

APRIL

HOLLYWOOD DETECTIVE

A
SPEED
MAGAZINE

15¢

APRIL
HOLLYWOOD DETECTIVE



HOMICIDE POLICY

by
Harley L. Court

SPEED



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April, 1944

No. 6

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Because Macklin came back from the South Seas with a game leg, they assumed he was washed up in the detective business. But Nick couldn't see it that way. At least, nothing had happened to lame his brains. . .

HOMICIDE POLICY

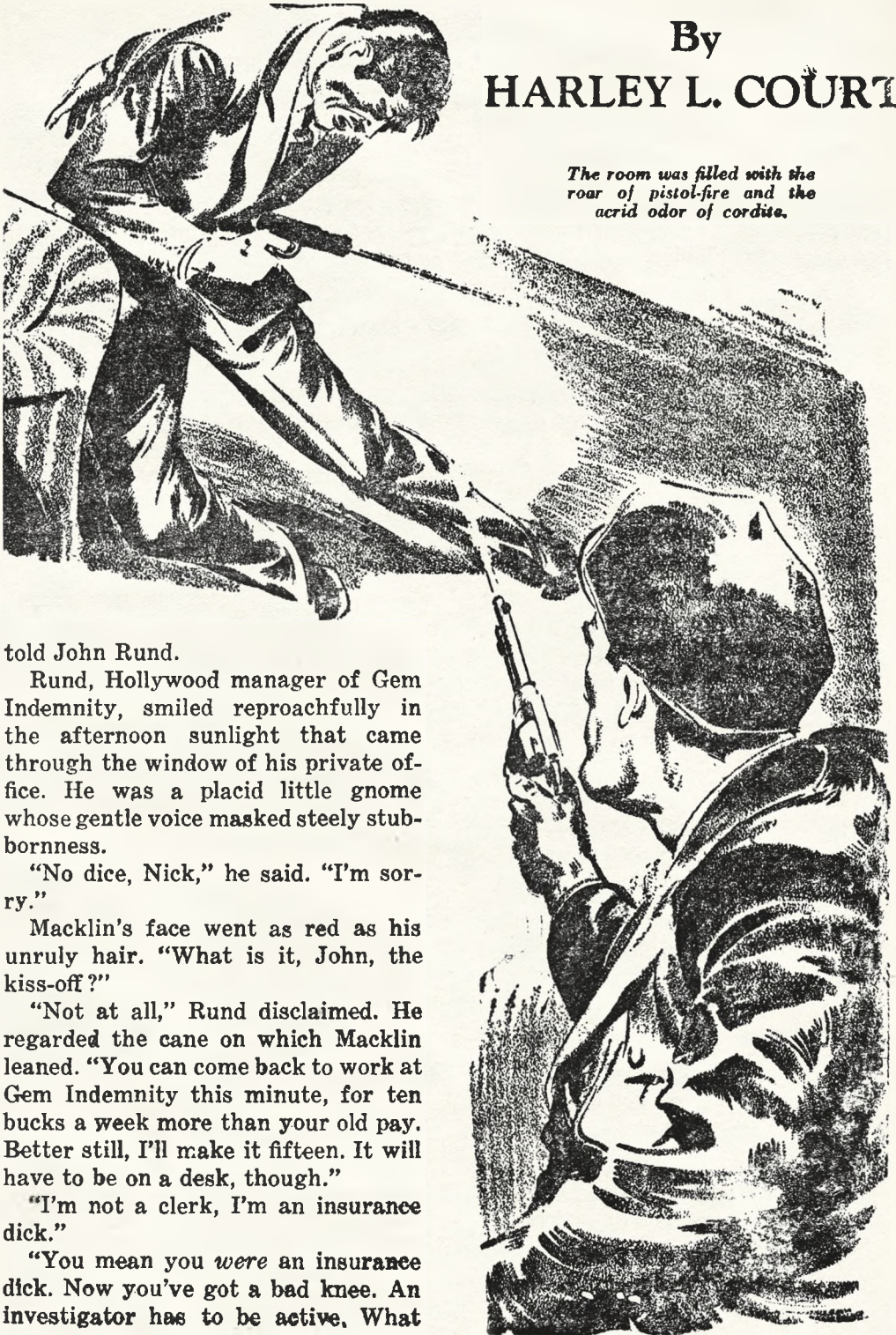
UNDER Marine Corps regulations Macklin could still have been wearing his uniform, even though he'd been invalidated out of service; but he preferred civilian clothes.

He didn't want to trade on his military record, his campaign ribbons, or the medal he had won in the South Seas.

"All I ask is my old job back," he

By
HARLEY L. COURT

*The room was filled with the
roar of pistol-fire and the
acrid odor of cordite.*



told John Rund.

Rund, Hollywood manager of Gem Indemnity, smiled reproachfully in the afternoon sunlight that came through the window of his private office. He was a placid little gnome whose gentle voice masked steely stubbornness.

"No dice, Nick," he said. "I'm sorry."

Macklin's face went as red as his unruly hair. "What is it, John, the kiss-off?"

"Not at all," Rund disclaimed. He regarded the cane on which Macklin leaned. "You can come back to work at Gem Indemnity this minute, for ten bucks a week more than your old pay. Better still, I'll make it fifteen. It will have to be on a desk, though."

"I'm not a clerk, I'm an insurance dick."

"You mean you *were* an insurance dick. Now you've got a bad knee. An investigator has to be active. What

chance would your limp give you if you got into a jam and had to battle your way out?"

Macklin cursed that Japanese sniper whose bullet had lamed him. "I see. You think I'm washed up. You're offering me a clerical berth out of charity."

"Wait, Nick. Don't—" Whatever Rund had been about to say remained unspoken because he was interrupted by a man bursting into the office without the formality of knocking.

THE newcomer was middle aged, impeccably groomed, sleek and glossy with good living. He had a golf course suntan, a stride that bespoke muscles under his fat, and the arrogance of wealth too easily acquired. An overly large diamond decorated the ring finger of his left hand, its adamantite glitter matched by his angry eyes.

"I want my money, Rund," he said harshly. "Now."

"But, Mr. Bonnerman, your policy—"

"Damn the policy. Gem Indemnity owes me sixty thousand dollars." He rapped his ring on Rund's desk and the diamond chewed a scar on the polished wood. "Pay or I'll sue."

"You won't get far," Rund was stubbornly polite. "It's true your emerald collection was stolen after we'd insured it. Under the terms of the contract, however, we have a certain length of time in which to recover the missing stones."

"Fat chance you'll recover them!"

"We've got another twenty-four hours to go," Rund said.

The man's nostrils flared. "Maybe I ought to beat the dough out of you."

Nick Macklin limped two steps for-

ward. "Better not. Unless you want it to backfire in your teeth."

"Oh, a smart guy." The man swung a contemptuous left jab at Macklin, who ducked it expertly. Then Macklin's trick knee went out from under him and he fell awkwardly into a right cross, a sneak punch that dumped him on the floor. It took a full minute for him to scramble upright and once more prop himself on his cane; by which time his assailant, Bonnerman, had stormed from the office and slammed the door.

Rund's eyes were rueful and his voice held sympathy. "Well, that proves it, Nick. Your place is at a desk."

Macklin reddened as he met the older man's gaze. "Maybe so. It takes a lot to convince me, though. Who was that guy?"

"James Pakham Bonnerman," Rund pronounced the syllables as if they tasted sour on his tongue. "A producer out at Pinnacle Studios, a collector of emeralds, and a gambler on anything from horse racing on down—or up."

"New in Hollywood since my day?"

"So to speak. He started getting famous around the time we lost you to the Marines."

"What about this green ice that was stolen?"

RUND shrugged. "They were in a wall safe in his Beverly mansion. Somebody opened the safe and took them. No fingerprints, no nitroglycerine, no marks of pete tools, and no clues. Except a dead butler."

"Murder?"

"Yes. Apparently the servant caught the thief and got knifed to prevent an outcry. I don't know why I'm telling you this stuff, Nick. You

aren't going to work on it."

"Suppose I free-lance?"

"No."

"Would you change your mind if I saved the company a payoff? I'd like nothing better than to locate those stones and hand them to Bonnerman with a black eye to remember me by."

Rund's gnome-like head wagged regretfully. "Sorry, Nick. I already have the whole investigation staff working on it." Then he added: "I've got an angle of my own that I want to follow—but it's strictly lone wolf and I'm going to play it that way."

"Meaning you don't want any interference from me, eh?"

"That's about it."

Macklin breathed hard. When he spoke, his tone was louder than he had intended. "Okay. I know when I'm brushed off." Pivoting on his good leg, he stumped to the door. "Thanks for nothing, John, and go to hell."

The words carried. Everybody in the outer office had heard them, evidently; for when Macklin limped past the long row of stenographers and file clerks he felt the impact of their furtive glances, knew they were speculating about his outburst. A sense of embarrassment tintured his bitterness, and he found himself sorry he had spoken that way to Rund. The old man had been almost like a father to him when he, Macklin, was first breaking into the investigation game years ago. Rund had been his teacher, the guy who had helped him over the rough spots and got him out of jams arising from his youthful inexperience. Now he had told Rund to go to hell.

"You shouldn't have done it, Nick," a voice chided him.

Macklin peered at the tall, slender man who approached him. This was

Tony Dutton, who had been not much more than a pimply office boy in those days before Pearl Harbor. Tony was a man now, blond, matured and competent-looking, an ace indemnity snoop.

"Hi, Tony," Macklin extended a hand.

Dutton grasped it. In pre-war times he had followed Macklin around like a hero-worshiping puppy, and this awed respect was still in his eyes as he grinned a greeting. "Hello, Nick! It's good to see you around again. Only I wish you hadn't talked so tough to the boss. After all, if you're going to work for him—"

"I'm not," Macklin said morosely.

Tony blinked. "You aren't coming back with us? Aw, Nick!"

"It's true. Rund wanted me to take a desk job. I can't see it his way."

"Desk job? On account of—of your—?"

"My game leg, yeah. He thinks I'm washed up."

Tony Dutton grew serious. "Rund's pretty smart, Nick. I mean—well, maybe you ought to play it his way until the leg sort of heals. He'd probably put you back on the investigating staff soon as you can ditch that cane."

"No. Pushing a pen around would drive me nuts."

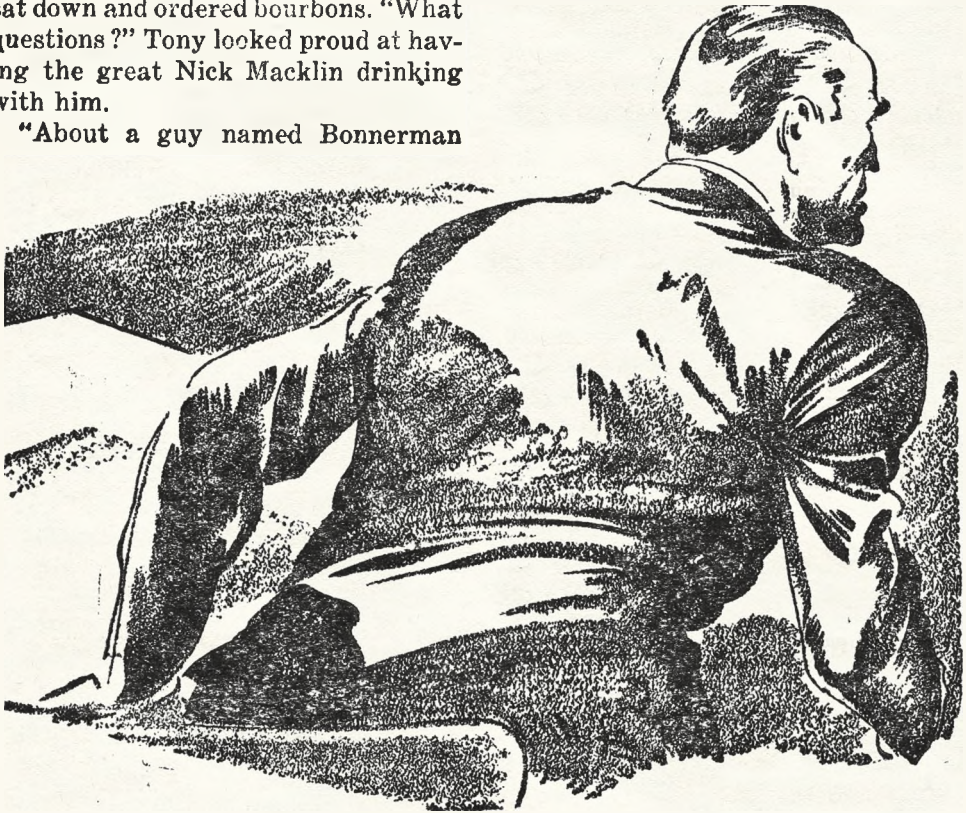
"Well, then, how's for going in and apologizing? I hate to see you and the boss on bad terms."

MACKLIN shook his head. "God knows I want to apologize to him. If I do, though, he'll talk me into accepting his proposition. He was always able to out-argue me. Look, kid, suppose we go get a drink. I want to ask you some questions."

"Sure thing Nick." They left the building together, found a nearby bar,

sat down and ordered bourbons. "What questions?" Tony looked proud at having the great Nick Macklin drinking with him.

"About a guy named Bonnerman



and some emeralds he lost."

Dutton's expression turned sheepish. "A stinking thing," he said. "Whoever bumped Bonnerman's butler and glommed the rocks out of that wall safe must have been hep to the combination; it wasn't a force job."

"Somebody on the inside, hunh?"

"That's the hell of it. Bonnerman had changed the combo only a day or so before the theft. According to the terms of his insurance contract he gave the new set of dial numbers to Rund. Aside from that, the guy claims nobody else knew the combination. Except himself, of course."

Macklin scowled. "Wait a second. He isn't hinting John Rund pulled the heist, is he?"

"He don't hint anything. He just makes it plain he didn't rob himself but the gems are gone and he wants his sixty grand. He must need that cash pretty bad, too, the stench he's raising about it. What's it look like to you, Nick?"

"It looks rather muddy at the moment," Macklin said thoughtfully. "You've checked all the fences, of course? And got your wires out to the stool pigeons around town?"

"Sure. The emeralds haven't turned up in any of the usual channels. Whoever took them is holding them under cover, probably until the heat dies."

Macklin paid for the drinks. "Well, it's no skin off me. I thought I might make a try at digging into the case on



He ducked under the sneak punch, but his trick leg went out from under him.

my own hook, proving to Rund I still have something on the ball. My brains aren't lame even if my leg is." He smiled sardonically. "I don't know, though. Rund's probably got it sewed up and is ready to pull his surprise rabbit out of the hat at the psychological moment. He intimated as much when he told me to keep my fingers out of it."

"And are you going to?"

"Am I going to steer clear, you mean? Not altogether. This Bonnerman guy did me a dirty trick and I'd like to check up on him just for the hell of it. If you aren't too busy, maybe you wouldn't mind driving me to the Pinnacle lot."

Tony indicated his car parked across the street. "Never too busy to do you a favor, Nick," his voice was eager, sincere. "Let's go."

FIFTEEN MINUTES later they were inside the vast reaches of the motion picture studio where James Pakham Bonnerman held an important production berth. They didn't seek Bonnerman's office right away, though. Macklin wanted to ask some questions first; discreet questions, with some of Bonnerman's underlings doing the answering. By the time a half hour had elapsed he had quizzed minor actors on sound stages, grips and property men in the scene docks, writers in the story department. And he had acquired a good deal of information.

"Looks as if Bonnerman isn't very popular with his subordinates, eh, Tony?" he said presently to Dutton. "Conceited, dictatorial, pompous, an all-around hard guy."

"You could tell that just by looking at him."

Macklin nodded. "But we've learned something else. He's been gambling beyond his means in recent months. He's borrowed advances on his salary. There's a rumor he's signed more than a cool hundred thousand dollars' worth of markers—I.O.U.'s—to Duke Yerxa, the one that operates a flossy roulette and dice layout on the Sunset Strip."

"That's no news," Tony objected. "We've already dug up that much. Rund knows it."

"But does Rund see the possibilities? Come along, I think I want to have a talk with Bonnerman." They made for the studio's main executive building, with Dutton accommodating his pace to Macklin's lamed stride. And then, as they came to an elbow in the corridor leading to Bonnerman's office, something happened.

A shot sounded.

The barking report seemed to issue from around the bend in the hallway, and on the heels of the noise a swarthy man came running into view. Instead of charging toward Macklin and Tony, however, he ducked into a side passage and scuttled off. They heard his footfalls receding down a staircase; and, by the time Macklin reached the transverse corridor, there was no trace of the swarthy man. He had vanished.

"Nick! Do you suppose—?" Dutton whispered.

"Do I suppose what?"

"That shot. Could it have been Bonnerman, or—?"

"Let's find out." They hastened to Bonnerman's door; and just as they gained it, someone opened it from inside. It was Bonnerman himself.

The producer's normally ruddy face seemed curiously colorless as he stared out over the threshold; his eyes were distended, frightened, and his nostrils appeared to twitch at a heavy reek of burned smokeless powder. Then he spotted Macklin, and a change stole over his expression. The fear was replaced by angry recognition.

"You!" he pointed a shaking finger. "The guy that tried taking a poke at me in Rund's office this afternoon! So you fired that shot at me just now!"

Macklin braced himself on his good leg; got set to parry a threatening fist. But it wasn't necessary. Tony Dutton interposed; faced Bonnerman. "You must be crazy. Macklin isn't the man you want. We both saw a swarthy ginzo running away from here a moment ago. If anybody fired at you, he was probably the one. I couldn't swear to it, of course, but—"

"Did y-you—you say a s-swarthy—I mean—?"

"Yes," Tony nodded. "Chunky, olive complexion, hat pulled low."

BY NOW, stenographers and clerks and a cluster of other executives had boiled from adjoining offices to form a ring around Macklin, Dutton, and Bonnerman. "God!" Bonnerman whispered. "It was a w-warning. He could just as well have k-killed me as missed me . . ." Then, for the first time, he seemed to notice that he had an audience.

He pulled himself together, assumed a counterfeit dignity and made pushing movements with both hands. "It was nothing at all, folks," he said haughtily. "No trouble. Just a little joke; a mistake."

He backed into his sanctum and slammed the door.

For an instant Macklin considered knocking, demanding to be admitted. He finally dismissed the notion and turned to Dutton. "Let's get out of here, kid."

"Oke." Then, as they went downstairs and outdoors to Tony's car: "What the hell was that routine, Nick?"

"Bonnerman told you. A threat. A warning. It hooks in with the hundred thousand bucks he's supposed to owe Duke Yerxa as a gambling debt, or I miss my guess. Do you know the location of Yerxa's place on the Strip?"

"Sure."

"Take me there."

Dusk was thickening as Tony headed past the studio's gates and swung toward Sunset. "It's only dinner time. Yerxa won't be rolling his wheels this early."

"We'll drop in anyhow and look around," Macklin said. "Maybe we'll see somebody we know." Then he

lapsed into silence until Dutton warped to the curb in front of a mock-Colonial white building twenty minutes later. The younger man hopped out first; helped Macklin from the machine. Macklin reddened at this solicitude. He could remember when he had two dependable legs instead of one. In those days he hadn't needed a youngster to help him. . . .

"Thanks," he told Tony gruffly. He paused at the building's entrance. "Can you think of an excuse for us to be here at this hour?"

The big blond kid's brow furrowed; then he grinned. "I've got it. I'll introduce you to Yerxa and say you'd like a guest card."

"Good." They pushed the door open, climbed a flight of carpeted stairs, and entered a large room paneled in knotty pine, a room equipped with roulette layouts, dice tables, U-shaped blackjack setups—all silent now, barren of dealers or croupiers or customers. Tony Dutton went to a rear door; tapped it.

Somebody said: "Come in." This somebody proved to be a bald man seated at a desk; a man with a face like a bleached sallow toad and a body so fat it seemed shapelessly inhuman. At first glance you got the impression that the guy was dead and propped in his chair, so motionless was he. But then you noticed the darting, restless little eyes, sharp and cold as refrigerated augurs. And finally you heard an equally frigid voice issuing from lard-like lips: "Well, Dutton?"

"Duke, this is Nick Macklin. Nick, Duke Yerxa. Nick thinks he'd like to buck your games tonight, Duke. Could he have the usual membership card?"

Yerxa regarded Macklin dispassionately.

sionately, then scribbled out an illegible signature on a rectangle of pasteboard. "We open at eight-thirty. Chips sell for cash. No personal checks, and no markers."

"Because I'm a stranger, eh?" Macklin smiled. "I mean you might take my I.O.U. if you knew me as well as you know James Pakham Bonnerman, for instance?"

The fat man's eyelids came down like windowshades. "I never discuss my clients with others." He pressed a button on his desk and someone entered behind Macklin and Tony. "Show these gentlemen out, Reginald."

TURNING, Macklin discovered that Reginald was a damned incongruous name for the chunky, swarthy guy who held the door open for him. It was not until they had gained the street, though, that Macklin whispered: "Did you lamp that Reginald, kid? He's the one we saw running down the corridor from Bonnerman's studio office!"

"I wasn't sure," Tony answered. "He did look a lot like him, didn't he? I wonder if he recognized us as having been there at Pinnacle? If he realizes we tabbed him, he'll tell Yerxa. And then Yerxa will remember you dropped that remark about Bonnerman's I.O.U.'s—which might lead to something nasty. I wish you hadn't done that, Nick."

"Never mind. Drive."

"Sure, Nick. Only—hey!"

"Now what?"

Tony gestured to his rear-view mirror. "I think we're being tailed. There's a sedan hanging on behind us."

"Take some corners and make with the speed. I'll watch behind."

Expertly Dutton tooled his car into a quick right turn at a north-south in-

tersection; went blasting down the inclined cross street and then whipped to the left. "With us?"

"Yeah," Macklin said. "Still hanging on. It's a tail, sure enough. Look. Turn right again, then slow. I'm getting out. You can go ahead and try to lose the guy; or if he catches up with you, at least you can take care of yourself without having a cripple on your hands."

Tony looked stricken. "Don't say that, Nick. You're no cripple, you're just a wounded Marine getting over a brawl with the Japs. You can fight as well as—"

"I learned different today. Bonnerman taught me," Macklin made a bitter mouth. "All I do is clutter up the scenery. Slow here, kid. Then lead that sedan as far astray as you can. Give me time to contact John Rund."

The blond youth applied his brakes. "You're the doctor. Be careful, fella. See you at the office later?"

"Yes, if Rund doesn't toss me out on my neck." Macklin got his good leg under him; stepped from the car and watched it as it gathered fresh speed, spurted away. Then he pressed against a tree trunk for concealment; saw the pursuing sedan come into the street and resume the chase.

As it flashed by, Macklin got a brief glance at its driver: the swarthy guy named Reginald from Duke Yerxa's gambling dive. Evidently he was Yerxa's muscle expert, the one who intimidated potential welchers by shooting at them and missing. Macklin wondered if there were times when Reginald was ordered not to miss. He looked capable of putting a bullet in a debtor's head . . . or a knife in a butler's heart while opening a safe and



The blast came from the doorway, and Rund folded forward on his desk.

glomming a handful of loose emeralds. . . .

Macklin damned the necessity that had made him send Tony Dutton to lure Reginald on a wild goose chase. The kid had guts, but was he a match for that swarthy guy? If anything happened to Tony, it would be Macklin's fault.

Still cursing, Macklin turned and limped back toward Santa Monica Boulevard. He was lucky enough to spot a cruising cab, into which he clambered wearily. He gave the hacker Gem Indemnity address, then settled in the tonneau and leaned back with his eyes closed. He was tired, and his bad leg was hurting him. That Japanese sniper had done more than cripple him. The lameness seemed to be as much in his brain as in his leg.

HE was still condemning himself as he rode the elevator up to Gem Indemnity's floor and limped toward the main entrance. It was locked, but Macklin had a key; a very special kind of key. It was solid gold, the handle inset with small diamonds; and along the flatness of the narrower part there were engraved words: *Use When You Come Back*. The reverse side bore the legend: *Nick Macklin From John Rund*.

There was an ironic significance to that. Rund had presented it to Macklin the day he enlisted, as a token of friendship and in mute testimony that there would always be a berth at Gem Indemnity for Macklin when he returned from the bigger job of fighting for his country.

Macklin grinned crookedly as he aimed the key at the door. It would be funny, he thought, if the lock had been changed in his absence and the

golden token no longer turned the tumblers. Funny, and yet pretty much in keeping with the way everything else had panned out. . . .

His misgivings proved baseless. The key worked. Pushing the door open, Macklin peered through the gloomy outer office; saw lights burning in Rund's private room. He had known Rund would be here; the old man always spent two or three hours at his desk after supper.

Macklin closed the main door behind him and limped quietly toward his erstwhile chief's office. Then, as he stared in, he suddenly cursed the key which had admitted him. Far better if the lock had been changed to keep him out, he told himself savagely.

For John Rund was sitting at his desk, fondling a sparkling handful of emeralds; comparing them, stone by stone, with a typed sheet of paper listing and describing them. Macklin, watching, knew at once what the green gems were.

They were James Pakham Bonnerman's stolen collection.

Macklin tried to turn silently and make his way out of the suite; but once again his trick knee failed him and he had to catch his balance by using the cane. It made a noise sliding on the floor; revealed his presence.

Within the smaller room, Rund leaped to his feet. "Nick—what are you doing here?" Then, as his startlement faded, he added: "Come in, Nick."

"No. I'm going. I wish to God I'd never walked through the door."

Rund looked at him like a bewildered gnome. "What do you mean by that? I don't get it."

"You know what I mean I came here to talk to you about a theft. I find

you with the stolen emeralds. You were the only guy who knew the new combination of Bonnerman's safe; the only one except Bonnerman himself. Damn it, I'd sooner be blind . . . than to see you with the loot and realize you're the one that cracked Bonnerman's safe, killed his butler . . ."

"Me?"

"You, of all people. The dean of insurance dicks, the daddy of them all. A crook. A thief."

Rund's wrinkled cheeks creased more deeply in what might have been a smile. His eyes were wary, but his tone held satisfaction. "You mean it would hurt you to think I'd gone wrong, Nick?"

"It does hurt. It hurts like hell. It hurts worse than anything the Japs ever did to me in the Solomons."

"Sit down, boy," Rund said gently. "You must be tired from so much jumping."

"What jumping?"

"At conclusions," Rund chuckled. "Now sit down and listen. To begin with, these aren't Bonnerman's emeralds. They're phonies; duplicates I had made up from a description list of the original stones. I was just now comparing them with the list to make certain they'd pass."

MACKLIN drew an unsteady breath. "What's the caper, John? For God's sake explain it!"

"That's easy. I think I know where the real emeralds are to be found. I intend to get them, replace them with these fakes and hand Bonnerman the genuines, thus saving Gem Indemnity sixty thousand bucks, putting Bonnerman behind the eight ball, and at the same time, I hope, fingering the

murderer of his butler. Simple, isn't it?"

"It may be, if it's true." Macklin reached out, picked up one of the glittering baubles from Rund's desk and closely inspected it under the glow of the desk lamp. He had behind him enough years as a gem expert to distinguish real emeralds from false—and these were false. "I'm sorry, John. I was a fool."

"We all are, at times. What brought you here?"

Macklin's grin was embarrassed. "Ego. I've got a condition known as swelled head. I thought I'd discovered something you hadn't yet learned."

"Such as?"

"I disobeyed you, chief. I did some independent snooping on this Bonnerman case. I found out Bonnerman is supposed to owe a gambler named Duke Yerxa a hundred grand, past due. Yerxa sent one of his gunsels, name of Reginald, to take a shot at Bonnerman by way of threat or warning; a shot that deliberately missed."

"Okay, go on. I knew about the debt, of course, but the gun stuff is news—and interesting."

Macklin said: "Well, here's how I figured it. Suppose Bonnerman robbed his own safe of the emeralds and turned them over to Yerxa as part payment on this gambling debt. He then promised to hand Yerxa the balance of the debt in cash as soon as he collected the insurance payoff."

"You're partially right, Nick. Keep going."

"It all adds up," Macklin said. "It explains why Bonnerman is so anxious to collect on his policy. Yerxa is pushing him hard for the dough, even to the point of bullet threats. I think Bonnerman is scared sweatless."

Rund nodded. "Sure he is. But there's one clue you've overlooked, a piece of the puzzle that doesn't fit into your theory, and therefore knocks it galleywampus."

"What clue?"

"The murdered butler. If Bonnerman had robbed his own safe and the servant saw him doing it, nothing like that would have happened. The flunky wouldn't suspect anything wrong if he saw his master opening the safe. Who would have a better right to open it?"

"I get it," Macklin's cheeks crimsoned. "Bonnerman needn't knife the guy. It wouldn't be necessary."

"Exactly. But if the butler caught a stranger taking those emeralds, he would have made a beef; and the intruder would kill him to keep him quiet."

"That clears Bonnerman, I guess."

"And leaves Duke Yerxa," Rund said. "Let's say the gambler wants his hundred grand. He grabs off Bonnerman's emeralds and then demands the insurance dough. Bonnerman agrees to pay it as soon as he collects from us. Actually we're standing more than half of his gambling losses. See?"

"Sure. Yerxa comes out on top with the stones and the cash from the insurance. He can fence the gems for at least forty thousand; they're worth a lot more but he can afford to peddle them for that figure. Which, plus the sixty thousand insurance money, gives him his hundred grand. Bonnerman merely loses his emeralds; we take the rest of the rap." Then Macklin shook his head. "Wait a minute."

"Now what, Nick?"

"How about these phonies? How do you figure they'll do any good?"

RUND smiled grimly. "Behind Yerxa's private office in his gambling joint there's a smaller room with a safe. I'm fairly positive he has the Bonnerman stones in that safe."

"Well?"

"I'm planning to get into that room tonight and open this safe I mentioned. I've looked it over, secretly; it's a cheese-box. I'll take the real emeralds and leave the fakes." With a pencil, Rund sketched a rough floor plan of Yerxa's establishment and the fire escape window through which he intended entering. "Having obtained the genuine gems, I'll return them tomorrow morning to Bonnerman, with witnesses."

"And—?" Macklin asked tautly.

"That will relieve us of liability. Instead of cash, Bonnerman will have his rocks again and Yerxa will be holding the phonies. Bonnerman will still be in debt to the tune of a hundred grand. Yerxa will go crazy when he learns this."

"I'll bet he will."

"He'll accuse Bonnerman of a double cross, perhaps. At the very least he'll demand his dough. Bonnerman won't be able to pay it. Anything might happen—including gunplay, threats, recriminations, accusations and counter-accusations. The truth will come out about the original robbery and the murder of the butler. The killer's name will be mentioned and then the police can step in."

Macklin scowled. "It sounds swell except for one thing. I can't see Yerxa as the guy who burgled Bonnerman's safe. Cripes, John, have you ever looked at him? He's fat as a hog; scarcely able to move his weight around. He couldn't—"

"I didn't say Yerxa pulled the heist



The cane flashed upward and knocked the cop's gun aside.

personally. He got a man to do it for him."

"Reginald!" the word was an explosive whisper on Macklin's lips as he thought of the chunky, swarthy,

gungel who did Duke Yerxa's dirty work. But even though the whisper was sibilantly explosive, it couldn't match the louder explosion that suddenly thundered from the doorway of John Rund's office. It was a bellowing report, blasting at the room's silence and belching an orange streak of flame from the threshold.

Rund grunted weirdly. Then he slowly folded forward, rested his head on the desk. He did not move again. Nick Macklin leaped from his chair—and walked into a second ribbon of yellow fire. The slug creased his left shoulder with sufficient burning sting to halt him for an instant. And in that fraction of time somebody slammed the door; raced unseen through the outer suite.

Macklin hurled himself at the door and it bounced him backward because somebody had jammed it with a chair on the other side. He staggered, righted himself, and turned to Rund; grasped the gnome-like oldster, shook him. "John!"

Rund didn't answer. There was a splotch of red on the front of his shirt, staining its whiteness and gradually spreading as the life-blood flowed. Macklin uttered a choked oath; gently lowered his erstwhile boss to the desk and whirled again to the jammed door. He picked up a clothes tree and smashed it at the woodwork.

A panel splintered, then another. Using the clothes tree as a battering ram, Macklin kept attacking; finally dislodged the door's outside impediment and lunged past, unmindful of his bad leg. And just as he rushed toward the suite's main doorway, it burst open. A cop appeared, his .38 drawn and cocked. Behind him came the building's night elevator operator,

who had heard gunshots and summoned the law.

MACKLIN yelled at the newcomers. "Did you see anybody running out of here? Quick, phone headquarters and get a cordon around this block! John Rund's been killed!"

"What?" the policeman gasped. Then he trained his pistol on Macklin. "Hold it, bud. If there's been a bump, I'm not letting you get out until you can tell us more about it. Where is this dead guy?"

"In that little office. Never mind looking at him. Get on the phone. Fast!"

"Don't tell me my business." The cop's dignity was offended. "Put your hands up and head for that door. First we'll see if there really is a corpse. Then we'll—"

Macklin turned desperately to the elevator operator. "Okay," *you* call headquarters. This numbskull wants to make like a genius." He then led the scowling patrolman to Rund's room. "Maybe you'll believe me now."

"Yeah, and maybe I won't. What's them rocks on the desk?"

"Phony emeralds."

"How do I know they're phony? You sure you didn't croak this bozo while trying to steal them sparklers?"

"Don't be dopey. I wouldn't have any reason to steal them. Or to kill Rund." Suddenly Macklin's voice broke. He was remembering his own hot anger of that afternoon, when he had loudly told Rund to go to hell. The entire office staff had heard it; and now Rund was dead. Worse still, Macklin had been found with the body. . . .

When the clerks and stenographers were called to testify, later, they would tell of that quarrel. Macklin's denials

might not carry much weight in the face of such evidence. He realized, abruptly, that this kill might be pinned on him; circumstances had made him a possible fall guy for the real murderer who was even now pulling a get-away. In the meantime, what about John Rund's carefully laid plans now that Rund was dead?

Those plans had been intended to enmesh Duke Yerxa and the arrogant Pinnacle movie producer, Bonnerman. And maybe there'd still be a chance to work the trick in modified form—if Macklin could gain freedom and time to do the job. Success would be a sort of tribute to Rund's memory, and Macklin felt he owed a tribute of that nature to the older man.

"Well, copper?" he said speculatively.

The patrolman eyed him. "Well what?"

"Are you going to stand there all night or are you going to do something about this homicide?"

"I'll do plenty about it. I'll beat a confession out of you before the plain-clothes dicks get here. Come on, talk. No lies, either."

Macklin shifted his weight imperceptibly, so that he wasn't leaning on his cane. "It was this way," he said. And he brought the cane upward in a flashing arc; knocked the cop's gun aside. Another stroke caught the uniformed man across the side of the head; stunned him. He lurched.

THAT was Macklin's opportunity. He pivoted and went racing from the little office, through the outer suite; reached the corridor without interference. Then the elevator operator spotted him; but too late. Disregarding his limp, Macklin hurtled

to the stairs and fled downward; breathlessly made the main lobby and then the street. Here luck was with him. A taxi drifted by and he boarded it. He had won the first round of his battle.

The next round was going to be tougher. Thinking back, he tried to recall all the details of the pencil sketch which John Rund had drawn, showing the fire escape layout of Duke Yerxa's gambling joint and the location of its rear room where Yerxa had a safe. Presently he was satisfied that he remembered the drawing well enough to act on it—

He had his cabby stop a block away from Yerxa's place on Sunset; walked the balance of the distance. Then, moving with infinite caution, he found the dim outlines of the fire ladder; discarded his cane and climbed.

At which instant his luck ran out.

A flashlight beam impaled him just as he came to the fifth rung; sprayed its brilliance upward and bathed him in baleful white glow. A voice said: "Down with you, mister. I've got you covered."

Macklin descended, cursing in his throat. "Reginald, I suppose," he growled.

"Reginald?" the guy with the flash sounded indignant. "And when did you think they started hiring county cops with a name like that?"

Macklin's heart leaped as he dropped to earth and peered at the blinding light-ray. "You're a cop?"

"Damn'd right." There was just enough reflection to show a glint of badge, a hint of uniform. "What were you doing on that fire escape, mister?"

"Listen," Macklin's whisper was desperate. "I'm an insurance dick.

(Continued on page 80)

CUT OUT FOR THE HANGMAN



*While we played, Angelo
snipped away at the
silhouette.*

REMEMBER those freakish, unpredictable duels the old Romans used to stage in the Coliseum? A battle to the death between a man armed with a dagger and a fellow with a slingshot? Or a no-quarter contest between a gladiator with sword and another whirling a

whip? Books are filled with them.

Let me tell you about a screwier match than any of those the ancient emperors ever witnessed. It happened about six months ago. The weapons were a Colt .32 versus a pair of scissors.

You know Pelican Beach. It's the

By ARTHUR FELDMAN

A Colt .32 versus a pair of scissors! It's a freak duel, and anything may happen. Particularly when a blind man and a ruby known as the "Blood of the Balkans" are involved—to say nothing of a new variation in the Spanish Opening in chess!



all-year play spot for the big shots from Washington, Hollywood, and Broadway. Sure, the army's moved in on some of it, and it's not like it used to be, but the big-money crowd still hangs around.

I'd gone down there to take my tests for cadet in the Air Corps. I passed my first exams O.K., and I was told I'd

not be called for a couple of months.

That afternoon I took a stroll along the boardwalk, and ran across a fellow named Ransom who had a chess-playing concession there. He played all comers for a fee. I took him on a few games.

Ransom saw I could handle myself across the board. He offered to sell me his equipment at a discount, suggesting that I could make a nice profit running the place. He was being inducted in a few days.

I saw a chance to combine business and pleasure for a few weeks. I moved in.

I had good company. On my right was Gladys. You can have those standardized pretty girls that are as flavorless as wax fruit, and welcome. I'll take charm, character, and a sense of humor. Gladys Humphrey had all three.

She was running a miniature golf course next to my chess layout. So then, as you can figure, I was sitting pretty.

THE very first day in business I ran into some interesting opposition. He was well-groomed, dark-eyed man of fifty with an aquiline nose and a determined jut to his jaw.

When a professional chess-player meets the run-of-the-mill player, it's about as much fun for the expert as shooting fish in a tub. About as thrilling as a fight between Joe Louis and Caspar Milquetoast. It's no contest.

But playing this dark-eyed fellow, it was all excitement from the first move to the last. He sprang a new variation in the Spanish Opening on me. When I accepted his line, I was soundly beaten each time.

My defeats piqued me. After the session I wired a friend of mine, Sam Martinsen. He's a professional chess-master who travels around the country and gives exhibitions. He's written a lot of books on the game. I asked him by wire what he considered the best reply to the new variation, which I notated move for move.

Martinsen replied, outlining a clever counter-attack, winding up his message with, "I ran across this same line in St. Paul, three years ago. It's originator, name of Kincaid, first showed it to me."

The next day Kincaid returned to my stand. I tried the counter against his line. It worked. But I didn't tell Kincaid where I'd gotten the dope. From that time on, not a day passed without a battle between us over the sixty-four squares.

We talked nothing but chess. He never asked my name. I never mentioned his.

ID been in Pelican Beach about a month, when on my way to the stand one morning, I happened to pass Talbot's window.

Talbot's, you know, is one of the great jewelry emporiums of the world. They don't do business in the dignified manner of Tiffany or Cartier, they believe in blowing their own horn, and blowing it loud. Their displays are always sensational.

Inside the window were two red stones, the size of hazelnuts, identical in shape, color and brilliance, lying side by side, on a white silk background. There was nothing else in there except a six foot square poster which read:

WHICH ONE OF THESE STONES IS WORTH \$50,000?

One of the rubies displayed here is the famous "Blood of the Balkans," specially priced by Talbot's at only \$50,000. The other ruby is a Talbot Replica. You can have it for \$50. Either gem is an exceptional buy. We solicit your inspection without obligation.

TALBOT'S

Jewelers to the masses and classes.

Sure, Talbot's were bold, brassy, and bellicose in going after business, but their word could be depended on. If they said a stone was worth fifty grand, that's what it was worth.

After getting my fill of the display, I walked around the corner on which the store was situated.

Standing on the curb, was a tall, hatless, grey-haired man wearing thick blue glasses. That was blind Angelo, and in his hand he held a small scissors. The blades of the scissors were curved slightly at the tips.

Everybody in Pelican Beach knew Angelo. He was a boardwalk character. A sign hung down over his coat front, dangling from a cord about his neck. The center of the sign read:

PROFILE PORTRAITS

By Blind Angelo

25c

On either side of this wording were silhouette heads of celebrities, cut from black paper and mounted on a white background. These were Angelo's testimonials, samples of his artistry.

A plump, over-dressed woman stopped at the curb.

Angelo sensed a customer. "Would you care for a portrait? Only a quarter."

The plump woman giggled, "Oh, me?" she asked. She looked at the famous profiles pasted on Angelo's sign. "Oh, all right," she agreed.

"Permit me to pass my fingers over your face, madame," said Angelo, stepping close to the woman, and exploring her features with the tips of his fingers.

From a camp-stool on which were placed paper, a paste-pot, and a tin cup with change, the blind man selected a square black sheet of foolscap and with a few, quick snips of his shears created a strikingly life-like profile of the fat woman.

He then pasted the silhouette on a background of white paper and handed it to her.

"M-m, it's certainly not flattering," she said, handing him a bill.

Angelo made change from his cup, "Full of character, madam. An unusual portrait, ma'am."

The woman waddled away. Well, that's a sample of how Angelo worked.

During the short time I'd been in the town, Angelo and I had become quite friendly. "How's everything, old-timer?" I greeted him.

Blind Angelo's face lighted up with a smile. He recognized my voice. "How are you, champ?" he said. Angelo used to stroll about my stand frequently, picking up business from the kibitzers that watched me play.

"I'm headed for the boardwalk," I said. "Coming along?"

"Not now. Be seeing you later," replied blind Angelo.

I GOT the boards out and set the chess-men up. It was about noon. Gladys was just opening up.

"How's the brain today?" she bantered.

"Functioning, angel," I said.

Soon I got tied up with a tough opponent and we were battling away, with a crowd swarming around our

table watching the attack and counter-attack over the board.

While I was figuring my way through a maze of complications, I heard a cane tapping, then a familiar voice. It was Blind Angelo, at my back. "Champ, let me cut your portrait. I want to show these gentlemen how it's done."

"Go ahead," I said. I didn't look up from the board. I felt Angelo's delicate fingers touching my face, then his lips were close to my ear, whispering, "I'm going to hide something in your mouth. Act as if nothing unusual's happening."

I felt his thumb and fingers inserted between my teeth, and then something the size of a hazel-nut was inserted underneath my tongue.

Angelo took his hand away. I kept the thing under my tongue, my eyes on the board. Then I heard Angelo snipping away with his scissors. A minute later he slipped the silhouette in my pocket. "Here's your portrait," he said, "Take a good look at it later. It's exceptional."

I was engrossed in the game, didn't look up. Angelo pressed hard on my arm. "Take care of that souvenir," he whispered huskily, "until I call for it, then we'll share."

I heard him tap, tap, tapping away. Some minutes later, my chess game ended, a hard-fought draw. The customer paid, sauntered off. The on-lookers dwindled away. I took the thing out of my mouth.

It was one of the rubies I had seen in Talbot's window, that morning.

I obeyed my first impulse and set out after Angelo, calling to Gladys, as I was leaving, "Tell anyone I'll be back soon."

One of Angelo's usual haunts was a

spot of beach, in front of The Caribbean House. I set off for the place.

At Surf Avenue, where the boardwalk bends and follows the shore-line, there was a short cut. This path went underneath a bathhouse, that stood on raised piles above the sand.

I started through the sandy cut. How did Angelo get that stone, I puzzled, what did he mean by, "We'll share?"

THEN I saw the body. Angelo lay there, his face, blue glasses and all, buried in the sand. One arm curled around a pile post, the other one stretched in a puddle of red.

I ran over to him. The sign cord around his throat was messy with blood, and there was a hole in the back of his neck, oozing scarlet. Lower down, a crimson blotch was spreading over his shirt. I knelt, listened to his heart. I didn't hear anything.

I scurried back to the boardwalk to look for a cop. As I ran, I tripped over something. Cursing, I glanced down at the thing. It was Angelo's cane. I was wondering why he had discarded it on the boardwalk, when I saw Laughlin, the blue-coat, who had the Surf Avenue beat, approaching.

I gasped out my discovery of the body, and he went with me to look at Angelo.

Laughlin wiped his florid face with a horny palm.

"This ain't for me to figure out how it happened. We'll call Delmar."

While Laughlin phoned, I watched the body. A theory of why Angelo had been murdered was formulating in my mind. I was shaping it up to have it ready for Detective-Sergeant Delmar's arrival.

Some minutes later, Laughlin re-

*There in the sand lay
Angelo.*



turned with two men. One was Delmar, lean, thin-lipped with cynical, slatey eyes. The bull-necked man with grizzled hair was Coroner Foxcroft.

We carried Angelo, with his blood-stained sign flopping in the hot wind, into a locker-room of the bathhouse. Then Welmar listened to me telling how I had discovered the body.

The detective went into his routine. He smiled at me patronizingly, "I suppose that's all you can tell me about this business."

"Not exactly," I replied. I had my story ready and I had the stone. But I was going to give it to him my way, the dramatic way.

"Let's have it," said Delmar. He wasn't smiling now.

"I suggest, maybe Dr. Foxcroft take a look at Angelo first," I said.

"All right," agreed Delmar. "Doctor, you give us the official medical report now."

Foxcroft rolled up his sleeves. "Ordinarily you'd wait until after the autopsy, but on this one I can give you the gist of it, from the looks of things."

Foxcroft bent over the body, and after a few minutes, stood up, puffing. "The man's been dead about half an hour, I'd say. One bullet severed the wind-pipe, deflected by the top vertebra. The other bullet entered the back, passed through the heart. Either one could have been fatal."

"Now that you've got that," Delmar said to me softly, "what's on your mind?"

I turned to Foxcroft. "But, doctor, you didn't look at his eyes."

"Eyes!" exclaimed Delmar. "What's that got to do with it?"

"I figured Angelo wasn't really blind," I said.

Foxcroft looked at me sharply. He

went over to the body, removed the blue glasses from Angelo's face, and started examining the dead man's eyes.

Delmar lit a cigarette, kept watching me above the match-flame. Laughlin mopped his big face, shook his head puzzledly.

After five long minutes, Foxcroft straightened up. He stared at me queerly. "Young fellow," he said, "You're right. There was never a thing wrong with his eyes!" He laughed, "You know I've seen Angelo around for the last ten years. The fakir certainly put one over on all of us."

Delmar wheeled on me, "What gave you the idea that Angelo could see?"

I smiled in a superior manner. "Just part of my theory," I said airily.

"Got any other ideas?" Delmar asked me.

"Yes. Get in touch with Talbot's. Ask them to check up on their stock. All of it. See if everything's O.K." I was getting set for the climax, extracting all the juice out of the situation that I could.

THERE was a phone-booth in the corner of the room. Delmar went to it, closed the door. I saw him dialing. He was inside it a pretty long time. When he came out, his face was sober. He looked at me with more respect. "Brother, you had something there," he said, "some crook got away with Talbot's \$50,000 ruby—the one called 'Blood of the Balkans.' The old switch act. Took the genuine and left an imitation in its place."

"Say," Foxcroft said to me, "how did you tie up Angelo's death with the missing ruby?"

I wanted to give it to them a little

bit at a time, before I flashed the stone as the climax of my act. "I tied it up because I remembered seeing Angelo standing in front of Talbot's place this morning as I went by the store."

"That's right," cut in Delmar. "They told me over the wire some of the employees had seen Angelo on the curb at the corner. He'd been there all morning."

Then Laughlin spoke up excitedly, "I got it. Angelo's not really blind. You see, he's a look-out for the crook. In the guise of a blind man his stand at the corner don't arouse suspicion. The crook goes in the store, switches the stone. Now that he's got it, Angelo's of no use to him any more. In fact he's dangerous. He knows too much. So the crook bumps him off."

It wasn't my theory, though parts of it coincided with my idea, but it was plausible, and I could see it was an idea that cooked my hash at once if I flashed the stone.

Now I saw only too clearly that if that stone were found on me, I'd be tagged as the villain. A lot of people had seen Angelo at my stand shortly before he was killed. It was I that found the body. I figured, if I showed the stone at this time, I'd be held on suspicion of robbery and murder. The truth would sound too fantastic to a detective as cynical as Delmar.

I'd certainly maneuvered myself into a tough spot. I saw now that had I given the stone up at the very beginning, I'd have been better off.

So then, rightly or wrongly, I decided to hold on to the ruby, until I tracked down the killer myself.

To distract attention from my person, I eagerly chimed in, "Laughlin, you figure it just as I do."

Foxcroft nodded agreement.

Delmar said sagely, "Sounds reasonable." He turned to Laughlin, "Just so we don't overlook anything, search Angelo's clothes."

While Laughlin went through the dead man's things, I prayed that neither of the cops would get the idea to start searching me.

Finally Laughlin announced, "Nothing there."

"Go out on the beach and look around near where the body was found," said Delmar, "maybe you'll find something."

Laughlin went out, and Delmar said to me affably, "Well, champ, I suppose you'll be turning up with the stone soon, yourself." He gave me a friendly slap on the side, where I was carrying the ruby in my pocket.

I managed a weak grin. "I'll let you know if I do, sergeant."

Delmar said, "We'll be wanting you at the inquest."

"I'll be at my stand," I said, moving off as nonchalantly as I could.

I went over to a place where they rented lockers. I put the "Blood of the Balkans" under lock and key, put the key in my shoe.

When I got back to my stand, there was a customer waiting for me. It was Kincaid.

WE chose for color. Kincaid got white and first move. He steered the game into his own line. I countered with Martinsen's variation. Soon a complicated position developed in the center.

Kincaid bent over the board in a brown study. A beefy man with a pair of stevedor's shoulders, sauntered by, stopped to observe the game. Kincaid was spending a lot of time over his

next move. I sat back, taking it easy. I had the situation well in hand.

I saw Gladys at the adjoining booth, polishing up a mashie.

I had my opponent across the board in a tight fix. He was leaning his face on his chin, studying the position hard, giving me a silhouette of his aquiline profile.

I felt something crinkle in my pocket. I remembered what it was. The cut-out portrait of myself, which Angelo had snipped that morning. I took it out of my pocket.

I looked at the dead man's last handiwork and my heart gave a great thump, for I knew now that I was sitting across from Angelo's killer.

Gladys came out of the booth, carrying the shining mashie.

Kincaid said to me in a soft voice, "Stay in your chair, don't move." Something hard was jabbing into the pit of my stomach. "Keep your hands above the board, keep playing the game."

The beefy man at Kincaid's side, edged in closer to the table.

I got the idea. I moved the queen. Kincaid countered with a knight. "Where's the ruby?" said Kincaid softly. He moved a pawn up one square.

"Where you'll never find it," I cried, and with that I turned the table on him, leaped over it and we clinched. I heard the gun go off, and then a heavy hand seized the back of my coat collar.

A mashie flashed high in the sunlight, there was the sound of metal on bone, I heard a gasp, I heard Gladys screaming, "Help, police!" Kincaid got a hand free, a gun sailed easterly, through the air, toward the Atlantic.

I saw the Colt splash and disappear beneath the wave.

Then Laughlin came running up. "What's all this about?" he asked, looking down at the overturned table and chessmen scattered on the ground.

Kincaid grinned sheepishly, "Aw, nothing that matters; we had a quarrel about the game. We both lost our heads, I guess."

Just then the beefy man, who lay on the ground, blinked open his eyes, staggered up.

"Well, no more of it, you two," said Laughlin sharply. "No fighting on the boardwalk." A crowd was gathering.

"I want you to arrest that man, officer," I said pointing to Kincaid.

"Take it easy, champ—cool off," laughed Laughlin.

"Arrest him for murder!" I insisted.

"He had a gun," broke in Gladys, pointing at Kincaid. "I saw it. The tub of suet joined in and I let him have it with a golf club."

Kincaid started to move off. The beefy man edged away silently.

Laughlin's gun snaked out. "Not so fast, men." He said to me, "What's all this about murder?"

Kincaid and Beefy halted in their tracks.

A thin man with slatey eyes shoved his way through the crowd. "What's up, Laughlin?" asked Sergeant Delmar.

I broke in, "It's all wrapped up for you, sergeant." I pointed to Kincaid. "The killer." I nodded toward Beefy, "and his pal."

Kincaid said evenly, "I haven't the slightest idea what this man's talking about."

Beefy mouthed, "I don't savvy none of his lingo."



There was no mistaking that portrait.

Delmar said to me, "Start talking, champ."

"Sergeant," I said earnestly, "let's save time. Take us all over to Talbot's. That's where it all began."

Delmar went and phoned beach headquarters. Five minutes later, two prowl cars roared up. Kincaid and Beefy were piled between Laughlin

and two more cops. I climbed in the other car with Delmar.

Then Gladys demanded to go along as witness. "I saw the gun," she repeated.

"Get in," said Delmar.

Now Laughlin called out, "Look, sergeant." He held up a small scissors, the blades of which were curved at the tips. "I found this at the water's edge, not far from the spot, where Angelo was killed."

"Hold on to it," said Delmar.

I had Delmar stop our car in front of the locker concession, and I took out the ruby and gave it to him for safe keeping. "I'll explain all this soon," I said.

THERE were seven of us in Talbot's office. Laughlin and Delmar. There were Kincaid and the beefy man. There were Gladys and I, and Talbot. The place was crowded.

Talbot, a pot-bellied man with a fringe of pink hair bordering a shiny dome, offered the lone chair to Gladys. He stood by his desk, tapping it with pink fingers.

Delmar handed him the ruby. "Here's your 'Blood of the Balkins.'" The detective nodded toward me. "He gets the credit for returning it."

Talbot looked at the jewel with hard, bright eyes. "So it is," he said, "very good." He locked the stone in his desk.

Delmar turned to me. "Go ahead. You've got the floor."

I said to Talbot, pointing to Kincaid, "Ever see this man before?"

Kincaid, not waiting for Talbot's reply, thrust a card at Delmar. "My name's Orpen. Here's my card and New York business address."

Talbot said to me, "I've seen Mr.

Orpen before. This morning. He was being shown the rubies, I believe. He left after inspecting them. A few minutes later he returned. I think he had left his purse on the counter. That's all I know of the man."

"That's right," broke in the man who called himself Orpen, jutting out his angular jaw belligerently, "but that don't make me a criminal." He turned to Delmar. "I must say this is a very unorthodox procedure."

Talbot pointed to the beefy man. "Sergeant, what's this man doing here?"

The beefy man said hotly, "My name's Styles. That's what I'd like to know—what I'm doing here! I'm watching a chess game," he pointed at me, "this guy up-turns a table on my foot. I get mad and jump him. Somebody cracks me on the bean. That's all I know."

Delmar said to me, "Proceed."

I went on: "Here's how it must have happened. Mr. Orpen comes in to look at the rubies. He's got the imitation with him. He makes the switch and leaves the store.

"As he passes the corner, he realizes that he's left his purse on the counter. He wants to go back for it—"

"Look here," interrupted Laughlin, who had been silent so far, "why should a man with a \$50,000 stone in his pocket take the risk to go back for a purse?"

"Well," I replied, "a rock's not ready cash. Maybe there's big money in the purse." I turned to Delmar. "Suppose you look inside Mr. Orpen's jacket."

Delmar went over, slipped a hand inside the angular-jawed man's coat.

"I resent your high-handed manner, sir," said the man who called himself Orpen.

Delmar took out a purse, counted the money in it. Big bills. Twenties and fifties. In all, ten thousand dollars. Delmar handed back the money and purse.

"Worth going back for, wasn't it?" I said.

Laughlin wiped his red face with a sweaty hand. "It sure was," he agreed.

"Let's resume," I said. "Orpen was standing at the curb and realizing that he had to return for his purse. But he was afraid then that the switch might have been discovered by this time, afraid that he might be searched on his return to the store. Where can he hide the ruby in the meantime?"

I paused dramatically. Nobody said anything.

"Then he saw Angelo, the blind man," I continued. "A brilliant idea struck him. Orpen placed the ruby in Angelo's tin cup. Alms for a beggar. Orpen must chance that the stone will be safe there until he returns for it. He can't hesitate. The ruby went into the tin cup. Orpen went back to the store, retrieved his purse, and departed again."

THE man who called himself Orpen said loftily to Delmar, "Of course, this entire tale is quite preposterous," then he bowed to me. "My very worthy opponent, will you permit me to ask Mr. Talbot a few questions before going on with your story?"

"Go ahead," I said. I was certain I had everything in hand. I winked confidently at Gladys, who was gazing at me with admiring eyes.

The angular-jawed man said to Talbot, "Previous to the discovery of the substitution, how many others, beside myself this day, examined the stones?"

Talbot considered. "Maybe half a dozen."

"Could the substitution be detected by a casual examination?"

"Not necessarily. If there was any doubt, certain tests would have to be made."

"When was the last time you made those tests, Mr. Talbot?"

Talbot drummed his fat fingers on the desk. "Frankly, sir, we never felt it necessary to make such a test until Sergeant Delmar suggested it this afternoon. Of course, when we first installed the display six days ago, we were well aware that one stone was the 'Blood of the Balkans' and the other a Talbot Replica."

"During the first five days of the window display, how many people examined those stones?"

"Countless numbers, I'm sure."

"Well, then, isn't it possible that the 'switch', as you term it, was made Lord knows when?"

"Mr. Orpen, sir, I have never asserted that you are concerned criminally in this matter."

The angular-jawed man turned to Delmar with a triumphant grin. He had made some shrewd points. He was trying to break up my game before it got started.

But I had a final coup in mind, which I was sure would demolish any defense.

I looked round the room. Styles, the beefy man, was yawning boredly. Laughlin's brow creased thoughtfully.

Delmar nodded to me, "Go on with your story. Orpen was departing a second time from the store. Go on from there."

"Okay. Orpen reached the curb.

(Continued on page 84)

Pistol-Packing



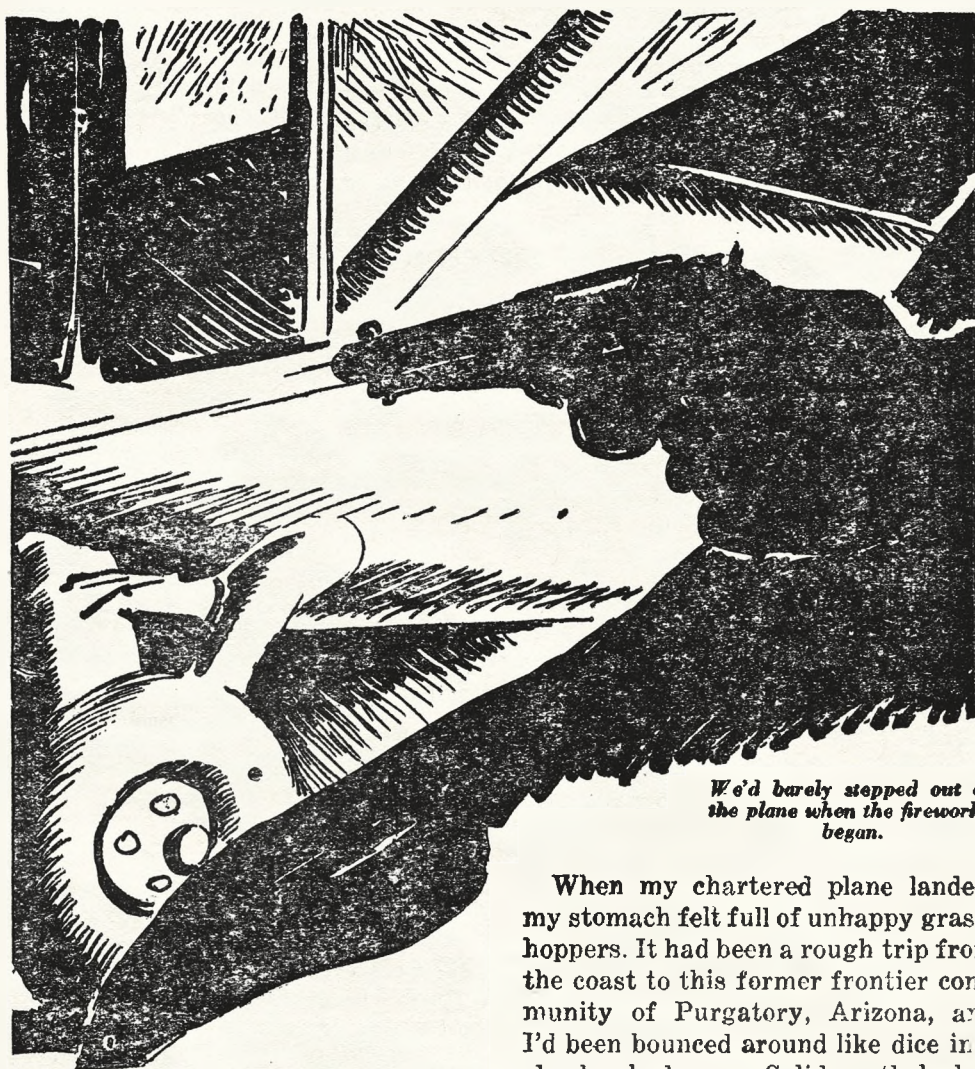
★ ★ ★

Homicide is seldom advertised in advance. It just doesn't make good publicity when a million-buck Western is having its premiere. And that's why Dan Turner was here in the town of Purgatory — to see that "Hell-Town Man-Law" entered the world without benefit of bloodshed

★ ★ ★

Premiere

By R. L.
BELLEM



We'd barely stepped out of the plane when the fireworks began.

IT WAS the last of the mammoth cinema shindigs to be held before the Japs took their sneak punch at Pearl Harbor; a pre-war clambake such as only a Hollywood studio could stage. A defunct mining town was the locale and I flew in for the festivities; arrived just in time to find myself in a murder jackpot.

When my chartered plane landed, my stomach felt full of unhappy grasshoppers. It had been a rough trip from the coast to this former frontier community of Purgatory, Arizona, and I'd been bounced around like dice in a chuck-a-luck cage. Solid earth looked plenty good to me, but maybe I wouldn't have been so anxious to pat the ground with my brogans if I'd known I was going to be shot at.

The makeshift airport lay about a mile south of Purgatory proper: a bumpy rectangle of cleared desert mesa with cactus and sagebrush sketchily barbered away to leave a

place for aircraft to drop anchor. Its kerosene landing flares seemed feeble by comparison to the stabbing pillars of brilliant glow from a dozen sun-arcs over in the temporarily resurrected ghost town, and I wondered how my pilot had ever contrived to hit the mark.

Not that it mattered, now that we were safely moored. What I had to think about was Purgatory and my reasons for being on hand. Big movie doings were scheduled that evening; far bigger than any of the inhabitants suspected. Everybody knew about the premiere of a Vitafilm million-buck western opus, of course—but the added attraction of homicide hadn't been announced. No killer ever advertises in advance.

I LOWERED my hundred and ninety pounds out of the plane's cabin; looked around for Steve Bannerton's promised taxi without finding it.

My pilot joined me. "We're a little ahead of time, Mr. Turner. I guess your man hasn't got here yet. Let's go wait in the hangar, shall we?"

I nodded, fished a gasper out of my pocket, and touched the flame of a match to it. That innocent act set off the fireworks like a director signaling for a retake on the Battle of Waterloo.

As the match-glow bathed my map, a hidden roscoe began to blast from the shadows somewhere beyond the kerosene flares around the landing field.

The pilot yodeled: "Cripes!" and went flat on his mush to make himself a less attractive target. Then, off in the blackness, somebody started running. The shooting stopped.

I yanked my .32 automatic from

the shoulder holster where I always carry it; hurled myself zig-zag toward those running footfalls. It was a dopey move to make. Just as I went hellity-blip past the flares, I barged full tilt into a cargo of brass knuckles. A burly blister in cowboy regalia and bandanna mask lunged at me from behind a boulder, knocked the rod out of my right duke, and corked me on the dimple.

The punch rocked me to my foundations. I fell into a groggy clinch with the guy and panted: "What's the idea?"

"Are you Dan Turner?"

"Yeah."

"The Hollywood private snoop?"

"Yeah. So what?" I choked.

"So that's all I wanted to know," he said, wrestling me around until he had my shoulders pinned against that giant outcropping of rock that had originally concealed him. As soon as he had me in position, he fainted at my chin.

I tried to yank away from the poke. This was my second mistake in as many minutes. Jerking my noggin violently backward, I smacked it on the boulder behind me. The impact filled me to the brim with outraged agony, which was apparently part of the masked bozo's strategy. His brass knucks met me on the rebound, bunted me on the button.

I became useless.

CHAPTER II

A Wanted Man

IT MUST have been a good five minutes later when I woke up. By that time the character in the cowboy suit had lammed, leaving me with a headache built for a hippo and an assort-

ment of unanswered questions to keep my mind occupied. To make it worse, he had also festooned me with a lariat wrapping that bound my wrists and ankles together, bending me into the general shape of a pretzel.

I squirmed, swore a few fervent oaths, and tried to make some sense of the screwy situation. Why had that anonymous citizen dished me a load of lumps and then trussed me helpless? As far as that was concerned, why had my friend Steve Bannerton asked me to come here?

Steve had wired me from this Purgatory dump, telling me to charter a plane and flag my adenoids over to Arizona in a hell of a yank. "*Trouble with an escaped convict,*" his message said. "*Need you immediately. Will be waiting for you with a taxi at airport.*"

As chief press representative for Vitafilm Productions he had engaged my professional services several times in the past to clean up undercover stench at the studio, and he'd always been good for a generous fee. So I fired him a fast reply: "*On my way. Lay off lammister pending arrival.*" Then I had myself wafted through the atmosphere, only to barge spang into a nest of bruises and contusions.

Aching in every pore, I tried to loosen the ropes embellishing my framework. It was no dice; but at least it gave me something to do while I pondered the puzzle. What I knew about the setup wasn't very enlightening:

BANNERTON'S company had just completed a lavish epic of the old wild west called Hell-Town Law-Man,

laid in that period of Arizona history when the town of Purgatory was the rowdiest badland outpost this side of the hot place. The pic starred Waldo LaRash as a two gun sheriff who used bullets for juries, thereby stuffing Boot Hill with deceased desperadoes.

Casting this LaRash hambo in the leading role had come as a surprise to the Hollywood smart set. Everybody thought Johnny Kinglund had the inside track, Kinglund being an old hand with the horse opera routine. The powers had passed him up, though, and LaRash got the sugar-coated job. If you paid any attention to gossip, Kinglund was as sore as a lanced abscess; but there wasn't anything he could do about it.

So now, as a publicity stunt, the production's premiere was being held right here in Purgatory itself. Two special trains of cinema celebrities and west coast columnists constituted the excursion, all at Vitafilm's expense; the entire cast of Hell-Town Law-Man would make personal appearances prior to the first showing of the film tonight. Once more a bedraggled ghost town would boil and spill over with yippee, just like the old frontier days.

The gag wasn't original, of course. Many major studios previewed their important pics away from Hollywood for the sake of newspaper headlines; but this was the first time I'd attended such a fracas. And it began to look now as if I'd miss the festivities, fail to make connections with Steve Bannerton; unless somebody came along to cut these ropes.

Somebody did.

It was my chartered pilot. I heard

him yowling: "Mr. Turner, where are you? Hey, Mr. Turner!"

I raised my voice to a bellowing bleat. "Over here. Make it snappy."

Presently he located me, whipped out a pocket knife, slashed my bonds. "Wha-what happened?"

"Assault and sluggery," I grunted. "Those shots were fired to suck me here to this boulder so I could be bashed." I tested my game by standing upright. The knee action wobbled, but otherwise I seemed to be functioning okay. "Where's a cab? I've got places to go and people to see!"

There wasn't any taxi. There wasn't even an attendant on duty at the airport's lone hangar. Over across the landing field, though, I lamped a rattletrap Model A coupe coming in from the road and kicking up billows of brown dust from locked wheels as the driver jammed the brakes. The jolopy skidded, halted. That was my cue to sprint toward it with my thumb unlimbered to beg a ride.

The thumb turned out to be unnecessary. A brunette cupcake thrust her noggin out of the chariot and said: "Dan!"

AS soon as I came close enough, I tabbed her. She was Lola Lorraine, an extra wren around the various movie lots until about a year ago. Then she'd dropped out of sight and I'd lost track of her; which was a shame, because she'd always been nice company.

It startled me to pipe her here in Purgatory. I said: "Hello, hon. It's a small world, isn't it, and how's about a swift lift to town?"

"Get in." She unlatched her brakes as I tumbled my tonnage alongside her. "Gee, Sherlock, I'm glad you

sh-showed up. I'm in t-terrible trouble." She coughed, and the sound wasn't very pleasant. Her shoulders shook.

They were thin shoulders, much skinnier than I remembered them. Her cheeks looked hollow, too, despite a thick application of makeup. She'd lost copious weight since I last saw her; she was still pretty, but in a different way. She seemed fragile—and frightened.

She souped the coupe back toward the road, and I noticed she was garnished in a costume that somehow looked out of place on her. It was a dance hall getup: short ruffled skirt of red silk, a tight matching bodice slashed low in front, high heeled crimson slippers and black chiffon hose that called your attention to her tapered stems. She was a nifty number.

She was also driving like an unleashed fugitive from a nuttery, mashing her throttle to the floorboards and whamming the antique bucket over chuck-holes as deep as the Grand Canyon. We hit one dip that damned near turned us over. I felt my bridgework come loose; grabbed her arm and howled: "Take it easy, babe! I crave to reach Purgatory all in one piece. I'm working on a case."

"It can wait a while."

"Ix-nay. The—"

"I need you now," she said without reducing speed.

SOMETHING in her tone gave me goose pimples big enough to hang pictures on. I said, "Hey, have you lost your marbles, sister?" Then I realized she was heading along a road that led at a tangent away from the

Klieg-lighted town. I'd never make contact with Steve Bannerton that way. I groped for the key in the dashboard. "Slow down before I cut your ignition."

"Do you expect me to confess to murder?" he demanded.



"Don't do it, hawkshaw."

"Try and stop me."

I mean it," she said. "Keep your hand away from that key." She took her left mitt off the steering wheel,

delved up under her skirt. She must have had a holster strapped to her thigh, because when her fingers re-

appeared they were wrapped around a roscoe; a deadly little automatic capable of boring ugly holes in your clockworks at close range.

I fastened the flabbergasted focus on her. "What the hell?" I whispered weakly.

"You're staying with me until I've talked to you, Sherlock. I'm serious," she said. And she jammed the cannon's muzzle ferninst my brisket.

CHAPTER III

Too Late

THIS MADE twice in thirty minutes I'd been on the wrong end of a fowling piece. I didn't like it. I rasped: "Listen, kiddo. If you think—"

She whipped the coupe off the road, sent it jouncing-along a wagon-track trail that meandered across the mesquite-dotted mesa this side of Purgatory's outskirts. "You've got to help me Dan. You've got to!" her tone was taut, shrill.

"Kidnaping me is a lousy way to ask favors."

"I—I'm not kidnaping you. I want you to k-kidnap somebody else."

I blinked; did a double-take. "Huh?"

We were nearing a little cabin at the dead end of the rutted trail. "Yes," she said. "Oh-h-h, Hawkshaw, I—I love him so much—" Her kisser drooped and so did the gat she was toting. She eased her toe off the gas.

I made a grab for the weapon with one hand; twisted the ignition key with the other. The motor died and the coupe came to a weary stop. "Now," I said grimly.

She struggled for the gun, but

gave up after a while. "Please . . ." she whimpered.

"Please what?"

"Give me back my g-gun."

I made a sour mouth. "So you can jump me through the hoop? Don't be silly, kitten." Then I nudged her. "Slide out of there. I'm going to borrow this jalopy."

"No. No. . . . you can't! You mustn't!"

"I've got to," I said. "It's a business matter. I have an important appointment with Steve Bannerton over in Purgatory. He sent for me."

"No he didn't. I m-mean . . . forget Bannerton for a minute." She gave me a pleading look through sudden puddles of brine in her peepers.

I said: "What's nibbling on you, Lola?"

"Terry," she answered.

I stared at her. "Terry who?"

"Terry O'Brien."

"I love him. He's my . . . my husband." Then a blurt of wordage began spilling out of her woeful yap. "I don't want him to g-go back to a Georgia ch-chain gang on my account. You've got to do something about it, Dan. You've got to stop him. I can't pay you much m-money, but . . ."

"Now wait," I said. "Hold everything. You might as well be talking Cherokee for all the sense you're making. Back off and start all over again, from the beginning. Did I understand you to say you're married?"

"Y-yes."

"Since when?"

"Shortly after I came to Arizona a year ago."

I said: "Congratulations, hon. Particularly if you really love the guy. But what's this about Georgia?"

“HE was c-convicted of a robbery down there a long wh-while back. Maybe he *was* guilty; what difference does it make? Since he escaped from the chain gang and came here to this country, he’s been g-going straight. And . . . he’s been good to me. Better than any m-man I’ve ever known.” She coughed.

I began to get hep. “Lungs, kiddo?”

She nodded.

I said: “So that’s why you left Hollywood and came to the great open spaces. You needed the sun cure.”

“Yes.”

“Then you met this O’Brien lam-mister and he took care of you, hunh?”

“He’s done everything for me, Dan. Everything. But now the doctors say I need surgery if I’m to get well. A rib resection; thoracoplasty, they call it.”

“I’ve heard of it. It’s pretty serious, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” she said. “And expensive. That’s why I’ve been trying to hold down a dance hall job, only it’s no use; I’m just not strong enough. So Terry w-wants to sacrifice himself . . . to get me the m-money.”

“Hey, what is this sacrifice stuff?” I asked her, meantime wondering if Terry O’Brien was the same escaped convict Steve Bannerton had wired me about.

The brunette chick dabbed a handkerchief at her glims and said: “There’s a reward posted for him in Georgia. Five hundred dollars.”

“Well?”

“And now he’s m-made a deal to be captured so the re-reward will come to m-me. I can’t talk him out of it. That’s why I’ve got to have your help.

I want you to stop him from going in to town tonight. By force if you can’t do it any other way. Understand?”

It was a funny thing for her to ask me. Being a private ferret, I’m sworn to uphold law and order—and escaped cons are supposed to be nabbed on sight. Yet here was this Lorraine cookie begging me to obstruct justice by keeping her hubby from handing himself in. To make the situation even whackier, I was seriously considering it!

The way I figured, Terry O’Brien must have been pretty decent; you’ve got to be a square shooter if you’re willing to go back to the rock pile so your wife can have the dough for surgical treatment. A character as white as that deserved some breaks, I told myself; and so did Lola. What good would the operation do her if the lug she loved had to spend his next few years wearing leg irons?

THERE was one thing I yearned to find out. I said: “Listen, baby. Are you sure you’re leveling with me? I mean I was clonked tonight at the landing field, and then you put the snatch on me. This isn’t just some gag to keep me from contacting Steve Bannerton, by any chance?”

“N-no. Bannerton doesn’t know . . . that is, I only want you to make sure Terry doesn’t give himself up.”

“You spoke of some deal he made. What deal?”

Her lower lip trembled. “A publicity deal. He arranged it with Bannerton. You know Vitafilm is premiering a western picture here tonight, Hell-Town Law-Man with Waldo LaRash playing the lead.”

“Sure.”

“Well, LaRash has a frontier sher-

iff role and he's to make a personal appearance at the premiere. Just before the show begins, he's to recognize my husband in front of the theatre and crack d-down on him."

I torched a coffin nail; exhaled a stream of astounded fumes. "Well, I'll be go to hell!"

"The headlines w-will make LaRash an apparent hero in real life as well as on the screen," she went on. "You can imagine how the newspapers would play it up: *Movie Star Enacts Genuine Sheriff Role, Nabs Convict at Premiere.*"

"Jeepers!" I grunted. "So that's why Bannerton sent for me. He wants me to help LaRash make the pinch."

"And I want you to p-prevent it," Lola said.

I glued the speculative hinge on her; saw how desperate she was. My decision would probably cost me all future connections with Vitafilm, I realized; and I'd likewise be stuck for chartering that plane I'd come in. But my mind was made up. I said: "Okay, hon. I'm on your side."

"You m-mean that? You aren't k-kidding me?"

"I'm so serious I can already feel it hurting my bankroll," I told her gloomily. "I'll keep your hubby away from tonight's festival if I have to kiek out his kidneys. By the way, where is he now?"

"In our c-cabin here. And . . . and thanks, Dan."

We drifted out of the jalopy, made for the ramshackle cabin at the end of the lane and ankled inside. There was only one room to the stash, lighted by a smudgy kerosene lamp and empty of population. The furnishings were cheap but neat and you didn't

have to look very hard to see the feminine touch—chintz drapes at the windows, a well-scrubbed appearance to the stove and the sink. As for Terry O'Brien, though, he wasn't in sight. Lola called: "Darling."

No answer.

"Terry!" she said in a louder voice.

All she got was an echo.

She turned, stared at me with peepers that were wide, tragic. "He's already g-gone. We're too late!" she said.

CHAPTER IV

Cue For Chaos

FOR AN instant I was afraid she might fold up. I put an arm around her slender waist, steadied her. "Chin up, kitten. Maybe there's still time to handle this."

"No, it's . . . all over now."

I said roughly: "Stow it. Look, I'll borrow your chariot and trail him to town, see? Leave it to me, and quit jittering. Incidentally, what does he look like, so I'M know him when I find him?"

"He's b-big and dark and w-wearing a cowboy outfit—chaps, Stetson, red and white checkered shirt, a yellow bandanna with a b-blue border . . ." her voice faded off hopelessly.

But she'd said enough to project a picture onto my mental movie screen: the picture of a slob who answered that same description, and who had fired those shots at me on the landing field, subsequently spooning me a double dose of brass knucks. Could that masked guy, I wondered, be Lola's jail-bird husband? If so, why had he wished to lower the boom on me? How could he have known I



"Tell me where to find your jail-bird hubby," I demanded.

was coming to Purgatory by plane? And what did it matter to him, inasmuch as he wanted to be arrested anyhow? A man seeking to be pinched doesn't assault private detectives—or does he?

Well, there wasn't time to fit that particular jigsaw puzzle into place

just now. I blew a kiss to the forlorn brunette doll, told her to keep a stiff upper lip. Then I barged out to her rambling wreckage, crawled under the wheel, and aimed toward the lights of town.

YOU couldn't miss the theater where the premiere was to be held. It was a former opera house, constructed in the earlier boom days by civic minded millionaire gold miners along the general scale of Grand Central Station. Here the pioneers of Purgatory had imported famous stage personalities at fabulous prices as a gesture toward what they thought was culture. In the intervening years the joint had fallen into disrepair and decay along with the ghost community itself, but tonight there was a resurrection.

The front blazed with arcs and Kliegs; a mob of natives and visitors jammed the refurbished foyer. Somebody was blowing verbal steam off his tonsils into a microphone hooked to a portable public address system, introducing Hollywood biggies to the assembled throngs. I tabbed the voice. It belonged to Steve Bannerton.

I parked in the middle of the street, wedged my way toward Steve's platform. He towered over the crowd, a long, lanky party with curly hair, an ingratiating grin, and an outfit of British tweeds that must have nicked him at least a hundred clams not counting the sales tax. Standing there, he kept up a running fire of emcee chatter; quick trigger japes and ad lib corn that had the mob in stitches. I moved closer, tried to catch a glance from him but couldn't.

I knew a way to get him, though. Near him stood his perky little blonde wife, name of Olga. She was wearing a white satin evening creation that was one third material and two thirds nudist colony. I reached up, touched her on the arm.

She turned and looked at me from the platform. "Well, hiya, gunshoe!

What brings you here?" she greeted me. She had the curves of a sultan's dream and the map of an angel; it was no wonder Bannerton was so ga-ga about her.

I said: "Look toots. Tell Steve to cork the yap a minute. I've got something important to tell him."

"Okay, Sherlock." She interrupted her husband's flow of syllables, got his attention and pointed to me. Steve handed his mike to an assistant, hopped off the platform, gripped my mitt. "When did you get in? What delayed you?"

"It's a long story and we'll skip it at this point. What I want to say is, the Terry O'Brien deal is nixed."

"Nixed? I don't follow your drift."

"Sure you do. Waldo LaRash is supposed to hang the pinch on him this evening, thereby making LaRash a counterfeit hero and boosting his stock as a he-man ham, not to mention the advertising it'll give your new pic, all for free. But it isn't going to go through. That's flat."

"Who says so? O'Brien himself?"

"No. I'm saying so."

He frowned as if a mosquito might be annoying him. "Wait a minute. How'd you learn about the stunt? I didn't give you any details."

"I found a grapevine," I said.

"Okay; tell the grapevine to go to hell. This is the swellest publicity break I ever planted."

"And the lousiest from an ethical standpoint," I said. "For the sake of a few stinking headlines, you're sending that poor O'Brien bozo back to the chain gang in Georgia. It's bad, Steve. I never thought you'd stoop to anything so dirty."

He looked uncomfortable. "Maybe you're right. I won't try to argue the

morals of it. But hell, fella, the guy came to me with the proposition. I didn't originate it. He made the offer voluntarily."

"Sure," I said. "Because he needed quick geetus for a sick wife. Surgery is the only thing that will save her life and he figures this is one quick way to make the grade. That kind of bravery deserves a medal, not a cell. Only a heel would take advantage of his desperation the way you're doing."

STEVE blushed. "So I'm a rat." He looked like a kid nabbed with his fist in the strawberry preserves. "I hadn't considered that angle of it, but—"

"But you see my point now?"

"Definitely," he admitted. "Only it's too late to call the thing off now. All the arrangements are made."

I said: "Look, chum. You and I are friends. Right?"

"Yes." He grinned wryly. "I wouldn't let anybody but a pal talk to me this way."

"We practically grew up together in the galloping tintypes," I said. "I hate to threaten you; but if you let this phony capture go through, I swear to Whozit I'll spill the inside facts to the newspaper boys; tell them how the arrest was framed. Then instead of Waldo LaRash being a mock hero for pinching an escaped con, he'll be laughed off the screen." I added darkly: "And you'll probably be blackballed."

"You wouldn't do that, Hawkshaw. Not to me."

"Even to you, keed."

He took a long gander at me; seemed to realize I was leveling. Then, presently, he shrugged. "Well, I sup-

pose I've got to play it your way. You're holding the aces."

"Will it be such a strain?"

He tilted his noggin back and laughed. "Okay, okay. Rub it in." He poked his duke at me. "Shake, Sherlock. I owe you an apology. You've made me see what a louse I was about to become. I just hadn't thought of it that way—until now."

"That makes me feel better, hearing you talk that way. You better get busy, though, and cancel the arrangements."

He nodded, tapped his golden-haired wife, helped her down from the platform, and whispered to her. Then the two of them squirmed through the mob, made for the street and lost themselves in the milling crush.

I climbed up where Olga had been standing; watched. I lamped a rattle-trap taxi stopping in front of the theater, disgorging two husky guys. One was Waldo LaRash, star of this Hell-Town Law-Man opus; a burly, handsome taxpayer garnished in a Gower Gulch cowboy outfit. I blinked when I recognized the character he had with him. It was Johnny Kinglund.

That seemed queer, considering how Kinglund had originally been slated to play the leading role but had lost it to LaRash. According to the gossip, Kinglund hated LaRash because of it; yet here they were together, closer than Siamese twins and displaying no signs of animosity. Evidently they'd patched up the beef between them, I reflected; whereupon, suddenly, I didn't have time to do any more thinking for a while. Thinks happened too damned fast, like a spool of action film being speeded up to a dizzy blur.

FIRST I saw a flash of English tweeds. That was Steve Banner-ton lankily elbowing himself toward the LaRash ham, reaching him and starting to say something to him.

At the same instant I tabbed somebody else in the crowd, a big, dark hombre in chaps, Stetson, red and white checked shirt and a yellow bannanna with a blue border. This gaudy lug had a look of taut expectancy on his puss and I knew instinctively that he was Terry O'Brien; I couldn't possibly mistake him after the description I'd been given.

Waldo LaRash spotted him,

whipped out a six-gun and pointed it at him. "You're an escaped criminal!" he roared cornily. "I place you under arrest. It's my duty as a law-abiding citizen. Freeze, mister!"

"All right," O'Brien said. He moved his hands outward. Simultaneously a roscoe yammered: *Ka-Chow!* and dames in the vicinity started screeching like banshees. I saw LaRash get a stupid expresison in his glimmers; claw at his belly. Then, slowly, he folded over and fell down.

That was the cue for chaos to spill over. O'Brien spun toward the street, started hammering a path through the crush of spectators. There was a glitter of gun-metal in his fist that sent people screeching and scattering



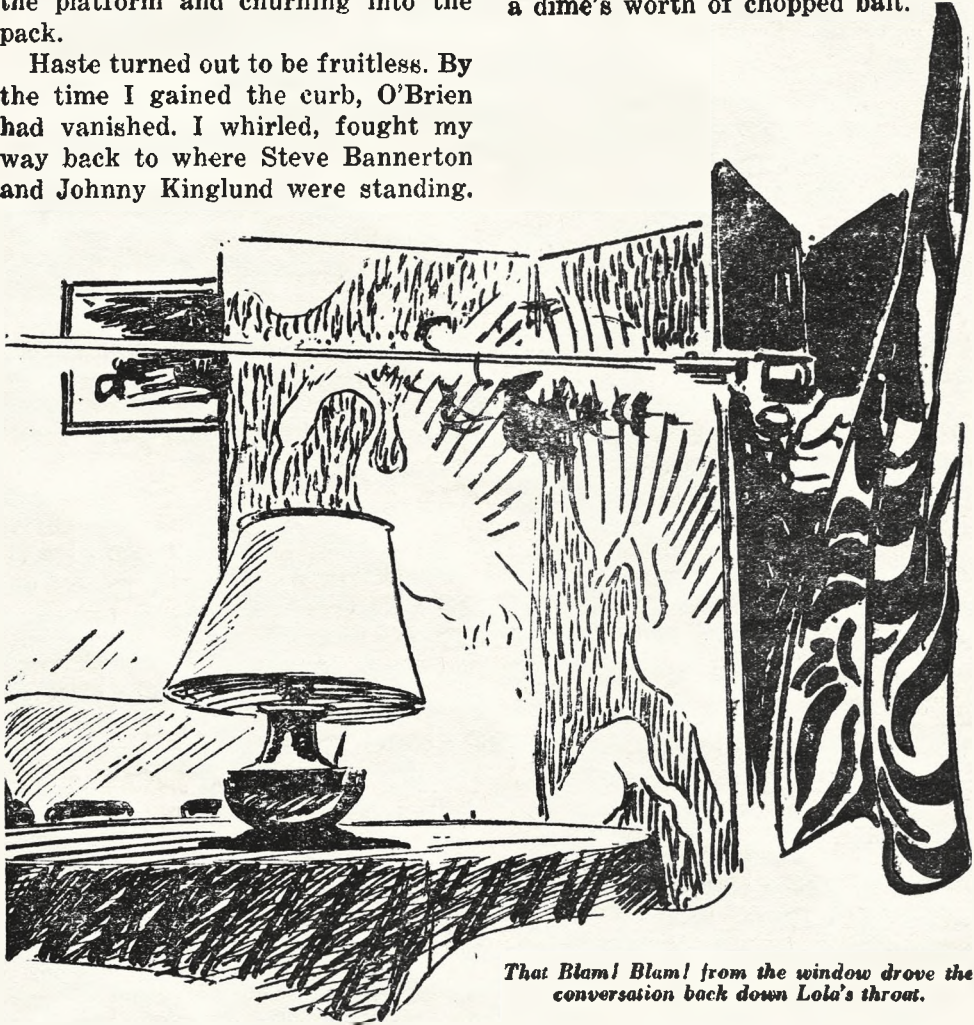
out of his way, including Olga Bannerton. Her white satin gown looked rumpled and disorderly as she yeped: "Help! Police! Oh, my God—!" Then she collapsed in a swoon, using the fallen Waldo LaRash as a bushion.

I snapped out of my trance, reached for my own .32. But it wasn't under my armpit where it belonged. Abruptly I remembered how it had been knocked out of my clutch, back at the airport when a masked guy slugged me. "Cripes!" I yodeled, lunging off the platform and churning into the pack.

Haste turned out to be fruitless. By the time I gained the curb, O'Brien had vanished. I whirled, fought my way back to where Steve Bannerton and Johnny Kinglund were standing.

They'd braced themselves against each other and were fighting to keep the panic stricken throng at bay so that LaRash and Olga wouldn't be trampled to raspberry jelly as they lay on the sidewalk. It was a nasty mess.

Not that it would have mattered to LaRash. I took one swivel at him, piped the bullet hole in his elly-bay and knew he'd never feel anything again. The blond Bannerton quail was okay, barring the fact that she'd fainted; but LaRash was deader than a dime's worth of chopped bait.



That Blam! Blam! from the window drove the conversation back down Lola's throat.

CHAPTER V

"It's a Lie!"

THE FIRST thing I noticed about the defunct hambo was that his six-shooter, still clutched in his fist, hadn't been fired. The odor of burned gunpowder, and consequently the death slug, had come from some other rod; not this one.

"It was Terry O'Brien. He did it!" Steve Bannerton bleated. He pounded my shoulder. "Damn his filthy soul to hell, he killed LaRash in cold blood. It was a double-cross!"

Steve's golden haired wife chose that particular moment to regain consciousness. She stirred, found herself practically in a corpse's embrace and emitted horrified wails. "Waldo . . . Waldo! Oh, my God . . . somebody do something for him . . . get a doctor . . . he needs . . ."

"Quiet, babe," I said, and lifted her up on her unsteady stems. "Look, Olga, the guy's beyond medical help. He's undertaker bait now."

She turned weeping again, so I handed her over to her flabbergasted hubby. "Here, Steve, see if can snap her out of it. She's hysterical." Then, getting her off my hands, I turned to Johnny Kinglund. "Well, friend?"

"Well what?" he glared at me.

"Can you tell me anything about this business?"

He drew a ragged breath. "What do you think I can tell you?" he demanded. "D'you expect me to confess I murdered him or something?"

"I didn't say so. It might be an idea, though. After all, he landed the leading role in this Vitafilm opus that you hoped to get. There was talk that you were plenty sore at him for cutting you out of the job."

"All right, so I was sore. So I got over it."

"You had no grudge against LaRash as of tonight?"

"None whatever. We were on good terms. We even came here together."

I said: "Yeah, I noticed that. Okay. Maybe you saw what happened. If so, spill it."

He licked his lips. "I don't know; it was all so quick, so unexpected. LaRash pulled his gun and aimed it at a fellow in a cowboy costume; then there was a flash and a roar and LaRash's weight sagged against me. Then he fell down and the man in the cowboy outfit shoved me aside; ran away. He had a pistol."

"All right. That's your story. See that you remember it."

He sneered a little. "You think I'd forget?"

"Some people do when it's convenient," I said. Then I returned my attention to Bannerton. "Hey, Steve."

"Now what? Can't you let me alone a minute? Or else help me with Olga. She's throwing a wing-ding."

"Send her back to the hotel and let her throw it there. We have work to do, bub."

The blond jane commenced to screech at the top of her adenoids, calling on heaven to witness that she was going to stay right here on the spot until Waldo LaRash's killer was collared. At this juncture Steve shook her silent, then shoved her at Kinglund.

"Take her to her room, Johnny," he rasped. "Stick with her until she calms down. Will do?"

"Will do," Kinglund nodded. Over Olga's protests he hauled her through the stunned mob; lammed with her.

THAT gave me a chance to talk turkey with Bannerton. I said: "Steve, I want to know something."

"Such as what?"

"A minute ago you accused O'Brien of the kill, O'Brien being that cow-poke in the gaudy shirt and bandanna, hunh?"

"Yes."

"You also mentioned a double-cross."

Bannerton clenched his dukes. "You're damned right! My God, why couldn't I have reached LaRash in time to tell him not to go through with that phony arrest? But no; he made his play and O'Brien drilled him. It's my fault."

"You actually saw O'Brien do the triggering?"

"Certainly I saw it. After I had paid him five centuries in advance to surrender quietly, too!"

I twitched as if he'd rammed me with a red hot bodkin. "So that's what you meant by a double-cross, eh? You'd slipped this payoff geetus to him ahead of time?"

"Right. Hey, where are you going?"

I snarled: "To put the arm on somebody," and started plunging through the throng. "I'm heading for Lola Lorraine's shanty at the edge of town. Lola O'Brien, I mean. She's married to the guy and he may try to hide out there. You stay here until some law arrives; give them the details." Then, after several yards of hard struggling, I reached Lola's battered bucket; piled in and aimed it for the trail across the mesa.

Luck, more than a sense of direction, helped me to steer a straight course on that unmarked barrenness of cactus and sagebrush. Clattering

in every bolt, the wheezy little jalopy surged ahead; and presently I spotted the tepee I was hunting.

A dim light burned through the front window when I approached. I went to the front door, shoved it open, ankled in without knocking and caught the brunette Lola in the act of putting a street frock on. Her discarded red dance-hall garb was hanging on a wall hook.

"Going somewhere, hon?" I said.

She gasped; got the dress adjusted. "You-you . . .!"

"Yeah. I asked you a question. Going somewhere?"

"To town, y-yes."

"Why?"

"I g-got tired waiting. I was going to walk to Purgatory . . . Tell me, did you find Terry? Did you s-stop him from giving himself up?"

I made a grim mouth. "Quit kidding me. You know what happened in front of the theater."

"What do you m-mean? I don't understand. Did . . . did anything go wrong?"

"In a large way," I said. "Listen. Your precious Terry made his five hundred buck collection in advance. You knew that, didn't you?"

"No! It's a lie. I don't believe it. They never paid him so much as a nickel!"

"Yes they did. And he didn't intend to go through with what he promised; didn't plan to let himself be captured. Once he'd got the geetus, he pulled a double-cross and took a powder. He croaked a guy while doing it."

"Are . . . are you trying to tell me he ran away?" Then the full impact seemed to hit her. "He . . . he *killed* somebody?"



The medicine from that .45 was red-hot and poisonous.

I nodded glumly. "Waldo LaRash."

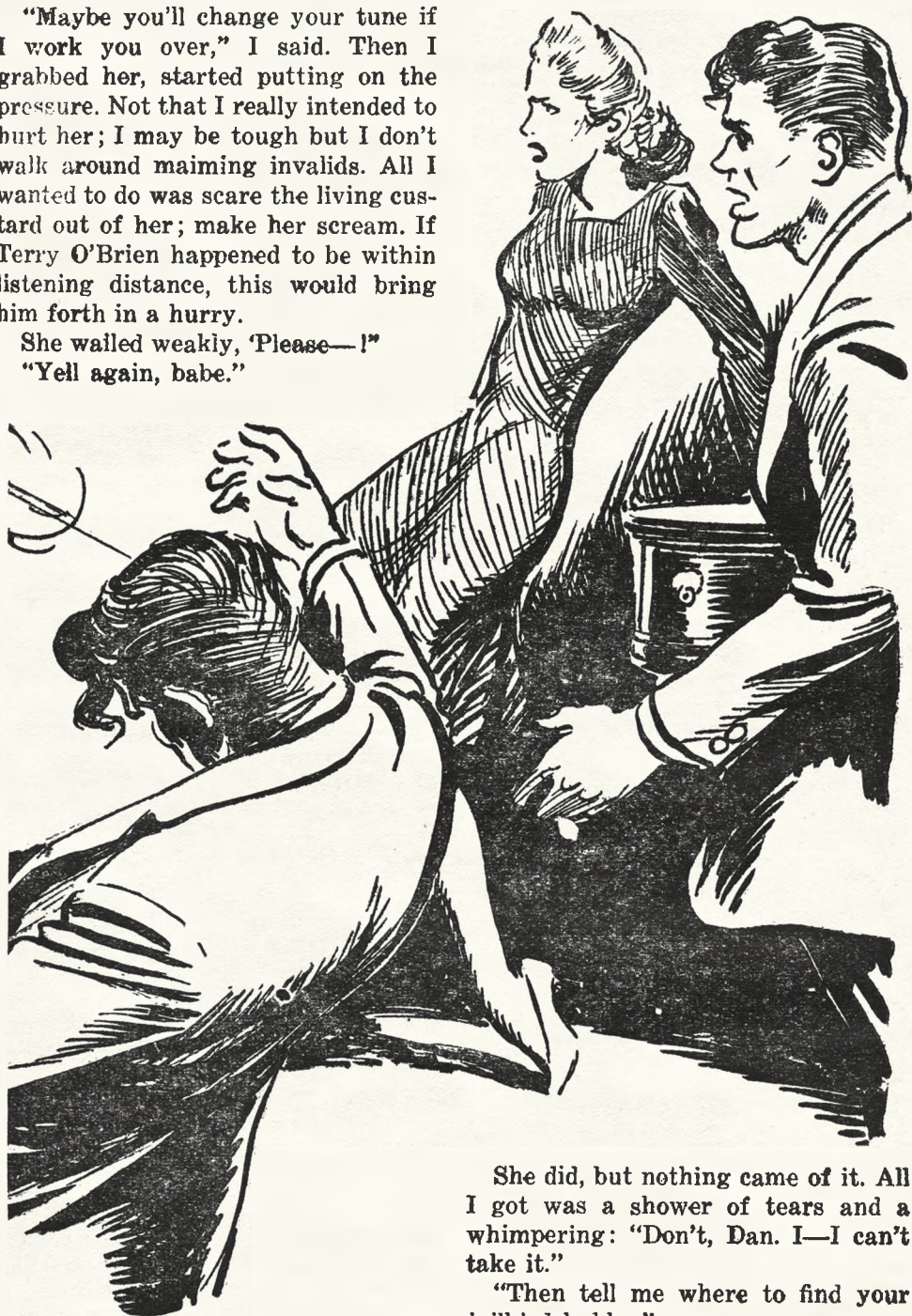
"You're lying! Terry wouldn't—"

"He did, though. And the way I tote it up, he came home to hide. Now trot him out. I want him."

She faced me. "He isn't here. I haven't seen him."

"Maybe you'll change your tune if I work you over," I said. Then I grabbed her, started putting on the pressure. Not that I really intended to hurt her; I may be tough but I don't walk around maiming invalids. All I wanted to do was scare the living custard out of her; make her scream. If Terry O'Brien happened to be within listening distance, this would bring him forth in a hurry.

She wailed weakly, "Please—!"
"Yell again, babe."



She did, but nothing came of it. All I got was a shower of tears and a whimpering: "Don't, Dan. I—I can't take it."

"Then tell me where to find your jailbird hubby."

"I don't know where he is."

"Lay off the stalling. Speak your piece."

"All I know is he didn't murder anybody, he couldn't have . . . because he isn't a killer. And he hadn't been paid any m-money." She quivered in my clutch like a kitten coughing lamb chops. "I was to collect the reward, afterward."

I sneered: "Nuts. The whole thing was a frame and maybe you were in on the deal. It was a stunt to grab off some easy cash and then lam. Possibly O'Brien didn't anticipate having to pistol his way into the clear, but he was ready in case it turned out that way."

"You're wrong! He really intended to give himself up. That was why I sent you the w—*aice-eeek!*"

Whatever she had been going to say, she never finished it. From the shack's side window the glass pane crashed inward and a roscoe thundered: *Blam Blam!* This drove the conversation back down Lola's throat. Where her kisser had been, there was a sudden bright crimson smear. She toppled.

I pivoted. The rod at the window stabbed another yammering streak of flame into the room and I felt a hornet sinking its stinger into my left arm, just above the elbow. Bullet impact knocked me off balance. I fell sideways and accidentally splintered a chair with my noggin. The blow disconnected my fuses.

CHAPTER VI

No Possible Motive

A GUY with a deputy sheriff's star pinned to his vest nudged me awake by trickling a jorum of something nasty past my tonsils. I sput-

tered: "That's the lousiest Scotch I ever gargled. Where's the Vat 69?"

"It's gin," the deputy told me. "And keep quiet. You got a bad bump on your scalp, mister."

He was telling me. It felt as big as a watermelon; throbbed like an ulcerated tooth. I sat up, stared woozily past him and lamped a lot of characters in the cabin, all wearing six-guns and looking ruggedly grim: Lola was stretched on the floor, as dead as canceled postage.

"Hey!" I said.

The deputy indicated my wounded wing. It had been bandaged and somebody had rigged a sling for it. The sling was a bandanna that looped around my neck. He grunted: "You lost a lot of blood, friend. Better save your strength and let me do the talking."

"Okay. Talk, then."

"Yeh, I will. In the first place I want to tell you something. You may be a fireball detective in Hollywood, but here in Arizona your badge don't mean a damn. Got that?"

"You make it plain enough."

"Good," he nodded, shifted his quid. "We got enough law in Purgatory, see? We can handle our own murders; don't need outsiders messing around like you been doing."

I said indignantly: "Messing around, huh? Are you accusing me of responsibility for this?" I copped a rueful gander at the deceased jane.

"I know you didn't gun her," the guy shook his head. "But it might not have happened if you'd let the law handle it instead of trying to be a lone-wolf mastermind."

"How do you figure?"

He went to the busted window; spat a streak of dark brown tobacco squirt-

ing over the countryside. "Well, the way I get it, her husband—this Terry O'Brien—shot Waldo LaRash. Then he came here to start his getaway, or maybe just to hide until morning.

"I go along with you so far," I said.

"Okay. You started questioning the girl and O'Brien was on the outside, listening. He tried to burn you down, only some of his bullets missed you and hit his wife. Now, if you'd brought a posse along with you, we might have caught him before he did the shooting. As it is, Lola's dead and you're wounded and Terry O'Brien is gone."

I WAS on the verge of poking an assortment of holes in his theory; then I thought better of it and buttoned my trap. I knew he was hay-wire, though. The slugs that cooled Lola had definitely been meant for her; they weren't accidental. At the time of the shooting, I'd released her from my grasp and she had crouched away from me on the other side of the joint. If the gunfire had been aimed in my direction, they wouldn't have come anywhere near her.

Therefore her murder was strictly intentional. I, too, had been slated for a casket; but luck had roosted on me so that I merely got a nicked arm and had been erroneously left for dead. Now I was being warned to keep my trumpet out of the affair—and unless I pretended to comply, this deputy might take a sudden notion to heave my suspenders into the local gow on general principles.

Getting jugged was the one thing I craved to avoid. As far as the croaking of Waldo was concerned, I didn't particularly care; but Lola was something else again. She'd been a hell of

a sweet chick; life had handed her some nasty knocks which she hadn't deserved, ending up with murder. Moreover, her killer had likewise tried to cut my strings at the same time; a circumstance that called for copious quantities of revenge. I'm accustomed to a certain amount of pushing around; you get used to it in the private snooping racket. But when some sharp disciple attempts to engrave my vital statistics on the bullet, I like to take steps.

However, I couldn't let the deputy know what I was thinking. He wanted me to lay off—or else. So I said: "Okay, pal. From now on it's in your lap. I'm out of it."

He helped me upright. "That's more like it. I'll have one of my boys take you to the hotel. The rest of us will start on the prowl for O'Brien; reckon we'll catch him before morning if we have any luck with us."

I told him I wouldn't need anybody to take me to town. "I can drive with one hand," I said. I proved this by going out to Lola's tin lizzie and whooshing it toward Purgatory.

STEVE BANNERTON was the guy I had to find. I craved to ask him for some more details regarding his deal with the O'Brien lammister. If it proved to be true that O'Brien had collected five hundred buttons in advance for submitting to arrest at the premiere, part of the puzzle might mesh into place. It might indicate that O'Brien had got cold feet at the last minute and burned his way to freedom with the lettuce rather than be shipped back to a Georgia chain gang.

Still, though, there were certain angles that bothered me. If the es-

(Continued on page 88)

Dan Turner - HOLLYWOOD DETECTIVE

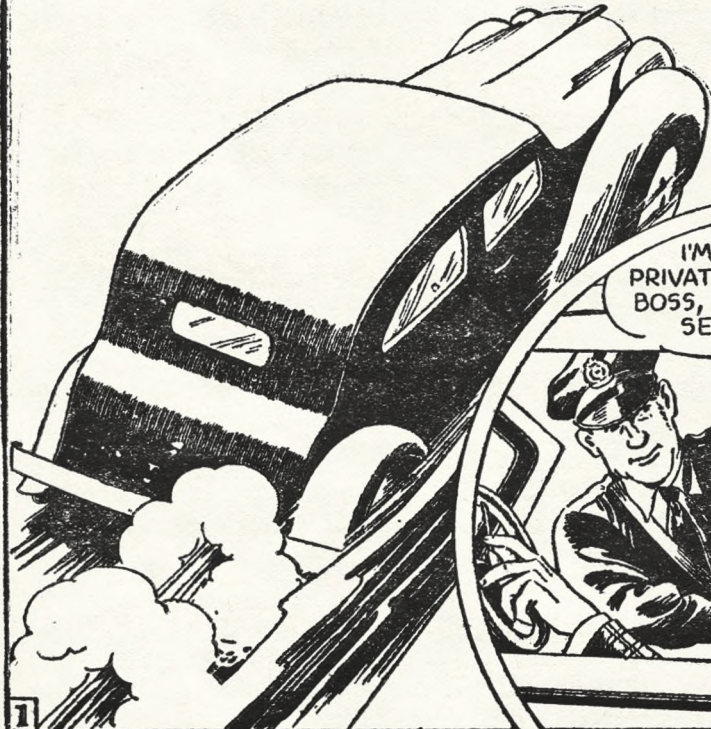
"CORPSE
FROM THE
SKY"

Story by
R. L. BELLEM
—
Pictures by
A. BARREAU

TURNER ARRIVES
AT THE
PARATONE LOT
IN RESPONSE
TO A HURRY-UP
PHONE CALL.

PARATONE STUDIOS

HALT!
WHAT'S YOUR
RUSH?



I'M DAN TURNER,
PRIVATE SNOOP. THE BIG-
BOSS, ANDY WHITE, JUST
SENT FOR ME.



PRESENTLY, TURNER FINDS WHITE, THE STUDIO PRESIDENT, ON A WESTERN STREET SET.

THANK GOODNESS YOU'RE HERE, DAN. WE'RE BEING SHAKEN DOWN FOR TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS.

YIPE! TELL ME THE SCORE.

IT'S A NEW FORM OF THE OLD "PROTECTION" RACKET. HERE'S AN ANONYMOUS LETTER I RECEIVED.

MR. WHITE -
UNLESS YOU PAY
TWO HUNDRED GRAND
YOUR STARS WILL
BEGIN TO DIE OFF.
WATCH OUT FOR
CORPSES FROM
THE SKY
X.Y.Z.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN, CORPSES FROM THE SKY --?

I DON'T KNOW. SOMEBODY PHONED ME TODAY AND SAID MY STARS WOULD FALL FROM HEAVEN UNLESS I PAID OFF. I REFUSED. NOW I'M SCARED.

YOU WANT ME TO FIND THE LETTER WRITER, HUNH?

YES - AND PUT HIM IN JAIL.

HEY - MR. WHITE!

BEN TOLMAN, AN ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, COMES UP WITH NEWS.

NANCY KIMBLE IS MISSING FROM SOUND STAGE 'B', SIR.

WHY, SHE'S OUR MOST DEPENDABLE STAR! SHE NEVER IS LATE FOR A CAMERA CALL!



ISN'T NANCY YOUR SWEETIE, TOLMAN?

SHE USED TO BE, BUT THAT ENDED LONG-AGO... AND IT'S NONE OF YOUR AFFAIR.



TURNER'S QUESTIONS ARE INTERRUPTED BY THE ARRIVAL OF CURLY BLAIR, HEAD OF THE SCENERY DEPARTMENT...

DID YOU SEND FOR ME, SIR?

NÖ - YOU'VE MADE A MISTAKE.



SUDDENLY, A HIDEOUS THING HAPPENS!

AIEE-EE-EEK!

GOOD HEAVENS! IT'S NANCY KIMBLE!

DROPPING FROM THE SKY!!!



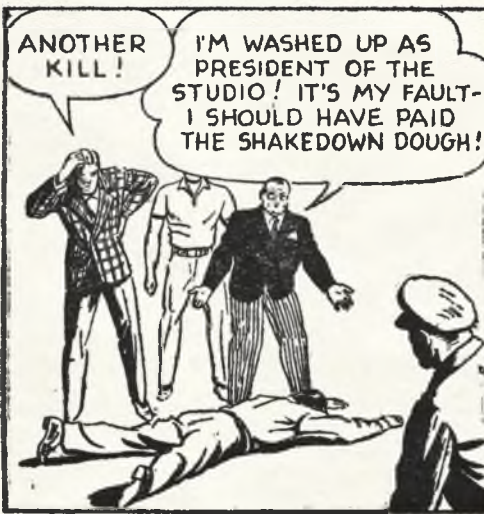
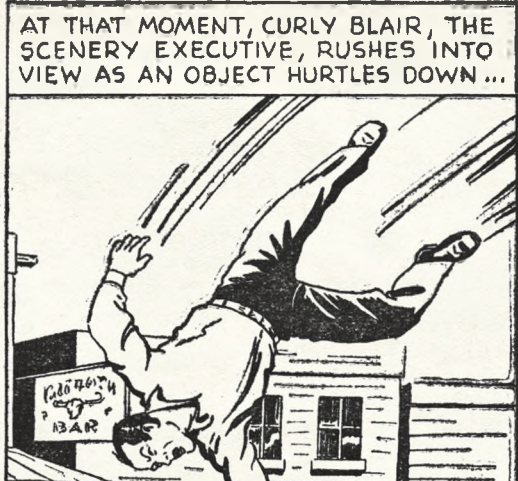


TURNER PHONES DONALDSON AT HEADQUARTERS.



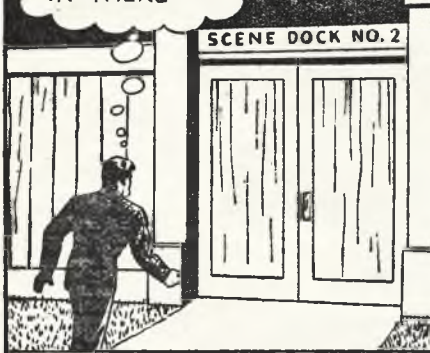
DONALDSON SOON ARRIVES IN HIS OFFICIAL SEDAN.





TURNER, SUSPICIOUS OF BLAIR, SNOOPS AROUND THE SCENERY CHIEF'S DEPARTMENT...

WONDER WHAT'S IN THERE ---



HOLY SMOKE! IT'S A GIANT SLINGSHOT PROP FROM SOME ROMAN WAR PIC!



WHAT THE DEVIL IS THAT?

WHITE SUDDENLY APPEARS WITH A ROSCOE...

FREEZE, PHILO. YOU'VE LEARNED TOO MUCH!



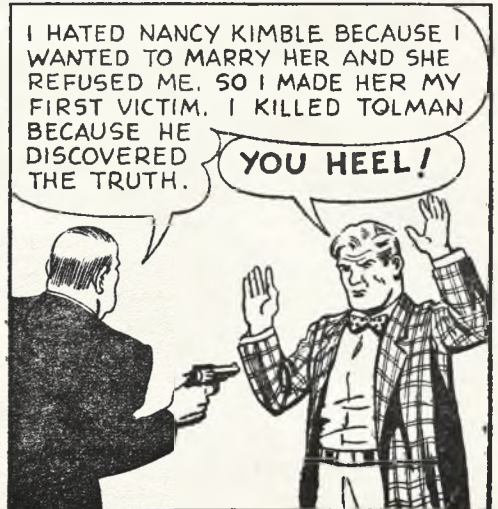
SO YOU'RE THE SHAKEDOWN ARTIST AND MURDERER!

YES, I'M DUE TO BE FIRED SO I DECIDED TO SQUEEZE TWO HUNDRED GRAND FROM THE COMPANY.



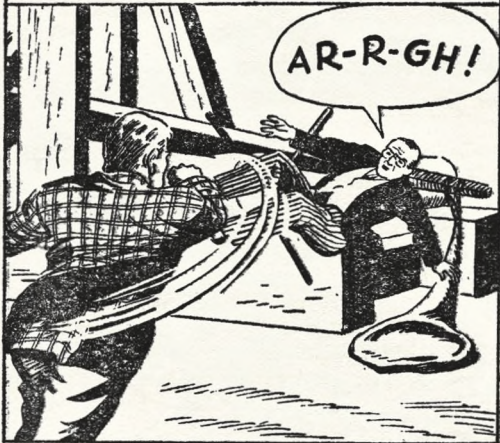
I HATED NANCY KIMBLE BECAUSE I WANTED TO MARRY HER AND SHE REFUSED ME. SO I MADE HER MY FIRST VICTIM. I KILLED TOLMAN BECAUSE HE DISCOVERED THE TRUTH.

YOU HEEL!

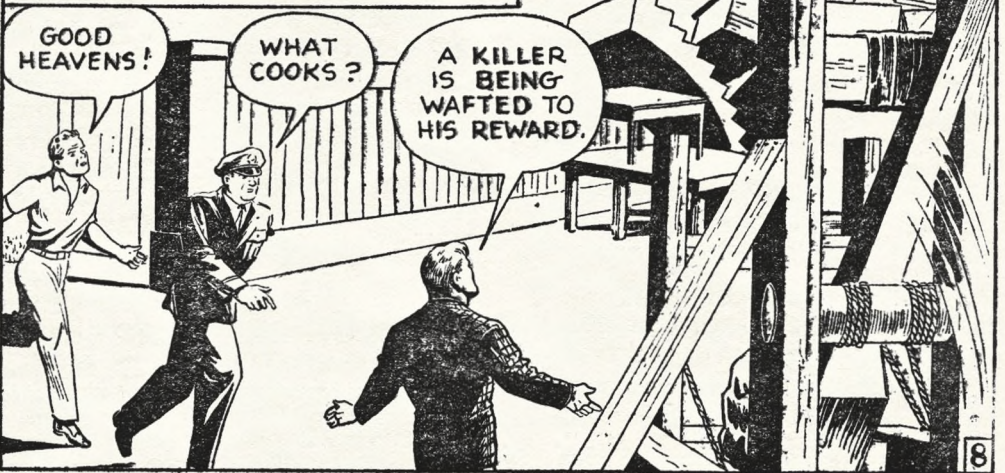




TURNER BOPS WHITE AND KNOCKS HIM ONTO THE CATAPULT ---



DONALDSON AND BLAIR RACE TO THE SCENE



• • Prescription

Lydia was a snob, and she'd have nothing to do with Hank, but he couldn't get over her beauty. When it looked as if she'd been kidnaped, he saw his golden opportunity. . . .



EVEN if he did expect something like it, the snub rankled deeply in Elmer Henry Royce's long-suffering soul. What made him boil even more than her snobbery was that

he couldn't entirely conceal his chagrin, and he knew that she observed it. He gave her a short nod, tweaked the sopping brim of his hat, and said politely, "Sorry."

For Death

By R. T. MAYNARD

His voice was level enough, but he had spoken through clenched teeth and his compressed lips showed how angry he was. In the drumming downpour he turned his back on her and in five stiff-legged strides made the return trip across the sidewalk to the place

where he had been waiting.

For almost twenty minutes he had been waiting for Miss Lydia Monroe in the rain; being a sucker for punishment he could wait a few minutes longer, till her bus or street car came, because this was the last he was ever



going to see of her willingly, so help him! So long, Lydia. If the self-sufficient, arrogant, untouchable little snob ever got into a jam where she needed friends, he hoped it would be one large double-barreled jam in which she would find herself utterly alone, just the way she wanted to be.

Of course, he had brought this mood of seething gloom on himself; it was an infantile thing to do, get wet waiting for her in the rain to offer her a ride home in his car; likewise, it was ingloriously sophomoric to get angry because she refused a courtesy from an individual to whom she had never addressed more than a dozen words. She didn't want to know him; he had never run into anyone like her before and resented being put in his place. She was batty. When she could have a comfortable, dry ride home, she preferred to stay out in the rain like the common herd and get her feet wet just for the principle of the thing.

A cruising hack swung in toward the curb, the driver craning at least eight inches of neck alongside his meter to gander hopefully at her. Lydia shook her head positively and retreated a few short steps to avoid getting splashed. The hack lunged ahead into the downpour.

THE rain was coming down vertically in a steady plunge; the long drops beat on Hank's hatbrim like a tattoo of fingertips. Lydia returned to the curb, peered up the street for her bus. She was holding an umbrella made of oiled silk, on which the fat drops of rain burst and drifted off in a cloud like steam. Slim and engagingly boyish, she stood with her legs close together, feet, ankles, calves, knees and with her elbows bent and

pressed to her sides, making herself as compact as possible. Her white hand held the umbrella in an unintentionally affected pose, as though she were about to take a sip from a cocktail.

Beneath her sleek, smart violet dress was the vigor of youth expressed in haunting curves. Her face had a rotogravure quality about it, more arresting than beautiful, composed with delicate, aristocratic reserve. Her mouth was somewhat wide, flawlessly rouged, and it was his first glance at her mouth, which Hank considered most important in judging character, that decided him that here was a girl whom he wanted more than anything else in the world.

Though she called herself Lydia Welsh ("I want to lead a useful life. . . . I hate publicity. . . . I want to yet a job in an office, and have to get awakened by an alarm clock, and be like other girls"), she was still Lydia Monroe herself. The streamlined dress was typical; so were the sheer stockings, which were wet up to the fully rounded calves; the stockings were the glamor-girl kind, and, when they got wet, the red in them was brought out, making them look like a coat of sunburn. Plus the straw hat, which was an original model, and the shoes, and underthings whose quality Hank could guess at, her outfit represented close to three months of the salary she was getting. All the heiress was doing by mingling with the common herd was depriving some kid of a needed job.

DOWN the avenue at a speed easily twice the limit came a thunderbolt, a lean, long, resplendent black sedan that looked as though it were trying to make the traffic light two

blocks down. It careened unexpectedly, started to skid, straightened out, and then hurtled in along the curb to come to a violent stop a couple of car-lengths past Lydia.

The gutter was running with water to a depth not much below the curb-level. A looping wave of the muddy water soared fantastically out of the gutter and hit Lydia with an enveloping smash. The shock of it affected her like the slap of a giant hand, almost knocking her down. She dropped the umbrella and it rolled away crazily, bouncing on the points of its ribs.

Some of the splash burst on Hank's trouser legs and the skirt of his trench coat. He took an angry step in the direction of the parked sedan, then backed into the partial protection of his doorway, Lydia couldn't have been more thoroughly soaked if she had jumped into the river. Grinning sardonically Hank watched her make the distance to the car with long strides that were masculine and purposeful. This was what she got for rejecting his kind offer, and the taste of it was blissful, smug-making.

Before she got to the sedan, the rear door opened; out into the beating rain stepped a man in a gray cloth raincoat and homburg. He had a wrinkled face, set features with a nose like a carrot-end, black eyebrows contrasting with white hair. He had a black moustache, and very bright gray eyes. Hank took notice of details because he had a habit of noticing things.

"Oh!" Lydia exclaimed. "Oh, so it's you, Mr. Cromwell! You saw me standing there, didn't you?"

"Yes, my dear," Cromwell said. "I—"

"Look what you've done! You old

goat!" she cried furiously. "My new dress! I could just bawl!"

Cromwell raised a meaty hand to his face and coughed apologetically behind it. "I'm terribly sorry, Lydia," he said gently. "It was raining so hard, and I only wanted to give you a ride home. I had no idea the chauffeur would swing in like that." He bent his head to manufacture a few more coughs. He had a cold, and Lydia was going to start sneezing any minute.

"Where are your brains?" she demanded. "Do you think I'd be standing on the curb in this weather if I wanted a ride from you or anybody else? I don't want a ride! I go home on the bus!"

Cromwell coughed, remonstrated mildly, "But Lydia, you're all wet."

"Wet!" she shrieked. "I'm practically drowned!" And she was getting wetter by the minute. Her straw hat had collapsed and a couple of strings of hair were glued to her neck. She was so mad that she was going to take a poke at the unlucky Cromwell in a jiffy, thought the watching, grinning detective.

"But you can't go home in a public conveyance now," Cromwell objected. "It—it would be indecent." He coughed again, indicated with an inclusive glance the Monroe curves, emphasized by the wet, clinging dress; if she took a bus or streetcar there would be a riot on it.

But she shouted, "What do I care! If anyone wants to gawp, let him gawp!"

"I can't allow it," Cromwell coughed protestingly. "Lydia, I must insist on your getting into the car."

She looked up the street, where the bus was coming along at last, at a crawl; she saw Hank grinning at her

from his doorway, snapped an angry glare at him and turned back to Cromwell. "All right," she told him grimly. "But I'll tell you this. The first thing I'm going to do is get a new lawyer."

She struck aside the helping hand he offered her and entered the car. Her skirt hobbled unexpectedly, and she fell on her knees, scrambled up and planted herself violently on the outer end of the seat.

Before following her inside Cromwell hauled open the front door and addressed the chauffeur, who had been sitting at the wheel with stony indifference all this while.

"You stupid oaf!" Cromwell swore at him. "Why did you swing in? Can't you see the gutter's almost flush with water?"

"I didn't do it on purpose," the chauffeur told him bluntly. "We started to skid, and I had to swing in to bring her out of it."

"Don't talk back to me!" Cromwell thundered. "Whose fault was it that we started to skid in the first place?"

"You told me to stop!" said the chauffeur.

"Shut up!" Cromwell bellowed. "Start looking for a new job, and don't expect any recommendation from me, either!"

"Keep your shirt on, chief," the chauffeur advised him. "Jobs ain't so hard to get as you think."

Cromwell was so dumfounded that he couldn't speak, hurled the door shut. He climbed into the rear, and that door also closed with a slam. The car crawled forward, plowing aside widening sheets of water as it accelerated.

Hank sighed, and with a shrug muttered, "Well, that's that."

CHAPTER II

An Old School Friend

HE made his trench coat snigger around his neck, and abruptly his attention was jerked back to Cromwell's sedan. Half a block down, the door on Lydia's side popped open. Through the streaming window he saw her step out onto the running board, twist; her legs kicked out as she was yanked back inside, the door shut. The car wavered in its course as though the chauffeur had looked around to see what was going on. Accelerating, the machine became a projectile which bored ahead to vanish in the record rain, which was falling unabated.

At the curb in front of Hank was a parked car. In it was a man who had grinned mockingly at Hank when he failed to pick up Lydia, and had feasted his eyes on her after the drenching episode. Hank crossed the sidewalk on the jump and yanked open the door. He started to pile in, giving the order, "Quick! Follow that car!"

"Go to hell, buddy," said the man calmly.

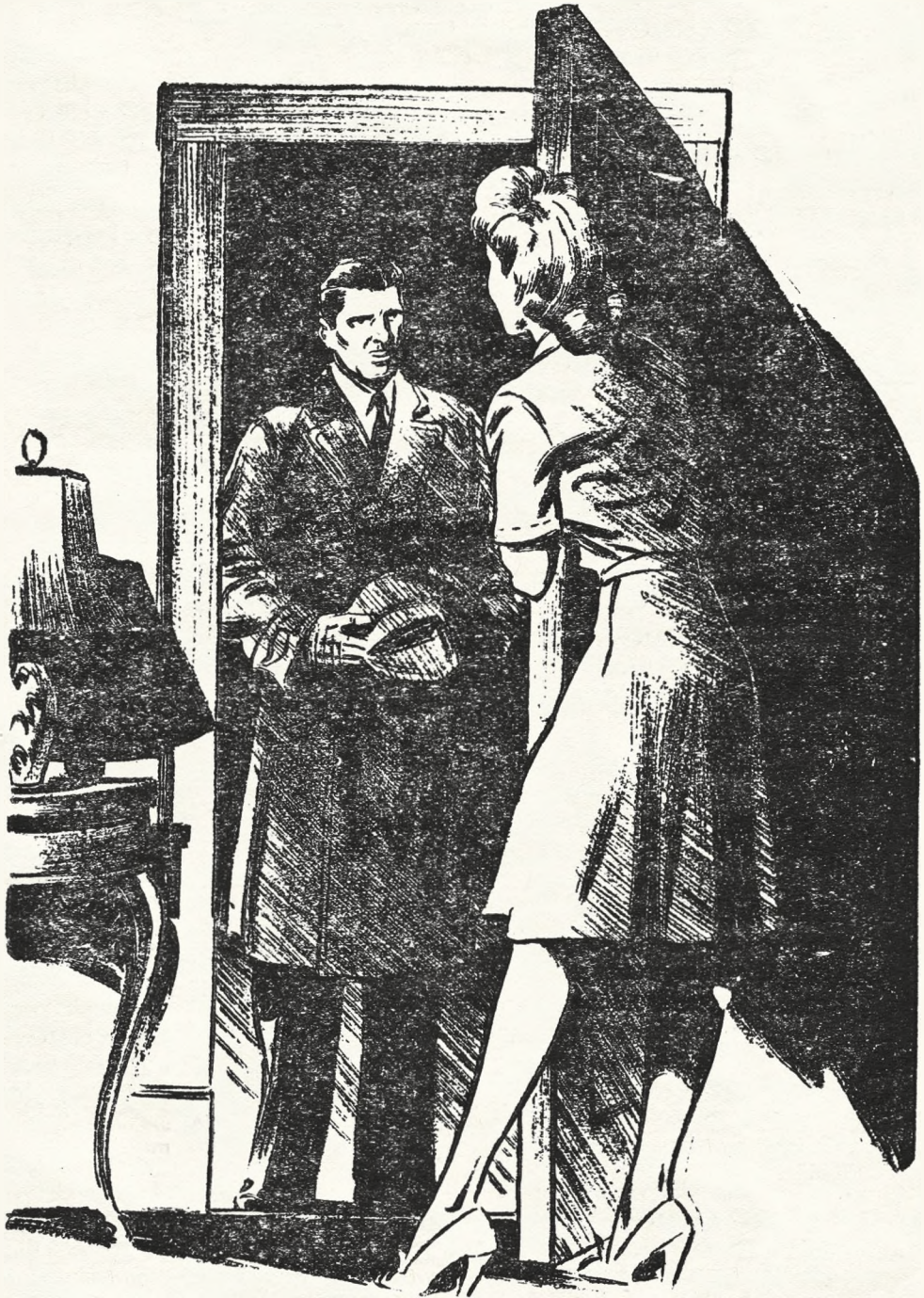
"I tell you there's something wrong!" Hank ejaculated. "That girl's in trouble!"

He was asked skeptically, "Oh, yeah? I don't s'pose she'd be in no trouble if you picked her up, huh?"

Hank felt a yearning to commit mayhem, but holding his temper for once he inquired with exaggerated politeness, "Okay, brother; got a pencil?"

It was too late to give chase to Cromwell's car now.

"What's it to yuh?" the stranger retorted insolently.



"Lydia'll be back in a minute. Won't you come in?" she asked.

"A guy like you ought to get his face pushed in," Hank decided.

The man chuckled balefully. "Well, sonny, maybe you'd like to try it," he invited. He shifted around in his seat as though he were going to get out. "You're letting the rain in. I don't know what kind of smart game you're trying to work, but if you don't shut that door damned fast you're gunna get both feet in the guts."

"I'd just as soon; it smells around here," said Hank through his teeth. He flung the door shut briskly; cursing under his breath he hiked around the corner to his own car, the nearest he had been able to park because of this heel blocking the way. He didn't forget faces, and he certainly wouldn't forget that guy's—the neckless, bullet head with the crease under the knob of chin, the round eyes crowding the squatty nose, the slash of mouth, the flesh as white as goose fat. Hank meant what he said about the smell. It was a hospital odor, made rank and gagging by the uncommonly wet air, soured by the stench of stale cigar smoke besides.

Hank entered his car, shut the door and fished irritably through the junk in the dash compartment for a pencil. In general he had a reliable memory, but among the things which baffled him were numbers and dates; that there was something funny going on he had no doubt, and he wanted to get down the license number of Cromwell's car before he forgot it. The number was low, B-1492. He had tried various methods of fixing numbers in his mind, like association, with uneven luck; added up, 1492 was sixteen, and six and one were seven, which was a lucky number and a cinch, but the chances were he'd never break it down

again into its component parts. Then he shut the compartment with elaborate caution and hitched across the seat to the wheel. He didn't find a pencil, but it occurred to him that 1492 was the year Columbus discovered America, and that certainly was a date he could remember. As long as he didn't get it mixed up with 1066, 1812, 1914, or an outside chance of A.D. 79, he was all right.

"My God, Royce!" he scorned himself, and yanked the car into gear.

HE drove slowly through downtown Redboro with no immediate destination in mind, asking himself whether he was just an excited gunsel or not. George Cromwell was the Monroe lawyer and would be the last person in the world to commit himself to assault. Therefore, if there was no funny business afoot he would have delivered Lydia to her place in ten minutes of ordinary driving. Lydia had left the Monroe mansion and taken an apartment by herself in the shabby West Side, part of her scheme of adopting a straphanger existence; there was no point in Hank's going down there to hang around.

He pulled up near the marquee of the Suit Yourself, a barn of a night-club where some of the damndest things went on, intending to kill the interval with a drink. Only the homely old walnut bar, covered with cigarette burns, initials, and dates, was in use at this time, and the waiters, in a variety of uniforms running from a simple butcher's apron to a handsome outfit which closely resembled that of the state troopers, hung around among the tables in readiness for the imminent evening trade. Prices were high and the bar didn't attract many

flies during the day, but the liquor was worth Hank's money.

The checkroom girl was a lass who called herself Candy, for Candace, and her last name was Rogers but wasn't used much. She had soft, succulent hair the warm yellow of ripe corn kernels shaved right off the cob and lips like live ruby. For tonight she wore a creation that made Hank comment, "Holy smokes! Why don't you go get yourself arrested?"

The blonde was reading a magazine, propped with her forearms on the counter. She pressed a pointed fingernail into the magazine under a line of type and languidly raised her head.

"Hello, gumshoe." Her winey lips smiled, and her eyes, made up with the lashes as soft and suggestive as velvet, stroked him down to his wet shoes and back up again to his grin. "What are you working on now?"

"It's a kidnaping," he divulged.

"Oh, really? Who could it be?"

"Candace Rogers," he stated "You. For months and months I've been figuring how to snag you out of there. Do you really like it, or are you kidding me?"

"You're kidding yourself, Hank."

"Maybe I am." So far as he knew, she couldn't be reached in any way; she was tantalizing, one of the main reasons why the Suit Yourself drew the best money in the city. Hank asked, "Hoat and cat?"

"Nell ho," said Candy. "How did you get all wet like that? Hock your car?"

"I'm getting there. Just a matter of time."

"You're dripping all over the carpet," she remarked. "You'd better chip in."

"Just to be candid," Hank sug-

gested, "I'd like to buy you a drink sometime. Know what I mean?"

"Chip in and go away," Candy ordered. "I'm reading."

"Nuts an' bolts," said Hank. He spun a half dollar toward her; she caught it on the first ringing bounce deftly, dropped it through a slot in the counter and returned to her magazine.

Hank walked in to the bar and hung his foot on the rail, ordered. Candy had to lean far out to see him and appraise him. He was a tall, lean person very little under six feet if he wasn't over, and altogether likable. He drank, talked as though he knew what was going on, as yet hadn't made any passes at her though he had had a few opportunities. She couldn't quite make him out, in view of the fact that all men were mauling drunks, with an allowance for a percentage of sissies otherwise.

She didn't know which was worse, the souse or the other kind, but Hank Royce was the best bet she had taken a tin from so far.

He gave Cromwell a liberal ten minutes, then phoned Lydia's place. When the bell at the other end had rung five times, he hung up and returned to the bar. He had another daiquiri, nursed it while he smoked two cigarettes. A full half hour after he last saw Lydia he called her place again and listened to five rings. No answer. Hanging up he dialed the number of the Monroe residence.

A MAID answered and he asked for Lydia. After a pause Mrs. Monroe came to the phone. She had a hard, level voice with something of the nakedness of bone about it.

"Is Lydia there?" he asked.

*His heels sledged against
the man's knobby jaw.*



"Who is speaking, please?" she asked crustily.

"A friend of hers."

The crash in the diaphragm deafened his ear for a moment. He found another nickel and called back, got the bony voice immediately. "You didn't give me a chance," he said. "My name is E. Henry Royce, and I'd like to speak to Lydia."

"She has never spoken of you," the old lady snapped.

"That's beside the point," Hank retorted. "Is she there?"

"No, she is not."

"Now we're getting somewhere. I think she's in trouble, Mrs. Monroe."

"What do you mean?"

It began to sound a little silly. "Well," he hedged, "how do you feel about that lawyer of yours, Cromwell?"

"What are you talking about?" she asked irritably.

"Lydia tried to get out of his car, and it looked as though he socked her in the jaw." That was using his imagination a little. "She's not at her apartment, and she's not with you, and she's as wet as a drowned turkey, so where is she?"



"May I ask what difference it makes to you?"

Hank jumped in with both feet. "I think," quoth he, "that she's been kidnaped."

"Really?" she asked sarcastically. "When is this supposed to have occurred?"

"About a half hour ago." Something

in her voice made him feel like a simpleton.

"Well, Mr. Royce or whatever your name is," she said in her rigid, caustic voice, "I talked with my daughter a few moments ago and she did not mention being struck on the jaw or anywhere else. I would advise you not to go around slandering men like Mr. Cromwell, or you'll find yourself in some of the trouble you appear to be looking for."

Came another smash in the diaphragm that made Hank jump. He hung up, called Lydia again. No answer. Something was fishy. The first thing a girl does when she is caught in the rain is go home and change into dry clothes; she had had plenty of time to reach her mother's, with her own apartment the more logical choice. Of course, there was a chance that she was in the shower or something and didn't hear the phone ring, or she might be quarreling with Cromwell yet in his car. The lawyer wouldn't want to lose the Monroe business just through Lydia's childish vindictiveness.

The latter possibility Hank discarded; briefly through the rear window of Cromwell's speeding sedan he had seen a blur of struggling forms; there had been a flash of white which might have been anything, and then the window was empty. Helped by his imagination, Hank saw Cromwell jerk Lydia back into the car when she opened the door, wrestle with her, belt her on the jaw and then put her down on the floor out of sight.

HANK called Cromwell's hotel and was told that the lawyer was not in; he called Cromwell's office, and a girl gave him the same information;

he left no message. It was remarkable that Lydia hadn't mentioned the lawyer when she talked to her mother, when she was so angry. Anger didn't cool off fast when it was her kind. If she had phoned from her apartment, she might be there now, and he might find Cromwell, along with some reasons. He bought a third drink, walked out to the checkroom and set it on the counter without spilling a drop.

"Here," he said.

"I told you I don't drink." Candy's indolent eyes lifted to his face.

"I'm checking it," he said. "What do you think I gave you that half dollar for?"

"Oh." Gingerly she placed the drink on a shelf and handed him a stub. While pocketing it he stared at her. She snapped, "Well, now that you've got it what are you going to do with it?"

Hank shook his head and clucked with regret, walked out. Candy looked after him with a flush stealing up her throat into her cheeks. It was as though he had said, "When you're so beautiful, how can you be so dumb?" Dumb about what? Of course, checking the drink was just a gag; people did things like that in the Suit Yourself; but he might have meant something by it and she didn't get it.

Outside, the rain had stopped but the heavy clouds had a soupy greenish cast that Hank could almost taste in the saturated air. The thunder of more rain boomed sullenly miles off in the west, and a wicked violet rivulet of lightning wriggled through the slowly tumbling murk in that direction. Hank climbed back into his car. It was as dark as night already and following the example of others he turned his lights on.

As he jabbed the motor into life with the starter button and put the car in gear, he reflected that there were only two women who had given him heart-wobbles so far, and he hadn't succeeded in exciting the least interest in either of them. First there was Candy with her beauty and—probably—no brains, and getting a whopping salary if she didn't own the checking concession. Then there was Lydia, who had lithe, boyish beauty and brains besides, not to speak of her inherited wealth.

All Hank had was his leanness, with a lean handsomeness of features, and his wits. Being masculine he liked women, but all he had to show for it was the nagging anger of failure to get either of the ones he wanted.

HE didn't realize that he had been driving so fast. Down among the tangled, guttery streets of the West Side, this one unpaved, he dropped his right wheels into a stony ditch and climbed an uneven boulevard, throwing water and reddish mud across the weedy grass. There was iron in the soil. No curb; only a single lane of cracked cement slabs for a sidewalk.

Taking only one step on the spongy turf he leaped to the walk, continued up another single lane of cement squares to the porch of an old mansion that had been converted into cheap apartments. The air was oppressive, suffocating. From the flagstoned porch he looked back at the street. On the boulevard in front of the third house down the lowest branch of a huge elm had broken off and lay across the muddy street. Up on the boulevard close to another tree, a car length in front of Hank's car, was a sedan whose fenders were spattered with the red-

dish mud. The street was desolate with unpainted houses, a few sagging roofs. The wood was as rotten as it looked. A hell of a place for a girl like Lydia to live. There were individual mail-boxes by the door, but no bells. He had been in this district several times and knew which apartment was Lydia's. A glance, when he hurried up the walk, had found her curtained windows on the second floor lighted. Somebody was home.

The unattainable Lydia. She had never given him a tumble, not once. His next move should have been to return to his car and go back to the Suit Yourself. That was why he had checked the drink with Candy, to tell her that he was coming back; these last few times he thought he had detected a brightening gleam of interest in her bonnie blue ee; she was the only girl left worth working on, and she was softening a little bit.

And here he stood like a kid, undecided. Cromwell's car wasn't around, and therefore Lydia was probably at home alone and everything was all right.

"What the hell, Royce!" he snarled audibly. "Get it over with!"

He pushed the front door open and was half way up the carpeted staircase before it closed with a dull slam. He hiked down the second floor hallway and rapped with his knuckles on her door. Footsteps approached on the other side of the door, a bolt was thrown and the door opened. In the lighted aperture stood a girl he had never seen before, and he stared blankly. She smiled.

"Lydia here?" he asked.

She shook her head, still with all that fun in her smile. "She'll be back in a minute. Won't you come in?"

Royce hesitated, made up his mind and stepped into the living room. He glanced at the floor, the rug was a heavy Oriental and he couldn't tell with the brief look whether water had dripped on it or not. Bright, complicated design.

He grinned, prompting, "I don't think I've met you."

SHE closed the door by backing it against the wall and responded gaily, "I'm Margaret Kane. I'm taking Lydia's apartment here."

"Oh, are you?" This was something.

"She's leaving tonight, as I suppose you know. She's taking a furnished place for a while and didn't want to store all these things. Aren't they beautiful?"

"They certainly are," Hank agreed, taking a swift look around. This was the living room, a large room sumptuously appointed with big leather pieces, mirrors, the priceless rug on the floor. When Lydia had turned working girl, she had raided the family castle. Damned little hypocrite.

"We used to go to school together," Miss Kane offered, smiling.

"Did we?" Hank asked, startled.

"Lydia and I." She burst out laughing. "I don't think I remember you."

"Call me Hank," he said.

"Call me Peggy," she responded promptly.

He eyed her with increasing interest. She was a big girl, well-proportioned, and she sounded bright. She used a light rouge on her lips, giving them the appearance of coral, and her eyes were an unusual light blue. Her eyes sparkled intriguingly with mischief.

"Would you like a drink while you wait, Hank?"

"I think I could use one, Peggy."

His eyes followed the athletic grace with which she moved to a coffee table, on which stood a tray of bottles, behind them a rack of glasses. She wasn't bumpy anywhere, but he could bet she was stronger than a lot of men he knew. When she bent over, she stood solidly with her feet a little apart like a man, suggesting that she had done a lot of exercise in her young life, probably had gone in for athletics at school in a big way.

She sat down on the lounge back of the table after pouring a couple of glasses, patted the cushion and invited, "Take your coat off and sit down a while."

"That sounds like a good idea." Hank stripped off the wet trench coat, folded it inside out and draped it on a chair with his hat. He sat down on the lounge beside the girl, shoulder to shoulder. The shoulder business was her doing; her hand touched him gently for support as she reached for his glass and gaye it to him, and he liked that.

"When will Lydia be back?" he asked.

"Well," Peggy confessed, "I'm not really sure. She was worked up about something, and said she might go to a show." She laughed. "You're not very flattering, are you?"

Her lips were close, and actions always did speak louder than words. When he kissed her she didn't draw away, rather leaned toward him just a little.

"No wonder Lydia never told me about you," she said. "You're nice." Her breath was warm and friendly against his cheek; promptly she put a forefinger under his glass and lifted it a trifle. Hank took the drink down

in one swallow and set the glass on the table, with Peggy following suit.

His arm was on the back of the lounge; Peggy leaned back into the curve of it and he slipped it naturally about her waist. He was telling himself that he wasn't very resourceful at making conversation but he didn't have to be.

The scent she wore was clean and delicate, reminding him elusively of someone or some past episode. She was all invitation, so much so that the thing was suspicious; a fleeting shadow in his eyes told her.

"You're not afraid of Lydia, are you?" she asked. Her inflection was a nice blend of jeering and anxiety.

"Not at all," he declared honestly.

CHAPTER III

"Somebody's Crazy!"

THE sudden knowledge that this whole set-up was wrong made him release her, but it was too late. Her arms turned to steel and locked tightly around him. There had been no warning, but his animal instinct still functioned, if somewhat tardily.

He whipped about to face her, and bucked to get on his feet; the toes of his shoes skidded on the rug, getting no purchase, and at the same time she brought her knee up violently.

Behind him a man said, "Okay; drop him."

Peggy continued the knee action and Hank tumbled to the floor, doubled up and groaning.

"Mighty nice," the familiar voice complimented her, as Peggy jumped to her feet. She kicked Hank in the back.

"He's just a kid," she said con-



She would have been an easy shot, but he let her get away.

temptuously, and gave a little bubbling laugh that had murder in it.

"Get up, Royce," the man ordered.

All Hank could see was the shoes,

but he recognized the nasty voice of the fellow whom he had accosted to chase Cromwell's car. For the moment it didn't surprise him that he had been

addressed by name. In reply to the command he let out an excruciating groan.

"Get up, smart boy," the nasty voice ordered, and the owner let fly with a kick that glanced from Hank's skull to his shoulder, making him tingle to his heels. He lay still, letting himself relax with his cheek against the rug.

"Now you've knocked him out," Peggy said calmly. "What took you so long?"

"Some kid in the phone booth was arguing with his sweetheart," the gunman sneered. Gunman. Hank had had just a glimpse of the heavy automatic the man held.

"Well, Rugog, what did you find out?"

Rugog. There was a name! It was unusual, and in Hank's mental file of underworld characters the name of Jack Rugog was easily remembered. Suspect in a murder case.

"Doc says everything's okay at the other end. All we gotta do now is take this snoop for a ride and we're through."

"I kind of hate to, at that; he's a nice looking boy, Rugog," she said hesitantly.

"Lay off of that, Kane," Rugog ordered curtly. "What would you do with him, keep him around for a pet?"

"You're sure he's the right one?"

"Hell yes; he pulled the door of the jalopy open and tried to bum me for a pencil. He's this private dick Royce, works for the McGowan outfit that showed up the cops on that big jewel robbery. And he ain't such a kid as you think; he's poison; I heard he's the one that killed two of the boys in the ambush. Only it wasn't no ambush. This kid just walked right into the

joint and started shooting, and that's what brung the cops."

"If he's as tough as all that, what are you waiting for?" she asked skeptically. "Anyone who falls for a pair of legs the way he does can't be so tough."

"I like a pair of legs myself, baby. And I'm waiting for him to come to so he can walk out of here under his own steam."

"What are we supposed to do with him?"

"Doc didn't say. Don't matter. When I was coming across the bridge I seen a piece of road washed out down by the river, and I guess we crack him over the dome and run him off there in his car. That'll look natural."

"You'd better get his gun. He's got one," she said. "I felt it."

"Yeah; you was doing all right." There was a leer in Rugog's voice.

A COUPLE of heavy treads took Rugog to the seemingly slumbering detective. Hank felt a heavy hand on his injured shoulder, and he was flipped over on his back.

"Ain't he cute," said Rugog, "all smeared up with rouge like that? Looks as though he's been eating strawberries."

"What do you suppose he wanted a pencil for?" she asked.

"How do I know? Probably just a gag."

It was now or never, Hank thought. He couldn't tell exactly where Rugog was standing, had to take a chance. Peggy had put on a good act, played him for a sucker. So had Hank put on a good act of playing blotto. Now he popped his eyes open, jackknifing all his lanky sinew simultaneously with all the power he could put into it.

Rugog was just bending over; his ugly pan was placid, and not a trace of surprise showed in his goose-fat features. It was as fast as that, but to Hank it was a grotesque business performed in slow motion. For leverage his arms were rigid against the floor; his feet floated aloft as he straightened his legs, his toes grazed Rugog's chest and both heels sledged against the man's knobby jaw. Rugog flung his arms out and the automatic slipped from his hand, flung away across the room. It didn't make much noise when it struck the heavy carpet, but when Rugog's blocky weight hit the floor, the whole house trembled and glass-ware jingled about the room.

Hank sprang to his feet as Peggy tore after Rugog's gun. At the same time Hank dug the side of his foot into the rug for a sprinting start which turned into a flying tackle. Clipping wasn't a nice way of bringing anyone down, especially a girl, but he took great moral satisfaction in ramming his shoulder accurately into her legs back of the knees. She went down with a slam that would have knocked the wind out of anybody. But she landed with a twisting bounce, fighting like a wildcat.

Hank was something of a wildcat himself when he got going, but he wasn't constituted to do his best when a girl was his antagonist, and this one had no qualms about using any trick in the book. When they were on the lounge, she had given him the knee, and he had let her think the foul had taken crippling effect; there was a good hundred and twenty pounds of her, all smooth muscle, and it was in clawing, whipping twisting action that he couldn't keep track of.

He jerked his head back to save his

eyesight from her sharp nails; that loosened his grip and let her come up with her knees, intended for his face but catching him in the chest. Determined to put an end to this nonsense, Hank took a reaching swing at her jaw. His wrist got caught in a live vise, his arm was yanked, and catapulted by her legs he went sailing over her head to dive into the padded leg of an easy chair. His head struck it just hard enough to daze him. Through the merry jingling of bells he heard running feet, the crack of Peggy's heels on bare flooring in the hall, and the slam of the door.

HANK got his legs under himself and hiked to the front window, let the shade go up on its roller. It was pretty dark, what with only one arc light over intersections in this neighborhood, but Peggy was an easy target as she raced down the lawn, ignoring the sidewalk. He held his gun on the twinkling gleam of her legs, let her cross the boulevard and get into the car parked under the elm. He could have shot a few holes in the tires, but he let her get away, put the gun back in the shoulder holster.

"Saphead!" he called himself. He didn't want any shooting, didn't want to shoot a girl, and shooting the tires off the car didn't mean that he would capture her. And if he killed her, he'd be out on a limb.

Disgustedly he returned to Rugog to see if the man was still out cold. He was. Hank stopped, alert for the least flicker of expression in case Rugog had an idea of borrowing a leaf from the detective's book. He touched the ugly bullet head, and it lolled. Broken neck. Never any more would Rugog play any tricks on anyone. Hank made

a low whistle of comment; he had killed the man in self defense, but he didn't feel any too comfortable.

Leaving Rugog's gun where it was, he made a leisurely exit after a jaunt through the apartment. He didn't find any wet clothing, and he couldn't tell whether any outfit was missing from a wardrobe jammed with dresses. But Peggy had lied about Lydia's being here. Cromwell hadn't brought her here at all. It was a snatch, all right, and Rugog was the lookout man. He had called "Doc" about Hank's seeing Cromwell pick up Lydia, and had been given orders to get rid of the detective. Doc was smart, and figured that Royce would check up on the actualities first, make sure there was a case. Doc had sent Rugog to Lydia's, along with the Kane girl, to wait for Hank to show up. Rugog hadn't dared to use Lydia's phone to report Tank's calls, because if Hank called and found the line busy, he would assume that Lydia was all right and wouldn't show up; so Hank walked into the trap, fell for Peggy's story, and was detained while Rugog was out getting in touch with his chief.

People in the house had certainly heard the rumpus, but around here they minded their own business. If a man wanted to beat his wife's or his girl's head off, he probably had a right to do so. Hank descended the stairs without running into any suspicion of interference. He could imagine that eyes were looking out under window shades when he entered his car, but didn't worry about it. He drove to headquarters.

He was a private detective, working for a man named Malcolm McGowan, a former city detective. McGowan kept in the good graces of the police department, throwing things their way,

and Hank knew the night chief personally. There was no business to speak of and he reached Chief Dahlgren at once.

DAHLGREN filled his ample uniform without inhaling and got fatter by the month; he was bald from the eyebrows back, and either through his wife's vanity or his own let his hair grow long on one side, combed it up over his bald crown and kept it plastered in place with an oil smelling of heliotrope.

"Hello, good-looking," Dahlgren greeted him.

"Hello," said Hank. And jumping in, "I hear there's a kidnaping or something."

"First I've heard of it." Dahlgren stroked the top of his skull crosswise with the palm of his broad hand, smelled the oil that came off on his palm, and worked his fingers. "When and where and who?"

"Lydia Monroe," Hank stated. "She got picked off the curb down there on Fourth Street where she works."

"Quit your kidding," said Dahlgren.

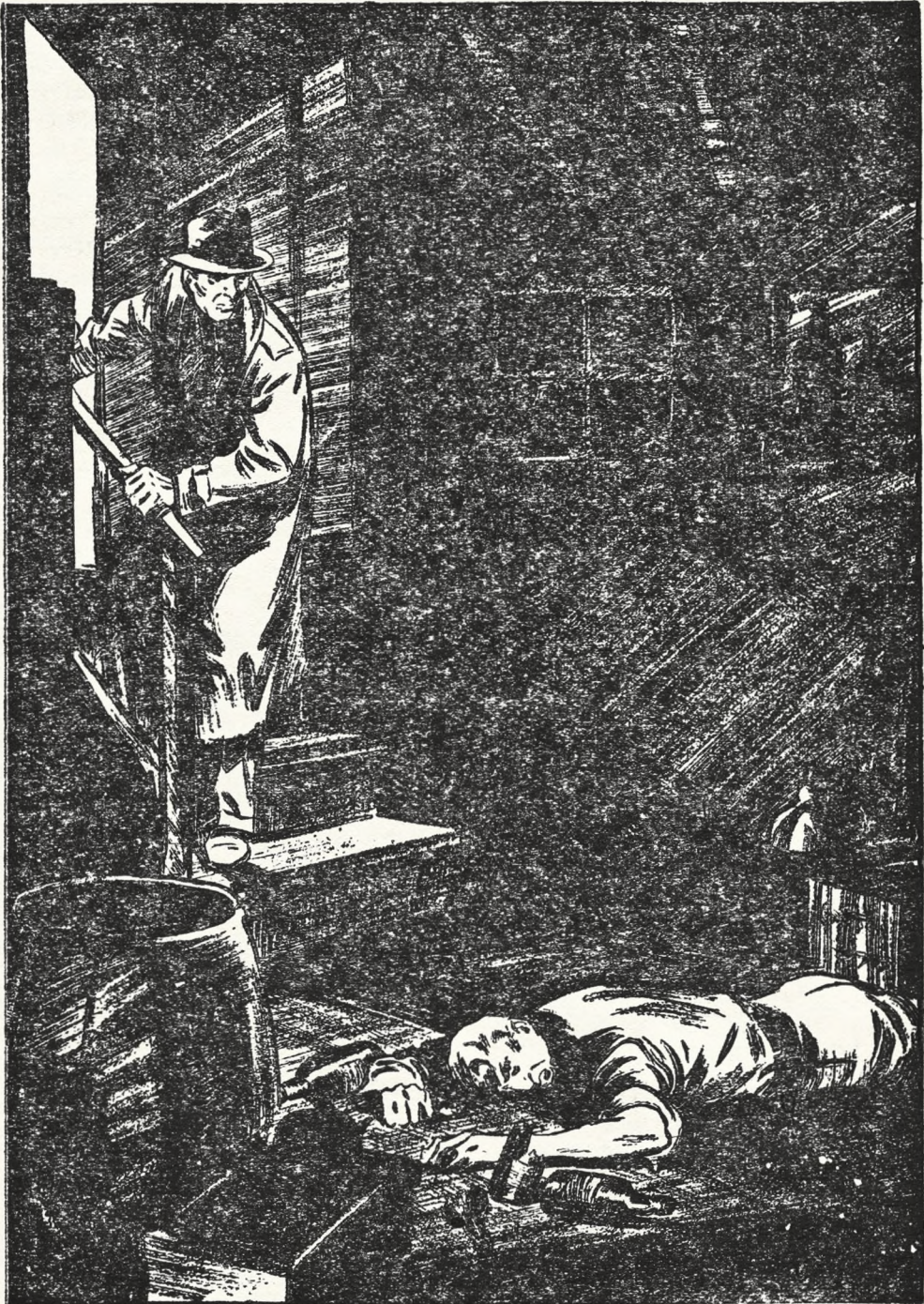
"I saw it myself, and it was as neat as rolling a barrel. The car swung in and splashed her from head to foot. The least the guy in the car could do was give her a lift home, and she got in. She must have smelled a rat, because she tried to jump out of the car before it had gone a block, and she got yanked back in and probably slugged."

"Then you saw the guy that did it."

Hank nodded. "It was George Cromwell, her own lawyer."

Dahlgren reached for the phone, pulled his hand back. He asked, "When did this happen?"

"A little after five; a quarter after, maybe a couple of minutes later."



The man lay in a pool of blood that ran in trickles to a drain. It was the worst mess Hank had ever seen.

"You had me going there for a minute," Dahlgren confessed. "Don't do that again. What's on your mind, now—do you want a traffic ticket fixed, or what?"

"Don't you believe me?" Hank demanded.

"Don't I believe you!" Dahlgren snorted. "Hell, no! I don't like this Cromwell bird much from what I've seen of him, but he's a big-shot, and you better not go around throwing off on him."

"Throwing off on him!" Hank exclaimed. "I tell you, I saw him pick her up after his car soaked her!"

"In a pig's eye you did!" Dahlgren retorted. "I came on at five o'clock, and Cromwell was here then. He was here until a little after five-thirty. Well?"

"What was he doing here?" Hank asked.

"He's been held up a couple of times, and he wanted a license to carry a gun."

"What time did he come here?"

Dahlgren gave him a look, took the phone and called Chief of Police Merrill at home. Hanging up after a brief conversation he told Hank, "Around four-thirty or quarter of five. Reason it took so long was because Merrill took him down on the range to see how he handled a gun, and Cromwell turned out to be a pretty good shot. We issued him a license."

Hank glared at Dahlgren and finally exploded, "Somebody's crazy and it's not me!"

A flush climbed into Dahlgren's well-padded face. "I don't like your tone!" he said bluntly, "and by heaven you'll be changing it!"

Hank took a breath and got hold of his temper. "All right, consider it

changed," he apologized. "But just the same Lydia isn't at her apartment and she isn't at her mother's, and she was sopping wet the last time I saw her. So where is she?"

"Lydia, huh?" Dahlgren grunted, running through the M's in the directory. "The trouble with you is you got too much imagination. You're just a kid yet." Hank's face warmed. Dahlgren dialed the Monroe number and finished off, shrewdly, "You tried to give her a lift and she turned you down, eh? Then another guy picks her up and you think she's kidnaped. You won't get anywhere chasing around after a girl like her, son; she's out of your class. Hello?"

HE talked at length with Mrs. Monroe, whose hard, bony voice was frequently audible to Hank in tinny annoyance from the receiver diaphragm. Hank waited with lips compressed; he was exceedingly hard-headed. Since he had seen George Cromwell with his eyes, and since both Merrill and Dahlgren were incorruptible men, then it was possible for a man to be in two places at the same time. George Cromwell didn't have any twin brothers.

Dahlgren hung up and eyed Hank speculatively. He said, "Boy, you certainly been hanging around Lydia, haven't you? You been a damned fool."

"Where is she?"

"You made a pest out of yourself, waiting for her after work, calling her up, and asking her out for lunch and so on. That's what all this is about."

"Is it?"

"It sure is. After you called up the old lady, she called up Lydia to find out what was going on. Lydia got sick and tired of you hanging around, quit

her job this afternoon and moved to a hotel, and if you hunt her up and bother her any more, you're going to get tossed into the klink and live on beans for a while. No fooling. The Monroes have got a lot of pull around here."

"Well, isn't that dandy?" Hank asked, thinking about Jack Rugog and Peggy Kane. "What hotel?"

"What you don't know won't hurt you," Dahlgren said paternally, so Hank knew the Chief didn't know. "Lay off. Go on a drunk and forget her."

"Gosh, I can't stand it," Hank said theatrically. He let his shoulders sag and tramped out with Dahlgren blinking after him.

Going down the corridor from the office Hank thought of a wide conjecture. Everything was as it stood; Lydia had changed her address because of him; there was no abduction; Cromwell wasn't Cromwell; Peggy Kane was a nice girl, except that her boy-friend was a gunman, and Rugog had stepped into the picture out of sheer chance; Rugog had a hard on for Hank because Hank had shot a couple of his kind a while back and therefore was a menace to his well-being. A nice, wide conjecture; Hank pegged the wide conjecture into a mental ashcan.

CHAPTER IV

Surprise!

ON the first floor of police headquarters was the traffic division. Hank walked in and spoke to Bill Vrooman, smoking a cigarette in uniform at the desk.

"Who's got 1776?" Hank asked.

"What?" Bill answered.

"Make it 1492," said Hank.

"Make up your mind," said Vrooman.

In fourteen hundred ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue. "B-1492," Hank said. "I got a guy who wants that number."

Vrooman went to a row of filing cabinets, pulled out a drawer and asked, "What does he want it for?"

"It adds up to seven."

Vrooman moved his lips while he trifled through a bank of cards and said, "Like hell it does, it adds up to sixteen."

"Six and one is seven," Hank told him.

"That's right." Vrooman scrutinized a card. "Well the guy can't have it; somebody else has got it."

"Who's got it?"

"A guy named Henderson. Don Henderson."

"My guy wants it pretty bad. He's a kind of nut, and he'll put out money," Hank explained. "Where does this Henderson live?"

"Well, I guess you could find it in the directory," said Vrooman. "Hell, here's a funny one. This Henderson lives at 1776 Portland Avenue. That's the first number you gave me."

"It's almost a coincidence," Hank admitted. "Thanks."

"Don't mention it."

The chances were that Henderson was a dead ringer for George Cromwell, Hank did not think. Cromwell was prominent, and such a strong resemblance would have been noted before this. So Hank drove through downtown as it began raining again, headed into the foot of Portland Avenue and continued through residential districts until he arrived at number 1776.

(Continued on page 97)

Homicide Policy

(Continued from page 19)

Gem Indemnity. My name's Macklin. I'm about to break that Bonnerman emerald robbery case; maybe you remember it. Where a butler was knifed."

The county patrolman grunted. "Insurance op, eh? Let's see your credentials."

"I haven't got them with me. You'll have to take my word. I—you—look, fella. Come up the ladder with me. Keep me covered with your gun every minute. If I make a wrong move, plug me in the back. But for God's sake give me a break and let me nail the rat that killed my boss."

"What boss?"

"John Rund. One of the swellest guys that ever lived."

"Rund? I know him. You say he got knocked off?"

Macklin clenched his fists. "Just a little while ago. I'm finishing the job he started. Will you play ball?"

"I dunno," the cop hesitated. "Tell me the lay."

SWIFTLY, tersely, Macklin gave it to him; and added his own theory. "So I've got to get inside!" he finished. "It's my one chance to crack the case!"

There was a long silence. Then: "Okay, Macklin. Up you go. Remember I'm right behind you and this roscoe has a hair trigger."

"I'll remember. And . . . thanks, copper." Macklin again ascended, with the uniformed man two steps back of him. He reached a second floor window; the one which led into Duke Yerxa's vault-room. Macklin tested the sash, found

it unfastened, raised the pane, and scissored his legs over the low sill.

As if he had tripped a hidden switch, overhead bulbs blazed to life. He froze; stared into the menacing muzzle of an automatic. The swarthy gungel, Reginald, was aiming it at him. Two steps beyond Reginald stood the hideously fat Yerxa; and behind Yerxa was James Pakham Bonnerman.

Yerxa's huge belly jiggled with noiseless laughter, but his eyes were mirthless. "How did you expect to crack my safe, wise guy?"

"I didn't," Macklin answered.

"Then how did you think you could take the genuine emeralds and leave the fakes?"

"I didn't intend to."

"Oh, yeh? Just what were your intentions?"

"To trip you up, which I've done," Macklin said levelly.

Yerxa's face darkened. "Meaning what?"

"Meaning you just told me you knew I was coming here to open your safe and make a trade. There's only one way you could have been wise to that."

"What way?"

"Somebody tipped you in advance."

"What somebody?" Yerxa probed maliciously.

"The one who eavesdropped tonight in the office of Gem Indemnity and overheard John Rund outlining his plans to me. The eavesdropper is therefore the same person who shot

Rund and jammed the door, leaving me with the corpse."

Yerxa smiled. "That's not too hard to figure."

"I've figured more," Macklin retorted. "That same killer is the man who originally burgled Bonnerman's wall safe and robbed it of the emeralds—for you. Knifing the butler in the process, I might add."

"The stabbing was an accident, sort of. The flunky shouldn't have butted in. Got any more to say before we take you out and put some holes in your head?"

"Yes," Macklin nodded. "A few more words ought to finish it. The guy I'm talking about couldn't have cracked that wall safe in Bonnerman's house without knowing the combination—"

"Now wait!" the exclamation came from Bonnerman himself. A violent indignation was in his voice. "Don't go accusing me of lifting my own emeralds. Somebody else knew that combination besides me. You know who I mean. Your boss, John Rund."

Duke Yerxa bent a sneer at the Pinacle producer. "Shut up, stupid."

"It's all right," Macklin smiled thinly. "He's got a right to say it. He's telling the truth; John Rund did have the combo. That's the point I've been leading up to."

"What point?" the fat gambler rasped. "Spit it out. You're wasting time and you haven't much time left."

MACKLIN drew a deep breath. "The heist guy and murderer had to be someone with access to Rund's files so he could copy the combination. And tonight when he shot Rund he had to be someone with a key to the Gem Indemnity suite. Finally, Yerxa, he had to be somebody who

knew you well; who worked for you in secret. I imagine he's standing directly behind that door at your back, listening—*aren't you, Tony Dutton?*"

The door opened and the tall, youthful blond insurance dick stepped over the threshold; looked glumly at Macklin. "I guess I should have bumped you along with Rund," he said. "I made a mistake, Nick, just creasing you instead of plugging you dead center—but hell, I couldn't make myself do it. You used to be a friend of mine when I was a punk."

"You're still a punk. You killed Rund because he was about to tell me the name of the guy he suspected. He was about to put the finger on you. Why'd you turn crooked, Tony?"

Dutton lowered his eyes. "I got in too deep on Yerxa's dice tables. He made me."

"That's what I figured." Then Macklin looked at the pudgy gambler. "Well, what now?"

"We take you out and croak you."

From the window a voice said: "Guess again. Freeze, everybody." Macklin's original captor, the county cop, launched himself over the sill.

There was an instant of silence. It was broken by the swarthy Reginald. He lifted his automatic; began spraying slugs. Over the sudden spiteful barking of his gun, the cop's heavier and slower .38 blasted like a deep-throated howitzer. The room was filled with deafening uproar, the stabbing flash of pistol fire, and the acrid odor of cordite.

Yerxa and James Pakham Bonnerman tried to scuttle out of the bedlam. Macklin saw the move; blocked them. He sank his fist into Yerxa's soft belly and the gambler doubled over, sickened. Then it was Bonner-

man's turn. Macklin growled: "You beat me to the punch this afternoon because my trick knee went out. I'm set for you now, though." And he clipped the movie executive on the chin with a short, chopping hook that dropped the guy insensible.

Oddly enough, as he did this he noticed that the thunder of guns had ceased. Turning, he saw the county patrolman standing grimly across the room. Reginald was on the floor with the top of his head blown off. Tony Dutton, too, was down. There were bloodstains on the front of his shirt and red bubbles frothing at his lips.

He smiled weakly at Macklin. "I . . . guess I'm . . . done for. And it's . . . no more than . . . I deserve . . . Sorry, Nick . . ."

"I'm sorry too, Tony," Macklin

said. Tony didn't hear him, though. Tony would never hear anything again except the fires of hell.

There wasn't much to be done after that; just the cleaning up of details and a trip to headquarters. It was at headquarters that Nick Macklin got the news about John Rund. The gnome-like little chief of Gem Indemnity's Hollywood branch wasn't dead. He was in the hospital, and he was going to pull through.

Macklin sped to Rund's bedside. "I followed through for you, John. It's finished. Washed up." Then he added: "Washed up just like me. I'm ready for that desk job."

The older man's eyes twinkled. "Desk job, hell. You're going back as my chief investigator. Now get out of here and let me take a nap."



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Conquerors of Cold

TO those of us who, by the strange machinations of fate, find ourselves buck privates on a thatch-roofed paradise somewhere in the South Pacific, the world of Alaska and faraway North Greenland seems very remote indeed. That world, however, becomes a stern reality for those of Uncle Sam's boys who left a port of embarkation on a ship that started off in a southerly direction and ended up due north. They have learned the true meaning of cold, or lack of heat, as the scientists call it, as no text book can ever describe it. They have learned, for example, that it can get so cold that a pot of boiling water will freeze to solid ice in a matter of minutes. But, more important, they have also learned about that strange inhabitant of the North, the Eskimo, who seems to have been born especially to withstand the rigors of everlasting ice and snow.

The American boy, who has been bred in the mechanical splendor of our way of life, soon learns that if he is to survive in the extreme cold of the far north, he must sometimes do as these Eskimos do. He discovers that the Eskimo knows all the tricks of survival. He learns that the most treacherous enemy of the frozen wasteland, the wolf, which preys on caribou and reindeer, can be killed by these Eskimos with nothing more formidable than a piece of whalebone.

What the Eskimo does is to sharpen a strip of whalebone at both ends and double it back, tying it with sinew. Then he covers it with a lump of fat and throws it out where the wolf will get it. Swallowed at a gulp, the

frozen delicacy melts in the wolf's stomach. The sharp whalebone, of course, springs open, piercing the wolf internally and killing it.

How adaptable these people are to their environment is best indicated by describing an imaginary trip that one of them might take. To start on such a trip, the Eskimo must have a sledge. But there is not enough driftwood to build one, because he lives beyond the timber line. So he soaks broad strips of walrus hide in water and rolls them up with salmon inside, laid lengthwise. These bundles he sets outside to freeze solid. Soon he has enough solid pieces to make a walrus-skin sledge that will carry him and his baggage.

Although it may be a two or three day trip and he will pass no settlements on the way, yet he travels very light. He takes fresh straw for his boots, food for his dogs, and some seal oil to light and heat the overnight huts that he will build. That is practically all, yet he contemplates a pleasant trip.

When night comes, he builds himself a snow house in which he is soon too warm for comfort.

Should he become hungry, he will manage to trap some birds. If that fails, he always has his sledge to depend upon, for he can feed the thawed walrus skins to his dogs and stuff himself on the salmon that was rolled up inside.

Our boys can well take lessons from these people who, without modern implements or science, have succeeded in taming the north where often civilized man has failed.

Cut Out for the Hangman

(Continued from page 31)

But Angelo wasn't there. Why wasn't Angelo there? Because he wasn't a blind man at all—as we found out a short while back. Angelo had seen the ruby in his cup. He saw Orpen put it in there. He sized up the situation. He figured a chance for some profit for himself. He figured there might be a reward for the return of the ruby to its rightful owner." I looked at Talbot. He didn't blink an eyelash.

I went on: "But Angelo didn't go to the police. He didn't want to disclose the fact that he'd been imposing on the public these many years. He went to me, trusting I could keep his secret if he had to disclose it. While he was cutting my portrait at my stand, he slipped the ruby in my mouth. He figured, no doubt, that I'd return it, gather the reward, split it with him.

"But as soon as I saw what I had, I ran after Angelo for a fuller explanation of the facts. The next I saw him he was dead. Orpen, I figure, had followed him to my stand and waited until he had departed, then trained after him again. When Orpen had him cornered in a secluded spot, he shot him then made a hasty and fruitless search on Angelo's person for the ruby. I discovered the body, called the police."

Delmar broke in icily, "Why didn't you tell me in the first place you had the stone?"

"Because I knew you'd not believe me then and I'd be held on suspicion of robbery and murder—"

"And that's exactly what's going to

be done with you," replied Delmar sardonically, "unless you can prove who did kill Angelo."

HERE was a twist of events that outwardly looked bad for me, but I knew I had the winning play whenever I wanted to spring it. I signaled Gladys with a confident smile that meant, "Don't worry."

"I'm telling you," I turned to Delmar, "Orpen made the 'switch' and killed Angelo."

"Saying so's not proving it," said Delmar. "How do you know?"

"While I was playing chess with him this afternoon he poked a gun at me, demanding I turn over the ruby to him."

"Yes, I saw the gun," exclaimed Gladys.

"You see," I explained, "after Orpen discovered no stone on Angelo, he figured Angelo had handed it to me. So Orpen came to me for it."

The angular-jawed man laughed derisively. "I deny everything. I never had a gun. If I did, where is it?"

"In the Atlantic Ocean," I said.

"Stuff and nonsense!" He turned to Delmar. "My clever friend has had the floor long enough. Now let me have my say. Fair enough?"

"Shoot," said Delmar.

"I say," replied the man who called himself Orpen, "that all the evidence points to the fact that my young friend himself is the killer. He and Angelo rigged the whole scheme up of the jewel switch. No doubt one of them must have seen me go in the store this

morning. Anyway, they managed to get the ruby. But my young friend gets frightened. He realizes it's not so easy to dispose of it. Hoping, at least, to cash in on some sort of reward, he kills Angelo, and concocts this not too fantastic yarn." He bowed to me courteously. "I say my story is more plausible than yours."

My opponent was counter-attacking cleverly.

I saw a lot of worry in Gladys' eyes. Delmar gave me a ghoulisn grin.

I held up my hand impressively. "No matter how much he denies it, sergeant, I've got the proof he's the killer right in my pocket." I pulled out a square of white paper, on which was pasted the black silhouette profile of a man's face. I held it high for everyone to see.

The sharp, aquiline nose, the strongly jutting jaw were clearly outlined. It was a life-like portrait of the man who called himself Orpen.

A greenish tinge spread along the living, angular jaw. The man who called himself Orpen loosened his collar.

Beefy Styles, against the wall, scratched his nose with the heel of his thumb.

I laid the portrait on Talbot's desk. Laughlin came up close to get a good look at it. He took the scissors out of his pocket, laid them down dramatically by the cut-out face. "And here's the tool it was done with," he declared.

"Exactly," I said. "Angelo wanted to warn me that Orpen was the thief. He remembered his features well enough to cut out an outline of them and slip the result in my pocket."

Talbot glanced at the silhouette, then shrugged and exchanged a look with Delmar.

The angular-jawed man made a quick recovery. He bowed to me in mock deference. "A diabolically clever idea, that, my young friend. But it won't work. True, my silhouette face was cut by Angelo. But it was a trick—planned days ago. It was a prepared alibi for you, in case you needed one. Angelo must have had plenty of chances to look at my face during those days you and I played chess together."

With cunning ingenuity, my opponent was twisting the evidence in his favor.

DELMAR'S fingers played an icy solo on the tips of his wolfish teeth. He said to Talbot, "How long would it take for anyone to obtain a passable imitation of the ruby?"

"More than six days, I'd say," replied Talbot, "but bear in mind, it was common knowledge in the trade that I had possession of the 'Blood of the Balkans' months before I displayed it in my window."

Delmar rubbed his hands. "Looks like I'll have to hold you both," he said to me.

Styles moved toward the door, but Laughlin barred his way. "Wait a minute."

One final play flashed to my brain. I shouted, "Wait, sergeant! Wire St. Paul. Ask them for the dope on a man named Kincaid."

Kincaid's long, angular jaw dropped an inch. His face changed from olive, to green, to grey. He recovered quickly.

"Another figment of your addled brain," he jeered at me. He moved close to the desk. "That last statement of yours is as false as this evidence here." He put out his hand to take up the silhouette, but I leaped and grabbed his wrist.

"Keep your hands off that evidence!" I cried.

"Take away your dirty paws," said Kincaid and bashed me across the mouth with his fist.

I closed with him. He gave me an unexpectedly vicious jolt with his knee. I swayed, fell against him. We crashed to the floor. Kincaid was on top, all two hundred pounds of him. His fingers tightened about my neck. "You dirty killer," he sneered.

Blobs of blackness were dancing in front of my eyes. I heard Gladys shriek, "Get him, Frank!" and then I gave a violent heave and my feet were hooked inside Kincaid's ankles.

We rolled over and over and I could feel Kincaid's fingers stabbing around my eyes. I got hold of his shirt collar and held on until I heard the cloth ripping. His fingers quit stabbing at my eyes. He choked on the word, "Ah-h!" a long minute and then I got my elbow under his chin.

When I heard his head hit the floor, I stood up. Kincaid lay gasping, looking up at me with the eyes of a bayed rat. He lay there, shirt in shreds, his throat and shoulders bare, his hairless, olive skin beaded with sweat.

And then I saw something on that hairless skin that made my heart give a great leap. What I saw was a row of scratches on Kincaid's chest.

"Sergeant!" I cried to Delmar, pointing at the heavily-breathing Kincaid on the floor, "see those marks on his chest. Those were made with the point of a curved blade. With the tip of Angelo's scissors!"

Kincaid arose shakily, his eyes black and glary. I said to him, "Those marks must have been made when you had the gun pressed against Angelo and he fought back with the only weapon he

had—his scissors. The point snagged through your shirt just deep enough to leave the evidence that's going to hang you!"

Kincaid hung his head, stared at the floor.

Styles turned to Delmar and began talking fast:

"Sergeant, I'm talking for the record!" He pointed at Kincaid. "If he's a killer, I had nothing to do with it. I don't know anything about murder! I'm a heist guy, a jewel thief but I'm no killer. Both of us have got records in St. Paul as long as the Erie Canal. I cased the front of this place, but I didn't plan any killing. I'm not even an accessory! I'm—"

Delmar said, "O.K. Tell the rest of it to the judge." He made a sign to Laughlin. They moved toward Kincaid.

Kincaid was swaying dizzily by the desk. Suddenly, he whirled, the scissors was in his hand. He darted to Gladys, pointed the blade at the middle of her throat.

His eyes were desperate and beady-black. "I'm getting out of here with a whole skin," he rasped, "if you let me. It's up to you. One move against me and I'll stick the blade in her!"

HE touched the white nape of her neck with the scissors point. "Move on out backwards," he said to her. He stared over her head, his eyes flickered towards the door.

Gladys moved back a step, a queer light was in her eyes. She sidled toward the right and tripped over the chair, and as she tripped Kincaid, his eyes on the door, stumbled. The scissors skidded on the floor.

I leaped. Kincaid and I fell together but I was the one on top. Delmar ran

over and snapped the cuffs on the killer.

Laughlin picked up the scissors, stowed it in his uniform.

Styles tagged along tamely with the two officers.

Before Delmar and Laughlin led them away, Talbot handed a check to the detective. "Take this thousand dollars. Will you see to it that Angelo gets a decent burial? What's over is for the police fund."

"Come on," I said to Gladys, starting after the cops.

"Wait a minute, you two," Talbot called to us.

We walked back to his desk.

Talbot's eyes were hard and bright. "I know," he said unctuously, "that I would only insult both of you if I offered you any reward for having done your duty."

I didn't say anything. Gladys nodded weakly.

Talbot picked up the profile portrait of Kincaid which lay on his desk. "This is your property," he said to me, "I wish to purchase it. Will you

sell?" He didn't wait for my answer. "I suppose \$3,000 would be a fair price for it."

He started scratching his pen on blue paper. Something like a wink flickered in one of his eyes.

I didn't open my mouth.

Talbot said, "I would like your fair companion to share in the purchase price—shall I make out separate checks?"

"Oh, one check!" said Gladys, grabbing my hand, "from now on it's—"

"Share and share alike," I said.

Talbot signed his name with a flourish, handed me the check. "What are you going to do with that portrait?" I asked him.

He laughed. "Delmar must have forgotten it. That's important evidence, of course. I'll hold it for him until I have some copies made for my scrap book."

We gripped hands. "By the way," said Talbot, "I wonder what sort of chess game this fellow Kincaid plays?"

"Just the sort of game you'd expect from a killer," I said, "it's murderous."

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Pistol-Packing Premiere

(Continued from page 51)

caped convict had planned to powder with the plunder, wouldn't he have taken it on the scam as soon as he had that cash in his jeans? Why would he have turned up at the premiere at all?

And then, later, why had he creamed his wife? If he loved her, there was no plausible motive for that particular piece of skulduggery. Maybe he had figured to leave her in the lurch while he faded with the moolah; even so, there was no necessity for him to hang the permanent chill on her before he pulled his freight. She hadn't represented any menace to him, one way or the other. Even when I was questioning her, she's refused to tell any tales. If ever a cupcake had fronted for a guy, Lola had shielded this O'Brien blister. Cooling her down was a hell of a way to show his gratitude.

The more I stirred my grey matter the more it struck me as impossible to believe that O'Brien would bump the brunette cutie. Yet I had a strong, persistent hunch that her demise was connected with the murder of Waldo LaRash. My intuition told me that one person must have pulled both those kills; but O'Brien was innocent of scalding Lola. Well, if he was innocent of that job he must be innocent of the LaRash shooting. Consequently, the question became: who had bumped LaRash at the movie premiere?

I parked in front of Purgatory's only hotel; went inside. It was quite a drop in a mid-Victorian way. Like the town's opera house, it had been

erected by mining nabobs in the days of their temporary affluence; it even had an elevator. Or rather, it had the shaft where an elevator had once been. Thieves had busted into the building some time during the past decade and glommed the cage as well as the machinery, probably to install in one of the surrounding mines. That had happened when the joint was boarded up and closed to match the rest of the ghost town; but tonight it was wide open and refurbished for its Hollywood guests. You could smell the dust and decay and dry rot clinging to the walls and furniture, but all the lights were on bright duty to lend an air of revived grandeur.

To the weatherbeaten clerk at the desk I said: "What's the Bannerton room number, grandpa?"

"Two-fourteen and two-fifteen," he said. "A suite. Second floor. And I ain't grandpa. I never been married."

I said: "That makes it tough on your grand-children, doesn't it?" and ankled over to the grand staircase; truded upward. Moths and silverfish had wrecked the heavy carpet, but I gained my destination without tripping over any frayed spots; rapped on the portal of 214. "Hey, Steve."

It was Olga Bannerton's voice that told me to wait a minute. She sounded startled and not too pleased. Then the door opened, and I got another surprise. Johnny Kinglund was the guy who let me in.

"Hello, gumshoe," he said. His handsome puss was red around the fringes.

I gave him the once-over, then de-

cided there was nothing haywire about his presence here. After all, Steve had asked him to bring Olga to her room and quiet her out of her incipient hysteria.

"Hi," I said. "Is Bannerton around?"

"Well, er, no. He sent word a few minutes ago that he'd be here presently. I, ah, er, I was just leaving—" There was a screwy hesitation in the way he talked; something that struck me as furtive. And apparently he was in a thundering sweat to get away. I couldn't help wondering why.

I stepped aside, let him pass me. As he moved into the corridor, I said casually: "By the way, what's your room number in case I want to contact you later?"

"Two-eleven, just down the hall. You, uh, you'll excuse me now, won't you?" And he slid down the hall with his hip pocket dipping dust and his mush looking worried.

CHAPTER VII

The Face in the Flames

I WATCHED until he entered his own quarters, then sauntered into the Bannerton suite. I was just in time to tab Olga emerging from the connecting room.

She drifted toward me, her cheeks pink and her manner obviously embarrassed. "Hello, Dan."

"Hello."

"Listen—I—I hope you don't think Johnny Kinglund—"

"What about him?"

"I wouldn't w-want you to get the idea that he—that I—I mean—well, Johnny didn't—"

I said: "Why the stammering rou-

tine, toots? Are you trying to ask me if I think Kinglund had anything to do with murdering Waldo LaRash? Hell, I don't know. It's an angle. We mustn't forget Kinglund wanted the leading role in Hell-Town Law-Man; that LaRash took it away from him. They were together when LaRash's clockworks got ventilated, if that means anything. Your guess is as good as mine."

Her peepers filled up with puzzlement. "But I didn't m-mean that, Dan. Of course Johnny didn't k-kill Waldo. That's absurd. The escaped convict did it. Terry O'Brien."

"Then what were you talking about, babe?"

She blushed again. "You know. About Johnny being here with me."

"Oh, that."

"It was entirely innocent. Honest it was."

"Am I arguing?" I said.

"I was upset about Waldo being murdered, and Johnny brought me here to the hotel and got me some smelling salts and a drink; but he—well, he and I—I mean we—"

All of a sudden I caught wise. "Are you scared I might get the idea he was making like a wolf?"

"Y-yes. I wouldn't want you to—to believe—"

As a matter of plain fact I hadn't even considered the possibility. According to my notion, Johnny Kinglund's attentions and intentions were strictly on the up and up. He'd been doing her a friendly favor, was all. Then why should she be so concerned about it, I wondered?

She went on, hurriedly: "Most of the time Johnny was right out here in the living room of the suite, while I

rested in my boudoir. He stayed in case I needed anything."

"Decent of him," I said absently.

She took a step in my direction. "Dan."

"Yeah?"

"Don't tell Steve."

"Don't tell him what?"

"That you found Johnny Kinglund here."

"Why not? Steve asked him to look after you."

She nodded. "That's true. But don't tell him, anyhow."

"Hey, listen," I said. "What gives?"

"Nothing, only, well, I wouldn't want Steve's jealousy all stirred up over something trivial."

I said: "If it's trivial, there's no use worrying. It seems to me you're making a mountain out of a hole in the ground. If there's smoke, there's sometimes fire." Using the words as an excuse, I flipped a gasper into my mush. "Speaking of smokes, I wonder if you can spare a match?"

Then, not waiting for her to get me a light, I barged into the adjoining room—ostensibly to hunt for one, but actually to glom a gander at the surroundings. My optics broomed the room for anything such as old cigar stubs, two whiskey glasses instead of one, and so forth.

There was nothing like that. The only extraordinary thing I noticed was a small fire in the huge fireplace over in a far corner. The hotel didn't have a central heating system; each room had its own hearth with mesquite wood and dried cactus for fuel. In the present instance, however, the fire was of wadded paper and what looked like a couple of photographs. I caught a hinge at one of these pics

just before a tongue of flame consumed it.

The late lamented Waldo LaRash was the subject of the photo, and there was an inscription that blazed and was gone even as I studied it: To Olga With Love—

I BARGED back to the blonde jane in the front chamber; didn't indicate that I'd seen anything out of the way. "No match," I said. "The hell with it." And I put the coffin nail back in my pocket.

She regarded me curiously. "You haven't yet given me your promise."

"What promise?"

"Not to tell Steve about Johnny Kinglund."

"For gosh sake, are you still harping on that?"

"Yes. Maybe I'm being silly, but—"

"Okay, okay. I promise," I said. I kept my mental fingers crossed, however.

She brightened as she came closer to me. "Thanks, Sherlock. Thanks a lot." And she started to slide her arms around me and award me an appreciative kiss.

It never happened, because just then there came a knock on the door, spoiling the scene. I yanked the portal open; faced the weatherbeaten desk clerk from downstairs. He hung the speculative hinge on me. "You ain't Mr. Bannerton, are you?"

"No."

He looked from me to Olga then back again with a malignant leer. "Speaking of unmarried guys, how's all your kids? Never mind, it ain't no fur off my hide. Mr. Bannerton is wanted. In the lobby. Phone call."

"He isn't here right now," I said.

"So I noticed. Well, I'll tell this party to ring again."

"Wait," I said. "Can't you connect it up here?"

"Not unless I passed a miracle, brother. This hotel was unveiled in the gay nineties without no phones in the rooms. Got one down at the desk, though. You want to answer for Mr. Bannerton or do you figger you're too busy?"

I said: "Yeah, I'll take the call. Maybe it's important." I waved temporary good-bye to the blonde Bannerton quail; trailed the clerk down the grand staircase and picked up his phone at the marble counter. "Hello."

"Mr. Bannerton? This is Terry O'Brien," a voice said.

CHAPTER VIII

The Trap Is Set

WHEN THE lammister's monicker drifted to me over the wire, I damned near leaped out of my binding. "Did you say O'Brien?" I yowled.

"Yes, sir."

"Where are you?"

"Hiding out," he said. "But listen, Mr. Bannerton. I know my number is up. The law will have me before morning. And Arizona will never let Georgia extradite me now; not with a local murder rap hanging over me."

I did some quick thinking; decided to let him go on believing I was Steve Bannerton. Maybe I'd learn something that way. "Yes, you're on the spot," I said. "Why'd you lose your nerve and shoot LaRash?"

"I didn't, sir. I guess I can't expect you to swallow that, any more than

the cops will. But it's true. I didn't plug him. I swear I didn't."

"Why tell me? I can't help you."

"I know you can't. Nobody can help me. I'm a goner. I know when I'm licked."

"Well, then, why are you phoning me now?"

He laughed, bitterly and without mirth. "I thought maybe I could ask you a favor. I was wondering about that dough. Could you fix it for my wife to have her operation even though there won't be any reward money coming out of Georgia? I mean, after all, you got more publicity for your picture than you ever had any idea of getting. What with its star being killed, I figure people will flock to see him in his last role. So maybe that's worth some kind of payoff, don't you think? I wouldn't mind so much going to the gas chamber if I knew Lola could get the surgery she needs—"

His gush of verbiage hit me like a kick in the kisser. If he still hoped Lola could have the treatment she'd needed, and didn't know she was defunct, then obviously he wasn't the bozo who'd bumped her. He was in the clear as far as that homicide was concerned; which added credence to his claim that he hadn't shot Waldo LaRash at the premiere.

I said: "Listen, O'Brien. Can you come to the hotel, quickly and without being tabbed?"

"I might try the alleys. Maybe I can make it. Why?"

"Do it and don't ask questions," I said. "Go to room two-eleven and wait there for me. If you hear voices coming toward the room, hide in a closet or something."

"I don't get the drift, Mr. Bannerton."

"You will, in time," I told him. "And you'd better do what I say, unless you'd sooner be lynched by a posse."

He drew an audible breath. "I'll come." The line went dead as he disconnected.

HANGING UP, I turned toward the stairs—and piped Johnny Kinglund planted directly before me. How long he'd been standing there at my back, listening to my telephone gab, I couldn't tell. Maybe he hadn't overheard any of it; perhaps he'd eavesdropped on the whole dialogue. You'd never guess the answer to look at his blank pan.

I gave him a ferocious scowl. "What are you doing here, bub?"

"Er, uh, waiting to see you."

"What about?"

He ran a finger around his collar, uneasy. "Well, ah, er, I was wondering if you—that is, when you see Steve Bannerton, would you mind not telling him about me being with Olga a while ago? He's so jealous of her—" He put a match in his mouth and tried to scratch a cigarette on the wall, obviously flustered.

I said: "Oh, that. Why should you worry if you didn't make any passes at her?"

"Well, I just—I don't want Steve to think—"

"Look," I scowled at him. "For a pair of allegedly innocent people, you and Olga certainly seem to have guilty consciences. Not that I give a curse."

"Meaning you won't mention it?"

"I'll think it over," I said. "Stick around a minute. I've got a call to make." Then I used the desk phone

again; got the telegraph office at the Purgatory railroad station and asked a question about the wire that had been sent to me in Hollywood—the message that had brought me here by air express.

Presently I was given the information I wanted; and it was the key to the whole puzzle. I rang off, turned back to Johnny Kinglund. "Let's go upstairs."

"Wh-why?"

"You'll find out," I said bleakly. And I steered him up the steps; along the corridor to the Bannerton suite. I knocked and Olga opened up.

She stood aside for us to barge over the threshold; eyed me in a way that seemed wary. "Was it anything important? The phone call for Steve, I mean."

"Important enough."

"Who was it?"

"Terry O'Brien," I said. Then I took a hinge at my watch to see how much time had passed. The lammister should have reached the hotel by now, I thought. I certainly hoped so!

The blonde doll and Kinglund exchanged furtive glances and Kinglund said: "O'Brien? Was that the one you were talking to? The guy who—"

"Cork it," I grunted. "Either you heard the conversation and know the score or else you're in the dark and you'll stay that way for a while. This thing's coming to a head and I'd as soon not answer any more questions until I'm ready to blow off the lid."

Olga emitted a nervous giggle, as meaningless as an idiot's burp. "Aren't you mixing your metaphors?"

I IGNORED HER; waited. The minutes dragged themselves into a crawling parade and you could feel

tension building up in the room as the silence deepened. Then, abruptly, the door opened and Steve Bannister came in. He had the deputy sheriff with him and they both looked bushed. The deputy said: "I was told we'd find you up here, Turner."

"The desk clerk?"

"Yeh."

I set fire to a gasper. "So what? You gave me orders to go into seclusion at the hotel, didn't you?"

"I also told you to stay out of this murder investigation," he said. "What are you doing here with Mr. Kinglund and Mrs. Bannerton? Quizzing them?"

"Not at all. We've scarcely discussed the case."

Steve Bannerton made an impatient gesture. "For God's sake, what's the use of all this palaver?" My premiere is ruined and LaRash is dead and his killer made a getaway—"

"He didn't make a getaway, Steve," I said. "Come along with me and I'll put the thumb on him."

Four startled exclamations bubbled out of four slack yawps. Kinglund and Olga handed me the frenzied focus; Bannerton made with the popping glimmers and the deputy said: "You mean you know where to find O'Brien?"

"I do. Follow me, all of you."

Steve took Olga's arm; drew her toward the door which the deputy had already opened. Kinglund held back, though. "I—I don't think I want to go."

"Think again, Johnny," I rasped. "You're coming if I have to drag you."

He looked green around the fringes as he fell into step. I took the lead; headed along the corridor and stopped at 211. Kinglund choked: "Hey, that's my room!"

"Right," I said. "I planned to use it for the showdown. I would have lured you out of it if necessary, a while ago; only you saved me the trouble by bargaining down to the lobby while I was on the phone. Now I believe we're all set." I made my tone loud enough to carry, so that if Terry O'Brien happened to be in the room he would hear me and have time to hide. I thought I could detect a scurrying noise inside, then silence. My stage was ready and waiting.

We trooped in. The deputy looked at me. "Well?"

"The killer is a guy who wore cowboy regalia and a mask at the airport; who took a shot at me, then slugged me," I explained. "He's here, as well as the person who's really responsible for the murders."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning Olga," I said, pointing to the yellow-haired jane. "You're to blame for all this, sister."

She cringed as if I'd whapped her across the profile. "How d-dare you say th-that?"

"Because it's true."

"I d-don't understand you!"

"Sure you do. Waldo LaRash was your secret sweetie. I proved that to my own satisfaction when I prowled your boudoir, saw some papers burning in the hearth."

"You—you—"

"They were love letters, most likely; and pix of LaRash affectionately inscribed to you. The very fact that you destroyed them indicates a guilty conscience. Besides, you'd shown more than a normal amount of hysteria at the theater when he got creamed. He must have meant a lot to you."

"That's absurd!"

"It's straight goods," I contradicted

her. "Anyhow, with LaRash now defunct, you wanted to get rid of any evidence that he had been your clandestine boy-friend. So you burned the stuff in the fireplace while Johnny Kinglund stayed in the front room suspecting nothing."

The deputy stepped forward. "What's that got to do with the murders, mister?"

"It provides the motive," I said. "Jealousy. Get it?" Then I swung around to Bannerton. "The jig's up, Steve. You croaked LaRash because he was too attentive to your wife."

CHAPTER IX

Too Bad!

THERE WAS an instant of shocked silence. Then Bannerton produced a roscoe from his pocket. "Take that back, Sherlock. Now." He brandished the cannon. "Before I make you eat your words without sugar and cream."

"Sorry," I said. "I can't take it back because it happens to be true. You're the murderer. You planned to scald LaRash; let a jailbird named Terry O'Brien take the rap for you."

"That's very funny indeed."

"It's tragic. O'Brien was an escaped convict with a reward on his noggin and a sick wife. He came to you with a publicity proposition; agreed to let the star of Hell-Town Law-Man arrest him at the premiere if Lola received the reward getus for the operation she needed."

"That much I admit. The rest of it—"

I said: "The rest of it stems from your particular disposition. You're an insanely jealous guy, I found that out

from Olga, and from Johnny Kinglund, here."

"So I'm jealous. Lots of people are."

"With you it was homicidal, though," I said. "The idea was to let Waldo LaRash make that phony pinch and then drill him in the guts from somewhere close behind the bozo he was arresting. After the kill, it would be easy to slip the gat into O'Brien's pocket and step away. Everybody would think O'Brien had done the job in an effort to resist capture. And as soon as O'Brien realized the jam he was in, he would naturally try to lam. Which is just how it happened."

"You're talking too much, gumshoe."

I said: "There's lots more. Your scheme struck a snag when O'Brien's sick wife tried to spike the play. She didn't know a murder was being hatched, of course; but she wanted to save her hubby from going back to a chain gang.

"As Lola Lorraine, she was a former Hollywood extra cutie; she'd known me in the old days. So she decided to enlist my services by sending me a telegram; forging your name to it. That's the only way she could be sure I'd come. I know she was the one who wired me; I just checked with the telegraph office. If I'd been smart I'd have guessed it long ago; God knows she dropped enough hints that she, not you, sent me the message."

Steve flourished his heater. "Well?"

"My answering telegram was delivered to you, obviously. It must have puzzled you. You wondered why I was flying here when you hadn't summoned me. You got scared I might interfere. Well, you put on a cowboy

outfit and bandanna mask, ambushed me over at the landing field, slugged me senseless, and tied me up. For what purpose? Why, to keep me out of your hair while you pulled your croakery."

"I should have beaten your brains out."

"Ah. You confess, eh?"

"I didn't say so."

"It was the same as a confession," I said. "You opened your puss and put your foot in it that time."

He cocked his trigger. "Does it matter?"

"Yeah, because I've trapped you. After the LaRash killing, I told you I was going out to Lola's tepee. You were the only one I mentioned it to."

"So what?"

"So therefore you must be the guy that tailed me out there and blasted from outside her window. By bumping her, you figured to keep her from trying to get O'Brien out of his jam. Also, if you cooled me, you needn't be afraid my detective abilities would eventually put the finger on you. On top of that, O'Brien would be suspected of these new murders and the net would

close around him all the tighter.

"So, as I say, you creamed Lola. But the slug you aimed at me only creased my arm and I lived to blow the whistle on you. Now you're washed up."

"No. You are," Bannerton grated. "I guess you're all washed up," he indicated the others in the room. "If I hope to make my getaway it looks as if I'd have to mow you down. Too bad, isn't it?"

Behind him, a closet door opened and Terry O'Brien ankled into view. "Yeah. Too bad. So you killed Lola, eh?" Then he whipped out a .45 and planted a dose of medicine in Steve's skull. The medicine was red-hot and poisonous. Bannerton was deceased before his corpse hit the floor.

O'Brien turned to the deputy and extended the roscoe. "Here, take it. I've just executed a killer for you. If that makes me a murderer, too, it's okay by me. Now that Lola's dead I've got nothing to live for."

So the State of Arizona did Terry O'Brien a favor and sent him to the lethal chamber. It was the first decent break he'd had in years.

Odds of Chance

IT is the day after pay-day. Little Joe, who only three months before was a guileless child of nature, doing the plowing, the milking, and the haying on his father's farm, had just finished his basic training. For he has lost all his pay in a dice game, and he has learned to take such whims of fate philosophically. It is part of being a soldier, he reasons, to be able to lose your whole month's

pay in little less than an hour without whimpering or whining. True, he didn't have a run for his money, but the guy who started the game was just too lucky, and, besides, he wasn't the only one who lost.

Joe, who was country-fresh only such a short time ago, has joined up with the world's fastest moving outfit, as Hitler and Tojo are learning to their regret. Not only does his out-

fit have the swiftest cars, tanks, and planes, but it seems to exercise a virtual monopoly over the fastest gambling game of them all—the rolling, jumping ivories. Stud poker might have been fast enough for the A. E. F. of World War I, but this is a completely mechanized war, and Joe learns that in many instances it is either juggling the bones or not gambling at all. Gone are the days when casino and rummy passed for excitement!

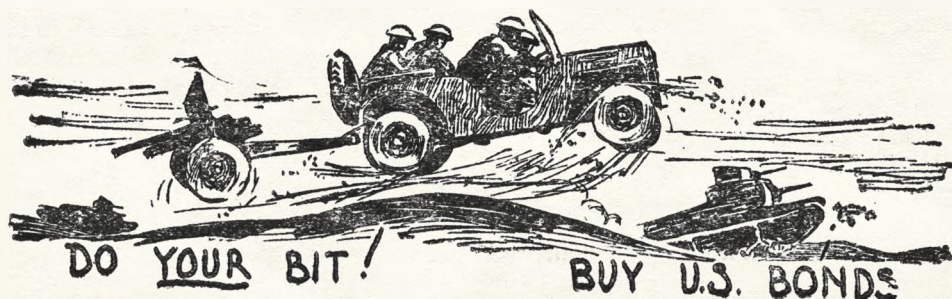
Ours is a gambling army. It has been estimated that in the course of one month, about \$300,000,000 will change hands in various forms of gambling. Of this, about \$75,000,000 will disappear entirely into the pockets of dice-wise GI's who were inducted along with the bank clerks, mechanics, and college kids. In many companies, there is always a crooked soldier who pops up with a pair of dice on pay-day and proceeds to organize a game. Since the dice have been loaded, the luck seems to be all one-sided, and it is then only a question of time before the game is cleaned out. Most of the players have lost so badly that they will have to go through that month without going to a movie or having a date.

Of course, the best way to hold

onto money in the army is not to gamble. But if a fellow gets that restless feeling, that craving for toying with the odds of chance, and he does decide to join a game, then the thing for him to do is *never, never* to start playing without first testing the dice. This is done by examining the bevel of the dice or by pivoting them to detect imbalance. But the infallible method is the water test. All that is needed for this test is a glass of water. The dice are dropped into the water. If the same combination turns up on the bottom of the glass a large number of times, then it may be assumed that the dice are loaded, and the soldier who brought them into the game should be tossed out and a new pair purchased at the PX.

The water test is nothing more than a bit of applied physics. As the loaded dice fall relatively slowly through the water, the pull of gravity tends to draw the weighted faces to the bottom first. Even the slightest variance is detected.

Of course, there is no guarantee that a fellow who loses with loaded dice will just naturally win with straight dice. But at least with straight dice, he is not working against ridiculous odds, and he gets more of a run for his money.



Prescription for Death

(Continued from page 79)

It was a two-story frame house with a brick porch added on, and it was as dark as ancient Egypt under the dripping foliage of trees. Hank drove on, turned the corner to the left, and went down the paved alley that served Portland and the residential boulevard of Crocker Avenue. He had located Henderson's as the fifth house down from the corner on a high embankment. But Portland had enough grade to let a boy on a bike coast, and the walk from Henderson's back porch ran on a level to the alley. Flush with the alley rose an ugly garage made of an old barn and a loft, a relic of carriage days. Hank parked his car in a homemade drive of gritting cinders and clinkers from the Henderson furnace.

The rain had the sound of light, multitudinous feet running through dry leaves, a susurrus which was most inimical in the pitchy gloom of the alley. The garage was equipped with a pair of big twin doors hung on pulley-wheels which traveled on rusty overhead rails. Both doors were padlocked.

Instead of running in tracks at the bottom, the doors were secured only with a single small guide-wheel the size of a caster, one for each, and the caster for the door on the right had been bent far enough out of position for Hank to warp the corner of the door out over it and squeeze through the narrow aperture. In the muggy, oil-smelling interior the steady finger-ing of rain on the roof was a low monotone like a dull, continuous stroke

on a drum. Hank lighted a match to examine Henderson's car. It was dry.

He laid his hand on the bonnet, and the metal was cool. The car was locked. He used another match and brought the petal of flame close to the front license plate, B-1792. The screws holding the plate were rusty, but the slots in the heads were bright from recent contact with a screwdriver. Hank blew his match out and made his exit in the same manner as his breaking in. He followed the walk up to Henderson's back door, rang the bell. He could tell the man his plates had been stolen and replaced, possibly get some information in return. There was no answer to his ring.

AFTER the second ring he tried the door, found it unlocked and stepped into a lobby where a large electric refrigerator sounded with rhythmic rattling from a defective motor-pulley. He knocked on the back door, waited, tried the knob and stepped into the kitchen on linoleum.

"Mr. Henderson!" he called.

He searched the wall next to the door and turned on the lights. Kitchen table and checkered cloth, stove, sink, dirty dishes.

He hiked through a doorway into a dining room, on into a long living room, turned more lights on. All the shades were drawn. He called Henderson's name again from the front hall, shrugged, ascended the stairs. Upstairs he found four rooms of approximately equal size, bathroom, closets. One bed was unmade. The air was

musty, with all the odors of old wood brought out by the wet weather, and rank besides from tobacco smoke. It was the penetrating staleness of cigars, which always nauseated Hank a little. He found ashtrays full of cigarette butts, noted the brand which Henderson smoked.

In the closet in that room with the unmade bed hung three girl's dresses along with the man's things. Traces of powder under the mirror in one of the rooms. In the bathroom were two tubes of lipstick and a vanity on a shelf.

He went downstairs, found the basement door and opened it, turned the basement lights on with a switch at the head of the stairs and stood there looking down. Saliva collected in his mouth and he swallowed. Below him on the cement of the basement floor was as bloody a mess as he had ever seen.

Presumably the dead man was Henderson—a man past thirty, with thin blond hair, of healthy build. He lay face down in a mass of broken beer bottles, apparently had tripped and fallen when carrying a load down. Trickle of blood from the pool in which he lay formed a network to the right, joined en route to a drain. No point in going down there.

But he did scrutinize the top steps for the point at which Henderson had tripped and fatally fallen. The house was at least thirty years old, and the wood of the steps was cheesy, easily marked. But there were no significant marks beyond normal wear at the edges of the wooden slabs. He found a scuffed mark on the linoleum where he was standing. And then he laughed, startling himself into gooseflesh in

the silence and stagnant air of the old house. Because this was murder, and the murderer had given himself away by thoughtlessly closing the basement door, or

HANK left the door ajar and went to the kitchen door, opened it. The sound of the rain rushed in on its myriad footfalls. He closed the door, and within the time of a couple of heartbeats the basement door swung shut, closed by the pull of the draft through the kitchen.

Now, then; why was it necessary to kill Henderson just for the use of his license plates? Hank hunkered down and examined the scuff on the linoleum in front of the basement door. It was a curving, dragged mark as though made with the corner of a dirty box, possibly a beer keg. Or the sole of a shoe skidding. Along the mark occurred minute flecks of bright yellow paint, dried. He blew on them and they were loose, tumbling away across the linoleum.

Nodding, he rose and commenced a search in the direction indicated by the mark. He advanced into the main ground-floor room, a studio, mapping a fan-shaped area as he hunted. The search yielded nothing. He extended the boundaries of the fan, found what he was looking for on the right. He fished it out from the coils of a radiator against the back wall, an octagonal yellow pencil which had been spun under someone's foot and had bounced freakishly from the studio rug into this chance hiding place. The point was unbroken, though down the angles of the pencil's octagonal length the yellow paint was mashed and chipped away.

In the studio was a battered flat-top

desk which accommodated every variety of art material Hank could think of off-hand, from a copper canister of crow-quill and lithograph pen points to beeswax and a gadget consisting of a copper cup, spout, and handle, a tjanting for making batiks. This Henderson had monkeyed with all technical methods. There were pounds of oil paints in tubes, a vase with a bouquet of brushes whose bristles smelled like a wet dog. On the walls hung a generous display of Henderson's work, and Hank remembered where he had seen the name before. Over the fireplace hung a girl picture in oil, the original of the cover of a national magazine which Hank had seen on the stands a couple of months ago, and liked. The guy could paint.

On the desk was a cigar box full of pencils, yellow ones of graphite, and carbon pencils in round shafts of raw reddish wood that had a smell of cedar. The yellow pencils were all of a kind, all pointed in the same way.

In the display of pictures on the walls were three excellent nudes, two of them done from the same model. The artist had a genius for rendering flesh tones, and an interest in detail. He had been perfecting a style which approached three-dimensional reality. In the best nude the flesh suggested the tingling flush of life. Dark-haired girl, reading a letter and laughing with the sheer joy of living. It was a job that would take a prize somewhere, if it hadn't done so already.

On a large easel standing near the desk was a canvas which Henderson had been working on, another study of the same girl, with the same individuality of slenderness that Henderson appeared to like. Uncompleted as it

was, this work was Henderson's best and another prizewinner.

Hank said, "Cripes."

He was wondering why the murderer had used a yellow pencil instead of one of the more plausible, round carbon pencils, besides giving his imagination free rein anent this girl, when the bell in the kitchen cut loose with an ominous, unexpected ringing. A long blast and two shorts. And the front door opened, as if the visitor was accustomed to making these "courtesy" rings.

HANK looked around hastily, got behind a screen near the fireplace and squatted down as the front door slammed. He squinted through the crack between panels of the screen as footsteps came down the hall, through the archway into the studio.

"Hello, Don!" the girl called. She was the girl Henderson had been using for the canvas racked on the easel. She listened for an instant after her call, head tilted engagingly with her lips parted; she glanced at a tiny gold watch on her wrist, shrugged. Her blue-black hair gleamed with rain-mist.

Entering the studio she placed a transparent silk umbrella on the floor to dry. She wore an oiled-silk raincoat also, through which her dress was plainly visible. The dress had no sleeves, and in the rustling, cellophane clear oiled silk her bare round arms were somehow indecent. She unbuttoned the coat, hung it on the wall near the model-stand, diagonally across the room from the easel. Her hands went to the top button of her dress, posed there momentarily while she listened. She called again, "Do-o-on! Martha's here!"

When there was no answer, she mixed a frown with a smile, and humming the haunting and eerily sweet melody of "Loch Lomond," she repaired to Henderson's battered desk, took something from the top drawer and turned around with it. Hank grinned a grin, because he had seen a revolver in that drawer, the which was now held steadily in her fist, and pointed directly at him besides.

"Come on out," she ordered curtly.

"Sure enough," said Hank. He got to his feet and casually circled the end of the screen, grinning at her. Sticking his hands in his pockets he nodded at the gun and said, "That was a silly thing to do. Suppose I was a crook and I had a gun; just imagine what might have happened to you. And just suppose there aren't any bullets in that gun anyhow."

"It's loaded, all right," she said with charming grimness. "Don keeps it loaded."

"Does he?" He lifted an eyebrow, jingled a couple of coins in his pocket. "Maybe I took the bullets out."

She examined the gun, giving Hank plenty of time to jump her, but he stood in his tracks and laughed at her. "Put it away," he suggested. "I wouldn't lay a finger on you, no matter how much I'd like to. If you think you have to, you can let out a scream, and you'll get better results than with the gun."

She thought she could, so she returned the gun to the drawer. "Aren't you proud of yourself," she said scornfully. "There's nothing cheaper than a peeping Tom."

"Call me Hank," he said equably. "When you came in, I didn't know who you were, and then I didn't want to scare you by popping out all of a sudden."

His smile was so engaging that she caught it. She asked, "Where's Mr. Henderson?"

"He had to go on a trip suddenly. A long trip, one-way."

"That's funny." Her forehead wrinkled. "I was supposed to pose for him tonight."

"Can I give you a ride home?" he invited. "My car's out in back."

SHE hesitated, appraising him. "All right. I wish he'd thought of calling me before he went, though. It's a long way to my place; maybe you want to change your mind about giving me the lift."

"As long as it's not over the state line, I guess it'll be all right."

"I'll be ready in a minute." Hank strolled to the desk and selected one of the pencils from the box.

"Say, Martha," he called. "What's the idea of sharpening pencils this way? Happen to know?"

They were cut away to expose the lead for an inch and a half on one side, and on the other the wood was trimmed very sharply, actually leaving only a stub of a point for use. The pencil Hank had found in the radiator was sharpened in the ordinary manner.

"Why, it's the way they're held," Martha explained as though the fact was obvious. "You can shade with them that way." She took one of the pencils and demonstrated on a scrap of paper. She took the pencil between thumb and the first two fingers, teacup fashion, with the shank of the pencil running between the ring and little finger for control. The effect of this method was to wear the points to a chisel edge, enabling the artist to get a line as sharp as a pen line or as broad as with a grease pencil. This was

something the murderer didn't know, either. Furthermore, the murderer's pencil had an eraser, and the drawing pencils had none. Hank appropriated one for a sample. A few seconds later when Martha got her coat on, they were off.

Out in the alley when they got into the car, Hank requested, "If you don't mind, I'd like to run downtown first and see a ma."

CHAPTER V

The Bughouse

MARTHA said it was all right, and he headed back down Portland Avenue. He didn't want to leave her hanging around Henderson's, discovering the body, and yelling bloody murder to the police. It did no one any good to get tied up with a murder at this stage of the game. There was the killing of Rugog besides, which might prove a tough one to explain away just now. On the way downtown he found that the model's full name was Martha Knopf, that she had been posing for only a few weeks, that she liked the work. Her "Oh" sounded like disappointment when Hank told her he couldn't draw worth sour apples.

"Maybe I'll take it up as a hobby," he suggested. "Would you pose for me?"

"There's no reason why not." She shrugged.

It was the darnedest thing, he thought, how there was a surplus of pretty girls all of a sudden. If a man deliberately set out to find a girl like Martha Knopf, he wouldn't know where to begin. Lydia he gave up for lost personally, except that he was committed to finding out what had

happened to her with no hope of gain. She'd have none of him.

Down at the Suit Yourself was Candy, who was just beginning to show response after his long campaign of raising a spark of interest in her. And here was Martha, who had sized him up with one good look and made no mistake about him. He knew he was a nice guy, with a fair amount of brains and no deformities of body or mind, but Martha was the first good looking girl to indicate he wouldn't have to spend time and effort convincing, and would take him as he was. Most certainly he would take her as she was. Just to show her that she didn't guess wrong he kept his hands on the wheel, taking no advantage of circumstances.

She wanted a cigarette; he fished a pack from his pocket and offered it so that she could take it without touching his hand. But her hand brushed his anyhow, and then she asked whether he didn't want a cigarette, lighted one for him. Her lips left a pleasant taste of lipstick on the tip, and he began to think that it was some time since he had kissed a girl.

He found a parking place without trouble at the Harrison, Cromwell's hotel, with the regular evening trade cut to a minimum by the rain. He walked through the lobby to the desk and asked for the lawyer. The clerk called his room, hung up and reported, "Sorry, Mr. Royce; he's not in; you might find him in the dining room or bar on a night like this, though."

"Don't page him; I'll look. Thanks." Hank tried the bar first and got looked at strenuously by a couple of glamour girls stranded by the weather. Darndest thing. When you're looking for them, there aren't any. When you

haven't got time for them, there're more than you can handle. He sauntered to the dining room entrance, glanced around, spotted Cromwell sitting alone at a table for two. Trade was light in here, too, and every time a knife hit a plate, it sounded like breakage.

Hank steered a course through the tables to Cromwell's, pulled the extra chair back and sat down. Cromwell stopped a piece of juicy sirloin on its way to his mouth, returned it to his plate. This was George Cromwell without any doubt, with his wrinkled face, the trap of jaw and the nose like a carrot-end, the gray hair offsetting the black eyebrows and black moustache. Hank could swear that this was the man who had picked up Lydia.

"My name's Royce," he announced, and was rewarded with the slightest flicker of interest in Cromwell's bright gray eyes. "You're the Monroe lawyer, aren't you?"

"Yes?" Cromwell asked inquisitively.

"I'm trying to get in touch with Lydia," Hank said, "and I thought you might be able to tell me where she is."

CROMWELL worked his leathery lips, stirred his piece of sirloin in gravy, laid the fork on the plate with a crack, and wiped his lips with his napkin.

"Is it important?" he asked.

"Important to me," Hank responded.

Cromwell smiled, showing a set of perfect, bluish-white teeth which were never produced by nature. "If you don't mind waiting," he urged, "I'll make a call and find out whether she wants to see you." He rose.

"Do you know where she is?" Hank demanded.

"I think I can get in touch with her."

"Don't bother; finish your dinner," Hank said. "Just give me her number and I'll call her myself. If she doesn't want to talk to me, she can hang up."

"I think I'd better call her. I'm her lawyer."

"You know I can't find out where she is, even if you give me her phone number. The phone company wouldn't give me her address. Sit down."

Cromwell sat down. "What do you want to see her about, may I ask?"

"It's a private matter. Never mind," Hank said, "I'll find out from her mother. You can give me the Monroe address, can't you?" He fumbled in his inside jacket pocket.

"I think it will save you considerable time if you let me make the call," Cromwell answered. "It won't take long."

"I'll take my chances," Hank refused. "Got a pencil?"

Cromwell stared at him, shrugged and brought out a handsome automatic pencil made of sterling silver, the mate to a sterling fountain pen. Wrong guess here. But Hank took it and wrote the Monroe address, which he already knew, on the back of an envelope. He thanked Cromwell very much and strode briskly out of the dining room into the lobby. Out there he turned right and entered the Gentlemen's Room. A Negro in a white uniform wanted to shine his shoes. Hank gave him a half dollar and told him to find something else to do, and the Negro disappeared. Hank kept the door open a fraction of an inch and watched the lobby.

Cromwell emerged from the dining room immediately and headed straight

for a line of telephone booths, none of which was in use. On his way he looked around the lobby the way anyone might, entered one of the booths and closed the door. Hank issued from his ambush and strode to the desk adjoining the booths, where there were pads of yellow telegraph blanks, a switchboard, and a neat red-headed girl on duty. He picked up a pad of blanks and poised over it.

A red light budded on the switchboard. The red head was waiting for it, and Hank had his neck craned just about as far as he was able. She repeated the number Cromwell called, "Nigh-un fow-er—thud-dee-six?" and plugged in. She looked at Hank, and he acted as though he had changed his mind. He shook his head absently, walked away, ducked into the booth next to Cromwell's. He left the folding door open so that the booth would remain dark. Quite plainly he heard Cromwell demand, "Doc? Why don't you stay near the phone?"

Hank was all ready to praise the phone company for its thin partitions, but from then on Cromwell was intelligible only in scattered words and phrases. Hank didn't find out who "Doc" was; the conversation was too rapid and too low. He heard, "Name Royce" Then, incredulously, "He killed Rugog? My God! Listen" The lawyer's voice was a mumble, rising to order "Doc" to send someone to Hank's apartment and "get him"

"You've got somebody there already?" Cromwell demanded clearly. "Spencer? All right. Don't let him get away this time. And operate right away. Now!"

Cromwell hung the receiver on the hook with a bang.

HANK straightened himself up and crowded into the corner of the dark booth. He heard the door of the next booth open with an impatient shove and saw Cromwell stride out on his return to the dining room, glancing about the lobby on his way.

Operate! On Lydia, surgically? Hank was tempted to run after Cromwell and throttle the truth out of him, but there might not be time. He hurried into the booth the lawyer had used and closed the door. Underneath the telephone was a lectern holding the telephone directory, open at the "M's". He went down the index of names rapidly, came to the name singled out by the mark of Cromwell's fingernail. "Roman A. Macky, M.D." It was a Riverview number, and the address was far out on River Drive. Hank scrambled from the phone booth and went to the street with the skirt of his trench coat sailing out behind.

"Got another call to make," he said to Martha, slamming the door and shooting the car away from the curb. He made a skidding U turn without signalling, and a cop roosting in a doorway drinking a glass of beer forgot about the lovely cold suds and cut loose on his whistle in a series of peanut-wagon tweets. There weren't any cars for him to commandeer, so it was all right.

"Where is it this time?" Martha asked pleasantly.

"Out on River Drive." Hank gave her the number. "A Dr. Macky. Lawyer, doctor, beggerman, thief. I'm making the rounds."

"Oh, the Haunted House," said she.

"Do you know the place?"

"I live just a few blocks from there. When I was a kid, a gang of us explored it. Somebody told us there were

ghosts hiding behind the wallpaper, and we kept on daring each other until we went in."

"What sort of place is it?"

"Oh, it's a beautiful place, in a way."

"What do you mean—in a way?"

He was using Grand Avenue this time, a straightaway to the Drive. There were car tracks on Grand, and he kept the machine out on the cobblestones between the tracks, taking his foot off the accelerator pedal every time he had to avoid another machine in going around, or cutting across the steel grooves of the tracks to pass a street car, to prevent skidding. The rain was a steady smashing spray against the windshield, and he was bent over the wheel with his eyes close to the glass. The speed was just under eighty.

"It's an old mansion, a brick one," Martha said calmly, ignoring the rocketing speed of the car as though she were talking with him over a cup of tea at home. "It used to be some millionaire's place, but he went abroad to live and it was closed up for years. You can't see the house from the Drive because of the big trees, but Don Henderson said it's probably the most important example of early American brick architecture in this part of the country. It hasn't any particular style; it's just beautiful. When it was falling to pieces and got all overgrown with weeds and vines, Dr. Macky came along and bought it for a song, and turned it into a private insane asylum. Sometimes when you're walking by on the Drive, you can hear screams." She made a sound of discomfort, and got another cigarette from Hank.

SO. A private bughouse. That was a nice kettle of fish for Lydia to be mixed up in, and the fact didn't tend

to decrease his speed any. When he hit the River Drive, he was still better than a mile from Macky's, and from here on the road was slick and high-bellied through some madness of road engineering, as interesting as a greased snake under this rain. Hank had to pull down to fifty miles an hour, but he still slung around to the loose gravel of the ditch on the wrong side of the corkscrewing "scenic" road when he negotiated the roller-coaster turns. Centrifugal force toppled Martha hard against him time after time. She didn't complain once about losing her balance, though she had to clutch him in places, turned half around on the seat once, and her legs were askew in the ample legroom under the dashboard or silkenly in the air. As a matter of fact, she had turned a succulent green around the gills, and was markedly languid in the way she yielded to the long, sickening slides of the fast car around the turns. She wasn't as at home at high speed as she pretended to be, any speed being high under the circumstances; she was scared faint.

The narrowest escape came when Hank took his foot off the pedal and slowed down to make the turn into Macky's drive. Rain greased the rounded slickness of the road, and even the lightest pressure on the brake pedal made the car swing when he saw that he was going past. The rear end of the car turned out lazily and they went aslant over the belly of the drive hopelessly out of control, and down, and down, making a complete change in direction and back around. The wheels on the left struck a low embankment reinforced with turf, and the impact hurled Martha against him.

The rear wheels had slewed a yard

and a half into the saturated ground and the right wheels had come high off the pavement, the car falling back with a frightening bound. It was horribly close. Another foot or two of skidding, or another inch in the air, and the car would have gone tumbling over a crumbling granite cliff thirty feet to a bank of rocks and the river below. The abrupt lodgement killed the motor. Hank stepped on the starter, with Martha crowded limply against him and breathing convulsively; he headed the car back across the drive in low gear, and Martha wearily removed her pressure from him.

Both took a deep breath together; Hank's heart was going, too, and his legs trembled with the nearness of death. He headed up into the graveled drive leading to Macky's, turned his lights off the moment he saw lights of the mansion through the dripping trees.

In front of the pillared entrance to the mansion was parked the expensive black sedan that had picked up Lydia. Hank rolled up alongside with the ignition cut off and braked to a stop. He got out and said, "Wait."

He tried the front door, and the knob was so stiff that for a moment he thought the high portal was locked. The portal yielded, he pushed in, closed it again, and shut out the endless surf-sound of the rain.

CHAPTER VI

The Works

HE stood in a spacious Colonial hallway, seeing a splendid mahogany staircase ascend from the rear in an architectural flourish to the second floor. To the right and left were

twin archways flanked with ornamental pillars. The one on the right was barred like a prison gate. Hank looked in. The walls of the room were padded, and the floor was heavily carpeted to the baseboards. The magnificent, high-ceilinged cell was inhabited by a solitary individual, an elderly, square-jawed gentleman dressed sedately in crisp steel-blue worsted. He had a businesslike appearance, and had the most intelligent eyes the detective had ever seen. With utter gravity the man raised his right arm, propped the back of his hand under his massive chin with the fingers extended, wiggled the fingers mockingly at Hank and enunciated oratorically, "Hoo, hoo-o! Hee, hee! Ho, ho! YOW!"

Bats. Hank looked to the left, into Macky's office. There was a desk, and something on it that jolted him more than the elderly genius's lunacy. It was a face. Cromwell's.

"It will bite you!" said the madman behind him in a gloating drawl.

It was a mask, cunningly realistic with the lawyer's black mustache and distinctive eyebrows, every hair duplicated, the folded flesh of age, the coloring. The surface of the mask had the texture of living skin; it was ghoulishly true to life. He picked it up from the desk and turned it over. Made of countless laminations of strips of tissue paper, the interior of the mask was a mold of a face other than Cromwell's. A heavier face, with an apish brutality about the nose, forehead and jaw. On the cheek inside was signed, "D. Henderson." Hank replaced the thing on the desk blotter.

Henderson must have taken a plaster mold of Cromwell's face to get

this reality; then he had to take another casting of Macky's brutish face to create the mask. A tour de force. Then Henderson had to be killed because he could spoil whatever scheme was afoot. Macky had done the kidnaping wearing this mask, must be close to Cromwell's stature. He had pretended to have a cold, coughed, covered the lower part of his face with his hand so that the immobility of his features wouldn't be evident immediately. Lydia had discovered that Macky wasn't Cromwell and had tried to escape from the car.

"You-u-u will die!" the madman gloated behind him.

Hank grimaced involuntarily and went hunting. He set foot on the staircase in the hall.

"Not up there!" the madman cautioned. "Oh, no! He is under the stairs. He will kill you the way he killed me. I am dead! You didn't know it, did you! But I am. I am dead, dead, dead."

"Thanks, old man," said Hank.

"Don't mention it," said the madman quietly. "For years and years and years and years I have wanted to do a man a favor."

"I beg your pardon," said Hank, "but frankly, are you nuts or what is this?"

The madman gazed at him with solemn, brilliant sanity and said, "Certainly I am. So are you, just the way everyone is. But I'll be darned if I like it in here. I've been here nearly six years, and if you've got time to hear the story of how I got in here, I'll tell you one that will raise your hair."

"Later on," said Hank, striding to the door behind the stairs. "Something's going on here."

"You're telling me," said the madman. "That scoundrel Macky has a girl

in there, and heaven's knows what he's going to do with her. But stick around a little while, will you? I'm as lonely as hell."

THE door under the stairs had bright light shining under it. Hank worked the knob soundlessly, yanked the door open.

It was an operating room, with all the paraphernalia, and an operation was in progress. On the operating table lay Lydia Monroe; she was still bucking as her system fought the ether being administered. Peggy Kane was taking care of that. The blade of a scalpel glittered liquidly in Dr. Macky's hand as he looked up, glaring. Lydia was strapped fast to the table, and the knife had not yet been used on her flesh.

"Get away from her!" Hank ordered. "Quick!"

"Kill him! Kill him!" the madman screamed.

Macky raised the scalpel to plunge it into Lydia's body. Simultaneously Peggy Kane made a snatch at the instrument table next to her, where surgical instruments glittered wickedly. She caught up a squat, heavy jar filled with a transparent liquid and flung it at Hank with all her might, the way she would pitch a baseball.

Things happened faster than Hank could think. His gun had jumped into his hand with his order, and his fist and his forefinger closed automatically around butt and trigger. With the roar of the heavy revolver, as he flung up his right arm in defense, the heavy glass jar exploded in Peggy's hand. Macky's downward sweep with the scalpel hit the metal table and the blade snapped. He jerked erect, twisted around and bent over to his knees,

clawing at his face and screaming.

"Just for fun," said Hank to Peggy, "I ought to sock two or three bullets through your tummy, where it would hurt most. Take that mask off Lydia's face before I lose my temper."

Peggy took off the ether mask. Lydia lay quiet, out completely now. Hank ordered, "Back away," and Peggy backed away obediently. He went around the operating table to the groveling Macky and slugged the doctor over his white head with the barrel of the pistol. Macky fell sloppily on the floor, grinning in his unconsciousness, and Hank had an impulse to stamp on the white teeth.

"What was in that jar?" he asked.

"Alcohol," said Peggy.

The shattered glass had cut Macky's face here and there, and the alcohol had gotten into his eyes. There was a cut on Peggy's hand. Keeping his gun on her, Hank stooped and emptied Macky's pockets. Among the collection he found keys, in particular a big fellow that could only be the key to the cage opposite the office, in which the madman was confined. He ordered the girl to pick up the unconscious Macky, and carry him to the cage. He locked them in, and the madman began laughing, stalking Peggy when she laid Macky on the floor.

HANK went back to the operating room and bent to examine the stuff he had gotten from Macky's pockets after making sure that Lydia would gradually drift out of her anaesthesia. There was a pencil among the effects; it had an eraser, and it was sharpened like the one Hank had picked up at Henderson's. There was also a pocket knife. What was interesting was the fact that there was a

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nick in one of the knife blades, and the nick left its distinctive mark on the sharpened pencils. That made Macky Henderson's murderer.

Also in Macky's belongings was a wallet, in which was a most interesting paper. It was dated two months before, was signed by Lydia, and gave sixty thousand dollars to the "Macky Hospital for the Insane." George Cromwell had executed the instrument, and it was witnessed by two unreadable signatures, those of persons picked from the street. Hank wheeled the operating table back into the office, unbuckled the straps which secured Lydia. She was covered with sheeting only. He went outside to his car, opened the door and asked Martha whether she could drive.

"Of course I can," she responded.

She was about Lydia's size. He said, "I'll appreciate it very much if you'll do me a favor. There's a girl in here who got soaked in the rain. Could you go home and collect an outfit for her? A dress and underthings and so on? You'll get paid, and there's no particular hurry."

"Sure," said Martha, moving over to the wheel. "And don't worry about the pay."

Hank was leaning inside somewhat; and he kissed her. He returned to Macky's office, with Martha letting the car into gear and winding down the graveled road to the River Drive.

Lydia was just coming to, rolling her head and moaning a little.

Hank shook his head with the way things figured out, with Mrs. Monroe and Cromwell mixed up with the Macky outfit as far as he could see. When Lydia regained consciousness and was able to talk, he found he was right.

Cromwell held Lydia's power of attorney, and with her mother had squandered most of Lydia's inheritance from her father. There had been over two million dollars, and the fortune had been reduced to less than fifty thousand through monkeying with the stock market. Mrs. Monroe was totally brainless and extravagant as far as money was concerned, and Monroe had left everything to his daughter. It might be said for Cromwell that he had at least made outright purchases of stock, but he didn't know there was a recession in business. In time, perhaps years, the holdings in which he had sunk the Monroe fortune might climb back into the money.

As Hank got it, the old lady wasn't right in her mind and scarcely knew that she had a daughter named Lydia. She had co-operated with Cromwell, and Cromwell had arranged things with his friend Macky. Lydia had no feeling for her mother, who could think of nothing but money.

When Lydia's fortune was lost, they schemed to protect themselves, and Lydia's headstrong personality fitted in. Lydia had a contempt for money after seeing how it had warped her mother, and had gone to work in an office like any other girl, trying to escape by earning a meager salary. Her renunciation of her moneyed, secure existence had been publicized.

Cromwell had drawn up a paper giving the dregs of the fortune to Macky, intending to sell enough of the stock he was stuck with to make up the amount of sixty thousand dollars and then close out the bank account. After the publicity, the law would not have been surprised at her relinquishing all rights to the Monroe wealth, giving it away in whatever manner.

Macky first had to threaten her with a mutilation operation in order to make her sign the paper, predated. She signed it. Then, obeying Cromwell's order from the Hotel Harrison, Macky had prepared to perform an operation for imaginary appendicitis on Lydia, during which he was supposed to let her die. He had attempted to kill her.

HANK used the desk phone and called Chief Dahlgren at headquarters. "This is Hank," he said. "I'm not getting a dime for this job, and the pleasure is all yours. Be a good egg and cover things up as much as you can."

"Go ahead," said Dahlgren.

"This time you've got the works," Hank stated. "It's murder, kidnaping, embezzlement, extortion, and a few other things no doubt." He gave his facts. "Send out some squad cars. Go down to the Harrison and pick up Cromwell; send a car to my place and pick up a gunman named Spencer, who's waiting there to kill me. And for the love of Mike, get out here to Macky's as fast as you can. There's a maniac out here who's slugging the daylight out of a couple of your prisoners."

Lydia was still groggy from the ether, but she knew what was going on. She sat up drunkenly and stretched her arms for Hank. He stayed out of reach morosely.

He remarked, "I thought you could take care of yourself. You've done all right without me so far."

"Don't be like that!" she wailed.

He kept his hands at his sides, closed his fists, opened them again and said, "I've got a date with that blonde down at the Suit Yourself. The checkroom girl, Candy."

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"You can break the date, can't you?"

"Listen," Hank said. "You remember the first time I saw you? Your boss called up mine and wanted a bodyguard for a friend of his that was going out west with a lot of money. I showed up at your office and what did you do?"

"What did I do?" she asked.

"You thought I looked like a kid,"

Hank said. "You wouldn't hire me, and while I was standing there, you called my boss up and bawled him out for sending a boy over. You said, 'Next time, don't send a boy.'"

Lydia buried her cheek against him and curled her legs up, sitting on the operating table. In spite of himself Hank's arms slipped around her. Lydia murmured, "Well, it sort of depends on what the boy is for."

Protection for the Dead

ALL too often in this troubled world of ours, the law will fail to bring justice to the living. Many a self-confessed, cold-blooded, premeditated killer, for example, is often-times acquitted by a jury of his peers, while the avowedly innocent may sometimes become enmeshed in a net of circumstantial evidence that leads inexorably to the hangman's noose. Fortunately, however, the law is much more just with the dead. Apparently because, once dead, a person can no longer raise a cry to protect his interests, the law becomes more vigilant in making certain that the dead man's last wishes are respected wherever possible.

To every person is given the sole right of directing the manner in which his body is to be disposed of after death. Many of us who are not too particular in life as to where we live suddenly give grave thought to our last resting places when death draws near. A man who has sailed the seven seas all of his life will indicate a preference for a lonely

grave somewhere in the desert. Another who has spent the best years of his life rooted to the dull routine of city life will want to be cremated and his ashes strewn from a plane to the angry waters of the Atlantic. Still another will want nothing better than to be buried in the family plot next to those of his family who have gone before him.

Whatever their desires may be, all they need do is to give the necessary instructions to their executors, who will then be legally bound to carry out such orders. The slightest reasonable wish of the living in the manner of burial after death is given effect by the law.

Not only may a person specify to the last detail as to the disposal of his earthly remains, but he also has the last say as to what is to be done with any part of his body which he may lose through accident, surgical operation, or otherwise. Thus, if a person has become dearly attached to his appendix and it is subsequently removed by surgical operation, he can direct his doctor to keep it from

the hospital cat and possibly to pickle it in an ornamental jar filled with formaldehyde.

In like manner, if an impacted wisdom tooth proves painful and must be removed, then, if so directed, the dentist cannot keep it for himself but must turn it over to the patient, who may want to carry it on his watch chain as a lucky charm.

While it may be easy to dispose of an old appendix or a decayed, broken-down tooth, it is indeed another matter when a leg or an arm is involved. Most people are so attached to their limbs that when they have to be amputated, they insist upon a proper, decent burial for the lost parts. It is not unusual, therefore, to find, in some parts of the country, tombstones in village cemeteries reading, "Here lies John Doe's left arm, 1901-1927. It was good while it lasted."

No matter what fortune brings us during life, we are at least certain of a last resting place after death. The law is that every person who dies shall be buried under ground. If we should die penniless and thus unable to meet our Maker in a heavy bronze casket, we need not despair, for the law has provided that a wooden casket is to be furnished in any event. Those of us who are philosophical can probably explain these gruesome matters away by saying that after you're dead, it just doesn't make any difference anymore.



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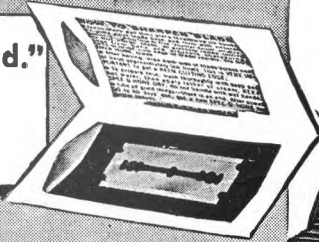
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