumed heartiness. "Sonia and Roddy. This is Mr. Roberts, your new tutor, kiddies."

"How do you do, Mr. Roberts," said the children, together.

Horace smiled down at them. They were, as Mr. Worthington had remarked,

charming children. Both were very fair-haired, blue-eyed, and sturdy; and there was a most attractive quality about the frankness of their expressions. Sonia, it turned out, was nine, and Roddy just eight: the years in which, Horace thought, children were at their most delightful stage.

"Tea-time!" said Mr. Worthington, still with that enforced heartiness. "Phillip will take your things to your room, Mr. Roberts. I'll show you up, and then we'll have tea on the terrace."

The children bobbed their heads politely as the two men went upstairs. Horace was shown to a large room overlooking a garden, and Mr. Worthington, expressing a hope that he would find everything comfortable, left him. Horace looked about with appreciation: his new job promised to be everything he could have desired.

When he went down to the terrace, Mr. Worthington and the children were waiting for him. At first the children were shy and reserved, but Horace's friendliness at length won them over.

"I got a kitten for my birthday," said Roddy confidently.

"But its tail is too long," added Sonia.

"It is, perhaps, a *little* too long," Roddy conceded, "but of course one can always take care of that."

Horace laughed and then glanced at Mr. Worthington. His employer had gone somewhat pale.

"Mr. Worthington!" Horace exclaimed. "What is it? Are you ill?"

"No. No, I—Roddy, I told you that you weren't—"

"But, Dad, I didn't ask Mrs. Parks for a kitten. She just gave it to me. You'll come and see it, won't you, Mr. Roberts?"

"Certainly," said Horace. "As soon as we finish tea."

"Excuse me," muttered Mr. Worthington, and abruptly rising he went into the house.

Horace was startled. "He doesn't like us to have pets," whispered Sonia.

"But I don't think there's much harm in having a kitten, do you, Mr. Roberts?" asked Roddy, turning to him appealingly.

"Well, no," said Horace, "though of course that's entirely up to your father."

"What we have to put up with from

that man, sighed Sonia, "nobody knows."

Horace kept a straight face with difficulty. "Well, we'll be good friends, won't we?" he asked at last.

"Oh, yes!" replied Roddy ecstatically.

"The best of friends," added Sonia, with a peculiar emphasis.

"Some of our tutors have been awful mean," said Roddy confidentially, "but you don't seem that way at all. You must be still a youth, Mr. Roberts."

"I'm twenty-five," said Horace, true to his theory that complete frankness is the only way to win the trust of precocious children.

"Twenty-five!" murmured Roddy enigmatically. "Think of that!"

"Suppose we go along and see the kitten now," suggested Horace, somewhat at a loss.

"Very well," said Sonia. "But I'm sure you'll agree with me that its tail is *much* too long."

She looked directly at Roddy as she spoke, and Horace, aware of a faint uneasiness, rose, holding out a hand to each somewhat self-consciously. The children glanced at each other; then one took his left hand, the other the right, and they led him around to the side of the house. Horace thought that they must have been starved for affection.

The kitten was lying in a basket in the sun, and Horace dutifully admired it. "The tail is unfortunate, however," remarked Sonia.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Horace, a remembrance of Mr. Worthington's false heartiness stabbing at him. "The tail's just the right length."

"I think Sonia may be right," Roddy said, considering, "though she ezzaggerates dreadfully." He picked up a pair of scissors and grinned at Horace.

**H**E HELD the kitten up to inspect it gravely and critically. The kitten squirmed and mewed. "You're holding her much too tightly," said Horace. "Here. Let me show you. Like this."

"Oh," said Roddy innocently, following his directions to the letter. "I see. I bet you know all about animals, don't you, Mr. Roberts?"

Sonia turned away with a faint smile.

Horace suddenly became aware that in a quietly malicious way both children were laughing at him. . . .

Mr. Worthington seemed anxious to see as little of his children as possible, and not until dinner did he put in his appearance again. The children seated themselves impassively.

"How is our mother this evening?" asked Sonia.

Mr. Worthington winced slightly, but muttered that she was much the same as usual.

"Our mother is a ninvalid," explained Roddy. "At least that's what we tell people," he added.

"Roddy!" said his father.

Sonia gave Horace a disarming smile. "You mustn't mind Roddy," she said. "In some ways he is very childish still."

Horace ate his dinner without much appetite; he began to understand that the precocity of these children might in time become extremely wearing.

In the days that followed, however, he had to admit that they were obedient, cheerful, and always willing to learn. Nevertheless, his sense of uneasiness persisted. He felt that they were amusing themselves at his expense, and that this docility of theirs was a game they were playing which they would bring to an end whenever it pleased them to do so. Mr. Worthington turned them over entirely to his care, merely outlining what he wished them taught. Horace had the impression that even this would be left to his own discretion if he insisted on it.

From time to time the children with a sort of smothered glee referred to their mother; and Horace found these occasions increasingly painful. He failed to understand, as well, what lay behind the frequent discussions concerning the length of the kitten's tail.

But one morning it was made all too plain to him. After breakfast, looking for the children, he heard a burst of laughter from the lawn at the side of the house. When he got there, he saw the kitten frantically chasing its tail on the grass. He started to laugh, himself, until he observed that the tail was only half as long as it formerly had been; then he felt a little sick.

"We have amputated her tail," an-

nounced Roddy, gasping with laughter.

Sonia triumphantly waved the severed half in Horace's face.

"That was very, very naughty," he said sternly, fighting back an impulse to slap her.

"Naughty?" echoed Roddy innocently.

"You have hurt the poor kitty," said Horace.

Mastering his repugnance, he picked it up and carried it around to the kitchen to have one of the servants look after it. When he returned, the children were sitting on the grass, Sonia nursing a scratch on her arm and Roddy sobbing into his hands.

"Now then," he said, "tell me why you did that to the kitten."

"Its tail was—" began Sonia.

"I've heard that before," snapped Horace. "And as I told you, it was absurd. This is very cruel of you! How would you like it if somebody cut off part of your arm because he thought it was too long for you?"

"That's silly," said Sonia. "Nobody is going to cut off my arm. It fits. Besides, the cat scratched me, and it's your duty to look after things like that. I might die of blood-poisoning."

No such luck! thought Horace. "At any rate, I'm glad to see that you're sorry for what you've done," he said aloud, turning to Roddy.

"Oh, yes," said Roddy, still sobbing.

In a few moments the boy raised his face from his hands and looked with a faint sly smile directly at Horace, who observed with a touch of horror that the eyes were perfectly clear and free of tears.

Thoroughly baffled, Horace took up their lessons for the morning.

**L**ATER that afternoon, at tea, Horace discovered that the children had tired of their game and, since he had rebuked them, had apparently decided to become hostile.

"Did you ever stop to consider," said Sonia thoughtfully, looking at him over the rim of her cup, "how easy it would really be to poison somebody you didn't like?"

Horace stared at her.

"Of course it would be easy," put in Roddy. "There are such a lot of ways

you could do it."

"That will be enough of this sort of talk," said Mr. Worthington.

"It's very interesting," Sonia said, ignoring him. "I mean, think of all the poisons you can get hold of without really trying. Arsenic in rat poison, strychnine in the medicine cabinet, and anybody can grind up glass—though that's not really a poison, I don't think."

Mr. Worthington, his face quite white, stood up and strode into the house. The children giggled at Horace. "He can't stand talk about poison," said Sonia scornfully. "If I were grown up, I wouldn't run away from children."

"It's because of what our mother tried to do to him," put in Roddy blandly.

Horace felt a little dazed. He recalled that he had not as yet laid eyes on Mrs. Worthington, who, he had been given to understand, never left her room and never received visitors.

"What do you mean?" he asked at last.

"Roddy talks too much," said Sonia primly. "We are not to discuss our mother, and he knows it. . . . With you, of course, it doesn't matter so much, because we're the best of friends," she added maliciously.

"We're not going to be," Horace said firmly, "if you continue acting this way."

Sonia's eyes widened in surprise. "Don't tell me you're nervous about poison, too!" she remarked.

"You know perfectly well what I mean, Sonia. You were cruel to the kitten this morning, and you were deliberately cruel to your father just now."

"That's silly," said Sonia calmly. "Grown-ups ought to know better than to get upset by anything little children say."

"But they sometimes are."

"Then they're stupid. Now you wouldn't be frightened if I talk about poison, would you, Mr. Roberts?"

"No," said Horace, "but that's no reason why other people shouldn't be."

"Well, then," exclaimed Sonia triumphantly, "we'll talk about poison."

And she did, while Horace listened in horrified fascination, wondering where in the world she had ever picked up so much knowledge and with such appalling accuracy. Despite what he had said,

he was frightened, and from that time on he watched both of them carefully around meal times, and saw to it that they stayed away from his place.

He understood now why Mr. Worthington would accept a tutor without recommendations: in all probability he could never have induced anyone with the slightest knowledge of his family to take the position. Horace considered resigning, but realized that his chances of getting another job immediately were slim; and besides, he could hardly admit defeat so soon. The children might be abnormal, but there was always a possibility of reclaiming them, of molding their young and impressionable minds in such a way that they might develop into decent citizens.

But within a few days he was forced to realize that all along they had detested him, just as they detested everyone except themselves. Their frequent sneering references to affection and friendship showed this clearly, and though he burned with shame and a wild desire to beat them, he continued to instruct them and to act in a calm and good-natured way. Ultimately, he thought, they would be touched by his generosity and kindness: and from there on it would be easy sailing.

**S**ONIA, since the kitten had scratched her, had conceived a great aversion toward it, and it was not long before she had poisoned Roddy's mind as well against his pet. Horace saw that it was fed and had a decent place to sleep, and the cook grew quite fond of it; but in time it became perfectly evident that the girl was out for revenge. One day the kitten disappeared.

"Have you children seen the kitten?" Horace asked, when they came in for their French lesson.

"Oh, yes," said Roddy, turning his candid blue eyes on his tutor.

"Well, where is it?"

"That's a secret," replied Roddy, giggling a little.

Horace hesitated. After all, it was Roddy's pet. "We buried her," said Sonia, sitting primly in her chair.

"Buried her!"

"Yes."

"But I—I didn't know she was dead."

"She wasn't," Sonia said calmly.

Horace felt a spasm of nausea. "You mean you—"

"You told us we mustn't ever be cruel again," said Sonia, with relentless logic, "and we knew it would be cruel to kill the poor kitty, so we just dug a hole and put her in."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Horace.

He called the lesson off and went to his room to lie down. His nerves were in terrible shape. . . .

About a week later Horace unexpectedly met Mrs. Worthington. He was sitting in a deck chair on the lawn trying to decide whether or not to try his luck in getting another job, when a gaunt, middle-aged woman came out of the house and hurried up to him. She was wearing a faded blue dressing-gown and her hair hung in lank wisps about her face, but Horace could see a strong resemblance to her children in the wasted beauty of her features.

"You must be the new tutor," she said, sitting beside him.

"Why, yes," said Horace. "How do you do, Mrs. Worthington. My name is Roberts."

"I'm not interested in your name," said Mrs. Worthington abruptly. Horace started. "Besides, you're much too good-looking to have a name as common as that."

"I hardly think—"

"Yes," she went on dreamily, paying no attention to him. "Youth is a wonderful time—but it doesn't last. Nothing lasts. How are you getting on with the children, Mr. Robinson? The dear kiddies."

"Oh—very well, thanks. Beautiful children."

"Aren't they? They take after me. Of course there's insanity on the other side of the family, but that often as not produces genius in the offspring. Children," Mrs. Worthington sighed, "I adore them. I always feel as though they're so lovely in their innocence that I could smother them to death."

"Sm—"

"With kisses," added Mrs. Worthington, in bored explanation.

"Oh, yes—of course," said Horace hastily.

"You thought I meant simply—"

smother them, didn't you, Mr. Rollins?" she asked, with a sly smile that made Horace think, with a shock, of Roddy.

"Why, of course not!" he babbled, in a light sweat. "What an idea! I'm sure you're simply mad about your children."

"Quite mad," said Mrs. Worthington absently. "Though of course they're actually loathsome little beasts. Nobody knows that better than I do. It's bad enough that they keep me a prisoner in my room most of the time, but that they should make repeated attempts to poison me is rather upsetting."

Horace stared at her in terror.

"You may well look surprised, Mr. Rawlings," she resumed. "It's not every woman who has to put up with what I'm confronted by. It's very pleasant to get out into the sun again, however, and even if they set my room on fire during my absence, I feel that it's worth while. You're such a restful young man, Mr. Riley. I think I really must sing you an aria or two from *Carmen*."

**R**ISING to her feet and striking a pose, she burst out into an eerie succession of shrieks that made Horace's flesh prickle. The racket was sufficient, however, to bring a couple of white-jacketed male attendants from the house on the run.

"They're after me again!" she suddenly screamed, throwing herself wildly into Horace's arms. "Save me, Mr. Remington! Don't let them touch me!"

The attendants took her gently but firmly out of Horace's arms.

"Come along, dear," said one of them. "We'll fix you a nice, cool drink."

"Oh, very well!" said Mrs. Worthington sulkily. "It's such a nuisance, this being always in demand. Good-by, young man," she added, turning to Horace and giving him her hand. "You must come back another time. I'm always in on Wednesdays from one till three. Next time you come I'll sing Brunnhilde for you—assuming, of course, that there are any oysters left."

One of the attendants winked at him. "I shall be delighted," said Horace with an effort, bowing.

The madwoman was led away, chattering gaily, and Horace sank shivering

back into his chair. A sound of giggling brought him to his feet with a bound. The two children were staring at him in high glee: they had been hiding behind a bush throughout the whole scene.

"How—how dare you!" sputtered Horace.

"Now you know, now you know!" they chanted, dancing away across the lawn.

Horace stared after them in revulsion and dread. . . .

"I can't say I blame you for wanting to leave, Mr. Roberts," said Mr. Worthington that evening. "We try to keep my poor wife locked in her room, but every now and then she manages to escape. I can quite appreciate how you must feel, isolated way out here, and I'm really grateful that you've stuck it out for as long as you have."

Horace felt a pang of sympathy. Certainly this seemed liked desertion.

"I daresay it would be better for the children to send them away to school," Mr. Worthington resumed, talking almost as much to himself as to Horace, "but I'm afraid! You—you know them, so I needn't explain further, I presume. I had hoped—"

He broke off, looking haggard and old. "I'll stay a little longer," Horace was startled to hear himself say. "At least until you can get somebody to replace me, Mr. Worthington. There's nothing wrong with the children, really. Mentally, I mean. They're neurotic, of course, but as you said yourself, remarkably intelligent. They'll turn out all right."

"That's very nice of you, Mr. Roberts," said Mr. Worthington gratefully.

In his room that night Horace cursed himself for being a sentimental fool, but resolved that from that point on his discipline was going to be of a more primitive type.

The children were obviously surprised to find him still on hand in the morning, and by no means pleased—especially when Horace made it clear to them that from now on any breach of decorum would ensure immediate and enthusiastic punishment in the form of spankings. They glowered at him.

From their vague hints and cross-conversations, before long he gathered that

they had been responsible for the escape of their mother the day before and were now gloating over the success of their enterprise, though they took no pains to conceal their disappointment that Horace had not been driven away.

As soon as he understood what it was all about, Horace took them over his knee, first Sonia and then Roddy, and administered what he was certain was the original real spanking to which the Worthington children had ever been subjected.

Somewhat winded but considerably pleased, he watched them leave the room, wailing aloud.

The spanking seemed to have a definitely salutary effect, however, and, considerably chastened, Sonia and Roddy resumed their studies later on. Horace, whose theories about child-training had suffered a severe jolt, was forced to admit to himself that on occasion brute strength was preferable to cold reason and logic. Quite possibly the result of his first venture into the field of corporal punishment made him over-confident, and, as he previously had had no experience with that sort of thing, he was unable to estimate its true worth. He simply accepted the children's new docility at its face value: which, considering their general vindictiveness, was a grave mistake.

**F**OR almost a week all went well. The children were obedient and subdued, and though Horace surprised them on a number of occasions whispering together, obviously—from the meaning glances which he intercepted—about him, he thought rather fatuously that they were discussing his heavy hand and how to avoid a repetition of its descent. Since they were careful to let him catch them in the very act of conspiracy, he might have known that something was afoot—but somehow he never gave it a thought.

One morning Mr. Worthington had to go to the city on business and left the house before breakfast.

Horace, on entering the study, found Roddy sitting alone, looking close to tears.

"Good morning, Roddy," he said cheerfully.

"Good morning, sir," said Roddy dolefully.

Horace started. The "sir" in itself was suspicious. "Where's Sonia?" he asked.

"She won't be able to come this morning," replied Roddy, giving an audible sob.

"Why not? Is she ill?"

"No. She's not—ill."

"Well, then?"

"You know how she likes to—to tease me, Mr. Roberts?"

"Tease you?" demanded Horace, with vague foreboding. "That's ridiculous, Roddy. You know very well she doesn't tease you."

"Well, she does—did," said Roddy stubbornly. "Maybe you wouldn't realize it, Mr. Roberts, because she knows how to hide things like that, and you're not very subservant. But I—I just couldn't stand it any longer."

"Pull yourself together, Roddy. Where is she?"

"Dead," said Roddy.

"Dead?" gasped Horace, turning pale.

"I—I didn't mean to do it, Mr. Roberts! I was playing with my knife, and she tried to take it away from me. So I thought I'd scare her, only—"

"Good God!" whispered Horace. "Where is she?"

"In the playroom. Will they hang me, Mr. Roberts, or will it just be lecrocutation, do you suppose?"

Without answering, Horace strode toward the playroom, followed by a whimpering Roddy. Perhaps there was a shade of suspicion at the back of Horace's mind, but one glance at the floor of the playroom was enough to banish it. Sonia was lying there, her face chalky white, the hilt of a knife projecting from the general region of her heart. There was a good deal of blood.

Horace's nerves snapped. He had put up with a lot in the past few weeks, and he was prepared to put up with even more for the sake of Mr. Worthington, but this was too much for him. Dimly he supposed that he should summon a doctor, even though it was obvious that the services of a physician had already been superseded. Mr. Worthington would have to be notified without delay, the authorities called in. . . .



Horace backed out of the room and closed the door after himself. "What—what shall we do, Mr. Roberts?" asked Roddy, tugging at his sleeve desperately.

Horace looked down at the boy with unspeakable horror. Then, cuffing him aside, he fled to his room.

Twenty minutes later, carelessly packed, and walking as though his life depended upon it, Horace started down the road toward the gatekeeper's lodge. The idea of desertion no longer weighed him down; the reprehensibility of his behavior offered no let or hindrance. All he wanted was to get away from there, fast—someone else could do whatever was necessary. . . .

From a window in the playroom the children watched him hurrying down the road. "Well, that takes care of him," said Roddy, giggling. "Number seven, isn't he?"

"Eight," replied Sonia, wiping the last vestiges of tomato sauce from the floor of the room. "He put up the best fight yet, though. Too bad we had to break the blade off your knife, Roddy, but it was worth it. I wasn't even sure Miss Horace was going to fall for this one. It's old as the hills."

"Well, you sure did *look* dead," said Roddy admiringly. "I was afraid you'd put too much powder on your face, but old Horace never noticed. One look was enough for him. I wonder what Dad is going to say when he comes back and

finds we don't have a tutor any more."

"He won't be very surprised," said Sonia thoughtfully. "But I suppose it's only a matter of time before a new one arrives."

"I guess that's right, but we can always take care of 'em, can't we, Sonia?"

"Of course."

"We'd better have a lot of fun now while we're alone, don't you think?"

"Yes. And I'm getting a first-class idea for a new game right now."

"What is it?" demanded Roddy eagerly.

"Well, in this one I pretend to be a witch, and so I get condemned and burned at the stake."

"That's a fine game!" said Roddy enthusiastically. "But can't I be the witch, please, Sonia?"

"Well," said Sonia, looking at him intently, "I thought of the game, so it's really my part, but if you'll promise not to cry or anything, maybe I'll let you."

"I won't cry," declared Roddy.

"We'll have to go out into the woods, away from the house, or they'll make us stop. I tie you up—"

"Not too tight, though."

"No," said Sonia. "Just tight enough. Then I pile dry leaves and branches and things up around you; and then I pretend to set fire to them. And of course I have to pretend to be praying all the time."

"It sounds like a most exciting game," said Roddy.

NEXT ISSUE'S DAN FOWLER NOVEL

CRIMSON TOMORROWS by C. K. M. SCANLON

**NO LUCK? - make a date with**

**WILDROOT  
CREAM  
OIL**

also in  
**TUBES**

**WILDROOT  
Cream Oil  
HAIR TONIC**

**WILDROOT  
CREAM OIL  
HAIR TONIC**

EASY TO USE  
NO WASTE  
OR SPILLING  
HANDY FOR  
TRAVELING

*When a band of racketeers selects its victim and commits murder in reverse, Detective John Prime seeks the key schemer in a bizarre crime conspiracy!*



As the shots rang out, Lurtin clutched at his throat and dropped to the floor

## CHAPTER I

### *Truant Patient*

**I**LD man Murtrie stirred in his bed and opened his rheumy eyes. The room was damp and outside rain spattered sullenly against the window pane. The day was gray and dull. "Like my own life," muttered old man Murtrie savagely. He fixed his vacant eyes upon the ceiling and waited for his breakfast.

Not that he would enjoy it. They fed him nothing now save fruit juice and

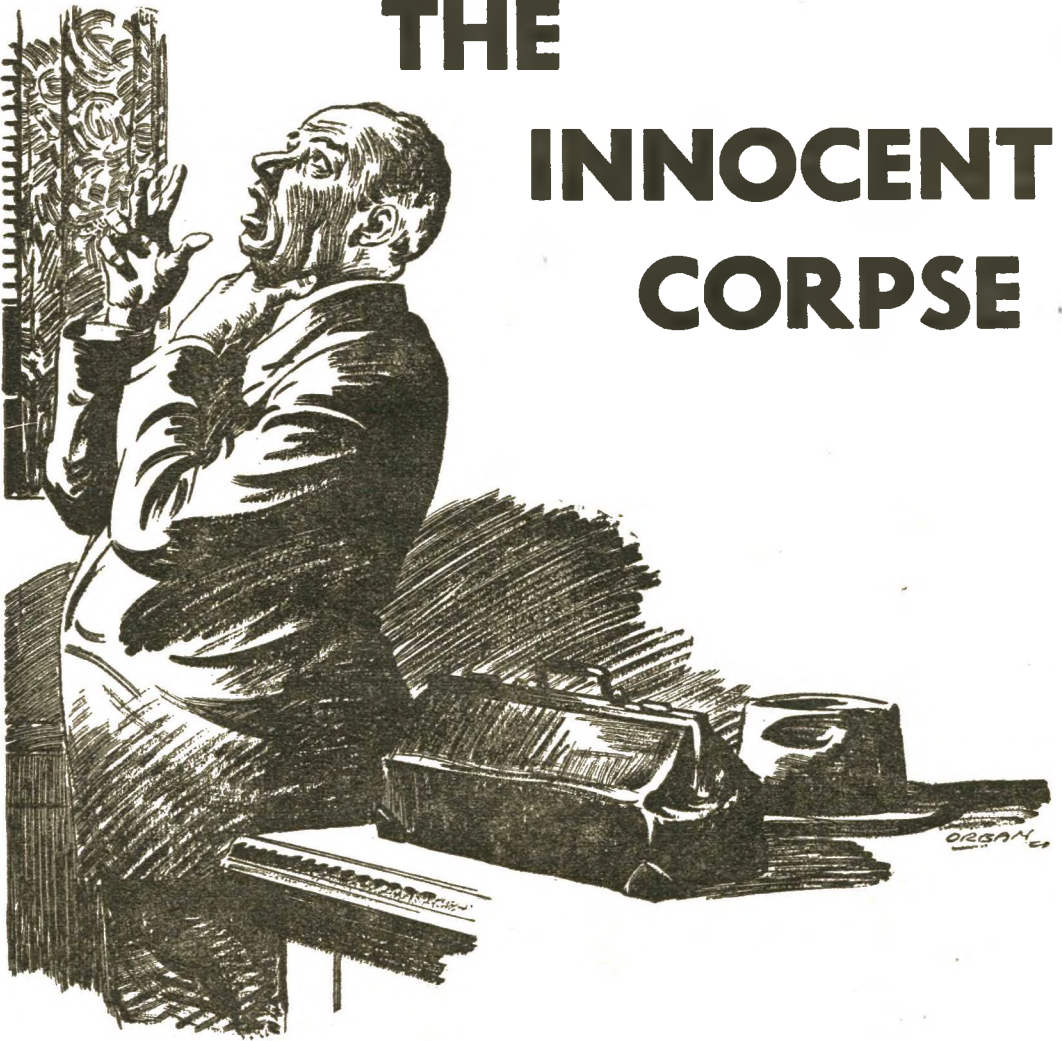
oatmeal, punctuated each hour by an unpalatable spoonful of liquid from one of the various medications on the taboret at his bedside.

Old man Murtrie was hungry. He had been hungry for as long as he could remember. Though he couldn't remember much any more. Eighty-seven years had passed over him, leaving his body ailing and brittle, dimming his mind.

But he certainly knew he was hungry.

# THE

# INNOCENT CORPSE



A NOVELET BY *D. L. Champion*

And he recalled clearly enough the savory taste of a rare steak, the warm bite of aged Bourbon, the fragrant aroma of a Havana cigar.

His cracked lips framed a curse. If they wouldn't feed him, why wouldn't they let him die? Why had they brought him to this rainy region, anyway? He had been quite content where he was. But they'd loaded him into something very like a hearse—it had probably been

an ambulance—and brought him here.

Of course, it was Emory's fault. He had lived a satisfactory enough life with his grandson, Arthur, until Emory had come along. It was then they had started feeding him pap. It was then that the doctor had begun poking him and prescribing the evil tasting medicines.

There wasn't much adrenalin left in his ancient frame. But he utilized what

there was in hating Emory. He detested Emory's arrogant bearing, his habit of speaking without moving his thin lips. And Arthur, somehow, seemed afraid of him.

The door opened. Arthur Benham came into the room, bearing a meager tray. He was a short man in his late twenties. His hair was light and sandy; his eyes were blue and weak. His manner was that of a coy nurse who is trying to edge in on the patient's will.

"Well, well!" he said. "And how are we this morning? Did we rest well?"

Old man Murtrie scowled. He hated this idiotic plural address, as if he were twins. Arthur handed him a glass of orange juice with a tube in it.

Old man Murtrie removed the tube from the glass and drained it. He said, without much hope, "What's in the bowl?"

"Oatmeal," said Arthur brightly. "Just the stuff to put warmth in your old bones."

Murtrie's grimace was a fearful thing to behold. At that moment there came the sound of the opening of the downstairs door, of footfalls on the stairs. Emory came into the room.

Ellis Emory was tall and thin. His hair was black as the raven's wing, his eyes dark as night and glittering. He removed an expensive raincoat, revealing an even more expensive suit. With his lips half an inch apart and perfectly motionless, he said:

"And how are we this morning?"

"We're hungry," snapped old man Murtrie.

"You won't be after you've had your oatmeal," said Arthur. He put the tray at the side of the bed.

Emory said, "I'm hungry, too. Let's go down to the kitchen and have a cup of coffee."

Arthur nodded and the pair of them left old man Murtrie alone with his porridge. He picked up the bowl. He screwed his face into a mask of disgust. Then he spat eloquently into the lumpy gray mass.

He sat up in bed and looked about wildly like a prisoner seeking some means of escape. His wandering gaze came to rest on Emory's raincoat, hang-

ing on the back of a chair.

An idea oozed slowly into his mind. Perhaps there might be some tobacco in the pockets. He knew Emory didn't smoke cigars but a cigarette was better than nothing.

Laboriously, he clambered out of the bed. His gouty knees trembled as he walked across the room. His gnarled fingers probed through the pockets of Emory's raincoat. They found a box of matches and eight cents in change.

Old man Murtrie plumbed his mind for an adequate oath. He found one and uttered it. He weighed the coat in his hand. He held it close to his eyes and examined it. His fingers explored its soft lining. Then the great idea burst, full bloom, into his brain.

The coat was worth money. Money could be translated into steak, whisky and cigars. Arthur and Emory were in the kitchen. If he was cautious he could sneak from the house and be at a pawnshop before they even missed him.

He dropped the coat and went to the closet. As he dressed his ancient heart pounded with excitement. His fingers shook so much that he abandoned the tying of his tie, left it hanging loosely in the collar. To save time he didn't bother to knot his shoe laces.

At last, sloppily clad, the raincoat over his arm, he made his way down the stairs, through the front door to the street.

The rain sliced into his face, soaked into his jacket as if it were blotting paper. Somehow it never occurred to him to put on the coat. To him it was not a protective garment, but a means of barter, a means of assuaging his hunger, slaking his thirst.

The pawnbroker handled the coat, cast on it an appraising eye, said brusquely, "How much you want?"

Old man Murtrie clacked his false teeth and said, "Twenty dollars."

"Give you eighteen. Sign here."

Old man Murtrie signed the slip with undisciplined fingers, thrust the money in his pocket and went out into the rain. He lurched across the street through the rumbling traffic to a cigar store. He bought the best Havana in stock, stuck it in his mouth and inhaled deeply.

He emerged from the store and sur-

veyed the avenue. Half a block away a garish neon sign proclaimed: *Choice Liquors. Chops and Steaks.* Old man Murtrie headed toward it in a straight line like a child who has just seen the Rock Candy Mountain.

**H**E DRANK four ounces of whisky at the bar. Then he crossed the room, sat at a table and peered at the menu. The blood pounded happily in his temples. He was warmer, younger than he had been in two years.

He looked up at the waiter. He grinned drunkenly. He said, "Do you have any oatmeal?"

"Yes, sir."

Old man Murtrie drew a deep breath. He gave the waiter specific instructions regarding the precise anatomical disposal of the oatmeal. He threw back his head and laughed boisterously. It sounded like the laughter of a hundred happy hens.

"Bring me a steak," he said. "Best you have and rare. Bring me another drink, too."

His plate was clean. His glass was empty and he had finished his cigar when the vertigo hit him. He was suddenly dizzy. His heart beat erratically against his frail chest. Spots danced mockingly before his eyes.

He rose from the table with some effort. He paid his bill and made toward the door. He fell into the taxi parked before the restaurant. He stammered him home address to the driver, then lay back, panting, against the seat cushions.

The driver helped him up the three steps to the porch. The front door was flung abruptly open. Dimly old man Murtrie was aware of Arthur's scared, white face. Behind him stood Emory, a black frown on his brow.

"You fool!" he raged. "You old, misbegotten fool! Get him upstairs. Quickly. Then call the doctor."

Arthur dragged old man Murtrie up the stairs. He dropped him, a sodden inert mass, on the bed and snatched up the telephone.

Old man Murtrie lay on the counterpane breathing stertorously. There was a tight pain in his chest. He closed his eyes and opened them again. It didn't

seem to make any difference. A swirling blackness surrounded him.

He opened his mouth and uttered an odd rattling sound. Something seemed to snap audibly at the base of his skull. Then the heart which had beaten steadily for eighty-seven years in old man Murtrie's breast was suddenly still. Arthur yelled excitedly into the telephone.

## CHAPTER II

### *Grave in the Woods*



**T**HE doctor, whose name was Lurtin, was pompous and well man-icured. His practice was a wealthy one. Therefore, so was the doctor. He was a portly man whose stomach began to swell some six inches beneath his chin, achieving quite an impressive bulge at the waistline.

He came slowly down the stairs from Murtrie's bedroom and proceeded with stately march into the living room. Arthur Benham, his face pastier than usual, sat on the edge of an armchair. Emory stood by the window. Save for a scowl on his forehead, his features were expressionless.

He caught the doctor's eye and said abruptly, "Well?"

Lurtin cleared his throat and averted his gaze. He had a set speech for such occasions as these and he was rather proud of it.

He said, "It is with the utmost regret and sympathy that I—"

Emory snapped, "Is he dead?"

Annoyed at the interruption, the doctor tried again. "We must remember that man is mortal. We must, in this hour—"

Emory took a step toward him. His dark eyes blazed. He said, and his voice was a blade, "Blast you! Is he dead?"

This time Lurtin gave up. He put the pretty speech aside. He said, "Yes. The liquor, the exposure. His heart failed him."

Arthur uttered a little wailing cry. Emory glanced at him sharply. Arthur

made a visible effort and pulled himself together. Emory put his hand in his coat pocket. He said, with the air of a man who has come to a decision:

"Doctor, are you interested in money?"

Lurtin blinked. He was intensely interested in money. However, at the moment, he was more interested in the point of Emory's question.

Emory said, "I'll give you ten thousand dollars if you don't sign the death certificate."

Lurtin blinked. "Not sign the certificate? That's impossible. Why shouldn't I?"

"Because," said Emory patiently, "I'll give you ten thousand dollars not to."

"I don't understand."

"You don't have to. Don't sign the certificate. As far as you and the world are concerned Murtrie never died. You're still treating him. You get ten G's. Cash."

It was an easy decision for Lurtin. True, he did not for a moment consider either the moral or legal aspects of the proposition. But his stock in trade was his impeccable respectability. It was ridiculous to jeopardize his career, even for ten thousand dollars.

His face became stern. He said, "Mr. Emory, to do as you ask would be most unethical."

"Then you refuse?"

"Of course I refuse."

Emory drew a deep breath. He looked like a man facing an unpleasant but imperative task. He said, "Arthur, turn on that radio."

Arthur Benham blinked at him. "The radio? There's nothing on now but soap operas."

Emory glared at him. Arthur reached over hastily and turned a dial on the console against the wall.

"Louder," said Emory.

Arthur turned another dial. Lurtin smiled professionally. He said, "I'll send the death certificate over right away. I shall no longer intrude upon your sorrow."

Voices came from the loud speaker, loud and harsh, filling the room with ugly vibration. Emory moved swiftly until he stood between the doctor and the door. His hand came out of his pocket. It was not empty.

LURTIN saw the automatic and his double chins dropped. Arthur made a small whimpering sound which was lost in the shouting of the radio. Emory fired three unheard shots.

Lurtin's plump hands clutched at his throat. His knees buckled. He fell to the floor, writhed in agony for an instant, then lay still.

Arthur sprang from his chair, his whole body trembling. "Emory," he cried. "What have you done? We're fools. We should have made a settlement. We should have—"

"Settlement," snarled Emory. "I'm playing for the whole pot."

"But we're licked now," said Arthur Benham. "And you've killed Lurtin. We—"

"Shut up," said Emory. "We're not licked. I've been ready for an emergency like this."

He crossed the room, stepping carefully over Lurtin's twisted body. He picked up the telephone and dialed a number. After a moment, he said:

"Bert? Come up here right away. Bring some help and the big car. And, Bert, bring Stoughton. Don't let anyone see him get in or out of the car. And hurry!"

He hung up. Arthur had sat down again. His hands were on his knees and his fingers moved convulsively like anxious white worms. His eyes were wide and drenched with horror. Emory sighed again. He crossed the room and pulled down the window shades.

The radio still blared. From the speaker came an idiot's jingle eulogizing soap, a frenzied fool's requiem for the soul of Lawrence S. Lurtin, M. D. . . .

It was night. The rain had stopped, the sky cleared and the moon was rising. John Prime strode along the deserted back road and swore mildly at the whim which had actuated his taking the short-cut.

A mile behind his coupe was parked at the side of the road, out of commission because of its broken fan belt. And there was no house, no telephone on this dirt highway, until he reached the Minor place just this side of Railtown, his destination.

But Prime was not particularly depressed. He was young, barely thirty.

His shoulders were broad, his eyes clear. He was the youngest Homicide lieutenant in the county's history.

The job kept him busy. But not too busy to preclude the weekly visit to his widowed mother who lived some forty miles away. It was from her cottage that he was returning now.

On his right was a vast tract of State owned forest. On his left was depressed swampland, appearing pale and eerie in the swelling light of the moon. Prime walked steadily along the edge of the road like a marching soldier.

Suddenly something ahead of him winked redly in the darkness. Prime blinked. Doubtless it was the tail light of a car. Since its size increased as he walked toward it, it was apparent that the car was parked.

Prime broke into a dog trot. Railtown was more than two miles away. Far better to ride than walk. Ahead of him a handful of men boldly silhouetted by the moon emerged from the woods and moved toward the car.

Prime increased his pace, lifted his voice in a hail. In the distance he saw the dim figures freeze to momentary immobility. Then the door of the car was wrenched open. The men sprang inside. The sound of a starting engine broke the silence.

"Hey," yelled Prime. "I want a lift into town. My car—"

His sentence was cut off by a sharp report and a gun flash. Prime heard the ominous whine of a bullet as it flew past his ear. The car jerked ahead. Its speed accelerated and its tail light evanesced along the empty road.

Prime came to a halt at the point where the car had been parked. He ran his fingers through his hair and a puzzled frown corrugated his brow. He had known that hitch-hikers were generally disliked. He had not known they were disliked to the point of having bullets fired at them.

**H**E GLANCED to the side of the road. The beaten underbrush indicated the path the men had taken from the woods. He lighted a cigarette thoughtfully, carefully made his way into the forest.

It needed no Indian tracker to follow

the trodden trail. His shin struck something hard and painful. He bent down to pick up the spade end of a shovel with half its handle. The other half had been broken off.

He took it along with him, proceeding slowly. A hundred feet beyond the perimeter of trees he came upon a clearing. By now the moon had cleared the roof of the forest. The scene was bathed in bright and argent light.

He needed no flashlight to observe that the earth at his feet had been freshly turned over. He stared at the fresh, worm-infested spill for a long moment. Then he removed his coat and began to dig.

With but half a spade the work was arduous. The moon had reached its zenith when he uncovered a dirt encrusted sack. He tossed the shovel aside and with sweat soaking into his shirt, dragged it from the hole. His pocket knife ripped it open.

He stared at the corpse of an old man. The face was benign and tranquil, though the sagging jaw revealed that he had no teeth. Moreover, it was quite obvious that he had not been dead long.

John Prime searched the dead man's clothing with professional competence. The tailor's label had been neatly removed from his coat, the laundry marks cut from his linen. The pockets, save for the last one Prime examined, were empty.

That last pocket, the tiny watch pocket in the trousers, yielded a folded yellow paper. Prime held it up and looked at it. It was a pawn ticket.

Prime put the pawn ticket in his own pocket. He donned his coat and walked back to the highway. He loped down the road and did not stop until he reached the Minor farm, half a mile from the city.

There he telephoned young Sampson, his second in command, and issued the necessary orders.

It was daylight by the time the corpse had passed through the departmental routine. John Prime arose after some three hours' sleep and went on duty.

It was barely noon when, with a lumpy brown paper parcel under his arm, he stopped beneath an unlit neon sign which proclaimed that these were

the premises of the Lucky Club.

At this hour the club was not officially open. Behind a long, deserted bar, a wide man in an apron checked an array of bottles against the inventory list in his hand. Beyond the bar a vast rectangular room contained the gambling equipment. The dice tables were covered with sheets. The roulette balls lay motionless in the wheels.

Prime approached the bar. He said, "Hello, Walsh. Is Emory here?"

Walsh glanced up from the inventory list. His eyebrows lifted a millimeter as he recognized Prime. He said from the corner of his mouth, "Emory? Yeah. Upstairs. In the office."

Prime nodded. He strode past the bar, through the gaming room to a small staircase at the rear. He mounted the steps, knocked sharply at a closed door. A clipped voice said, "Come in."

Ellis Emory sat behind a flat topped desk, a ledger before him. He regarded Prime with the faintest flicker of surprise in his pupils. He said through almost motionless lips:

"Sit down, Prime. Make yourself at home. I don't often have coppers calling on me."

Prime remained standing. He said, "I'm quite aware of that. You've been in this town for two years, Emory. In that time you've established yourself solidly with certain influential politicians. It's for that reason coppers don't call on you. If it wasn't for the crooked politicians you'd see a lot of coppers. They'd raid this joint and close it up."

Emory's smile was mocking. "You didn't come here to tell me this."

"No," said Prime. "I've come to return your raincoat."

He put the brown paper parcel on the desk, untied its string. Emory's face was granite as he watched Prime take the coat from the thick paper and lay it on the desk.

He said, "What makes you think it's mine?"

"Your initials are on the label. So is the name of the shop which sold it. I've checked with them."

Their gazes met and clashed. Emory's eyes dropped first. "Well," he said, "thanks. I guess I mislaid it somewhere."

"You didn't mislay it."

"Where did you find it?"

"In a hock shop. It was pawned by a man named Murtrie yesterday morning."

## CHAPTER III

### *Covered Trail*



MORY'S black eyes glittered. He was silent for some twenty seconds. Then he said, "You're wrong, Prime. Murtrie wouldn't hock my coat."

Prime said quickly, "So you know Murtrie?"

"Sure, I know him. Met him down South a couple of years ago. As a matter of fact we moved to this town at the same time."

"Where is this Murtrie now?"

Emory somehow achieved the effect of a shrug without moving his shoulders. "I don't know. Probably home. Why?"

"Let's stop kidding," said Prime. "You know, I know, and since the story's in the morning papers, half the town knows that we found a dead man out in the woods last night. That's the man who hocked your coat."

"I'll take your word for it," said Emory. "But what's that got to do with me? Or Murtrie? Or you?"

"The dead man was Murtrie. He had the hock ticket on him. I have the slip he signed in the pawn shop—a slip with his name and address on it. You're tied up in it somewhere, Emory. You admit you knew him. He hocked your coat. And he was found murdered in a home-made grave."

Emory lifted his eyebrows. "Murdered?" he said politely. "Is that what the M. E. said?"

"The M. E. hasn't finished the post mortem yet. But it's obvious, isn't it? People don't hide bodies of persons who have died naturally."

"This is all intensely interesting," said Emory. "And I must insist on repaying you the dough you've laid out for the coat. Beyond that I don't know what



you're talking about. I know nothing about old corpses lying around in the woods. Moreover, I'm certain Murtrie is alive. You will be, too, after you've made your next move."

"How do you know what my next move is?"

An unpleasant smile flickered on Emory's thin lips. "Baby," he said, "I've been buying and selling coppers all my life. I can read their minds. Listen: When you leave here you'll go to the address you got from the pawnbroker. You'll see if Murtrie's there. If he is, you'll get a sample of his handwriting to see if it checks against that on the hockshop slip. If it does, it'll prove that Murtrie is alive."

"It'll also prove that he *did* hock your coat."

"All right," said Emory, irritated. "Maybe he did. Some sort of a joke. Then this dead guy swiped the ticket from him or something. Whatever happened it's no concern of the Homicide Squad."

The telephone on Emory's desk jangled. Emory picked it up. He listened for a moment, then handed the instrument to Prime.

"It's your office," he said. "I've got to do downstairs for a minute, so you needn't worry about my eavesdropping."

He left the room as Prime said, "Hello," into the mouthpiece.

"John," said the voice at the other end of the wire, "this is Sampson. A dame just called up, name of Betty Morehead. Saw the murder story in the paper and wanted to know if the dead guy was Aaron Jabez Murtrie."

"Why did she want to know?" said Prime.

"Well, it seems her grandfather who lives with her knew that Murtrie years ago. Says if it is the same guy she can make positive identification."

"How?"

"She didn't say. From the way she spoke I guess the guy had a birthmark or some other definite body mark."

Prime grunted. "All right," he said. "Hold everything. I'll be right down to the office."

He hung up. Going down the stairway he passed Emory who was coming up. Their eyes met and the gambler's

gaze was malevolent. They did not speak.

**T**WENTY minutes later John Prime sat at his own desk. Facing him stood Sampson, a tall, fair youth in his twenties. He held a sheaf of police reports in his hand.

He said, "John, I've a couple of items for you. Neither is good."

Prime sighed and lit a cigarette. "Go ahead."

"First, a guy called Lurtin, a doctor, was found dead this morning at the wheel of his car. Shot three times. On the face of it it was a stickup. His wallet and watch were missing."

"So?"

"Well," said Sampson, "it seems to me that if you're going to shoot a guy who's sitting behind the wheel of a car you shoot him in the head. It's much harder to shoot him in the stomach."

"Lurtin was shot in the stomach?"

"Three times. And when the boys checked at his office they found out that for the last two years he's been in attendance on this guy, Murtrie."

"I am a simple man," said John Prime wearily. "This is getting too complicated for me."

"Then you won't like this at all. The M. E.'s report on the dead man is in."

"What's it say?"

"It says," said Sampson slowly, "that the subject died of natural causes. Heart failure."

Prime blinked. He said, "Natural causes?" incredulously and added, "Why in heaven's name would anyone try to hide the corpse of somebody who died naturally?"

Sampson shrugged. He said with despondent humor, "We're detectives. We're supposed to find out."

"We'll try," said Prime grimly. "I've got something better than a hunch that Emory's in this up to his pretty little eyebrows. And if we can pin something rough on Emory, we can clean up this whole town."

He stood up. "I'm going to this Murtrie address to find out if Murtrie's still alive. I want you to come with me and canvass the neighborhood. Find out all you can about Murtrie, even to his physical appearance. Then I'm going to

see this Morehead girl who telephoned. Pick me up there if you're through in time. Otherwise I'll see you back here at the office."

**A**N HOUR LATER, John Prime emerged from a neat frame house on Spruce Street.

There was a frown upon his brow and his head ached with the intensity of his thinking.

Deep inside him he was still convinced that Murtrie was dead. However, he had obtained what appeared to be irrefutable evidence that he was alive. He had just met the man who claimed he was Murtrie. He was a handsome gentleman, soft spoken, with iron gray hair; in his sixties, certainly, but hale and well preserved.

He had, without hesitation, acceded to Prime's request for a handwriting sample and it coincided exactly with the signature on the pawnbroker's slip.

Under questioning Murtrie admitted that he had pawned Emory's raincoat. His story was slick, plausible but unconvincing to John Prime.

He claimed that Emory, an old acquaintance, had left his raincoat at the house. Late in the afternoon, when the banks were closed, the old man had found he was out of cash. He had pawned the coat intending to redeem it in the morning and return it to the gambler. However, in the meantime, he had lost the ticket. His theory was that the dead man had found it just before he died.

John Prime climbed into his coupe and headed for the address of Betty Morehead. He had taken the story of the raincoat with several grains of salt. Unfortunately, he had no ironclad theory of his own with which to combat it.

He sighed as he parked the car before a green picket fence. He walked through the gate along a gray gravel path. He pressed the doorbell and heard soft chimes reverberate through the house.

A girl opened the door. She was in her early twenties. Her hair was dark, her eyes were brown, her manner demure. She put a slim finger to her rouged lips and said, "Sssh." She added by way of explanation, "Grandpa's having his afternoon nap."

**J**OHAN PRIME nodded and established his identity in a whisper. He was then led into the house and seated in an armchair in a simply, but comfortably, furnished living room.

"Now," said Prime, "what is it that you know about this Murtrie?"

The girl shrugged her slim shoulders. "Me? I don't know anything. I never heard the name until this morning. I live here alone with Grandpa. He's an invalid. On reading the morning paper he saw the story about the dead man found in the woods and that his name was probably Murtrie." She paused and knitted her brow. "He acted kind of funny about it."

"Funny how?"

"Well, Grandpa's the kindest, most sensitive man in the world, and he seemed sort of unhappy when he read Murtrie was dead. He told me that if this Murtrie was Aaron Murtrie, I'd have it made up to me for all the trouble I'd had nursing him. I don't know what he meant. Anyway, he told me to call up and find out."

Prime drew a deep breath. He felt like a drunken man trying to find his way out of a maze.

He said, "What was this about being able to identify the man?"

"Grandpa merely said that he'd known Murtrie very well as a boy. That if it was the same man, he could positively identify him, as they'd often been swimming together. That's all he said. I suppose he meant that Murtrie had some sort of a birthmark."

For the first time since he had stumbled on the corpse a little light seeped into Prime's brain. If Murtrie had a birthmark and Grandpa Morehead could make positive identification, then he could at least be sure that it was Murtrie who was dead.

He was about to suggest going upstairs to see the old man when a bell rang.

"Back door," said the girl rising. "Probably the grocer. Excuse me, I'll be right back."

She got up and disappeared along the corridor. Prime lighted a cigarette and waited.

He waited for some time. There was no sound whatever from the kitchen

but Prime thought he heard footfalls above his head in the upper story. He surmised that the girl had gone upstairs to wake her grandfather and apprise him of Prime's presence.

Then he heard a yell—a quavering yell pregnant with terror. Prime jammed out his cigarette and sprang to his feet. Before he gained the bottom stair, he heard the shots. Two of them blasted through the house, ominous, deafening.

Prime took the stairs three at a time. As he gained the upper corridor he saw a figure turn at its end, apparently to descend a back stairway.

Prime jerked his gun from his shoulder holster and shouted, "Halt or I'll shoot!"

Prime's threat was drowned by a more direct one. There was a white flash from the end of the hall. A bullet sang, hissing and sinister, past Prime's ear. Before he could bring his Police Special into action, the man who had shot at him disappeared.

Prime charged down the hall. He reached the rear staircase and leaped down the first flight, touching it only twice. He turned at the newel post where the second half of the staircase led to the kitchen.

Racing across the floor was a squat, saturnine man, wearing a cap pulled low over his forehead. This time Prime wasted no time in warning. He lifted his gun and leveled it. Just as his finger tightened on the trigger, the man turned his head, saw his danger.

He threw himself violently to one side as Prime's gun jerked and fired angrily. Prime jumped the second flight of steps and a pair of bullets whistled over his head as he did so. His feet hit the linoleum of the kitchen. He moved forward. Then his shoe hit the edge of a garbage can protruding from beneath the sink.

He stumbled, for an instant was off balance. The squat man moved in like a panther. He grabbed Prime's right wrist with his left hand. With his right, he lifted his gun and brought it crashing down on Prime's temple.

Prime grunted and staggered. The fingers which held the Police Special were suddenly inert. The weapon clattered to the linoleum. Again the squat

man's revolver cracked against Prime's skull.

The bones in John Prime's knees were suddenly transformed to water. They crumpled. Prime fell. The squat man, breathing hard, raced to the kitchen door, went through it and slammed it after him. From outside came the sound of a powerful, racing motor.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Vain Search*



PRIME, sprawled on the floor, was dimly conscious of a distant knocking sound, a high pitched voice crying in distress. With tremendous effort he raised his head.

Across the room was a broom closet with a key in its lock. It seemed to his fogged brain that the sound came from there. He crawled across the floor arduously and the pain beat at his skull like a drumstick.

He reached the closet door. He lifted an arm which weighed a thousand pounds. He turned the key. The door burst open. Betty Morehead emerged, her face ashen, a spot of blood on her mouth. Prime looked at her. His lips moved silently. Then a terrible, isolating darkness overwhelmed him and consciousness slid from him.

When he opened his eyes, he was aware of a strong taste of brandy in his mouth. Standing over him was Sampson. Prime lay on the living room couch and as he raised himself to sitting position, he saw Betty Morehead in the chair on the far side of the room. Her face was in her hands and her shoulders shook with sobbing.

Prime put a hand to his aching head. He asked Sampson a question with his eyes.

"He's dead," said Sampson. "Died within a minute after I arrived."

Prime said, "What happened?"

"I came here after checking up on Murtric," said Sampson. "I arrived to find you unconscious, the girl hysteri-

cally trying to get Headquarters on the phone. The old man was at the point of death."

Prime said, "You say he died in your presence? Did he say anything?"

Sampson nodded. "He said something that sounded like Tontine. He said it twice, then he died. I guess it's a name. Maybe the name of the guy who killed him."

Prime looked across the room. Betty Morehead had managed to achieve some degree of self-possession. She dabbed at her tear stained eyes with a handkerchief.

"Tontine," said Prime to her. "Did you ever hear the name before?"

She shook her head. Prime frowned. After a moment's thought, he said, "I'm still sure Emory's mixed up in this. Maybe this Tontine is one of his boys. We can check back at the office." He addressed the girl again. "Tell me exactly what happened when you went into the kitchen."

"That man was at the door," she said in a low voice. "The squat man in the cap. He said he wanted to read the light meter. I let him in and he hit me with a pistol. He pushed me in the broom closet and locked the door. I was half unconscious for a few minutes. Then I banged on the door and yelled and you let me out. That's all I know."

With some effort Prime got off the couch.

"Let's go upstairs," he said.

A moment later he stood at the foot of Grandpa Morehead's bed. The old man lay still against a pillow red as a cardinal's hat. There was an ugly hole in his cheek and another just above the heart. His eyes stared, blank and unseeing, at the ceiling.

"The boys are on the way," said Sampson. "Fingerprint and the M. E."

"I don't think they can do much good," said Prime wearily. "Let's take a look around ourselves."

With professional skill the pair began a thorough search of the room. Nothing out of the ordinary came to light, until Prime, rummaging through the bottom drawer of an ancient roll-top desk in one corner of the room, came upon a sere and crinkled sheet of foolscap.

He stared at it for a long silent mo-

ment, then said, "Sampson. Look at this."

Sampson crossed the room and looked over his superior's shoulder. Prime held the long sheet of paper in his hand. At its top was printed the legend: "Caldwell, Wentworth & Calhoun, Attorneys-at-law, New York City.

Beneath the firm's title was a list of thirteen names written in a crabbed Spencerian hand. Eleven of those names had a thin inked line drawn through them. Of the two that remained one had a question mark in the margin, the other had no mark at all.

**T**HE name that had been question marked was that of *Murtrie*. The name with no mark at all was *Morehead*.

"Well," said Sampson, "how do you figure that?"

"I don't quite know," said Prime thoughtfully. "But I'm sure this paper is at least fifty years old. Look at it."

Prime's brow corrugated. The effort of deep thought almost caused his already aching head to split. He lifted his eyes at last and said, "A few pieces are beginning to slide into place. Let's go back to the office. We've got some checking to do."

As they descended the stairs, the M. E. and the fingerprint experts tramped into the house. Betty Morehead was out on the porch, staring off into space.

Prime put a gentle hand on her shoulder. "You'd better call up some friend of yours to stay with you," he said quietly.

"I've already done that. I'm waiting for her now."

"Good," said Prime. "Keep your chin up. And delve into your memory. See if you can recall someone called Tontine. Call me at Headquarters if you come up with it."

She smiled a brave and tremulous smile at him as Prime and Sampson walked to the curb where Prime's coupe was parked.

On the way down to the office, Prime, remembering, said, "What about Murtrie? What did you find out?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? You must have at least got a physical description of him from the neighbors or tradesmen."

"Nothing," said Sampson again. "No one's ever seen him. Emory drove Murtrie and his grandson up to the house a couple of years ago. The old man never came out of the house. The neighbors understood he was an invalid. That doctor who was killed, Lurtin, was in constant attendance."

Prime grunted. He was silent for a while, then he said, "Suppose the dead man actually did pawn Emory's coat, suppose he actually signed the pawnbroker's slip. Then suppose the man who is alive in Murtrie's house right now had a handwriting exactly the same as the dead man. How would you figure that?"

"As a coincidence," said Sampson, "which couldn't possibly happen."

"Or," said Prime, "you'd figure that the living man could copy Murtrie's handwriting perfectly. That would make him an expert, a professional."

"Professional what?"

"Forger," said Prime as the car drew up before police headquarters.

**B**EHIND his own desk again, Prime said, "I'm going through all our records looking for a guy named Tontine. Then I'm checking our rogues' gallery and calling the F. B. I., if necessary, for other information. In the meantime, there's one thing I want you to do at once."

"What's that?"

"Check with the telephone company. See if there's an extension telephone in Emory's Lucky Club."

Sampson regarded him with some surprise. "An extension phone at the Lucky Club?" he repeated. "Where's that going to lead to?"

"If my hunch is right," said Prime, "maybe to the gallows. Get going."

It was dusk. The evening breeze which blew over Raitown had a chill in it. The sun had almost disappeared over the rim of the horizon and a deep crepuscular light cast itself over the city.

John Prime still sat at his desk. A sheet of paper before him was covered with scribblings. The telephone receiver at his side was warm from the sweat of his hand and continued use. He looked like a man who has solved

half of a jigsaw puzzle, then finds that for the life of him he can't get another single piece to fit. And not to put too fine a point upon it, he was.

The office door opened. Young Sampson came in. He said, "You're right about Emory's Club. There is an extension phone. One instrument's in his office. The other's downstairs in the gaming room."

"Click," said Prime. "That's another piece. But I'm still licked."

"Did you make any headway at all?"

"Some. According to the description I gave the F. B. I. that guy posing as Murtrie is Stoughton, a big time forger. Considered the best in the country. They're sending me his prints and picture."

Sampson screwed up his brow. "I don't quite get it but it sounds important."

"It is important. It's important enough to wrap up two murders if I could only figure a motive. Or maybe it'd help if I could get a line on this guy, Tontine."

"Nothing at all on him?"

Prime shook his head. "Not in our records. And the F. B. I. never heard of him."

He stared gloomily out the window into the lowering night. The telephone jangled on his desk. He snatched it up and said, "Hello," into the receiver.

A voice which he recognized as that of Betty Morehead came over the wire.

"Lieutenant Prime, have you found out anything about Tontine?"

Prime said, "No. I've checked every possible record. The Rogues' Gallery, the Federal files, the penitentiary records and the memory of every stool-pigeon in town."

Betty Morehead uttered a short laugh with more nervous excitement in it than mirth. She said, "You've been looking in the wrong place. Do you have an unabridged dictionary at Police Headquarters?"

"Yeah. There's one in the Chief's room. Why?"

"Well, look in there. The correct name is Tonti. A tontine was named after him."

"Okay," said Prime with some puzzlement. "Thanks."

"And by the way," said the girl be-

fore he could hang up, "you still have that list of names you found in Grandfather's desk, don't you?"

"Sure. Why?"

"You'll find out," she said swiftly. Then hung up.

"What gives?" asked Sampson.

"I haven't the faintest idea," said Prime. "Go up to the Chief's room and bring down that big dictionary."

John Prime thumbed through the big dictionary. At last he paused and his eyes ran down the page of fine type. He read aloud:

"Tontine—deriving its name from Lorenzo Tonti, a Neapolitan banker of the Seventeenth Century. A—" He broke off and stared at the page. Then he slammed the book shut with a cry of triumph. He snatched up the telephone.

"Operator," he said, "get me New York City. A law firm by the name of Caldwell, Wentworth and Calhoun. If none of the partners are at their office, have the New York operator try to find them at their homes. And hurry!"

He put down the phone and grinned at the bewildered Sampson. "You," he said, "take a car and a couple of men. Go to Murtrie's house and bring Arthur Benham and the guy who says he's Murtrie here at once."

"You mean we really have something this time?"

"Not only something," said Prime happily. "But we have it on Emory."

"Good. Enough to drive him out of town?"

"Enough," said Prime grimly, "to drive him right out of this world."

## CHAPTER V

### *Gambler's Chance*



BOVE the entrance of the Lucky Club the neon sign was the color of bright, phthisical blood. Its light jerked nervously like a frightened pulse. John Prime pushed the door open and made his way into the bar.

The customers were lined up two deep.

Prime walked the length of the room and entered the chamber given over to the devotees of chance. A grim crowd stood about the green baize of a craps table. Hard eyed women stared concentratedly at the whirring roulette ball.

Prime strode past them. He turned into the small staircase at the rear of the room and purposefully walked up the flight. This time he did not knock at the door of Emory's private office. He flung it open and strode inside.

Ellis Emory sat at his desk. His face was white and strained. There were dark shadows beneath his eyes. On the desk before him was a large brown paper bag, the mouth of which faced him. As Prime entered Emory thrust his hand in the bag and withdrew a handful of potato chips which he thrust into his mouth.

Prime slammed the door shut behind him and advanced into the room. Emory said, in a flat emotionless tone, "I've been expecting you."

"Then," said Prime, "we can save a lot of conversation. I presume you know why I'm here."

"I can guess," said Emory. "But it'll take more than guesses this time. You need evidence."

Prime stood with his left hand on Emory's desk. "I have evidence. Do you want to hear it?"

"Go ahead," said Emory and there was a faint, strained note in his voice. "Go ahead. Talk."

"I have been pulling rabbits out of a hat," said Prime. "Or rather clues out of a dictionary. I've been learning about Lorenzo Tonti."

Emory regarded him impassively. He reached in and pulled another handful of potato chips from the greasy bag.

"Tonti," said Prime, "the guy who invented the tontine. There isn't much sense in telling you about it, Emory, because you're probably one of the half dozen people in this town who know all about it. But I'll explain anyway. A tontine is an insurance deal where at an early age any number of people band together to buy annuities. Say there are, well, thirteen people, whose parents all kick in several thousand dollars. The money is held in trust and, of course, the interest pyramids. This goes on

for years until all the original participants, save one, are dead. That survivor gets the whole pot, Emory."

A fragment of potato chip fell on Emory's vest. He brushed it off with a gesture of annoyance.

"Since," went on Prime, "these tontines are usually started when the entrants are about ten years old and keep riding for sixty or seventy years, there's a whale of a lot of dough in them. In this particular one I'm talking about, there is over six million dollars."

Emory drew a deep breath. He repeated, "Six million dollars," in a soft caressing voice like a man speaking of a dead hope. Which in a manner of speaking, he was.

"Now," said Prime, "suppose a gambler—a gambler who's running a joint down South—a guy pretty much like you, Emory. Suppose he has a young customer who loses more than he can pay. He tells the gambler of his prospects instead of giving him the cash. I'm talking about you and Arthur Benham, Emory."

Had it not been for the movement of his mouth as he crunched the potato chips, Emory would have looked more like a graven image than a man.

"So Benham told you that his grandfather, Murtrie, was one of the two living members of a tontine worth a fortune. He told you, further, that the other member was Morehead who lived in this town. You found Benham, a weakling, easy enough to dominate. You brought him and Murtrie here, where you could keep an eye on Morehead."

**T**HERE was a long silence. John Prime spoke again.

"You rented a house here and installed Murtrie and his grandson in it. You made sure that Murtrie was seen by no one, that he kept to his bed. You saw that he had the best medical care to insure that he would outlive Morehead. In the meantime you made quite a career for yourself in this town, achieved an enormous amount of influence.

"But even you, Emory, have no influence in heaven, so you plotted to protect yourself in case Murtrie died before Morehead. That's when you dug up Stoughton."

Emory's eyes held no fear. But there was hate in them, and menace.

"Stoughton," said Prime, "is the best penman in the country. You figured if Murtrie, who was a sick old man, died, you still weren't licked. No one here had seen Murtrie, no one could identify him. When Morehead died it would be Murtrie's handwriting which would claim the tontine. That's why you had Stoughton ready to impersonate Murtrie if anything happened to him. And something did happen to him, Emory."

Prime continued, "Murtrie died. You immediately substituted Stoughton and prepared to play a waiting game, waiting for Morehead, also an ill old man, to die. But the telephone call which I got here, and which you listened to, forced your hand.

"You listened to that call from Morehead's daughter, Emory. You learned that Morehead was prepared to make positive identification of the corpse I found in the woods where you'd had your boys hide it. Now positive identification of that corpse as Murtrie would cost you a fortune. You had to get rid of the man who could make that identification. So you sent one of your boys up to kill Morehead."

"Is that all?" said Emory and his voice was soft as a woman's.

"Not quite. You murdered Doctor Lurtin, too. Because he also knew Murtrie was dead."

Emory crammed potato chips in his mouth. "And you figured all this out yourself?"

"Most of it. I figured the framework. I filled in the details a while ago after we arrested Stoughton and Benham."

"And they sang?"

"In a very high key. Stoughton's a three time loser. And Benham has the spunk of a rabbit."

"I'm a gambler," said Emory. "I believe in luck. In this deal I've had none. If that old fool hadn't hocked my coat to buy booze with, he'd be alive today. If you hadn't been walking down that road the other night, I'd have got away with it."

"All right," said Prime. "You'd better come downtown with me now."

Emory said, "I admit I've been unlucky. But I'm not a fool, Prime."

There was odd urgency in his tone. Prime looked at him curiously.

"No," repeated Emory, "I'm not a fool. Naturally, the boy who killed Morehead told me he'd tangled with you. And there's been no answer on the Murtrie house phone for the last hour or so. I knew you were up to something. I had time to make a getaway, Prime. But I didn't."

"No," said John Prime. "You didn't."

"I'll tell you why I didn't," said Emory. "There was too much at stake. I couldn't pull out and leave until I was absolutely sure you'd got me dead to rights. I couldn't walk out on six million dollars."

"No," said Prime. "You couldn't."

"But," said Emory, "I made this resolve. That if someone had swindled me out of that money I would kill him. I swore that if I lost the six million the man who made me lose it would lose something more valuable—his life."

**J**OHAN PRIME'S eyes narrowed. He watched Emory like a hawk. His right hand was loose at his side and his coat was unbuttoned.

"Emory," he said, "you'll get up and come with me. I'm a crack shot and, while I mightn't be as good as Billy the Kid, I'm considered quick on the draw for this day and age. If you reach for a desk drawer or a pocket, I'll blast you."

Emory's smile was thin and mirthless. He said, "I'm fully aware of your reputation. In fact, I took it into consideration when I swore to kill you."

His right hand reached for the bag of potato chips. And in that single instant something flashed in John Prime's brain. Ellis Emory, the dapperest gourmet in all Railtown, was no potato chip eater. It didn't add up. There was something in that bag other than potato chips!

Prime flung his body to one side as an explosion shook the room. The paper bag burst and shattered fragments of potato chips flew in all directions. A bullet ripped the fabric from Prime's coat and buried itself in the rear wall. Directly before him Emory was standing, an automatic in his hand, and a feral snarl on his thin lips.

Now, Prime's Police Special was in his hand. It jerked and blasted. Emory reeled back, a bullet in his shoulder, knocking over his chair. In the next instant John Prime was upon him.

A half hour later Ellis Emory was being treated by a police surgeon at Headquarters. Prime sat in his office smoking a cigarette and watching young Sampson preparing to leave.

"You know," said Prime, "maybe you should go over to the Morehead house and tell the girl the whole story. She's not a bad looking kid and you're still a bachelor."

Sampson looked at him ruefully. "You know," he said, "when I first saw her this afternoon I was thinking of asking her for a date. But I guess I better not after all."

"Why not?"

"My gosh," said Sampson, "how can a guy make a pass at six million dollars?"



COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

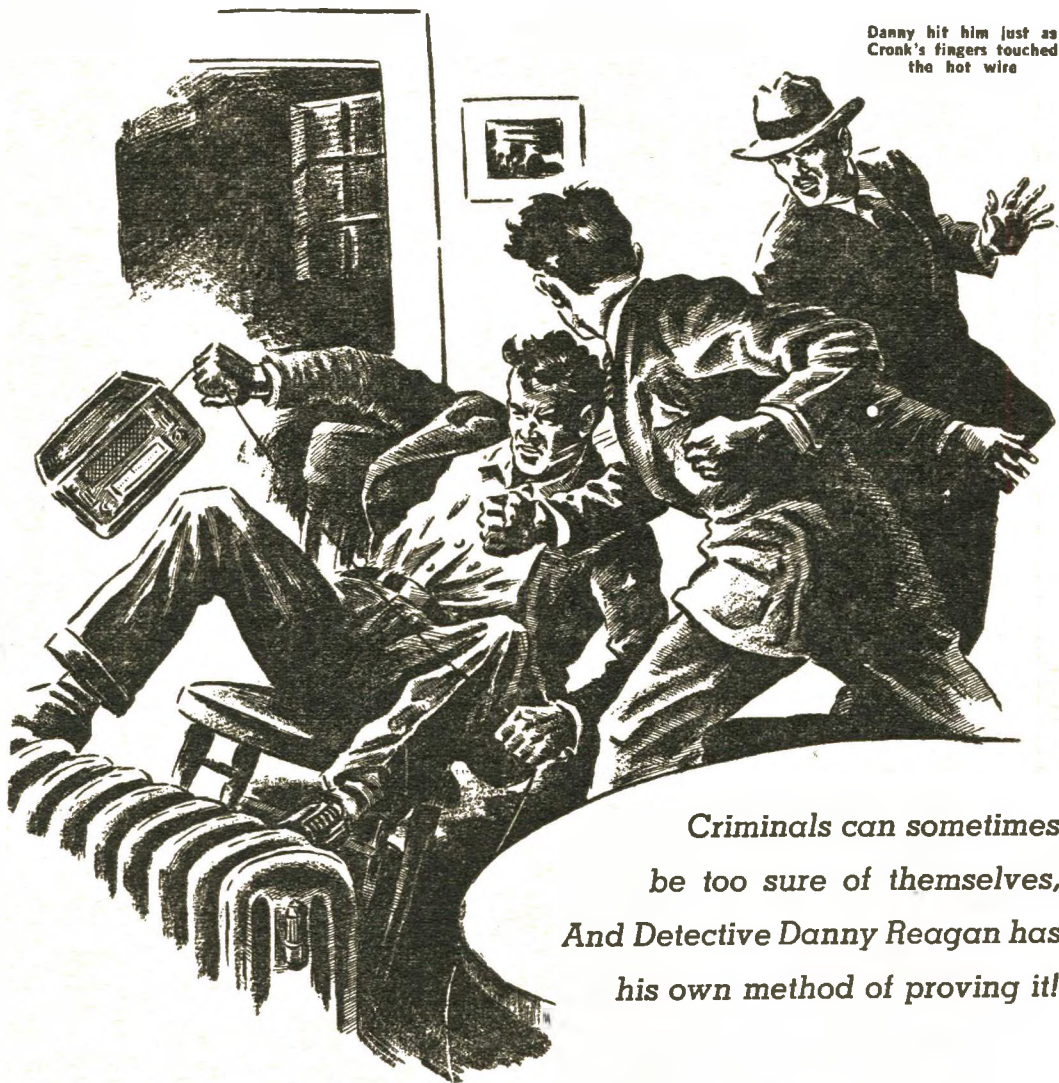
## TRUST ME TO SLAY

A Complete Mystery Novelet by ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT



# First, Find the Body

Danny hit him just as Cronk's fingers touched the hot wire



*Criminals can sometimes  
be too sure of themselves,  
And Detective Danny Reagan has  
his own method of proving it!*

**A**L CRONK turned into his driveway, drove past the five room cottage and parked the sedan in front of the one-car garage. He was tired from the long drive, but cheerful. Murdering his wife, May, had come off beautifully. There hadn't been a slip in a single detail of the general plan.

And May, without realizing it, had not only cooperated in her own death, but would aid materially in her husband's escaping the gallows.

Al Cronk was elated over his own attention to little things—the little slips that enable detectives to solve the crime. Al hadn't slipped.

**By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE**

"And why?" he asked himself, "because I thought everything through before I made a move. Before finishing her off I did the things I normally did in everyday life—things her friends and neighbors would likely notice. Such as carefully cleaning my shoes before stepping into the kitchen. And I'm going to maintain the usual routine."

A steel scraper had been installed on the bottom step. He scraped dried mud from his shoes, then stopped at the landing and rubbed them vigorously on a mat. He opened the kitchen door and called, "May! May!" This was for the benefit of Mrs. Keenan, next door.

"May hasn't come back yet," Mrs. Keenan said. "Still mad at you, like as not. But she'll cool off, Al, she'll cool off and come back like she's always done."

"She's cooled," Al thought grimly. "I cooled her—good and plenty. And she's never coming back." He shook his head in a resigned manner. "I guess I just don't understand women, Molly. It seems like if I keep my mouth shut May gets mad because I'm saying nothing. And when I talk I say the wrong thing."

"You might call Edna," Molly Keenan suggested. She was a warm-hearted person who liked to see people get along in the world. Edna Brady was May's sister who lived in another part of town.

"I suppose I could call Edna," Al said, "but I'm blessed if I will. May got mad at me again and took off as usual. You ought to see the way she left the bedroom. I'm not going to run after her. A man's got some pride."

This little conversation was going to look mighty good when repeated to investigating detectives. Cronk left the curtains up so that Molly Keenan could duly note his movements. All this was part of the pattern he had planned in detail.

Plan carefully, do the murder, dispose of the body, then act normally afterwards was Al Cronk's creed. It had paid off in the murder of his first wife—paid off in clearing him of all blame and rewarding him with her thirty thousand dollar estate. Thirty thousand dollars wasn't much these days, but it was better than a kick in the pants.

How simple it had been to jerk the

wheel five years ago when Ellen was driving, then step from the car as it crossed the highway, smashed through the guard rail, then gone end over end to shatter against a tree.

He had followed, knowing the shale on the slope would instantly cover his tracks. He had gashed his forehead with a rock, then rolled into the brush near the wreck and waited. It wasn't long until a truck driver had noted the broken guard rail, stopped, gone down to the wreck, then waited for the highway patrol to come along.

Al Cronk had breathed irregularly and done a little muttering while stout men carried him up the slope on a stretcher. At the hospital they had asked him questions. He had answered, "Ellen was driving. I was dozing. I heard her scream. I opened my eyes and I had a sensation of dropping. But I don't remember a thing." It had been as easy at that.

**N**OW May's murder had been just as simple. He prepared a steak dinner. While the vegetables were cooking he carried a steak next door. "May hasn't shown up," he said lightly, "and you might as well have hers, Molly."

"If I'd have thought," Molly said, "I'd have invited you over."

"No, thanks," he answered. "She might phone. She cools off, phones and then I go and pick her up. Then we get along okay for awhile."

Molly Keenan smiled, thinking, "As if I hadn't noticed that a dozen times in the past year."

Al Cronk ate slowly, cleaned up the kitchen, turned on the radio, lighted a cigar, picked up the evening paper, shifted his favorite chair to the exact spot under the reading lamp, then sat down. When the game ended he turned in.

The following evening he telephoned May's sister. "Edna, is May with you by any chance?" he asked. "Oh, she isn't? You knew she wanted to call it quits, didn't you? Oh, you didn't? She'd been riding me rather hard lately. I told her that it was time we worked something out as neither of us was happy. We had an offer for the business and she thought we should take it and split the amount.

We sold, for cash, and I suggested a vacation as a means of bringing us closer together."

Not waiting for his sister-in-law to reply, Cronk rambled on:

"That sounded good at first, then she blew her top and we met at lunch. I paid her her half and took a receipt. She gave me a cold, 'thank you' and said if she never saw me again it would be too soon. I've been hanging around the house ever since. The lease expires in two weeks and either she should come back and help me make a go of it, or else pack her things. I don't intend renewing the lease and living here alone. I think I'm being reasonable, Edna."

"Very reasonable, Al," Edna finally answered. When he hung up she telephoned the Detective Bureau and the switchboard operator rang Danny Reagan. . . .

At the moment Danny's body was present behind his desk, but his heart and thoughts were on an Arctic island where he hoped, some day, to excavate kitchen middens and add to his store of anthropological knowledge. He listened a moment, then asked, "Do you feel, Mrs. Brady, that your sister has met with foul play?"

"I don't know what to think," Edna Brady answered. "May is short tempered and impulsive. When she gets mad she's liable to sulk a few days. Then she returns with smiles, apologies and presents."

"How old is she?"

"Thirty-five."

"Been married before or did she marry late in life?"

"Married ten years, a widow two years, then she met and married Al Cronk," Edna Brady said. "He's shrewd and cold when he wants to be. Or he can turn on the old charm and make a plain girl feel important. I've never felt that I knew the real Al Cronk, and at times I've wondered whether May, or anyone else, knows him."

"Is this Cronk's second marriage?" Danny Reagan asked.

"Yes. First wife killed in an automobile accident. He was thrown from the car and knocked unconscious," the woman replied. "He showed me the clippings one day—to explain a light

scar on his head."

"You've been very helpful. I'll drop out and see what Cronk has to say. Personally I have no opinion, one way or another. And won't have until I've talked to the persons involved," Danny said.

He hung up the telephone and lit a cigarette. He supposed he shouldn't be annoyed at this interruption. After all, the city was paying his salary, and anthropology was an avocation which regularly ate into that salary. But he had been enjoying digging into frozen ruins when the telephone rang.

He found it intriguing to dig into soils and determine by the structure and gravels, silts, clays and vegetation whether the glaciers had covered a particular area. If so, when and how many times. Then to excavate the kitchen middens of an ancient people and reclaim their broken dishes and utensils.

Currently anyone delving into a garbage dump is a scavenger, but if you poke through the dumps of a long-dead people, then you are an anthropologist. Danny Reagan grinned when he considered all this, and he was grinning the following evening when he parked his personal car in front of Al Cronk's home. No need of using a detective bureau car and drawing the neighbors' attention.

**D**ANNY saw a rugged, granite-jawed individual polishing a sedan and he walked up the driveway and asked, "Mr. Cronk?"

"Yes," Cronk answered. "Friday night is car polishing night and my sales resistance is strong. So if you've got something to sell, hit me some other evening."

"I'm Lieutenant Reagan of the detective bureau," Danny said pleasantly. "Go right along with your polishing. Mrs. Brady reports her sister is missing and before we give the matter publicity I thought you might have some ideas."

"Until a day or so ago I thought it might be one of those husband-wife spats," Al Cronk answered, "but now I'm thinking she wasn't kidding this last time. And it's for keeps. I've been marking time to see what happens. I think you should know this. At the

time I last saw her, she had twenty-five thousand dollars in bills of large denomination, her share of the sale of our business."

Danny whistled. "That's a lot of dough to be packing around in a handbag," the detective said. "Especially the way women leave handbags on counters, tea tables and in phone booths."

"Back in the depression days when she was a kid, a bank failed and she lost twenty-seven dollars, I think it was," Cronk said. "That looked big to a kid who had saved it four bits and a dollar at a time. She doesn't trust banks. I do. I deposited the entire fifty thousand dollars to my account. I offered to meet her with a check for her half. She answered, 'I trust you even less than I do the banks. Your check would bounce. I want good, clean currency.' So she got good, clean currency."

"Where was this paid, and when?"

"We met in the Gregori Bronson lunch room," Cronk answered. "We talked it over. I suggested that with the strain of business off of our shoulders we might improve our domestic relations. She said that she was fed up, and that when she was fed up she was fed clear up to here. And she put her hand to her throat just under the jaw."

"About as full as one can get," Danny lightly observed.

"What time did this luncheon take place?"

"I met her at one. It lasted over an hour because my parking time had expired. I remember it was an hour zone and there was an over-parking slip on the windshield swipe," Cronk said. He handed Danny a pink slip.

"That fixes the time okay," Danny said. "I suppose the waitress would confirm the fact that you were there together?"

"She would unless she has lost her memory," Cronk declared. "We were on our dignity, polite as all get-out, talking in low, refined tones. You know how it is when a man and his wife want to throw things."

"I'm a bachelor," Danny answered, "but I've heard. May I look around in the house? You understand no charges have been filed, nor are there any pointing fingers of suspicion. I can't be too

emphatic on this point."

"The fact you want to look around, Lieutenant, suggests to me that you aren't too sure I've told all," Cronk remarked quietly. "I'll say this much. Money couldn't hire me to leave town until she is located. If she thought for a minute that by hiding out she could get me into a jam, she'd lie low for months. She hates me—period. I wish you'd do one thing."

"What?"

"Check with the safe deposit department, National Bank of Commerce, and determine whether she opened her box some time after two-thirty o'clock the afternoon of the nineteenth," Cronk said.

"Glad to do it," Danny answered.

"I'd like to know whether she deposited that dough or took it with her," Cronk began again.

He finished polishing the car and led the way up the back steps, pausing to scrape his shoes. "Someone trained you well," Danny commented.

"She did," Cronk replied. "Always yelling about the kitchen floor and the dirt I tracked in."

Theirs had been a bitter relationship, Danny sensed. He scraped his own shoes, then stooped to tie a shoe lace. The kitchen was neat, the dishes washed and put away, the towels hung up to dry, but the dishrag had dropped in a limp heap on the floor. That was the mark of a man performing housework. A woman never hung up the rag in a wad. And she made sure that it stayed where it was hung.

There were other signs—the withered flowers in a vase, and the full ash trays. "Her room," Cronk said, jerking his thumb over his shoulder.

Danny looked into the bedroom. The bed had been neatly made, but the drawers had been yanked open and their contents piled up while the departing woman apparently searched through them for some particular item. Then she had tried to close the drawers, but the contents had wadded and the drawers remained partly open.

There were also things on the floor, and many pieces of clothing in the closets had dropped to the row of shoes beneath. Here and there a wire hanger made a brave effort to keep coat shoul-

ders in shape. "She sure was mad," Danny commented.

"Plenty," Al Cronk agreed. "I'm glad I was down town at the time. But there've been times when I was home. And then—oh, brother!" He thought, "They've sent their ace detective on this case. The chips are down right now, but I've protected myself at every turn. Shake off Danny Reagan and I can preen my feathers. Cooperation does it. Instead of them giving me enough rope to hang myself, I'm giving them enough rope to bind themselves hand and foot."

"Would you mind letting me look over the clothing you wore at the luncheon that day?" Danny asked. "Now remember you don't have to comply with any request I make."

"I'd be a darned fool if I didn't," Cronk answered, grinning. "Things can look bad for me if she doesn't show up in a few days, and I know it. You couldn't hire me to leave town or say no to any request. The blazes with my rights at a time like this."

As he waved Danny Reagan toward the clothes closet he thought, "I figured that one out ahead of time. No chance of tracing a suit suddenly sent to the cleaners and the cleaners reporting bloodstains, or a request for quick service. The suit I wore when I killed May is right there in the closet. And I was mighty careful not to pick up any stains. My compliance must be driving Reagan screwy."

The detective spent twenty minutes in complete privacy as he examined Cronk's clothing. When he returned to the living room, Cronk was listening to a radio broadcast of the ball game. He turned it down and waited for Danny to comment.

Danny said nothing. Then to make conversation Cronk said, "You've solved several Skid Row cases I've heard."

"You haven't been in this country long," Danny commented.

Cronk looked surprised. "Five years. Why?"

"You used the words, 'Skid Row,'" Danny answered. "In the Puget Sound country it is Skidroad. The name comes from the fact that in the old days of logging, skids were laid across the road at intervals. The skids were greased so

that the logs, dragged by oxen or horses, would slide over them. That part of Seattle where loggers and seasonal workers lived between jobs became known as the Skidroad."

"It's funny I hadn't noticed they call that part of the city the Skidroad out here," Cronk said. "I'm usually very observing."

"I imagine you are a man who is very thorough in whatever you do," Danny suggested. "A man whom an employer can rely upon to carry out an order in detail."

"I've received several compliments of that nature," Cronk admitted. "And what is more—substantial raises from time to time." He smiled. "I'm blowing my own horn, I'm afraid."

"I brought up the subject in a questioning tone," Danny said. You supplied the answers. I'd rather deal with a man who was quite frank about his good points than one loaded with false modesty. Well, I'll be going. I'd like to listen to the ball game but I happen to be on duty. You'll be notified of developments."

**T**HE chief of detectives was in his office when Danny returned. "What about the missing Cronk woman?" he asked.

"I may be jumping to conclusions," Danny answered. "I think he killed her."

"What makes you think so, Reagan?" the chief asked.

"A number of little things, which if tied together can mean big things," Danny answered. "For example, the average man has to stop and think a moment if you ask him what he did or did not do at a given time on a certain day. Free of guilt, his thoughts are more on what he plans to do rather than what he has done. The past is a little vague. Then he begins to put things together and presently he has the answer. Even if the answer is wrong, it is no proof of guilt."

"Often the contrary," the chief agreed.

"When I mentioned the time and interval of their lunch together, Cronk produced a parking ticket to prove it," Danny answered. "You see, I hadn't

asked for proof, but he supplied it."

"Let's find the body," the chief suggested. "Want Cronk arrested?"

"Not yet," Danny answered. "Let him play out his hand. He's a cold-blooded cuss, priding himself on attention to detail and thoroughness. But is he? He's been here five years and hasn't noticed we call it Skidroad, not Skid Row."

"You play out your hand while he's playing his," the chief advised. "You haven't said so, but I think you've picked up a couple of aces."

"I have," Danny admitted. "A couple of aces, a deuce, trey and four spot."

"Discard three of 'em and hope to catch another ace on the next deal," the chief said.

"I'm going home to my lab and work on this. Okay?" The chief nodded, and Danny went to his apartment.

It was a strange apartment. A row of books was devoted exclusively to soils. There were many in the region who knew more about the productivity of the various soils than did Danny Reagan, but few, if any, were his equal in knowledge of the distribution of gravels, clays and silts. His anthropological investigations had taught him the hard way—with pick and shovel.

He put over the coffee pot because he had an idea he would be kept up until dawn. There was first analysis, then checking and cross checking and finally a dismaying conclusion. He was aware that a body can be buried in one of several areas in hundreds of square miles of country. A thorough man, and Cronk prided himself on his thoroughness, would be careful not to leave a mound.

He finally turned in and was asleep almost instantly. He made it a point not to take his problems to bed with him. And sometimes he made the resolution stick.

The following morning Danny called at the safe deposit vault and checked. Mrs. Cronk had not opened her box during the month, and this was significant. In Danny's opinion she had not only not received a large sum of money, but had not expected to receive any. She hadn't taken out the box to make preparation for receiving it.

The record revealed that she made

weekly visits to her box, usually on Friday, to take out sufficient funds for her immediate needs. She frankly admitted she was afraid banks "would go bust" as she told the girls on duty in the vault. "You don't get much interest these days anyway," she had told one girl. "If my money is in a box, it can't be tied up because there's a run on the bank."

"Have you any idea, in view of her past record," Danny asked, "why Mrs. Cronk hasn't called within the past month?"

"Mr. Cronk probably kept her supplied with funds," the girl answered. "With taxes due, and all, it wasn't likely they were taking dividends out of the business. It was these dividends that she usually cashed immediately and then put in her box."

Danny dropped in on Cronk that afternoon. "It looks bad," he said, but didn't mention exactly what looked bad.

"What looks bad?" Cronk asked quietly. "Her continued absence, or my story, or what?"

"Oh, there's nothing wrong with your story, Mr. Cronk," Danny said quickly. "It's perfect. But your wife hasn't signed out her safe deposit box in a month, so she has that money with her. You can prove, of course, that you divided?"

"Yes sir," Cronk answered. "Here's a receipt. She wasn't going to put anything over on me like that."

Danny examined the slip of paper. Date, time and amount fitted in with Cronk's story. Mrs. Cronk's signature was firm, free of signs of anger, fear or weakness. The signature of a satisfied woman. Cronk had it in black and white.

"Now, Lieutenant Reagan, if I can be of any help to you, don't hesitate to call on me. True, we didn't get along, and we split up, but, after all, I loved her enough to marry her. You can understand my feelings."

"Yes, of course," Danny agreed. "And you can help. I'd like to swing through some of the Olympic Peninsula towns and question people who run hotels and resorts. She may be hiding out. You might help me in asking questions. I've never seen your wife and you might supply little details leading to her iden-

tification. Shall we say, the nine o'clock ferry, tomorrow morning?"

"Good as any," Cronk agreed. He called Danny that afternoon, however, and changed the date to ten o'clock, explaining that he had forgotten an appointment. "Of course, Lieutenant, if it'll put you out too much—"

"Ten o'clock is fine," Danny said hastily. "I'll meet you at the ferry dock, or pick you up at your home, whichever is convenient."

"Make it the ferry dock," Cronk said.

There was no Cronk in sight when the waiting cars rolled onto the ferry the following morning, but a minute before sailing time the man arrived, breathless. "Got held up," he explained. "I hope this mess can be cleaned up quickly. I'd like to leave town on a very promising deal."

"It may drag on and on," Danny warned.

**F**OR the most part, the Olympic Peninsula is wild, rugged country. It is truly the Last West. Here are the last great stands of the rain forests. The towns cluster along the salt water, as the Indians did of old, as if fearing to venture inland. Lofty snow-capped mountains, deep canyons, roaring torrents combine to make the land one of awesome beauty.

A fine ribbon of concrete runs around the Peninsula, and branching off are narrow roads, surfaced with gravel, or hardly improved at all. They lead to logging camps, farms or to Forest Service trails and trout lakes. It is a land of big game, stillness and mystery.

At each gasoline service station, Danny stopped, handed the attendant a photograph of May Cronk and asked, "Have you seen this woman recently?" Invariably the answer, after careful study, was a negative shake of the head.

"Looks like a wild goose chase," Cronk said after awhile. "May isn't the kind to hide out in some little resort. She likes the smart spots, so she can tell her friends about them afterwards."

"It does look like a wild goose chase from here," Danny admitted, "but you can never tell what a woman will do when she's mad at her husband. As a man who believes in thoroughness you

must agree we can't overlook the smallest detail." He slowed down. A dirt road was almost immediately swallowed by the dense timber.

"Take a road like that, for example," the detective went on. "The average person wouldn't think of turning into it. He'd be afraid he'd come to a down tree, couldn't turn around and would have to back out over a narrow road. It probably leads to some stump ranch. It'd be a perfect hideout."

"I'm enjoying the ride," Cronk said placidly.

He sat, relaxed, right arm on the door, left hand resting on his leg, eyes lazily observing details as they passed. Danny turned up the next side road, and ended up at a clearing studded with stumps from two to six feet in diameter. The ground about the house was packed hard from the feet of chickens, animals and children. A dog barked as if he were fooling. Vegetables grew between the stumps. "I can tell you right now," Cronk said, "May would never hole up in a place like this."

Danny questioned a woman briefly, turned around after nearly wrecking a bumper against a stump, then returned to the highway. Several times he slowed down, as if to leave the highway, only to change his mind. Finally he said, "Think we'll take a shot at this one."

"Looks like a low gear job," Cronk observed. "Got good tires?" A steep pitch lay ahead. They climbed in low, then made the remainder of the grade in second. Small roads branched off every quarter mile, and a faded sign pointed to a lake. Danny slowed down at each crossroad as if debating whether to enter it or not. "Wonder where this one goes?" Cronk asked. "Looks inviting."

"Pretty steep. Might get stuck in that loose gravel," Danny said. He drove on. "This one is level," he said a few minutes later. "And someone lives down there. There're recently broken alders."

"More'n likely some fisherman drove a jeep down there," Cronk said.

"Think I'll take a look," Danny observed. He stopped, walked down the road a way, then retraced his steps. "Got into a lot of mud," he said. "Nobody lives down there. From what I could

make out an old logging road went down there once. My guess is fishermen use the road occasionally. I wouldn't take a good car down there. Get it all scratched up. Chalk this one down as a road without a stump ranch."

After considerable seesawing back and forth, Danny got the car turned around. Cronk sat, left hand on his leg, right arm on the door, casually studying the timber. "What're you looking for, Cronk?" Danny asked.

"Blue grouse," Cronk answered. "There used to be a lot of 'em years ago, but I've only shot a dozen in the five years I've been in these parts."

"Maybe the reason Mrs. Cronk and you didn't get on was a lack of mutual interests," Danny said. "A woman who likes to hunt and fish can understand a man's liking for it. If she hates camping out, then she isn't much of a pal when her husband takes her along—more of a captive. How'd Mrs. Cronk feel about your hunting trips?"

"I took her sometimes," Cronk answered. "She was pretty good with a twenty-two rifle."

When they turned onto the highway again Danny declared, "I'm about ready to call it a day. What do you think?"

"It's up to you," Cronk answered. "I've enjoyed the ride. The city's paying the gas bill." He grinned. "But I wish we'd have picked up a clue."

"When you're trying to find the answer to a missing person," Danny replied, "it's a matter of infinite patience—the screening of many little things and the putting together of what remains on your screen."

They turned into one more road, talked briefly to the woman in charge of a small resort, then drove home. "Thanks for your cooperation," Danny said as he dropped Cronk at his home.

"I'm doing myself a favor," Cronk answered. He went into the house and poured himself a stiff drink. "Wow!" he exclaimed. "Never in my life have I been under such a strain. I've never met anyone exactly like him before. I can hardly figure him out, but I kept two jumps ahead of him. I took the worst of it and never showed what I was feeling. Think I'll get myself something to eat, then listen to the ball game. No—

to blazes with food and the ball game. I'm going to bed. I'm dog tired."

**W**HEN Danny Reagan drove to the station he found the chief of detectives examining routine reports. "Thought you might show up, Danny," he said. "What luck?"

"I've reduced the area in which May Cronk is buried from hundreds of square miles to dozens of acres," Danny answered. "Chief, Cronk is a cool one. In his general attitude I detected but one sign of nervousness, and I cashed in on that, naturally. Otherwise he played a beautiful role of a man, innocent of crime, who realized his wife's disappearance put him on the spot."

"Where do we go from here and when?"

"Tomorrow I hope to narrow my dozens of acres down to a plot about six feet long and three feet wide," Danny answered. "I'll need a couple of the boys, preferably lads with shovels."

"They'll be ready at eight o'clock in the morning," the chief said. "Now get some sleep, Danny. The strain of trying to crack Cronk is beginning to show."

Danny didn't take the Cronk case "to bed with him," but slept soundly. Brannigan and Sanderson, two of the bureau's newer men, were ready when he arrived at headquarters. Hours later they stopped the car on the deserted logging round. Danny led the way, sauntering, eyes searching for the little signs the most cautious man leaves when moving through the woods.

"A car drove this far, Brannigan," Danny said. "It went through this low spot, got stuck in the mud, then backed out."

At this point the builders of the road had made a gravel fill in a low area. The cross ties, exposed to an unusual amount of moisture, had rotted away. For a time hunters and fishermen had driven their cars to points well beyond the fill, but gradually as they got stuck in the muck, they had concluded walking was easier and had left their cars on higher ground.

The muck was studded with flinty bits of rock which aided traction when the muck was thin, but of no use where it



was thick. The material afforded good railroad bed binding between ties but stood up poorly under automobile traffic.

"The ooze mixed with the rock has spread over the tread marks the tires left," Brannigan said. "You can't tell what brand of tires was used. It might help if we knew that."

"In most cases yes," Danny agreed, "but not in this one. Walk slowly and look for spots where someone might have entered the brush. It could be in the vicinity of a large tree."

"There's a blue grouse hooting up in that fir," Brannigan said. "Is that big enough for you?"

"That may be just the item we're looking for," Danny answered.

The area had been logged when fine timber, close in, was plentiful. The tree was twisted and knotty. Loggers had scorned to cut it. It had seeded the cut-over area, which was now dense with second-growth firs. The giant, with its crown of branches and dense needles, towered above the new forest.

It was the one spot within many miles where a blue grouse would fly for a little honest hooting. While the others were trying to locate the hooter, Danny, however, was studying the timber growing on either side of the logging road, and he was thinking.

"If I killed a woman at this spot and wanted to dispose of the body, how would I pack it off without leaving tell-tale footprints?" Danny ruminated, half aloud. "First, I would be inclined to think a searcher would never narrow down the grave's probable location to this particular area. But if I were a thorough man, I'd not jump to that conclusion. So I'd be careful. I'd look for a log running from the logging road into the timber. The ties up here are dry, the bed well drained, so I'd walk from tie to tie, then get onto the log."

He found such a log within a hundred yards of the tree. He walked slowly over the log, looking right and left. Dead branches from nearby trees had snapped off. There were clusters of fir needles on the ground, proof that someone had brushed off the tender branch tips in a recent passing.

The grass beyond was matted down. He called the others. "See anything

peculiar ahead?" he asked.

"Yes," Brannigan said. "One patch of grass isn't as green as the surrounding area."

"Unless I'm completely wrong, you're looking on Mrs. Cronk's grave," Danny said.

"What about the mound?" Brannigan asked. "Why isn't the grass stained from sub-soil?"

"A thorough man would spread a rubber tarp down," Danny answered. "This would prevent water from sub-soil staining the grass. He would also cut and remove the sod from the grave. Later he would carefully replace it. But in the cutting many little roots would be destroyed, though many more would be untouched. But the dying grass would cause a brownish tint. The excess dirt would be carried off in the tarp and dumped. In time the grass would regain its vigor and no one would ever dream a grave existed. Brannigan, you'd better get a deputy coroner on the job before we start digging."

"Anything else?"

"Yes, telephone headquarters and ask that a detail keep an eye on Cronk. This business may get out on the radio," Danny said. "Arrest him if necessary, but explain that I'd like to be in at the finish."

**L**ATE that evening, Danny and the chief dropped in. They found Cronk listening to the ball game broadcast. "Three to three tie, eleventh inning," he stated. Then he asked: "Shall we listen?"

"I've got some news for you, Cronk," Danny replied. "Let's begin at the beginning. First, you directed suspicion toward yourself by being ready to explain everything immediately. No pondering, no doubts, but the answer—just like that." He snapped his fingers. "Such as the parking ticket. Then, of course, she made it easy for you by certain characteristics, generally known, such as a distrust of banks; tempers, followed by periods of sulking.

"Now here's what happened. You wanted her money," Danny continued. He waited a moment while Cronk lighted a cigarette. The man's hand was steady enough. "You met and you gave

her her share. Then you probably created a little feeling of your happier days by recalling pleasant episodes. She didn't care for the rougher side of hunting and fishing, but she did like walks in the forest, and shooting a twenty-two caliber rifle at targets.

"Sometime during the hour-plus luncheon you won her over. One more trip, one more attempt to get along with each other. An impulsive consent on her part to go along with you—a quick drive to the ferry, then a swing over the Olympic Highway, with many possible overnight stopping places," Danny went on. He noticed Cronk was clutching his left leg, near the knee, with his hand. Tiny beads of perspiration were forming on his forehead.

"Finally a turn up the side road. You got stuck in the muck, but backed out and went on afoot to the big fir tree," Danny said. "She was trying to locate a blue grouse when you picked up a rock. It was heavy, fitting your hand nicely."

Danny paused now to light his own cigarette. The suspense was nerve-shattering. "You had a little trouble with that rock, Cronk, because it was sticking into a bit of clay soil between rotting cross ties. But you worked it loose, then struck her behind the right ear. And you were thorough to the last—even burying the rock with her in the grave. We found it, and then we hunted around until we located the hole. It fitted perfectly. Well, Cronk?"

"Mind if I see how the home team is doing?" Cronk asked.

"Not at all," Danny answered.

It was the fourteenth inning and the tie was unbroken. "I'm sorry May came to such an end," Cronk said. "We didn't get along and at times it seemed as if we hated each other, but I never wished her a tragic end, even in my angriest mo-

ments. You've built up a rather ingenious case against me. I suppose I'll be put to considerable expense clearing myself. Why don't you find the murderer, now that you've found the body?"

"You are a tough man," Danny said. "But you'll crack. You don't suppose I was playing a hunch when we took our little drive? I don't waste the city's money on hunches. Your car picked up some of the logging road muck. It was studded with fine rock. When you washed your car, the clay dissolved, leaving the grit on your driveway. I noticed it, not as a detective so much as an anthropologist.

"When you've dug as much as I have you notice those little things. I knew that you'd been on the Olympic Peninsula, and over a remote road because the highway people use crushed rock in their road building. It was a matter of taking you for a drive, slowing down at various cross roads. You were relaxed until I hesitated before heading for the old logging road, then your fingers, resting on your left leg, tightened. I knew then the road led to your wife's body.

"And then there were minor details," Danny commented, "such as setting back your speedometer, so that it wouldn't show excessive driving if compared with the mileage noted after the last grease job. That's about all, Cronk, except that when you worked the stone from the clay, you left a nice set of fingerprints in the clay. We brought 'em along."

"Quick!" The detective chief warned.

Cronk had whirled, thrust his feet against the radiator and was tearing the radio cord apart—a quick way of electrocution. Danny hit him just as Cronk's fingers touched a hot wire.

"In this state, Cronk," Danny said as the chief put on the handcuffs, "we use the rope, not the chair."

COMING NEXT ISSUE

## THE DOLL SPY

*A True Story of Federal Agents in Action*

By JACKSON HITE

# the BLACK Chamber

A Department for Cipher Solvers By M. K. DIRIGO.

## MAGIC SQUARES

**I**N THE previous issue we promised to explain the construction of the three by three magic square.

Begin by writing number ONE in the center cell of the top row. Although it will not be important to you at the moment, it is interesting to note that number ONE cannot be placed in any of the corner cells or in the center cell and still result in a magic square.

The rest of the numbers are then placed into the cells according to a certain route and this route is made up of two separate parts called the ADVANCE and the BREAK.

The ADVANCE refers to the route taken by each successive number from one cell to another. In a normal arrangement of nine numbers in a square the ONE is placed in the first cell of the top row, then you ADVANCE one cell to the right for each additional number and when you reach the end of the row, you begin the second row and follow the same ADVANCE until your last number (NINE) occupies the last cell in the bottom row.

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

This is the Fundamental Square.

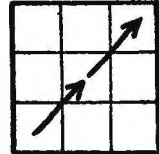
The ADVANCE IS → → → → etc.

Notice that there is nothing MAGIC about the square.

The ADVANCE in the MAGIC SQUARE follows a diagonal route UP-

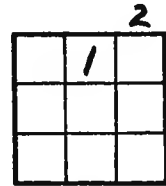
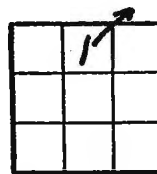
WARD one cell at a time as for example the numbers 4, 5, and 6 in the following.

		6
	5	
4		

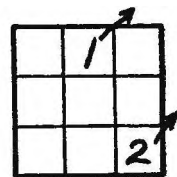
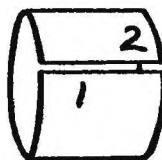


After you have written number ONE in the center cell of the top row, the first problem of the ADVANCE presents itself —WHERE TO PLACE THE NUMBER TWO?

A diagonal upward move from number ONE would bring number TWO outside of the square as in the following diagram.

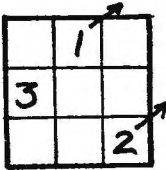


You must now IMAGINE that this diagram takes on the form of a SCROLL where the top horizontal line MEETS the bottom horizontal line. The result of this would be to bring the TWO from outside the square INTO the square in the last cell on the bottom row, as follows.



Continuing, you notice that one diagonal move from number TWO to number THREE, will bring the number THREE, OUTSIDE of the square as in the previous instance.

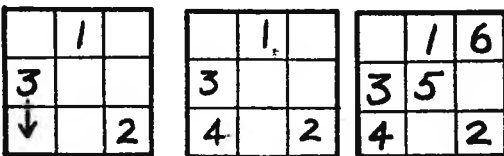
In order to bring the number THREE back into the square, imagine that the figure has a SCROLL effect from LEFT to RIGHT so that the left vertical line will meet the right vertical line. This will bring the THREE into the middle cell of the left column or, which is the same thing, the first cell of the middle row.



NOW, you come to the first stumbling block. You CANNOT ADVANCE from THREE to FOUR because that cell is already occupied with number ONE and this situation will arise after every three numbers. In this example it will come up between THREE and FOUR, and between SIX and SEVEN.

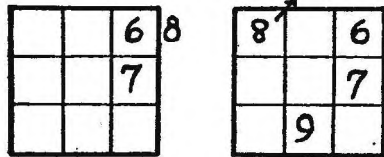
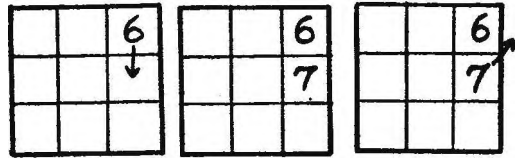
This situation, where you have a BREAK in the ADVANCE move, gives rise to the second part of the routine, the BREAK. This simply means that when you can no longer continue with the diagonal ADVANCE move, you BREAK with what is called a BREAK MOVE, after which you again continue with the original ADVANCE move.

The BREAK MOVE in this example will be one cell DOWNWARD from the last number. This would bring the FOUR directly under the THREE, then continue with FOUR, FIVE, SIX in regular order.



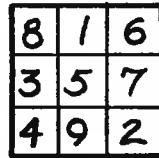
A diagonal move from SIX cannot be made as it is not possible to go RIGHT OBLIQUE from the corner occupied by the SIX since there is no cell correspond-

ing to this move. This then, is your second occasion to BREAK and therefore the SEVEN goes directly under the SIX with the BREAK MOVE.

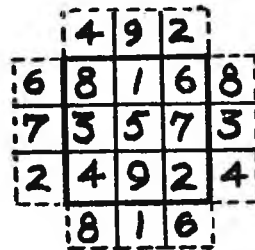


Following the diagrams, you can easily see how these two parts of the route work out, the ADVANCE and the BREAK.

The completed square is now shown.



To clarify this, another way of showing this would be to show you with dotted lines the OUTSIDE of the square with the corresponding numbers continued therein.



You can now clearly see that the series of numbers, and each number separately, contained in the dotted cells are the same as the numbers contained in the cells occupying the same position on the opposite side but INSIDE the square.

This diagram may be expanded to show

## Try to Solve These New Cryptograms

**B**ELOW are five more cryptograms to test your deciphering skill. We start off once more with a limerick for beginners, and to make it quite simple for the tyros here are some special hints:

1. The one-letter word "F." What is it?  
2. The four two-letter words, HA, JU, RZ and UY. Here you have seven different letters, and four of them are VOWELS. Can you spot them? The Z occurs fourteen times and it is also the end letter of a three letter word, JIZ. Does this mean anything to you? As to the word UY, the U occurs eight times, and the Y only once. Which is the vowel? Also, with Y appearing only once, you know you are going to look for a low frequency consonant.

3. Examine the pattern words JIZEZ, MIZEZ.

The four other cryptograms given in this issue are not as easy as the limerick, but just as entertaining. They include a regulation cryptogram, an alliteration cipher, a transposition and a pedantic proverb. In the last-named, you first solve the cryptogram and then simplify the statement so that it becomes a well-known saying. Cryptograms Nos. 446, 447 and 448 have been submitted by Wilbur Greenlees of Buffalo, N. Y.

Please send all solutions, comments and criticisms to **THE BLACK CHAMBER**, c/o **G-MEN DETECTIVE MAGAZINE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. From time to time, letters will be printed and communications acknowledged in this department. Thank you!

No. 444—*A Limerick for Beginners*

JIZEZ MFX F BUCAT SFWB AFPZW IFEEHX  
MIU AUJIHAT OUCSW ZKZE ZPRFEEFX  
JHSS JIZ RFJI XFXJX UAZ WFB  
HA F JCR MIZEZ XIZ SFB  
JCEAZW UCJ JU RZ LSFJZE UY LFEHX

No. 445—*By Garfield*

PKBFCM QXFP PDSF DY BF PKBM VXSWQ  
DFPBW MXNUHXQZ PDSFM PKUN DY

No. 446—*Alliteration*

YVDMUDOPJLQF YKZLLKY YDRLZQ  
YDLUZZL YPHDLIDVKL YKPHLF  
YKJOT YKPML YZBDOIZK YZGPJQF  
YVLYDVOL YVLIKDBIVPO YZGDLIDIZL  
YZBDOIZK

No. 447—*Transposition*

TRICE UTDHE SNILI OIHIO TOOOS  
PNGSS NTTIT NMFIS YCEIE OSRPF  
RTTUDU EEOES HOND.

No. 448—*Pedantic Proverb*

BZQBYLYZYLFE FM DZTOAZCPOB LB  
LETOWLBTQGP XKLGP YATWPABLEN  
RZAAPEYB

*Note: First solve the cryptogram, then convert it into plain English.*

you the **MAGIC SQUARE** repeated on each of its sides.

8	1	6						
	3	5	7					
	4	9	2					
8	1	6	8	1	6	8	1	6
3	5	7	3	5	7	3	5	7
4	9	2	4	9	2	4	9	2
	8	1	6					
	3	5	7					
	4	9	2					

You can now see how numbers are represented in scroll positions when they fall outside the original square.

There are only two important things you must remember after beginning with the **ONE** in the center cell of the top row. Continue with the **ADVANCE** move by an upward diagonal move until you are stuck, then **BREAK** with a downward move of one cell and continue as before.



**ADVANCE**



**BREAK**

All this may sound complicated at first but in actual practice you will find it very easy.

Try it a few times.

There is a lot more to **MAGIC SQUARES** than what you have just learned. Much of it you will not require in so far as it relates to a route in cryptography, and belongs rather to a class of mathematical **PUZZLES**. Some of these are extremely interesting and entertaining and if there is any demand for it from our readers we will be glad to cover the subject more thoroughly.

For the present purposes, however, let it suffice that we will experiment in the next few issues with **MAGIC SQUARES** for routing transposition cryptograms.

One thing you will soon learn and that is that there are a great many variations in the directions of **ADVANCES** and **BREAKS**. We have shown you only **ONE**. In squares of the fifth order and higher,

the number of different variations for routes are **UNLIMITED**.

In the next issue we will present the **FIVE SQUARE**.

## PATTERN WORDS

Five issues ago we began running a new list of a different type of pattern words when we started printing words with three, four and six consecutive vowels. Then, four issues ago, we began printing our lists of three-letter consonant sequences, and so far have covered such sequences from **BBL** to **PBR**. This issue we go from **PHL** to **RSH**.

This new type of pattern word interrupts our regular list of pattern words, which will be resumed with the publication of nine-letter words in a forthcoming issue.

A knowledge of words containing vowel and consonant sequences is of help in solving secret writing. Many times a word can be recognized once the vowel or consonant pattern is understood.

## THREE-LETTER CONSONANT SEQUENCES

### PHL

phlebectasia, phlebectasy, phlebenteric, phlebenterism, phlebin, phlebismus, phlebitis, phlebogram, phlebograph, phlebolite, phlebolith, phlebology, phleborrhagia, phlebostrepsis, phlebotomist, phlebotomize, phlebotomy, phlegethon, phlegm, phlegmagogue, phlegmasia, phlegmatic, phlegmatical, phlegmatically, phlematically, phlegmon, phlegmonoid, phlegmonous, phleme, phleum, phlobaphene, phloem, phloem, phlogistian, phlogistic, phlogistical, phlogisticate, phlogistication, phlogiston, phlogogenic, phlogogenous, phlogopite, phlogosin, phlogosis, phlogotic, phloramine, phloretic, phloretin, phlorizin, phloroglucin, phloroglucinol, phlorol, phlorone, phloryl, phlox, phloxin, phlox-worm, phlyctena, phlyctenular.

### PHR

antiphraasis, aphrodite, hermaphrodite, metaphraastic, nephritis.

paraphrase, periphraasis, periphraastic, phragma, phragmocone, phragmosiphon, phrasal, phrase, phrasebook, phraseless, phraseogram, phraseologic, phraseological, phraseologist, phraseology, phrasing, phratry, phreatic, phrenetic, phrenetically, phrenic, phrenics, phrenism, phrenitis, phrenogastric, phrenograph, phrenologer, phrenologic, phrenologically, phrenologist, phrenology, phrenomagnatism, phrenopathia, phrenopathy, phrenosin, phrensted, phrensy, phrentic, phrontisterion, phrontistery, phryganeid, phryganidae, phrygian, phryma.

### PHT

phtalate, phtalein, phtalic, phtalid, phtalide, phtalimid, phtalimide, phtalin, phtalyl, phtanite, phtartolatrasae, phtiriasis, phtisic, phtisical, phtisicky, phtisiology, phtisipneumonia, phtisis, phtthongal, phtthongometer, phtor.

### PKN

topknot.

- PPH**  
sapphire
- PPL**  
applaud, apple, appliance, applicant, applied, applique, apply.  
cripple.  
dapple.  
hopple.  
nipple.  
ripple, rippling.  
scapple, serapple, stipple, stippler, stopple, supple, supplement, suppliant, supplicant, supplicate, supplier, supply.  
tipple, topple.
- PPR**  
appraisal, appreciate, apprehend, apprentice, apprise, approach, approbate, appropriate, approve, approximate.  
disapproval.  
oppress, opprobrious, opprobrium.  
suppress.
- PSC**  
hopsacotch.  
rapscallion.
- PSH**  
pshaw, pshawing, pshawed.  
sheepshead, shipshape, slipshod.  
upshot.
- PSK**  
sheepskin.
- PST**  
capstan, capstone, chopsticks.  
sweepstakes.  
tapster, tipstaff, tipster.  
upstart.
- PTF**  
septfoil
- PTH**  
depth.
- PTL**  
abruptly.  
ineptly.
- PTR**  
catoptric, claptrap.  
dioptric.
- RBL**  
garble.  
purbblind.  
warble, warbling.
- RCH**  
anarchic, antarchism, arch, archaeologic, archaic, archebiosis, archeconomy, archer, archetype, architect, archipelago, architrave, archival, archive archon.  
chillarch, church.  
demarch.  
exarch.  
fourchette.  
gynarchy.  
handkerchief, heptarchy, hierarch.  
inarch.  
kerchief.  
larch, lurch.  
march, marchioness, merchandise, merchant, merchantman, monarch, monarchism, monarchy, oligarch, oligarchal, orchard, orchestra, orchid, orchis.  
parch, patriarch, perch, perchance, plutarchy, porch, purchase.  
recherche, research.  
seorch, seorch, smirch, starch, starched, starchy.  
tetrarch, torch.  
urchin.
- RCL**  
arc-lamp.  
circle, circlet.  
enccircle.
- RCH**  
hypercritical.
- RDB**  
cardboard.
- RDF**  
regardful.  
swordfish.
- RDL**  
cowardly, curate.  
dastardly, dastardliness.  
girdle.  
hardly, hurdle.  
inwardly.  
lordliness.
- niggardly.
- RDM**  
bombardment.
- RDN**  
forwardness.  
hardness.  
ordnance.
- RDR**  
airdrome.  
wardrobe, wardrobe.
- RDS**  
forwards.  
upwards.
- RFB**  
surfboat.
- RFL**  
butterfly.  
superfluous.
- RFM**  
surfman.
- RGH**  
narghile.  
sorghum.
- RGL**  
burglar, burglarious, burglary.  
everglade.  
gargle, gurgle.
- RGM**  
bergmehl.  
ergometer.
- RGN**  
epergne.  
lorgnette.
- RGR**  
ambergris.  
burgrave.  
evergreen.  
margrave.  
speargrass.
- RKH**  
workhouse.
- RKL**  
clerkly.  
darkling, darkly.  
porkling.  
sparkle.
- RKN**  
darkness.
- RKR**  
sauerkraut.
- RKS**  
darksome.  
irksome.
- RLD**  
earldom.  
world.
- RLP**  
whirlpool.
- RLW**  
whirlwind.
- RMF**  
armful.  
harmful.
- RML**  
armlet.  
harmless.
- RMN**  
firmness.
- RMP**  
armpit.
- RMW**  
wormwood.
- RNB**  
thornback, turnbuckle.
- RNC**  
turncoat.
- RND**  
turn dun.
- RNF**  
mournful.  
scornful.
- RNG**  
cairngorm.
- RNK**  
turnkey.
- RNM**  
adjournment, adornment.  
government.
- RNP**  
turnpike.
- RNS**  
guernsey.

**RNT**

burnt.

**RPH**

allomorphism, amorphism, amorphous.

homomorph.

metamorphic, morphia, morphinism, morphol-  
ogy.

orphan, orphean.

porphyritic, porphyry.

zoomorphism.

**RPL**

marplot.

perplex.

surplice, surplus.

**RPM**

escarpment.

**RPN**

sharpness.

**RPR**

enterprize.

interpret.

surprise, surprising.

**RPS**

corpse.

harpsichord.

stirps.

terpsichorean.

**RPT**

absorption, absorptive.

excerpt.

**RRH**

amenorrhoea.

catarrh, catarrhal, cirrhosis.

diarrhoea.

gonorrhoea.

hemorrhoids.

leucorrhoea.

myrrh, myrrha.

pyrrhic.

scirrhus.

**RSD**

horsd'oeuvre.

Thursday.

**RSH**

airship, ayrshire.

barshot.

censorship.

harsh.

leadership.

marsh, marshal, marshiness, marshy, mem-  
bership.

ownership.

petersham.

scholarship, sponsorship.

worship, worshipful.

**ANSWERS TO CRYPTOGRAMS  
IN THE MARCH ISSUE**

No. 439: There was a young lady from Crete,  
Who was so exceedingly neat,  
When she got out of bed  
She stood on her head  
To make sure of not soiling her feet.

No. 440: Speech is the body, thought the soul,  
and suitable action the life of eloquence.

No. 441: Flabbergasted flappers finched from  
flatulent fliers fearing fiendish famili-  
arity.

No. 422: Solution: Live to do good and you will  
never tire of your employment. (Route  
of inscription - Alternate diagonals be-  
ginning at upper left corner, and letters  
taken out by alternate verticals begin-  
ning at lower right corner.)

L V E O O L L F  
I T G D I N O Y  
O O A W E E O O  
D N U V R U L Y  
D O E I R P M T  
Y R T E M E N X

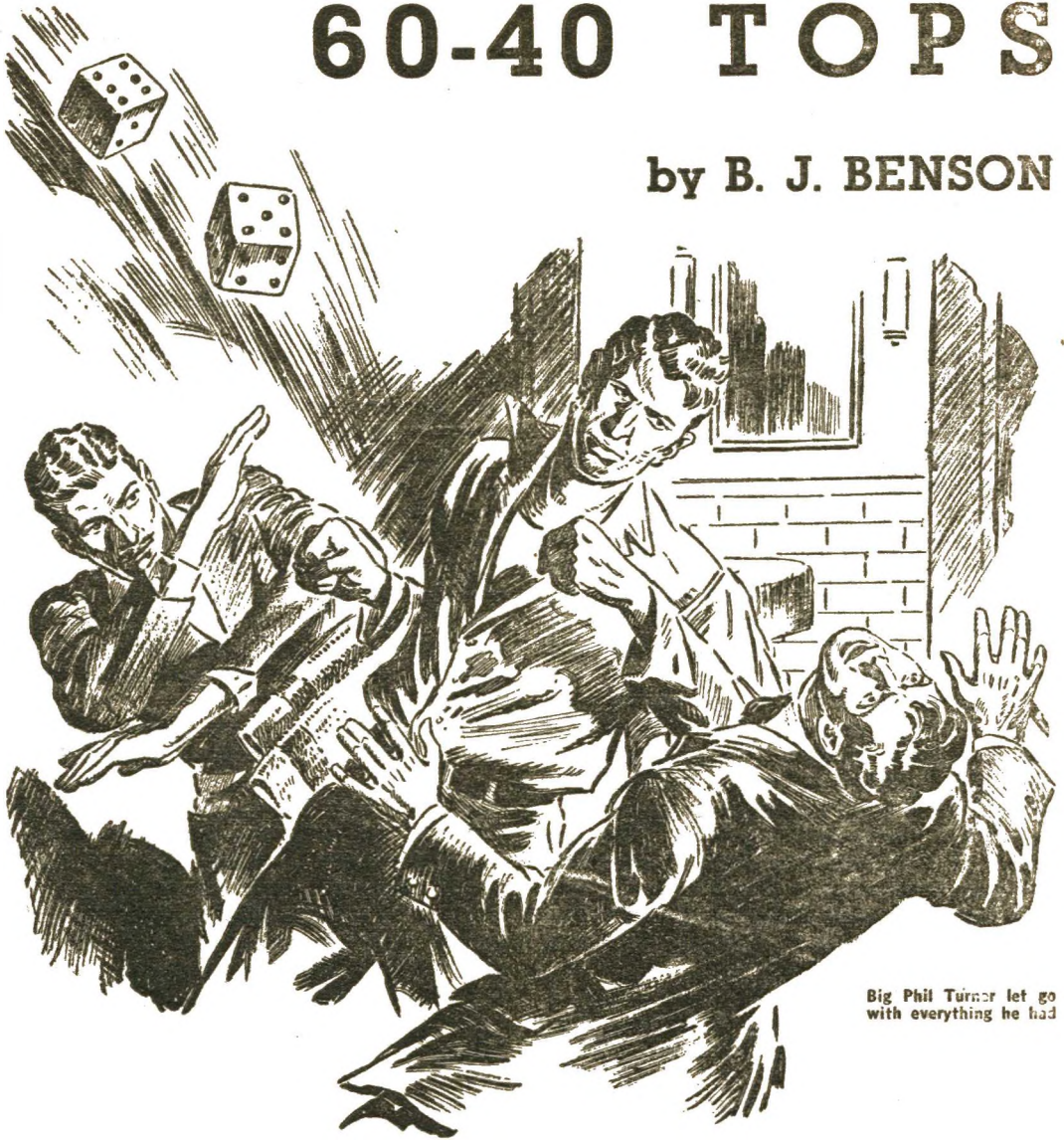
No. 443: You can get away with anything in  
dealing with Eros and Ares. *In plain  
English: All's fair in love and war.*

**THREE GREAT DETECTIVES—IN THREE GREAT NOVELS!***Dr. Gideon Fell in***DEATH WATCH, by John Dickson Carr***Asey Mayo in***MURDER IN THE ANTIQUE SHOP****by Phoebe Atwood Taylor***Max Thursday in***FATAL STEP, by Wade Miller****All in the Spring TRIPLE DETECTIVE—25c at all stands!**



# 60-40 TOPS

by B. J. BENSON



Big Phil Turner let go with everything he had

*Fate appears to have loaded the dice for Phil Turner, but tough fists and a quick pass roll up the murderer's game!*

**I**T STARTED out as a friendly little game.

We were all sitting around in the game room of the Athletic Club chewing the fat when the new member, Bob Wayne, came in and threw a pair of dice on the green felt of the pool table. A few of the boys looked up and some of

the others began to edge over.

Most of us had joined the Athletic Club when we were eighteen or so and played some semi-pro baseball. Only it was called the Linden Club then and it was housed down on Linden Street in an old ramshackle building which had an old pipe shower and a few twisted

steel lockers with the doors off.

While most of us were in the service, old man Sandler died. But before he did he set up a trust fund called the Athletic Club Foundation and that's how we got the new brick building at the corner of Church and State. Now that we were in our mid twenties some of the boys had drifted off to jobs in other cities, to marriage, and some now filled graves overseas. The rest of us wandered in, off and on, to talk and to hash over old times. Times like when we headed the twilight league three years straight and who was the better pitcher, Fats Clemens or Red Litcofsky.

But what most of us liked about the Athletic Club was the quiet spirit, the leisurely game of pool or penny ante poker, and the Saturday softball games. There never was a dice game at the Athletic Club—one that I can remember. That's why we were surprised to see the dice roll along the table and bounce up against the side.

I was sitting near the door talking to Ken Toland, the chemist. He was a nervous little fellow with a small, thin mustache and it was he who had brought Bob Wayne in as a member a few weeks ago. We went over together. The big form of Wayne's was hulked over the table as he threw the dice idly and slowly—just bouncing them back and forth.

"Want to have a try, Phil?" he asked me.

I looked at my watch. It was five of seven and I had a date with Sylvia at nine. "I'll try a few rolls," I said. "How about a dollar?"

"It's all right for a start," he said as he threw a bill down on the table. The first roll was a seven and I collected. Then I rolled a six and two rolls later up came a five and a two.

I threw the dice over to him. "They're all yours," I said.

"Go ahead," he said, handing them back to me. "I'll bet against the roll."

So I rolled and a half hour went by and I was still rolling. But I was out eighty-three bucks and the betting had gone from one to ten, and then to twenty. And the pool table was now ringed two deep. I tossed my last ten on the table. All I had left now was some silver.

I rolled a twelve. "That's all," I said. "There is no more."

His hand clawed out for the dice. I didn't like it. He was in too much of a hurry. "Let's see them," I said.

"See what?" he asked.

"The dice, Wayne," I said. "Let's see them."

"What for?"

"Curious, that's all."

"You took them," he said, wetting his lips.

"Come on," I said. "Everybody saw you grab them." I put my hand on his arm. He twisted away and began to push through the crowd. So I hit him.

I grabbed him by the collar and jerked him around. He was fumbling for something in his back pocket and I wasn't waiting to find out what it was. I jabbed him hard, and then again. I saw the red marks on his flabby face as he went down in a welter of legs. Reaching down over him I went through his pockets. I counted out my eighty-three dollars.

"The Athletic Club is going great," I said. "Now we even have loaded dice."

**A**T EXACTLY twenty to nine I was in the bathroom shaving for my date with Sylvia. The doorbell rang and I came out with the lather still on my face to push the button and open the front door. I waited for the elevator to come up. The case whined and rasped the way it always did and the doors opened and Ken Toland came out. I said, hello, Ken, and he said, nello, Phil, and we both went back into the living room.

He sank down into my leather lounge chair and fished for a cigarette in his pocket. He lit it with my table lighter.

"Thought I'd let you know," he said, spitting a fleck of tobacco from his lip, "Wayne's on his way over to see you."

I didn't answer. I went back into the bathroom and ran the razor under the hot water tap.

"I'd get out of here if I were you," Ken said from the living room. "I know Bob. I wouldn't buck him when he's mad like that. Why don't you take off until he cools off a little?"

"No," I snapped. "Let him come. I'd enjoy cooling him off."

"He wants the eighty-three bucks."

"He'll get it," I said, coming back into the living room. "He'll get it right across the mouth. Those dice were loaded."

"He said you were welshing."

"I never welshed in my life and you know it," I said, beginning to boil again. "Those dice were sixty-forty tops and they're made special for guys who bet against the throw."

"Sixty-fortys?"

"Sixty-fortys. Shaded dice. A guy once pulled them on me down at Camp Croft, South Carolina. We had a little dice game going on in the Twenty-ninth Battalion woods. This mug throws in a pair of new dice and bets against them like Bob Wayne did tonight. I went for my roll then, but we caught up with him. He ended up in the station hospital. Those dice were shaded so that they crap out sixty percent of the time. It gives the fellow who's betting wrong a good enough edge."

"Bob said the dice were straight."

"Where were they?" I asked. "I'll tell you where. He palmed them afterwards. You're his buddy. You yourself would know if he was on the level."

He puffed on his cigarette.

"Well, is he?" I asked.

"I'm not getting mixed up in it."

"You're in it," I said. "I've never been able to figure you out, Ken, anyway. You're his pal and yet you come up here and warn me."

"I don't want anyone to get hurt. You're both big and I know what a temper Bob's got. No telling what he'll do."

"Thanks," I replied testily. "But I'm not running away. Besides, I want to talk to you about him. We never had a grifter in the club until you brought Wayne in."

"He seemed all right. He works with me at Bay State Chemical. He's a good chemist. Right now we're working on an insecticide formula together. Powerful stuff. If it works out it'll mean a lot to both of us."

"He may be a good chemist," I said, "but he's got a streak of larceny in him." The bell rang just then and the room became silent.

"It's him," said Ken, getting up. I

went into the bedroom and came out buttoning my shirt. There was a knock at the door and Ken went over and answered it.

Wayne came in. His mouth was compressed and his eyes were slitted and his thick black hair was down over his forehead.

We both looked at one another. "The money, Phil," he said, coming up close to me. "Eighty-three dollars and a public apology in front of the rest of the members."

"Get out," I said.

"The money and an apology," he said. His voice was cold and flat.

I turned away from him. His left hand was on my shoulder and as I started to turn I saw the light glint on something in his right hand. I moved fast, but the little penknife he had by the blade flashed out and cut the front of my shirt clean across. I felt my skin there sear and burn and I reached away back and let go with everything I had.

I caught him high across the head because I was off balance, but the blow was hard and he bounced back and dropped. His head knocked against the baseboard of the wall and he was still. I took a quick look at him and saw the blood oozing from his lips. I put my hand inside my shirt and it came out wet. I went into the bathroom and put some iodine on the thin slice he had made across my chest.

When I came out Ken was kneeling over him. "He's out," Ken said.

"I don't care," I said. "I want him all the way out. Drag him up and take him downstairs. I don't want the apartment manager to know I have vermin here."

Ken got up and went into the bathroom while I went back into the bedroom to change my shirt. When I came back Ken was down before him with an empty glass in his hand.

"Something's wrong," he said worriedly. "He doesn't respond."

I went over quickly. I had my hand on Wayne's pulse but I couldn't feel a thing. I opened one eyelid. The eye stared glassily. I went to my bureau, got a hand mirror, came back and held it to his mouth.

There was no moisture. Ken looked up at me. "Dead," he said.

**M**Y LEGS turned to water. My mouth was so dry I had trouble talking. "He might have had a bad heart," I said.

"You hit him hard."

"I hit him hard this afternoon."

"Yes, but he didn't hit his head then."

I went over to the telephone. "What are you going to do?" Ken asked.

"A doctor," I said. "Then the police."

"Wait a minute. You'd better think it over. It's too late for a doctor. And to the police it'll look like murder."

"Murder, my eye," I said. "You were a witness. You can prove he started it."

"They might not believe me," he almost pleaded. "Anyway, even if you beat the homicide rap, it would mean a manslaughter charge. Bang goes your career and your future with Sylvia."

"It's a chance I'll take. I can always manage a shoe store."

"But not for Bonner's. Not for the big time."

"So what do you expect me to do?" I asked. "Bury the body somewhere?"

He got up and fished for a cigarette again. He lit it very slowly. "That's not as crazy as it sounds," he said. "Why not?"

"Now you're the one who's screwy," I said. But he had me thinking now. The Bonner Stores and the supervisor's job that was coming up. Sylvia. The freedom I always took for granted.

"No," I said.

"Okay. Call the police. I'll get in touch with Sylvia and have her see you in your cell. That is, if they'll let her."

He had me thinking again. Every time he mentioned Sylvia I felt a stab of pain.

"It's so fantastic," I said. "I wouldn't even know how to go about it."

"I'm with you," he said. "You know the family's had a summer place at Mirror Lake for years. There's a big estate adjoining it. The old Markham place. They're in Europe and they won't be back for a year. The place is closed up. We can take the body there and bury it under the pines. The needles will cover the ground. Next year—if they find the body—how will they ever know who it is?"

"You keep saying we. You coming along?"

"Why not? I said I was in with you. The whole thing was just an accident and what's done is done. Nothing would be accomplished by you serving a sentence for manslaughter."

"Thanks," I said. "How far is it to Mirror Lake?"

"Two hours by car."

"We need tools."

"We have them at our summer place. A shed full."

"I still don't like it," I said.

"Okay. You don't like it. Go ahead, call the cops. It's your funeral."

"How would we get him out of here?"

"Down the service elevator. We'll wait until twelve when things quiet down. They you'll get your car and bring it around back."

"I've got to do a little thinking," I said. "Let's go out and have a drink. That's what we both need."

"Go ahead," he said. "I'll wait here for you."

"Here?" I asked. "With him?"

"In case anybody comes."

"The heck with it," I said. "Let's go."

"Okay," he said reluctantly. "It's your party."

**WE WERE** sitting at the bar of the Hotel Regal and I wasn't even thinking of the time. I was looking at the faces of all the patrons and wondering how many of them had committed murder or if any of them had a corpse lying in their living room. I was nursing my second double scotch. Ken had had one and had refused another. I lifted my glass to take a long deep one, when I heard, "Mr. Turner."

I sighed and turned around to look at her. She was wearing a black cocktail gown and her coat was over her arm. Her reddish brown hair was coiled up on top of her head and her green eyes were more than a little angry. She was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen and right then I wished she was a thousand miles away.

"Sylvia," I called.

"Don't Sylvia me," she answered, stamping a gold shod foot. "Now go ahead and tell me you forgot all about our date."

"She won't believe me, Ken," I said. "You tell her."

"I won't believe Ken either," she insisted now.

"Business engagement," Ken said. "He's waiting for one of Bonner's buyers."

"He could have phoned me," she said. "I would have returned his nickel. Furthermore, I don't believe you."

"How'd you find me?" I asked.

"Where else would you be if you weren't at your apartment or the club? Here at the Regal getting pie-eyed."

"I'm as sober as a judge," I said. I winced inside when I said judge.

"Were you up at the apartment?" Ken asked quickly.

"I phoned. No answer. I phoned the club. No Philip Turner. I come to the Regal bar. Philip Turner."

"I have an important engagement, Sylvia," I began again. "I'd better take you home."

"I'll wait here," she said. "I want to get my nails into that big buxom blonde."

"There's your imagination again," I insisted. "There's no blonde. I only wish it was as simple as that."

"He's right, Sylvia," Ken remarked glibly.

"I don't believe any of you. You men are always ganging up against us poor women."

"Come on, dear," I soothed her, pulling a stool over for her. "I'll buy you a drink, then home you go. My car's outside."

"I saw it," she replied now. "That's how I knew you were in here draped over the bar. Your favorite position. . . ."

The sidewalks were wet when we got out of the Regal and I was glad I had the top of the convertible up. The rain was drifting down lazily in tiny drops.

"Rain," she said, making a face. "Me and my fancy slippers."

"High fog," said Ken, getting in back. I closed the door beside Sylvia and went around to my side and got in.

"Don't think for one moment that I believe you," Sylvia began. "You said it wasn't a blonde. Maybe it was a brunette. A female buyer of Bonner's."

"That's her imagination again," I said laughingly to Ken. "It's working overtime. One drink and she calls me pie-eyed."

"Two," she said. "I saw the other

empty glass."

"All right, two," I said. "Sharpeyes saw the empty glass."

**K**EN stirred on the leather seat in back. I was driving slowly now because little gears in my brain started to go around. The blood was pounding in my ears.

"An empty glass," I ruminated. "He drank a whole glass of water."

"It wasn't you, darling," she said. "You never drank a glass of water in your life."

"Not me," I insisted now. "I want to ask a very elementary question. Could a dead man drink a glass of water?"

"What on earth are you talking about?" she asked. "I saw what you had. It wasn't water and you were far from dead."

"Somebody else is dead," I boldly said now. "After he died he drank a glass of water."

"Don't mind me," she continued, with a half-startled laugh. "I just love to flounder around in the dark."

"This isn't a joke, Sylvia. I had a fight with Bob Wayne at the club today. Earlier tonight he came up to my apartment. He pulled a knife on me and I had to hit him again. His head knocked against the baseboard of the wall. Ken was there all the time and Ken went and brought him a glass of water. After the water was swallowed we looked at him again. He was dead."

"Oh, Phil," she moaned, gripping my arm.

"It was an accident," I said. "Anyway, up to now I thought it was. But now maybe it wasn't an accident after all."

"What do you mean?" Ken asked behind me.

"When a man's dead the muscles in his throat constrict. He couldn't swallow the water if he was dead. The water wasn't spilled either."

"He might have swallowed it just before he died," Ken remarked cunningly.

"He might have," I replied. "Then again there might have been something in the glass."

"What are you driving at?" Ken asked.

"You," I said. "You're no boy scout. Suddenly you're a great pal of mine.

anxious to help me. You knew you'd be an accessory after the fact. Then it was your idea to get rid of the body. Why?"

Ken Toland gave a short laugh. Then he spoke again:

"You're crazy! You're inferring that I was the one who killed him. Why would I want to commit murder?"

"I don't know," I said. "You were both working on an insecticide formula. You told me that yourself. Maybe you wanted all the credit. Maybe the formula was all Wayne's idea and you wanted to get rid of him."

"You're talking like a madman," he snapped, but I noticed a worried note in his voice.

"Maybe. Why were you so anxious to get rid of the body? Because they'd find poison in it?"

"That's gratitude for you," Ken said. "I stick my neck out for a club member and now he turns around and accuses me of murder. Okay, wise guy, call the police and find out how wrong you are."

"Don't," Sylvia whispered tensely. "Maybe he's right, Phil."

"There's a drug store," I said, edging the car to the curb.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw him make his move. The gun that came out of his coat pocket was a small, flat, blued steel automatic.

"I've got it against Sylvia's lovely neck," he said softly. "You wouldn't want me to pull the trigger, Phil."

"He wouldn't dare," Sylvia said to me. "Go ahead and make your call."

"He might," I said, pulling out again into the thin stream of traffic. "Don't forget he's already killed one person tonight."

"Now you're smart," he said. "Get out onto Route Hundred and six."

"Hundred and six?"

"That's right—Mirror Lake."

"You're not serious," I said.

"What makes you think not?" he replied. "One down and two to go. Same penalty for one as it is for three. And this will make it even stronger. They'll find the body in your apartment. You're gone, Sylvia's gone. Perfect motive. You had a fight with him and you killed him. Then you ran away with Sylvia."

I turned the car onto the four lane concrete highway which was 106 and

headed north to Mirror Lake. It had stopped raining and there was a slight ground fog.

"What did you kill him with?" I asked.

"Nicotinic acid, C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>5</sub>N<sub>2</sub>. Makes a marvelous insecticide. Colorless. Works instantly. After all, you did say Bob was vermin."

"So you had it all figured out in advance," I said.

"Only vaguely. I had some acid with me from the lab. One never knows when the opportunity presents itself."

"You made this one to order. Were they your dice?"

"Oh, no. I really had no idea Bob was like that. He was a good chemist but he always spent more than he earned. I knew he'd get into trouble if I was patient enough to wait. After all, two people can't get credit for the same formula. It wouldn't be cricket, would it?"

"Oh, no," I said. "It was very sporting of you to kill him."

"Thanks," he replied. "I knew you'd see it my way."

"You're clever, all right," I went on, "that's why you wanted me to leave you alone at the apartment. So you could wash the glass and the fingerprints off."

"Yes," he stated blandly. "Now you've made it inconvenient for me. I'll have to go back there and do it."

"Now?" I asked, slowing down.

"Oh, not right away," he said. "You can keep going. I've got to dispose of you two first."

**R**AUCOUSLY the wheels of the car crunched across the pine needles. Looking out over the lake with its shimmering water, the big Markham house loomed huge and forbidding. I felt Sylvia shudder beside me and I reached over and patted her arm.

"Cheerful little place," I said hollowly.

"It looks nicer during the season," Ken began apologetically. "You've got a flashlight in your glove compartment, haven't you, Phil?"

"No," I answered.

"You have," he insisted. "I've seen it before. Open up."

"What do you want it for?" I asked.

"For you. You're going to the shed and you'll bring back a pick and shovel. You'll dig two graves."

Sylvia gasped. I felt my stomach muscles curl. "Think again, Ken," I pleaded. "You can't beat the rap that easy."

"That's the trouble with you, Phil," he said. "You never gave me credit for thinking, even when we were kids. I was always the quiet mousy little fellow. You see how wrong you were."

"All right, so I was wrong. Now let's turn around and get out of here."

"No, Phil," he continued. "You're not selling shoes. Get the flash out and go over to the shed. Keep it on at all times. I'll wait here with Sylvia. I don't want any tricks."

I had the flash out of the glove compartment now, in my right hand. My left arm was up over the back of the seat. Slowly I brought my right arm up as though I was going to half raise myself out of the car.

"Make it snappy," he snarled. "We can't be here all night. You've got a lot of digging to do."

Just then I brought my right arm down as hard as I could. The flash struck his arm and he screamed out.

Then, in a low moan, I heard his breath suck in. I heard the gun drop to the floor as I twisted around and got my hands over the back of his neck.

"Get out of the car, Sylvia," I ordered quietly.

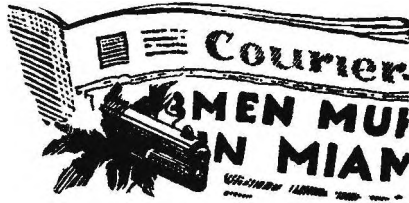
She yanked at the door handle and slid out onto the pine needles. Ken's fingers scratched out at me as his feet lashed out. I flipped his squirming body over the seat beside me. His fingers went for my eyes as he sobbed with frustration and rage. I chopped two hard ones to his jaw. His head sagged forward, legs still dangling over the top of the seat. I called to Sylvia:

"It's all right now, Sylvia. You come around and drive. I'll sit in back and have a chat with Ken all the way to Police Headquarters."

"My dress," she said as she got in. "I tore it on the door. I've only worn it twice."

"Is that all?" I asked. "Is that all you've got to say at a time like this?"

"No, Mr. Turner. I've got much more to say. You've certainly ruined a fine evening for us. We could have been dancing at the Plaza. Now it's much too late to go anywhere."



## G-MEN IN ACTION!

**F**EARFUL for his mother's life, young Buddy Barbeau agreed to pay extortioners the \$20,000 they demanded. He stood on the observation platform of the train leaving Buffalo and watched for the white flag signal at which he was to drop the parcel of bills he carried. Overhead flew an FBI plane taking in the scene—and then swooping down on the extortioners!

**B**ECAUSE a group of high school youngsters noted just part of a New York license number —"7N"—FBI men were able to track down a car used in a kidnaping. From the car they traced to a group of men who might be the kidnapers of Arthur Fried and eventually placed each of the suspects at the scene of the crime and gathered them in.

**I**NVESTIGATION by FBI men has put the finger on approximately 100,000 subversive persons, including 30,000 in New York State, 8,500 in California and 6,500 in Illinois. Top men in these groups are actively watched and their danger potential accordingly reduced.

# Lady



In the secret compartment of the trunk the customs agent found a small leather bag, filled with white powder

## FAMOUS FEDERAL CASES



# from Shanghai

*Follow the United States Customs Agents on one of their toughest cases as they pit themselves against smugglers and smash into ruthless and daring traffickers in drugs!*

by **JACKSON HITE**

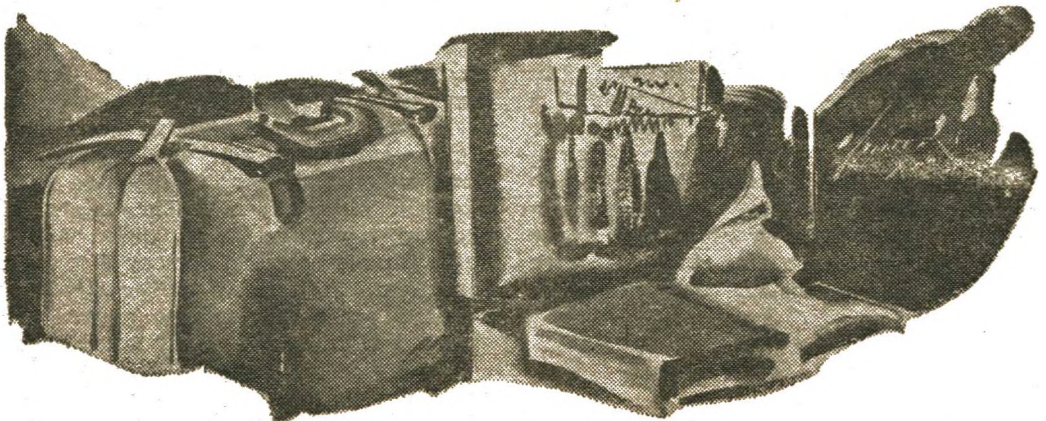
**T**HE rust streaked *Heiyo Maru*, a Japanese steamer, was warped into its berth in the Wilmington docks of the Los Angeles Harbor. Waiting on shore were several hundred relatives and friends of those on shipboard, waving a boisterous welcome to visitors and travelers of various nationalities returning from Oriental ports. It was early August, 1936, and no thought of war with Japan was in the minds of the passengers lining the rails.

Off to one side in the customs shed a group of men waited for the passengers to disembark with their luggage. These men were U. S. Customs Agents and to them an undeclared war was raging. For a number of years Japanese vessels had been the main source of narcotics being smuggled into this country and it was

up to these Agents to stamp out the traffic.

### *Keen Eyes Balk Smugglers*

Many travelers, making their first trip through customs, obtain the mistaken impression that it must be easy to smuggle contraband into this country because the inspectors didn't seem to give their baggage more than a cursory going over. Actually, the customs men are skilled experts and practising psychologists who can spot a neophyte smuggler by his actions as quickly as they can ferret out the undeclared purchases. Many smugglers have learned this to their sorrow. A quick run through of a packed bag is all these men need to know whether a traveler is trying any tricks



and there are few tricks indeed with which they are not familiar.

As the baggage from the *Heiyo Maru* was trundled ashore and assorted, the Agents went to work, each man assigned to cover several letters of the alphabet. Waiting for her baggage to be inspected in the W section was an attractive slender girl whose features showed some Oriental characteristics. Customs Agent William Mills approached, she smiled and pointed out two expensive wardrobe trunks as her baggage.

#### *Agent Inspects Girl's Trunks*

The customs man noted that her passport identified her as Maria Wendt of Shanghai, and her visa declared that she was the daughter of a German father and a Chinese mother. Her father occupied a high post with the Chinese civil government.

Speaking in excellent English, with almost no trace of an accent, the girl informed the inspector that the trunks contained only her clothes. She opened them for his scrutiny. Mills quickly rifled through the clothes in the first trunk without finding anything.

The second trunk, finished in the same luxurious blue and white lining, also held dresses and undergarments. In pulling out the compartments Mills noticed that the rear corners were rounded off in a decorative fashion that actually cut down on drawer space. This meant that there were hollow spaces in the trunk behind the drawers.

There was nothing about the actions of the girl that were suspicious in any way. She stood there completely at ease, well dressed in the latest fashion, and the fact that she was the daughter of a government official was highly in her favor.

Yet the skilled customs man was suspicious. He knew that trunk manufacturers try to utilize every inch of space they can, but here was a trunk with waste space, ostensibly for decorative effect.

#### *Find \$50,000 Heroin*

Mills waved to a guard and a few minutes later the trunk was wheeled in-

to an office for closer inspection. The double row of drawers was removed and the binding holding the decorative pieces in place pulled out. There resting in each recess was a small leather bag filled with a white powder. Tests were made and it was discovered that the twelve sacks contained a large shipment of heroin valued at more than \$50,000!

When the customs men confronted the girl with their find, Maria stared at them in surprise.

"I don't understand what it is doing in my trunk," she said in a bewildered voice.

She explained that she was a nurse at the Pau Lun Hospital in Shanghai and had been hired to bring a patient back to Shanghai from this country. She had jumped at the opportunity to visit here because she had a sister living in Los Angeles. She had expected to stay in this country for several months getting her patient ready for the trip. Maria said she had been hired in Shanghai by a woman named Mrs. Rosendahl.

She was to meet her patient, a woman named Mrs. Freed, at a hotel in Los Angeles.

#### *Girl Claims She Was Tricked*

When informed that she was being placed under arrest pending further investigation, Maria urged the officials to allow her to cable her father.

"I have been fooled and I need his advice," she declared.

Leroy B. Powers, commanding officer of the customs men in the Los Angeles area took active charge of the case. He told Maria to go to the hotel and register according to her instructions. At the same time he assigned a woman undercover agent on his staff to accompany the 23-year-old nurse. Two men agents were assigned to keep the women under constant observation if they went out and arrangements were made at the hotel for an agent to occupy a connecting room. All hotels in the city were checked for a sick woman named Mrs. Freed, without finding any trace of her.

Powers told his men that he doubted the story told by the pretty Eurasian girl. His hope was that other members of the narcotics ring would try and get

in contact with her at the hotel and that the agents on duty would nab them.

### *Maria Is Watched Closely*

Complications arose almost immediately. Maria complained of feeling ill and a reliable physician was summoned. The girl said she was suffering from a kidney ailment and the physician found that this was true. He cautioned the customs men that their prisoner was not well and had to avoid excitement.

Because her illness necessitated frequent trips to the bathroom the cautious Federal officers checked the room thoroughly, removing any objects with which the prisoner might commit suicide. There was no way to get out of the bathroom except through a narrow

portant official with the Chinese government, even though he was a white man, was correct. He was stationed in Shanghai. Maria, like her sister, also had studied to be a physician but ill health had forced her to drop her studies, and she became a nurse.

Several times a doctor had to be summoned to treat the ailing prisoner. On the fifth day after her arrest Maria was in bed resting when the woman undercover agent received a call that her brother, who was leaving for New York, was in the hotel lobby to say good-by. A customs agent stepped in from the adjoining room to take over while she went down to the lobby.

A few minutes after she left, Maria got out of bed and said she was going to take a shower. She stepped into the

This is one of a remarkable series of true stories about the far-flung activities of G-Men, T-Men and all other law enforcement officers of the nation. Written by Jackson Hite, these stories acquaint you with the breadth and scope of the tasks performed by brave operatives in every branch of Government service. The authentic cases which are described by Jackson Hite in this series are far stranger than fiction—and every bit as exciting!

window which overlooked the street. Since the suite was on the ninth floor and even a human fly would have difficulty in climbing up or down the smooth front facade of the hotel, they had no fear of her escaping. Nevertheless, they locked the window.

### *Insists She's Innocent*

Several days passed with no attempt by anybody to get in touch with the girl at the hotel. Maria talked freely to the woman undercover agent and the various customs agents who took turns guarding her, but her theme always was the same—she was an innocent dupe of a clever ring.

An investigation revealed that part of her story was true. She did have a sister who lived in Los Angeles. Her sister was a physician studying to be a specialist and she was genuinely shocked at the news of Maria's arrest. She pointed out that her sister had never wanted for money and could not understand how it was possible for her to be involved with a dope gang.

Inquiries showed that Maria's story about her German father being an im-

bathroom and closed, but did not lock, the door. The customs man could hear the water from the shower splashing in the tub.

### *An Extended Bath*

When several minutes passed with no slacking in the flow of water, the customs agent rapped on the bathroom door and called to the girl. He had taken the precaution of balancing a metal rod on the doorknob so that any attempt to turn it would dislodge the rod, causing it to bang on the floor. The rod still was in place.

Afraid that she might have become ill in the tub he opened the door. The shower still was on but the tub and bathroom were empty. The narrow window still was locked from the inside. He opened it and looked out. There were no signs that the girl had fled that way.

The woman undercover agent returned just then and the two officers made a thorough search of the hotel suite. Maria Wendt had vanished from the hotel. She had not passed through the lobby.

An immediate search was made for her through the city, with particular atten-

tion paid to Los Angeles' Chinatown. Police covering San Francisco's noted Chinatown also were alerted. The night passed, however, with no clue as to where the girl had gone or how she had managed to escape from a closed room. Even more puzzling was the fact that she had not taken any of her clothes or handbags and had no funds on her person when she vanished.

### *Trace Girl to New York*

A checkup of various airlines produced information that a well dressed young Chinese woman had boarded a plane in Los Angeles just seconds before flight time and had arrived in New York. Her general description matched that of Maria Wendt. Customs agents in New York were asked to see if they could pick up her trail. They learned that two women of Oriental origin had purchased tickets on a British luxury liner shortly before the vessel had sailed earlier that day. A Coast Guard cutter put out and halted the transatlantic vessel before it cleared the harbor. An inspection of the passengers revealed that neither of the two women was Maria. The luxury vessel was allowed to proceed.

### *Find Secret Pocket*

Meanwhile there was another development in the case. Experts had been studying with minute care the luggage owned by the vanished prisoner and found a tiny slit in the lining of an overnight bag. It seemed too small to secrete anything, but the men probed with tweezers and pulled out two tiny rolled balls of flimsy paper. The papers contained an illegible stamp mark and some numbers. Laboratory technicians were able to restore the blurred printing and discovered that the small pieces of paper were receipts for registered letters mailed from Shanghai to Naples, Italy.

Men in Shanghai already were checking there on Maria. The investigation spread to Naples.

Information soon was flowing into the office of Chief Customs Agent Roberts. The letters sent by Maria from Shanghai had been received in Naples by a man

with the name of Loffeholz. A native of Poland, he seemed to have plenty of money and traveled a great deal. He was not on the suspect list of any of the narcotic bureaus of Europe. Loffeholz had left for Havana just two weeks earlier. A wire was sent to Cuban authorities asking them to locate the man.

Once more they learned that their quarry had moved. His destination was unknown. Cuban agents, however, picked up the information that Loffeholz had telephoned the office of the Nippon Usen Kaisha Line in Los Angeles three times during his brief stay in Havana.

### *Uncover Hot Clue*

At the NUK line office in Los Angeles clerks readily remembered the three toll calls from Havana. They said some man had wanted to know when the *Heiyo Maru* would reach Mexico and had checked every day to make certain that the vessel was keeping to schedule. They had a valuable bit of information to add. Loffeholz had asked them to call collect at a hotel in Mexico City if there was any delay in the ship's arrival.

A wire was sent to Mexican authorities asking them to check the hotel for the wanted man. They replied that he had not registered at the hotel yet although he had made reservations. Loffeholz arrived in Mexico City later that day on board a plane. Mexican immigration officials, aware that inquiry had been made about him, refused to allow him to enter that country.

Havana authorities were notified of this sudden switch and agreed to take Loffeholz into custody when the plane landed and deport him as an undesirable person. Part of the agreement was that he would be placed on a vessel that was certain to dock in New York so American authorities could grab him as being in their jurisdiction.

### *Smoked Glasses Are Giveaway*

Powers now was in New York to direct the search for the missing girl. The day after Loffeholz was picked up by Cuban authorities he learned that a girl who wore smoked glasses had booked

passage for Europe on the *S. S. Deutschland*. Customs agents were at the gangplank when the passenger appeared, followed by a porter with a load of new and expensive luggage. Ordered to remove her glasses, the girl shrugged and took them off.

She was Maria Wendt. She refused to reveal how she had escaped from the hotel room.

Cuban agents placed Loffholz on board a cruise ship returning to New York. Customs agents met the steamer as it entered the harbor. When they went down to Loffholz's stateroom they received no answer to repeated knocks on the door. A steward opened it for them with a passkey. Loffholz, realizing that he had been outsmarted and trapped by Uncle Sam's Custom Agents, had committed suicide by hanging himself from a pipe in his room.

#### *Suicide Throws Plans Awry*

Maria Wendt had not been told by Chief Powers about the finding of the receipts for the registered letters in the lining of her bag. He had hoped to confront the pair unexpectedly and surprise a confession from one or both of them. With this plan knocked askew by the suicide of a man who undoubtedly was an important link in the narcotics ring, Powers decided to spring the information about his suicide suddenly to Maria and get her reaction.

Maria simply wrinkled her brow when she heard the name. "I don't think I know the man," was her cool reply.

The investigation in far-off Shanghai was beginning to produce results. It was learned that, after Maria had completed her education at a convent and made her debut to local society, she began to associate with a number of questionable Shanghai characters in a city noted for the number of schemers it attracts.

#### *Chinese Make Inquiry*

Loffholz, it seems, was not unknown in Shanghai and one of his best friends there was Aloysius Stein, Superintendent of the Pau Lun Hospital where Maria worked as a nurse. Stein was a well known member of the International

Settlement and his reputation was excellent.

Chinese authorities decided to make a searching inquiry into Stein's background. They learned that he had received a cablegram from Loffholz which read, "OK Mexico and Los Angeles." This message had been sent to him while Maria was aboard the *Heiyo Maru* on her way to the United States with the narcotics.

Shortly after police learned this information Stein was found dying in a vacant lot in the International Settlement. He was dead before an ambulance could rush him to his hospital. Physicians found that he died of a poison administered by a hypodermic needle.

First Loffholz had committed suicide as authorities closed in on him and now Stein was dead as soon as a definite link had been made. Autopsy surgeons ruled out the possibility that the hospital head had committed suicide. They pointed out that the hypodermic had been injected in the back of his thigh, a most unusual spot for a self administered injection. It was evident that the narcotics ring, fearing that Stein might talk, had taken prompt action to silence him forever.

A raid had been made on the hospital seeking to link Stein with the narcotics gang. A search of his office brought nothing to light. The searchers did come across a locked door which they promptly smashed open only to discover that it was empty. They did find a cleverly concealed door, also locked. They pounded this one open and found themselves in a secret laboratory, the existence of which was not known to any other hospital attaches.

#### *Find Drug Traces*

The searchers discovered traces of white powder which they had analyzed. The substance was heroin. They also uncovered several empty leather sacks similar to the ones found filled with heroin in Maria's trunk.

The prompt death of the hospital superintendent convinced Chief Powers of the Customs service that he never would get Maria to talk—she knew full

well what fate would be in store for her.

In December, 1936, Maria was placed on trial in Los Angeles, charged with smuggling drugs into this country and also for possession of narcotics. Her story that she had been a dupe was ridiculed by United States Attorney Perison Hall who pointed out that her sensational escape showed that she somehow had managed to get in touch with a member of the gang and the ring had engineered her attempted flight from this country. Her actions, he pointed out, hardly fit in with her claim of being an innocent victim.

Hall also had brought to this country several Shanghai agents who testified they had found no trace of a woman named Mrs. Rosendahl and believed she was an invention of Maria's agile brain.

They said she was the renegade daughter of an honest official and, from everything they could learn, was an important member of one of the most ruthless and daring narcotic rings in existence.

Throughout her trial, the 23-year-old beauty dressed in simple, demure clothes in keeping with her tale. The jury refused to accept her story and found her guilty of both charges. She was sentenced to ten years in prison but later was ordered deported to China.

The Lady from Shanghai had given United States Customs Agents one of their toughest cases, involving the cooperation of authorities in China, Cuba and Mexico in their never ending war with smugglers, a war where, to the smugglers, the stakes are incredibly lucrative and human life cheap.



## *The New Look in Crime!*

**T**HE old-time gangs were coming back! New Capones, Floyds and men of their ilk were beginning to emerge as the leaders. It was the new day of the gang—the resurgence of all the crime and murder that thrived during Prohibition. Only, a little different this time. Smarter leaders with new ideas. Incorporating tricks discovered and perfected during the war. But behind all this—the same men, the same faces, the same types. . . .

Yes, the old gang chieftains were back, fully organized, committing crimes that bore the stamp of yesterday's gangdom—with a new look. The loot was running into hundreds of thousands—and it was into this explosive situation that Dan Fowler and his aides stepped when they tackled a sinister murder case in **CRIMSON TOMORROWS**, next issue's exciting complete G-Men novel. Follow the Ace of the F.B.I. on one of his toughest crime trails as he combats and downs the hydra-headed monster of gangsterism in—

# **CRIMSON TOMORROWS**

By **C. K. M. SCANLON**

**NEXT ISSUE'S FEATURED COMPLETE DAN FOWLER NOVEL!**



# The Kiss of Death

By O. B. MYERS

*From aboriginal poison darts and ancient mystic rites, it was but one step to the bullet destined for murder. . . .*

**T**HE coroner blinked his heavy-lidded eyes at the jury and turned back to me.

"You were in the audience at the Orpheum Theatre on the evening of

Monday, the sixteenth?" he asked.

I cleared my throat and said, "Yes, sir, I was."

"What did you see there that evening?"

"I saw a man murdered on the stage."

The word "murdered" seemed to make Dr. Wiswell slightly unhappy.

"Please do not jump to any conclusions, Mr. Bray. It is the duty of the jury to draw inferences, not of the witness. Just tell us the facts—exactly what you saw and heard."

I leaned back in the witness chair. The room had a high ceiling and bare walls, giving my voice a faint, uncanny echo.

"It was at the end of the second act. The stage was half dark. It represented a bedroom. The maid was there, alone with a man who had just returned from—well, in the play he was supposed to be her husband."

"I suggest that you disregard the characters of the play, and use the actual names of persons, when you know them."

I started over again. "Sonia Ballou was at one side of the stage with Farley Delbart. He was holding her in his arms."

**I**NSTINCTIVELY I paused to look at the girl who sat in the aisle seat of the second row.

Every other eye in the crowded room seemed to follow mine as if drawn by a magnet.

It was easy to picture her in a man's arms. Her figure, even in that stiff-backed courtroom chair, was all yielding curves and pliant grace. Her smoky eyes were languorous under long lashes, her full lips the deep crimson of fresh blood. Playing a scene on stage in which those lips surrendered to a storm of kisses would doubtless be, for her, combining business with pleasure.

"Another man came on, from the right," I resumed. "It was Tom Froman, the star. He had a revolver in his hand. There were just a couple of lines, as he crossed the stage. Then he raised the gun. It was nickel-plated, easy to see in the half light. He fired twice, in rapid succession. The other man—Farley Delbart—collapsed with a faint groan. Tom ran across with the gun, leaped through an open window, and disappeared off-stage. You see, he was in love with Sonia, and . . . Excuse me. That is, in the play."

**T**HE coroner shook his head at me. That was an unfortunate slip. Broadway gossip had whispered for months that young Tom Froman was madly, hopelessly, in love with Sonia Ballou. Hopelessly, because Sonia was married to Victor Ballou, the cashier of the Orpheum Theatre; madly, because she flaunted her tantalizing charms before him at every brazen opportunity.

The columnists had made hay with this titillating morsel ever since "High-boy" opened in September, had even occasionally added extra flavor with the name of Farley Delbart, owner of the show. Which of course swelled Sonia's publicity—and her ego.

"What happened then?" asked the coroner.

"The curtain went down, to applause. The audience moved around during the intermission, came back to their seats. There was a delay. The lights went down, then went up again. After several minutes a man came out before the curtain—the assistant manager. He announced that there had been an accident, that the play would not be finished. Money would be refunded at the box office. Everyone was—surprised."

"What did you do?"

"I was with Inspector McCorlie, of the Homicide Bureau."

"You mean you were—er—on duty?"

"No. I'm a private detective, not connected with the police. We were enjoying a night off, both of us—at least we had been, up till then. We went backstage to see what had happened. Farley Delbart had been shot. He was lying on the floor of the stage, unconscious. An ambulance came from Northern Hospital; someone had already telephoned. They took him away. I believe he died in the ambulance."

"Yes, we know he died." The coroner's eyes flickered toward the door on his left, where the jury had already viewed the body. "And what did you do then?"

"There was a lot of confusion."

I did not try to elaborate that statement. Stagehands, actors, maids, and managers, running about, shouting, whispering, weeping. For weeks these same people had watched Farley Delbart get shot in the back, in panto-



mime. Perhaps that very fact made it more of a shock when they found him actually shot in the back. Had the curtain by chance been raised on that scene, it would have caused a panic.

"I saw Tom Froman, asked him some questions," I went on. "He was excited. He couldn't understand what had happened. He had a pistol in his pocket, the one he had used on stage. I took it away from him."

The coroner picked up one of the two guns that lay on the table by his side—an old-fashioned, nickel-plated .38 caliber revolver. Not the kind you would choose for accurate shooting, but the kind that looked deadly across the footlights.

"Was it similar to this one?" he asked.

A stocky, bald man came to his feet. I did not know his name then, but I knew that he represented Tom Froman.

"May I object?" Neither of these weapons has been properly introduced in evidence, and in justice to my client—"

Dr. Wiswell halted him with an upraised hand.

"This is a coroner's inquest, not a court of justice. Your client is not on trial. No one is on trial. Our purpose here is merely to bring out as many facts as possible, so that it can be decided who, if anyone, should be brought to trial. You will note that I did not ask the witness to identify this weapon. My question only touched on similarity."

The lawyer sat down.

"Yes, it was similar to that one," I said.

"Did you examine the gun you took from Mr. Froman?"

"I did. It had been recently fired. Two chambers contained empty cartridges. Two chambers contained live rounds. That is, they were blank cartridges, but they had not been fired. The other chambers were empty. The property man told me he usually loaded—"

"Never mind that. The property man will give his own testimony. Did you notice anything unusual about those cartridges?"

"They all looked the same to me—standard thirty-eight caliber blank cart-

ridges. Nothing peculiar about the revolver, either."

"And you say that two of the cartridges had been fired?"

I nodded. "That's right."

"Now go back for a moment to the end of the second act, when the shooting took place. How many shots did you hear?"

"I heard two," I said carefully.

"Could there have been three shots?"

The lawyer representing Victor Ballou slid to the edge of his chair, but did not rise.

"I heard two shots," I repeated. "There could not have been three shots fired from that same gun. It is impossible to pull the trigger quick enough to make two explosions overlap and sound like one. But if, at that precise moment, some other gun had been fired—"

**B**ALLOU'S lawyer came to his feet. Before he had time to open his mouth, the coroner stopped me with a gesture.

"All right, Mr. Bray. Any statement that begins with the word 'if' is probably speculative. Tell the jury what else you did, or saw."

My eyes strayed to Sonia's husband, seated inside the railing, well-groomed and imperturbable.

"I saw Victor Ballou, the cashier. We passed him in the side aisle leading to the stage. He was carrying a satchel, and was evidently going back to the box office to handle the refunds."

"Then he was coming from the stage? He had been on the stage?"

"Yes, that's right."

The coroner turned and picked up the other gun from the table. This was a compact .32 caliber automatic finished in businesslike blued steel. He hefted it significantly, and fixed me with his eye.

"Was Victor Ballou carrying a gun—similar to *this*?"

I chose my words carefully. "Not in his hand," I replied. "If he had any pistol on him, I didn't see it."

The coroner hesitated momentarily, then put down the automatic.

"That's all, Mr. Bray." He turned toward the ranked rows of chairs. "Dr. Birch, please!"

I got up and moved away from the witness chair. My lungs were begging for a cigarette, but that meant going outside, for smoking was not permitted in the courtroom. I was so anxious to hear the rest of the testimony that I returned to the empty seat next to McCorlie.

I leaned close to murmur, "All right, Mac?"

He nodded silently, without looking at me.

The physician gave his testimony on the cause of death with a curt, professional air. Stripped of technicalities, it boiled down to a bullet which had grazed the heart, punctured an artery, and torn the lung. He had performed a desperate emergency operation immediately upon arrival at the hospital, but too late. The patient was already dead. In the course of the operation, he had removed the fatal bullet.

"What did you do with that bullet, Doctor?"

"I turned it over to the police."

The next witness, Sergeant Kalisch from the police laboratories downtown, I knew by reputation. He referred to enough experience in two minutes to qualify three times over as an expert witness on ballistics. The coroner showed him the two guns. Yes, he had seen them both before; had fired them for test purposes.

Dr. Wiswell took from a brief case a number of flat, oblong boxes. Each carried a stamped number, and was further identified by several symbols and at least one signature. In each one a bullet reposed on a bed of cotton batting. Under questioning, the sergeant recognized them in rapid succession. These had been fired in the laboratory from the one pistol, those from the other.

"Now I ask you to examine this bullet, Sergeant."

The expert peered at the markings on the box. "That is the bullet which was removed from the body of Farley Delbart, after causing his death. It was given to me for examination."

"And tell the jury what your examination disclosed."

"It is a standard, round-nose, thirty-two caliber bullet, and was fired from a thirty-two caliber pistol before it struck

the deceased."

A faint murmur ran through the big room, and died.

The coroner framed his next question carefully. "And can you tell the jury *what* thirty-two caliber pistol it was fired from?"

"I can."

The sergeant, in his element, rested his elbows on the arms of the chair and faced the jury. For five minutes he gave an unusually lucid explanation of the comparison microscope, the camera attachments, and the manner in which the rifling of a barrel imposed its individualistic markings upon a bullet passing through it. These markings, he declared, were as characteristic as fingerprints.

"I have comparison photographs in my pocket," he stated. "With more time—after all, it is only three days since the shooting—I could prepare blown-up enlargements to show in the courtroom. They would prove to you what the originals have proved to me under the glass—that the fatal bullet was fired from that thirty-two caliber pistol lying there on the table, the one that was in Victor Ballou's pocket."

Ballou's lawyer was on his feet, but the murmur of astonishment, no longer faint, almost drowned out his angry demand to be told how a man could be killed by a .32 caliber bullet when a .38 caliber pistol had been fired at his back. The coroner silenced the hubbub by banging a gavel on the table.

"Gentlemen, let me remind you again. I am neither prosecuting nor defending. I am merely trying to get at the facts. The time will come later for you to present these facts in court, or to exclude them, depending on the circumstances. The interpretation of these facts is something that rests with the jury. Now, Sergeant—"

**T**HE rest of the expert's testimony only repeated and strengthened what he had already set forth. He gave the impression of knowing his stuff perfectly. When he got through, no one in the room doubted that Farley Delbart had been killed by a .32 caliber bullet fired from the automatic with the serial number 631884.

Dr. Wiswell had turned away to consult his witness list, then bethought himself of something else.

"This bullet, Sergeant." He held it up. "It is perfectly clean. Was it like that when you received it?"

"It was not. It was covered with blood."

"And how did you clean it, prior to examination?"

"I gave it to the chemistry lads, in the lab. They dissolve the foreign matter, and then analyze it."

"And do you know the results of that analysis?"

"Yes, sir. I got it just before I came up here." He consulted a slip of paper. "The blood was type O. That matches Farley Delbart's. But there was something else on that bullet."

"Yes? What else was on the bullet?"

I don't think anybody in the room knew what was coming, not even McCornie. Mac and I had arrived together. The sergeant had come in later, and had had no chance to speak with his chief. The breathless silence was eloquent of curiosity.

"A small quantity of wax." The sergeant was reading from his memorandum. "'Some kind of animal grease, of organic origin, insoluble in water. Traces of coloring matter, a deep red in hue, but not, repeat *not* confused with the coloring of the blood. Quantities too small for further, detailed analysis.'"

He looked up at the coroner. Even his own tone held a note of mystified awe. "They think it's kissproof lipstick, sir."

A pin dropped in the courtroom at that moment would have shaken the windows in their frames. I felt, rather than saw, Mac next to me repress a start. A cold shudder started at the base of my spine and ended at the nape of my neck.

I was thinking, as others must have been thinking, of stories I had read. Of the aboriginal Indians in the jungles of South America, who dipped their darts in deadly poison before discharging them through their blow-guns. Of ancient, mystic rites, where the mighty warrior dipped his arrowhead in the blood of human sacrifices before setting forth to track down his victim.

From that it was only one step to the thought of the bullet, destined for murder, being pressed to the lips of a woman a token of passionate hate. I could foresee the headlines which were to flare in tomorrow's papers:

#### THE KISS OF DEATH!

The sigh of a hundred people exhaling at once broke the tension in the room. Men shifted in their chairs. Reporters got up and tiptoed toward the corridor, where the phone booths were. Mac twisted sideward to peer at Sonia Ballou.

Her eyes were lowered to the floor, extravagantly long lashes hiding whatever emotion might have been there to see. She sat with her legs crossed, lacquered toe-nails protruding from the open end of a high-heeled, lizard-skin slipper. As I looked, that balanced foot jerked once, spasmodically, then relaxed.

The coroner knew a dramatic point when he got hold of one, and was smart enough not to milk it dry.

He dismissed the sergeant with a gesture, and called the property man to the stand.

This witness had been with "High-boy" since it opened. His duty was to see that all props were in condition, ready for use, and in the right place at the right time. He identified the .38 caliber pistol as the one used by Tom Froman in the show at the end of the second act.

It was his habit, he stated, to inspect the gun, eject any empty shells, and load four or five of the chambers with live blank cartridges, of which he kept an ample stock. He had no other kind. He usually placed the pistol, ready, in Tom Froman's dressing room some time during the first act. Tom was on and off stage several times, but always returned to his dressing room before the shooting scene at the end of the second act.

"Then there were times when anyone backstage could have had access to this gun by stepping into Froman's dressing room?"

"Yes, sir!" the witness said, with obvious eagerness.

"And is this the same pistol always used in the show?"

HIS, "No, sir!" was even more ready this time.

"When the show first opened," he explained, "we used a small thirty-two caliber automatic in that scene. That one right there," he asserted, nodding his head toward the other gun on the table. "But Mr. Delbart decided—he owned the show, you know, and ran it, besides playing a small part himself—he decided a bigger, flashier gun would be more easily visible to the audience. So I bought the nickel-plated thirty-eight caliber job."

"And what happened to the smaller pistol—this one?"

"It was given to Mr. Ballou. He is cashier—handles the money. He generally comes backstage every night, along about the middle of the second act, with the receipts in his bag. He reports to Mr. Delbart, then after the show he takes the cash to the bank, to a night depository. He carried the pistol for protection."

"I see. So that pistol, I presume, was loaded with live ammunition? I mean, the cartridges had bullets in them?"

The property man shrugged. "I suppose so. I had nothing to do with that ammunition. Mr. Ballou bought that himself."

The jurymen were beginning to look rather puzzled. They were hardly to be blamed. They had so far been confronted with two guns, evidence that one, after being loaded with blanks, had been fired at the victim, and further evidence that the victim had been killed by a bullet fired from the other, which had not been fired. At least, they had heard nothing to indicate that the .32 automatic had been fired, except the faint suggestion which I had tried myself to insinuate at one point in my testimony.

This didn't weigh much, even with me. I knew, and the jury could guess, that to fire one pistol absolutely coincident with another, so that the two explosions should sound like one, was an exceedingly ticklish proposition. It could happen, but no sane man would try to plan it that way.

Now, however, they were to hear something that would give them a new light on the puzzle. "Inspector McCorlie!" called the coroner.

Mac got up and ambled to the chair. He is a big man; big shoulders, big hips, big head. He obviously made an impression with his shock of white hair and his calm but serious mien. But his jowls were a little pinker than usual. He wasn't too pleased.

Mac seldom took the stand himself. Normally his men did the leg work, picking up clues and interviewing witnesses, while he remained in the background, adding up deductions and planning strategy. In this particular case, however, there was no alternative.

"You were backstage at the Orpheum, last Monday night?"

Mac's tone was low but clear. "I was."

The coroner picked something from the table that looked like a crushed cigarette butt and held it up.

"I ask you if you can identify this."

Mac took it between his fingers and looked at it closely. From the front row I could see that it contained no tobacco.

"It is a piece of heavy, soft paper rolled into a tube about the diameter of a cigarette. Part of it has been burned or charred away until less than an inch remains. It is either the fragment I picked up on the stage less than fifteen minutes after Farley Delbart had been shot, or another similar to it."

Dr. Wiswell faced the jury. "Gentlemen, this witness is a distinguished and experienced police officer. He has a theory which may explain some of the apparent contradictions in the evidence you have already listened to. I am going to let him explain it to you in his own words—with the distinct understanding that you appraise it for what it is: theory, not fact."

Mac settled himself in his chair, his eyes on the ceiling.

"If I wished to fire at a man with one gun, and kill him with a bullet that carried the markings of another, I would go about it like this. I would gain possession of the smaller pistol, and fire several rounds into a bale of hay, a large wad of cotton batting, or something similar, from which the bullets could be easily recovered. Then I would roll a

tube of thickish paper about one of those bullets—like this." The motions of his fingers illustrated his meaning.

"The diameter of a thirty-eight caliber barrel is just under three-eighths of an inch, that of a thirty-two caliber about one-sixteenth smaller. The difference in radius, therefore, is approximately one thirty-second of an inch. Blotting paper is just about that thick. My paper sleeve would be cut slightly shorter than the barrel of the thirty-eight."

The jury, the whole room, hung on his words.

"On the night of my attempt, when an opportunity offered, I would slide my tube containing the smaller bullet into the barrel of the thirty-eight. Far enough to be out of sight, but not quite far enough to interfere with the rotation of the cylinder. It would be snug enough to stay in place, especially if I dampened it with my lips."

I HEARD what sounded like a faint gasp on my right. Sonia Ballou had straightened up in her chair, and was glaring at the inspector in horror and resentment.

"When the pistol was fired," continued McCornie, "the force of the explosion would drive out the bullet, of course, and the paper sleeve would prevent its picking up any new markings from the barrel of the thirty-eight. The wad from the blank cartridge would also drive out the sleeve before it, and the flame of the explosion would set fire to it. I would hope that it would be entirely consumed, leaving no trace—unless someone happened to step on it, accidentally or otherwise. A bullet fired in this manner through an oversize barrel would have, of course, somewhat less than normal muzzle velocity, and its accuracy would be poor. At a range of eight or ten feet, however, neither of these considerations is important."

The coroner waited until the buzz of interest had died down.

"Obviously such a course of action, Inspector, would mean planning, far ahead, and would require that the guilty party should have had access, at one time or another, to both guns."

"That's right," said Mac.

"Now who do you think might have been able—"

But all the lawyers were on their feet with objections before he even finished the question.

"Prejudicial!" cried Sonia's attorney. "You're trying to convert theory to fact, call for a conclusion of the witness. Irrelevant, immaterial, and contrary to—"

The coroner held up both hands, smiling faintly.

"All right, gentlemen; all right! We'll let that pass."

He glanced at the clock. "Recess for lunch until one-thirty! All previous witnesses please remain available for re-questioning."

Mac and I left together, and found a table in the Sindbad Grill, around the corner. But before we even caught a waiter's eye, the whole place buzzed with the confusion of Sonia's entrance.

She swept to a table in the exact center of the restaurant, her head high. She was accompanied by her lawyer, his assistant, his clerk, two or three members of the cast, all male, and trailed by a battery of reporters and news photographers. She was playing to the hilt the part of the *femme fatale*, over whom men fought. Her smile was just wan enough to excite sympathy, her attitude one of resignation to the storms of violent emotion which swirled about her.

"The motive is pretty obvious, isn't she?" I murmured.

Mac didn't look up from his menu. "What do you mean?"

"She's a hot number. Delbart put her in his show so he could make time with her. She never had a speaking part before. And I'd wager he played that small part himself because it gave him an opportunity to whip up his suggestions. Tom Froman was crazy about her. He couldn't stand watching that every night. Or of course her husband might have been moved by similar feelings. He's human, too."

Mac laid aside the menu and fixed me with a gloomy stare.

"He's human, eh? Then he has human motives. Nick, there are two great goals that men strive for. They motivate most of our major crimes, as well as our legitimate efforts. They are—"

money and women. All other ambitions are incidental. Sometimes they overlap. Some men marry women in order to get money; some men pursue money in order to buy women. But sometimes they're quite separate and distinct—and I have a feeling this is one of those times."

I stared in amazement at this vest-pocket philosophy.

"Money?" I stammered. "Delbart had plenty, but none of these people get any of it when he's dead."

"I've got a man looking into that," grunted Mac.

Before I could ask what he meant, the waiter came to take our orders. When he had left, I was on a different tack.

"Tom Froman is in a tough spot," I mused. "He could have loaded that thirty-eight the way you described, to make it look as if Victor Ballou had done the shooting. He knew that Victor carried the thirty-two, and Tom has had access to both those pistols."

"Yes, but he hasn't had his hands on the thirty-two since the first week the show opened. If he fired a test round, it must have been then. That's a long while to wait between planning a murder and carrying it out."

"Maybe Victor did shoot Delbart with the thirty-two and the noise of the shot was drowned in the other two explosions."

"If we tried Victor Ballou on that theory, we would never be able to convict him on the evidence we have right now. And if he's tried once, and acquitted, he can never be tried again, you know."

**W**HILE we drank our soup I fell silent.

"Tom is still in a tough spot," I pointed out when we had finished. "No matter how that bullet got in his pistol, he pulled the trigger that fired it into Delbart's body. He killed Delbart."

"But it's not murder, without intent. If he didn't know it was in there, it's involuntary manslaughter, and he'll get nothing. No, the murderer is the person who first fired that bullet from the thirty-two, and saved it, and planned to put it in the thirty-eight at the right

time. When we can prove that, we solve the case. . . Pass the salt."

When we got back, the court room was already nearly filled. Mac and I could not find two seats together. He went up front, while I slipped into a vacant chair on the side aisle.

At one-thirty the coroner started questioning the stage manager, some scene-shifters, and several members of the cast. They all agreed on two things. Victor Ballou was in the wings at the time, where he *could* have fired the shot that killed. Also, they had all heard the usual two shots; no more, no less.

Two facts kept jostling each other in my mind. Someone, at some time, had fired a test round from that .32, and had saved the marked bullet. As Mac had said, when we could prove who, we solved the case. And also, the amazing fact, as yet unexplained, that the slug that killed Farley Delbart carried traces of lipstick. Between those two facts there was—there must be—some connection. If I could establish it, I might have the answer.

Mac did not see me leave. I tiptoed up the side aisle, caught a cab in front of the building, and told the driver:

"The Hotel Jeddison."

This was a tall, narrow wedge of a building on one of the side streets off Broadway. It called itself a "family hotel," and catered principally to the theatrical crowd. The lobby held a desk, some potted plants, a couple of telephone booths, and a house dick named Deegan who dozed in a chair next to the elevator shaft.

The manager was a stoop-shouldered vulture who eyed me through horn-rimmed glasses with rheumy suspicion cultivated through years of dealing with the slipperiest clients in the hotel game. The old man's name softened him up a little—every old-time hotel clerk in New York knew the old man for a square shooter—but when I told him what I wanted, he started to shake his head.

"Are you crazy? I can't let you into guests' rooms, in their absence. What if they should come in?"

"These guests won't come in. They're attending an inquest for the afternoon, I'll guarantee that. Besides, I didn't say let me in. I said take me in. I want you

to go in with me, watch everything I do and everything I touch, and report it to the police, later."

That was just enough at variance with the usual snooper's request to puzzle him. Perhaps that was why he consented. He kicked Deegan on the shin.

"Watch the desk!" he snapped, and motioned me into the self-service elevator.

On the fourth floor he used a pass-key on the door of 416, and we stepped into a double room that was a fantastic mixture of order and disorder.

Stage folk are notoriously careless in their personal habits, and Sonia obviously lived up to the tradition. Feminine garments and accessories were strewn helter-skelter over every piece of furniture, and even hung from the door-knobs. In front of the large mirror on the bureau stood or lay an army of jars, tubes, perfume flasks, hair-nets, and face tissues, used and unused. Nature had endowed Sonia with plenty to start with, but she evidently practiced considerable artifice in order to exaggerate her allure.

What struck me as odd was the point that, although this room was occupied by a couple, you would scarcely have guessed the existence of a man at first glance. On the male side, the eye met the opposite extreme of neatness and precision. Several suits were racked on hangers in one of the closets, shoes were lined up in a careful row, each necktie hung trimly in its appointed place. The contrast was a startling revelation of character.

I looked first among the array of cosmetics for lipstick, but learned nothing definite. In addition to at least one in her bag, I saw at least seven more on the dresser, each one a different shade. She apparently used a different color morning, noon, and night—or perhaps she changed to suit the disposition of the man she was with.

I peered in the closets, I pulled out drawers, I poked under the beds. I was thinking, "A bale of hay—a wad of cotton batting," but of course I was having no luck. I rummaged in the tiny bath, and came back into the room, where I found myself facing the twin beds. They were neatly made up. Maid

service attended to that detail. My mind gave a jump. The pillows!

THE manager frowned in puzzled disapproval, but I tore the beds apart. The four pillows were all in clean cases, none showing any holes. The fact that they were clean showed that they had been recently changed. I yanked off the pillow-cases. The manager scowled harder than ever. The pillows themselves were in blue-striped ticking, not quite as clean as the pillow-cases. In none of the ticking could I find the slightest sign of a puncture.

Apparently at a dead end, I straightened up. Then I noticed that one pillow looked cleaner than the others; newer. When I picked it up, I saw that the end seam had been sewed with black thread, although the ticking was striped in blue like the rest. I carried it nearer the window.

Unlike the others, that seam had been sewed not on a machine, but by hand, and not by a skillful hand either. The stitches were long and clumsy. When I hooked my fingernail under one, the thread snapped. I pulled it out, opening up the end of the case. Inside was another one. A new case had simply been slipped over an old one. When I got the old one out, right away I saw two punctures about the size of a lead pencil, one near one end and one near the other.

Sewed into the fabric at one end was a tag of tough, glazed paper, on which was printed, "Do Not Remove! Official Statement—Made of All New Material" followed by considerable fine print. The other side was blank. I flattened it on the desk.

"Sign your name on that tag," I told the manager. "So that you can identify it later, if necessary."

While he did so, I asked, "Where are the pillow-cases that were on these pillows last week?"

"In the laundry, I suppose."

I made him come with me. The laundry was way over on West 46th Street, almost to the river. It was on the ground floor of a loft building, dimly lighted, and full of the hiss of steam and the grind and clank of heavy machinery. We found the foreman.

"The Hotel Jeddison? We pick up

there Mondays, I think." He peered into a thick ledger, muttered, "J—Nineteen," and led us back through the sorting and wrapping rooms.

He stopped a couple of times to speak to women working at huge tables, or to inspect the mark on a hem. Finally, in the rear, we came upon a big heap that had just come out of a centrifugal dryer and was waiting for the mangles. It contained over a hundred towels, nearly as many sheets and pillow-cases, and a number of miscellaneous pieces.

"Here we are," said the foreman, examining a laundry mark. "A pillow-case with holes in it?" He grinned sarcastically. "You got a lot to choose from."

But I knew pretty much what kind of holes I was looking for. Rips, triangular tears, and worn spots did not interest me. I went through the pile like a minor cyclone, disregarding everything but pillow-cases. I got to the bottom without finding what I sought.

The manager, poking curiously through the stuff I had thrown aside, pulled out a white slip.

"What the devil is this? It can't belong to the hotel."

"Probably one of your tenants," explained the foreman, "whose laundry was picked up at the same time, and went through in the same batch." He frowned at a stain of discoloration. "Looks like it would have to go through the steam a second time. Give it here."

But I snatched the slip from the manager's hands. It was of sheer rayon, a delicate pink except for the top six inches. Here ran a wide band of rather coarse white lace, designed to give a sort of peek-a-boo effect on the wearer. It was far from new, and the lace was torn in several places. After a second look, I turned to the foreman.

"Can you tell who this belongs to?"

"Sure—from the laundry mark. It'll be in the numbers file. It only happens to be in with the hotel's stuff because—"

"Yes, yes, I understand that. Let's go look at the file."

When he had checked the number in the sorting room, he told me:

"Mrs. Sonia Ballou. She must live at the Jeddison, I guess."

Without explaining, I flattened the hem of the slip on the table.

"Here, write your name here. Yes, use that indelible ink you mark with. . . That's fine. Just so you can identify it, if necessary."

When I got back to the courtroom, Sonia was in the witness chair. She sat so that the afternoon sun fell on her smooth, dark hair, bringing out the auburn undertones, and showed her classic profile to the jury as she replied in a small, pathetic voice to the coroner's discreet questions about her relations with Tom Froman.

A MAN in a rumpled brown suit, who had entered just ahead of me, sat down next to Mac and spoke into his ear for less than a minute. Then the man got up and left. I made my way down the side aisle and to the vacant chair over a lot of toes. I was carrying the pillow wrapped up in my topcoat. Mac gave me a curious glance.

"What did you do? Have a baby?"

I opened the lapels of the coat just enough for him to see what I had. I told him in whispers just what I had found at the Jeddison, and at the laundry. The slip was bunched up in the side pocket of the topcoat. Without displaying it to the view of the room, he tucked it in his own side pocket. Then he stood up.

The coroner was about to finish with Sonia. "I realize that this affair is very difficult and embarrassing for you. The jealousies and passions of two men, over whom you . . . I beg pardon?"

Mac whispered in his ear. Dr. Wiswell faced the jury.

"Inspector McCornie has requested permission to ask a few questions of this witness. Permission is granted."

Mac's manner was stern but not threatening as he faced the girl in the chair. Her chin lifted to meet his level stare.

"Your husband is in love with you, Mrs. Ballou?"

"Why—why, yes, of course he is."

"And you are in love with him?"

Her cheeks were pink. "Certainly."

"Then the attentions of other men meant nothing to you?"

She hesitated. "They were only—annoying."

"I see. They were annoying." He



shifted his attack. "How long has your husband been cashier at the Orpheum, Mrs. Ballou?"

"Since 'Highboy' opened. Something over two months."

His inflection did not change by a hair. "And how long have you known that he was juggling the cash receipts, making false reports to Mr. Delbart, and pocketing the shortages himself?"

Her flush of dismay went almost unnoticed in the clamor of protests from Victor Ballou's lawyer about proofs.

"I will present proofs at the trial of the guilty party," Mac told him icily. "Right now I am merely asking confirmation of a fact." He turned back to Sonia and continued as if he had been interrupted in the middle of his question: "So that you and your husband, by planning to murder Farley Delbart, thus kept him from uncovering the peculations, and by throwing suspicion on Tom Froman, rid yourself of attentions which were—as you put it—annoying?"

Her cheeks now took on a chalky pallor; "I—I don't know what you're talking about!" she stammered, through livid lips.

McCorlie turned from as if in disgust, to speak to the jury.

"Gentlemen, she will confess—shortly. As soon as she finds herself hopelessly entangled, she will try to put all the blame on her confederate, Victor Ballou. Money is her dominating motive. You will notice that she is married, not to an actor, but to a cashier. When she sees him without cash, she will turn on him."

In clear, methodical phrases he described what had happened in that hotel room as factually as if he had been present.

"They stripped off a pillow-case, bunching the pillow up against some blankets on the bed. They fired the thirty-two just once. The bullet, clogged by the feathers, came out the other side, but without force enough to more than

dent the blanket. Victor devised and made the paper sleeve. Sonia carried it to the theatre and slipped it into the thirty-eight while Tom Froman was out of his dressing room. Victor came back and stood in the wings, as usual. He hoped that the obvious clues would lead us to try him, but fail to convict. Thus he could never be tried again, even if the whole truth were to come out."

Mac stepped to my chair, held up the pillow, and pointed out the two holes.

"This is the pillow they used. It will be identified by the manager of the Hotel Jeddison as being in their room, Number Four-sixteen."

The coroner caught Mac's eye, and beckoned. Mac leaned down.

"Dr. Wiswell reminds me," he told the jury with a faint smile, "that these facts do not explain the rouge on the bullet. A minor point, but quite capable of explanation. Before firing the test bullet, the feminine touch asserted itself. As a gesture—women are fond of gestures—she replaced the pillow-case with one of her slips. She was about to take the first step toward murdering one man who loved her and ruining another. As a gesture of contempt for all of them in general, she used lip-stick to draw a conventional heart on the lacy portion of the slip, for use as an aiming point. The bullet, when fired, pierced the lace almost without damaging it, but picked up a tiny smear of lipstick—her own lipstick—in passing."

As he finished he jerked the slip from his pocket and flung it wide for all to see. The "kissproof" scarlet had only partially washed out. Another laundering would have finished it. But now the outline of the heart, like a gruesome Valentine, was still plain.

Sonia came half to her feet, shuddered violently, wheeled toward her husband to emit a piercing shriek of rage and frustration, and suddenly pitched forward onto her face in a dead faint.

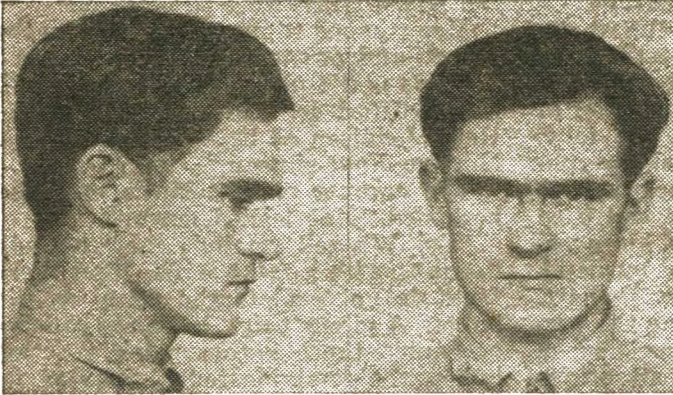
The room broke into pandemonium.



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**WILLIAM ALLEN THOMAS**  
FBI No. 1,361,226

Born August 18, 1921, Athens, Texas. Height, 5' 10½". Weight, 165 lbs. Eyes, blue. Hair, brown. Occupations, truck driver, seaman, mechanic. Sometimes wears mustache. Has been arrested in many states for burglary, assault, robbery, violation of Selective Service Act and as an escaped Federal prisoner. CAUTION: He is considered dangerous and may be armed.

**FRANK DOUGLAS  
PRZYBYLSKI**  
FBI No. 473,030

Born July 5, 1915, Omaha, Neb. Height, 5' 11½". Weight, 175 lbs. Eyes, brown. Hair, Brown. Occupations, chauffeur, stenographer. Hobbies, motorcycle enthusiast, stamp collector. Has been arrested for burglary, forgery, and petty theft. Now wanted for car theft. CAUTION: Przybylski is considered dangerous and may be armed.



**EUGENE MARTIN BREWER**  
FBI No. 1,355,684

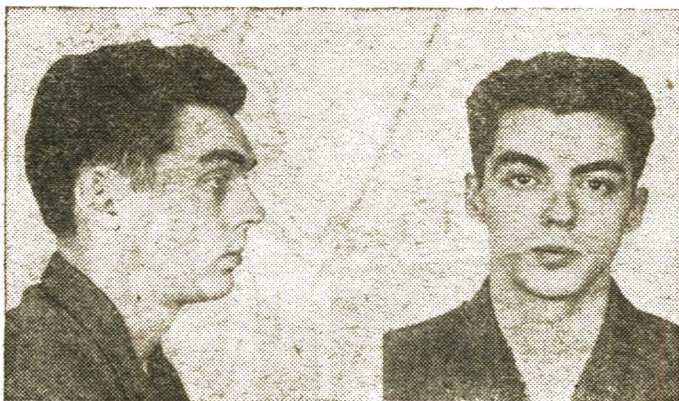
Born June 28, 1916, Maryville, Mo. Height, 5' 10½". Weight, 140 lbs. Eyes, blue. Hair, brown. Occupations, aircraft mechanic, printer. Several tattoos on both arms including heart, aviation insignia, bird and butterfly. Has been arrested many times. Now wanted in Colorado for transporting a stolen car interstate. CAUTION: He is considered dangerous and may be armed.

# THE F. B. I.

In cooperation with J. Edgar Hoover and the Federal Bureau of Investigation we bring you these pictures and descriptions of fugitives wanted by the FBI. If you see any of these persons or have information which may assist in locating them, immediately notify the FBI, Washington, D. C.

**JAMES EDWARD BURNS**  
FBI No. 4,509,997

Alias, Jimmy McGuire. Born April 17, 1923. Height, 5' 10". Weight, 145 lbs. Hair and eyes, brown. Tattoos, eagle with "U.S.N.," shamrock and ribbon with "Erin," "J.E.B." eagle and flower on right arm. Dagger with ribbon "Death before Dishonor" on left arm. "I love you" on fingers of left hand. Wanted for robbery. CAUTION: Burns is armed and dangerous.

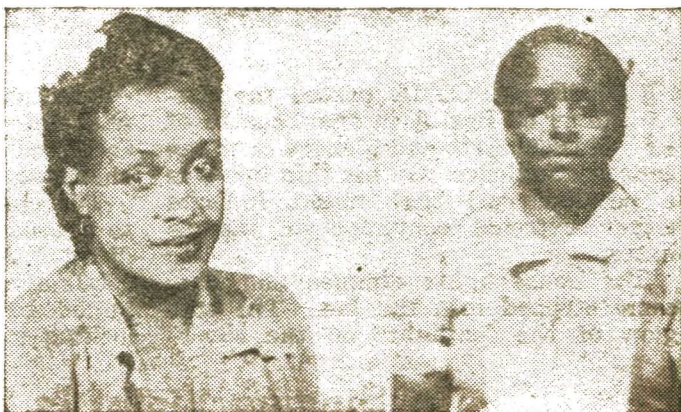


**WILLIAM MILTON HOFFMAN**  
FBI No. 173,377

Born March 4, 1895. Height, 5' 7½". Weight, 135 lbs. Hair, gray, thin. Eyes, slate blue. Occupation, plumber. Mole below left eye and above right eye. Has been convicted on charges of burglary in the states of Ohio and Illinois. Now wanted in Michigan for robbery. CAUTION: Hoffman is considered dangerous and may be armed.

**IVA CADDO LAWSON**  
FBI No. 1,643,458

Aliases, Mrs. Ivory C. Anderson, I. C. Brown, Ruth Harris, Ruth Conley, Hutchinson Morris. Born March 3, 1914, Haywood, Ark. Height, 5' 4". Weight, 140 lbs. Hair, black. Eyes, maroon. Occupations, cook and maid. 1¼" cut scar on left cheek near eye. A complaint has been filed charging she fled the state of Texas to avoid prosecution for the crime of burglary.



By M. D. ORR



Carlotta's black eyes filled with fear

## Music of Death

**J**OZEF BASCOME parted the curtains of Box A in the Theatre of Musical Arts and glanced over the capacity audience. On his thin lips was a peculiar curl that might indicate either extreme contempt or intense hatred.

The house lights dimmed and Bascome stepped into the box. The soft glow of the footlights on the silver-

colored curtain of the stage accentuated the gray shadows on his elderly face and partly masked the ominous sharpness of his eyes.

The chattering of the audience died to a whisper. Bascome's attention was directed down into the audience where a talkative woman was unable to put a period to her conversation. A stern-looking woman in front of her turned

**A Singing Violin Is Tuned for Murder!**

and glared. The voluble lady lifted her nose to indicate her opinion of the stern one. Bascome looked disgusted as he turned back toward the stage and the silver curtain began to ascend.

Bascome was not concerned about his immediate surroundings. He was interested only in the fact that this evening was to be the beginning of the end of all things for him. He watched the curtain reveal two white Grecian columns, about twelve feet apart, standing backstage against black velvet. A white grand piano with its curved top upraised like the wing of a gull about to take flight was on the left, and on the right was a white fluted pedestal supporting a huge white bowl filled with sprawling silvered branches. It reminded Bascome of a chalk and charcoal etching.

Bascome watched his wife, Carlotta, as she came out of the wings and walked to the center of the stage. A white spotlight beamed down on her shapely and youthful shoulders rising from her evening gown. She acknowledged the applause of the audience with a slight inclination of her head. Her black hair was parted in the middle and coiffured severely, and her eyes sparkled like black diamonds in the spotlight.

She looked directly at Bascome, but there was no indication that she saw him. Although Bascome's face appeared expressionless, nevertheless, his thoughts surged and boiled like a cyclonic disturbance. This was the last time that Carlotta would play his compositions; this was the last time that he would hear her play; this was the last evening that they would be husband and wife. Tomorrow would be the end—for both of them.

ALEX JAMES emerged out of the blackness of the cyclorama. He carried Carlotta's violin which he handed to her with a stiff bow. Bascome leaned forward. His eyes blazed with anger and his lips thinned into a straight line as he saw Carlotta flash a tender smile at James. How he hated James! James was always with Carlotta—even when he wasn't playing her accompaniment on the stage or practicing at home.

James was young and handsome. Carlotta had no use for people who were old. She hated age—and she hated Bascome. She had told him so a year ago when she had applied for her divorce. Well, tomorrow all would be over.

As James began the spirited and brilliant introduction of Jozef Bascome's latest composition for the violin, "A Fantasia in A Minor," his wavy brown hair spilled down over his high forehead and his full lips parted slightly. Bascome watched his powerful fingers flash over the keyboard with artistic and dramatic precision. He wished he could reach out and crash the keyboard cover down on those flashing fingers and break them so that they would never play again.

In the reflected light from the stage, Bascome's white hair and deeply lined face was a keen contrast to the black hair and youthful beauty of his wife. He drew back into the shadow of the box, his eyes fixed on her intently.

Carlotta raised her violin, slowly and dramatically. She placed it carefully beneath her chin and pressed her cheek against it—like a caress.

Her eyes turned toward Bascome. He glared at her. She smiled at him; contemptuously.

Bascome swore. How he hated her! She was heartless and no good! She would even pretend to love a piece of wood if she thought it would irritate him. Let her caress the violin! Tomorrow would be different.

Bascome looked down into the audience. People who came to concerts because it was socially proper to do so irritated him. He saw the drowsy inattention of bored husbands who would rather be playing poker at their clubs instead of sitting all evening in starchy boredom, listening to something they neither understood nor appreciated.

The first sweet notes of the "Fantasia" filled the theatre with their dreamy melody. Bascome saw Detective-sergeant O'Brien in the wings watching Carlotta. O'Brien never missed one of Carlotta's recitals, even if he had to sneak away from the office and listen backstage. Bascome hadn't been able to decide whether O'Brien liked Carlotta's music, or Carlotta.

Suddenly Bascome became rigidly attentive. The pizzicato movement of the "Fantasia" was about to begin. This was the part he had labored over—the effect must be just right or his whole composition would be a failure. There was a funny buzzing in his ears. He brushed his hand nervously across his mouth.

Carlotta poised her hand above the violin, her forefinger gracefully extended, preparatory to the execution of the pizzicato movement. Her hand flashed downward on the strings. There were three quick notes—and she stopped. She gasped. Her hand flew to her throat and she began to choke. Her black eyes, filled with surprise and fear, were looking directly into Bascome's. He tried to look away but her eyes held him with a hypnotic power.

Her violin slipped slowly from her hand to the floor. She staggered backward. James rushed forward and caught her in his arms.

Gasps of astonishment came from the audience. Everybody began to talk excitedly as Bascome started for the stage.

The silver curtain dropped and Reginald Maxwell, the socially prominent young stage manager, stepped in front of the curtain and held up his hand.

"I'm sorry, ladies and gentlemen," he shouted, "but Madam Bascome will not be able to continue her recital tonight. If you will call at the box office, your money will be refunded." He stepped behind the curtain.

By the time Bascome reached the stage, Carlotta had been removed to her dressing room and placed on the lounge. O'Brien, in the doorway, was ordering curiosity seekers away.

"Come in, Mr. Bascome!" he called. "Right this way. . . On your way everybody—don't block the doorway."

**A**S BASCOMBE entered the dressing room, he saw Dr. Frank Nawton, Carlotta's personal physician, bending over her.

"Where'd you come from?" Bascome demanded.

Nawton straightened up. "Hello, Bascome," he said, and bent over Carlotta again.

Bascome hated Nawton. Nawton was

a society psychiatrist who had made Carlotta believe she should divorce Bascome if she wished to accomplish her life's desire and become the world's greatest violinist. Nawton had convinced her that Bascome was detrimental to her future, that she would never attain her goal if she allowed him to dominate her with his mediocre music. Bascome's fingers opened and closed slowly.

"How is she, Doc?" asked O'Brien.

"She's dead," said Nawton. "Looks like her heart."

"I'll call the coroner," said O'Brien, and left the room.

Alex James moved to Bascome's side and touched him on the arm.

"Want me to take over, Joe?" he asked.

Bascome whirled and faced him. His face was gray and his eyes glittered between narrowed eyelids.

"You've been taking over long enough," he said quietly, but there was menace in his voice.

James shrugged and left the room.

Bascome looked down at the still form of his wife. He could see the dilated pupils of her eyes between her partly opened eyelids. Nawton was staring down at her as he backed slowly away. Bascome moved between him and Carlotta. He bent forward, his eyes on her face.

Her lower jaw sagged and the whiteness of her teeth showed behind the dark red of her rouged lips. He shuddered involuntarily as one of her slippers dropped off her foot and struck the bare floor with a sharp thud. He stooped and picked it up. His knuckles showed white as he crushed it—slowly and deliberately—into a crumpled mass. If he couldn't have her, no one else could—now.

"Sorry, Bascome." The voice of Nawton caused a quick change of expression on the face of Carlotta's husband. But he didn't look at Nawton. His eyes were on Carlotta.

"You didn't get her after all, did you, Nawton?" he said, a curious note of exultation in his voice.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Nawton.

"You know what I mean," said Bas-

come evenly. "You thought that she was going to marry *you*. You even divorced your wife and turned over all your property to her in order that she wouldn't contest your divorce. You see, Newton, I know a few things about what you've been doing. You and Carlotta were planning to leave town as soon as her divorce from me became final. Well, you may be leaving town, Newton, but Carlotta won't be going with you."

Bascome abruptly walked over to the dressing table. A frown creased Newton's forehead when he saw Bascome pick up Carlotta's violin, place it in its case, and snap the lock.

"I don't know what you are talking about," said Newton.

Bascome selected a small gold key from his key ring and locked the case. He turned and faced Newton, and a sardonic smile began to curl his thin lips.

Bascome noted the perfect wave in Newton's black hair, the close-cropped black mustache. He didn't like the sharp expression the long black eyelashes gave to his eyes, neither did he care for the satin smoothness of his swarthy skin. No wonder he was so successful in transferring the fixation of neurotic patients to himself.

A petal dropped from the white rose fastened in Newton's lapel. Bascome's eyes followed it to the floor.

"You got here pretty quick after—ah—after Carlotta's death," he said curiously.

"Naturally," said Newton. "I was in the audience."

Bascome started to reply but was interrupted by the entrance of Reginald Maxwell.

"How is Carlotta?" asked Maxwell.

"Dead," said Newton, and left the room.

**M**AXWELL walked slowly toward the lounge, his eyes fixed on Carlotta's distorted features.

"She isn't interesting any more, is she, Maxwell?" said Bascome, almost exultantly.

Maxwell turned toward Bascome with horror in his eyes.

"Your mother won't have to worry any more about her little boy running

around with a married woman, will she, Maxwell?" Bascome drawled.

"But—" Maxwell backed away from the menace of Bascome.

"But what, Maxwell?" insisted Bascome.

"I—I—"

"Perhaps I should refresh your memory," said Bascome. "Perhaps I should tell you that I heard you tell Carlotta last Sunday evening that you were going to marry her as soon as her divorce from me became final. Perhaps I should also tell you that I heard her tell you that she didn't care for you enough to marry you, that she had used you only as an escape from me."

Maxwell stared unbelievably at Bascome.

"I also heard you tell her that if she didn't marry you, no one else would have her," Bascome went on.

"That's a lie!" shouted Maxwell.

"Don't call me a liar, young man," said Bascome evenly as he moved slowly toward Maxwell. "I have no inhibitions about either life or death at the present moment, and I—"

The door burst open with a bang and O'Brien, followed by Harold Pettibone, Carlotta's manager, entered the room.

"What's going on in here?" demanded O'Brien.

"Nothing," said Bascome without a trace of emotion.

"I heard a lot of loud talking," said O'Brien.

"Did you?"

Bascome picked up the violin case.

"Where're you going?" demanded O'Brien.

"Home."

"You'll have to wait until the medical examiner gets here."

"This is terrible, Joe," said Pettibone, looking down at Carlotta. "Was it her heart?"

"You should know," said Bascome curtly.

"What did Doc Newton say was the trouble?" asked O'Brien.

"He didn't say," said Bascome, and laid the violin case on the dressing table.

O'Brien scowled. "Well, I guess I might as well start taking statements," he said and pulled out a report book.

"I'll take yours first, Mr. Bascome."

Carlotta's gold key container was on the dressing table. Bascome picked it up and slipped it in his pocket.

"Your name is Jozef Bascome?" began O'Brien.

"Yes," said Bascome. "Jozef Francis Bascome."

"How old are you, Mr. Bascome?"

Bascome felt the eyes of the three men watching him. "Sixty," he said, almost defiantly.

"Where were you born?"

"What do all these questions have to do with Carlotta's death? She's dead. I'm not—yet."

"Just routine questions, Mr. Bascome. You're her husband."

"I won't be tomorrow morning," said Bascome quietly. "That is, I wouldn't have been her husband if she had lived."

O'Brien looked at Bascome in surprise. "What's that?"

"Aren't you aware, O'Brien, that my wife's divorce becomes final tomorrow—everyone else in town knows it."

Maxwell and Pettibone evaded his gaze.

"Funny I didn't hear about that," O'Brien said to Pettibone.

"It wasn't generally known," explained Pettibone.

O'Brien glanced at Bascome out of the corner of his eye. "Sorry, Mr. Bascome," he said sympathetically. "I didn't know or I wouldn't have questioned you—publicly." He motioned toward the door. "All right boys. Step out a minute."

"Let them stay," said Bascome quickly. "I haven't seen Carlotta, without one of them or some other man being with her, for over a year. Let them stay. I'm sure they'll enjoy being with her in my presence, even in death."

Maxwell began inspecting his fingernails. Pettibone blinked nervously and his Adam's apple bobbed up and down.

"Just as you say, Mr. Bascome," O'Brien said and began writing again.

**B**ASCOME felt an overpowering force pulling his eyes toward Carlotta's silent form on the lounge. He hoped the medical examiner would come soon so that he could go home—he had so many things to do.

"What was Mrs. Bascome's maiden name?" asked O'Brien.

"Carlotta St. John."

"Age?"

"Thirty."

"When were you married?"

Bascome hesitated again. "Ten years ago—tonight," he said finally.

His thoughts had flashed back to the first time he had seen Carlotta. She had come to him for violin instruction. He still could see her as she stood in the doorway looking up into his face. She was so young and beautiful, so fresh and unsophisticated—just nineteen. His heart had skipped several beats when he had seen her and heard her soft voice saying, "I am Carlotta St. John."

Bascome closed his eyes.

"What relatives had Mrs. Bascome—blood relatives?" asked O'Brien.

"Only two distant cousins—fifth removed, I believe," said Bascome and rubbed his moist palm across his hot forehead. He wished O'Brien would stop asking questions. They seemed so unnecessary.

"Cause of death—mm—heart trouble," said O'Brien. "Say, where did Doc Nawton go? I got to get a statement from him. Did any of you call him?" asked O'Brien.

"He wasn't in the audience," said Bascome quietly.

"I didn't call him," said Maxwell and wet his lips nervously.

"Neither did I," said Pettibone.

O'Brien scratched his head thoughtfully. "Let me see," he began. "James carried her in here and laid her on the couch. I followed, and Nawton came in right behind me. . . That's right—he followed me in and began to examine Mrs. Bascome. I ordered the stage hands out and then you came, Mr. Bascome." O'Brien chewed the end of his pencil. "Who brought Mrs. Bascome to the theatre tonight?" he asked.

"I did," said Pettibone.

"Was she feeling all right?" asked O'Brien.

"She was in excellent spirits," said Pettibone.

Bascome's eyes were fixed on Pettibone.

"Was she?" asked Bascome. His voice held a note of peculiar significance.



Pettibone turned quickly away. "Time of death," read O'Brien. "Let me see. . . It must have been about—" "Exactly eight-thirty," said Bascome. "I happened to glance at my wrist-watch," said Bascome.

"I've got to get hold of Doc Newton," said O'Brien. "Anyone know where I can find him?"

"He's probably out looking for a new client," said Pettibone. "He's one of those society psychiatrists who live off neurotic women whose husbands don't understand them. What a racket? Too bad I didn't take a correspondence course in psychiatry instead of trying to be an artist's agent."

"From what I've seen," said Maxwell sourly, "you haven't been doing too badly."

"What do you mean by that crack?" demanded Pettibone angrily.

"Remember Monday night at ten-thirty?" said Maxwell quietly.

Pettibone smiled condescendingly. "I don't know what you are talking about, sonny boy," he said easily.

"What's the matter with you two fellows?" barked O'Brien.

"The kettle's calling the pot black," said Bascome and sat down beside the dressing table. An enigmatic smile flashed across his lips and as quickly disappeared.

A rap sounded on the door. O'Brien called: "Come in."

The medical examiner entered. O'Brien told him what had happened and handed him the report. During the examination, Dr. Newton and Alex James came in, and after a consultation with Newton, the M.E. gave his verdict—heart failure.

**EVERYBODY** was allowed to leave. O'Brien remained to complete his report while Bascome gathered Carlotta's personal effects and put them in her dressing case. Carrying the violin and dressing cases, he followed the others out of the room.

Maxwell was nervous. Just before Bascome opened the stage door, Maxwell touched him on the arm. Bascome turned and looked at him curiously.

"I've got to talk to you privately, Mr.

[Turn page]

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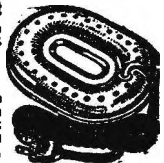
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Bascome," he said in a low voice and glanced furtively at the other three men.

"What for?" said Bascome, irritated.

"I've got something to tell you—about Carlotta," he said, in a whisper.

Bascome's eyelids narrowed quickly. "Tomorrow," he said and started to open the door.

"I've got to talk to you tonight," insisted Maxwell. "I'll drive you home."

"I have my own car," said Bascome briefly. "I can't see any one tonight."

"The information I've got is worth quite a lot to you, Mr. Bascome," insisted Maxwell. "You'd better talk to me tonight!"

Bascome glared at Maxwell for a moment, then opened the door and stepped down onto the sidewalk.

"If you want to see me, Maxwell, I'll be at my house tomorrow at nine," he said brusquely, and let the door close behind him. . . .

At five o'clock the next morning the telephone in Bascome's study began to ring furiously. Bascome sat at his desk gazing vacantly into space. The telephone continued to ring. Suddenly he looked at the telephone curiously and picked it up.

"Hello," he said dully.

"This is Sergeant O'Brien," said the voice in the telephone. "We just found Reginald Maxwell's body in his car in front of his apartment. It looks like murder."

Bascome's face appeared like a grey mask in the dim light of the study.

"Hello, hello!" called O'Brien. "Did you hear me?"

"Yes, I heard," said Bascome quietly.

"I'm coming up to see you," said O'Brien. "I understand that Maxwell wanted to tell you something about your wife last night."

"Who told you that?" asked Bascome wearily.

"Alex James," said O'Brien. "He just left here. I'll be right over."

"I'll be here," said Bascome, and replaced the telephone in its cradle.

He reached into his pocket and brought out Carlotta's gold key container. He had given it to her on their fifth wedding anniversary. He fingered

it absently for a moment, then dropped it back into his pocket. He got up and walked over to a table where her violin case laid and picked it up. There was a faint rattle inside the case. He hesitated for a second, then shook the case. He heard the rattle again.

He unlocked the case and removed the violin. An odor of almonds was in the case. He shook the violin. The rattle was louder. It was inside the violin. He turned the violin over and shook it gently. A small piece of glass fell out of one of the scrolled openings. He smelled the odor of almonds.

He stooped and picked up the piece of glass. It was thin and brittle.

He placed a piece of paper on the table and began to shake the violin over it. Several more fine particles of glass dropped on the paper. He tilted the violin and looked down into the openings. His eyes caught the reflection of light on the bridge. A hairlike splinter of glass was imbedded in a small drop of colorless substance on the bridge directly beneath the 'A' string.

He took his pen knife and carefully removed it from the bridge. He then tapped all of the particles of glass toward the center of the paper, folded it, and put in his vest pocket. He still smelled the odor of almonds.

**B**ASCOME'S face was set rigidly as he locked the violin in its case, placed it in his steel safe, and spun the dial. He then went to the door that separated Carlotta's part of their apartment from his. The door was locked from Carlotta's side—it had been for over a year.

He went out into the hall. With Carlotta's keys he let himself into her part of the apartment, the first time he had been in her rooms since she had started her divorce action. The night light in her bedroom was burning. Her rooms were severely modern; not as he remembered them. The color scheme, black and white, made him feel cold.

Standing beside her dressing table he looked down at the disarray of black and white toilet articles on it. A film of powder was over everything.

Suddenly he tensed. The sound of a

key in the lock of the hall door came to his ears. He moved quickly across the room and stepped into a small clothes closet where Carlotta's black and white gowns and dresses were hanging on a bar across the center of the closet. He pulled the door together, but left a small opening so that he could see into the room.

He heard the hall door close with a faint click. His heart pounded in his ears and his mouth was dry. Then the intruder appeared in front of Carlotta's dressing table. It was Dr. Newton.

Newton was wearing gloves and he began searching through the dressing table drawers. He found a small black note book, glanced through it, and slipped it into his pocket. Turning his attention to the telephone on the night table beside Carlotta's bed he wiped it carefully, then wiped off the wooden arms of all the chairs.

When he reached the clothes closet, Bascome held his breath. The doorknob

[Turn page]

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rattled, but the door was not opened. Nawton was wiping fingerprints from the knob.

Bascome heard Nawton leave the room, heard him moving about in the apartment, apparently removing other fingerprints. Finally Nawton came back into the bedroom, went to the bolted door between the apartments and pressed his ear against a panel. He listened for nearly a minute, then began to withdraw the bolts, slowly and cautiously. He stopped and listened between every move. When the last bolt was withdrawn, he went over and turned out the night light.

There was a faint glow in the room from the street lights. Bascome saw Nawton pass cautiously through the door, his footsteps muffled by the heavy carpet. Bascome moved out of the closet toward the open door.

A darting beam of light caught his eyes—Nawton was using a flashlight to find his way through the apartment. Bascome followed quietly and saw him enter the study, wondering why Nawton had broken into his apartment.

Nawton's flashlight was beamed on the front of the steel safe, then it flashed around the room. Bascome moved out of its range. When he looked again, Nawton was on his knee in front of the safe and was thumbing through the black note book he had found in Carlotta's dressing table. He stopped at a page, then inspected the dial of the safe with the flashlight. Bascome heard the dial turning.

Bascome's hand crept around the door jamb and his fingers contacted the light switch in the study, but did not press it. He watched Nawton open the safe and remove the violin case. His lips thinned as Nawton took a small gold key from

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his pocket and opened the case.

Nawton was under a nervous tension. His hand trembled and he kept wiping his forehead with his gloved hand. When he took the violin out of the case, he nearly dropped it, then tipped it so that he could see the bridge. He ran his finger over its smooth surface, then quickly beamed his flashlight on the part just beneath the "A" string. His eyes moved closer to the bridge.

Bascome could see his nervousness increase as he frantically rubbed his finger over the bridge again.

Bascome pressed the switch. The room was flooded with light. Nawton whirled and stared at Bascome in astonishment. His mouth dropped open, then shut with a click.

"Well, Nawton," said Bascome, with a dangerous gleam in his eyes, "I see that safe cracking is also one of your accomplishments."

**N**AWTON'S hand flashed into his pocket and the next instant Bascome was looking into the muzzle of an automatic.

"Get into that chair, Bascome," Nawton growled, his voice cold and deadly.


[Turn page]



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Bascome only stared at him fixedly. "I said get into that chair!" repeated Nawton, taking a step toward Bascome. "So you killed Carlotta," said Bascome. Ignoring Nawton he moved toward the safe.

"No, Bascome, you killed Carlotta," said Nawton. "I made Maxwell tell me what he was going to tell you—just before you killed him, too."

"Who told you that Maxwell was dead?" Bascome asked quietly. "O'Brien."

Bascome backed toward the safe, with Nawton's automatic held on him unwaveringly.

"I found a white rose petal in Carlotta's violin case when I put the violin in it at the theatre," Bascome lied in the same quiet voice. "I also found a white rose petal in Carlotta's bedroom just before you came in and rubbed off all your fingerprints."

The muscles of Nawton's jaws rippled and his eyes glittered like a cornered rat's. The knuckles of his hand that held the gun whitened. Bascome was not afraid of death—he only hoped Nawton knew enough to shoot him in a vital spot.

"What were you looking for on the bridge of the violin?" he asked.

"A thin-necked capsule of liquid hydrocyanic acid," said Nawton, "which Maxwell told me you had glued with collodion to the bridge of Carlotta's violin—just underneath the 'A' string, so that when she began the pizzicato movement the vibrations would snap the neck and the acid would volatilize."

"But you didn't find anything, did you?" said Bascome.

"I might have known you would remove the evidence; the part of the cap-

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sule that remained fastened to the bridge," said Nawton, with a crooked smile of self-approbation.

"For your information," Bascome said, "I did find where the capsule had been fastened to the bridge. I also found the capsule—in the violin."

"Naturally, when you put it there."

"I also took it to the police," said Bascome. "They found a clear fingerprint on the capsule which matched other fingerprints on the violin. The police are hunting for the owner of those fingerprints."

Nawton's swarthy complexion became darker. The muzzle of his gun moved slowly upward toward Bascome's heart.

"The police just found Maxwell," continued Bascome. "O'Brien called me not five minutes before you arrived, so you couldn't have talked to O'Brien. You killed Maxwell—because he knew something about Carlotta's murder. You knew how this—this hydro something would act. You are a doctor. You killed Carlotta, Nawton, because she turned

[Turn page]

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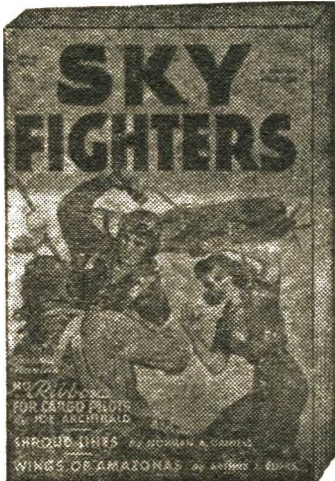
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you down after you had divorced your wife and had given up everything you had in the world for Carlotta. I overheard your little argument with Carlotta—through the door, the one you came through into this apartment.”

Nawton's face began to twitch. His eyes looked wild as he pulled the trigger. At the instant of his shot another report came from the room behind him. He grabbed his shoulder and screamed. O'Brien stepped into the room. Carlotta's violin slipped from Nawton's hand and fell to the floor. Nawton collapsed on top of it and crushed it into a tangled mass of wood and broken strings.

O'Brien snapped handcuffs on Nawton's wrists.

“I only winged him,” O'Brien told Bascome.

“How'd you get in?” asked Bascome as he removed his coat and felt of a small red spot that began to show on the shoulder of his white shirt.

“Your door was open and I came in just as Nawton was telling you about that prussic acid that killed your wife.” O'Brien jerked Nawton to his feet. “Stand up!” he ordered gruffly. “You aren't hurt—yet.”

**N**AWTON started to run toward the door but O'Brien stuck out his foot and Nawton crashed to the floor on his wounded side.

“Get me to a hospital!” he moaned.

“Get me to a hospital—I'm dying!”

“Aw, shut up!” shouted O'Brien. “You're only scratched.”

“I'm bleeding to death—get me to a hospital!” Nawton begged frantically.

“I'll take you to a hospital if you tell me why you killed Mrs. Bascome,” said O'Brien.

“She was no good,” sobbed Nawton. “I gave up everything for her and she told me that she was through with me. I couldn't stand it. I went crazy. I didn't know what I was doing—I swear it—until it was too late. I tried to get to the theatre to remove the capsule, when I realized what I had done, but when I got there she was—dead.”

O'Brien jerked Nawton to his feet.

“Come along, Doc,” he said grimly. “I've always wanted to see a psychiatrist get psyched!”



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(Continued from page 7)

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The next two letters seem to take opposing sides in a debate. Which viewpoint appeals to you?

Please skip the articles and the true detective stories. There are enough true detective magazines on the market now for readers of that stuff.—*William Greer, Pittsburgh, Pa.*

I am a newcomer to the ranks of G-MEN DETECTIVE readers, but I'm really sorry that I wasn't aware of your fine publication before this. I find the stories not only interesting, but of excellent literary calibre. This type of publication serves not only as a medium of thrilling entertainment, but also as a vital channel for the dissemination of factual information regarding our Federal Bureau of Investigation. I'd like to see in some future issue a story dealing with the used car racket now being uncovered.—*Jonathan H. Gerard, Uniondale, N. Y.*

The only trouble with G-MEN DETECTIVE is that it doesn't come out often enough.—*Ozzie Oliphant, San Diego, California.*

You might try reading some of our companion magazines, Ozzie. All of them feature top-flight stories—BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE, POPULAR DETECTIVE, THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE, TRIPLE DETECTIVE, THRILLING DETECTIVE, DETEC-

TIVE NOVEL MAGAZINE and MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE.

I find your stories in G-MEN DETECTIVE so real and full of action that often I am tempted to call for help. That's maybe funny to you, but to me Dan Fowler, Larry Kendal and Sally Vane are real people.—*Leanore Barkey, Bronx, N. Y.*

Why don't Dan and Sally get married? Then Dan can retire her to the kitchen where she belongs.—*Donaldson McFee, Jr., Kansas City, Mo.*

Sally Vane is hot stuff. I think the G-Men could use more like her. Why not have a story sometime in which she plays the lead part and Dan and Larry help her?—*Alison Phoebe, Evanston, Ill.*

What do you other readers think? Please write and let us know. Our thanks to all others who have written in and especially to Joseph Tokay, Pittsburgh, Pa., Mrs. Hugh Boyd, Scottsboro, Ala., Henry R. Neubert, Baltimore, Md., Edgar E. Pillow, Malta, and Alvin Beckler, Trinidad, B.W.I., for their interesting letters.

We'll be back next issue with many more letters. Hope yours is among them. Kindly address all letters and postcards to The Editor, G-MEN DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Thanks, and until we meet next issue—happy reading!

—THE EDITOR.

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\*J. T. Mancelona, Mich.



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\*S. E. A., Kansas City, Mo.



### Shares Course With Sister

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\*D. E. G., Wausau, Wis.



### Finding New Joy

I am finding a new joy that I never experienced before, for I have always wanted to play, but had given up hope until I heard of your course.  
\*C. S. Lucien, Okla.



### Plays After 2 Months

I hesitated before sending for your course because of an earlier experience I had with a course by ear from another company. I am playing pieces now I never dreamed I would play after only two months.  
\*E. T., Prichard, Ala.

\*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.

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