THE BEST IN NEW DETECTIVE FICTION

AND

MYSTERY BOOK

MAGAZINE

SUMMER
25c

THE CASE OF *The Dancing* SANDWICHES

A Murder Frame Mystery

By FREDRIC BROWN

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Mystery Book Magazine

THE BEST IN NEW CRIME FICTION—NO REPRINTS

Vol. 10, No. 1 A THRILLING PUBLICATION Summer, 1950

Two Featured Short Novels

Five Short Stories

Features

Also See "From the Case Files," by Simpson M. Ritter, on Page 112, and "A Bargain in Crime," by Sam Sleuth, on Page 142

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GOOD CRIMES *are* COMING

A Preview of Cases on the Calendar for Our Next Issue

IT WAS morning, and John Quincy was driving to work, and he was thinking—among other things—about murder. Just academically, though. He didn't really expect to find murder that morning.

Murder, he was thinking, can happen anywhere. In dark alleys on fog-choked nights to the sound of river whistles. In drawing rooms rich with sad mahogany. In the wheat fields, on the broad highways. In Macy's window at high noon, as the saying goes.

It could even happen in Philadelphia.

Quincy coaxed the old sedan along and in a half-hearted way tried to keep his mind on the traffic lights. He yawned. He was still half asleep, although his thoughts would have rambled anyway if he had been completely awake.

Blasting Pistols

John Quincy's burden, as he liked to think of it, was mainly the fact that he no longer worked on a newspaper, but for a television station. Yes, here he was, thirty years old, half a lifetime behind him, slaving away in Siberia, which was just another name for the Newsreel Lab of Television Station KLL-TV. He sighed, and savored his tragedy a bit, in the manner of a Russian poet.

He glanced at the Autoload sixteen millimeter movie camera on the seat beside him. In the old days he would have carried a Graflex—not that he was much of a photographer, but he just liked to be prepared in case anything happened. Things could happen. Even in Philadelphia. . . .

At this moment he happened to glance, quite idly, to the right as he passed a side street. He saw a car parked about a hundred feet away. A big, black heavy sedan. He saw two men scurry across the street, diagonally, veering toward him. He saw great puddles of fear splashed across their faces, both of them. He barely had time to lift his eyebrows when two other men stepped from behind the black sedan, raised pistols, and started to blast away at the first two men.

Whang! Spratttt! Whang-whang!

Quincy's eyebrows went up, his jaw went down. He jammed the brakes.

The Pointing Camera

He grabbed the camera, fast, from the seat. He checked the exposure hastily, set the distance to infinity, then aimed the camera through the open right hand window. He pressed the button. *Whirrrrrr—*

Whang! Whang!

More shots. Quincy watched through the finder rectangle. The victims were nearest him. They were both little men and, beyond them, their assailants stood calmly there by the black sedan's fender and kept shooting.

The first of the little men stumbled and sprawled. He fell as though he had simply tripped over something. The

second victim stopped short. He threw his chin up, showed a twisted face, then tried to lift his arms and fell over backward.

Quincy could hear people shouting. From the corner of his eye he glimpsed doors flung open . . . distant white faces . . . somebody running . . . the gunmen scrambling back into the sedan. He heard a woman scream.

The whole thing hadn't taken ten seconds.

Quincy kept his camera pointed at the men lying on the street, and then he heard the growl of the sedan moving off, and he panned the camera upward to catch it as it faded away.

The Black Sedan

He had a final look at the rear window of the murder sedan. He saw a blob of a face—no features he could recognize—and he saw a finger jabbing toward him, pointing. He felt as though he had just swallowed an icicle.

Those killers had seen him! They'd seen his camera!

Quincy shifted gears and got out of there fast. He went through a red light and his knees shook so he could hardly keep his foot on the accelerator. And then he saw it in his rearview mirror.

The big black sedan! It had circled the block, and had come up behind him! The killers had sighted him, and now were closing in to give their guns another workout. . . .

That's the rapid-fire beginning of SIX MINUTES OF MURDER, complete book-length detective novel by Walt Sheldon which will be featured in our next issue of MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE.

As it turns out, the killers don't get either Quincy or the incriminating film right away. Not until Quincy has involved his lovely girl-friend, Marlyn, does the hot water he's in become sizzling.

You'll like the nice tongue-in-cheek zip of this yarn, its excitement and its fun. It's lively, loose, amusing stuff, told against the glamorous backdrop of a television studio.

SIX MINUTES OF MURDER will

[*Turn page*]

give you many minutes of reading pleasure!

Far North Mystery

Also in our next issue we will give you a detective novelet that is built up on an extremely unique subject. People who are familiar with the happenings in the Far North have often heard tell of the famous Ice Pools. These are betting coups that rival the Irish Sweepstakes and other popular big-prize horse-race pools.

The Ice Pool is based on the day, hour and minute that the ice goes out on a particular river. Sometimes the number of tickets sold on a particular pool will guarantee that the winner will collect thousands of dollars.

William Degenhard has set a fascinating story of crime and intrigue against the background of the Ice Pool in Nenana, and the way in which the mystic moment when the ice goes out is woven into the pattern of murder in the snowdrifts or along the slushy streets of the Alaskan town makes DEATH IN ALASKA one of the most exciting stories it has been our privilege and pleasure to publish in this magazine in a long time.

Steve Webster returns to his home town while the excitement concerning the pool is building up to a crescendo, and is immediately plunged into a murder melee built up around his partner Sam Pew. Most folks believed that Steve was coming to meet Sam with murder in his heart, but what Webster's actual intentions were—well, wait until you read this grand yarn!

Besides SIX MINUTES OF MURDER and DEATH IN ALASKA the next issue of MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE will bring you a variety of other top-flight stories and features. Yes, the next issue looks like a real treat. Be on hand to enjoy it.

FROM OUR READERS

THIS time in our mail bag the majority of letters concern themselves with the shorter fiction in our recent issue of MBM. Though there were many who had nice things to say about WALTZ WITH DEATH, by Kelley

Roos, a few raised this objection—which is well expressed in the following letter:

Dear Editor: There can be no question about WALTZ WITH DEATH being a superior story, well-written and taut with suspense. I liked it, and I'm sure most of your other readers did. But I can't help but feel that there is something lacking in a detective story told from a girl's point of view, particularly when told in the first person, as this story was. To me, detective stories concern a rough, tough business, and the protagonist can only effectively be a man. Women are important in these stories, sure, but in a secondary role, and the role must never be anything else but secondary . . . . —*James V. Donelkey, New Haven, Conn.*

We wonder how many of our other readers agree with Mr. Donelkey's sentiments. We'd be very happy to hear your private opinion on the subject.

And here is a short note from someone who prefers to omit his name.

Dear Editor: I enjoyed HARD GUY BURKE, written by Bill Erin. I am a shut in and read constantly. I like his style and clear thinking. Hope to read more of his stories in your excellent MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE.—*A Reader, who thanks you for a sea story, La Crosse, Wis.*

We always enjoy getting mail from readers who write just to say hello. This is the sort of note we mean:

Dear Editor: Many times I have wanted to write, not only to you but to plenty other editors, to tell them how very much I love to read. I have just now put down my MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE. It is so good I shall keep it for a rainy eve, then read it again and pass it on to the boys who are ill. MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE is tops from first to last page.—*Molly Hedman, 4608 Bline Ave., Union City, N. J.*

Thank you.

We'll be back again next issue, and we hope all you folks will be with us then. Meanwhile, thanks to everybody—and whether you have criticism or praise to offer, please drop us a letter or a postcard. We'd appreciate hearing from you. Just write to: The Editor, MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE, Best Publications, Inc., 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. So long until next time!

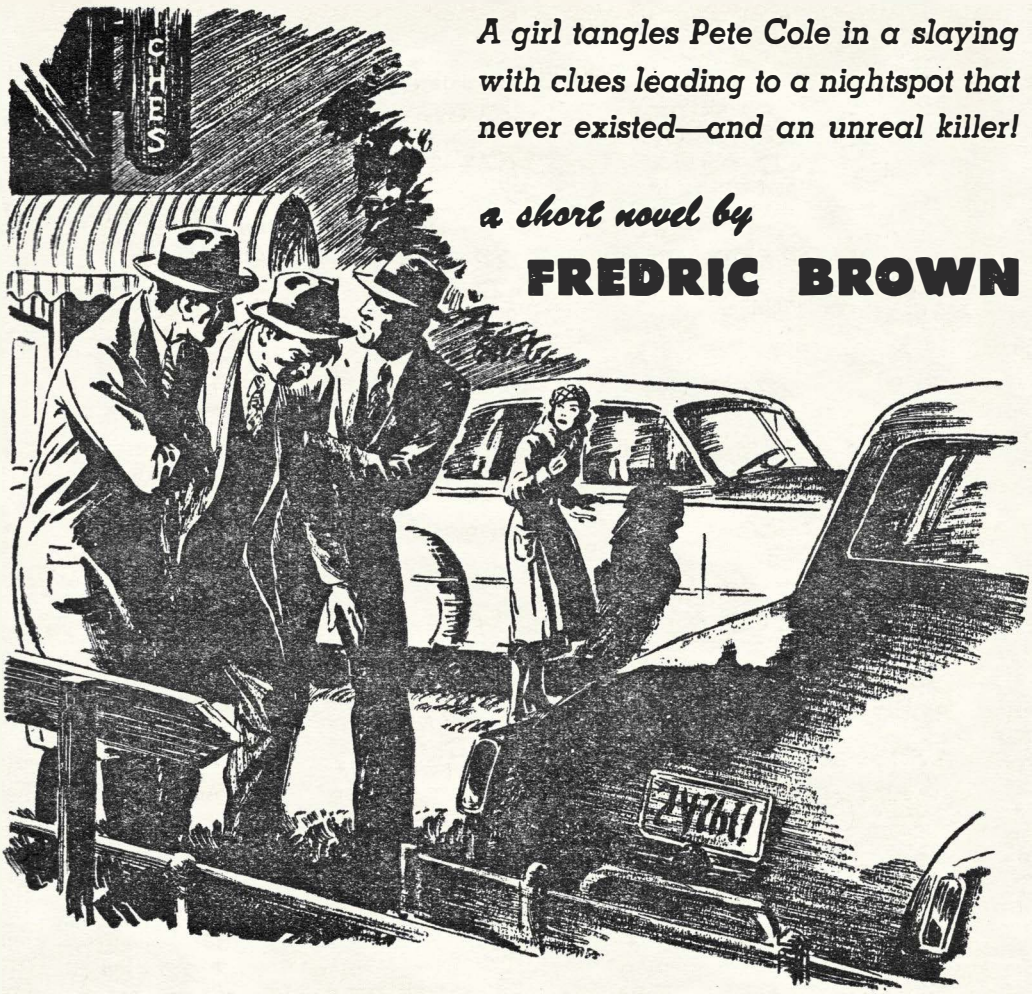
—THE EDITOR.

JERRY RECAPTURED THE LION AND THEN...

ON AN OVERNIGHT HOP TO THE NEXT TOWN, YOUNG JERRY HUNTER'S SMALL TRAVELING CIRCUS SUDDENLY LOSES ONE OF ITS MAJOR ATTRACTIONS...

NEXT MORNING

MARY PETERS HAD HEARD THAT ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN ON OPENING DAY OF BASS SEASON. BUT THIS IS TOO MUCH!



A girl tangles Pete Cole in a slaying with clues leading to a nightspot that never existed—and an unreal killer!

a short novel by

FREDRIC BROWN

The Case of the DANCING SANDWICHES

CHAPTER I

IT WAS an evening like any other evening—up to midnight, when the drinks began to sneak up on him. And Carl Dixon was a man like any other man, so he began to forget that he had a fiancee who was out of town for a few days, and he began to hold Dorothy more tightly when they danced.

He squeezed her hand and felt an answering pressure. She turned her head and looked at him, her face only inches from his, and her face was beautiful in the smoky dimness of the night club. Her body was beautiful, too, although he couldn't see that. It was too close to him.

She put her head back on his shoulder and he got a heady whiff of the per-

fume again. It was wonderful. By inversion it made him think of Susan because Susan didn't go in for perfume. And he was discovering now that he liked perfume. Maybe he should give some perfume to Susan. She'd probably use it if she were given some. Possibly the same—

"Dorothy," he said.

"Yes, Carl?" into his shoulder.

"What kind of perfume is that? It's wonderful."

She raised her head from his shoulder again, and again her face was inches from his. "Why do you want to know?" She was laughing at him.

"Just curious. Is it a secret?"

"*Le Secrêt?* No, I have some of that, too. But this is called *Une Nuit d'Amour.*"

Her dark eyes were laughing into his and her so-red tempting lips were laughing, too. But just for a second—and a second can be a long time—there was something in her eyes besides laughter. Then her face was turned from his again.

But it shook him so that he almost missed a step. The way she'd said it—*Une Nuit d'Amour*—and the way she'd looked at him, well, his French wasn't much but it was enough to translate *Une Nuit d'Amour* into a night of love. And his knowledge of women wasn't much but it was enough to translate that look she'd given him into the promise of a night of love, this very night, if he wished.

It almost sobered Carl Dixon because it proposed so many simultaneous questions—practical and moral—for his keen, accountant's mind to answer. There was Susan. He loved Susan—not fervently, not passionately, but, he thought, sincerely. He was going to marry her next spring. They'd be happy together. Was it worth risking *that,* however slight the risk might be? Part of him said no and part of him said yes, and his mind weighed the two and decided that the balance depended upon whether the risk was negligible or considerable.

He thought, what about her brother? How would they get rid of him? But there must be an answer to that, else why her invitation?

But what about his job, if he risked a scandal?

THE dance ended and the clarinet tootled a little "That's all" to show that it was the end of a set. And Carl Dixon followed Dorothy back to the table where her brother waited. Walking three steps behind, he couldn't keep his eyes off her bare, white shoulders and her almost-bare white back, the black sleekness of her hair (Susan's was a nondescript brown) and the black sleekness of the satin that molded her hips and thighs as smoothly as the white skin molded her back and shoulders.

Vic Tremaine grinned at them, showing the gold tooth that was the only thing about him Carl Dixon didn't like.

"Hi, kids," he said. "I had our drinks replenished while you were gone."

Carl held Dorothy's chair for her and then took his own and sipped moodily at his drink, wondering.

For one thing he wondered just what he knew about these people and decided he didn't really know a thing except what Vic had told him. He'd met Vic Tremaine quite casually in a bar about two weeks ago. They'd been standing next to each other and he couldn't remember now which of them had spoken first. He rather thought it had been he. He'd asked Vic for a match. Then they'd got to talking and had liked each other.

But neither of them had tried to follow up on the acquaintance. Three days ago he'd run into Vic again, this time on the street, and they'd had lunch together. Over that lunch they'd exchanged addresses, quite casually, Vic explaining

but Carl Dixon Was the One They Framed!

that he was still a stranger in Manhattan and didn't know many people—wouldn't Carl give him a ring sometime if he found himself at a loose end? And Vic had talked a little more about himself then. He'd run a roadhouse near Chicago, but things were dull there and he'd sold out and come to New York. Now he was looking for a place near

PETE COLE

New York, preferably on Long Island, but possibly in Jersey. A quiet little place, nothing big or pretentious with a floor show—but with a good pianist who could sing, to alternate with a three-piece combo for dancing.

He'd probably be in partnership with a man by the name of Richard Ancin—he'd known Ancin for many years and had shared other enterprises with him. Ancin was a great guy. Carl would like him. And Carl would also like his, Vic's, sister Dorothy, who'd be joining him in New York shortly.

And tonight, just as he'd got home from work, Vic had called. He'd said there were two things to celebrate. Dorothy had just arrived in town for one thing. For another, Dick Ancin had found a little place for them in Jersey and was already there, running it. The man they'd bought it from had turned it over right away.

Would Carl have dinner with him and Dorothy?

Carl Dixon had demurred at first, but not long. He was a bit lonesome, with Susan out of town visiting her parents in Philadelphia. And it was Friday night, so he didn't have to go to work the next day. And he did like Vic, in spite of the gold tooth. And, on the phone, Vic said it was his celebration and on him, that Carl wasn't even to bring his wallet along. Yes, it was an invitation that would have been hard to turn down.

And since then—until now—he'd been glad he'd accepted. Dorothy Tremaine had turned out to be a knockout. They'd had cocktails—several apiece—at a crowded bar at the Astor and Carl felt a mild, delightful glow even before they'd eaten dinner at Lindy's. Dorothy said she'd never been to Lindy's, other times she'd been in New York and wanted to see all the celebrities. So they went to Lindy's (without Carl admitting that he'd never been there either) and had a fine dinner, although they didn't see—or at least they didn't recognize—any celebrities.

It had been almost ten o'clock when they'd got in Vic's car, all three of them in the front seat, and Carl had to put his arm up along the back of the seat so there'd be room. Dorothy had been very soft and warm against him and for the first time he'd been close enough to smell that perfume.

It had been almost more intoxicating than the martinis. Not in just the same way, of course.

Dorothy had done quite a bit of talking and had, as women can, led him into doing quite a bit of talking, too. So he'd hardly noticed where or even what direction they went after the Holland Tunnel. He did remember the tunnel because there was so much of it and because he'd remarked to Dorothy how wonderful it was that a car could turn into a submarine and go right under a river.

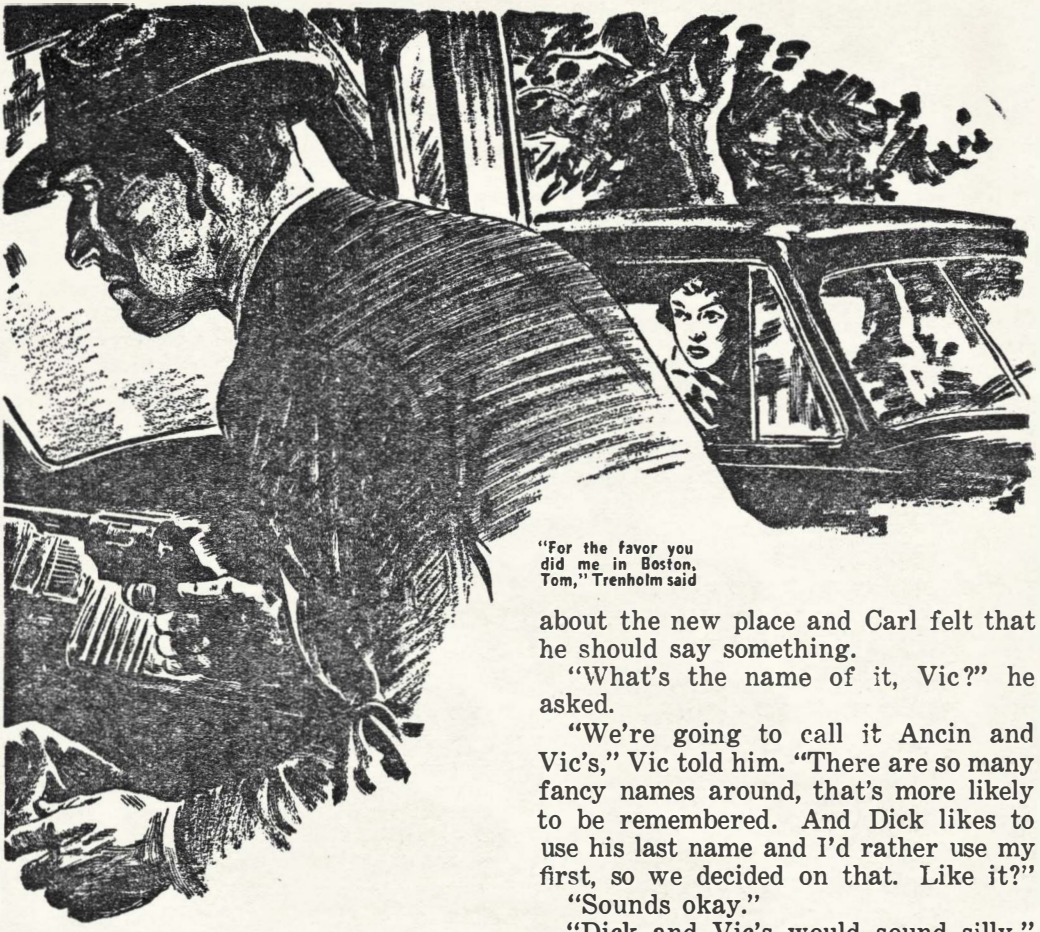
Anyway, he didn't know Jersey. They had gone through several towns that might have been Jersey City, Hoboken and Weehawken, or they might have been Jersey City, Newark and Elizabeth. Or any other reasonable combination you can suggest.

FINALLY Vic had turned in a parking lot beside a brightly lighted place and Dorothy had asked eagerly, "Is this it, Vic?"

Vic had laughed and said no, his place wasn't anywhere near this big, although they were going to expand it a bit now that they had it.

"It's early yet," he said. "Not much after eleven, and you said you wanted to dance a bit. Let's spend an hour here and have a few more drinks and you and Carl can dance a couple of times."

Dorothy had said it was a good idea and then, as they were getting out of the car, she'd laughed and said to Carl, "You'll *have* to dance with me, Carl. Vic won't. He says it's practically incest for



"For the favor you did me in Boston, Tom," Trenholm said

a man to dance with his own sister."

Carl had laughed, too, but down inside he'd been just a little shocked. Susan wouldn't have said that. Just maybe—and some other little things pointed that way—Dorothy wasn't quite as moral a girl as Susan. In fact, maybe—just maybe—

And now it was midnight and several dances and quite a few drinks later, and the maybe wasn't a maybe any more, and it worried him so that he almost wished that he hadn't come with them. He was a little drunk by now, but he could still think clearly enough to realize the problems involved.

Well, he didn't have to decide right away. Vic and Dorothy were talking about the new place and Carl felt that he should say something.

"What's the name of it, Vic?" he asked.

"We're going to call it Ancin and Vic's," Vic told him. "There are so many fancy names around, that's more likely to be remembered. And Dick likes to use his last name and I'd rather use my first, so we decided on that. Like it?"

"Sounds okay."

"Dick and Vic's would sound silly," Dorothy said. "And Ancin and Tremaine would be worse. Too—what's the word I want, Carl?"

He was still sober enough to think of it. "Pretentious, maybe?"

She patted his hand. And then let her hand remain on top of his.

Vic glanced at his wrist watch. He said, "One more drink and we'll go there."

Carl said, "Maybe I'd better skip this one."

Vic laughed at him, and ordered three drinks. And Carl didn't want to look like a sissy so he drank his, but he shouldn't have. He had to concentrate pretty hard after that not to give away how drunk he was. At any rate, he hoped he wasn't giving it away.

He could still follow what Vic was saying about the size of the new place. "It's about two-thirds the size it's going to be when we get the addition built for the bar," Vic said. "Right now the bar's in the main part of the building, right along with the dance floor and the tables. The dance floor's too small, that way, and the music they got is terrible. But we took over the combo and we let them play out their contract, ten more days. Anyway, that's why I let you kids dance here instead of there. It's a crummy band and a bad floor. Well, you ready?"

Vic settled the bill, just as he'd settled at the Astor and at Lindy's, over Carl's not too vociferous protests. At least Vic hadn't been exaggerating when he'd said the evening was on him.

They got back in Vic's car and drove some more. By this time Carl didn't know whether they were going north, south or west—or, for that matter, up or down. But this time—although he still hadn't got his ledger balanced—he let his arm drop from the back of the seat across Dorothy's shoulders. She snuggled up against him and again there was *Une Nuit d'Amour* in his nostrils and on his mind, in more ways than one.

Then the car was slowing down and Vic said delightedly, "By golly, he's got the neon sign up already. We didn't think it would be here before tomorrow at the earliest. Look!" And Carl looked out of the window and saw a brightly-lighted little roadhouse with a fair-sized red neon sign that said *Ancin and Vic* in foot-high capital letters, and then Vic turned into the driveway and back to the parking lot.

They went in the side door and it was a nice place, although not large. There were about a dozen customers at tables or in booths and a few more at the bar. The dance floor was small, as Vic had said, and the combo was down to two pieces because no one was sitting at the trap drums. But the accordion and sax made plenty of noise.

Vic looked around and shook his head disgustedly. "Business looks rotten," he said. "Oh, well, we'll build it up when we get going. Take a booth, kids. I'll see where Dick is."

He walked over to the bar and talked to the bartender a moment while Dorothy slid into a booth and Carl sat down beside her. He felt pretty wobbly by now and was having trouble keeping his eyes in focus. But, he told himself, he was having a swell time.

CHAPTER II

IT WAS a job like any other job, but Tom Anders didn't like it. Not that there was anything hard about it. It was duck soup and a quick hundred bucks and he needed the hundred bucks. Besides, Jerry Trenholm had promised him another hundred if everything went smoothly. Not that he'd count on that second hundred until he saw the green of its eyes, but it was nice to think that he might get it.

He sat there back in the booth in the corner and didn't seem to pay any attention when the three of them came in. That was the program. He waited until the girl and the mooch sat down with their backs to him and then he went out the side door and got the cloth back as Jerry had told him to. Nobody had spotted it. That part was all right.

He came back in and Jerry was still at the bar talking to the bartender. So he went back to the corner booth and sat there again waiting for Jerry to give him the high sign to go into his act. He went over the details in his mind so he wouldn't miss up on anything. Not that he would anyway. He'd been at short-con and long-con so long that he could talk in his sleep without breaking cover.

Anders looked at Jerry Trenholm and told himself that Jerry Trenholm was now Vic Tremaine, his partner in this measly little joint. Vic Tremaine—call him Vic. And he, Tom Anders, was Richard Ancin, and Jerry would call

him Dick. They were supposed to have been in partnership before, out in Chicago. Good. That was easy. And the mooch's name was Carl Dixon, although he wasn't supposed to know that until they'd been introduced. But then he could say, "Oh sure, Vic has mentioned you to me."

And the dame was supposed to be named Dorothy Tremaine and to be Vic Tremaine's sister, just in from Chi. Anders had never seen her before, but the fact that he didn't know her real name made it easier to remember that she was Dorothy Tremaine. He didn't have to keep his mind on its toes about that, like he did about having to remember that he himself was Dick Ancin and Jerry was Vic Tremaine. Of course he would have to remember that he was supposed to have known Dorothy back in Chi, to greet her as an old friend.

And Jerry had said that he'd have the waiter fixed so the waiter wouldn't try to collect for the drinks—which would have been a giveaway, since they were supposed to own the joint.

Then Jerry turned around at the bar and gave him the high sign and he walked over to Jerry. He said, "Copasetic?" and Jerry nodded, but Jerry took him by the arm before they went to the table. They both glanced over and saw that the mooch wasn't looking toward them, but toward Dorothy, so there wasn't any hurry.

"One more drink," Jerry said, "and he'll be ready to pass out. He's up to the eyeballs now. Be sure he drinks it. Act hurt as the devil if he won't drink with you. Got that?"

"Sure, Jerry."

"And we watch him and get him outside just before he passes out. Don't want to attract attention having to get him out after he's out cold. He'll be wobbly, but we can get him out between us without anybody paying attention. But we don't want any big-eye stuff."

"Sure, Jerry, but—I don't like it."

"Don't like what?"

"Playing tag in the dark. I wish I knew what the score was, what you were shooting for, if for no other reason than so I won't make any bulls."

"You won't make any bulls. If you did, he's too drunk to notice. If you want that other hundred, just follow through."

"But if it's badger game, why do you want him to go—in my car instead of along with the dame? And if it isn't badger, what is it?"

JERRY took another quick look at the mooch and then looked back at Anders, and Anders saw that Jerry's eyes were cold.

"Look, Jerry," Anders said, "I'm not trying to chisel in. I don't care what the racket is, as long as it's not a bump-off. You say it's not, but how do I know, if I don't know what it really is? And you got to admit it looks funny, me getting him in my car—"

"The car I gave you money to rent."

"All right, the car you gave me money to rent. And God only knows why you wanted me to use the mooch's name to rent it under. That's one thing that's funny. And then, after he's passed out, to stop on that side road till you catch up. How do I know you're not figuring on bumping him off there? And I'd be the buy that left here with him and—"

"Use your brains, Anders." Jerry Trenholm's voice was getting ugly now. "If I wanted to bump him off, I could have done it a dozen times, a dozen places on the way here. And as for his leaving here with you, we're all four leaving together, and who's going to come outside to notice who gets in whose car? And why would I have come here and rung you into it at all?"

Tom Anders sighed. He'd thought of those angles too. It all didn't make sense. Must be some variation on the good old badger, but he couldn't see where the pay-off was.

He tried once more. "But, Jerry—"

"All right," Jerry said. "Give me back the hundred. We'll skip it."

"All right, all right," Anders said. "If I got to work in the dark, I'll work in the dark. Just one thing, though. If I

don't know what you're doing, how'll I know if it comes off or not—and whether you owe me the other hundred or not?"

"Do a good job on your part of it," Jerry said, "and you'll get your other hundred tomorrow, whether the deal comes off or not. Fair enough?"

"Okay," Anders said. Anyway, he'd got that much by arguing. And he couldn't have given the first hundred back anyway. There was only sixty of it left. "Do we go over now?"

"I will. You come in a minute, like you just turned up. And the waiter'll come right after you do, and he's fixed."

Anders ambled back to his corner booth. Might as well finish the drink he had back there. He drank it, watching Jerry Trenholm over the rim of his glass.

He still hated playing tag in the dark. Well, he'd hate it worse, he thought, if there was a chance that Jerry Trenholm could possibly know who it was had tipped off the coppers that time in Boston when Jerry was building up old Harrison to hang some paper on him. But hell, his own long-con on Harrison would have fallen through if the old man had been bitten by Jerry first. Anyway, that was eight years ago and Jerry hadn't found out.

He caught Jerry's eye and went over to their table. He slapped Jerry on the back.

"Hi, Vic," he said. "And Dorothy—swell to see you again. Vic phoned me you just got in. How're things in Chicago?"

She gave him her hand across the table and he had time to take a good look at her and to see that she was quite a dish, and then Jerry was saying, "Dick, this is Carl Dixon. Carl—Dick Ancin, my partner."

And he was shaking hands with the mooch and saying, "Glad to know you, Dixon. Vic's mentioned you to me. How do you like the place here? Sure, I know it's a dump, but wait till we get through with it. You won't recognize—"

Then he broke off because the waiter was coming to the table, and they all ordered except Carl, who said he'd maybe better skip a round. But Anders gave him a frown and some good-natured mock indignation and they ordered a whisky and wash for him.

When you're trying to get anybody drunk, Anders knew, straight shots are the thing. Not so much because they're more potent, but because a mooch can't stall by sipping at one like he can on a highball or even a cocktail. Get him to down it, and then you can order another.

IT MIGHT or might not, he decided, looking at the mooch, take another one. He was pretty well under. You could tell by his eyes and by the thickness of his voice. When a man's eyes looked that way, he was seeing double. And Dixon didn't look like someone who'd had much experience at drinking, so he'd go quick once he started to go.

They got him to drink that round easily. They waited until the waiter had left and then proposed a toast to the success of Ancin and Vic's, and it would have been boorish under the circumstances for the mooch not to have drunk to that. Anders studied him after that one and decided that one more would be just right, and plenty. They'd have to get him out quick after one more.

Jerry Trenholm must have figured the same way because he said he wanted to see how things were going back in the kitchen and excused himself from the table. Anders saw him talk to the waiter instead of going to the kitchen. Then, a minute after Jerry came back to the table, the waiter brought another full round of drinks and that put another shot of whisky in front of the mooch without his having had a chance to turn it down.

They sipped their own drinks without paying any attention to the mooch, and Anders pretended to be talking to Jerry about plans for the roadhouse.

But out of the corner of his eye Anders saw Dorothy squeeze the sucker's arm an instant. Then she picked up her own drink and glanced at his.

Anders heard her whisper, "Let's drink to *us*, Carl." And she smiled at the mooch and he smiled back and downed his whisky like a good boy.

And that was enough. They all knew it. In a minute or three Jerry glanced at his watch.

"Say, it's getting late," he said. "Maybe we'd better get back to town. You coming, Dick?"

"Sure," Anders said. "I'm calling it a night. I'll let the boys close up. But I can't ride in with you, Vic. I'm stuck with my own car and I'll need it tomorrow morning, so I can't leave it here. How's about splitting two and two? One of you ride with me, so I won't have that long ride all alone?"

"Not Dorothy," Jerry said. "I've got something I haven't had a chance to talk to her about. Say, Carl, how'd you like to keep Dick Ancin company?"

The mooch frowned, and obviously started looking for a way out. Dorothy took care of that, neatly. Anders had to admire her technique. It would have worked on men less drunk than Dixon.

She squeezed his arm again and said, "You won't mind, will you, Carl? I haven't had a chance to talk to Vic yet, and I've got some things to tell him, too. Here's an idea. You and Dick come up to my place for a few minutes when we get into town. Vic took Suite 817 for me at the Ambassador."

"Deal me out, Sis," Vic said. "I'm going to drop you off and hit the hay. Got to see a man early tomorrow—about getting a decent combo for this place."

"'Fraid I can't come up, either, Dorothy," Anders said. "But I'll drop Carl off on your doorstep if he wants to have a nightcap with you."

And Dorothy said, "Will you, Carl? It's my first night in New York for years, and I feel like talking for hours yet."

It was as simple as that. The mooch was groggy when they stood up, but Jerry and Anders got him between them and outside to the car Anders had rented a few hours before in New York.

Their timing had been perfect, too. The mooch passed out cold the minute they got him comfortably settled in the front seat. And Anders got in behind the wheel and started driving along the route Jerry Trenholm had laid out for him when he'd given him the C-note, plus expenses, for the job.

He pulled out of the parking lot and Jerry's car pulled out after him, and then dropped back.

The only hard part of the job was over. That is, the part that could have been hard—getting the mooch into his car instead of the other one. Now he had about thirty miles to drive, then the turn-off into an unused side road where Jerry would catch up with him and they'd switch the mooch back to the other car. Then he had to drive to New York and turn his rented car in, and that was all. An easy hundred bucks for a few hours' simple work. Two hundred bucks, if Jerry kept his promise.

Just the same, he didn't like it. He'd

[*Turn page*]

be a lot happier if he knew what the score was.

CHAPTER III

JERRY TRENHOLM slowed down and let the car ahead pull out of sight. All the better not to keep a close tail as long as Anders was going to stop and wait for him anyway. Don't let the two cars be seen together. He leaned over and patted Claire's hand.

"You did a swell job, honey," he said. "Had him eating out of your hand. Another half hour and he'd have been eating your hand too."

"I kind of liked him," Claire said. "He was dumb, but nice. He didn't even try to paw me."

"Maybe we should change plans. Maybe we should take him up to your suite at the Ambassador. We'd have to rent you one first."

"Don't look now, Jerry, but your eyes are turning green." She laughed, and then stopped laughing. Her voice was different when she said, "Jerry, I'm a little scared."

"Nothing to be scared of, honey," he said. "I've figured the angles. There isn't any wheel going to come off. We're going to kill two birds with one stone. And it'll give us a racket, Baby, that will put us on top of the world. We'll roll in the green stuff. We'll wallow in it."

"But what if he goes to the cops when he wakes up?"

"He'll be scared to. But if he does, so what? He cooks his own goose. We lose out on the racket and I'll have spent two hundred bucks and some brain cells, but what the devil, the other part of it is worth twice that to me. I'll settle."

"I think you're wrong on one thing, Jerry. I think Carl will go to the cops. He's that kind of a guy."

Jerry Trenholm shrugged. "All right, so maybe he'll go to the cops. I told you I'd settle if he did. We're in the clear. And if he doesn't, we're in the bucks. That's the beauty of it."

"But what if this Tom Anders is heeled?"

"He isn't. I've got his gun. Picked it up when I went up to his room this afternoon to proposition him. And don't worry. Nobody saw me go up there. And he doesn't know I've got the heater. I got it when he went to the bathroom down the hall."

He laughed. "And I didn't even take a chance that maybe he'd go to the bathroom. I pretended I wanted to talk over old times and I brought a lot of beer with me and stayed a while. When a guy drinks a lot of beer—well, I was sure I could get his gun if he had one. And he did. That makes it perfect."

"But what if he missed it after you left?"

For the first time, Trenholm sounded annoyed. "If he had," he said, "he wouldn't have been here tonight. He'd have been scared off. Now shut up till we get there. I've got half an hour yet before our little rendezvous and I want to spend it thinking back over tonight. I want to be sure there isn't a single thing that could lead to us."

Claire was quiet. After a minute Jerry said, "One thing. Did you see anybody you knew tonight anywhere while we were with him? The Astor? Lindy's? The Golden Glow? The last place? Anywhere?"

"No, Jerry."

He grunted and then started thinking back again. He ran over the angles, all of them. He had time to check everything. Thus far he hadn't done a thing. If, in the next half hour, he could think of a single tangible that could lead the cops from Carl Dixon or from Tom Anders to him or to Claire, then there was still time. He could still call the whole thing off. He could tell Anders plans were changed and to drop the sucker off where he lived—or anywhere else for that matter. Thus far, he was out only a couple of hundred bucks.

Half an hour from now—

HE BEGAN to sweat a little bit. He felt beads of perspiration on his forehead and he ran down the window on his side of the car and let a cool breeze blow in on his face. He'd killed before, twice, but both times had been back in the days when he was young and was a gun punk during prohibition. This was different. This was like playing chess.

Only this was the *big* game. If you lost, you didn't play again.

But he couldn't lose, except the two hundred bucks. And since he'd found out six months ago that it had been Tom Anders who'd thrown him to the bulls that time in Boston, well, it was worth two hundred bucks to do something about that. And if, in the process, he could set himself up to make money that might run into six figures, wasn't that a gamble worth taking?

Yes, it was. And he ran over the whole evening again, and then over everything that had happened in connection with Carl Dixon since the first time Dixon had been pointed out to him and he'd followed the guy into a bar and struck up an acquaintance, just in case, without as yet having any particular plan in mind.

Not a loophole. Nothing they could trace back to him.

Just the same, he began to sweat again. Despite the cold draft that came in the open window on his side of the car his forehead got wet again and he had to wipe it off with his handkerchief.

Then the side road where Anders would be waiting was only a mile ahead, two minutes ahead at the thirty an hour he was crawling along, and he had to make up his mind.

He made it up, and he wasn't scared any more. The coldness was in his mind now.

He turned into the side road and slowed down long enough to take Anders' gun out of the door pocket of the car and put it in his coat pocket. Then he kept going until he saw Anders' car parked off the road ahead of him.

He got out and walked up beside Anders. Anders turned the window down and leaned out.

"Hi, Jerry," he said. "He's out cold. You don't have to worry about talking, or about waking him, moving him."

"You sure?" Trenholm asked. It made a difference. If a man was really out, stiff, paralyzed, a gun-shot near his ear wouldn't wake him. If Dixon was only asleep, then he'd have to use the butt of the gun on Anders. And it wouldn't be as good that way.

Anders laughed. "He's out like a light," he said. "I shook him good to make sure. Stuck a bottle in the glove compartment there, so I could give him another drink if he could use it. But nothing will wake him now. Listen to the way he's breathing."

"Good," Trenholm said. "Stay where you are, Tom, for a minute."

He walked around the car and opened the door on Dixon's side. He looked at Dixon and listened to him and then put his hand on Dixon's shoulder and shook him.

Okay, he thought, a shot might wake him, but if it does, he can be slapped back to sleep.

He took Tom Anders' short-barreled .38 revolver out of his pocket. He reached across Carl Dixon's chest and jammed the muzzle of it into Anders' ribs.

He said, "For the favor you did me in Boston, Tom." He pulled the trigger.

And that was *that*. Even as he pulled the trigger, his eyes went from Anders' face to Dixon's. Dixon had jerked at that explosion of sound, but he hadn't awakened. It seemed impossible, but he hadn't. He moved in his sleep and his head slid down the other way, onto Anders' dead shoulder.

BY THE dim light of the bulb on the dashboard, Jerry Trenholm watched Dixon's face for a full thirty seconds before he was satisfied, and sure.

Then he went back to his own car and opened the door.

"It's okay, honey," he said. "Everything's swell. But come on. I want you

to help me a few minutes. We got a few things to do." He reached into the glove compartment of his own car and took out another pistol. And a leather shoulder holster.

Claire got out of the car, shaking a little. "What, Jerry?" she asked. "What is there to do?"

"The thing I want you to help me with is to get Anders' coat off and put this shoulder holster on him. It's his. I swiped it with his gun. See, Baby, I want everything to fit. If he's got his shoulder holster on that fits the gun, the cops will know it's his gun even if they can't trace it to him otherwise. And if Dixon *is* fool enough to go to the cops with this, they'll figure he fought Anders for Anders' gun and shot him with it. So come on, Baby, it's going to be a job to get his coat off and on again, but we can do it between us."

He heard Claire grit her teeth a little. "All right, Jerry," she said. "For you, all right. And why the other gun?" She got out of the car.

"We got to fire another shot, honey—with Dixon's hand wrapped around the butt of a gun, so he'll have nitrate marks if they give him a paraffin test. And I can't use Anders' gun for that, because it should have only one bullet fired out of it. And everything will check for Sunday after I wipe my fingerprints off Anders' gun and put Dixon's on. And don't let me forget the door handles of the car. We're not missing *anything*, Baby."

They didn't. They didn't miss anything.

It took them fifteen minutes, but that didn't matter on a side road that nobody would use until morning. And when they were finished, Jerry Trenholm spent another five minutes just looking and thinking things over, making like he was a cop himself and looking for something, and there wasn't a thing he had missed.

Just the same, he sweated a little again as he drove away. He sweated a little now and then for two months, and then the trial was over and he knew he was safe—even though he'd missed the big gamble and the big money.

And that part of it was bad, but what the devil. He was safe, wasn't he? And he'd got Anders. And he was doing all right, even if he didn't have the six figures he'd hoped for.

Or maybe he did have six, one way you looked at it. Five figures in the bank. And then there was Claire's.

Even after the trial, he had a bad moment or two. But another month went by and finally he knew he was safe.

CHAPTER IV

HIS name was Peter Cole and he was a detective like any detective, and no smarter than the average. He was thirty-three. He'd graduated out of harness when he was twenty-eight and that meant he'd been a detective for five years. He had a good record, nothing brilliant, but no bad boners either.

He worked for the City of New York, and he worked out of the 24th Precinct Station on West 100th Street. There is a large proportion of Puerto Ricans in that precinct and Peter Cole got along well because he spoke fluent Spanish, having been born and raised in a Texas border town. New York's Puerto Ricans speak English, but they speak Spanish among themselves and they think in Spanish. If you can talk that language with them, you get along with them better. Peter Cole got along fine with them.

And now, at six o'clock of a November evening, he was heading for the door of the station, through for the day. Somebody yelled "Hey, Pete," and he turned and said, "Yeah?"

"Phone."

He went back and picked up the phone and said, "Cole speaking."

"Mr. Cole, my name is Susan Bailey. You don't know me, but a mutual friend of ours, Mrs. Richmond, suggested that

I ask your advice about—about a problem."

It was a nice voice. He liked it. "You're a friend of Grace Richmond's?" he said. "I haven't seen her for a couple of months. How is she?"

He'd gone to school with Grace in Texas twenty years ago. Now she was the only friend he had in New York who was from his home town. She and her husband had a little apartment in the Village and once in a while he was invited there to dinner and once in a while he took Grace and her husband, Harry Richmond, out to a restaurant, to reciprocate. He liked Harry too. Usually he saw them about once a month. This time it had been longer.

"Grace is fine," the voice on the phone assured him. "And so is Harry. But about my problem, Mr. Cole. It's awfully complicated to explain over the phone. Do you have any plans for this evening?"

"Well—" he said.

"I live in the apartment across the hall from the Richmond's. If you're through work now—Grace told me you generally get off at six—I could rustle something to eat for us by the time you get here, and that would give us time to talk. And after that we could have Grace and Harry come over for some bridge."

Peter Cole liked bridge, and Grace and Harry were good players. "Do you ever trump your partner's ace?" he asked. "That's one thing I'd have to know."

"I did once. I had to, to get the lead, and we set a doubled contract by two tricks."

"Fine," he said. "In that case, I'll come. Will seven-thirty be all right?"

She said it was.

He went out, turning up the collar of his topcoat against the cold gray drizzle of rain, took the Columbus Avenue bus to 72nd Street and went up to his hotel room to shave and change his clothes. He told himself that he was cleaning up, not because he'd liked the sound of Susan Bailey's voice, but because he was going to see Grace and Harry later in the evening.

He walked to the subway on Central Park West and rode to the 4th Street Station. At one minute after seven-thirty he pushed the buzzer of the apartment across the hall from the Richmonds'.

The door opened, and Peter Cole liked what he saw through it. Susan Bailey was a tall girl, almost as tall as he, and well built, not thin as so many tall girls are. She had a face that was pretty, if not beautiful with a generous mouth and wide, clear brown eyes. Her hair was a nice shade of brown and she had a few well-arranged freckles on an otherwise clear, creamy skin. She wore no make-up, except some lip-colored lipstick, and he liked the fact that her fingernails were the color of fingernails instead of screaming scarlet or garish purple.

He liked the simple house-dress she wore and the way she filled it. And he liked the unaffected naturalness of her smile and her voice when she said, "Come in, Mr. Cole."

He liked the efficient way in which she took care of his wet hat and topcoat, putting the latter on a hanger, but spreading a place for it in the closet so it wouldn't wet other things hanging there. And he liked the smell of frying chicken coming from the kitchenette. And he was ravenously hungry. This was an hour and a half, almost, after the time he usually ate.

THE fried chicken tasted even better than it had smelled, and there was plenty of it and plenty of creamy mashed potatoes and chicken gravy—as rich and greasy as chicken gravy should be.

It was wonderful. Hungry as he was, it was too wonderful to interrupt by talking very much. Of course, they didn't eat in complete silence. But they talked about the horrible weather, about what nice people Grace and Harry Richmond were, and—from Cole—how wonderful the dinner was. And he wondered, aloud, why the Richmonds hadn't invited her across the hall other times

he'd been there and learned that she'd lived there only six weeks whereas the last time he'd been to see Grace and Harry had been two months ago, and that explained that.

Finally he put down his final cup of coffee, empty, and lighted cigarettes for both of them. He took a deep breath of satisfaction and managed, unobtrusively, to let out his belt a notch.

"And for that, Miss Bailey," he said, "I would slay dragons for you. If there are any around. Are there?" Banteringly, of course.

And then, all of a sudden, it looked as though she were going to cry. He didn't know what he'd said that was wrong, but he knew the light touch had been wrong.

He leaned across the table. "I'm sorry. Are you really in trouble, Susan?" He didn't even notice that he'd used her first name for the first time. "Is there anything I can do?"

But then her face was all right again. It was just the suddenness with which he'd veered the conversation from food to murder, not knowing that it was murder.

"I'm not in any trouble myself," she said. "My fiance is. Very bad trouble. He's in prison—for life—for murder. A murder he didn't commit."

Peter Cole stared at her. It was such a change of pace that he was thrown off base for a moment.

All he could think of to say was, "Tell me about it."

"His name is Carl Dixon. Does that tell you, or—?" She paused to see if the name meant anything to him.

It didn't, quite. "I seem to remember the name," he said, "but—"

"In New Jersey. Essex County. The trial was in Newark. The murder was three months ago. The trial was one month ago."

"I remember now. I read about it, but I didn't follow it closely. The man who was murdered was a crook, wasn't he? A con-man, I believe. What was his name?"

"Tom Anders. Yes, he was a con-man. But Carl didn't kill him. I *know* that."

"Want to run over the details for me?"

"Carl was taken out by a man who called himself Vic Tremaine and a woman he introduced as his sister, Dorothy. Cocktails at the Astor, dinner at Lindy's. Drinks and dancing at a place in Jersey. Then they drove to a little roadhouse called Ancin and Vic's—Carl saw the neon sign with that name on it—and they introduced him to this Tom Anders under the name of Dick Ancin. They got him drunk. About one-thirty or two o'clock they started back to New York and he was in Anders' car and he passed out, completely.

"He woke up—or came to—about five o'clock in the morning. He was in Anders' car, parked off the road. A little side road just inside Essex County, no houses nearby and no traffic late at night. Anders was behind the wheel, dead. He'd been shot in the side, the side toward Carl. The gun he'd been shot with was on the floor of the car between them, and Carl didn't touch it, of course.

"He got out of the car fast and started walking. You can imagine how he felt, physically as well as mentally. He admits he seriously, very seriously, considered going home, not reporting it. If he went to the police, it might cost him his job. It never occurred to him it might cost him more than that."

"Why? I mean, why might he have lost his job?"

"He's an accountant for the New York State bank examiners. I mean he was. He isn't now, of course. With a job like that, you can't get into any scandals or associate with criminals. You've got to lean backward to be respectable. And he always had."

"I can see that," Cole said. "But honesty prevailed over interest and he went to the police."

"He phoned them from a farmhouse and waited for them."

"And they arrested him for the murder?"

"Not right away. They held him as a material witness for twenty-four hours, and by that time they had enough evidence against him to issue a warrant. And to convict him when it came to trial two months later. It was pretty bad evidence—bad for Carl, I mean."

COLE prompted her. "Such as?"

"His fingerprints were on the gun. And ballistics showed that it was the murder weapon. One shot had been fired out of it. And when they found that, they gave him a paraffin test and there were nitrate marks on his right hand, none on his left."

"That isn't conclusive. Nitrate marks can come from other things than firing a gun."

"That was admitted at the trial. But it was contributory evidence just the same. And the gun was Anders', and he was wearing a shoulder holster that fitted it. That looked bad, too, with only the two of them in the car. The police figured he got the gun away from Anders and used it on him. They tried to get him to confess and plead self-defense, to say that Anders had pulled the gun to shoot or threaten Carl and that he'd fought for the gun and used it in self-defense."

"It would have been a good plea. It would probably have stood up and he could have got a light sentence if any."

"But it wasn't true, Mr. Cole. At least it wasn't true as far as he knew. He was out cold at the time it happened."

"Then it could have happened that way. I mean, it could have been something that happened before he passed out, but while he was too drunk to know what he was doing or to remember afterwards."

"I don't think so. He swears he remembers everything up to the time he passed out. And Carl—well, he isn't a drinker, but he has been drunk before, a few times, and he says he's never done anything he didn't remember. Some people are that way. Others aren't."

"I know," Cole said. "I'm that way myself. I've done some pretty silly things a few times, but I remembered them the next day. Was there any other evidence?"

"Plenty of it. There was *too much* of it, but the police just wouldn't recognize that. For one thing, they were unable to verify a single thing Carl told them about the early part of the evening. There are no such people as Vic Tremaine or Dorothy Tremaine, as far as they've ever discovered. They haven't found the roadhouse where the three of them stopped on the way to what was supposed to be Vic's roadhouse, and as for that—well, there's no place called Ancin and Vic's within a hundred miles of New York."

"They check at the Astor bar and at Lindy's?"

"Yes, but they didn't get around to that for several days and they didn't get anything. Carl gave them the location of the table at Lindy's and they found the waiter who'd been at that station on the night in question. He vaguely remembered having seen Carl, when they showed him Carl's picture, but he couldn't remember what evening it had been or who Carl was with."

Peter Cole nodded. "That's about all you could expect, after several days, unless he'd been a regular customer there or they'd given the waiter some reason to remember the party. How about the menu? Did they try that angle?"

"Carl told them what each of the three had ordered, and they were all things that had been on the menu that evening. But that didn't help. He could have found that out by eating there alone. Or even with Tom Anders. That's what they think. That he spent the evening with Tom Anders, and that he just made up Vic and Dorothy Tremaine."

"Nothing at the Astor?"

"Not a thing. They found all the bartenders who were on duty that evening, but none of them remembered Carl from his picture."

"Not surprising, of course. Anything else?"

"Two things on the positive side. Both very bad. One was that the car Anders

had was a rented car and that he'd rented it earlier in the evening using the name of Carl Dixon. And you know what the prosecutor did with that?"

"No. Wait a minute, let me think. I can guess. He adds that fact to the fact that Anders was carrying a gun and comes up with the presumption that Anders rented the car for his meeting with Dixon, thought Dixon might possibly try to kill him and used Dixon's name so, if it did happen, it would leave a trail to Dixon when the cops traced the rented car."

"That's exactly it. And there was one thing worse. In the wastebasket in Tom Anders' room they found a crumpled sheet of stationery that he'd started to write a note on. He just got as far as 'Dear Carl—' and then crumpled it and threw it away. The police figured he'd started to write Carl—and they took that as a pretty strong indication that the two knew each other—and then had decided he would see him instead.

"See how it all seems to dovetail? Carl says Vic Tremaine phoned him that night about six, and the switchboard record shows he did get a call then. But the police think the call was from Anders, after Anders had started to write him a note and then changed his mind."

"But the note had just the first name Carl? Not the last name or address?"

"No, it could have been to any other Carl. But in connection with Anders renting the car under Carl's name, his full name, and—well, everything put together. Fingerprints, nitrate test, their not being able to verify a single point of Carl's story—"

Peter Cole nodded slowly. He said, "I see what you mean. They had a case. It's a wonder they didn't give him the chair."

CHAPTER V

THE GIRL had an answer to that. "I think they would have, on Carl's testimony. I think his attorney saved him from the chair by making an about-face, more or less, in his final talk to the jury. He must have seen that he was licked, that there wasn't a chance on earth of an acquittal or even a split jury. So he managed, pretty cleverly, to get across the idea that even if Carl was lying, as they already thought anyway, he was probably lying out of having killed Anders in a fight over Anders' gun, or that maybe he really didn't remember doing it at all, that it had been in a drunken struggle after he was too far gone to know what he was doing.

"Anyway, they didn't see it as a cold-blooded, premeditated crime, so they gave him the benefit of that much doubt. They brought in a recommendation for mercy along with their verdict. And the judge gave him life. And that was fair enough, I guess. Nobody except me—and Carl—seemed to doubt he'd killed Anders, but some of them must have doubted that it was a premeditated crime. Some of the men who picked him up at the farmhouse after he'd phoned testified he was in bad physical shape and had obviously been pretty drunk."

"And did the prosecutor suggest a motive?"

"Yes, of course. Carl was a bank examiner. Anders was a con-man. It would come in handy for a con-man to know people's bank balances and transactions. The prosecutor suggested that Anders had some hold over Carl and was going to blackmail him into giving information that he could use."

"Pretty sound," Cole said. "But the one thing they wouldn't be able to understand is why Carl had called copper instead of going home after the murder. He wouldn't have known about the car being rented in his name or about the

note in the wastebasket, so he wouldn't have known the crime could be traced to him."

She nodded solemnly. "And the fact that he didn't wipe his fingerprints off the gun. Those two things together made it look as though he really was pretty drunk and may actually not have known what he'd done. That was the doubt that got him life instead of—of the electric chair."

"Frankly," said Cole, "that's how it would look to me, I'm afraid. Are you sure that's not the way it was? Can you be sure?"

"I can be. I am. Because I know Carl. I know he isn't lying. I know he didn't know this Anders before that evening and that he'd met him as Dick Ancin and had no reason to kill him—drunk or sober. I know he didn't make up that story about Ancin and Vic's, or about Vic and Dorothy. And if all that is true, plus the fact that Carl isn't the type who does things when he's drunk and doesn't remember them, well, he didn't do it. Vic Tremaine must have. He was following them back to New York in his car. He must have done it while Carl was unconscious, and put Carl's prints on the gun and left him there to take the blame."

Peter Cole stared at the girl across the table from him. "It could have been," he said. "It would be a devil of a thing to try to prove, now. Three months is a long time."

"I know it."

"What do you want me to do?"

"To do? Nothing. I couldn't ask you to do anything, of course. I want to ask your advice about a private detective. That is, I wanted the advice of some detective on the force as to who is a good private one, and Grace Richmond said I should ask you, that you'd probably know some private detectives."

"Oh, I see." He thought of a few whom he knew, but he didn't mention them yet. Instead he asked, "Why now? If you were going to do that, why didn't you do it sooner? Even if you hoped for an acquittal until the trial was over, why didn't you think about a private detective right after the trial, a month ago?"

"I didn't have the money then. I did think of it. Wait, I'm going to make us some more coffee."

She went into the kitchenette to get it started and when she came back she said, "Carl had a little money saved up and so did I. When we saw how serious things were, how black it looked for him, I lent him what I had and we used it to get a really good lawyer. And I'm glad we did. With a poor one, even an average one, Carl might have—have got the chair. Stuart Willoughby—that's the lawyer we got—at least kept Carl alive. And that means there's still a chance."

A DEVIL of a slim chance, Peter Cole thought. But he didn't say it.

"After the trial," she said, "we were both flat broke. I even lost my job." She smiled a little. "I'm a private secretary and my boss didn't see eye to eye with me on the necessity of my attending every day of the trial. He didn't exactly fire me, but he told me what a fool I was to stick by a murderer. Anyway, I quit. But I got another job two weeks ago.

"Meanwhile, early this week, an aunt of mine died and left me a small bequest. A thousand dollars. I ran into debt about a hundred during the trial, and while I was out of work, and I'll have to pay that off. That leaves me about nine hundred, clear. That may give Carl another chance, if I use it to hire a private detective."

The poor kid, he thought. She really *does* believe he's innocent.

"Maybe," he said, "it could better be spent for further legal steps."

"No. I asked Mr. Willoughby after the trial if there was anything at all that could be done. He said definitely not, unless there was new evidence." She smiled a bit wryly. "He said that in about ten years we could start working for a parole, that we wouldn't get one that soon, but we could start trying."

He said, "Let me think a minute."

"Of course. I'll get the coffee."

She came back with it and he'd been thinking. "There are the Pinkertons," he said, "if you could get them to handle it. But I doubt if they would unless they saw something they could do for you. I mean specific angles that they could investigate. I don't see offhand what those would be, but maybe we could think of some. They're pretty good, but they're good enough to be choosy about what they take, and this isn't exactly in their line. You could try them, and if they take it, you'll get your money's worth of time put in on the job, but I don't think they'll get anywhere. I don't see how they can, now."

"You think a small agency, a one or two man outfit, would do better?"

"No, and you'd be more likely to get gypped. But—"

He didn't know how to go on. What he really thought was that she shouldn't waste her money at all. It was too hopeless. It was like buying a part of a ticket in the Irish Sweepstakes. Now, after three months, even if her man was innocent, it must be hopeless. Surely the police had looked into every angle. And she'd gone broke for the guy once and now she was going to do it again. What it boiled down to was that he didn't think she should spend that nine hundred bucks at all.

"Thanks," she said gravely. "Then I'll try the Pinkerton Agency. I'll go there tomorrow."

"No, don't. Not yet." He said it irritably, not knowing that he was irritated or that he sounded that way. He was frowning at her. "Let me read up on the case in the papers. I'll get back numbers at the library. Let me think it over to see what angles there are that still *can* be investigated."

"But Mr. Cole, I'm not asking you to do all that. I merely asked you to recommend a private detective."

"And I'm not recommending one, not yet. Not even the Pinks. Look, I'm off work tomorrow. I want to go to the library and read up on the case. Then let me advise you."

"Well—if you want to do that. But you won't have to go to the library. I've got the newspapers. I kept them. I mean, I kept copies of the Newark *Star-Ledger* for the first few days after the murder and for all four days of the trial. It got better coverage there than in the New York papers because the murder was in Essex County and the trial was in Newark. And I've got a transcript of the trial itself."

"A transcript? What on earth for?"

"To study. I had Mr. Willoughby buy me a copy from the court reporter, at so much a page. It has all the testimony and cross-examination. You really want to read through it? It's long."

"Sure, and the newspapers you have, too. If I may take them along."

"Of course. But you won't have to carry all the newspapers if you look at them now while I do the dishes. Then you'll just have to take the trial transcript. That is, if you want to read them now."

"Why not? Except that I hate to see you stuck with all these dishes."

She didn't even answer that. She got the papers and put them and him on the sofa where he could stretch out and read comfortably, lying on his back as all sensible people like to read.

FOR a while he heard her working around in the kitchenette, then the sounds faded from his consciousness and he was completely absorbed in what he was reading. He was a moderately slow reader, but he had a retentive memory for details.

He was halfway through the trial when he became aware that she had finished and was standing in front of him. "Want to quit now and take the other couple of papers along?" she asked.

"Don't bother me," he said. "Beat it. Take a walk around the block. Or sit down and shut up."

She laughed at that. She sat down and shut up, but she watched him. He knew she was watching him and it was harder to concentrate, but he finished, through the last day of the trial, and

the sentencing. Then he put the last paper down and frowned at her.

"It's going to be a tough job," he said. "Even if he's innocent, it's going to be a tough job. But wait till I've read that transcript of the trial before I stick my neck out any farther than that."

"But, Peter—" and she didn't notice that she'd used his first name for the first time—"I'm not asking you to stick your neck out at all. I just asked you—"

"How to waste your last nine hundred dollars?" he said. "Well, don't do anything until I've talked to you again. You work tomorrow?"

"Yes, tomorrow's Friday. Then I'm off two days, Saturday and Sunday. Why?"

"If I get any wild ideas while I'm reading that transcript tomorrow, can I phone you?"

"Of course." She gave him the number. "I haven't a phone here yet. But you can reach me through Grace across the hall. And that reminds me. I called you from her phone at six, and she heard the conversation, so she knows you're here and they're looking for us to go over for a rubber or two of bridge. Maybe we'd better. It's almost nine."

He didn't want to, but he said "Sure," and they went across the hall.

He didn't play quite his usual game of bridge, because his mind was going in circles. But he didn't trump any of Susan's aces and they took two rubbers out of three.

And at eleven-thirty he went home, with a bulky envelope that contained the transcript under his topcoat to protect it from the drizzling rain. He didn't try to read it on the subway and he tried not to think about it after he was home and while he was going to sleep.

In the morning he slept late, as he always did on his day off, and when he went down for breakfast, he took the transcript with him. The rain had stopped and the weather was clear and cold. He read through three cups of coffee after his breakfast and then went

[*Turn page*]

back to his room and finished by mid-afternoon.

When he finished, he said, "Damn!" very fervently.

He didn't think Carl Dixon had killed Tom Anders. He didn't know whether it was anything he had read, either in the newspapers or in the transcript, or whether it was Susan Bailey's calm confidence that had infected him.

Maybe, more than anything else, it was the lack of motivation for Dixon's having acted as he did, having told the story he did, if he had been guilty, if the story wasn't true. And, blast it, there *was* a doubt. That's why he'd been given life instead of death. Neither juries nor judges are legally supposed to figure that way, but they do.

But it wasn't any of his business. He ought to go over things with Susan, figure some angles that could stand further checking, and then send her to the Pinks with those angles. Or to one of the best small operators if the Pinks didn't want it. That was the only sensible thing to do. It was even more than Susan had expected him to do.

So he picked up the phone and called Captain Blain. "This is Cole, Cap," he said. "I've got a couple of weeks of accumulated sick leave. Okay if I take part of it now, starting tomorrow? It's short notice, but if it isn't going to gum things too much—"

"I guess it will be all right. Not sick, are you?"

"No, I'm okay."

"Devil of a time of year to take a vacation. You must be crazy."

"That's it," Cole said. "I wondered what was wrong with me, Cap, and you hit it on the head. I must be crazy."

CHAPTER VI

HE CALLED Susan Bailey at the number she'd given him. "This is Peter Cole, Susan," he said. "I've finished the transcript and I'd like to talk it over with you. Are you free this evening?"

"Of course. Would you care to eat at my place again?"

"No, we're going out. We're going to have cocktails at one place and dinner at another."

"You sound very masterful, Peter. I don't seem to have any choice. But don't you like my cooking?"

"Sure I do. It's wonderful. But we're going to have cocktails at the Astor and dinner at Lindy's."

"Oh." Her voice sounded quite different. Softer. "Thank you, Peter. Thank you very much."

"Don't be silly," he said, and without knowing it his voice was quite irritated. "If you've got a pic of this Dixon guy, bring it along. There are pix in the papers, but you know how a newspaper picture is. Sometimes you wouldn't recognize your own brother. Can you be ready at six-thirty?"

"Easily, but why come all the way down to the Village? I can meet you uptown."

"Six-thirty, then. It's all right. I've got a car. Just wasn't using it last night."

"All right, then. And I have a photograph. Two, in fact."

"Only one thing, Susan. Understand that we probably won't get anything at either place. It was too long ago. But don't let that discourage you, because we won't expect to get anything."

He was right in one way, wrong in another. They didn't get anything that would help clear Carl Dixon, even though they were lucky enough to find the right waiter at Lindy's and two of the three bartenders who'd been on duty at the

Astor bar on the night of August 16th. But they did get excellent martinis at the bar and they had borscht, filet mignon and pineapple cheese pie at Lindy's. So it wasn't a lost evening.

There was one question he remembered to ask her. "I was going to ask you this last night after I finished reading the Newark *Star-Ledgers*," he said. "In one of the papers during the trial there was a reference to their having tried to locate this place called Ancin and Vic's, and a box item they ran on it. Must have been in one of the papers in between the murder and the trial. Did you read it?"

"Yes, it was about a week after the murder, when the police were still trying to find something that might substantiate Carl's story. The *Star-Ledger* ran a boxed item on the front page headed "Have You Been to Ancin and Vic's?" and asking anybody who might know where the place was to write in to them with the information."

"Get any answers at all?"

"Not that I know of. I presume if they had got anything, they'd have given it to the police, or at least printed it in the paper."

"A reasonable enough assumption. Susan, that place—Ancin and Vic's—is the key. We've got to find it, or we aren't going to get started. And that's going to be a sweet job, unless we get a lead. According to Carl's story, that place could be anywhere within a hundred miles of New York."

"Anywhere across the Hudson, that is. He didn't notice where they were driving, but he'd certainly have noticed if they'd recrossed the Hudson, either back through a tunnel or over a bridge. He'd surely have noticed that."

"At least, he might have. And for that reason, if they didn't want him to know where he was going, they wouldn't have crossed back. Okay, within a hundred miles of Manhattan, but west of the Hudson. That gives us most of New Jersey, a sizable hunk of Pennsylvania and a sizable hunk of New York State if they turned north after they got into Jersey." He shook his head. "A semicircle with a radius of a hundred miles. If I remember my math, that would be —let's see, radius squared, ten thousand, times pi—which we'll call three even—thirty thousand for the whole circle. Fifteen thousand square miles, Susan. That's all we've got to cover to find Ancin and Vic's. Fifteen thousand square miles."

SHE smiled a bit wanly. "Sounds pretty bad when you put it that way."

"It isn't quite that bad. I hope. How about the neon sign angle? Did the police go into that?"

"Pretty thoroughly, they tell me. They checked with every maker of neon signs in the vicinity. It cost them plenty, because there were a lot of firms. But no one had sold a sign like that."

"It's bad they didn't get anything," he said, "but at least it saves us having to check on it. That would have been an awful job. It's going to be bad enough as it is."

"Peter, it isn't *your* job. I can't expect you to—"

"Be quiet," he said. "Look, I've got to go to Newark tomorrow, on business. While I'm there I might drop in at the *Star-Ledger* and check up on that question they ran about Ancin and Vic's, and I might drop in to talk to the prosecutor who handled the case. And tomorrow's Saturday. Want to come along?"

"Of course, if I won't be in the way."

"I won't let you. I'll be there at one o'clock, and I'll let you feed me before we start. And now—we can't sit here and take up a table at Lindy's forever. Want to go back to the Astor bar?"

"Let's go up to my place, Peter. We can talk better there, and I've got the wherewithal for some drinks."

So they went up to Susan's and talked, by mutual consent, about almost everything else but murder. Almost everything else. There was one other topic they avoided just as scrupulously.

For some reason, when he got home that night, he was mad. He didn't know if he was mad at himself for being suck-

er enough to get himself roped into a business like this, a lost cause if he ever saw one, a case in which he was chasing shadows. But it must be that, because he wasn't mad at Susan. He had nothing against this Carl Dixon.

But just the same he stood a moment outside the door of his empty room, looking at the door and wanting to put his fist through it. But he used the key instead.

He slept late. It was almost eleven when he woke, and since he'd be eating at Susan's at one, he skipped breakfast except for a cup of coffee.

It was colder out and it was snowing. The fresh snow was clean and white on the streets and it was falling fast enough to stay that way except on very busy streets where the traffic outpaced its fall. It was the first really good snowfall of the year. He hated cold weather, but he liked snow. He'd take cold weather any time to get snow like that, falling in big soft flakes.

He drove east into Central Park and southward along its winding drives for as far south as it went, then he cut over to Fifth Avenue and kept on it south into the Village.

She had corned beef and cabbage ready and, particularly after no breakfast, it smelled like ambrosia to him. He wondered if she had guessed it was his favorite dish. He didn't see how she could have for he hadn't mentioned it in all the times he'd talked to her. That thought pulled him up short: All the times? He'd seen her for exactly two evenings.

They ate leisurely and talked a lot. It was after two when they started for Newark and it was three when they got there. He found the *Star-Ledger* building and parked in front of it.

They found the managing editor's office and asked him about the question he'd run boxed on the first page.

"That was an idea of one of our rewrite men," he said. "Anything that came in from it would have gone to him. But I don't think there was anything, or he'd have made something of it."

"Could I talk to him about it?" Cole asked.

The managing editor said into a phone, "Send Roy Green in here, please."

A MINUTE later, a tall, stoop-shouldered man with iron gray hair came in.

"Roy," the editor said, "these people are interested in the Anders murder case. Did you get any replies at all to that question you ran on Ancin and Vic's?"

"Nothing that seemed important. One screwball letter from a man who offered to start a place and name it that if we'd lend him the money. The other was too vague to be taken seriously. It was from a man in Jersey City. He wrote that he vaguely remembered seeing a place called Ancin and Vic's, but he couldn't remember where or when. It didn't seem very helpful."

"Did you follow it up at all?"

"Yes, I did. I wrote and asked him to think it over and if he remembered anything more about it to let us know. We haven't heard from him, so I suppose he hasn't."

"Did it sound like a screwball letter to you?"

"No, I don't think it was. He sounded sane, and sincere. But possibly, even probably, he'd read the phrase Ancin and Vic's from a previous story on the case—then forgot where he'd read it and had a vague idea he really had seen a roadhouse with that name on it."

"Do you still have his name and address?" Cole asked.

"Not the address," Roy Green said, "but I remember the name because it was an unusual one. It was John Smith —John Smith, M. D. And it wasn't a gag signature because the letter was on his letterhead. So even without the street address, he should be findable. There won't be many Doctor John Smiths in Jersey City, and a doctor will certainly have a phone listing. Want me to get it for you?"

"Thanks, no. I can do that," Cole said. They thanked the editor, too, and left.

"Sounds like an awfully slim lead," Susan said.

"It does, but we may run it down. Next, I'm going to talk to the prosecutor who handled the case, if I can find him in. And I think you'd better sit that one out, Susan. If I talk to him as a New York cop who has a side interest in one angle of the case, he'll dig deeper than if he thinks I'm working with you to try to break down the case he built up. Understand?"

"Of course."

He left her in the car when he went up to see Roy Harlan, who, he knew from the newspapers and the trial transcript, had handled the case. Harlan was in his office and was willing to talk.

"I'm interested in Anders' record," Cole said. "Not much of that came out in the trial. No reason why it should have, of course."

Harlan's eyebrows raised slightly. "You have that available in your files at New York. As much as we have."

"Of course," Cole said. "I meant recently, since the last pickup that would show on the books. Something must have come out on what he's been doing recently."

Roy Harlan tented his fingers. "Nothing for six months or so. As I get it, he hadn't been doing very well. His room was in a cheap hotel and his wardrobe was only so-so, which is bad for a con-man. I'd say he was pretty close to being on his uppers. He seemed to have money while he was in Boston, but not since he left there. He spent most of the last dozen years in Boston, but I guess it got too hot for him."

Cole nodded. "Maybe I'll run up there to check on him. Another thing, Mr. Harlan. According to the papers—anyway, according to the *Star-Ledger*—Anders rented a car that night under the name of Carl Dickson. D-i-c-k-s-o-n instead of D-i-x-o-n. Same sound, but different spelling. That wasn't brought up in the trial. Is it straight?"

"Yes, it's straight. No, we didn't bring it up at the trial because it didn't seem to matter. If it did, the implication would be that Anders had known Carl Dixon only through meeting him, whereas we contended he probably knew him pretty well. The defense knew about the variation in spelling, of course, but they didn't bring it up. Why should they? They contended Dixon didn't know Anders at all, at least at the time Anders rented the car. So it seemed to have no bearing and be no help to either side."

Cole overplayed his hand by snorting slightly. "Wasn't either side, by any chance, interested in what really did happen," he said, "instead of merely the point of getting an acquittal or a conviction for Carl Dixon?"

"I don't see the connection, Mr. Cole."

Peter Cole sighed. "I'm not sure I do, either," he said. "Well, thanks, Mr. Harlan."

He rejoined Susan in the car. "I didn't get much," he said, "but one thing sounds encouraging. Very mildly encouraging."

"What?"

"Let's have a drink. We'll find a bar that's got a private phone booth and I'll call this Dr. John Smith of Jersey City. And then I'll tell you the mildly encouraging thing."

They found the bar and ordered the drinks, and then Cole got the Jersey City operator on the phone and she had no difficulty finding the listing of Dr. John Smith.

CHAPTER VII

MIRACULOUSLY, Dr. Smith was in, but, sadly, he confessed that he'd come no closer to remembering where he'd seen a place called Ancin and Vic's than he had been at the time he wrote the letter. He said that, afterwards, he'd felt a little foolish about having written it, since it was all so vague.

Cole thanked him and went back to

join Susan in the booth.

"No dice with Doc Smith," he said. "He still doesn't remember where he saw that neon sign."

"I was almost beginning to hope. But what's the one thing that is encouraging—mildly encouraging?"

He told her about the Dixon-Dickson angle.

"I knew that," she said. "It was in the papers. Mr. Willoughby considered whether or not to bring it out at the trial, but decided it wouldn't help our case."

He frowned. "That's one thing wrong with this whole business. Every fact is looked at with the idea of whether it's going to help or hurt Carl Dixon. Well, maybe that was natural. But now we can stop doing it."

"What do you mean, Peter?" Susan asked, puzzled.

"He's past help, in a manner of speaking. He's convicted, so no fact can hurt him. And we'll never get him free by finding facts that help him. We've got to find who did kill Anders. In other words, we've got to find this Vic Tremaine. And Dorothy. If we can find them—and Ancin and Vic's roadhouse—we've got enough to get the police to question them. They'd certainly want to do that, even if only because they might suspect them of being accomplices of Carl's."

He stared moodily at his drink. "Anyway, I like that misspelling of the name Dixon."

"Why?"

"It makes the only positive motive I've been able to figure out make sense. Not the motive for the murder—Vic Tremaine may have had any kind of a motive for killing Anders. But what's puzzling is why he went to such lengths to frame Dixon."

"Yes."

"We can work it out one way, that I can see. Let's say Vic is a con-man, forger, even a bank robber. I like forger best for this purpose. *If* such a man could get a bank examiner to give him inside dope on bank accounts all over the state, maybe get him photographic copies of signatures, give him inside information, he could make a fortune.

"Help from a clerk in any given bank would be invaluable to him, but if a lot of forgeries turned up on accounts at any one bank—well, the racket wouldn't hold up long. But a bank examiner could get him fresh data from lots of banks. Maybe he had in mind starting a ring to capitalize on it instead of working solo. He already has one accomplice, Dorothy. But, solo or otherwise, he could make a killing. Do you see, Susan?"

"Of course. Carl thought of that and we talked it over with his lawyer, but we couldn't see how it was expected to work out. I mean, Carl's in jail now and can't help him. And the evidence was so strong, Vic couldn't have expected Carl to beat it. And—"

"Slow down. You're forgetting something. When he found himself in a jam, Carl went to the police. He wasn't supposed to do that. Vic figured him wrong, although he must have known there was a possibility that Carl would.

"But suppose it had been the other way, Susan. Carl wakes up in the car with a corpse and he's scared stiff of consequences and goes home and says nothing. The police find the car and the body, and the case is in the papers and they're looking for the killer. And *then* Vic goes to Carl and tells him his fingerprints are on the gun the police have, tells him all the evidence there is against him.

"Carl might or might not think the charge of murder against him would stand up, but he knows he'd be in plenty of trouble even if he told the truth and was believed. He'd walked out on a crime, instead of reporting it. If he was lucky, he might only lose his job. But on his own admission he could go to jail for walking away from the murder. At the worst, he could be convicted of it. Do you see the spot he'd have been in a week later, say, if he'd sneaked home that morning after he woke up? And that's what Vic must have figured he'd do."

SUSAN nodded.

"But what's the spelling of the name Anders used in renting the car got to do with it?"

"I'm assuming Anders rented that car under Vic's orders and that Vic told him what name to use. Now suppose Vic had told him to rent it under the name 'Carl Dixon.' Police find the body and the car, trace the renting of the car, and—well, on the off chance that the name means something, they'd look up any Carl Dixons in New York, where the car came from. And if a policeman even walked in on Carl Dixon to ask him what time it was, he'd have given himself away. So Vic's trouble would have been for nothing."

"I see. It's—it's beginning to make sense, Peter. Rather horrible sense."

"Yes, having that car rented under the name 'Carl Dickson' was subtle. It wouldn't lead the police to Carl Dixon, but Carl would read it in the papers and shake in his shoes. He'd know it was a point against him if the police ever were aimed his way. He'd begin to see what he was up against."

"If we could only find that roadhouse!"

"It would help. But I'd rather find Vic Tremaine. I'm going to Boston."

"To Boston? Why?"

"Anders came from there, fairly recently. I'm going to check every point on his record, and talk to anybody in the department there who may have known him. I want to find out who might have wanted to kill him—and preferably someone he wouldn't know would want to kill him. Apparently he trusted Vic. Want another drink?"

"No, thanks."

"Then let's go. I'll drop you home, and then I'm going to take a night train for Boston. I can get an early start in the morning."

"But tomorrow's Sunday. Can you get anything on Sunday?"

He laughed at that. "There aren't any Sundays for police departments. They'll be open."

"This is more than wonderful of you, Peter. But *why*—? When I asked you for advice, I didn't dream—"

"Forget it," he said, almost rudely. "I got interested, that's all. A busman's holiday, maybe, but if I want to, why shouldn't I?"

"But are you taking time off work? If you are, you've got to let me—"

"Don't say it. It's sick leave, and I'm getting paid for it. It's not costing me anything. If you insist, I'll keep track of expenses. Now come on, we might as well eat somewhere, and then I've got to find out about trains."

He caught the eight-thirty train and spent the whole trip thinking, not about what he was going to do in Boston—that was simple enough, whether it got him anywhere or not—but what other angles might be open. There was an idea at the back of his brain, but he couldn't get it front and center. It had something to do with Ancin and Vic's roadhouse. There ought to be *some* lead that would take him to it. Was there any way to jog the memory of the one man—Dr. John Smith of Jersey City—who remembered seeing it?

Was it worthwhile making a trip to Jersey City to talk to him? At least he could discover what parts of the state were familiar to the doctor and, unless the doctor were widely traveled, cut down the territory. But that seemed pretty futile.

And the incipient idea stayed incipient. He couldn't get any closer to it. Point by point he went over Carl Dixon's story, looking for a lead, something he could get his teeth into.

He couldn't.

Worse, he kept thinking about Susan Bailey.

HE GOT to Boston in time to get a few hours sleep, but he slept restlessly. At nine o'clock he went to police headquarters and spent two hours there. Then he caught a fast train back to New York and went directly from Grand Central to New York police headquarters.

At five-thirty he phoned Susan. "Eat-

en yet?" he asked her. "If not, I'll pick you up. And I promise not to put it on your bill."

"Did you get anything, Peter?"

"Maybe. I don't know yet. I'll tell you about it."

"Come on around. We'll eat here, and you can tell me."

SHE was cooking dinner for them when he got there a little after six, but she stopped work long enough to sit down to listen to what he'd learned.

"I checked pretty far back and pretty thoroughly," he said. "I got names and descriptions of three men who might have disliked Anders enough to liquidate him. Only one of the three came anywhere close to Carl Dixon's description of Vic Tremaine. It's a guy named Jerry Trenholm and in a general way he fits the description. Eight years ago this Jerry Trenholm went to jail on a tip Anders gave the police. That isn't on the records, but I talked to a captain who remembered the case."

"What is he? What kind of criminal, I mean."

"A forger. He did five years in jail in Massachusetts. He's been out three years. They thought he'd come to New York—and he did. I checked that at Headquarters here. At least he was here six months ago. That was their last notation on him. But here's the real break, Susan. He's got a wife—or a woman—who's been with him a couple of years. Her name's Claire. Either Claire Evans or Claire Trenholm, if they're really married. And her description pretty well fits that of Dorothy Tremaine."

"Peter, wonderful!"

"I've got a photo of Jerry Trenholm. Couldn't get one of Claire because she's never been in jail, although she's been up for questioning a few times. Anyway, I'm going over to Newark again tonight, to talk to Harlan, the prosecutor. I'm going to give him the Trenholm picture and ask him if he'll show it to Carl Dixon to see whether Dixon identifies Trenholm as Tremaine. They'll show it to him with a dozen other pictures, so if he picks out Trenholm, then we'll know we're on the right track.

"Now don't get your hopes too high. Even if we're right so far, and if he does identify Trenholm, then they aren't going to let him out on account of that. But they will pull in Trenholm for questioning—I'll promise that much."

That was all he had to tell her, so she finished getting dinner and they ate. Sitting across the table from her seemed natural by now. He wondered whether, if he got her man out of jail for her and they were married, did she have any wild idea that he, Peter Cole, was going to be a friend of the family, like he was a friend of Grace and Harry Richmond's? That was different.

He insisted on helping with the dishes afterwards.

He wanted to have something to do besides sit and think.

IT WASN'T until they were driving through the tunnel that conversation got back to murder.

"Peter," she asked, "what if Mr. Harlan won't help us by showing that picture to Carl?"

"Then we'll have to wait for visiting day and you can show it to him. But Harlan will. Sure, he thinks Carl's guilty, but he'll play along with us in trying to clear him. Why shouldn't he? Policemen and prosecutors are human, Susan."

"I know *one* who is."

He let the remark go and concentrated on his driving. Then she was back on the subject of Carl again.

"Peter, suppose Carl can identify the picture of this Trenholm and that the police are willing to pick him up for questioning. Can they find him? Do they know where he is?"

"As I said, the last record is six months old. But unless he's hiding out, they'll be able to find him. And the one good thing about how bad this case is, is that he won't think he has any cause for hiding. If he's in New York, my guess is that he can be picked up in twenty-four hours if we really try."

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN THEY were driving into Newark, and not talking, suddenly that incipient idea that had been in the back of Peter Cole's mind on the train to Boston was back again, only it seemed closer. So close that he knew he could get it, if he kept trying.

He swung into the curb in front of a bar. "Let's have a drink, Susan," he said.

She looked a bit surprised at the sudden suggestion, but she didn't argue. They sat at the bar and ordered martinis. He sipped his and the idea seemed closer, somehow. And then, quite suddenly, he slapped his hand on the bar.

"Susan," he said, "let's go to Jersey City. And from there—just maybe—to Ancin and Vic's. What do you say?"

"Are you—serious?"

"Why not? I can take this photo to Harlan tomorrow. He'll be less annoyed if I see him at his office instead of bothering him at home, and he won't get it to the prison tonight anyway."

"But *how?* I mean, how do we go to Ancin and Vic's?"

"We'll drive there." He felt so good now that he laughed out loud. "After Dr. Smith tells us where it is, of course."

"But I thought he didn't remember."

"Susan, he doesn't *have* to remember. Look, there isn't any roadhouse called Ancin and Vic's. If there was, the investigation and the publicity would have turned it up. And yet Carl Dixon went there and saw the sign. So. That means the sign was put up temporarily for him to see. Anders, as Ancin, was already there and probably knew to the minute when Vic and Dorothy and Carl would arrive. He put up the sign just before they got there and took it down before he joined them at their booth. Probably Carl's mistaken in thinking it was a neon sign. That could be done, but it would have been a lot of expense and trouble."

Susan nodded. "That could be. But how does it help us find the place? I'd say it would be just that much harder to find."

"It would be if it weren't for Dr. Smith. Look, Susan, that sign would have been up only a few minutes. Still, some other cars must have gone by during those few minutes. Several people may have seen that sign while it was up, and one of them remembered it, Dr. Smith.

"So that changes the question. The doctor doesn't have to remember where he saw it. All he has to remember is *where he was at about half past twelve on the night of August 16th!* If he was out on a call, as is probable at that time of night, he'd keep a record of the call and—wait a minute, I'm going to phone him from here. Maybe we won't even have to go to see him."

He got a handful of change from the

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bartender and went to the phone booth. In ten minutes he came back, jubilant.

"Got it!" he said. "Within ten miles, which is closer than I hoped. It was a confinement case, out in the country, ten miles from Jersey City on Highway 106. He remembers the call for him to go there came about midnight, after he was in bed. He got dressed and drove there, and didn't get away until after three in the morning. So Ancin and Vic's is—was—on that ten mile stretch of Highway 106. He couldn't have passed it anywhere else!"

"Peter, let's go look right now."

"We're practically there now."

HE COULD see how excited she was, her hands clenched to fists in her lap as she sat beside him in the car. He drove to Jersey City and found Highway 106. They followed it out of town.

"This must be about the edge of town," he said when the houses began to thin out. "Watch the reading on the speedometer and let me know when we've gone ten miles. We'll do the whole stretch first and stop to look over the likely places on our way back."

They passed three roadhouses before Susan said they'd gone a little over ten miles.

He kept on only until he came to a driveway and could turn the car around.

"The second one," Susan said, "looks like the best bet. The one called Brian's Inn. Let's go in and order a dancing sandwich."

"Huh?"

Susan laughed. "Didn't you notice the neon sign? It reads 'Brian's Inn, Dancing Sandwiches.' On three separate lines, of course, but I still want to order a dancing sandwich."

Peter Cole grinned and started the car. "Okay," he said, "we'll have one if they've got them. But we're going to stop at all three. Even if Brian's is the best bet. And why, by the way, do you think it is?"

"Well—the distance back from the road. The size of the place. I guess that's all."

THEY stopped for a drink apiece at the nearest roadhouse and, once inside, agreed that it was eliminated. The arrangement of the place was completely different from Carl Dixon's description of Ancin and Vic's. If nothing else, there weren't any booths and obviously never had been. The place wasn't arranged for them.

They got back in the car and drove on to Brian's Inn. He slowed down to look at the sign before they turned into the parking lot. Susan had been right. In big neon letters on a framework in the yard in front of the building, it read:

BRIAN'S INN
DANCING
SANDWICHES

They went inside and there were booths. There were tables and a small dance floor. There was a platform about big enough to hold a three-piece combo although there weren't any musicians on it just then, possibly because it was not quite nine o'clock, every early evening for a roadhouse.

"Peter!" Susan said. "This is *it*. It's got to be."

He could hear the barely suppressed excitement in her voice and said, "Take it easy, Susan. Let's not go overboard. This could be it, but we haven't anything definite yet."

"That booth—" she pointed— "must be the one they sat at. Let's sit there."

"Okay." He followed her to the booth and they sat down, one on either side. She looked at him and her eyes were shining with excitement.

"Peter, this is *it*."

"I think you're right. But let's see if we can prove it. Let's not get excited unless we can."

A waiter was coming over to take their order, a tall thin man with a melancholy face like a bloodhound's. Before he reached them Peter grinned at Susan. "Shall we order dancing sandwiches?" he asked.

"No. Let's not be funny. This is it, Peter, and let's prove it."

The waiter was there by then and Peter Cole said, "Two martinis, please," and then "Just a minute," before the waiter could turn away. He flashed his buzzer quickly, not giving the man time to see that it was a New York and not a New Jersey badge.

"Don't worry," he said, "there's no trouble. Just want to see if you recognize a picture." He took the police photograph of Jerry Trenholm out of his pocket and handed it to the waiter.

The waiter studied it and shook his head slowly.

"He's never been here?" Cole asked, to make sure.

"Not that I remember, since I've been here. That ain't long."

"How long?"

"Month and a half, about."

"Oh. Who's here now that might have been here three months ago?"

"Joe, the bartender. The cook, I think. I'm not sure how long he's been here. And, of course, Powell, the owner."

"Is there a Brian?"

"Brian Powell. Brian's his first name."

"If he's here, would you ask him to drop over to talk to us?"

"Sure."

The waiter went into a back room before he went to the bar with their order. And, just as the martinis came, a plump, cheerful-looking man with a fringe of gray hair around a very shiny bald spot came out of the back room and looked toward the waiter. The waiter nodded to their booth and the plump man came over.

"I'm Brian Powell," he said. "You wanted to see me?"

"Won't you join us, Mr. Powell," Susan said, moving over to make room for him on her side of the booth. He smiled and sat down.

"We're interested in some people who may have been in here on the night of August sixteenth," Cole said. "About twelve-thirty to one-thirty in the morning. Do you by any chance recognize this man?"

POWELL studied the picture of Trenholm. "Vaguely familiar," he said. "I may have seen him. I wouldn't know when. And August sixteenth—that's a long time ago. What day of the week was it?"

"A Friday."

"Then I was probably here. But if business was dull, I may have been back in my office, where I was tonight."

"How many people would have been working here that night?"

"Outside of the music? Well, Joe would have been behind the bar. Two waiters and the cook. And when things are busy, I help out myself wherever needed. Sometimes at the tables, sometimes behind the bar."

"It wasn't, I understand," Cole said, "a busy evening. One of the members of this party I'm talking about said there were only a few other customers."

"If it was that bad, there might have been only one waiter. I might have sent the other off duty early. I might be able to check my records, my employment records, if it's important. Is it?"

"Very," Susan told him.

"Excuse me a moment, then." He went to the back room again.

"Shall I show him a picture of Carl?" Susan asked. "I still have it in my purse."

"It won't hurt any. Give it to me now. While he's checking records, I'll show it and the Jerry Trenholm picture to the bartender. He might remember one of them, although the waiter's our best bet if they were served in a booth."

"And for another reason," Susan said.

"What's that?"

"They didn't pay for the drinks," Susan reminded him. "They were supposed to own the place, so they couldn't have. Either Anders or Vic Tremaine must have got the waiter aside and slipped him money, more than enough to cover whatever they expected to drink, and told him not to collect at the table, and to keep the change. They'd have had to do it that way."

"Smart girl! I didn't think of that.

Sure, the waiter would remember if they did that."

He went over to the bar and showed the pictures to Joe, talked to him a while, and then went back into the kitchen.

When he came back to the table he told Susan, "Joe remembers seeing someone who looked like Trenholm in here once or twice, but doesn't remember when or any details. He doesn't remember Dixon. The cook never saw either of them. The waiter's going to be our best chance."

She nodded and he saw that she was trembling a little. He knew why. Ten minutes ago, things had looked wonderful. They had found the place. They had found Ancin and Vic's. And now it looked as though it might be useless for them to have found it. There wasn't going to be any proof.

"Chin up, Susan," he said. "If this is the place, we'll prove it."

"But how, Peter?"

Brian Powell was coming back. He sat down with them again.

"Yes," he said, "I sent one waiter home at midnight that night. There would have been only one on duty. Ray Wheeler."

"He still works for you?"

Powell shook his head. "He left a month and a half ago, in early September. Said he was going to Florida, and I haven't any address for him."

"Any way you know of that we could even try to reach him?"

"I'm afraid not. He's a drifter. Worked for me only three months."

Susan tried. "Does the name Ancin and Vic mean anything to you, Mr. Powell?" she asked.

"Ancin and Vic? It's vaguely familiar. Say, wasn't it in connection with that murder case near Newark a few months ago."

"Yes. And we thought this place might—well, never mind." Peter handed him the picture of Carl Dixon. "Ever seen this man?"

Powell studied the photograph. "Not in person, no. But I think I've seen his picture in the papers. Isn't he the one who was convicted in the Newark case?"

Peter Cole sighed. This had looked like their lucky day, until now.

Powell had a drink with them and then excused himself and went back to his office. Susan looked at Peter and there was a mist of tears in her eyes. He reached across the table and patted her hand.

"Buck up," he said. "We're not licked. We're just stuck for the moment. We've been at this only two days."

"I know, Peter. You've done wonderful. But right now it does seem pretty discouraging. So near, and yet so far."

"We'll get nearer."

HE DISCOVERED that his hand was still lying on top of hers, and he almost jerked it away.

She looked at him. "Should we go, Peter? You must be tired, after traveling to Boston last night and back today."

"No. I'm all right."

"Getting hungry? Want a dancing sandwich yet?"

"No. Shall I order you one?"

"No. I was just—trying to inject a light note into the gloom. Don't frown so, Peter. All right, maybe I started this, but now you look gloomier than I feel. But why didn't we kid Mr. Powell about those dancing sandwiches while he was here?"

"Susan, shut up. I want to think."

"I can't help?"

"By shutting up, yes. There must be some way—"

She must have realized he didn't want an answer, and she kept still. Peter Cole stared moodily into his drink and made wet circles on the wood with the bottom of the glass.

Suddenly the fingers that gripped the glass tightened, went white. "Susan!" he said. "I've got it!"

"What?"

"Wait!"

He got up, not even remembering to excuse himself, and went back into the room at the rear into which Powell had

gone fifteen minutes before. He was in there two or three minutes and then came out. His eyes were shining and he looked across the room and caught Susan's eye. She'd been staring at the door.

He held up his right hand—thumb and forefinger making a circle. Then he went into the phone booth.

He was in there longer, possibly ten minutes.

Then he was at the edge of the booth, his eyes still shining with excitement. "Come on," he said. "Harlan's coming here. Right away."

"Harlan?"

"The prosecutor. I told him we'd found Ancin and Vic's. I told him I thought we had a picture of Vic Tremaine to show him. He's coming right away."

"But—" She got up, reached back for her purse. "But if he's coming here, why are we leaving?"

"We aren't. Come on. Don't bother with your purse. We're coming right back in."

HE ALMOST dragged her through the door and to his car parked in the parking lot.

He opened the back door instead of the front and instead of getting in, he reached in and pulled out a heavy auto robe. He said, "Hold this. By the corners."

"But Peter, what?"

"Shush. Do as you're told, woman."

She had hold of the robe and he got a pen knife out of the side pocket of his trousers.

He snapped open the knife and cut through the binding of the robe about a foot from one corner.

"Hold it tighter," he said, "so I can cut better. We can tear it, I think, once we get it started away."

"But why—?"

"It's an old robe. I don't like it any more. We're cutting and tearing it into strips. And no backtalk."

While they worked, he said, "I've got Powell's permission to do this, so don't worry. And when Harlan sees it—"

Finally the robe was in strips and he cut some of the strips in half crosswise. "Come on!" he said then, and with a double handful of the heavy strips, he was almost running around to the front of the roadhouse, to the big neon sign on the front lawn.

Susan's high heels had trouble keeping up with him.

"There ought to be a switch," he said, "two switches I mean, behind here. Powell says you can turn off— Here it is."

The top line of the sign, the eighteen-inch blue letters that read "Brian's Inn" went dark. Only the two lines of red letters underneath each line a foot high, remained.

They read:

DANCING
SANDWICHES

Peter Cole laughed.

"Watch, Susan," he said. "Here's to dancing sandwiches!"

He came around to the front of the sign and wrapped a strip of auto robe around the first and the last letters of the top line. It read: ANCIN. He wrapped a strip around the S of SANDWICHES and then folded one in half and covered only the first half of the letter W. Then he covered the last three letters of the word with one long strip wrapped around them. He stepped back to enjoy his handiwork and the sign read:

ANCIN
AND VIC

Susan, transfixed, was staring at it. Peter Cole reached out a hand toward her, remembered, and let the hand drop to his side.

For some reason his voice didn't sound cheerful.

"Come on back inside," he said "We'll let Harlan find it that way for himself when he drives up."

CHAPTER IX

IT WAS midnight, and Claire Evans was getting mad, plenty mad. An hour now she'd been stuck here in the hotel room, stood up. They'd left the Diamond Horseshoe before eleven, bored by fifty violins playing sweet music.

"Let's go to Eddie Condon's or Jimmy Ryan's and hear some real music, baby," Jerry had said.

She said it was a good idea, and then when they got outside it was snowing and colder and she'd wanted to drop in at the hotel to get her muskrat coat instead of the chubby she was wearing. Instead of keeping the cab, he'd paid it off and gone in with her. But at the elevator he'd touched her arm.

"Want to see a guy up on another floor for just a second, baby," he'd said. "Wait in the room and I'll pick you up on my way down."

And that was all right except that it had been an hour ago, a darned long hour ago, and here she was alone and bored stiff right in the middle of the evening. Had he looked up another woman, or got in a floating crap game, or what?

If only she knew she was stood up, then it'd be all right. Sauce for the gander was sauce for the goose, and she could go out and finish the evening all right. Yes and the night too, if he wanted things that way.

And it was after twelve now and the evening was being shot. But if she did go out, and she was wrong, and he stopped for her a few minutes after she'd left—well, that would start something. And she got along pretty well with Jerry and didn't want to spoil it as long as he was on the level with her.

But she was getting plenty mad. The few drinks she'd had at the Horseshoe were wearing off and she'd be cold sober by the time they got going again—if they ever did. She started for the door, changed her mind and turned back. Instead she picked up the phone and got room service.

"Three-oh-four," she said. "Bottle of scotch, bottle of sparkling, some ice cubes." All right, she'd wait another full hour, but she wouldn't have to do it dry. And if he wasn't back by one—

She paced back and forth until there was a knock on the door, and then she called out, "Come in."

The door opened and a man came in, but he wasn't from room service and he wasn't bringing scotch. He was a copper. No uniform, but a copper. And another one came in behind him.

"Claire Evans?" the first one said.

There wasn't any use denying it. If they were here, they knew who she was. "Mrs. Trenholm," she said. "Formerly Claire Evans."

"Jerry here?"

"No. I don't know where he is." She hoped Jerry wasn't in a bad jam, that this was just another pickup he could talk his way out of.

The coppers didn't take her word, of course. The first one nodded to the second one and the second went into the bedroom and she heard him open the bathroom door and look in there, too. He came back and shook his head.

"We'll get him later," the first said. "We'll take the dame in." To Claire he said, "Come on, Sister. Get your coat on. It's snowing."

"What's the charge, if I may ask?"

"A little matter to do with checks. Coming willingly?"

She shrugged, and picked up the coat. They didn't have anything on her. They just wanted to pump her about Jerry, and a lot of good that would do them. Most she'd done for Jerry recently was play secretary a few times on the phone. They couldn't get an identification on that. Only she hoped Jerry wasn't going to be in bad trouble.

THEY drove her to Headquarters and took her to an office with "Captain

J. C. Crandall" on the door. As she went in, one of the coppers said, "Claire Evans, Cap." Neither of them followed her in. They closed the door from the outside and went away.

The captain looked up at her briefly and then motioned to a chair at one side. "Sit down," he said. He went back to some paper work on his desk.

She waited fifteen minutes, beginning to fume. What kind of a game was this? "May I phone a lawyer?" she said finally.

"Not yet," he said, without even looking up.

Another fifteen minutes dragged by. It went so slowly that she thought her wrist watch had stopped and twice held it to her ear to be sure it was still ticking. "What's this all about?" she said when she couldn't stand it any more.

The captain looked up again. "Cashed any checks recently?" he asked.

"No."

"Then you haven't a thing to worry about. A dame that fits your description passed one last Tuesday. The pen work could have been Jerry's. He's coming in. If he doesn't identify you, you can go home."

She breathed easier. She hadn't passed a check in months. She relaxed a little in the chair and lighted a cigarette. The captain smiled at her, "Sorry you have to wait, if it's a bum rap. He should have been here by now. Want something to look at?"

He took a couple of magazines out of a drawer of his desk and handed them to her. That should have warned her, but she said, "Thanks," and started leafing through one of them. There was a new Michael Shayne story in it, and she started reading it.

It was almost half an hour before there was a knock on the door and it opened. The captain said, "Come in," and a tall young man opened the door and stood in the doorway.

"I'm Pete Cole, Captain," the young man said. "We've got the guy here. Shall I send him in?"

Claire closed the magazine, but held the place with her finger. When this was over with, in a minute, she'd ask if she could take it along to finish the story.

Captain Crandall said, "Sure," and the man in the doorway—he was good looking, Claire thought, even if he was a copper—moved aside into the room and motioned to someone outside.

The someone outside came in—and Claire's mouth opened and the back of her hand flew up to push back the scream she felt coming.

Carl Dixon looked at her and smiled faintly. "Hello, Dorothy," he said.

IT was a dawn like any other dawn, but it was the first one Susan Bailey had waited up for in a long time. She stood now at the window of her room and while she watched, the street lights, haloed by the falling snow, went out. The street grew whiter now as the air turned from dull gray to light gray. She'd been home since midnight, when Peter had sent her home in a cab, saying

[Turn page]

that he was going to stay and see things through. But he'd promised to come, no matter what the hour. So she hadn't gone to bed. She'd alternately tried to read and stood looking out the window.

She heard footsteps coming up the stairs. Twenty times since midnight, footsteps had come up the stairs and every time she had tensed. She felt herself go tense now, until there was a knock on the door. She hurried to it and threw it open.

PETER COLE stood there, snow on his hat and snow on the shoulders of his coat. He smiled at her, but it wasn't a convincing smile and for a moment she thought something had gone wrong.

"Everything's all right, Susan," he said then. "They're letting him out. He's completely cleared."

She pulled him into the room. He took off his hat, but held it, dripping, in his hand. He wouldn't give her his coat.

"I can stay only a minute," he said.

"Nonsense, Peter. Give me your coat."

"No, I'm leaving. There isn't much to tell. After I sent you home, I went with Harlan to the prison and Carl made positive identification of the picture of Jerry Trenholm. Harlan phoned, right from the prison, to New York and asked them to pick up Trenholm and Claire Evans. They got Claire right away.

"Harlan got a release on Carl into his custody and we took him to New York. He identified Claire as Dorothy and she went to pieces. When we gave her a choice of a full share in a murder charge or a light term as accessory-after if she turned state's evidence, she sang beautifully.

"They got Trenholm a couple of hours later, and I watched them try to break him down, but they couldn't. He's sitting tight, but it doesn't matter. With Claire's testimony, they've got him cold. And even if he should beat the rap—not that he will—Carl is cleared."

"Where is Carl?"

"He's released by now. There were formalities, and they wanted him to help them with Jerry Trenholm and what not. But he'll be here any minute. I talked to him and told him you'd be up and to come here first, that you'd be waiting up for him. So I've got to go."

"Why? Wait, Peter. Don't run off. I haven't even—thanked you."

"Forget it. I don't want you to thank me. It's all right. It's all over. And I haven't slept for—"

"Peter, please be quiet."

"Huh?" He stared at her, puzzled.

"Peter, I'm awfully glad Carl is coming here right away, right now. So I can get it over with. I've got to break our engagement, and don't you see that this is the time to do it?—while he's so happy about being freed, about being cleared, getting his job back—for I'm sure he will—and everything.

"Carl is nice. I like him. But, Peter, I started falling out of love with him even before—three months ago. I might have broken the engagement within a week or two, then, but don't you see, I couldn't after he was in trouble. I had to stick by him, even though I didn't love him, when he was in trouble. Especially when I was sure that he was innocent, and I was just about the only one who was sure."

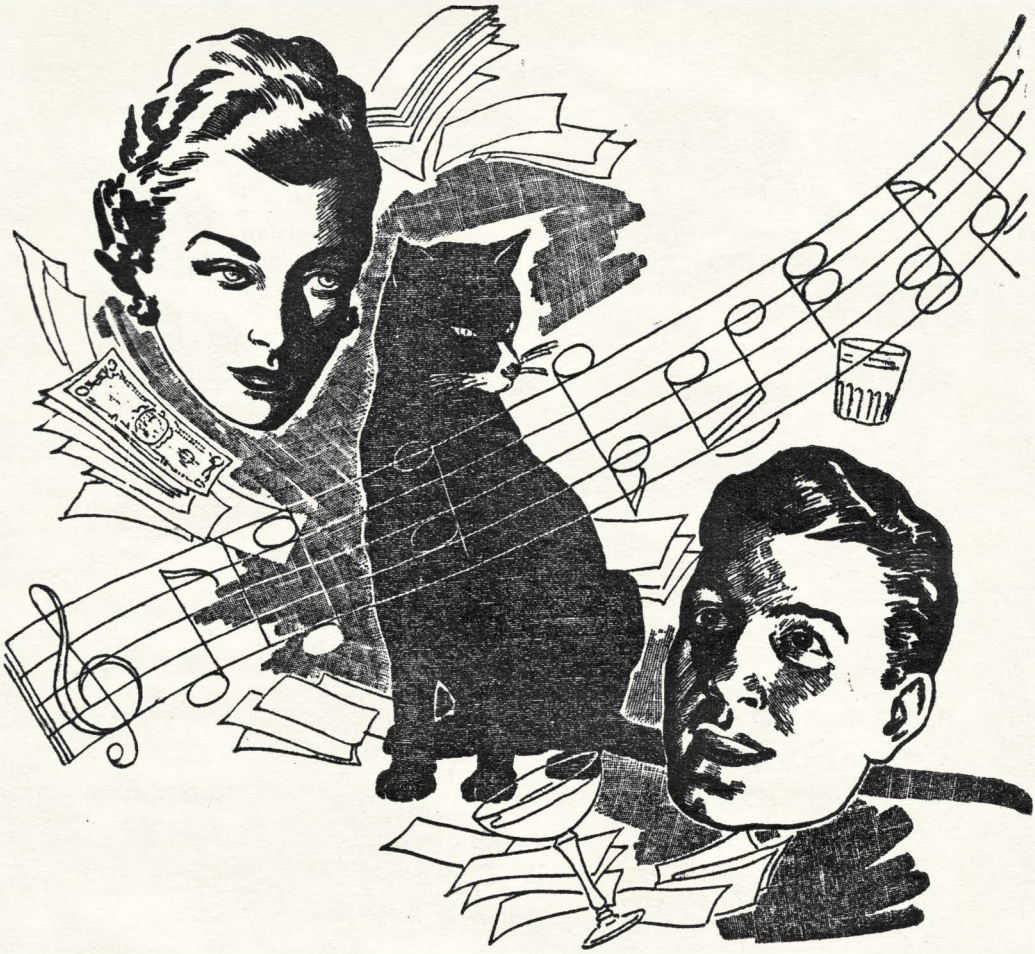
"Susan—"

"Don't say it yet, Peter. As long as Carl's coming here within minutes, let me tell him first. It won't hurt him, I'm sure. Not now. But will you wait? And we'll talk afterwards. There's an all-night restaurant across the street. Will you wait there? When Carl has gone, I'll come down."

He started to put out a hand toward her, pulled it back. His face, through a twenty-four-hours' growth of beard, looked almost shining.

"No," he said. "I'll wait outside, across the street, until I see him come and go. I'll get covered with snow, but I love snow. Maybe I'll get cold, but—you'll thaw me out?"

She smiled, her eyes misty. And her eyes must have given enough answer, for he turned quite suddenly and went quickly down the stairs.



THE SLEEK BLACK CAT

By RICHARD BRISTER

STICK around," somebody said, "and you'll really see something. Another half hour and he'll put on his dance of death, as he calls it."

"His dance of death?" Marva said, frowning down at the clinking ice cubes in her highball glass. She lifted a curious glance toward her host, who had given off eating fire and now was blandly eating a wine glass to the amused astonishment of his guests. "What is his dance of death?"

"He goes out there," said her informant, waving toward the terrace of

Marva's Husband Knew She Planned to Get Away With Murder!

this penthouse apartment, "and climbs up on the railing. Of course, he doesn't really dance up there. The top of the railing is less than a foot wide. But he does walk back and forth and—"

"Why, he's a fool!" Marva said, remembering the long ride in the elevator which had brought her up to this party in Josh Wadkins' apartment. "The way he's been drinking he could—he must be crazy!"

"Just crazy enough to make a fortune writing smash hits for Broadway and Hollywood musicals, d a r l i n g." There was something superior in the way her informant smiled at her. "Josh is a genius. Geniuses are noted for being somewhat unstable."

"But why take such a chance?" Marva said. "It isn't as if he had nothing to live for. I mean—"

"Why do little boys dive off bridges, darling? He's vain. And of course he loves danger. Flirting with death, you might say, is his hobby. Just an hour ago he told me in all seriousness that he never feels really alive unless he's in grave danger. Really, he's quite fascinating, darling. All that wonderful talent, you know, and then this ridiculous quirk about danger—and not even married! *Imagine!*"

Yes, imagine, thought Marva, and again her large black eyes lifted, under their long feline lashes, toward her host. It was now two a. m. and she had a long taxing day's work looming before her—but she decided to stay and see him do it. He was rather an ass, she found herself thinking. But attractive—and all that money.

She stood somewhat s c o r n f u l l y among the circle of onlookers when he finally fortified himself with another long pull on a highball and climbed up on top of the railing out there.

HE WAS quite drunk and some of the guests could not help gasping. It was a long way down to the street.

She heard a young girl whisper to her escort, "Why doesn't somebody stop him?"

And the answer—"No use. He'd just get sore, and take more chances. It's best to let him alone when he's in this mood."

So there was Josh Wadkins, a million dollars' worth of musical g e n i u s, perched precariously atop the terrace railing. He strode carefully from one end to the other, turned around and walked back, holding his arms out. One false step would be the end of him. The guests watched, fascinated, as spectators watch a bullfight or the auto races or any show whose main appeal hinges on the possibility of disaster.

She saw one thing—he had sobered himself by a supreme effort of will once he mounted the railing. She saw a wild gleam in his eye, knew he was enjoying himself up there. She knew too that it was not so much the fact of having an audience that thrilled him—it was the danger.

This man really did love flirting with death.

Somebody near her whispered, "One of these days he'll miss his footing and there'll be the end of him."

All that money, thought Marva. And suddenly, as she watched him cavorting atop that railing, a thin smile touched the edges of her wide beautiful mouth.

The people she had come with were anxious to leave soon thereafter. She sent them along, insisting she'd find a ride with somebody else later on. She became animated, appeared to be having a wonderful time.

Actually she wished the diehards would fold up and go home—and quit offering her rides with them. She wanted Josh Wadkins to see her home. She managed that finally and in the taxi, when he tried to kiss her, she offered only token resistance.

One moment he appeared very drunk, the next he was quite sober. She had never had reason to doubt the effect of her kiss upon any man. It pleased her vanity that he became quite lucid after he kissed her.

"You're a beautiful thing," he said, peering owlishly at her in the cold gray light of dawn. "Like a sleek black cat."

"Do you like sleek black cats?" she said.

"Love 'em."

"That's a help, Josh."

"Why?"

"I like talented men with a strain of divine madness in them."

"What do you do?" he said.

"Model at Berg's on the Avenue."

"That's not going to satisfy you for long, is it, Marva?"

"No. How could you tell?"

"You have the look of a girl who wants something better than that and intends to get it."

"You're discerning," she said. "I do."

"What is it you want?" he asked, staring down curiously at her.

"You," she said, looking unabashedly into his amused brown eyes. "And I intend to get you."

He grinned, flattered by this display of feminine candor. "You do?"

"I will," she said and offered her mouth to him. His lips met hers guardedly for a moment, then his arms pulled her hard against him. He was panting as they embraced. Up ahead the cabby swung into a side street, a grin on his face, and said to himself, "Yeah, she will. That kind of dame don't stop at nothing!"

For the honeymoon he took her on a trip to the Canadian wilds and they went hunting for mountain lions. Their third day in the woods a huge cat sprang at him out of ambush and for a moment she thought the beast would kill him and save her the trouble.

The swiftness with which he reacted to the danger was amazing. He spun like a ballet dancer, brought his big rifle up into train and plunked a slug into the cat even as it hurtled through the air at him.

Even so the beast managed to claw him about one leg. He sprang back, that wild gleam of pleasurable excitement in his brown eyes, and spanked two more slugs into the ball of furred fury before it lay still.

He was rather marvelous about it. Her own pulse was pounding, whereas he was quite cool, even afterward, and she nibbled at her ripe lower lip with veiled annoyance.

"Darling!" she cried, acting her role of concerned wife to perfection, "I was so *frightened!* I just couldn't *move!* He very nearly did get you."

THE fanatical light still danced in his eyes. He was still drunk on danger. And he was amused.

"Pretty close," he admitted. "I'm all right though. Just scratched a bit, Marva. I can smell a stalking cat," he told her proudly.

He'd had his taste of danger. They went back to New York and he rented a huge old stone mansion, an "eagle's aerie" he called it, perched atop the Palisades on the Jersey side of the Hudson.

"Apartment's too small for us," he said. "We need room now. Throw some beautiful brawls in this place, Marva. And the view! Have you been out on that balcony that gives off from the ballroom?"

"Yes." She was purposely cool. He hadn't consulted her about renting this place and it was costing a fortune.

"Sheer drop of two hundred feet down the cliffside from that balcony," he said and the gleam was in his eyes again.

"But it's *such* a big place, Josh. When I think of the money—"

"Don't," he said.

She did though. After all she had married him for his money and it was a bitter frustration when she learned there wasn't any. There was income, a fabulous income from the hit songs he'd written and was still writing, but he was constitutionally unable to hang onto a penny.

He gave it away to his old pals along Tin Pan Alley. He entertained like a Croesus, hired name bands to play in

the big ballroom for his guests, paid caterers outlandish sums to provide refreshments. He hadn't a nickel in the bank and the day she learned he had a phobia against insurance and didn't have any she was stricken with the irony of her situation.

If he died tomorrow, if he managed finally to kill himself with one of his fantastic stunts—he had taken to walking the railing of that balcony outside the ballroom when he felt the need of some excitement lately—she would have nothing, except possibly some of his debts.

Once she tactfully broached the subject. "Darling, do you love me?"

"Crazy about you. You know that," he said.

"How crazy?"

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, I don't know," she parried.

"You look unhappy, Marva. What is it?"

"Josh, I love you and it's awfully nice living the way we live out here and entertaining so much. But—well, I'm a woman, after all. And a woman needs a bedrock to her life—a security that we don't have."

"Why don't we?"

"Darling, I know how you feel about insurance. But did it ever occur to you that if anything happened to you—God forbid—I wouldn't have a red cent to carry on with?"

"Nothing's going to happen to me," he said.

"Well, but it might. You take such crazy chances with yourself."

"Nothing's going to happen to me, Marva. I'll admit I'm a fool about money. I'm always in debt. But as long as I can be propped up in front of a piano with a sheet of blank music paper in front of me we'll keep our heads above water. I can always write my way out of debt."

"It's easy for you, isn't it?" she said. "The composing, I mean?"

He grinned. "I don't suffer any great pangs of creation when I give birth to a song."

"Then I wonder," she said, "if I could ask a favor."

"Go ahead."

"Write me a song, darling."

He laughed. "I've written you a half dozen songs, Marva. Ever since we were married I've been writings songs for you."

"No, I don't mean like that. I mean write me a song all my own—a song only you and I know about, Josh. A song I can put under lock and key.

"And then if something ever did happen to you—I mean, it *is* possible, Josh, so don't grin at me that way—I could take this song down to your publishers and have the royalties from it. Don't you see? It would be our own special kind of insurance, darling."

He laughed softly at her. "That's not bad. That's clever. How'd you think of it?"

"Really, Josh, it would make all the difference to my peace of mind. I suppose to you it sounds silly but—"

"Not at all. It's clever. And I'll do it."

"Oh, Josh! You darling!" She threw her arms around him.

"I'll even do better," he grinned. "I'll write you a lot of songs, Marva, for your little rainy-day stockpile. Say every fifth one on the average. How would that strike you?"

"Oh, darling"—she kissed him—"I love you so much!"

A HARD line to read, a professional actress once had told her at a cocktail party. It wasn't so hard, Marva thought scornfully. Josh appeared to be drinking it up.

"My little black cat," he said huskily and pulled her roughly, h u n g r i l y, against him. "You know something, Mrs. Wadkins?"

"What?"

"You fascinate me."

"I don't mind if I do," she said, smiling up tantalizingly at him.

She liked the first one he wrote for

her. She knew a hit when she heard it and as Josh played it to her behind locked doors in the privacy of the room he used for his composing she could tell this song was a smash. The second one he offered her for her rainy-day stockpile she crinkled her nose at.

"What's the matter?" Josh said.

"How about one of those others you turned out these last few months, Josh?"

"Hey, they're for Bill Emling. On contract."

"Don't I rate as high with you as Emling?"

"You don't like the song. Is that it?"

"You've done better. One of those others would make me happier, darling. They're all solid hits. I can almost feel when a song has it in here." She put her hand over her heart. "Please, Josh—let me have *Heartburn* for my stockpile."

He finally did with reluctance. In this way she managed to garner herself a nice little kitty of songs as the months passed. She had learned enough about the money end of Josh's business by now to realize that she would not have to worry too much if something happened to her eccentric husband.

It was a very nice feeling. It made her smile when she was alone with her thoughts, like the sleek black cat Josh had called her. Now if he would only oblige her by killing himself, as everyone said he was bound to, sooner or later . . .

She yearned for the independence of widowhood. It was unfair of Josh not to oblige her. Subconsciously, of course, she had always known she would have to kill him. She didn't cringe from the necessity. Perhaps there was in her something of that quality that was in him. The thought of death, for somebody else, stirred her to a strange pleasure.

It was one of his ridiculous, flamboyant, spare-no-expense parties. Everybody was there—but everybody. Something told her, as she moved from one clique to another, that this was to be the night. Exhilaration came on her, brightened her cheeks, put an unwonted sparkle in her luminous black eyes.

Everyone told her how well she looked—even Josh. "Having fun, darling?" he said. "But of course you are. It's written all over you. My sleek black cat," he said and put his arm around her.

"Please, Josh, people are looking."

"What about it?" he said, sulking a little.

"Oh, for Pete's sake!" she said and moved away from him. She drew George Carter, the brilliant new young composer, into conversation, made a great fuss over him, always aware of Josh's jealous eyes on her. He was burning up, she could tell. She saw him go to the whisky decanter and pour himself a stiff tumblerful, toss it off without pausing.

She smiled to herself. He was such a predictable ass, was her husband. Spoiled by success he could not stand the slightest deflation of his considerable ego. He would drink heavily the rest of this evening, she knew.

She saw him, fifteen minutes later, walk out alone onto the balcony at the side of the ballroom, carrying a bottle of Scotch. Everyone saw him but there was no danger of anybody going out there to join him. His face had looked too unsociable for that.

She let another fifteen minutes pass before she excused herself from George Carter, under pretense of a headache, and went out, presumably in search of an aspirin tablet. She went upstairs without attracting attention and let herself into the room directly above Josh's balcony.

In the closet she found a fishing rod—she had placed it there before the party—and quickly telescoped it together. It was a heavy rod, such as is used in deep sea fishing. She went to the window and carefully glanced downward.

He was walking the railing, quite

drunk, judging from the manner of him. It wasn't the audience—there was no audience this time, not that he knew of. It was the kicks, the awareness of danger, that accounted for this eccentric compulsion to risk his life in high places.

"You fool!" she said through her lovely teeth. "You unmitigated vain fool. I knew you'd react this way, go off sulking with your precious liquor just because I pretended an interest in George Carter. And I knew you'd wind up walking that railing again once the liquor got to you."

SHE was smiling up there at the window. It was opened. She had seen to that also before the party. She gently snaked the end of the fishing rod out there, watching its gleaming tip carefully as she guided it toward him.

One little push—one nice little jab on the side of the face or on the neck was all it would take to send him over. Two hundred feet and the jagged rocks below would complete the job for her very nicely.

The moon was at the other side of the house. He couldn't see her here in the shadow. But he was a sharp silhouette, an easy target. She waited for him to turn around, come walking back in his solitary revel with danger atop the balcony railing.

She smiled a tight little smile, a sleek black cat's smile, and jabbed the fishing rod at him.

It was a good jab. He was sent off his balance, she saw. He reacted with a truer instinct than she had believed was possible, however, even in a man who has made a hobby of exposing himself to danger. Instead of wildly thrashing about with his arms, he sent an exploring hand up and out, grasped the end of the fishing rod firmly and yanked mightily on it.

Her own reflexes were unprepared for this unexpected maneuver. Her first thought was only this—*Oh, no you don't! You don't take the murder weapon down there with you—not with my fingerprints on this end of it.*

She tried to wrest it away from him, free it for another poke at him.

She succeeded only in helping him retrieve his lost balance. He leaped down onto the balcony, out of all danger now, she saw with a sinking of her aroused hopes. He gave a little wave of his hand and two men suddenly appeared on the balcony beside him.

She was framed there in the open window as a flashlight shot its blinding beam up at her. She was still grasping the fishing rod.

And her husband, Josh Wadkins, was saying, "All right, Lieutenant. Open and shut, isn't it? She tried to kill me."

Lieutenant—*lieutenant*—the police! It was a trap. He had set a trap for her. She felt a cold sinking rage in her. "Josh—*Josh!*" she cried out suddenly. "What in the name of—"

He said something she would always remember then. He said, while the glare of the light shone up at her so that she could not see him, only hear the light raillery in his voice, "I can smell a stalking cat, Marva."

He could—oh, he could! Now she knew it too late—too late. "But—but how?" she said sickly.

The light must be in his eyes now, the flirting-with-death gleam she so well remembered. His voice had the sound of it, the excitement.

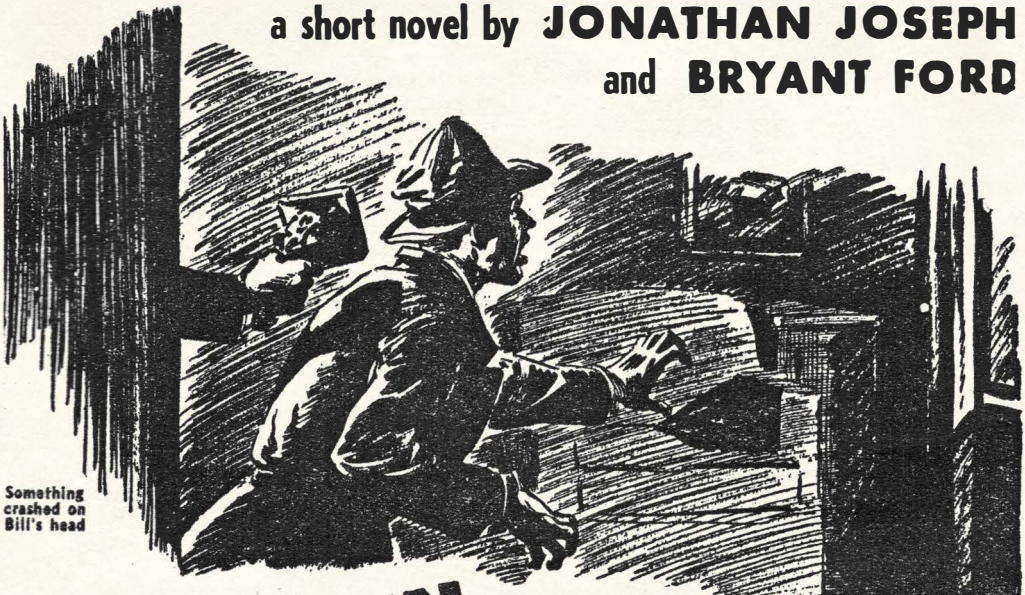
"When you asked for those songs, my lovely. Then I suspected. I took the trouble of having your background investigated. Really, Marva, you should have told me you'd been in jail for grand larceny. It came as quite a shock to me.

"But the songs—I knew after you wanted the songs that you meant to kill me. It was rather fun, darling. You know how I dote on danger. I decided to let you have a go at it. I merely took the precaution of having a couple of policemen present."

She could hear his soft chuckling.

(Concluded on Page 107)

a short novel by **JONATHAN JOSEPH** and **BRYANT FORD**



Something crashed on Bill's head

MURDER IN BRIGHT LIGHTS

When Leo Murray is slain after his most triumphant New York opening, the police are up against it—because Murray's the most hated man on Broadway!

CHAPTER I

THE wonderful thing about the beauty of a young woman is that it cannot be hidden. It is revealed through whatever she may wear. It shines despite such vicissitudes as life may bestow upon her.

Looking at Ruth Murray you knew that within the severe little tailored suit was a delectable body, unspeakably smooth and softly rounded, firmly and flawlessly molded. Her inscrutable young face, which told you only that she had

been around and had had her troubles, could not obscure the seductive sweetness in her grey-green eyes and the promise of passion in her scarlet lips.

Indeed that neatly tailored form and the faintly sad and cynical hardness of her glance served to heighten the speculative imagination of men when they looked at her—and few men failed to look at Ruth Murray.

She was lunching alone that Monday at the Chafing-Dish—and the men busily talking business at the bar and at the red-checkered tables around her could not help wondering among other things why she should be lunching alone, what it would be like to be lunching alone with her—not there but in the seclusion of some sweet-scented apartment where she would let that smooth-brushed honey-colored hair fall wildly about the creamy oval of her face.

Above their own brassy masculine talk they could not help listening for the low throaty tones of her voice as she spoke to the waiter. Imprisoned in their chairs they watched her pick up her purse and gloves, rise and go toward the door with a motion that was not merely walking.

But one man, a hulking fellow at the bar, left a half-finished drink and followed her out.

The brisk air of autumn was blowing across town from the Hudson River. As Ruth turned with the throng bustling west toward Broadway the man turned too, and with a flip of his hand signaled to the driver of a grey sedan at the curb. The car swung out into the traffic and moved slowly westward with them.

At the corner the policeman's whistle shrilled, the light turned red and they were stopped. In the crowd halted at the curb Ruth Murray stood thoughtfully staring across Broadway at the Murray Theatre, whose big billboard announced the opening that night of a new Leo Murray production, *Hour's End*, a play by Leo Murray, starring Leo Murray and Lady Lawrence. Men were at work on the marquee, setting the lights.

DIRECTLY behind Ruth Murray stood the hulking man. The grey car was also waiting for the light.

The light turned to green, the cop's whistle shrilled and the crowd began moving across Broadway. When Ruth stepped off the curb with the man close behind her the grey car moved forward too. The driver suddenly blew his horn and swerved sharply into Broadway so Ruth stopped to let it go by and tried to step back a little to get out of its way. A violent push sent her right into its path and she would have fallen before it were it not that with remarkable self-control she recovered her balance and flung herself out of the way of the car bearing down on her. It was almost as if she had been expecting the blow.

But when the cop came to her and asked was she hurt and began berating the driver of the grey car she said, "It wasn't his fault. Let him go." She was pale and shaken but she spoke quietly. She looked around, but the hulking man was not visible in the curious crowd that had gathered.

"I'm all right, Officer. Thank you," she said, smiling wryly. "I've got to go on."

He made way for her, waved the crowd away and the traffic of Broadway resumed its endless flow as Ruth entered the Murray Theatre Building and took the elevator up to the offices.

The office door was impressively lettered:

MR. LEO MURRAY
Leo Murray Productions

Francis Xavier Boley,
Mr. Murray's General Manager

William Benedict,
Mr. Murray's Press Representative

Ruth glanced at the two very young actresses waiting on the bench just inside the door. "You had better not wait. I don't think Mr. Murray will be in today," she said as she went on in behind the railing to her desk.

Bill knocked Finley down —and the short man went for the revolver in his pocket

Ruth picked up the phone and said, "I'm back, Frank. Any calls? All right, I'll take over now." She started to hang up but Francis Boley went on talking. As she listened Ruth's face hardened a little. "Frank, I can't talk to you now—and you'd better put that bottle away." As she hung up, the door opened and Bill Benedict came in.

If you knew Broadway at all, you knew that thin, well-dressed form, with the fresh linen handkerchief flowing from his breast pocket—that lean knowing face under dark curly hair.

"Any calls, Ruthie?" asked Bill.

"Herbert Bayard Swope's secretary called this morning for press tickets." Ruth looked down, consulting her desk pad.

"Send 'em out. He's always good for a note in Winchell."

"Traube, of the D.A.'s office, called for two. He's been promoted to first assistant."

"Okay."

"Nothing else of importance. Oh—a Sue Huxley is in town at the Astor—wants you to call her."

"Now, for the love of Pete, Ruthie, that's an *important* call!"

Ruth looked up from under her silken lashes. "Then why don't you marry her or one of the others and get them all off this phone?"

"Have a heart, Ruthie! Can I help it if I like women? I've got to have something to fill my days with. And who knows, I might exploit them some day. Look at what your brother Leo has done with his sex appeal! The cops are expecting a thousand swooners at the stage door tonight. Get Sue for me, Ruthie?"

"Little cupid, Ruthie." She switched the phone and dialed the Astor. "I ought to go around with a bunch of arrows. Miss Huxley, please."

"It wouldn't hurt you if you got one stuck in yourself. Somebody's got to carry the great Murray dynasty along. Leo never will."

Ruth looked as if someone had suddenly slapped her. She flipped the phone switch. "She's not in, Bill." She looked down.

Bill was perplexed. "No feelings hurt?"

She looked up and shook her head but her inscrutable face was white.

"What's the matter with you today, Ruthie? You're not your hardboiled little self."

"You used to be a detective, Bill? What would you say if twice in one week a girl almost got killed—once by almost getting shoved off a crowded subway station and today by getting shoved in front of an automobile?"

"I'd say either her number was coming up or someone was trying to get rid of her. But you're imagining things. New York's naturally a dangerous place. Anyway, I wouldn't worry about anyone trying to push *you* around, Ruthie. You can take care of yourself. That's one of the three things I like about you."

"What are the other two?"

He laughed. "You'd tell Leo if I told you and then I'd lose my job."

"You don't trust me, Bill, do you?"

Bill looked at her speculatively. "I don't trust any woman, Ruthie, much as I like them. And besides you're Leo's sister, which is certainly a handicap to any girl. But I wouldn't say you're a *bad* egg."

She eyed him coolly. "I suppose from you that's a compliment. Thanks."

Bill walked down the corridor toward his office. The corridor linked Ruth's outer office with Leo Murray's exclusive precincts. And jutting off the hall were Bill's office and Frank Boley's with a toilet between the two.

"Hya, Frank." Bill had to pass Boley's office to get to his own. He stuck his head inside to greet Leo's manager.

BOLEY nodded. He was smoking and his hands were busy. In his right, he held a bottle of Haig and Haig, in his other was a Lily cup. Boley, for the last twenty-five years, had lived, it seemed, solely on the calories and vitamins found in good Scotch and twenty-

five-cent cigars. He looked like a prosperous Tammany ward heeler until you looked into his bloodshot eyes, which had gone soft and spongy.

Bill went into his own office, closed the door, lit a cigarette and pulled out a murder mystery he had hidden behind a pile of Varieties.

The phone rang. It was Ruth. "Leo's come in."

"Thanks," said Bill, "And, Ruthie, keep trying Sue Huxley at the Astor." He hung up and started to make sounds on his typewriter. He heard Boley's phone ring.

Boley said, "Thanks, Ruth," and threw his whiskey-wet Lily cup into the waste-paper basket and hid the bottle of Scotch in his desk.

Leo Murray, though he had widely tailored shoulders, walked very softly for a man. He stopped at Boley's door.

"Good morning, Leo," Boley said deferentially.

Leo ignored the greeting. "Did they hang the new floodlights last night?"

"Yes," said Boley, looking away from Leo's too handsome eyes.

Leo came to Bill's door. "I want to see you in a couple of minutes."

Bill nodded. When Leo went into his own office, slamming the door behind him, Bill pulled the sheet of paper out of his typewriter and crumpled it in a sudden angry gesture.

He waited five minutes and went into Leo's office. He stood at the door. Leo was reading a newspaper. He didn't look up.

"What do you want, Leo? You said for me to come in."

Leo looked up. "Don't stand up there like the Statue of Liberty." Leo hated anybody taller than he was.

Bill grinned and remained standing. The telephone rang. Leo picked up the receiver and listened. Then: "Why bother me with that, Ruth? Tell him I don't want his lousy play. I don't care what I promised. He says he counted on *me?* Tell him next time to count on the weather." He hung up and went back to his paper as if he had forgotten Bill.

"I've got work to do, Leo."

The actor-producer stared at him with nervous eyes. "Sit down."

Bill shrugged and pulled over a hard chair. He sat slumped down in it.

Then Leo stood up and walked over to Bill, looked down at him. "Did you hear what Finley said during our argument last night at Sardi's?"

"Yes. Said you robbed him of *Hour's End.* He said Beach promised to let him see it first. But Nick's always griping, like all producers. He accused Max Reinhardt of stealing *The Miracle* right out of his pants pocket."

"I want it stopped."

"Why don't you see a good lawyer, Leo?"

Leo paced up and down.

"Try buying him off," Bill suggested.

Leo stopped and glared. "Not a cent. Not if I knew I was going to make a million."

"What do you want me to do?" Bill asked. "And keep it clean. I won't commit murder, you know."

Leo carefully brushed some lint off the arm of his handsome blue suit. It had up and down stripes to accentuate his height. "Get the columnists to run some stories that Nick won't like. How he stole my first angel from me."

"The boys don't like libel."

Leo reddened. "I'll go to court and swear it's true."

Bill laughed. "*You'll* go to court? Maybe you've forgotten that you lost me my private detective licence because you wouldn't go near a court. Below your dignity, you said. Remember?"

"You hate me, don't you, Bill?"

"Yes."

"But you respect me for what I can do."

"Respect isn't the word. I acknowledge your wits and talents."

"That's all I want. The minute you think I'm a fool I'll know. Then I'll fire you."

"Is that what you called me in to tell me?"

"No. Everybody's ganging up on me. Not only Nick Finley and Charlie Beach. All Broadway. They hate my taste. My success they call luck. My popular following they call your press agent work. They can't stand something well done. They're eaten with envy."

"Some of them do pretty well too."

"But I give Broadway its best shows. No can-can and no melodrama. Good theatre. I work with the writers. I make something out of the lousy scripts they bring in. Actors and actresses—they don't know how to walk. They don't know what to do with their hands. I teach them. Directors—I let them watch me and learn. But every one of them hates me."

"Where do I come into this sad picture, Leo."

"I want you to do a fresh job with the papers."

"You're getting plenty of publicity now with your name in all of it."

"I don't want any more of that cheap publicity, Bill, I'm moving into a new field with this play, co-starring a British aristocrat. I'm not playing to the hoi polloi any more." Leo strode across the room. "I want it clearly understood by everybody that a Leo Murray production means everything Leo Murray from script to lighting to acting. I want fellows like Charlie Beach to be proud to have me rewrite their plays for them."

Bill looked up at Leo and narrowed his eyes. He got up slowly and walked to the door. "What you need is Napoleon's press agent," he said.

RUTH was persuading a pair of jobless actors—a man and woman—that Leo wouldn't see them. "Not if you were John Barrymore's ghost and Katharine Cornell in tights," she said firmly. As they went out a young man came in, slight, sensitive-looking. It was Charlie Beach.

Charlie was thin from too little eating and yellow from too much drink and a dark fire burned in his too-intelligent eyes.

"Leo's not in," Ruth said.

"I want to see Leo," he said coldly, keeping his burning eyes below the level of hers.

"I'm sorry, Charlie."

"Don't call me Charlie. I'm still crazy about you—but you've got all you wanted out of me for your precious brother—you cold-hearted witch—"

"He'll be back at five," she interrupted quietly.

"I'll wait for him in his office." Charlie swung open the gate leading into the corridor.

Ruth made no move to stop him. She called Leo on the phone. "Charlie Beach is coming in."

Boley and Bill saw Charlie going by. He entered Leo's office and closed the door carefully. Leo rose from his chair. He was taller than Charlie.

Charlie said, "You can sit down, Leo. I know what you look like standing."

Leo hesitated, then sat on the corner of his desk. He cleared his throat. He smiled stiffly. "What's clouding your day, Charlie?"

Beach swallowed before he could speak. "Why didn't you put my name on the house boards and programs?" he blurted out.

Leo relaxed. "Read any good plays lately?"

"Why didn't you put my name on my play?" Charlie's voice was weak with anger.

Leo shrugged hopelessly, got up and walked toward the window, turning his back on Charlie.

"I deserve it," said Charlie with trembling lips.

"That's open to question," said Leo coldly.

"The idea is mine and most of the situations. It's still mostly my play even if you changed the lines. I deserve it." Charlie's eyes were fearful with anguish.

Leo returned to his desk and fiddled with the telephone. "Everyone on Broadway knows that no one contributes to any show I produce." He leaned toward

Charlie. "You fool! I've paid you, haven't I!"

Charlie's face turned deep red. "If my name isn't on the boards and programs tonight," he said clearly, "you'll have a premiere you won't forget."

Leo watched him a moment and smiled sadly. "Need any more dough, Charlie?" He took some bills out of his pocket and put them on the corner of the desk near Charlie.

Charlie kept his eyes fixed on Leo as if fascinated.

"Take it, kid. And forget about paying it back."

The burning eyes dropped to the money, then were raised back to Leo's too handsome face.

Suddenly Charlie picked up the money. He tore the bills in two and threw them in Leo's face. "You'll have a premiere you won't forget, Leo." He walked out.

Murray wiped his face slowly as if the money had been wet. He wasn't angry —he felt elated. He stood in the dusty shaft of sunlight sloping down and dialed the phone for Ruth.

"Send Bill in—and you come in too and take a letter."

Bill and Ruth came in together.

Leo pointed to the torn money on the floor. "Take those bills over to the bank," he said to Bill, "and get them exchanged for good ones."

Bill hesitated a moment; but he bent down and gathered up the pieces.

"Charlie Beach was in," Leo said in a pained voice. "He's a maniac. Delusions of grandeur. I feel sorry for him. Failure is fatal to some men—the kind who have big ideas and no guts." Murray rubbed his hands against each other thoughtfully.

"People are inverted. Help them and they hate you." He paused, seeing Ruth's cool grey-green eyes fixed on his. "Someone ought to write a book about the physiology of social relations."

"Shall I bring the bills back here?" asked Bill, going toward the door.

"In every group of men," Leo nodded and went on, "one is the powerful energizing heart. He sends out the fresh aerated red blood. Do you remember your physiology, Bill?"

Bill was at the door. "Charlie deserves a break. After all he did contribute something to *Hour's End,* didn't he?"

"You know what the heart gets back?" Leo ignored the intrusion. "The strong heart gets back the diseased and used-up blood, the tired dark fluid." He ran a slim hand wearily over his eyes. "Go on to the bank, Bill. And see that Beach doesn't get into the theatre tonight. He was very threatening."

"You've got a lot of ionized gall, Leo," Bill said softly and turned to Ruth. "If you get hold of Sue Huxley at the Astor tell her to come to the opening of *Hour's End* if she can't see me before." Then Bill went out.

"Take a letter," Leo said to Ruth, leaning back in his chair and looking at the ceiling. "This is to Noel Coward. My dear Noel."

Leo's eyes dropped and he saw that Ruth had not moved. She was sitting with her note-book still closed in her hand, just looking at him.

"I said, take a letter, Ruth."

"Leo," she said quietly, "Why are you trying to kill me?"

He went white. "What are you talking about?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Last week someone tried to push me in front of a subway train and today they tried it with a car, right across the street from here." Without raising her voice she went on steadily. "I've played your game, Leo. I've done your dirty work and I've kept the rules you laid down. No one suspects a thing about us. Why are you trying to get rid of me?" Her words were like small hammers.

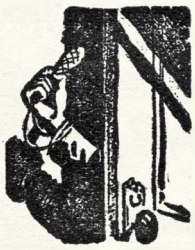
Leo quivered. "You're crazy, Ruth. You don't know what you're saying! You're losing your mind!" He saw a flicker of unsureness in her eyes, and at once his contorted face relaxed, and sympathy welled up into his own too beautiful eyes.

"I know, Ruthie, we're all unstrung today. This last week has been hard on

all of us. You need a rest. Lie down here on the couch and I'll tell Frank to take the calls." He looked at his jeweled wrist watch and got up. "I've got to get down to rehearsal." He went to her and patted her cheek. "Be a good girl, Ruth, and forget all that nonsense. This is an important opening tonight, the most important of my career. I've got to keep my mind on it."

Ruth looked up at him. Her eyes were steady again. "Yes," she said in a flat toneless voice, as if without feeling. "You'd better go now, Leo." But when he had gone she flung herself down on the couch and burst into low and terrible sobs.

CHAPTER II



BY eight-fifteen the lobby of the Murray Theatre was crowded. The first-nighters eddied around the ticket entrance where Jimmy Burke in an ill-fitting tuxedo tore their tickets and passed them inside.

Sentineal, the doorman, opened limousine doors with dignity and offered his hand to the dowagers. On the sidewalk loitered the critics. It was one of the most glittering openings Bill Benedict had ever seen.

He saw Ruth Murray with Katherine and Henry Traube. He went over to them and said, "Congratulations, Hank! —on your promotion."

Katherine said, "The first assistant D.A. for a husband is no fun. You begin to wonder if kissing is a crime."

"It's certainly a misdemeanor," said Bill, but he was looking at Ruth. She was wearing a grey outfit, a grey hooded cape over a matching dinner dress, the hood drawn up over her honey-colored hair. It was unadorned but she had short red gloves and red shoes and a purse that matched the scarlet lips in her ivory face. She was a knockout.

The Traubes started going in and Bill and Ruth followed them. At the entrance Bill asked Jimmy Burke, "Seen Charlie Beach around?"

"I've been too busy to watch, Bill," said Jimmy, "The cops seem to be on the job."

Just then Sentineal came over and told Bill that Steve Levy, the stage manager, wanted to see him.

"I'm going around to the stage door," Bill said to Ruth.

"I'll come along," she said and waved to the Traubes and followed him.

Steve was at the stage-door, very nervous. "Lady Lawrence isn't here yet. Leo is getting frantic."

"Is she on at the opening?"

"About ten speeches after," Steve wiped his grimy face. "What the hell we gonna do?"

A taxi jogged to a halt in front of them. "Here she is!" Steve cried with relief.

Lady Lawrence, slender and graceful as a reed, stepped out, followed by Ricky Linton, Leo's understudy, not quite as handsome as Leo but even more soigné. He was very British and Lady Lawrence's friend. She had brought him with her from England.

"Your Highness is late," said Bill to Lawrence.

"Go to hell, my dear. I've never been late to my openings. See you at my party after the show." She glanced at Ruth, but it was clear she was not including Leo's sister in that invitation.

"I suppose Leo is here," said Ricky. He could load five words with a ton of arrogance.

"Yes," said Bill, "and rarin' to go on. I guess you won't get to play the part tonight."

Ricky followed Lady Lawrence.

"I'd like to kick his pants off," the stage-manager said. "He and Leo had a fist fight at rehearsal this afternoon, when Leo suddenly ordered a change in the ending."

"He owns more than half the show," Bill said. "Try kicking him next year."

He and Ruth went back to the lobby. It was eight-forty-five and there were just the hurrying late-comers. "If Charlie Beach tries to come in," Bill told Jimmy Burke, "I'll be at the end of the middle aisle, standing."

Ruth went down to her seat in row J. The house lights dimmed.

Bill knew the play by heart. The first act was light and tenuous. He scanned the audience. He saw Ruth, hunched forward, intent on the stage where Leo was beginning to weave his sexy spell. That talented heel could enchant even his own hard-boiled sister. From the balcony came the sighs of the swooners. There was no doubt about how the play was going with them. It remained to be seen what the sophisticates in the orchestra and the critics would say.

WHEN the first-act curtain fell and the house lights went up Bill caught Ruth's eye as she came up the crowded aisle and he joined her in the throng moving slowly toward the smoke-filled foyer. She had left her cape in her seat. In the grey glove-fitting gown, revealing only her slender young throat and the smooth bare arms above the scarlet gloved hands, she was even more striking.

"I think it's a hit," said Bill.

"The best part he's ever played," she said.

"La Lawrence makes a fine foil for him. She's as brittle and cool as he is passionate."

"Yes, she's a good match for Leo. Are you going to her party?"

"No. Society bores me stiff. I'll go to the Fifth Avenue Child's and wait for the reviews. You'll make a killing at the party in that outfit. It's cute. Little Grey Riding-Hood—after eating the wolf."

"Thanks. But I'm not going. Lawrence doesn't want me, as you may have noticed at the stage door. For reasons best known to herself she's got no use for Leo's little sister. I'll sit up with you for the reviews—if you'll let me."

"Now you dumb cluck, gimme my ten grand and get out of here!"

"Sure! I'll even play wolf and let you eat me. We'll go over to Child's together."

Sentineal appeared beside them and said that Leo wanted to see Bill. Bill left Ruth in the foyer and went back stage to Leo's dressing-room.

Sight of Leo's avid egocentric eyes reflected above the row of bright lights in the makeup mirror, made Bill's gorge rise and prevented him from saying anything flattering. He said instead, "What do you want, Leo?" and waited for Leo Murray to ask for the commendation he needed as much as he needed the breath of life.

"Has Charlie Beach been around?"

"No sign of him yet."

"Keep watching!" Leo went on penciling shadows of dissipation under his eyes.

"I will."

The door opened and Lady Lawrence came in, smoking a cigarette in a long slim holder. "Hallo!" She looked shrewdly from Bill to Leo and back to Bill. "You two having a tiff?"

"Is that all, Leo?" said Bill. He saw exasperation boil up and overflow in the too-handsome eyes in the mirror.

"*No!*" Leo's voice rose hysterically. "There's something else. I want you to get rid of that pack of sighing shopgirls who fill the balcony. They make me and Lady Lawrence ridiculous to a sophisticated audience."

Bill laughed. "They made you what you are today, Leo—and they pay for their tickets. We can't turn them away."

"But you can get something printed that will keep them away—an interview in which I express my dislike for that sort of thing."

"I can remember when you lapped up that sort of thing, Leo. Anyway I don't think it's a press agent's job to insult people—even if they're not quite 'the best people'."

Leo was furious. "Do you want to lose your job?"

"No; but there's a limit to what I'll do to keep it—even for the great Leo Murray. And don't be surprised if one of these days someone decides to get rid of *you* for a change."

From the corridor came the call, "Curtain going up!"

Lady Lawrence said, "Sorry I can't stay for the end. This is better than the play. Mind you don't miss your cue, Leo!" She swept out.

Leo got up and put on his beautifully fitted dinner jacket. He didn't look at Bill. 'I didn't mean to go off the handle. I'm on edge. Those females have been getting on my nerves." Bill was at the door. "There is something you can do for me, Bill."

"What is it?"

"Let me sneak over to your apartment for a nap after the show. It will keep those crazy kids from following me to Lady Lawrence's and it will set me up for the party."

Bill unhooked a key from his ring and tossed it to Leo. "Just leave the key on the living-room table and the door open when you go. I won't be coming in until after the reviews are out."

Leo said, "Don't tell anyone I'm going there." Bill was opening the door. "What do you think of the show?"

"I think it's a hit," said Bill and went out.

The second act was started when he got into the theatre. Ruth was hunched up in her seat. Charlie Beach was nowhere in sight.

By the second-act intermission Bill knew that *Hour's End* was in the bag. He could tell by the way the critics tried not to be the first to admit it was good. Looking at them he missed Ruth going out. Nor was she in the lobby, which was buzzing with enthusiastic exclamations.

Nick Finley was standing by himself looking heartbroken. Bill went over to him.

"Don't look so sour, Nicky."

"Sour? A half a million bucks this show'll make. You like to get gypped out of a fortune?"

"Next time will be yours."

But Nick Finley would not be comforted. "Leo Murray is a four-star crook. And you wire that for sound."

"Nick, it's show business—dog eat dog."

"I know one dog that should be chloroformed—or something."

Bill smiled. "You'll feel better tomorrow." He left Nick and looked around for Ruth.

But Ruth wasn't there. Right after the second-act curtain, which came down on a breathtaking love scene Leo played to the hilt, Ruth had hurried backstage. She didn't wait to knock at his dressing-room door.

When she opened it, Leo was trying to embrace Lady Lawrence, who was saying coldly, "But Leo, you know how much I dislike being pawed offstage." It certainly made Leo look a bit ridiculous after that passionate scene they had just finished playing. But even that couldn't quite account for the furious rage that flared in his face when he caught sight of Ruth over Lady Lawrence's shoulder.

"Dear me!" Lady Lawrence, disengaged herself and swished out, carefully shutting the door behind her.

Ruth quietly latched it. Then she turned to Leo, all the excitement gone from her masklike face. "You heel!" she said softly.

Leo sat down at the make-up mirror, turning his back to her. "What do you want now?" He spat the words at her reflection in the glass.

"I came to tell you what a fine performance you gave." She laughed mirthlessly. "This other one was certainly funny."

"Get out!"

"I *won't* get out. I have the right to be here with you, Leo." Her eyes, which had hardened, turned softer. A pleading note crept into her husky voice. "Even if I'm not your sister."

FOR a moment there was no sound at all. Then Leo turned slowly, fixed his eyes on her face and spoke deliberately. "Listen! Let's get this over with now. I had to do that to shut you up or you'd have spoiled my popularity with those thousands of silly infatuated little girls like yourself who were giving me the publicity I needed. As I explained to you then I couldn't have a wife for the same reason, so I got you to pose as—"

"—your sister. And now—"

"I don't need those stupid swooners. I don't want them. I've got another audience, sophisticated, elegant. I'm climbing up—"

"—to Lady Lawrence."

"Yes, to Lady Lawrence."

"Now you love Lady Lawrence."

"Love? Don't be ridiculous! She can take me on up where I want to go. And she will because I've got enough on her now to make her."

"Leo, did you love me at all when you took me?"

"I was taking everything that came my way in those days." With ungovernable impatience he sprang to his feet, but he did not raise his voice above that hateful whisper. "Don't you understand, you little fool? I despise women."

"And that child you made me give away?"

He turned back to the mirror and sat down. "I don't want to hear any more about that."

"But suppose I spill the story now? It won't set you up in the estimation of your new audience, sophisticated as they are."

"If you do that I'll have you found insane and put away. Your story about my wanting to kill you will help. You've let everyone believe you're my sister. I know a psychiatrist who will fix you for me."

He turned around again. His tone changed, but it was still as ruthless. "Listen, Ruthie, I'll let you go on being my sister if you like. But you've got to forget all the past, keep your nose out of my affairs and do what I tell you like a good little girl." He stood up, straightened his vest. "Now tonight I want you to help me avoid that mob at the stage

door. After the show you go out there and tell them I've already gone."

He smiled. "You might tell them it's unhealthy for a girl to hang around me. After all, it's true—it got you into trouble, eh Ruthie?" He laughed. "Then you get into my car and drive off; and when they're gone I'll go over to Bill's apartment at the Chicopee to rest for an hour before going on to the party. Right?" He was unlatching the door for her. He looked into her face.

It was a mask, pale, beautiful, inscrutable. She stood smoothing the red gloves on her hands. From the corridor came the cry, "Curtain going up!"

Ruth turned from him and went out.

The curtain was up for the third act when she went into the theatre, and she brushed by Bill without seeing him as she hurried down the aisle to her seat. Her eyes were fixed on the stage where Leo had just appeared and was bending over the sleeping form of Lady Lawrence to waken her with a kiss.

Then followed a scene of seduction done so adeptly that, though he knew it by heart and knew the black heart of the man who was playing it, Bill stood spellbound until, near the middle of the act, Jimmy Burke came up behind him and whispered:

"Charlie Beach sneaked in through a fire door."

Bill turned swiftly. "Where is he?"

"Standing near the last aisle, to the right."

Bill moved over there quickly. Charlie was gripping the railing, his eyes burning bright with the reflected stage light. Bill took his arm. Charlie turned wildly. He smelled of liquor.

"Lemme alone!"

"Shut up!"

People turned in their seats and began to "shush." Charlie quieted down.

"Come outside with me," Bill said.

"Lemme stay."

"You'll raise a stink."

"I won't. Wanna see what he did to it. Wanna see how he used my stuff." Charlie's voice grew louder. An usher came over.

Bill pulled him away from the rail. With his fist muffled by a glove he hit Charlie across the jaw. Charlie sagged. Bill stripped the glove off quickly and stuffed it in Charlie's mouth. Jimmy Burke helped him haul Charlie out to the lobby and through the box-office door. Frank Boley was in there counting up the take. He had a coco cola bottle beside him.

"He'll come to in a minute," Bill said.

"You shut him up, all right."

"Frank, douse that drink on him."

Frank swished the coco cola smelling of Scotch on Charlie's pale face. His eyes opened. He looked up sadly at Bill.

"You didn't have to do that."

"Sorry, kid."

"Call a cop?" Jimmy Burke asked.

Charlie's eyes clouded with terror. "No cops, Bill."

"Forget it," Boley said.

Bill said, "Okay. But if I see you back in the theatre, it'll be cops and worse." He watched Charlie go out of the lobby and then went back into the theatre. He saw Ruth in her seat intently watching the end of the play.

Leo and Lady Lawrence got many curtain calls. The orchestra clapped their hands heartily; the girls in the balcony screamed for Leo; and the play was an unmistakable hit. When the house lights finally went up and Bill looked around for Ruth she was gone from her seat. Nor was she in the lobby.

But a woman's voice cried, "Bill," and there was Sue Huxley—a girl of about Bill's age, one of those vital newspaper women, very well turned out. Sue kissed him and talked a blue streak.

"You look wonderful, Bill! I'm so very sorry I couldn't get to you again before this but I've been busy every minute of the day and now I must make the midnight plane for Rio—an unexpected assignment. Come on over to my room at the Astor for a quick one and tell me you still love me and all the rest of the news while I pack. You're not married yet, are you? I thought not.

"But while I was waiting for you I saw that sister of Leo Murray's come out in a very tricky grey outfit with accessories of ruddy gore. Now that's a neat little number you'd do well to marry. You'd be fixed for life. Not that I'd envy you having Leo Murray for a brother-in-law, but that wouldn't be any worse than having him for a boss."

Bill laughed. Not seeing Ruth around he went over to the Astor with Sue Huxley and spent a very pleasant hour.

RUTH had gone backstage before the curtain calls were over. When the crowd of cooing fans gathered between the stage door and Leo's car was at the curb, she went out and said, "Listen, kids, Mr. Murray has gone out by another door. He is very tired and can't see you tonight."

She watched the eagerness die out of their foolish young faces. "I know just how disappointed you are, but there's no use your waiting." They made way for her and she got into the car and drove off.

Driving east on 47th Street she passed the discreet entrance of the Chicopee Apartments.

The Fifth Avenue Child's had a side-entrance in the next block. She found a parking place right in front of it and went in and took a small table by the window. The restaurant was just filling up with the after-theatre crowd. When the waitress came she ordered a pot of coffee.

"That will be all," she said. The waitress made out a check and put it on the table and went to fetch the coffee.

Ruth looked at the check, picked it up and on a sudden impulse took her red purse, got up and went across the restaurant to the front entrance on Fifth Avenue, paid the check and went out.

The waitress returned and left the pot of coffee and the cup on the table.

By then, Ruth had turned the corner from Fifth Avenue and was walking back quickly in the quiet shadows of 47th Street. She had drawn the hood of the cape over her read. At the Chicopee the slim grey figure turned and disappeared into the discreet entrance. From the row of letter boxes she learned that Bill Benedict's apartment was 4A. She entered the small self-service elevator and pressed button number 4 with one red gloved finger.

Fifteen minutes later, when she returned to the elevator and raised her right hand to press the button, she noticed that there was a break in the red glove. The seam between the thumb and palm had split. She stared at it, as the elevator descended—like one whose eyes are open but has not yet waked from a dream.

The busy waitress in Child's, seeing Ruth finishing her coffee, stopped to ask if she wanted anything else.

"No, thank you," said Ruth. "Will you give me my check?" Her grey-green eyes were alert now.

"I thought I gave it to you before." The waitress searched the table.

"No you didn't," said Ruth, smiling patiently. While the waitress made out another check Ruth noticed again the break in the red glove on her right hand. She took off that glove. Then she sat looking through the window on 47th Street.

Just after midnight she picked up the check and her purse and was getting up to go when Bill appeared on the street outside. He had spied the Murray car and was looking into it. Then he turned and saw Ruth inside. She had sat down again. He waved to her and came hurrying in.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting all this time. Sue Huxley turned up in the lobby and not seeing you there I thought you'd changed your mind and weren't coming. Sue said she'd seen you go out. So I went over to the Astor with her."

"I had a little job to do at the stage door for Leo. Then I came right over here."

The waitress came.

"Something to eat?" Bill asked Ruth.

"No, thanks. I've been having a bit of indigestion. Had to go to the Ladies'

Room for a spell while I was waiting for you." She smiled to the waitress, who nodded her head. "Musta' been somethin' I et. But you go ahead, Bill."

"Just bring me a cup of coffee," he said to the waitress, who made out a check and went to get it. Bill looked at Ruth. "You don't *look* bad."

"I feel fine now."

"That's good. I'll tell you something funny to cheer you up. Sue Huxley made a remarkable suggestion about you. She said why didn't I marry you. How d'you like that!"

He expected a jibe. But she looked up from under her silken lashes and said, "How do *you* like it, Bill?"

"Me marry!" She had let the grey cape drop back over her chair and was leaning toward him so that his glance fell from her grey-green eyes to her red lips and then to the exquisitely molded and smoothly clad form. "Not that I can't see as well as Sue Huxley that you're a pretty neat nummer."

So absorbed was Bill in this observation that he had not noticed the waitress setting his coffee before him. As he picked it up and drank it down he saw Ruth quietly examining him as if for the first time.

"Well, I'm not interested in marriage either, Bill. But I can see as well as Sue Huxley that you're a pretty good man. And do you know what makes you good?"

"No, Miss Interlocutor, you tell whatall is it that makes Bill Benedict a good hunk of man."

"It's that you really like women, Bill. So many men chase women who really hate them. You love them. That's what makes you good. That's why Sue Huxley likes you and all the rest of those gals that keep calling you up."

"Ah'm sho' obliged to you-all, Miss Interlocutor, fo' tellin' me—but how come you-all knows all this? Of course, you been chased a lot yo'self but I reckon ain't many men got to you account of your brother, Leo the watch-dog, is there?"

Ruth did not answer this. She watched him finish his coffee. When he set down the cup she said, "Do we have to sit here until the reviews come out? Why not go over to your place?"

He shot a glance at her eyes but they were calm and inscrutable as ever, promising nothing. "Sure," he said. Then remembering Leo, he looked at his watch. "Leo said he wanted to rest in my apartment before going to the party."

"Oh!" she said, "has Leo been at your apartment?"

"I guess he'll be gone by now, but I'll have to check."

"Let's drive over and I'll wait downstairs while you see."

"All right." He took his check and hers and paid them and they went out into 47th Street and she drove him over to the Chicopee. There he got out and she waited in the car.

He looked in his mail box and found nothing. He took the elevator up to the fourth floor. His door was unlocked and the room was dark. He stepped forward to the switch.

As he reached out, something crashed on his head. He fell to the floor, unconscious.

CHAPTER III

SHORTLY after Bill went into the Chicopee Ruth saw a man come out and walk swiftly away in the darkness. She waited almost three quarters of an hour. Then she got out of the car and went into the Chicopee and up in the elevator to the fourth uoor.

Bill's door was unlocked. She walked in. It was dark. She felt for the light switch on the wall and flipped it. Bill was lying on his side at her feet with blood on his head. Beyond him lay Leo Murray, face down. A long hunting knife stood upright in his back. Ruth

paid no attention to Leo. She dropped to her knees beside Bill. She tried to pick him up. He groaned.

"Bill! Bill!" she cried, shaking him.

He groaned again, opened his eyes and got up on his hands and knees.

"Bill—are you hurt?"

He rubbed his temple and looked at the blood on his hand. "Who did it?" he demanded angrily. "It's a helluva trick to play on a guy!"

"Bill! Look there!"

He looked where Ruth was pointing. He blinked drunkenly. Then his vision cleared. "Holy—!" He reached over and felt Leo's head. It was cold.

"What happened?" Ruth's face was working strangely.

He stood up unsteadily. "When I came in, the room was dark. Before I could switch on the light someone hit me. It couldn't have been him." He stared at the blood which had dripped from the knife to the floor. "The guy's dead," he muttered. "Your brother's dead!" He shook his head unbelieving.

Ruth moved toward the body.

"Don't touch it!" Bill said.

"He's dead! Leo's dead!" Ruth's cry was strange, unearthly wild, like someone waking from a nightmare. She covered her face with her hands. "Call the police!"

Bill held her close to him. "No, Ruth, not yet. Please try to forget you're his sister for a little while, will you? Leo Murray was murdered in my apartment —with my hunting knife. What does that make me?"

She stared at him as if he had revealed something to her. "The murderer?"

"That's what they'll think." The two of them looked at each other. Bill touched Ruth's ungloved hand. "Don't you worry about me, Ruth. I didn't do it. Give me a chance to work this out before the police come in and tie my hands."

He went to the windows and lowered the shades. He looked in the bedroom and bathroom. There was no sign of a disturbance. "I wonder what he hit me with? It couldn't have been just his hand."

Ruth sat down with her back to the body. "Don't waste time looking for clues, Bill," she said. "This isn't a job for an ex-detective."

"And it isn't something you get in a lending library for three cents a day. Help me wash this blood off my face."

Ruth took off her cape and the other red glove. She took the wet towel he brought from the bathroom.

He winced. "Go easy, Ruth."

She wiped the wound carefully.

"The murderer was here when I came in," he said.

"Better phone the police," she said, as she finished.

Bill folded the towel abstractedly, and put it back in the bathroom. He put on his topcoat and hat, pulling the brim down over the bruise on his brow.

"Bill, I think you'd better."

"Get your cape on." He helped her with it. He took his key from the table where Leo had left it. He turned off the lights, locked the door behind them and pressed the button for the elevator.

On the sidewalk Bill hesitated a minute, lit a cigarette. Then he went to the car and opened the door for her. When she got in he said, "You better go home now but don't call the police."

"The cops don't like people who don't tell them about a murder."

"Don't call them. I'll see you in the morning." He shut the car door and when she had driven east he started walking west toward Broadway.

When he got to Broadway he saw Frank Boley coming toward him, rocking like a coal barge in a heavy sea.

"Bill—Bill—Bill—h'ya, Bill!"

"Boley, you're tanked," Bill said.

"Boys will be boys. A drink?" Boley put his arm around Bill. "You're an okay feller, Bill."

"Where's Leo?" asked Bill abruptly.

"Hurray for Leo— Got a hit— Man of hits! But who gives a—" he belched, "for Leo? It's Ruthie I've been lookin'

for. Where's Ruthie?" He belched again. "Pardon. Belchin's good for the soul."

"Where's Leo?"

"Whaddya wanna know for?"

"Got a hundred grand movie offer for *Hour's End.*"

"Tha's important, Bill. Very important, Bill. Gotta get Leo right away." He staggered over to a wall and supported himself. "Leo's very funny guy. Know where he is now?"

"Where?"

"Where no one can see him."

"Where is that, Frank?"

BOLEY took a long breath and squinted his eyes to get a better look at Bill. "Where no one can see him. The hell with Leo and the hundred grand. Let's go for a drink."

"Thanks," said Bill, starting to walk away.

"Wait a minute!" Boley grabbed Bill's arm.

"Tomorrow night, Frank." He went across Broadway and down to the Murray Theatre. He went in the stage door and found Steve Levy still at work on the stage, haggard and dirty, having coffee out of a container.

"Forget something, Bill?" Steve asked.

"I want to check up for Leo. What time did the curtain fall at the end of the show?"

Steve took a piece of grimy paper out of his back-packet and referred to it. "Eleven-two."

"Was everybody on stage for it?"

Steve grinned. "Who'd miss a curtain call? There isn't an actor born—"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes." Steve looked queerly at Bill. "Why?"

"Was Ricky Linton there?"

"Linton? No, I don't remember seeing him around."

"All right, Steve. See you tomorrow."

He took a cab to River House, where Lady Lawrence lived. With his shirt front rumpled and the bump on his brow he had some difficulty getting by the butler. He stood for a while just inside the door of the long living room watching the glittering crowd.

Leo would have loved this party—it was what he had been working for, all his life. Between the tall windows overlooking the gleaming dark river and the long sumptuous buffet-bar swarmed Park Avenue and Café society with a dash of the aristocracy of Hollywood.

Bill waited until Lady Lawrence came drifting by.

"Who's late now?" she cried, giving him her cool white hand. "And does Leo Murray think he is being frightfully original making a dreadfully late entrance at his own party?" Her ice-blue eyes travelled to the bump on Bill's brow. "Or have you killed him by any chance?"

"No, Your Highness, I haven't. But he is a pretty sick man. He won't be able to play tomorrow night. You'd better tell Linton."

She turned and called, "Ricky!"

Linton was standing nearby with his back to them, talking with a group of people. He looked around and then came over.

"Rickey, Mr. Benedict says Leo is ill and you will play the part tomorrow."

"That *is* a bit of luck, isn't it."

Bill looked at them and thought they could both have killed Leo and put on this cool little act—they were quite capable of it, these two.

Linton, impeccable from head to foot, glanced at the swelling over Bill's right eye. "Did you fall, Mr. Benedict?"

"A mosquito bite," said Bill.

"Rather a nasty one."

"I'm looking for the mosquito."

Lady Lawrence said, "Is Leo still at your place?"

"Yes, how did you know he went there?"

"He told me, of course. What's the matter with him?" She stopped the butler, circulating with a huge silver salver of champagne and they took glasses.

Linton lifted his glass. "Here's hop-

ing it's nothing trivial."

"It isn't," said Bill and drank his champagne and left.

It was half past two. He took a cab back to the Chicopee, went up to his apartment and walked into the large, checkered arms of Detective-Lieutenant Potts. Hake Potts was almost as broad as he was tall, meaning that he was built like a six-foot length of six-foot water conduit. He had been in charge of the Broadway district from the ingenue days of Ethel Barrymore. He knew everybody and distrusted everybody.

"Hello, Benedict," he said. "Don't you know the modern criminal never returns to the scene of his crime? He knows better."

Bill was looking around for Leo's body.

"Don't bother looking for Leo Murray. He has an aisle seat in the morgue. Sit down, my friend, and tell Potts all about it."

Bill glanced at the blood stains on the floor, then sank into a chair. Suddenly he leaned toward Potts. "When did you get here?"

Potts slid a cuff back from his big wrist and looked at his watch. "An hour and a half ago."

"Who told you to come?"

Potts grinned and said mildly, "How about *you* bein' on the receiving end for a while? What was Murray doing here tonight?"

"Resting; after the opening of his show."

"*Hour's End*, wasn't it?"

"Yes. He wanted to rest here before going to a party. I came back here about twelve o'clock. I walked in—the room was dark. I go to switch on the light—I get knocked out."

"Sounds like The March of Time," Potts said. "How come ya wasn't here when *I* walked in."

Bill hesitated. "A friend came in and found me. When I came to we went out together."

"Who's your friend?"

"I'll tell you some other time. My friend knew nothing about this."

"And you thought Murray was layin' on the floor for fun, or maybe lookin' for termites."

Bill lit a cigarette. "I knew he was dead."

"Whyn't ya call the police department?" Pots took a pack of chewing gum out of his pocket and split the cellophane angrily. "Whyn't ya?" He threw three chiclets into his capacious mouth. "The last time ya got into trouble I took your dick's license away from ya. This time, I'll put ya away for good. You're a menace."

"I know I'm in trouble, Potts. Don't lay it on," Bill got up and walked around the room. Potts followed him with his large Irish-setter eyes.

"I played a hunch." Bill said, finally, "I thought I'd find something to clear me before the cops stepped in."

"And messed things up, eh? Ya think cops are pretty dumb about these things, ya was going to have the case all cracked. All we gotta do is make the arrest. You think the boys in blue are on the dumbwit side!" He chewed his gum resentfully. "That's what comes of readin' all them screwy detective stories. What was your hunch?"

"That there were others besides me who knew where Leo Murray was, although he had asked me not to tell anyone because he didn't want to be disturbed."

"Not a bad hunch." Potts said grudgingly. "Did ya find anyone?"

"Lady Lawrence, the star of *Hour's End*. And she must have told it to her friend Ricky Linton who owns a good half of the show."

"*He* certainly wouldn't want to kill Leo and stop the show."

"He is an actor and has been understudying Leo—would give his eyeteeth to replace him. He hates Leo's guts. They had a fist-fight at the last rehearsal this afternoon."

Potts' big round eyes were fixed on an imaginary object on the ceiling. "Did

ya see the knife that killed Murray?"

Bill hesitated. "Yes."

"Recognize it?" Potts' jaws moved faster.

"Yes. It's mine."

"What are *ya* doing with a hunting knife in the middle of Broadway?"

"It was given to me. I'm Ol' Daniel Benedict, the Times Square Trapper."

"By the Boy Scouts?"

"By the Fine Steel Company of New Haven. I was doing some promotion for them."

"Ya know what I think?" Potts asked mildly.

"What?"

"That you're lying." He rose and yawned. "And I'm too tired to find out why right now. So instead of crawling between your own cool sheets you come along with me and try a night at the station-house." He moved his two-hundred pounds of pavement-pounder to the door and sighed. "Tomorrow is another day. Everythin's always different tomorrow. Tomorrow this will be different, too."

HAKE Potts didn't wait till tomorrow. After depositing Bill in jail he drove swiftly uptown through the night and arrived at the Central Park West apartment hotel of the late Leo Murray at just four o'clock.

He telephoned the apartment from the lobby, and Ruth Murray answered so quickly that she must have been awake. She did not sk what he wanted when Potts introduced himself. "You can come right up," she said.

She was wearing one of those long slim tailored tweed house coats over her night clothes. It w s buttoned up tight to her slender neck. She looked small and alone standing before Potts—like a mouse between the paws of a lion—a gentle lion.

"Sorry to be disturbing ya at this hous," he said. "I have had news for ya. It's about your brother, Leo."

"I know," she said. "He is dead."

"How did you know?"

"Haven't you seen Bill Benedict?"

Potts nodded yes.

"Didn't he tell you about me?"

"No. He mentioned a friend who found him unconscious."

"I don't know why he is hiding things. I was with Bill at the Fifth Avenue Child's and then we went over to his place to wait for the reviews of Leo's new show and Bill told me that Leo had gone to his apartment for a rest and might still be there.

"So I waited in the car while Bill went up to see. And when he didn't come down for quite awhile I went up to see what was the matter and found him lying unconscious beside Leo, who had been stabbed." She covered her eyes with her hands.

"Please try to go on," said Potts.

She uncovered her face. "When Bill came to I begged him to call the police but he wouldn't. He told me not to call them and sent me home."

"Miss Murray, I must ask ya a personal question. Is Bill Benedict anything to you—anything special I mean—ya know what I mean."

"He's nothing to me—just a man who worked for my brother."

"Do you want to help me find your brother's murderer?"

"Of course."

"All right. Were you and Benedict together at Child's from the time the show ended until ya went to his place?"

"No. I drove Leo's car over to Child's after telling the fans at the stage-door that Leo had left. He asked me to do that so they'd go away. I got to Child's about ten after eleven. Bill didn't get there till midnight. He said he had been with a friend he met in the theatre lobby."

"A lady friend?"

"Yes."

"Bill has lots of lady friends, hasn't he."

"Yes. Bill likes women. That's a nice thing about him."

"He likes you too, doesn't he?"

"I don't think so. You see, I was

Leo's sister and Bill didn't like Leo." She stopped suddenly as if that were a slip of the tongue.

"Oh!" said Potts. "And what was the trouble between them?"

"Just—" She hesitated and looked away as if reluctant to speak. "Just that Leo was overbearing as he was with everyone, even with me. Leo couldn't help it. But Bill resented it and they would quarrel, especially when Leo would threaten to fire Bill as he did yesterday afternoon."

SHE LOOKED up at Potts, then added, "Leo quarreled with me too yesterday for that matter."

"Leo must have been in a particularly bad mood yesterday. He had a fight with Ricky Linton, too. Do you think Linton might have done it?"

"I don't know, Mr. Potts. I don't know who might have done it. Leo had made so many enemies." She looked distraught and frightened. "The murderer may have been here too this evening. Someone was in here rummaging through his desk." She led him to a large ornate spinet desk. She lifted the lid. "He kept this locked." Papers had been pulled out of pigeon-holes and left in disorder. Among them lay a bunch of keys. "Whoever it was stole these keys from Leo."

"What time did you leave here this evening?"

"Just before eight."

"What do you think was taken?"

"Maybe nothing. Maybe he was looking for these?" She pressed a button in the carving and a secret drawer sprang out.

In it was a package of letters and some canceled checks.

Potts took them.

"I'll look these over. Was your brother ever married?"

The unexpected question halted her for an instant.

"No," she said softly.

"Then you are his heir."

"Leo told me he was going to leave most of his money to the Academy of Arts and Sciences for a Dramatic Foundation in his name—the Leo Murray Dramatic Foundation. Leo always needed to have his name remembered. But he probably left me enough to get along on. I don't need much."

POTTS sat down and fixed his round eyes on his imaginary object on the ceiling. Then he looked at her and said, "You're a brave girl for your age. Not many women would go through this night as well as you have. You can help me."

"How?"

"With Benedict. I've put him in the pen. But he may have fixed an alibi with his girl friend. Anyway, innocent or guilty, I'm sure he has information I'll want before this case is cracked. I'm going to let him out. You keep close to him. Don't discourage him from liking you. I don't mean—well, just keep tabs on him and let me know if he lets anything slip. I'll go after the other leads." He picked up his hat and stood up, towering over her again—like a lion over a mouse.

She looked at him.

"Do you think that Bill could commit murder?"

"Anyone could commit murder under certain circumstances. *You* could commit murder."

She stood up and led him to the door. "Good night," she said softly and closed the door behind him.

When Potts got down to the lobby he took out a little black note-book and opened it to section W. Under the heading *Women* were a number of brief notes.

With a stubby pencil he swiftly added another:

A woman dresses her face every day. A man shaves his. A man's face is naked. But you might just as well try to tell what's going on in a woman's heart by looking at her dress as by watching her face.

CHAPTER IV

THE next morning about ten o'clock Hake Potts opened the door of Bill's cell.

"Come out and have some breakfast," he said in a friendly way. He took Bill into his office and handed him a morning paper. A waiter entered with a tray of food.

"Feed all your prisoners this way?" Bill asked.

Potts shook his bulky head. "Extra-special for you."

"What makes me so important?"

"A fellow like you talks better on a full stomach." Potts leaned ponderously over the table and came up with a small roll which he proceeded to plaster with butter and jelly.

Bill dug into a grapefruit.

"Whyn't ya tell me about Charlie Beach last night?"

Bill looked up, wiping his mouth slowly. "How did you find out about Charlie?"

"You asked the cops to watch for him at the theatre. Whyn't ya tell me?"

Bill concentrated on his food.

"I'm waiting to hear."

Bill remained silent.

"Need an earphone, Mr. Benedict?"

"Listen, Mr. Detective. When I've finished with breakfast you're either going to let me go or charge me with something so I can get a lawyer. Either way I'm as dumb as Harpo Marx."

Potts looked at him, amazed. "Now that's not what I call the co-operative spirit."

"*You* arrested me!"

"I didn't arrest ya. I brought ya here for your own good."

"Then give me my money back. The place stinks. I'm going to sue the city."

Potts poured some coffee into Bill's cup. "Sugar?"

Bill laughed. "Two—and cream." He watched Potts' thick fingers drop the pieces in.

"I've found out a lot of things I didn't know last night," Potts said ingratiatingly.

"I'm not interested."

Potts buttered another roll. "Sometimes a guy can't help being interested."

Bill put his coffee down. "What do you mean?"

A police sergeant entered and gave Potts an official looking paper. Potts read it. He finished his roll in thoughtful silence.

"Got a cigarette, Mr. Potts?" Bill was trying not to look curious.

Potts handed him his pack. "Benedict, I think we was all carried away last night. There's gonna be a slight change in procedure."

Bill blew out a cloud of smoke. "If you're laying on the soft soap, Mr. Potts, thinking you're going to get me to break down and confess—"

"No soft soap, Benedict. I can't hold you for the chair—not yet."

Bill rose. "Fine. That leaves me the rest of the morning to get a lawyer to draw up a bill of complaint against the city."

"Don't go yet. I just got a report from the Post Mortem Examination."

"I suppose they found my fingerprints on the knife," Bill said bitterly. "*My* knife. Why shouldn't they?"

"Don't worry about fingerprints. The knife was as clean as the Legion of Decency. What's bad for me is that ya said ya come into your room at the Chicopee about twelve-thirty."

"So what?"

Potts tossed some gum into his mouth. His big eyes were sad. "Ya see, the Medical Examiner says Murray was killed between eleven and eleven-thirty."

Bill smiled.

"—which sorta opens the field—"

"That's tough for you, Potts."

"—and besides"—Potts chewed glumly—"you got an alibi. From eleven to twelve you was with a dame at the Astor."

"How *do* you know?"

"It so happens that Assistant District Attorney Traube and his frau who live at the Astor seen you meet that lady-correspondent in the theatre lobby after the show, and they was walking behind you to the hotel. You was so interested in this Miss Huxley, they didn't want to intrude. Traube's in charge of the Murray case. He told me about it this morning."

"Did he see me leaving the hotel too?"

"No."

"Then how do you know I didn't come right out?"

"I know you're not the man to leave a dame you like in a hurry—even to murder Leo Murray."

"All right—so what am I doing here?"

"Any guy can make a mistake." The jaws had a slower rhythm.

"Sure, Potts."

"Then, let bygones be bygones? I need some help, Bill. This is a Broadway case. I need the help of a Broadway in-and-outer."

"What'll you give me?"

"Your detective agency license back."

"What do you want?"

"Draw me up a list of everybody you know who had a grudge against Murray?"

"That's easy," said Bill. "It's all done."

"Where is it?"

"See *Who's Who in the American theatre.*"

POTTS sighed like a tree falling. "Any other time I'd be sore at a wisecrack like that." He frowned. "Bill, you're going to help me whether ya like it or not."

"Well, if you ask me that way."

"I'm not asking no more. I'm telling ya for your own health. I think there was two people that come into your room last night—the guy who bumped off Leo and the guy who socked you."

"Why couldn't they be the same?"

Potts spat out his gum in disgust. "They could. But no sane murderer would wait around even for the fun of banging you on the head."

Bill stared at him thoughtfully. "All right, so there were two."

"The second guy can't be sure whether ya got anything on him. Maybe ya caught a glimpse of him when ya fell. He can't be sure. That means he's gonna get after ya to find out how much ya know. If he thinks ya know too much—" Potts left the sentence in mid-air. "So I brought ya here to keep ya out of trouble. And I advise ya to watch your step."

Bill's eyes narrowed. He wiped his lips with a napkin and took a deep puff of his cigarette. He squashed it. "Thanks, Potts. I'm not frightened but I'll help."

"Swell!" Potts stuck out his hand. "And when we catch them ya can go back and become a private dick all over again."

Bill smiled. "I'm going to sue the city anyway."

"Sue and be damned. But see that the *Hour's End* company remains on stage after the show tonight. I want to see them actors and actresses; especially that Lawrence and Linton team."

"Sure." Bill started for the door and stopped. "Lieutenant, I've got one question to ask you."

"We're buddies now. Go ahead."

"Who told you to come up to my room last night?"

"A call came in about one-thirty."

"Man or woman?"

"Man. We checked the call. It came from a pay-station at the Brass Bar, a little restaurant on Forty-fifth Street."

"One-thirty at Forty-fifth Street." Bill seemed to be figuring. "Sure it wasn't a woman?"

"Sure."

Bill looked relieved. "You can reach me at Murray's office. I'll be there all day," he said, and left.

When Bill entered the office Ruth Murray was at her desk. She was wearing a black dress. Her face was ivory white and her lips were pale. But she

was cutting the reviews from the morning papers just as she had done on the mornings after all of Leo's openings.

"Come here, Bill," she said in a low dead voice. She looked up at him when he came close to her. Her words came in a husky whisper. "A detective, Potts, came and questioned me. I had to tell him about last night."

"Don't worry about Potts." He put his hand on her shoulder; and she put her pale white hand up on his hand. Her hand looked cold but it was warm, and the fragrance of her honey-colored hair came up to him and even the plain black dress could not hide the young beauty of her body.

Suddenly he remembered her saying, "You love them. That's what makes you good," and he remembered that Leo, the watchdog, was no longer there and in the next instant was ashamed to be thinking such things at such a time so he said, "Go home, Ruth. You'd better go home."

"I keep wondering who could have done it?"

"We'll find out. Take the day off, Ruth. We can run the office, Boley and me."

She took her hand away. "No. There's so much to do today. You know how it is, the day after an opening."

"When is the funeral going to be?"

"Tomorrow."

"Need any cash?"

She shook her head, and looked down at the papers on her desk. Her lips were bitter. "Leo would have loved these fine reviews."

"He sure would."

"I keep thinking how wonderful he could be." She picked up the scissors. "He showed people only the side of him that—that was rotten." Her voice was very low.

"We're all rotten at times, Ruth." Bill patted her arm gently. "I'll be in my office if you want anything. I'll take you to lunch."

"Thanks, Bill. Linton is in Leo's office with Steve Levy. I guess Linton will be taking over here."

Bill walked down the hall. He saw Boley's red face and stopped at the business manager's door. "Good morning, Frank."

Boley sat at his desk like a man in a trance.

"I want to talk to you, Frank."

"Get the hell out of here," Boley cried. "I don't want to talk to no one."

Bill took out a cigarette and lit it, watching Boley. "Okay." He went on down the corridor to Leo's office.

RICKY Linton was sitting on the desk swinging his long well-groomed legs. "So God's gift to the American Theatre got his," Ricky chirped. "Why didn't you tell us the good news last night?"

"Cut it," said Bill.

"*De mortuis nil nisi bonum,* eh?"

"Oh, for the love of Pete, Linton," Steve burst out.

"I say! Do *you* know Latin too?"

"I went to school!" said Steve bristling.

The telephone rang on Leo's desk. Bill picked it up. It was Ruth. "Lieutenant Potts to see you."

"Tell him to come in here."

Potts entered with Ruth and Boley.

"I wasn't expecting to see you again so soon," said Bill.

"I like to surprise people." Potts was looking at Linton.

Bill introduced him to Ricky Linton and Steve Levy. Potts was still wearing his checked serge suit. It made him look a little like a burlesque comedian.

He sat down at Leo's desk, took Leo's pad and silver pencil. "I've got a few simple questions I wanna ask all of ya."

Ricky murmured, "Haven't I seen this picture before?"

Potts shot a sharp glance at him. "Miss Murray," he said. "Where were *you* last night between eleven-fifteen and eleven-thirty?"

Ruth spoke quietly. "At Child's, having coffee."

"What Child's?"

"Fifth Avenue at Forty-seventh Street."

"Did ya see anybody you know there?"

"Not at that time. The waitress may remember my being there. I was not feeling well and I went to the Ladies' Room while she was bringing the coffee. Later, about midnight, Mr. Benedict met me there."

Potts made a note. "Had your brother told you where he was going right after the show?"

"No. I took it for granted he would be going to Lady Lawrence's party."

"All right, Miss Murray. Thanks. Ya can go now."

Ruth hesitated. She looked gravely at each of the men in the room and went out. Potts coughed and shoved his heavy body around to face Linton.

"Now you, Mr. Linton. Where were you last night between eleven-fifteen and eleven-thirty?"

Ricky stared at him with smiling arrogance. "You ought to get someone to write your dialogue for you, Leftenant. That line's a cliché."

"Shut up and answer my question."

"I couldn't possibly do both, could I?"

Potts glared at him.

"I was at Lady Lawrence's apartment," drawled Rickey. "I had left the theatre before the end of the play to see that her party was being properly prepared for."

Potts turned abruptly to the stage manager. "Do you keep a record of when people come and go?"

"Not exactly a written record."

"Did anyone else leave early?"

"Not that I can remember."

"Anybody arrive late—after eight o'clock?"

Steve thought a moment, avoiding Linton's stare. "Lady Lawrence."

"When did she check in?"

"At eight-thirty—with Mr. Linton."

"They come in a cab?"

"Yes."

"What kind?"

Linton interrupted. "The reason Lady Lawrence was late was that she was not feeling well. I called for her at her apartment at seven-thirty. We were together from that time on."

"Seems like there was a female epidemic of not feeling well last night. Where were ya just before ya got to the theayter?"

"In the taxi, of course."

"Where'd you get on?"

"At River House, where Lady Lawrence lives. I got off at the Murray Theatre. And this is getting to be an awful bore, Mr. Potts."

"What company was the cab, Mr. Linton?"

Ricky tapped a cigarette on his thumbnail. "Terminal."

Potts jotted it down. "Do you know Charlie Beach?"

"Yes—slightly."

"When was the last time ya seen him?"

"I don't remember."

"Did ya know where Leo Murray was last night?"

"No."

"Lady Lawrence didn't tell ya?"

"No. I first learned it from Mr. Benedict at the party."

Potts passed his box of chiclets around. He scratched the pad with his pencil as Bill and Steve helped themselves. Ricky refused it. Potts took some himself. "I suppose Lady Lawrence will tell me the same thing as you."

Ricky nodded. "Reminds me one time Granville Barker was robbed by two hoofers. The boys alibied each other." He chuckled. "Both of 'em was proved guilty."

"You can get out of here and go to hell!" Linton was on his feet.

POTTS shoved his body around to face Linton. "You ain't boss in here yet. And if I ain't found someone I like less by midnight, Linton, I'm gonna have the boys pick ya up, if only for insultin' an officer of the New York Police Department. We don't need ya this morning no more. Exit!"

Linton glanced at Steve. The stage manager turned away and sat down. Linton left.

Potts, sighed and looked at Steve. "Any more to tell us, Mr. Levy?"

"No," said Steve.

"All right. Do *you* know Charlie Beach?"

"Yes."

"When did ya see him last?"

"A couple of days ago."

Potts looked up at his imaginary object on the ceiling. "Step outside for a minute, Mr. Levy."

Steve went out quickly.

Without looking down Potts said, "Mr. Boley. What about *you?*"

Bill looked at Frank. The man's usually flushed face was white and tight. He exhaled a heavy whiskey breath when he talked. "I was in the box-office from seven-thirty on."

"Did you see Charlie Beach lately?"

"Last night." Boley looked inquiringly to Bill.

"You can tell him, Frank," Bill said.

"Bill brought him in the box-office in the third act. Charlie was threatening to make a stink. He wanted to get even with Leo. Bill stopped him."

Potts glanced at Bill with enlightened eyes. "Mr. Boley, you knew that Leo Murray was at Bill's place at the Chicopee after the show, didn't you?"

Boley looked puzzled. "No. I didn't."

Bill said, "Sure you didn't see Leo while you were tight?"

Boley rose angrily. His face was red again. He took a step toward Bill. "Benedict, you're trying to wangle me into this thing. You know damn well I wouldn't touch Leo." He was breathing hard.

"I'm not wangling you into anything," Bill said.

"Keep your shirt tucked in, Boley," Potts warned. "When was the last time ya talked to Leo?"

"When he went down for the rehearsal in the afternoon. I went down with him. I separated him from Linton when they started fighting.

Potts turned to Bill. "When did Leo ask for the use of your room?"

"In the intermission between the first and second acts of the show."

Boley burst out. "I didn't know where Leo was and if I did I wouldn't have done harm to him."

"That's fine, Boley," said Potts soothingly. "You hang around the office today. I'll want to talk to ya later, maybe."

But Boley went out angrily. He slammed the door behind him.

Potts opened it and called Steve Levy in.

Steve, biting at a pipe, walked over to a chair and sat down.

Potts filled his mouth with chewing gum. "What time did Linton and Lawrence arrive at the theatre last night?"

"Just about eight-thirty. I told you before. Bill can verify that."

"That's right, Potts, and Ruth Murray was with me," Bill said. "Steve was worried that Lawrence would be late for her entrance cue."

"And they came in a cab," Potts persisted.

"Yes," said Bill. Steve nodded.

"What kind of a cab?"

Steve was silent.

"What kind of a cab, Bill?"

"To tell the truth I didn't notice."

"The same with me, Mr. Potts," Steve added hastily.

"Why lie, Levy?"

"Linton said he came in a Terminal. But it wasn't a Terminal, was it." It wasn't a question.

Steve looked down at the pipe in his hand.

"Come on, Steve," Bill said. "Tell him what you know, if you know anything."

"I'll lose my job."

"To hell with a job, Levy. We're trying to find a murderer."

"Yeah—that's easy. But try to find a job if you get fired without a reference. I got a wife and kid."

"It don't have to go no further than me, Levy. Be a good guy and tell me. If he fires ya, I'll scare him into taking

you back."

"It was a Yellow."

"Thanks, Levy." Potts made a note on the pad. "And don't worry about your job."

Steve left in a hurry.

Potts smiled. "Stick to me, Bill and you'll learn something. I may not be any educated, word-spoutin' Philo Vance. I don't take dope like Sherlock Holmes. I don't love orchids like Nero Wolfe. But I'll be a four-star pretzel-bender if I'm as dumb as the cops they got as stooges in them detective stories, am I?"

"What do you do now?"

Potts studied his notes. "I don't say no one is outa consideration yet, even you and Miss Murray, but Boley's a hot Irishman with something burning his pants. Linton's lie about the cab and his coming in late ties him and his Lady friend in with something you don't know about yet."

The door opened and Ruth came in. "A call came from your office. I said you were busy and they said to tell you Charlie Beach has disappeared."

Potts grunted. "He didn't get home to sleep last night. His landlady said he called her this morning to tell her he was leaving town."

"The fool!" said Bill.

Ruth said, "What would *you* do if you had done it?"

The question floored him for a minute but he grinned and said, "I'd do what I'm doing now. Stick around and act as if I were innocent."

Ruth looked thoughtfully at him, then she turned and went out with that movement that was not merely walking.

Even Potts' skeptical eyes were held by that slender black figure. Then he turned to Bill and said, "I won't bother with the cast tonight. Make it tomorrow."

In the elevator going down he got out his little black notebook and stubby pencil. In section *W*, under *Women* he wrote:

All women are very curious about what men think. The information they get is very useful in getting around men. A few men are interested in what women think, but it doesn't do them any good. They can't get any reliable information.

CHAPTER V

WHEN Ruth and Bill came into the Chafing Dish for lunch it was rather late and there were only two men at the bar. The hulking one, seeing them pass in the mirror, said without turning his head, "There she is now."

The other one looked and said, "Forget it. Murray's gone and we don't have to go through with the job."

The hulking one said, "He wouldn't have paid in advance if he didn't wanna make sure it was done. And maybe he set someone to check up on us. Murray was the kind of a guy to do that. I'm not takin' any chances. We'll to the job."

The other one said, "It's gonna be harder now that she's runnin' around so much with Benedict."

Bill was saying, "The suspects who were free at the time as far as we know were Ricky Linton, Lady Lawrence, Charlie Beach and Nick Finley. Frank Boley has an alibi and so has Steve Levy."

"So have you and so have I," said Ruth in her low, throaty voice, "and so have the United States Marines."

The waiter brought their drinks, set them on the red checkered table and went for the food.

Bill downed his drink. "I'm glad to see you getting your spirit back."

"What else is there to do?" She lifted the thin black veil on her hat and sipped her drink.

The funny thing about her eyes, Bill observed, was that you couldn't be sure if they were sad or smiling at you. "I've been meaning to ask you—what about that idea you had yesterday that some-

one was trying to bump *you* off?"

She looked down and smiled then as if embarrassed. "I think you were right, Bill, I must have been mistaken. It must have been nerves." She looked up again. "Anyway I don't feel that way now. Although, as you said, New York *is* certainly a dangerous place to live in."

A tall man with a Dutchman's round beer-red face had entered the restaurant and walked over to their table. "Hello, Bill."

Bill looked up, not to pleased. "Hello, Happy. Happy Vorhaus, Miss Murray —Well, so long, Happy."

"Thanks, Bill," said Happy. "I'd be glad to join you for a bite to eat, especially as I've got some business with you."

Bill shrugged his shoulders helplessly and looked at Ruth.

"Sit down, Mr. Vorhaus," said Ruth.

The waiter brought a tureen of spaghetti with meat sauce.

"Please bring a plate for Mr. Vorhaus," said Ruth to the waiter.

"And a bottle of beer," said Happy. He turned to Bill. "What are you going to do now?" Happy asked. "I mean by way of a job?"

"I'm going to hang onto Murray Productions as long as I get paid."

"I don't think that's going to be long."

"Why not?" Bill was mildly amused by Happy's prophetic manner.

"The dope is—Ricky Linton's arranging to hire someone else. That gives you the well-known gate." Happy puffed out his cheeks to denote the importance of his words. "Linton don't like you, Bill."

"The feeling's mutual. Got another job for me, Happy? How's about my publicizing the new python they got at the Bronx zoo?"

"This ain't no joke," said Happy, holding his plate while Ruth heaped it with spaghetti. "Last night I was having a bite to eat with Nick Finley and—"

"Where was that?" Bill had stopped smiling.

"At the Brass Bar—that little joint on Forty-fifth Street."

"At what time?"

"Oh, about half past one. What's the idea of the third degree, Bill? You don't think *I* had anything to do with—" Happy looked at Ruth, who was serving Bill.

"Of course not," said Bill. "What did Finley want?"

"He said he needed a press agent for a new show of his going into rehearsal next month and he wished he could get you."

"Why didn't Nick ask me himself?"

"Well," Happy's eyes glanced with embarrassment toward Ruth, "being that Leo and Nick was not exactly on talking terms Nick thought that you might hesitate before going over to him. Anyway Nick asked me to kind of broach it to you."

"Good old Happy," Bill said. "Always ready to jump into the broach."

No one smiled. No one seemed to be really enjoying the spaghetti, although Happy quickly did away with two enormous portions of it. He finished his beer, lit a cigar. "What about the Finley job, Bill?"

Bill spun the sugar bowl thoughtfully. "I'll talk it over with Miss Murray. If it's okay with her I go to work tomorrow. That is if he'll pay three hundred a week?"

"I'm sure he will," said Happy quickly and rose. "I'll tell him. I know he'll be glad." He bowed to Ruth. "Pleased to have met you."

When Happy had gone Bill said, "There's one of those things that makes New York life dangerous. Happy would just as soon slit your throat as look at you—if there's something in it for him."

Ruth clinched her cigarette. "Bill, you asked for two hundred a week more than Leo gave you."

"Yes, I know. So does Happy. Something's in the air. Finley never paid a press agent as much as that before. And it's not because I'm so good."

"What was all that about their being

at the Brass Bar at half past one?"

"That may be just a coincidence. Or it may lead me to the man who hit me over the head. It may even lead me to the murderer. We'll see about that tomorrow. How about dessert?"

A newsboy came by and dropped a paper on the table. Bill scanned the front page as he fished for a coin in his pocket. He laid a quarter on the table without lifting his eyes from a headline which had caught them. He did not pick up the change. When he raised his eyes to Ruth they had tears in them. He handed her the paper.

She read that an airliner had crashed in the hills outside of Rio. Among those killed was Sue Huxley. Bill bowed his head in his hands.

Ruth beckoned to the waiter, said, "No dessert," and was about to pay the check when Bill roused himself.

"I'm all right now," he said and paid it.

They got up and went out. The two men who had been at the bar were sitting in their grey sedan at the curb, watching for them. When Bill and Ruth came out and went with the throng bustling west toward Broadway, the grey car swung out into the traffic and moved slowly westward with them.

Ruth said, "Were you in love with Sue?"

"Not *in love*," said Bill. "But I loved Sue Huxley because she was such a good scout."

"She was also your alibi."

Bill, startled, looked down at Ruth. "You're right. I guess I've lost that too." For a moment he seemed dismayed as he took her arm and piloted her across Broadway.

And when they had gone into the entrance of the Murray Theatre Building the grey car, because there was no parking place in sight, picked up speed and disappeared.

AT THE funeral services the next day the pews of the Riverside Memorial Chapel were garnished with as many celebrities as could get out of bed that early in the afternoon. Among those present "to pay their last respects to the theatrical genius of Leo Murray," as his best enemy among the critics put it, were all the somebodies who get their names in the columns of Ed Sullivan, Leonard Lyons and Walter Winchell.

Hake Potts was standing around as unobtrusively as was possible with his great bulk. He saw Bill come in and went over to him.

"Seen Charlie Beach?" he asked.

"Not unless he's hiding in Mae West's new hairdo."

"I'm sending out a statewide alarm." Potts tried to whisper but it came out a hoarse broadcast.

Someone nearby hissed, "*Please!* This is a funeral."

Potts lowered the creases of his face into a saintlike expression and folded his large red hands in front of him.

When the services ended and people began filing into the cars to go to the cemetery Bill got separated from Potts. He looked around and saw that the detective was with Ruth Murray, talking earnestly to her. Her face was hidden behind a heavy black veil, her slender body enveloped in a black cloak.

Bill felt a strong desire to go to her and say something to comfort her but Lady Lawrence appeared beside him, carrying a pair of priceless silver foxes.

"My advice to you, old dear, is stay away from all Murrays. They're dangerous."

"Thanks. May I ride with your Highness?"

"Please do. Ricky!" she called to Linton. "Let's go with Mr. Benedict."

"A wonderful production!" she said in the car.

Linton beside her added, "The first Leo Murray production no one has begrudged him. I say," he turned to Bill, "have you found that mosquito yet?"

Bill drove back from the cemetery with Potts. The detective was glum, champing his gum listlessly.

"I take it the Leo Murray mystery is still a mystery," said Bill.

"What do ya thing I am? He was murdered less than forty-eight hours ago. All I have to do is think and deduct and deduct and think and then make an arrest, eh? Hell, I haven't spoken to the cast yet. I haven't seen Charlie Beach. And why ain't ya been honest with me?"

"Honest ol' Bill is what they all call me on Broadway."

"Ya said ya would help me. So whyn't ya tell me about Nick Finley?"

"Tell what?" said Bill cautiously.

Potts crumpled a piece of cellophane and threw it away. "Don't you ever read Winchell?"

"I can't read small print."

"He says Finley and Murray had a fight at Sardi's. He says you was there."

"So I was. A lot of guys have had fights with Murray before."

"But Murray wasn't murdered before. Now if Finley turns out to be the killer Winchell will say, 'I told ya so'." Potts glanced sideways at Bill. "I saw Finley this morning."

"You did?" Bill seemed nonchalant. "What's *his* story."

"He says he was at the theayter from eight-thirty on. And in Central Park after the show, walking alone. How in the name of honesty can a guy check on a story like that?" Potts massaged his gums and continued casually. "He wanted to know what *you* were doing at that time?"

"Me!"

"He asked it offhand like."

Bill smiled. "Very interesting. And only at lunch today he had a henchman ask me did I want to work for him. Mr. Finley needs a little going over. He's on my list."

"The law's done all it can."

"Who said anything about the law?"

Potts was silent for a moment. "Now about *your* movements after the show."

Bill looked sharply at him. "I suppose you've heard of the death of Sue Huxley."

"Yes." Potts was looking at that imaginary object on the ceiling of the cab. "You understand that, much as I like you, Bill, I—"

"I understand—but give me a little time."

Potts nodded.

Bill said he had arranged for the examination of the cast after the performance that night. Potts said he'd be there at eleven and they parted at the entrance to the Murray Theatre Building.

BILL went into the Western Union next door and sent a wire to Nick Finley.

Then he went up to the Murray office. The door was locked. It had a neat sign saying it was closed for the day on account of the death of Leo Murray. Bill let himself in with his key. He picked up a pack of telegrams of condolence which had accumulated and opened them.

One telegram made him stop and whistle. He held it before him on Ruth's desk as he dialed Potts' office. The detective wasn't in.

"Any message?" the desk sergeant asked.

Bill bit a nail. "No. I'll be seeing him." He put the telegram in his pocket. For a few minutes he sat in the darkening office without moving. Then he got up and went to Boley's office. The door was locked. He went to his own office. In the open door was a key. He took it out and tried it on Boley's lock. It worked.

Frank's office was dark. Bill turned on the small desk lamp. He tried all the drawers. They were unlocked. The biggest one had six bottles of Scotch and a hundred or more Lily cups. The other drawers contained old Varietys and box-office statements. But in the last one he found something he was looking for —Boley's checkbooks.

Bill made a list of people and stores to whom checks had been drawn. One name appearing several times interested

him—the Lionel Company. He was making a note of the dates of the canceled checks when he heard the outer office door opened. Quickly he put the checkbook back in its place, turned out the light and went into the hall. It was Ruth.

"Hello!"

Ruth looked at him, startled. "Bill! I thought no one was here!"

"I came in to knock out a release on the funeral."

"Oh?"

"Ruth, you oughtn't to be hanging around here."

Tears filled her eyes. She pulled nervously at her black pocketbook. He had never seen her like this, looking upset and helpless. She was trembling.

"I can't help it. I can't stay at home. I'm terribly lonely—and frightened—not only for me—but for you too, Bill." In the dusky light her face turned up to him like a fragrant flower—to the sun.

He put his hands on her shoulders to comfort her. He didn't mean to but he bent down and kissed her. Her pale lips were warm too—but she did not let them stay long.

"I'm not afraid when I'm with you, Bill," she said gently.

"Come to dinner with me."

She smiled. "Thanks. Not tonight. I couldn't eat. Some other night." She looked around the darkening room, her white hands fluttering oddly from her black sleeved arms. "There are scripts I ought to return. I'll keep busy." She switched on her desk light, and looked at the pile of telegrams.

He offered her a cigarette. She took one, and he lit it for her. "There's a telegram for you from the murderer."

"Are you trying to be funny?"

He shook his head.

"What does it say?"

"Come and have a drink first."

She followed him into his office. He lit the lamp, opened his desk and took out a bottle of Scotch and two glasses. He poured two drinks.

"Could I have some water in mine?" she said.

He filled hers with water from the cooler but drank his straight. Watching her drinking he said, "You're beautiful."

"No," she said.

"No, what?"

"No, I won't marry you despite what Sue Huxley said."

"Who asked you to?"

"Then why did you say I looked beautiful? Now tell me about the telegram."

"It's from John Wilkes Booth."

"Then it *is* a joke. Why don't you tell it to Mrs. Lincoln? She'd be interested."

"It isn't *that* John Wilkes Booth."

"Oh, little Junior! I always say, like father like son."

"You've really got spunk, Ruthie, even if you do act frightened sometimes. I like girls with spunk."

"Yes I know—you like girls, period." She took the telegram he handed her and read:

RUTH MURRAY 1131A 156P R108
MURRAY THEATRE BUILDING
NEW YORK
WHAT YOUR BROTHER RECEIVED YOU ALSO CAN RECEIVE SUGGEST YOU CLOSE HOUR'S END IMMEDIATELY BEST RETURNS OF THE DAY

JOHN WILKES BOOTH

"Might be just a crank," said Ruth. "Is there anyone who gets anything by closing *Hour's End*?"

"The actors wouldn't. Linton wouldn't."

"Nick Finley?"

HE SHOOK his head. "The more hits, the better it is for every producer in town. He's sore about this one but he's not a nut. I called Potts but he wasn't in. I'll give it to him tonight. Maybe he'll put a man on to guard you."

Ruth swallowed the rest of her drink.

"Maybe Potts can trace the wire," Bill said.

"I have an idea," said Ruth.

"I know. You think Charlie Beach sent it."

SHE nodded.

Bill grinned. "Even Father Brown would have got that right off. Potts is looking for Charlie. But here's something else that's harder, which you might have an idea about. What's the Lionel Company best known for"

She looked surprised. "Why—toys—electric trains."

"Right, Ruthie. You go to the Quiz Kids next week. Now Leo was definitely not the kind of man who builds a railroad system in his back yard, was he. Nor did he go about buying gifts for his friends' kids."

She looked down. "Leo didn't have much use for children."

"Maybe not in general but if there was one of his own somewhere—"

"But what makes you think there might be?"

"In Frank Boley's checkbook—in an account he ran for Leo, I found the stubs of several checks drawn to the order of the Lionel Company."

Ruth handed him her glass for another drink.

"My instinct," said Bill as he poured it for her, "leads me to look up the Murrays in the marriage records at City Hall."

Ruth drank half her drink. "Listen, Bill. Leo's will was read this morning. There was no mention of a wife or child in it. He left almost all his money for a Leo Murray Drama Foundation."

"All the same I'm going to look. Want to go with me?"

"When?"

"Tomorrow afternoon. I'll let you know what time."

Bill was reaching for his hat.

"I've got a date. Got to see a man who's a dog. You better stay here and I'll take you home. I'll be back by eleven when Potts is going to examine the cast after the show. Potts may not want you around but you can hide in a hole."

"Like a rabbit?"

"No, like a sweet little fox." He leaned over and kissed her lightly. "If Boley comes in don't say anything about the checks."

"Of course not. But I think you're wrong in suspecting Frank."

There was the sound of an uncertain key in the door. It opened and Frank Boley came in.

"Speak of the devil," said Bill. "Sure you don't want to come to dinner?" he asked Ruth.

She shook her head definitely.

"So long," he said, and went out.

Boley fixed his uncertain eyes on Ruth. "What's *he* up to?"

"He's been going through your checkbooks. He noticed the checks to the Lionel Company. It set him thinking Leo might have had a wife and a child somewhere. He's going to begin hunting for them."

"You can stop him."

"How?"

"Tell Benedict the truth—that the kid is yours and I've been helping you and keeping your secret from Leo. Now that your brother's gone you have nothing to fear. Maybe they'll give you back the kid—and maybe you'll marry me now and let me take care of the two of you.

"I don't care whose kid it is, Ruth, so long as it's yours. You don't ever have to tell me whose it is. I'd do anything for you."

He sat down, trembling at the mere thought of getting what he had so long desired. He drew her toward him until she stood between his knees. He put his arms around her and leaned his head against her.

"I almost killed a man for you, Ruth."

"Who?"

"Charlie Beach. He came to me and said he saw you going out of Child's Monday night in time to get to—" He stopped. "I almost killed him. I told him if he tried to tell that story to anyone else I *would* kill him. I made him leave town."

Ruth put her hand on his heavy shoul-

der. "You've been a faithful friend, Frank. But don't ask me to marry you yet."

"Why not?" He looked up, puzzled and hurt. "I've waited so long!"

She saw the indignation rising in his muddled eyes. She bent over and kissed him. He tried to hold her but she disengaged herself gently.

"It'll never be," he said sadly. "And what about Benedict and those checks?"

"Wait, Frank. This thing will blow over. I think Bill Benedict will soon be too involved himself to be bothering about your checks to the Lionel Company. Leave him to me."

CHAPTER VI

BILL found Nick Finley at home waiting for him. Finley lived alone in a penthouse apartment on Central Park South. He met Bill at the door. "I got your wire, Bill," he said.

"I thought you'd be here."

"Have a drink?" The stocky man walked over to a cellarette.

"Scotch straight," Bill said. He looked at the room. It was large and furnished in modern style. Bill sat down on a huge sofa which was very low, facing a great glass window through which he could see the distant lights of Harlem beyond the Park.

"Nice view, eh?" Finley asked. The Irishman's goldrimmed glasses caught the reflection of a chromium lamp. He handed Bill a drink and sat down at the other end of the sofa.

"Beautiful," said Bill. "Now tell me something, Finley."

"Sure. What?"

"Why are you willing to pay me three hundred buckeroos each week?"

Finly moved uneasily on the couch. "You're worth it."

"For what?"

"For doing your regular p.a. job."

Bill swallowed his drink. "You're a liar, Nick."

Nick got pale. He took off his glasses and wiped them with his handkerchief. "What makes you say that?"

Bill grinned. "I think you want to hire me so you can keep your eyes on Bill Benedict. That's what I think."

Nick tried to smile. "You ain't so pretty, Bill."

"What show you plan to do?"

Finley sat back and sighed with relief. "Have another Scotch, Bill."

"Thanks. What show, Nick?"

Nick got up off the couch and went across to a wide blond oak desk. He opened a drawer, took out a manuscript and tossed it to Bill. It dropped to the floor. As Bill bent to pick it up Nick slipped a service revolver from the desk drawer into his pocket.

Bill wiped his mouth with the back of his hand as he looked at the manuscript. Then he dropped it on the couch and lit a cigarette. "*Hour's End,* eh?"

"Yeah."

"What makes you think you can have it?"

"It's going to close tomorrow night. The cast will have to be changed and I'm going to reopen it."

Bill took the "Booth" telegram from his pocket and showed it to Finley. "Is that why you sent this? To frighten Ruth Murray so she'll sell out her share?"

Finley read it and began to tremble. He took his glasses off and wiped them. "I didn't send that. For Pete's sake, Bill, I didn't have to send that. I already own Linton's share."

"You're lying!"

"I bought him out this morning. I wouldn't send such a telegram. You think I'm crazy?"

"What about Leo Murray's share?"

"I don't need it. Linton has fifty-five percent. That's enough for me." Finley went to the desk. "I'll show you our deal." He brought out a contract. "Look."

Bill glanced through the sheet. "Why

would Linton sell?"

"Because the guy's lousy with money. He don't need the play. All he wanted was to act in it. But this murder has loused it up for him, he says. He wants to get away now. He's going to marry Lawrence and go to Europe with her."

"Oh, he is? And the murder fixed it for you," said Bill. "It'll make you half a million if it makes a cent."

"Maybe not with Lady Lawrence out of it."

"You've got Nina Gale."

"She's all right but she can't pull 'em in by herself. I'm trying to get Ina Claire. And I've got to get someone good for Leo's part."

"You going to keep the revised ending?"

Finley smiled weakly. "What revised ending?"

Bill grinned. He put his glass down and stood up in front of Nick. "Don't you know about Leo's last minute change of the end?"

Nick waved him away. "Oh sure, that —Linton told me."

"He did, eh? What is it?"

"Oh— I don't want to discuss it now. I don't like it." Finley tried to get up.

"Oh, you don't like it," Bill said, pushing him down. "You don't like it because you never saw it. And you never saw it because it was done for the first time the opening night right before the final curtain."

"Sure," said Nick.

"Sure. Now that I've told you, you remember. But you didn't a minute ago and you can't tell me what the change was because you left the theatre before the final curtain to sneak up to my room in the Chicopee to kill Leo Murray."

"You're crazy!" Nick screamed.

Bill reached down and grabbed Nick's glasses. With the knuckles of the other hand he hit Nick's head hard—and again. "Don't you remember, Nick? I came in and you got scared—and you hit me with something hard. What was it? It couldn't have been just your hand." He hit Finley again and the short man fell to the floor. "Do you remember how you knocked me out?"

FINLEY dove his hand into his pocket for the revolver.

Bill saw it in time and jumped him. He pinned Nick's hand to the floor and socked a knee into him.

Nick squealed. The revolver fell from his fingers. "Stop it!" he yelled. "You'll kill me!"

"You killed Leo Murray and tried to finish me off!" Bill slid his fingers around Nick's fat throat. "You did, didn't you?"

Nick gasped. "I'll tell—you! Let—me—up."

Bill released his hold and pulled Finley to his feet. He picked up the gun. "Sure, you'll tell me."

Nick dropped to the couch. "Get me a drink," he said weakly.

"You don't have any more of these toys around?" Bill waved the gun.

Finley shook his head. Then Bill poured a glass of Scotch for Finley and one for himself. Bill drank his. Finley was still trying to catch his breath.

"Where are my glasses?" His blue nearsighted eyes blinked. Bill picked them up and put them on him. Perspiration dripped from Finley's bald dome.

Bill pulled his big linen handkerchief out of his breast pocket. "Here," he said, "wipe yourself, you're all wet."

Finley took some of his drink. "What about the revision? Did you just trip me up, or is that a fact?"

"The McCoy. If you were there you'd know the end had been changed. You knew how Charlie's play ended. Leo stole it from you, didn't he?"

"Sure he stole it."

"And you killed him."

"I didn't kill him."

"But you were in my room."

Finley drank some more of the whiskey and coughed. "Yes, I went there but—I found Leo dead when I arrived."

"How did you know he was in my room?"

"I sat through the first two acts like a man sitting on fire. Then I met you in the intermission—remember? But I couldn't sit through the third act to the end and watch my million dollars going into another man's pocket. I went around to the stage door to wait for him. I saw his sister get rid of the fans, and then when Leo came out I made him let me ride in the cab with him as far as the Chicopee."

Finley wiped his head. "I begged him for ten percent. A million dollars he stole from me. It could be like *Grand Hotel* or *Our Town*. The least he could do was to cut me in. I was willing to pay for it but Leo was a guy without a heart. Something you step on before it bites you. A cockroach, a scab, a louse."

"Cut out the eulogy. What did you do then?"

"I walked around like a crazy man, maybe for an hour. Then I went back to the Chicopee. I was only going to threaten him unless he gave me a share of the show." Finley was trembling. "Maybe I would've killed him. I don't know. My God, I don't know. I got into the room. The lights were on. I saw him on the floor, the knife sticking into his back like a toothpick in an olive. Then I heard the elevator and steps coming to the door. I picked up a book-end and turned out the light."

Bill touched his temple. "Yeah, I remember."

"I had sense enough to wipe the book-end and put it back and then I beat it. I didn't kill Leo."

"Do you think the cops will believe you?"

"Bill, you ain't going to tell 'em, are you?"

"Sure." Bill got his hat and put it on.

"Bill—it'll kill me. I won't be able to stand it." Bill walked to the door relentlessly. "I'll give you a cut of the show if you shut up."

"How big a cut?"

Finley's eyes narrowed. "Two percent."

"You cheapskate! For two percent you want me to save you from the chair?"

"Five percent," Finley bid, breathing hard.

"Not for your whole fifty-five," Bill replied. "I'm not a blackmailer. But I'll take your offer of the job beginning tomorrow—so I can keep an eye on *you*."

"But you won't tell the cops." Finley kept wiping his chin.

"Not if I can find someone else who killed Leo. Where were you at one-thirty last night?"

Finley's lips twisted. "Walking in Central Park. I told that to Potts."

"Yeah. That's what you told *him*. But you're talking to *me* now. Come clean or—"

"I was at the Brass Bar, a restaurant on Forty-fifth Street."

"With Happy Vorhaus. And you phoned the police from there. Why?"

"I was going crazy. I thought if they found you there alone with him they might pin it on you. Looks now like Linton might've done it. Wish I'd've thought of that before. I could've beat him down in the sale."

"I'm going to reward you for your frankness, Nick. I won't tell Potts about you—yet." He pointed the revlover at Finley. The producer cringed on the couch. "But if you try anything funny, my friend I'm going to *give* you to Potts—in pieces. Good night."

Bill tossed the revolver on to the couch and left.

CHAPTER VII

POTTS was out in front of the stage entrance with some plainclothes men when Bill arrived at the theatre.

"Picked up Charlie Beach yet?" Bill asked.

"Nope," Potts answered sullenly. "He's probably living next door to the police

station. It's the safest place."

"An admission, Lieutenant. I thought you—"

"Ice it and put it away, what you thought. All cops ain't dumb and all cops ain't Perry Masons."

"My but you're in a bad mood, Lieutenant!"

"I'm working myself up for the questioning I got to do when the show's over."

People began seeping out of the theatre doors with the applause of the final curtain calls. Jimmy Burke came over. "It's curtain time, Mr. Potts."

"Don't let nobody in, Burke," Potts ordered and went in backstage followed by his men.

Bill went up to the office to get Ruth. She had cleaned up her desk. Boley wasn't there. Bill said, "Finley was the man who knocked me out—but he didn't kill Leo. That was someone else."

Ruth was putting on her hat; under the heavy black veil her grey-green eyes were like cool pools in the shade. You wanted to get into them.

"Who do you think it was?" she asked.

"Linton's my best bet now. Let's go down and see how he acts for Potts."

As they came out of the building Ruth said, "There's a friend of yours. He wants to see you."

It was Happy Vorhaus, smiling, red-faced, who had apparently been waiting for Bill. "You're together so much. Whyn't you two get hitched?"

Bill said, "That's been suggested before. Miss Murray is considering it. What's really on your mind?"

Happy glanced at Ruth.

Bill said, "Since we're practically one happy family you can speak freely."

Happy said to Ruth, "Sure—and besides this should interest you, too, Miss Murray." To Bill he said, "Will ya gimme five grand if I put my finger on the guy who knifed Leo Murray?"

Bill said right back, "Make it two."

Happy's pleasant expression did not change. "Five."

"Three," said Bill.

"I told ya five." He glanced at Ruth. "Ya don't gimme it, I get it somewhere else."

Bill said, "Okay, when?"

"I'll have to have a couple of days."

"Take all the time you want, Happy, I'll need a little myself to get that much dough," said Bill and took Ruth's arm and went with her into the theatre, which was empty now. They sat down in the front row.

The curtain had been rung up again and the cast and stage crew were scattered around the stage on various prop chairs and couches. In one corner sat Lady Lawrence, looking disdainfully amused, her brunette hair glossy from the amber and rose spotlights. Standing by her was Ricky Linton looking disdainfully annoyed.

Potts stood in the center of the stage with Steve Levy, checking a list of the company and stagehands. "All right," he was saying, "I'm satisfied with everyone but Lady Lawrence and Mr. Linton. See that they don't leave, McNally. The rest of your clear out."

They hurried away backstage.

Potts tossed some fresh gum into his big mouth.

Ricky Linton strode toward Potts. Before he had a chance to smack a fist into the detective's face McNally grabbed him.

"Hold him, Mac. If he don't like it dirty that starched shirt of his."

Linton said: "You'll be walking a beat in Brooklyn for this."

Potts laughed. "Everybody from Dutch Schulz up and down has threatened me with Brooklyn and I'm still on Broadway. And anyway, what's wrong with Brooklyn? I live there."

A couple of stagehands lingering in the wings laughed. "Get on with you!" shouted Potts, and they disappeared.

"I want to see my lawyer," Lady Lawrence said shrilly.

"I'm not arresting you, Lady. Just holding you temporarily for questioning. Maybe when I'm through you'll get to see your lawyer."

Potts sat down, stretched his thick legs and pointed a pudgy finger at Linton. "Why'd'ya clinch with Murray at the last rehearsal?"

Ricky suddenly relaxed. "He insulted me while we were arguing about his sudden decision to change the end of the play."

"That's a fair reason. But that wouldn't be enough for murder, would it? Could it be that you wanted to lift his keys from his pocket?"

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"All right, Linton, then why did ya lie to me about coming in a Terminal cab?"

"I didn't lie."

"It was a Yellow."

"I'm not in the habit of making entries in my diary as to what kind of cab I take. I thought it was a Terminal."

"Ya knew it was a Yellow but ya didn't want me to check where ya took it from. That was foolish, Linton. When Terminal had no record of a trip from River House to the theayter, I tried the other companies. Even the driver recognized you, Lady Lawrence." Potts opened his notebook. "Ya got on at Central Park West at ten minutes past eight. What were ya doing there?"

"Ask my lawyer about that."

"But I'm asking *you*." Potts' prognathous jaw came out further.

LADY Lawrence leaned toward Linton. "Don't let this ape make you say anything you don't want to, Ricky."

Potts reddened. "Lady, you better save your speeches for an audience that pays. Funny that you two should go calling on Leo Murray when you knew he was here at the theatre."

Linton adjusted his white tie. Lady Lawrence followed the pattern of the couch with her finger.

"What was Leo Murray to *you*, Lady Lawrence?"

She raised her cold blue eyes to him. "I've forgotten."

Potts stood up. "All right. Now try to forget this—Leo Murray's been giving ya a weekly check for the past year. Maybe he was just a good Samaritan though no one else thought that of Leo —sit down, Linton!"

"I will not!" He lifted a vase and threw it at Potts.

Potts ducked, kicked over a chair that stood in front of him and slammed a large brick-like fist into Linton's jaw. Linton staggered. Lady Lawrence screamed, got up and swung her handbag at Potts. With one hand the detective caught hold of Linton's arm and twisted it.

"Let him go! You're killing him!" shrieked Lady Lawrence.

"Call a cop, why don't ya," Potts grunted. Linton slumped to the floor.

"What do you want of us?" Lady Lawrence kneeled at Linton's side. Potts and McNally helped him up and sat him on a chair.

"I want nothing but the truth. Why did ya break into Murray's apartment the night of the murder?"

She looked at Linton. He lowered his eyelids and made a slight movement of his head. "We did not break into Mr. Murray's apartment. We weren't anywhere near it," she said.

Linton got to his feet, straightened his tie. "And put that on your gramophone and play it."

"What was ya looking for?"

"Lady Lawrence just told you we weren't there," Linton brushed his clothes.

"Prove it. Where is your evidence?"

"If you have any evidence," said Lady Lawrence walking offstage, "why not arrest us? And why not arrest Mr. Benedict, who was having a quarrel with Mr. Murray when I came to his dressing room between the first and second act; or Miss Murray, who may not have wanted her brother to marry someone who would deprive her of his wealth."

"I'll arrest people only when it suits me, Lady," said Potts.

Linton took her arm. "Let's get out

of here. Unless," he turned to Potts, "the police would like to stop us?"

"No," said Potts. "I give ya the freedom of the city. As for our little argument, fair exchange is not even petty larceny."

They went out.

Potts came to the footlights rubbing his fist.

"Well!" Bill said. "That was quite a show."

"Well," Potts asked, "would you like to come up and do a turn?"

"Well," said Ruth, getting up, "I thought you were having a date with me, Bill."

Potts looked sharply at Ruth. "Let's all three have a date," said Potts.

He took them to a room he had in the New Yorker Hotel, which served him as a place to sleep when he was working late and didn't feel like going to Brooklyn.

He poured out three large drinks of Irish pot-still whiskey, took off his coat and put on a flowery smoking jacket.

The typical hotel room was cluttered with Potts' untidy paraphernalia. But over the bed he had hung a copy of the familiar marble death mask of a French girl.

Ruth, holding her drink, stood looking at the smooth, lovely young face.

Potts said, "They say she was fished out of the river in Paris—committed suicide because some guy gave her the gate."

"A girl's a fool who commits suicide for that reason," said Ruth.

Bill smiled. "You said it. In her place you would have drowned *him,* eh, Ruthie? What's that old saying—hell has no fury like a woman scorned?"

"I want to talk about the case." Potts turned to Ruth. "Can you stand it?"

She was sipping her drink. "Please go ahead," she said.

Potts gave her a pencil and pad. "You can take shorthand—take this down. And you listen, Bill. When I went over to Leo Murray's apartment the night before last his sister"—Ruth was writing as calmly as if it were someone else he was talking about—"his sister said someone had broken into the apartment that night. She couldn't say just what time. She had left the apartment before eight—and when she got home, she noticed that someone had been fooling with Leo's desk. Its contents were disturbed and Leo's keys were in it. His sister showed me a secret drawer, which the searcher hadn't found. It had some letters from Lady Lawrence to Leo and fifty-odd weekly checks he had made out to her."

HE TOSSED the package of canceled checks to Bill. "Putting the checks and letters together it was clear that Leo had been supporting her for a year before he got her this new play. Tonight I tried to scare her and Linton into giving themselves away and establishing their motive for the murder."

"That's simple," said Bill. "Ricky and Her Highness wanted to get married. She wanted to get those checks and letters back so Leo couldn't use them to blackmail her or Ricky." Bill refilled his glass.

"That fits nicely," said Potts. "Don't you think so, Miss Murray? I hope this isn't bothering you."

"Not at all; not at all." She handed her empty glass to Bill to be refilled.

"This is pretty strong stuff," said Bill, who had been lapping it up.

"Never refuse a woman," said Potts.

Bill filled her glass. She rewarded him with a smile.

"Now suppose we keep adding one and one," Potts went on. "Suppose we say that not having found the letters and checks and knowing that Leo is at Bill Benedict's place after the show Linton goes over there and demands them. Leo threatens blackmail. Linton loses his temper—you saw how easily he does that—and picking up your handy Boy Scout knife—"

Ruth was sipping her drink and writing.

Bill said, "We don't have to go over

that, do we?" He was looking at Ruth but Ruth did not even look up.

"I'm just deducting, that's all," said Potts, "and to do that ya must go over the thing from different angles. Like them crossword puzzles. Ya don't know a word but ya stick something in to see if it fits. If it does, okay. If it don't, ya try something else."

Potts unbuttoned his shoes and hoisted his feet up to a bureau top. "Here's something else," he said. "The Medical Examiner can tell approximately the height and strength of the murderer by studying the angle of the wound. For example—"

Potts got up suddenly and went to Bill, who was standing with his back turned, filling his glass. Ruth looked up.

Potts took a pencil out of his pocket. "The natural hitting stroke with a knife is down from above your shoulder." He raised the pencil above his head and stabbed Bill in the back.

"*Hey!* You mustn't hit a guy with liquor in his arms. I almost spilled it!"

"Stand still," Potts said, keeping Bill from turning around as he went on talking directly to Ruth, who had stopped writing. "We figured from the way the body fell he had his back turned and the murderer jabbed the knife in near the backbone, a bit to the left. If the killer was short the knife would have gone in lower. Here—" Potts took Ruth's hand and drew her to her feet—"*you* stab Bill with your pencil."

"I couldn't do that to Bill," she said a bit thickly, trying to free her hand.

Potts did not let go. "Just once."

"All right," said Ruth, suddenly compliant, "if you insist."

"You can't knife me, Ruth," Bill cried. It was apparent that the whisky was getting to him too. "We're not married yet."

"Eventually. Why not now?"

"You mean marry me?"

"No, knife you." She jabbed the pencil at his back. It landed about halfway down his spine and snapped.

"That hurt!" said Bill.

"You see what I mean?" Potts said, watching Ruth. "She hit you every bit of five inches lower than I did. That's because she's shorter."

"God help me if she were a pigmy."

Ruth, who had sat down on the bed, shied a pillow at Bill. Bill ducked and the pillow knocked over Mr. Potts' whisky glass, which he had hardly touched. The whisky wet his pants.

He laughed. "I'll have you both run in. This ain't no play street."

"Mr. Potts," said Ruth with elaborate gravity. "I—am deeply—'pologetic. I 'pologize and beg—"

Bill glanced at Ruth. Her grey-green eyes, with a slight glaze on them, were drooping. Then she tried to rise and put out a wavering hand for help.

"I—guess—I'm going to—pass out." She fell over gently.

"She sure guessed right," Potts said dryly as he lifted her legs to the bed and put a pillow under her head. "Never let her even smell Irish whisky again. It's death to females."

Bill said curiously, "Then why did you give it to her?"

"Just wanted to see if it still works. Don't worry, she'll come back. Anyway it looks like a tall man murdered Leo. Might've been as tall as you."

Bill, who had been looking down at her loveliness, glanced keenly at Potts. "I'm glad it didn't work this time."

"Falling for her, eh?"

BILL didn't answer. He took the John Wilkes Booth telegram out of his pocket and gave it to Potts, who read and reread it, working the gum in his mouth reflectively.

"Can you find out who sent it?" Bill asked.

"No murderer leaves his name and address and telephone number. The bloke may have phoned it in from a pay station."

"That's fine."

"I'll stick someone on her tail so no harm comes to her." He nodded toward Ruth.

"Do that," said Bill, looking at her face, flushed like a sleeping child's under the halo of honey-colored hair.

Potts waved the telegram. "Sounds like a nut, don't it?"

"Could be Charlie Beach."

"Yeah—could be Ricky Linton. Could be Nick Finley."

"No," said Bill.

"Why not?"

"Nick hasn't the guts."

"It don't take guts to send a wire."

"I meant—to kill Leo."

Potts sighed like the exhaust of a Mack Truck. "All right. Then between Beach and Linton I choose Beach."

"On what?"

"A cross between a hunch and neuralgia. Like knowing it'll rain tomorrow. That's the feeling I've got now about this Beach."

"Charlie is short. You said he had to be tall—as me."

Potts grinned. "Guess that rules out Beach. Though theories often have holes. You can be sure only that Murray was standing with his back toward the killer."

"That means he trusted the murderer."

Potts looked at Bill in disgust. "There you go swallowing that mystery story sewerage. It could be all his relatives and friends and enemies. Take Nick Finley, for example. That money-eating cannibal probably would've liked to sink his teeth in a piece of Murray. But would Murray be so suspicious he wouldn't turn around for a minute, maybe to reach for a cigarette? Bushwah!"

"All right, all right. So where are you now?"

"Damned if I know." Potts yawned and jerked his thumb toward the sleeping form on the bed. "How's about taking your friend home?"

Bill shook Ruth's shoulder. She opened her eyes and sat up.

"What happened to me?"

Potts winked at Bill and said, "Congratulations, Mrs. Benedict."

"I couldn't have been that drunk."

She looked at Bill, who said, "I'll take you home now."

"Thank you, Bill." She got up and took his arm.

When they were gone Potts got from his jacket the little black notebook and his stubby pencil. In Section *W* under *Women* he wrote:

Women are like men in one way—maybe the only way—they are more likely to fall for what's dangerous than what's safe.

In the cab Ruth leaned her head on Bill's shoulder.

And at her door she let him kiss her, long and long—so long that he knew he had lighted a flame in that cool lovely lamp.

When he returned to the Chicopee, he found a note in his mailbox:

Bill—

Very important that I see you. I have something to tell you. Make it at the 45th Street end of Shubert's Alley tomorrow night at eleven. Please don't tell cops or anyone and come alone. Please.

Charlie B.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Bill dropped into the office the next afternoon to get his things the end of Leo Murray Productions was well under way. There were no actors and actresses in the outer office. The stack of play scripts which usually leaned precariously in the corner like the tower of Pisa had been broken into small piles for return to the various agencies. Ruth was directing a couple of boys who were packing papers in cardboard cases.

"It's all over, isn't it?" Bill said. Ruth looked into his eyes, without answering

for a moment. Her face was paler than usual and Bill thought it was that Irish whisky of the night before. He wondered if what had followed had also been due to the whisky.

"Yes, Bill. Linton's sold out to Nick Finley and there's nothing for me to do but move Leo's stuff home."

"Can I help you, Ruth?"

She took hold of his hand. "I'm worried, Bill, about something. There's a grey car I keep seeing wherever I go. This morning, leaving the house, and again on my way to lunch—"

Bill smiled. "That's nothing to worry about. On the contrary. That's Potts' man trailing you to see that no one gets to you. Stick around with me and I bet you won't see that car."

"But this car—" The telephone rang. Ruth answered it. "It's for you, Bill." She handed him the receiver.

"Hello?"

It was Hake Potts. "I'm getting worried about Beach. Not a trace—"

"Be a good boy, Potts, and I may give you some dope on Charlie tomorrow morning. Or even late tonight."

"What?" Potts sounded as if he had swallowed his gum. "Say, if you're holding out on me one drop of dope I'll hang ya as an accomplice before and after the fact."

"I'm not holding a thing—yet."

"Charlie get in touch with ya?"

"Yes."

"Where are ya going to see him?"

"Want to scare him away?" Bill hung up softly.

"Are you going to see Charlie Beach?" asked Ruth.

"Yes, I'm going to see him tonight."

Ruth said, "I wish Charlie hadn't come back. I've been thinking how wonderful it would be if he just disappeared with his guilt."

Bill sighed. "That's a nice dream. But maybe he isn't guilty? Maybe he's got an alibi. Everyone else seems to have. Where's Frank Boley?"

"He's in his office, fortifying himself against the loss of his job."

"Did you ask him about those checks to the Lionel Company?"

"No. He's got enough to drive him to drink as it is."

Bill went along the corridor. Frank's door was locked. He knocked at it. "It's Bill, Frank." He got no answer. He went on to his own office and took from the drawers the few things he wanted, made a package and went back to Ruth's desk. "Tell Frank I think I can make Nick Finley give him a job. Tell him to give me a ring."

"I will."

"I'll take these things home and then I have an errand down town, so will you meet me at three o'clock in front of City Hall?"

"I think it's a waste of time," she said. "But I'll be there."

He leaned over and kissed her. Her lips were as warm and sweet as they were the night before.

When he had gone she went to Frank Boley's door and knocked on it. "Let me in, Frank. It's Ruth." The door opened and she went in.

AT THREE o'clock she was on the steps in front of the City Hall. In dull black with touches of white, she was ravishing. She said, "I saw that grey car again a moment ago when I got out of the cab."

He looked around. There was no grey car in sight.

"It's gone now."

"What did I tell you? It's one of Potts' men. Seeing me with you he knew you'd be all right. You should keep me around all the time. That gives me an idea. Before we go to the Record Office let's stop in and see a friend of mine."

"Who?"

Bill smiled mysteriously. "Just a friend."

He steered her into the Marriage Bureau and stopped in front of a clerk.

"I want a marriage license," Bill said.

"Who are you going to marry?" asked Ruth.

"You. It'll save wear and tear on

Potts' men and it's good for heartburn."

"Why not try bicarbonate?"

"What's the name of the man?" the clerk intruded sourly.

"William Benedict."

"And the bride?"

Ruth kept quiet.

"Ruth Murray," said Bill.

But when the clerk asked their ages and addresses and their parent's names she answered. When it came to signing Ruth asked the clerk whether she *had* to get married once she put her name on the application for the license.

"Lady," said the clerk, "you are your own boss now and you can be your own boss yet. This paper—" he waved the license indifferently—"don't mean a thing. As far as the city's consoined you can use it to make out your next week's laundry list."

"Thanks for the suggestion." She signed it.

"That was a pretty gesture, Bill," she said as they went along the corridor to the Record Office. "You certainly know what to do to cheer a girl up."

"Never can tell," he said. "It might come in handy one of these days. We'll be alone in your apartment or mine and I'll have your highball nicely doped or maybe I'll just give you some Irish whisky. 'Will you marry me?' I'll say. And you'll be too cat-eyed to deny me anything. So you'll say yes. And if I have to wait to get the license the next day you'll change your mind. This way we can get the ball rolling right away."

"You think of everything," Ruth said.

They spent the rest of the afternoon going through dusty card catalogues and ledgers. "There are almost as many Murrays in New York as Cohns and Smiths," said Bill.

Ruth kept telling him they were wasting their time. She proved to be right. There were records of the marriages of two Leo Murrays but neither one could have been the man they were looking for.

At the end, Bill said, "You win. Let's go and eat."

When they came out on the steps, Ruth looked around. There was no sign of a grey car. She looked relieved. She looked happy. She took his arm and they walked across the pleasant square to a Russian restaurant, where they had onion cakes and sour cream and he held her knees between his under the table and Bill was sure it wasn't just the Irish whisky that had lighted the flame in her the night before.

In the warm October twilight they walked through the deserted business district all the way to Washington Square. They got on top of a bus and rode up Fifth Avenue. Bill put his arm around her and leaned her head on his shoulder. At 110th Street they fell asleep. At 168th Street and Broadway the conductor woke them up for their return fares.

A little later Bill pointed to the Hudson gleaming below them. "Look, darling, Niagara Falls."

Ruth looked up at him from under those long lashes and said, "You're wonderful."

Bill glanced at his watch. "Say driver," Bill called down to him. "I want to get off at ten o'clock."

The driver said, "All right." Then, realizing what Bill had said, he said, "Nuts! Greenwich Village nuts!"

Ruth said, "I wish you wouldn't go. Forget Charlie Beach."

Bill said, "I'd like to, but I can't. This may clear things up. I'll come to your place right afterwards."

She sat very quietly after that. At ten o'clock they were at 72nd Street. The driver called up to them.

"I have to leave you now," said Bill. He kissed Ruth on her warm red lips and darted down the steps. He waved up to her and hopped into a cab. "Forty-fifth and Broadway, brother," he said and leaned back, feeling sure things were going to be cleared up.

At a quarter to eleven he walked toward Shubert's Alley from Broadway. None of the audience had been let out yet. Groups of chauffeurs stood chat-

ting in the warm squares of golden light thrown on the sidewalks from the lobbies. Ranked along the curb from Broadway to Eighth Avenue were limousines, reflecting the lights over the theatres. Taxis filled the middle of the street, purring like yellow cats ready to pounce.

Bill took his stand a little way in the Alley next to the Booth Theatre. It was dark at his end, except for the red exit lights. He lit a cigarette and waited. His eyes moved along the length of the Alley and up and down 45th Street.

At a few minutes before eleven the streets came alive with the first of departing audiences. Gradually the wave of movement and noise mounted. Hackies raced their motors, chaffeurs started their limousines. Up from Broadway trotted a flock of newsboys shouting tomorrow's headlines. The doors of the John Golden Theatre opened—then the Booth with a burst of applause.

The little area at the end of the Alley became a whirlpool of people swirling in from the street with the honking of horns and cries of "Here's your taxi . . . Here's your taxi . . ." and friends calling to each other and laughter and pushing and yelling.

"Hello," came a low voice.

Bill was suddenly confronted by Charlie Beach. "Where did you come from?"

Charlie made a quick move with his thin hand. "What's the difference?" The boy's burning eyes shifted from side to side fearfully. He grabbed Bill's arm. "Come on, let's get out of here."

"What's up?"

They started pushing their way through the crowd.

"I've got to talk to you!" The words came with desperate rapidity. "You didn't tell anyone, did you?"

Bill almost got knocked off his feet by a stout gentleman with a flying white muffler who was making a dash for his car at the curb. He felt Charlie's fingers lose their grip on his arm. He was engulfed in the crowd. He lost sight of Charlie.

Then he saw him a few feet away, struggling to get back to Bill. His eyes burning with fear, Charlie was roughly elbowing his way through a group of chattering women. He must have hurt one of them—she stopped him, protesting.

Then Bill thought a car back-fired loudly until he saw Charlie stiffen up and turn his head wildly from side to side. "Bill!" he called and slumped against the people around him, who drew back from him in fear as he fell to the sidewalk.

Bill pushed toward him. A woman screamed, "He's hurt! Get a doctor!" A pool of blood was spreading around Charlie from a hole in his back. Bill turned him over and looked at the boy's anguished face. He was dead.

"Get back!" Bill ordered the well-dressed men and women who were trying to push in to see what was the matter. Charlie's blood lapped the toes of their evening shoes. They stepped hastily away. "Someone get a cop!"

A doorman whistled three times. From Broadway came an answer. A couple of cops ran up.

Bill pointed to Charlie's body. "Call Lieutenant Potts."

"You come along with me," said one of the cops.

"Sure, just a minute," said Bill. He leaned unsteadily over the curb and was sick.

CHAPTER IX

"YA SURE do get around," Potts said with a chuckle that had no humor in it. "Is this what ya meant when ya said on the phone you'd have something to tell me about Charlie Beach tonight?"

Bill was silent. He took a long pull

at his cigarette and closed his eyes. He was trying to recall the faces of all the people he had seen in Shubert's Alley. It made him feel sick, dizzy and hopeless. So did the voice of Hake Potts.

"Leo Murray gets killed in *your* room. Charlie Beach gets shot while walking with *you*. You should wear horseshoes. You need 'em."

"At least the hind pair," said Bill, opening his eyes.

Potts' office phone rang. He answered, listened. "Yeah . . . Uh . . . Okay . . . All right, send out word to be on the lookout for a thirty-eight service-type revolver. . . . Okay." He hung up and turned to Bill.

"A service-type revolver," Bill mused. "Plenty of them around."

"Yeah. Know anybody has one?"

Bill didn't answer.

"You were right near Beach when he got it. Didn't ya see nobody?"

Bill shook his head.

"Was it you?"

Bill smiled bitterly. "No."

Potts moved uneasily out of his chair and walked across the room, shaking his head from side to side like a big dog trying to shake off something annoying. Finally he said, "Well, that gets rid of Charlie Beach."

Bill said, "I assume that Beach had something on Leo Murray's murderer which he was going to tell me tonight. So Charlie was wiped out."

Potts looked at him skeptically. "What else do you assume?"

Bill very deliberately opened a fresh pack of cigarettes. "That the murderer doesn't know Charlie didn't get a chance to say anything."

"So what?"

"So maybe I'm next on his list."

"So what?" Potts looked as if that were a matter of complete indifference to him.

"So I'd like to find that guy before he finds me."

"You wouldn't rather I'd put you away where he couldn't get to you?"

"No I wouldn't. I'd rather you'd let me go look for him."

Potts was considering his imaginary object on the ceiling. "All right, go ahead. See how long you can keep out of the hands of the cops this time."

Bill got up quickly and reached for his hat. "Thanks," he said.

Potts stopped him at the door with a quiet question, "Anybody know you was going to meet Charlie Beach tonight?"

"No—yes."

"Who?"

"Ruth Murray."

"Oh."

"She didn't know where or just when. I left her at ten o'clock."

"Where?"

"At Seventy-second Street and Riverside Drive. On top of a bus."

"So you've taken to riding on top of a bus. Well isn't that ducky."

Bill was gone before he had finished.

He got out of his cab a block away from Nick Finley's place on Central Park South. He made sure that he wasn't being followed and walked the rest of the way. Finley opened his door cautiously.

"Oh—it's you!"

"Who'd you think it was—the cops?"

Finley locked and bolted the door.

"What's the matter, Nick? You look terrible."

"What kept you so long?"

"Kept me?"

"I been ringing you at the Chicopee since six o'clock. It was important. What d'ya think I'm paying you three hundred a week for?"

"I thought I told you." Bill poured himself a drink. "What did you want, Nick?"

"I'm in a helluva fix. I'm being blackmailed!"

Bill laughed out loud.

"What's so funny?" Finley shouted.

"I'm sorry, Nick. But just the idea of *you* being blackmailed—" His face staightened. "Is it Happy Vorhaus?"

Nick's jaw dropped. "How did you know?" Fear swept over his face, taking all the blood with it. "Has he started

talking? I was with him all the time after I saw Leo and now he wants ten thousand dollars, says he'll go to the cops and say I threatened to kill Leo and that he wasn't with me the time Leo was killed. Something's gotta be done, Bill."

Bill put down his glass. "Is that all to the story?"

"So help me, Bill." Finley's face was covered with beads of perspiration. "Bill, you gotta get me out of this. Go down and see Happy. Talk hard-boiled to him. You used to be a dick. You know how to handle mugs. I'll give you a grand if you get rid of him. He lives at three hundred-ten West Twentieth Street. Maybe you can scare him off."

"I'll try." Bill drained his glass. "Only it'll cost you five grand."

"Five grand!"

"Happy wants ten. You give me five. That's settling for fifty cents on the dollar."

"Okay. I'll do it. But you got to get him off my neck for good."

Bill held out his hand, but not to shake.

Finley said, "You have to have the dough right now?"

"Yes."

"You don't trust me?" Finley looked hurt.

"Sure, I trust you, Nick. Only I work better when I'm well oiled."

"I suppose you want cash."

"You guessed it." Nick turned away to get the money. "And I'd like the use of that service-type revolver you had here to help scare him."

NICK returned with five one-thousand-dollar bills in his hand. "I'm not giving you a gun, Bill. If anything happened it'd be traced to me."

"Have you still got it?"

Nick ignored the question. "I'm not giving you a gun. Now what if Happy doesn't scare?"

Bill got up and took the money from his hand. "I'll return forty-five hundred. The other five is a service charge." He pocketed the money. "By the way, Nick, Charlie Beach was murdered an hour or so ago. He was killed by a service-type revolver."

Nick's face flushed, then blanched. *"Charlie!"*

"Yes."

Finley took off his glasses and wiped them with trembling hands. "This is terrible," he whispered.

"Yes, I figured that's what you'd think." Bill went out.

Nick stood still until he heard the elevator descending. Then he went to the telephone and dialed a Chelsea number. "Hello . . . Call Mr. Vorhaus to the phone." He waited. "Happy? . . . This is Finley. . . . Yeah. I made up my mind to come through. I'm sending Benedict with ten grand for you. . . . Yeah, ten grand. And that's all you get from me. . . . Okay." He hung up. He wiped his brow, muttering, and poured himself a drink.

Bill took a cab to the Chicopee. He told the driver to wait. He went upstairs and shoved the five bills under a corner of the carpet in his living room. Then he went down and gave the driver Happy's address. He arrived at the shabby Chelsea tenement at one o'clock. He climbed the four flights to Happy's grimy flat and was a little surprised to observe that Happy was not surprised to see him.

Happy asked him to sit down and pushed over a half-empty bottle of rye. "Drink?"

"Thanks, I don't care for rye. I got the money for you."

Happy nodded.

"Who killed Leo Murray?"

Happy looked surprised.

Bill thought he was trying to be funny. "I don't have time to waste, Happy. You tell me who murdered Leo and I give you five grand."

"Ya just gonna give me *five* grand?"

Bill smiled. "Sure. That's what we agreed."

Happy rubbed his chin speculatively without taking his eyes off Bill. He got

up and went to the window and looked out at the street.

"Well?" said Bill.

Happy turned. "Why do you want to double-cross me, Bill? I t'ought you was smart but you're a dope. I know Finley sent you down here with ten grand—not five. To buy me off him, see? Not to find out what I know about the Murray knifer."

"Finley call you?"

"Sure. Ya think he's a dope like you?"

"Happy, I'm going to ask you a question." Bill watched Happy's right hand. "Did you kill Charlie Beach with your own gun or with Finley's service-type revolver?"

"You're talking through your hat, Bill. I didn't know this Beach guy."

"What do you know about Finley?"

"That he gave ya ten grand to give me."

"Why?"

"Because he loves me. Now put the ten on the table."

Bill grinned. "One minute, Happy. If your sense of sportmanship stops you from squealing on Mr. Finley let me tell *you* how it happened. You'll just have to say yes or no. Nick Finley hired you to kill Murray or to help him do it. You did. You got paid for it.

"Now you're blackmailing him for more, and you were planning to hijack me and Ruth Murray. You sent her the John Wilkes Booth telegram to frighten us. Somehow Charlie Beach knew about your part in the murder. You had to get rid of him. You found out that he was going to meet me tonight at eleven o'clock at Shubert's Alley. I don't know how you found out, but you did.

"You killed him with a thirty-eight service type revolver. The cops know that already. What they don't know is that I saw a rod like that up in Finley's apartment. I asked him for it tonight. He didn't have it. My guess is it's here. What do you say, Happy?"

Happy laughed out loud. "You're a dope, Bill, a twenty-one-jewel dope."

"What's wrong with the picture?"

Happy opened a dresser drawer and took out a service-type gun. "You're right about my sending that telegram and here's Finley's gun. But I got an alibi not even you can break. Ya know what? At eleven o'clock, when I'm supposed to be slippin' it to this Beach guy—" He fished in the pocket of his jacket.

"What's your alibi?"

HAPPY brought out a piece of paper and shoved it in Bill's face. "A ticket for passing a red light. Got it right down here at Twenty-third Street. The time is marked on it. Now you dumb cluck, gimme my ten grand and get the hell out of here." He aimed the gun at Bill.

"I don't have the money."

Happy's round red face did not change its pleasant expression, which only became more fixed.

"I left it home," Bill said, then something terrific hit him. Happy had slammed the gun down on his head. Bill tried to duck but it hit him again. He fell to the floor.

Happy turned Bill over on his back and dug quickly through his pockets. There was no money in them but small change and the few bills in his wallet. Happy took those. He gathered a few clothes in a handbag and left the flat, locking the door behind him.

About two o'clock Ruth got tired of waiting for Bill. She went downstairs to get a morning paper and a package of cigarettes. The headlines in the paper made her forget the cigarettes.

CHARLIE BEACH, MURRAY MURDER SUSPECT KILLED
THEATRE CROWD HYSTERICAL AS ASSAILANT ESCAPES

Charlie Beach, 26, promising young playwright, was mysteriously shot and killed in front of the Booth Theatre, 45th Street West of Broadway, as the audience was leaving the theatre.

Lieutenant Potts in charge of the Murray case revealed that Beach had been

one of the suspects in the unsolved murder of Leo Murray, noted actor and producer.

With Beach at the time was William Benedict, press-agent of the late Leo Murray, and well-known Broadwayite. Benedict was arrested on the spot by Traffic Patrolman Nealy who . . .

Ruth, reading the paper, was in the elevator when she changed her mind. She asked the operator to take her down again, went out, got into a cab and told the driver to take her to the 52nd Street Police Station.

At the sergeant's desk she brushed aside a couple of drunks and asked, "Where's Bill Benedict?"

The sergeant, more absorbed in the looks of the questioner than her question, repeated, "Benedict?"

"Yes, the man arrested at the Beach murder."

The sergeant shook his head. "No arrest was made, Lady."

She shoved the paper under his nose.

He took his eyes from her long enough to look at it. "Nope, Lady, you shouldn't believe what you read in the paper. No arrest was made. Benedict left here a couple hours ago. Are you the wife?"

"No. Is Lieutenant Potts here?"

"Nope. Anything I can do for you?"

"Where is Lieutenant Potts?"

"Gone home."

"What's he doing at home when—"

"Now, lady, can't a cop even have a private life? But I'm sure he'll want to see *you*, so I'll tell you he ain't gone to Brooklyn. He's staying at his room in the New Yorker."

At the hotel she called Potts' room. "This is Ruth Murray. It's about Mr. Benedict."

"Come up," he said and met her at the door looking huger than ever in a flamboyant dressing gown.

He shoved a chair forward for her. "What about Benedict?"

She didn't sit down. "Where is he?"

"I don't know."

"I don't believe you."

She started for the door but he stopped her. "When were you expecting him?"

"He said he would come to my place about midnight," she said.

"Do you know about Beach?"

"I just read it in the paper."

Potts said, "I let Bill go about midnight."

"He hasn't come yet—or called."

"Did you think you'd find him under my bed?"

Ruth's eyes were inscrutable, her lips silent.

"Or did ya come to have a crystal-gazing party with me?"

"It's almost three o'clock. Someone may have got him."

"I see. You love that guy."

"What if I do?" she said quietly.

"I thought you were going to help me. Suppose he killed your brother? Right now he's the only suspect left who hasn't some kind of an alibi."

"I don't care. I love Bill. I know he didn't do it."

"Who do you think did?"

"Why ask *me?* I don't know—and I don't care any more. All I want now is to get Bill out of that mess and forget it. I wish we could all forget it. You too."

"It's my business not to forget it and bring the criminal to justice."

"Suppose Charlie Beach did it."

"Even so. Who did it to Charlie Beach?"

Ruth said nothing.

His eyes softened a little. "I'll send someone out to look for Bill. But you've no reason to be worried. He's probably got his dates mixed. You know how Bill is with women. He'll get to *you* tomorrow. Go home and get some sleep. I'll tell Bill ya were hot and bothered about him."

"Please don't."

"So I won't tell him," said Potts, still smiling. "Good night."

He closed the door, took off his dressing gown and got into bed. But he hadn't any more than turned off the light when he turned it on again, got out of bed and looked for his notebook

and pencil. He opened the little black book at W and read the last note he had made:

Women are like men in one way—maybe the only way—they are more likely to fall for what's dangerous than what's safe.

He thought a moment, moistening the stubby pencil, and then merely wrote *Check* under that note.

CHAPTER X

WHEN Bill came to, in Vorhaus' flat he battered down the door. The disturbance brought a policeman and he was arrested and jailed in that precinct, so far removed from Times Square that Bill Benedict was quite unknown there. It was well into the morning before he succeeded in persuading a skeptical desk sergeant to call Lieutenant Potts instead of sending him to the Magistrate's Court.

When Potts arrived Bill was pacing his cell with a splitting headache. The bloody bandage on his head made him look like a captured brigand. "New York has the dumbest police department in America," he declared with conviction.

"Ya seem to be attached to it. Ya didn't stay out of our hands long this time." Potts seemed amused. "Arrested for jaywalking?"

"The charge is drunk and disorderly conduct," said Bill not at all amused.

"I hope the cops didn't give you that head."

"It was Happy Vorhaus and you'd better get your men busy looking for him. He may be able to tell us something about the Murray case and then again he may not."

"That's encouraging. When did ya see him?"

"Last night."

"This is a helluva time to let me know."

"I tried to explain to your cops but they wouldn't listen."

Potts' face reddened and he yelled his reproof and orders to the sergeant. "Now, Bill, tell me *all*."

Bill groaned and held his head. "I'm sick. Get me a doctor. My head feels like a balloon."

Potts got a police surgeon. He ordered Bill to bed with icebags. "You came close to a class-B Concussion. You really got hit. Here's a sedative to take —one every four hours—until the pain goes away." He handed Bill a small box.

Bill said to Potts, "I'd be obliged if you'd let me go home."

Potts said, "I'll take you there. Ya can tell me what happened on the way."

In the cab, Bill said, "Night before last Happy offered to tell me who murdered Leo for five grand. Last night I went to see him to get the dope."

"Did you have the five grand?"

"Of course not—but he thought I did and he tried to double-cross me into getting the money without spilling, so I told him off. As a result I got beat up. And that's all I know. Maybe he was bluffing."

Potts was staring up at his imaginary object on the roof of the cab. "You're a liar, Bill. Ya mean that's all ya want me to know."

"Have it your way. My head hurts too much for an argument."

"I'm gonna find Happy Vorhaus and if he lets on that you know more than you say you're never gonna get your license back."

But in Bill's apartment he helped Bill undress and get into bed. He gave Bill one of the sleeping powders from the box. He dissolved it in a glass of water. It was colorless and tasteless but had a faintly pungent odor.

While Potts was in the kitchenette filling the ice-bag Bill called Nick Finly's office. His secretary said he was out of town. When Potts came in and

was putting the ice-bag on his head Bill picked up the phone again and called Ruth and told her how he'd been hurt.

She said, "I'm coming down."

Bill said, "You don't want to come here again, Ruth."

She said, "What d'you think I am, a baby? I'll be there right away."

When he hung up Potts asked, "What did she say?"

"She's not a baby."

"That's a game girl, all right. I'll stay with you till she comes."

She came in, laden with bags of fruit and sandwiches. She invited Potts to have a bit of lunch with them.

"No thanks, three's a crowd," he said with a twinkle. "And by the way I didn't tell him what you didn't want me to tell him."

"What's that?" asked Bill.

RUTH looked steadily at Potts and said to Bill, "I'll tell you later."

She went with Potts into the living room.

"That's a nice new rug you got in here," Potts called back to Bill.

"I'm going to sue the city for taking the other one," said Bill.

"When I find out who spoiled it you can sue *him*," answered Potts. To Ruth he said, "Don't let him get out of this place until I say so. Otherwise I don't take no responsibility."

"I'll keep him here." She closed the door behind him.

She went to the kitchenette and arranged the food on a tray with two tall drinks that she stirred with swizzle sticks. When she went back into the bedroom Bill said:

"That looks nice. But first tell me what Potts didn't tell me."

She put down the tray and stood looking at him, "That I love you, Bill."

He drew her down to him. After awhile he said, "We'll be married by a magistrate—"

"If you insist," she interpolated.

"—and have a wedding breakfast at Charles'. For our honeymoon we'll take a streamlined subway to Kew Gardens and find a little house with a refrigerator and a bed. That's all you really need in a house—and that's all I think we can get for five thousand dollars, which is all I have."

"When is this to be?"

"As soon as this case is cracked."

"Can't we forget this case, Bill?" She sat up and stirred the ice in her glass with the swizzle stick.

"Of course not."

"Leo is dead. We can't go on looking the rest of our lives. It must have been Charlie Beach."

"Charlie wasn't tall enough. Potts proved it had to be a tall man."

"It could have been Charlie." She hesitated. "I can prove it." She stood up. "Sit up and bend over," she said.

Looking puzzled, he sat up on the edge of the bed and bent over. She jabbed him with the swizzle stick high up on his back.

He looked up and said, "Hit me again."

"Looks like I'm marrying a masochist." She jabbed him again.

"Looks like you're right. If Leo was bending down it need not have been someone tall. It need not have been anyone taller than you."

Ruth said, "That's right. It could have been Charlie Beach."

"Get Potts on the phone," said Bill.

"Why bother Potts now? Let's forget it for a while."

"All right, sweet. Let's forget it." He drew her down to him.

After awhile she said, "Now, Bill, will you please stop making believe you're Sherlock Holmes. Leave this business to Potts from here on."

"Yes, darling." He yawned. "That powder's taking effect. I'm going to sleep for a week. You go on home. When I wake up I'll be a new man. I'll come and marry you. Lucky we got that license, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is." She leaned down and kissed him.

He smiled, turned over and closed

his eyes and in a moment was sleeping like a child.

She stood looking at him—and because there was no one to see it, love and envy shone clear in her grey-green eyes.

She picked up the box of sleeping powders. It said *Aconite. A sedative. Danger! Poisonous in large doses.* She slipped it into her handbag before she put on her hat and went out.

BILL woke toward evening, refreshed. The apartment doorbell was ringing. He got out of bed and went to open it.

Ricky Linton was standing there. "I hope I'm not disturbing you."

Bill couldn't return the politeness. "I've slept all I want. What's on your mind?"

"It's something I'd like to discuss with you. May I come in?"

Bill led him into the living room and they sat down on the couch.

"I've come upon something that may point to the murderer of Leo Murray," said Linton.

"You too? I thought you didn't want to be involved in that sordid business. I got the impression you didn't relish having anything to do with the police."

"The stupid police are making it necessary for me to do so. Lady Lawrence and I have reservations to sail next week. They say we cannot go until this matter is cleared up."

"Now that's just too bad, isn't it." Bill was not at all sympathetic.

"But that isn't what I came to tell you. I came to tell you that Frank Boley, Leo Murray's manager, has been robbing Mr. Murray for quite some time."

"I'm sure I've given you no reason to believe I'd take your word for anything as against Frank Boley's."

Linton took some papers from his pocket. "In connection with the transfer of the business to Finley I've been going over the books. On this show alone I find a discrepancy of almost three thousand dollars between his total production cost and the sum of the actual charges."

"It's just possible your addition is not so good."

"All right, you needn't believe me. Look at the books. For example he charged us for five more stagehands than we have. His prop account alone had a discrepancy of almost a thousand dollars. I don't know how much he's taken from Murray before this show."

"Have you talked to Boley?"

"I've tried to reach him but can't."

"What makes you think this has anything to do with Murray's death?"

"Motive, my dear fellow, motive! Leo finds out that Boley was robbing him and threatens to expose it. Boley kills him to protect himself and perhaps kills Charlie Beach too—because Charlie knows something about it."

"Why tell *me* this?"

"Because I want the money back if there's any of it left and I thought you might be able to locate him. There would be a little something in it for you."

"And what makes you think you could get it out of him if he had it even if I could locate him?"

"I'd threaten him with exposure, of course, unless he handed it over."

"And if he did you'd expose him anyway."

"Naturally."

"Just an upright member of society who wants whatever he can lay his hands on. Well, it happens I like Frank Boley. And I don't believe he would have murdered Leo even if it meant twenty years for embezzlement."

"I take it you do not care to locate him for me."

"That's putting it mildly."

Linton reached for the telephone. "Then I suppose I'd better take this matter direct to the police." He took off the receiver and started to dial.

Bill put his hand out and stopped him. "Give me a few hours. I'll try to find Boley and get you that money—part of

it goes to Ruth Murray, you understand. If I don't find him you can take it up with the cops. I'll call you if I give up. But if I do find him and you get your dough you're to leave him in my hands."

Linton nodded.

"And listen. If you call the cops either before I give up or after I find Frank for you I'll get a warrant out for Lady Lawrence on a charge of moral turpitude and make such a fuss she won't be able to get a visa for any country and you'll have to spend your honeymoon at Niagara Falls."

He pushed Linton out, got into his clothes, took the bandages off his head and concealed its ravages as well as he could under his hat and hurried out. When he got out of the elevator downstairs a stubby little man was in the small entry, looking at the letter boxes, blocking the way out.

"I'm looking for McCleary," said the little man.

"I've never noticed any such name here," said Bill.

"Must have the wrong address," said the little man, walking with him toward the cabstand at the corner where Bill took a cab. The little man took the cab behind his.

Bill spent a fruitless hour riding around, searching for Frank Boley. He tried all the drinking holes from the Cafe Deauville to Dinty Moore's, from Jack and Charlie's to John the Swede's. No one had seen Boley. He set others searching for Frank over a wider area.

At six o'clock he called Ruth.

"How are you now?" she asked.

"I'm fine."

"Good. I'll come right down and give you some supper."

"But I'm out."

"*Bill!* You shouldn't be out!"

"I've got to. Do you know where I can reach Frank Boley?"

"No." She hesitated. "Anything wrong?"

"No." He hesitated. "But I've got to see him."

"Bill. I'd like to see you." Her voice was troubled.

"Sure. Coming right up."

SHE opened the door, and kissed him. She clung to him. "Bill, you shouldn't be out. You'll get into trouble again. I'm worried about you, terribly afraid."

He laughed and kissed her. "But, darling, the case is practically cracked. I called Potts and told him your idea about Beach and he said you're a very smart girl. But you're cracking under the strain and I don't wonder. Why don't you go out of town for a week or so? It'll be all over by then."

She looked into his face. "I won't leave you, Bill. I don't want ever to leave you. I don't want to live without you."

"Pretty serious, isn't it."

"Yes, pretty serious."

He kissed her and held her to him. "All right, then stick by me until it's over." He drew her down to the couch and leaned her head on his shoulder.

After awhile she said, "Why did you ask me about Frank Boley?"

"Linton says he has evidence that Frank's been gypping Murray Productions out of a lot of money."

She sat up. "My God, *no!* That's a lie! It's impossible! Frank wouldn't do such a thing. Leo trusted him."

Her sudden unwonted excitement was strange and puzzling to him. "That's what I thought but Linton seems to have proof."

She stared at Bill. "Are you keeping something from me? Has Frank been arrested? *Has* he?"

"No. I've been looking for him. He isn't anywhere around. I'm trying to find him to stop Linton calling in the police. I've got some friends looking now. They'll call me here if they find him. Ruth, if Frank did take that dough it may be that he is involved in the death of Leo and even of Charlie Beach. You've got to be prepared for anything."

"I'm prepared for anything, Bill."

He kissed her. "You're really a great

girl, Ruth. Now how's about a drink to soothe our nerves while we're waiting."

She went to the kitchen and started making two tall drinks when the phone rang. Bill took it. He went into the kitchen. "It's from a friend in Harlem. He has found Frank at Mattie's, next to the Savoy. Hold those drinks until I get back and make one for Frank."

Ruth said, "I'm coming with you, Bill."

"No you aren't. It may be messy."

"I'm coming with you," she insisted.

In an alley between two tenements an iron stairway led up to a door with MATTIE'S painted on it. A huge slatternly woman greeted Bill and waved an arm to a table where Boley was sitting asleep, his head on his arms.

"He's been here since close to midnight," said Mattie. "Passed out once or twice but we brung him to."

"Thanks, Mattie." Ruth followed Bill to the table. Bill nudged Boley. He grunted and slowly raised his head. He had a two-day beard, his blood-shot eyes were barely visible between the puffed lids and around the corners of his mouth was a brown crust of saliva.

He fumbled for his glass like a blind man. Then he looked up and saw Bill. His blurred vision did not take in Ruth. The glass rolled from his fingers. He leaned back in his chair, his hand automatically reaching to straighten his tie. He tried to grin.

"H'lo!"

"Hello, Frank. Where have you been?"

" 'Round. Don' know. Who wansa know? Cops?"

"No. Me and Ruth Murray."

Boley opened his eyes and saw Ruth. "Ruth!" He looked from one to the other. "*You* and Ruth."

"I'm glad we found you, Frank," said Ruth.

"Yes," said Bill. "Why did you disappear?"

"Don't bother him now, Bill." said Ruth.

"Didn' disappear," said Boley stubbornly.

"No one could find you."

"They didn' know where to look." He reached over and patted Bill's hand. "But you found me, didn' ya? Good guy, Bill. Ain't he, Ruth?"

"Come along to Ruth's place."

"Why?" He looked at Bill with sodden suspicion.

"Ricky Linton has found out that the accounts of *Hour's End* are cockeyed."

"Sure."

"You know about it?" asked Bill.

"Sure."

"You took the money, then?"

Ruth said, "Let's take him home first, Bill."

Bill said, "He'll be sober by then."

Boley shifted his eyes from Bill and tried to focus on Ruth. He shook his head to clear it of the fog and saw the signal in her eyes.

"No, I didn'," he said and looked back to Bill.

"You gypped Leo Murray out of three grand."

"Yea—sure—more than three grand."

"Why?"

He saw Ruth's warning eyes again. "Lea' me alone, will ya?"

"Why did you kill Leo?"

Boley rose from his chair and bellowed, "Get outa here! You— Get out!"

Mattie came over. "You'll have to shut him up."

Bill pulled Boley back into his chair. "Okay, you didn't kill Leo. But why did you rob him?"

Boley waved the question away.

"Listen, Frank, if you don't come with us Linton is going to set the cops on you. I think we can straighten this out for you—me and Ruth."

"You and Ruth?" He seemed puzzled by that as he tried to focus them both.

Bill called Mattie over and paid for his drinks. "There may be a little fuss while I'm taking him out."

"Okay, only don't break no chairs or anything."

"I'll pay for what's broken," said Bill. "Go and call a cab to the door."

Frank burst out laughing. "Look at

that funny little man!" He pointed to a table in a nearby alcove.

It was the stubby little man Bill had met in the entry of the Chicopee. "Hey *you*!" Bill walked over to him.

"Speaking to me?"

"What are you following me for?"

"I never saw you before."

"You were looking for McCleary in my house."

"Go away, buddy, you're tight. Pick a fellow your size."

"If I see you again, my size or no size, I'm going to bust you wide open."

The little man grinned sourly. "You won't see me."

Ruth was saying quietly to Frank, "I'm afraid we're both in a tight spot, Frank. If we don't get out, thanks for everything."

Mattie went over to Bill. "The cab's waitin'."

Boley let himself be led to the taxi without a struggle.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN they got into the foyer of Ruth's apartment Frank said, "I'm going to be sick. Take me to the bathroom."

Ruth went on into the living room while Bill opened the powder-room door and took Frank in and started to help him.

"Leave me alone, please," said Frank.

Bill went out and closed the door and went along the hall to the living room.

Potts was standing there with his coat on and his hat still in his hand. Ruth was sitting down.

Bill said, "He's pretty quick, that little man of yours."

Potts nodded his head.

"You might as well hear it now that you're here," said Bill. "Sit down."

Potts sat down.

"Linton found that Boley had been gypping Leo of a considerable amount of money. Boley has confessed that to me. What else Boley has done, I can't say yet. But I guess we'll find out."

He turned to Ruth. "In the meantime he's making a mess of your powder room. But I think it may be worth having that other mess cleared up. I could stand a drink now—make mine double. And Boley will probably want a hair of the dog that bit him. How about you, Lieutenant"

Potts shook his head. "I want to talk to Boley. I think he has something important to tell us." He looked straight at Ruth.

SHE GOT up and went into the kitchen. She finished the two drinks she had started and made a third one, a double. Then she went into her bedroom and got the box of sleeping powders she had taken from Bill's bedside.

She returned to the kitchen and divided the powders in the box between the first two drinks. She stirred them thoroughly, set them on a tray and then set Bill's double drink on it apart from the other two. She carried the tray into the living-room and set it on the table.

"This is yours, Bill," she said, pointing to the double drink.

They heard a loud groan and the noise of a body falling.

Bill got to the powder room first. Boley was on the floor, blood streaming from his throat. Bill tried to pick him up but the man was too heavy. Potts took a towel and tried to stanch the pulsing blood. But Boley was dying.

His washed-out eyes were fastened not on Bill or Potts but on Ruth, who stood in the doorway. He seemed to be trying to smile apologetically before his eyes closed and all expression faded from his face.

Bill looked up and saw something scrawled on the bathroom mirror. It was done with soap.

TELL POLICE I KILLED MURRAY AND BEACH

BOLEY

Ruth's eyes were fixed on it.

Potts said, "I guess you can forget it now." And to Bill, "Take her out of here. I'll attend to this."

Bill put his arm around Ruth and went with her into the living room. At sight of the drinks on the table he said, "Those will sure come in handy," and was reaching for one when Ruth leaned against the table. The glasses fell over and the drinks spilled down on the carpet.

Ruth covered her face with her hands and began to cry softly.

"Go and lie down," said Bill. He took out the large linen handerchief he always wore in his breast pocket and mopped up the wet place on the floor. He went into the kitchen to wring out his handkerchief at the sink. He saw the small medicine box standing there, and took it with him when he went into the bedroom.

Ruth was lying on the bed. She stared strangely at him as he sat down beside her, holding the box in one hand and his damp handkerchief in the other. They could hear Potts in the livingroom, telephoning to come for the body and bring a photographer.

"Did you take this from me?" Bill held out the box.

"Yes. I thought I might need it." Then, seeing that there was no look of suspicion in his eyes, Ruth took it from his hand.

Bill smiled and said, "Better let sleeping powders lie. It's all over now, Ruthie. Come on. Let's get out of here and forget it." He leaned over and kissed her.

He helped her up and went into the living room while she got herself together.

Potts was sitting there. "Here." He took a badge out of his pocket and handed it to Bill. "I suppose I'll have to give ya that dick's badge now that you've cracked this case."

Bill smiled. "Thanks." He folded the damp handkerchief and put it in his pocket before he took the badge and pinned it on inside his jacket.

Ruth came out of her bedroom.

"I'll have the place all tidy for you by the time you get back," said Potts.

"Thank you," she said softly.

In the street a mild evening breeze was blowing across from the Park, laden with the autumn fragrance of falling leaves.

"Let's go into the park," she said.

As they started across the street she said, "There's that grey car."

Bill looked in time to see a car go around the corner. "It's your nerves. Forget it."

They went across and walked up a shady path and sat down on a bench. Bill put his arm around her and held her tight.

After awhile she said, "Let's go away, Bill, as far away as possible, as quickly as possible."

"All right," he said. "Let's go tomorrow. You pack a little bag and come to my place about four o'clock. I'll get tickets tonight on a plane that leaves in the evening for some nice warm place, Mexico or South America. We'll get married, have dinner and fly away."

"Bill, you're wonderful!"

"I'll ask Potts to come and marry me. He's a justice of the peace. Will you do something to please me?"

"Anything, Bill."

"Wear that outfit—that grey cape with the red gloves and shoes. You were a knockout. I fell for you in that."

"I'll do anything to please you, Bill—anything."

Bill grinned. "I'll call Potts tonight. I'll tell him to come at five o'clock."

RIGHT after Bill's call, Potts went to see Henry Traube, Assistant District Attorney. He took his stubby little man along. Traube passed out some cigars and said, "I've been waiting to see you, Potts. I've read your reports."

"Mr. Traube," Potts said, "it's almost a week since Leo Murray was killed in Bill Benedict's room. Ya left the case entirely in my hands. Ya ain't

pressed me and I'm grateful for that. It's the toughest case I ever had and getting worse every day. I been playing the cards my own way. Now I gotta lay them on the table for ya."

"One minute, Lieutenant. If you don't mind I want a girl to take down what you say for the record."

Potts nodded and the D.A. rang for a stenographer. "Go ahead, Mr. Potts."

"At first I figured that Charlie Beach was a very hot prospect. He disappeared and in my experience that's as good a clue as any. Then he sends Bill Benedict—who gave ya a partial alibi—a note to meet him. Benedict goes to pick him up and Beach is knocked off. Mind ya—that was the second murder with Benedict somewhere around."

Traube looked troubled. "Are you suspecting Benedict?"

Potts waved a heavy hand. "Let me continue."

"Okay."

"That phony telegram signed John Wilkes Booth which was sent to Murray's sister was found by Benedict. Benedict again."

"He reported it to you, didn't he?"

"Sure. All the same I assign Nelson here—" he pointed to the stubby little man who was sitting in a corner, paring his nails— "to tail him. Which he does." Potts relaxed and sighed like a steam locomotive.

"Benedict finds Frank Boley, who was hardly in the picture—and all of a sudden, out of a clear sky, Boley commits suicide and leaves a confession after Benedict brings him to Ruth Murray's apartment and put him in the bathroom."

"You conclude, therefore, that Benedict killed Murray—then Beach to protect himself—and finally Boley to mislead the police?"

Potts hesitated. "No, Mr. Traube. I don't blame you for thinking that."

He cleared his throat. "*I* think Ruth Murray killed Leo Murray. Don't ask me why now because we don't have a case against her yet. But we do have a case against Bill Benedict, and they are going to be married tomorrow and will fly to South America. I got to take action."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want a warrant from your office for the arrest of Benedict on the charge of murdering Murray, Beach and Boley. I don't think Ruth Murray will let me arrest him."

Traube looked very grave. "If she *does* we will be on a spot."

"I think I know something about women. I'll stake my job on it." Potts looked very determined.

Traube smiled and said to the stenographer, "Be sure to make a note of that." He walked to the window and looked down into the street. "All right, Potts. You get the warrant."

When Bill awoke the next morning it seemed to him that he had been singing in his sleep. "This is my lucky day—" the tune was still ringing in his head. He hummed, whistled and shouted it as he shaved, got out of his pajamas, into the stinging shower, stood drying his vigorous body before the long bathroom mriror. And a fine golden fall day it was, he observed through the windows as he put on his best suit of clothes.

Then he went to empty the pockets of the suit he had worn yesterday. Having transferred the things from the pants pocket—the loose change, the keys, the wallet—he took from the pockets of the jacket the bill-fold, the cigarettes—and the soiled handkerchief with which he had mopped up the spilled liquor from Ruth's carpet. He crumpled it in his hand and was going to toss it into the laundry bag when two things stopped him.

The linen seemed to be disintegrating in his hand; and a familiar faintly-pungent odor came from it. He pulled at it and it came apart as if its fiber had been eaten by acid.

He held it to his nose and in a flash he saw himself in bed, drinking the sedative Potts had fixed for him and

then in Ruth's kitchen, wringing out the handkerchief and noticing the box and then in her bedroom, asking her about it . . . "I thought I might need it."

His mouth went dry.

He put down the handkerchief and went to pour himself a drink and sat down with it but a tumult of things kept running through his head and he forgot to drink it. After awhile he got up and finished dressing.

He picked up the handkerchief and smelled it again and got an envelope and was putting the handkerchief in it when the telephone rang. He reached for it but withdrew his hand and waited while it rang and rang. When it stopped he put the envelope in his pocket and got his hat and went out. It was almost ten o'clock.

At ten-thirty he had left the handkerchief at a chemical laboratory.

AT ELEVEN he was in the offices of the Lionel Company, manufacturers of toy trains on East 26th Street. He talked to the vice-president, a busy man who had to be persuaded—with the aid of the badge Bill had got from Potts—that his bookkeeper should take the time right away to trace those orders charged to Leo Murray Productions.

"It will take at least an hour," said the vice-president.

"I'll be back at noon," said Bill, who suddenly realized that at least part of that feeling in the pit of his stomach was due to the fact that he hadn't had breakfast. He went out to a restaurant and ordered but he couldn't eat because he kept hearing Ruth talking. *"Can't we forget this case? It must have been Charlie Beach."*

He wished to heaven he could forget it. *"Now, Bill, please stop making believe you're Sherlock Holmes. Leave this business to Potts."* He could see her happily packing. *"You're wonderful, Bill."* He got up and paid the check and went to the telephone booth and looked up the number of the chemical laboratory, thinking, *If the handkerchief is okay, I won't go back to the Lionel Company.*

The chemist said: "Aconite . . . Oh yes, a toxic quantity."

Bill went back to the Lionel Company and they gave him the name and address to which the toys were delivered, last Christmas and on May 16th. The name wasn't Murray or Boley. The address was in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

It was half-past one when he located it—they had moved to another address since May—a simple cottage on a quiet street on the edge of town. A sweet-faced woman came to the door, wiping her hands on her apron. Bill's badge troubled her at first but he quickly reassured her, and she led him into the spotless parlor.

Her husband was at work, she said. Yes, they had a child—an adopted child. She had met the mother in the hospital—had shared a room with her—when she herself unfortunately lost her baby and was told she could have no more. The mother had called herself Mrs. Smith but she had suspected it wasn't her real name. The mother had not explained why she had to give her baby away.

No, she had no idea what had become of the mother. But on the child's birthday and at Christmas gifts came—and generous sums of money were sent regularly with unsigned notes directing that part be set aside for his future needs and education.

"He's a very bright child and he loves music. He's talented. We think he may be a musician."

As they were talking a school bus full of children stopped before the house and a little boy got down amid the clamorous good-bys of the others. The woman went to the door to meet him.

"Please don't say anything about it before him," she said.

"Of course not," said Bill.

"Mommy!" The boy was bursting with exictement. "I got a star and a

book!" He opened it to show her. "See? A is for arms." There was a picture of a child in its mother's arms. "B is for box."

"That's wonderful!" she said, taking off his coat and hat.

His hair was curly brown, his cheeks ruddy, a handsome husky little boy. Bill thought he might be anybody's little boy—until he turned to look at Bill. His eyes were grey-green.

The woman said, "Say hello to the gentleman, Leo."

In the train on the way back to town Bill felt as if he had fallen into some dreadful morass and were being drawn into it deeper and deeper. He struggled to rise from it—and listened to the whisperings of reason that rose in his brain above the hard clatter of the train.

What if she did have the bad luck to fall for some rotter? Five years ago she was just a foolish kid and had named her child for her great brother, Leo, whom she adored. Thousands of kids her age who weren't his sister adored Leo—

He kept other men away from her because he loved his little sister and, being a heel himself, he knew what heels could do—not knowing what she had been through already, not knowing that Frank Boley was robbing him to help her provide for the child.

But why would Boley do that and kill Leo when Leo found out? Was it because the child was Boley's? Then why had Boley not married her? And how had she stood by without a cry and seen her lover, the father of her child, die there on the floor with his eyes on her?

And then she had let him, Bill Benedict, make love to her and plan their marriage! She would have to be a monster!

HE SAW those inscrutable grey-green eyes, half sad, half smiling. It was a hopeless tangle. No use trying to work it out himself—he would ask her and she would tell him the truth and it would be something quite simple and forgivable and he would take her in his arms.

At Penn Station he got into a cab and gave the address of the Chicopee to the driver. He leaned back, closed his eyes and kept his mind on taking her in his arms.

The cab slowed down to make the turn from Fifth Avenue into 48th Street, and Bill, glancing out, saw the side street window of the Fifth Avenue Child's and just inside the window a waitress bending over, clearing a table, the very table at which he and Ruth had sat that fatal first night.

"Stop. I'm getting out here."

The cab stopped. He got out and went into Child's and sat down at the table. It was the same waitress.

"What will you have?" she said without looking at him.

"Just coffee. Weren't you on the night shift the beginning of the week?"

She was making out the check. "Yes. We work days one week and then one week nights. We change on Wednesdays." She tore off the check and looked at him. "Oh yes. Weren't you here at this table Monday night—with a young lady—had on a grey cape and red gloves?"

He nodded.

"Well ain't that funny. I been wondering if I'd see you again."

"Why?"

"Well, because a funny thing happened. You know she was here first, waiting for you, and she ordered a pot of coffee and when I brought it she was in the ladies' room—remember like she told you she had been sick to her stomach or something.

"Well, when I come by later and asked did she want anything else she said I hadn't given her a check though I felt sure I had—anyone's liable to make a slip once in a while and we couldn't find no check on the table, so I made one out for her and you paid it with yours when you left together, remember?"

He nodded.

"But the funny thing was that when the two cashiers—the one at this entrance and the one over there at the Fifth Avenue side—checked the checks for that night with the kitchen orders they found I made out *two* checks for that pot of coffee.

"Both had been paid—one at this cashier and the other at the Fifth Avenue—and I couldn't figure when and why your girl friend paid that first check I gave her. Funny, wasn't it. You ask her." She smiled and went to get his coffee.

When she returned Bill said, "That first check might have blown off the table and been picked up by someone else who used it instead of paying his own larger check. There are people who would do that."

"Ain't it the truth!" she said. "Say, you're good! Now why didn't *I* think of that? I just couldn't figure it out." She went off to tell it to the cashier.

Bill tried to drink the coffee but couldn't. There was a weight in his chest that had to be gotten off. He got up and paid and went out into 47th Street and walked quickly to the Chicopee.

WHEN he opened the door she was standing by the window in that slim grey dress, beautifully unadorned. Her grey cape, the red gloves and red purse were on a chair. A traveling bag stood by it. She turned eagerly as he came in, her eyes alight with anticipation. Already her face was transformed with happiness, all sadness and hardness gone.

"Where have you been all day? I tried to—" At sight of his eyes the light went out of hers. "What's happened?"

He stood still and spoke gently. "I've learned three things today, Ruth. That the liquor you spilled yesterday was poisoned—that there is a little boy named Leo with eyes like yours in Elizabeth, New Jersey—and that the first check the waitress gave you in Child's on Monday night was paid. Will you tell me the truth?"

"Yes." Her eyes were like a grey-green wall. "I—" she stopped, holding to the last precious moment of safety. "I killed Leo."

"Why?"

"I was not his sister. Leo wanted it so. It was a terrible thing to do but I couldn't help it when he calmly turned his back on me and bent down to tie his shoe, saying he was through with me. You know that saying you quoted—about a woman scorned—it's true. That little boy was ours." Her eyes lighted a little. "Is he well? Is he a nice boy?"

"He is a fine little boy. Who was the poison for?"

"For me and Frank. Frank was my friend, nothing more, Bill. Because Leo would do nothing for the boy, wouldn't give me money to send him and because Frank loved me, I told Frank about the boy—but not about Leo. Frank got the money for me."

"What about Charlie Beach?"

"He was in Child's Monday night. I didn't see him but he saw me go out. Charlie went to Frank and told him I might have done it. Frank in a rage forbid him to tell anyone—threatened to kill him if he did—got Charlie to go away. But Charlie, afraid of the police on his trail, tried to tell you.

"Frank shot him. When we brought Frank home and I saw Potts I knew that the jig was up for both of us. I poisoned his drink and mine." Her eyes filled with anguish.

"Oh Bill! You didn't think—but I can't blame you if you did. At first I tried to get Potts thinking you might have done it. I was desperate. But I fell in love with you, Bill. I didn't mean to. I knew it was a bad idea but—well, I did. I love you, Bill. You must believe that."

He looked into her eyes and saw that it was so. "I believe you, Ruth." He looked at his watch. "Potts will be here at five. If you stay here I shall have to tell him." He took from his pocket two tickets. He handed her one.

She looked at it. "Mexico City. It would have been wonderful with you." Then she looked straight at him. "Which would you rather I'd do? Stay or go?"

"Go."

"Why?" Her eyes seemed bitterly mocking. "Because I've said I love you?"

"No. Because I love you."

She almost smiled. "That's all I wanted to hear, Bill." She picked up the grey cape. He helped her on with it. She turned her head to him. "You wouldn't want to kiss me just this once more?"

He took her in his arms and forgot everything until she put him away.

"I'd better go before Potts comes." She took the red gloves and the purse, picked up her bag and went to the door.

"Good luck, Ruth." He opened the door and she went out.

He went to the window and looked down.

She came out of the entry and turned west, going toward the corner cab-stand with that movement which was more than mere walking. The sun setting in the Hudson shone red on her honey-colored hair.

A car parked across the way left the curb and moved westward, too. It was a grey car. As it came abreast of her, Ruth suddenly turned and ran out into the street directly in its path.

WHEN Bill got down there a crowd had gathered and the hulking man from the car was protesting, "I couldn't get out of her way."

She was dead—her grey-green eyes closed forever, her pale smooth face at peace like the marble mask of the girl they fished out of the Seine in Paris—her lips almost smiling, as when he had told her, "Because I love you."

A police-car pulled up. It was Potts. "How did it happen?" Potts asked the hulking man.

"It was an accident," said Bill. "I saw it from my window. She was cutting across the street in a hurry to get to my place."

The hulking man said nothing. He looked curiously at Bill. So did Potts.

Bill looked as if he believed it.

THE SLEEK BLACK CAT

(Concluded from Page 50)

She hated him. Never had she hated a man the way she now hated her husband. Toyed with her, like a cat with a mouse—and she had thought him such a fool. He had risked it that way to pin the murder attempt on her.

Now she knew why he had reacted as he had, foiled her at the climactic moment. He had probably known just how she meant to do it, right down to the weapon—and enjoyed every moment of the excitement—the danger.

A sudden hysterical cry oozed from her slack trembling mouth, turned to weird, high-pitched laughter. She was still hysterical, half-laughing, half-crying, clutching the fishing rod, when the policemen came up to get her.

One of the cops had a sense of humor. "Lady, don't carry on," he said. "You caught yourself something with that fishing rod. You caught a long one."

"A *long* one?" she said dully, not understanding.

"At least ten years long." He grinned sardonically at her. "Let's go."

A COLD NIGHT for MURDER

"You're both under arrest," Manning said

By JOHN L. BENTON

HENRY MANNING was tall, thin and gray haired. He wore rimless glasses and looked like a character actor playing a school teacher. His clothes were fairly expensive, but always quite conservative. Upon seeing him in a crowd no one was likely to give him more than a casual glance, and that suited Manning. It was far better for a detective not to be conspicuous.

"Getting cold out, Mr. Manning," said John Fuller, the room clerk at a hotel in the West 40s as Manning entered the lobby and walked up to the desk. "Guess it makes you feel you were back in Chicago instead of New York."

Manning had registered at the hotel three days ago, and given Chicago as his home address. So far as Fuller or anyone else in the hotel knew, he had come east on a business trip. Manning was working on a special case, and at such times he had his own methods of procedure.

"It is quite chilly, Mr. Fuller," Manning said in his dry voice. "Though I have known colder weather."

Fuller reached into the rack behind the desk and handed Manning the key to Room 624 and a letter. In the room clerk's estimation Henry Manning was a pretty dull individual. One of those people who grow old before their time and never seem to have any fun out of life.

"Thank you," Manning said as he took the key and letter and thrust them into an inside pocket. "Have you seen Mr. Brookfield around?"

"He just went up to his room a little while ago," Fuller said. "Said he wasn't feeling well and was going to lie down for awhile."

"Since his room is just across the hall from mine, I'll see if I can do anything for him when I go up," Manning said. "I wouldn't want anything to happen to Mr. Brookfield."

Fuller stared at the tall man in the gray soft hat and the dark gray overcoat as Manning strolled toward the elevators. It was the first time that 624 had even sounded human in the room clerk's estimation.

The Odd Case of the Corpse in the Hotel Room

"Maybe he's not as much of a cold fish as I thought," Fuller muttered.

Manning took an elevator up to the sixth floor. There were other passengers in the car. Save to name their floors, no one said anything. Manning was the only one who got out at the sixth floor.

A TALL dark haired man was waiting for an elevator that was going down. Manning had seen the man around the hotel, but didn't know his name. As Manning walked on along the corridor a descending elevator stopped and the dark haired man got into the car.

Manning reached the door of his hotel room. He hesitated as he glanced at the closed door of 623 directly across the hall. Then he dropped his key into his pocket and walked over and knocked on the door of 623. There was no answer from the room beyond the door.

"Mr. Brookfield?" Manning called. "It is Henry Manning. Is there anything I can do for you? I heard you were ill."

Still the silence, and there was something about it that made Manning uneasy. He frowned as he saw the room key of 623 was hanging in the lock on the outside of the door. He hesitated a moment and then turned the knob and thrust the door open.

The lights were burning in the room, and there was a man lying on the bed, a white spread drawn up over him so that only his gray head was visible. He appeared to be asleep.

Manning stepped into the room, closing the door silently behind him. He walked over to the bed. As he stared at the face of Robert Brookfield, there was little doubt in Manning's mind that he was looking at a dead man.

Carefully Manning drew back the spread. Brookfield was fully dressed, and the coat of his dark blue double breasted suit was buttoned across his chest. Manning unbuttoned the coat. There was very little blood on the soft white shirt front from the wound over the heart.

"Murder!" Manning said softly. "And very neatly done, with some sharp weapon like an ice pick, or at least that shape."

He stood erectly and turned away from the bed as the door of the room opened and a big man stood there staring in. A man with a big blank face. He wore a soft gray hat with the brim turned up all the way around so that it made him look a bit silly. His overcoat was also gray.

"I'm Arthur Small, the house detective," the big man said. "Is there anything wrong here?"

"Mr. Brookfield has been murdered," Manning said quietly. "I just found out about it."

"Murdered!" Small stepped into the room, closing the door behind him. "Who are you?"

"Henry Manning. I'm a guest here."

Small walked over to the bed and stared at the dead man. Then he glanced at Manning and frowned.

"Go ahead," Manning said dryly. "I'm waiting."

"Waiting for what?" Small asked.

"For you to accuse me of the crime," Manning said.

"Why should I?" Small shrugged his shoulders. "I left my crystal ball home tonight. I don't know whether you killed him or not. If you did, you would be a sap to admit it."

Manning quickly changed his first impression of Arthur Small. The big man had seemed like the blustering type, but apparently he had brains and knew his way around. Manning decided that Small was a smooth and perhaps dangerous individual.

"Fuller, the night clerk, told me that Mr. Brookfield here had gone up to his room as he wasn't feeling well," Manning said. "I knew Brookfield casually the way one hotel guest sometimes knows another. So when I came up I decided to ask Brookfield if there was anything I could do for him. When

he didn't answer my knock, I found the door unlocked, came in here and found the body."

"A bit pat, but good," Small said, staring at the corpse. "Stabbed in the heart. Any ideas as to the motive, Mr. Manning?"

"I have," Manning said. "A hundred thousand dollars in cash."

"A nice, neat round sum." Small pushed his hat back on his head and looked like a stout comedian about to go into his act. "Why was Brookfield carrying that much money around?"

"Unfortunately, I'm not certain that he was," Manning said. "I'm just guessing. Two weeks ago a man named Ranson Blake, a paying teller, in one of the big banks here in town, suddenly disappeared, and a hundred thousand dollars of the bank's money vanished at the same time."

"And Robert Brookfield answers the description of Ranson Blake?" Small asked.

"Enough for him to have been a possible suspect," Manning said. "Blake had a mustache, Brookfield hasn't. But the rest of the description is pretty much the same. Height, build, weight and all the rest of it."

"No purple sea serpent tattooed on the left wrist of both men?" Small asked.

MANNING almost smiled, and he looked like a faintly amused horse. "Unfortunately, no. And Brookfield seemed too well established to be arrested on suspicion."

"What are you, a Federal investigator?" Small asked.

"No, just a city detective," Manning said. "Assigned to the job of trying to prove that Brookfield was actually Ranson Blake."

"Nice tough job," Small said. "The things some men will do to make a living. But I'm a cautious soul and seldom believe all I hear. Would you mind showing me your badge?"

"Not at all." Manning drew a small leather case from his pocket and displayed his shield. "I like to get things straight, too. How did you happen to open the door and walk in here a few minutes ago without knocking?"

"Was walking along the hall, saw the key hanging in the lock of the door and decided I had better take a look into the room," Small said. "Sometimes guests go off and leave their key in the lock, then the hotel gets blamed if some petty thief steals the guests' stuff." The stout man frowned. "What happens now? Do we send for Homicide?"

"Not yet," said Manning. "Suppose that Brookfield's killer failed to find the hundred thousand dollars after the murder was committed."

"It probably would have made the killer very unhappy," Small said. "I know the old gag about the boy who found the mule by thinking where he would go if he were a mule, and going there. But what would a man do who couldn't find a hundred thousand dollars?"

"Doubtlessly keep on looking," said Manning. A thought struck him. "Do you happen to know a tall, dark haired man about thirty-five? He has a white scar just over his left eyebrow. Apparently he is a guest here."

"Sounds like a man named Forrest Nelson," Small said. "He has the room next to this one—Six-Twenty-One. Don't know much about him, but suspect he is a Government man of some sort."

"He also could be the man who killed Brookfield," Manning said dryly. "I think we had better go down to the lobby and tell the night clerk what happened."

"Good idea," said Small. "We might find Nelson down there and get a chance to ask him a few questions."

Manning covered the dead man with the spread, then followed Small out of the room. Small locked the door from the outside and thrust the key into his pocket. They silently walked along the hall to the elevators. Manning rang

the bell and in a few moments a car took them down to the lobby.

The tall, dark haired man whom Manning had seen in the sixth floor hall just a few moments before he found the body, was leaving the hotel desk carrying a traveling bag.

"That's Forrest Nelson," Small said as he spied the tall man. "Looks like he is leaving. I'd better stop him."

"Go ahead," said Manning. "Hold him until I get there. I'll be with you in a minute. Just want to ask Fuller a couple of questions."

AS NELSON stepped out through the entrance doors of the hotel Small hurried after him. Manning walked over to the desk. The desk clerk looked at him.

"Did you see Mr. Brookfield?" Fuller asked. "Is he all right?"

"No, he isn't," Manning said. "He has been murdered."

"Murdered?" There was an expression of horror on the clerk's face. "Who—how—what happened?"

"Tell you all about it later." Manning displayed his shield. "I'm in charge of the case. Did Forrest Nelson just check out?"

"He did," said Fuller. "And seemed to be in a hurry, too. He got the bag he left in the checkroom all the time he has been here but he isn't even wearing his overcoat and it is a cold night out."

"I know," said Manning. "Good thing your house detective went after Nelson to stop him from getting away."

"Our what?" demanded Fuller. "We haven't any house detective in this hotel."

"I suspected that," Manning said. "But that stout man who just came downstairs with me said his name was Arthur Small and that he was the house detective here."

"He's lying," snapped Fuller. "He is one of the guests here. Six-thirty-eight."

"That's all I wanted to know," said Manning, hurrying across the lobby toward the entrance door.

WHEN he reached the sidewalk, he saw a smart looking coupe drawn up to the curb. The rumble seat at the rear of the car was open. Small and Nelson were just getting into the car. Manning drew his service revolver and covered the two men.

"Come back here!" Manning shouted. "You two aren't going anywhere!"

"What's the idea, Manning?" Small demanded. "I was holding Nelson for you. We were just going to sit in the car and keep warm until you showed up."

The two men circled around so that they were between Manning and the hotel entrance. He now stood with his back to the car.

"You're both under arrest," Manning said coldly, still covering them with his gun. He looked at Nelson. "You are wanted for stealing a hundred thousand dollars from the bank, and I'm willing to bet the money is in that bag you just got from the hotel check-room."

"You're crazy, Manning," Small said impatiently. "You told me that you suspected Brookfield of being Ranson Blake. Now you claim Nelson here is Blake."

"Of course I told you that I suspected Brookfield," said Manning. "If I hadn't I'm sure you would have tried to kill me up there in Brookfield's room just as the two of you murdered him when you found out he was a Federal agent who was too close on Blake's trail."

A patrol car rolled up to the curb and two officers got out. They had seen Manning standing there covering the two other men with the gun and considered it decidedly suspicious. Manning produced his shield and talked fast as they reached him.

"Good thing we figured you might be a detective," said one of the officers. "Otherwise we would have shot first and asked questions afterwards."

At Manning's orders one of the of-

ficers got the bag out of the car, opened it and found the bank money. Manning and the other patrolman were guarding Small and Nelson.

"And I got talked into this mess for a measly twenty grand," Small said disgustedly. "Even though I knew I wouldn't get away with it for long, I was sure I had you convinced I was the house detective. What gave me away, Manning?"

"Your overcoat," Manning said. "A house detective. What gave me away, and checking up, as you said you were doing when you stepped into Brookfield's room, might wear his hat but I doubt that he would be wearing a heavy overcoat like you were."

"But it is a cold night," Small protested a bit inanely.

"That's right," Manning said. "A cold night for murder!"

From the Case Files

CAN you tie these? In South Bend, Indiana, just a few years ago, a jurist convicted a chimpanzee for smoking a cigarette. At Holbrook, Scotland, a man was fined ten shillings for scolding his wife in public. In Crecy, France, a woman was sent to prison for three days for wearing her husband's pants while making repairs on a fence. And in Florence, Italy, a carter was sentenced to five days in prison for failing to cover some pictures of nudes he was moving.

RECENTLY an autoist was stopped for a traffic violation in Moultrie, Ga., and the policeman asked his name. "Scram," said the motorist, and the cop's face turned several shades of unorthodox purple and red. It took some explaining, but the motorist finally proved that his name was Joseph P. Scram.

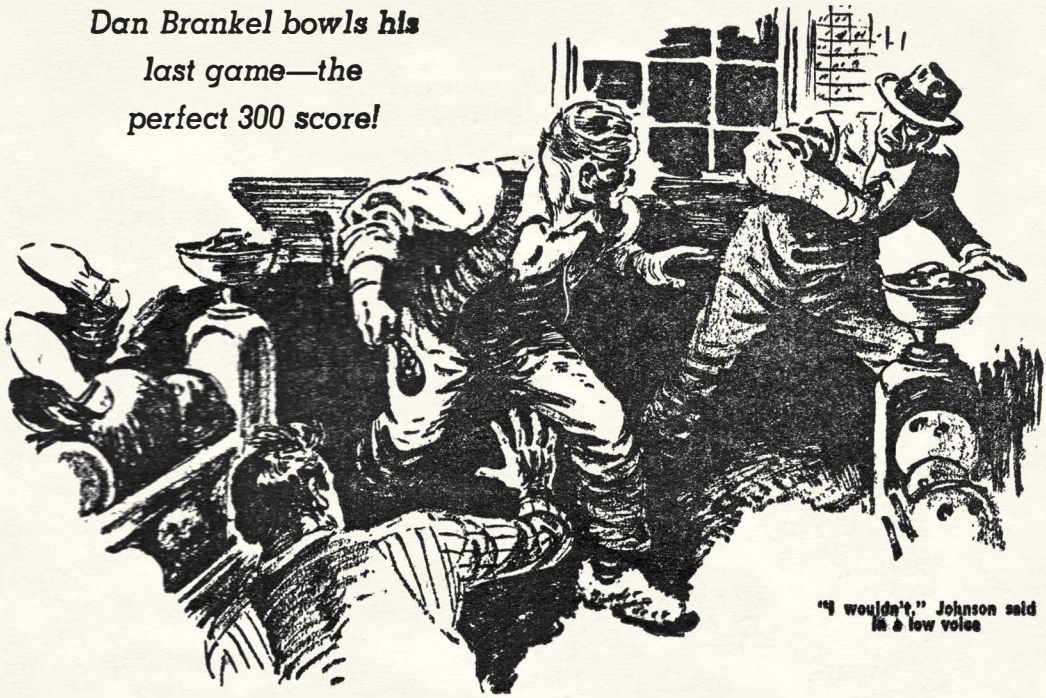
IN BIRMINGHAM, ALA., a man named Daniel Ford reported that his Ford car had been stolen. The Ford car was recovered a few days later by State Highway Patrolman Grady Ford. The next day, City Policeman D. E. Ford arrested the thief.

MAINZ, GERMANY, was the scene in 1927 of the longest prison sentence ever handed down by a court. It was imposed on a brewer found cheating on his tax returns. The court gave him 14,975 years, or one day for every mark he had held back from the government. Previous record was a term of 800 years imposed by an Australian judge on a cow thief caught with 800 stolen cows, who was given a year for every cow.

EAVESDROPPING, a crook heard a Sharon's Corners, Louisiana, householder tell some friends he always kept $10,000 in cash in his house "for emergencies." That night the crook paid a visit to the householder, and made off with the $10,000, which he later scattered angrily over the countryside. The bills were Confederate.

—*Simpson M. Ritter.*

Dan Brankel bowls his last game—the perfect 300 score!



"I wouldn't," Johnson said in a low voice

Dead on the Pin

MY NAME is Joe Desmon and I'm manager of the Wonderland Bowling Alleys on the turnpike three miles out of town. I've held the job ever since I got back from the war. The hours are sour, but I'm not kicking. I've got a little stashed away and I'm getting the experience and some day I'm going to have my own layout and hire some stupid guy to keep the crazy hours I keep.

The town needs more alleys, and so the leagues are stacked. The way it is now, they've got me working twenty-six hours a day during the season. All the time I'm yapping at the pinboys or calming down some clown full of beer or ducking the big looping passes made by the members of the Industrial Girls' League. That in addition to paying all the bills, keeping track of the cash, running the beer business, seeing that the equipment stays in shape, renting shoes and giving lessons.

So it seemed like almost too much to expect when one day about three months ago this little guy showed up and asked if I could hire him to do jobs around the place. He was edging close to fifty with the top of his head up to about my chin. He was the sort of little man you would push out of your way, but not if you looked close. There were hard, blunt bones in his face and a pair of pale blue expressionless eyes and a tight slit for a mouth. He had a thick look through the shoulders, and his arms hung almost down to his

By JOHN D. MacDONALD

knees, with big square wrists.

He was pretty well dressed, not a bum, you know, and I figured he'd be out of my salary range. I asked him how much he had to make and he said, "Whatever you can give me, kid."

"How about twenty-five a week, and I'm not kid. I'm Mr. Desmon."

"That'll be fine, Mr. Desmon. Just dandy."

"For that dough you brush down the alleys whenever they're clear, mop the floors, empty the ashtrays, check the equipment and scrub the rest rooms. And anything else I can think up."

He said mildly, "I'd like a chance to bowl a little, too."

I took a quick look at his right thumb. It had that swollen, bent-back look of a man who has done a lot of it. But I didn't see any callouses. His hands looked pink and soft.

I wasn't behind and it was a slack hour. I said, "How about a quick one?"

I had my own ball and shoes behind the counter. He picked a pair of shoes out of the rental rack and spent at least five long minutes finding a ball to suit him.

WITH my double and spare in the first three frames and his two splits and a miss, I felt pretty patronizing. When I made a strike in the fourth to make my fill on the third frame a fat 69 to his 27, I began to get bored. He had a nice hook but it was coming in too quickly.

In the fourth frame he found the pocket for one of the prettiest strikes I've ever seen. He did it again in the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth.

He paused then and said, "Mr. Desmon, do you fire people you can't beat?"

"What do you think I am?" I demanded.

"Just asking, ki— Mr. Desmon."

He then plunked across the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth strike in a row, snowing me under 237 to 202.

I said, "You've got eight in a row. Keep pitching."

He grinned for the first time. The grin came and went so fast that I almost missed it. He got the ninth, then blew the tenth and left the ball on the rack.

I kept an eye on him. He did his work and got along with the rest of the help. He got along by staying out of everybody's way. After the first month I began to throw lessons his way, giving him a cut. He had perfect style, setting the ball down so smoothly that it wouldn't dent a custard, and he was quick to pick out flaws and point them out. Having him around eased the pressure on me, but he wasn't a fellow you could chum up to.

When he bowled, it was either alone or with me, just before we closed the joint in the small hours. I began to keep a pocket score on him.

As he was leaving one night I said, "Hey, Johnson. Wait a minute."

He turned around. "What?"

"In the last ten games you've rolled, you've averaged two-twenty-one."

"So?"

"So I'd like to wangle you a spot on one of the pro leagues. You're as steady as a rock. How about it? I know an outfit that could use a new anchor man."

He walked slowly back toward me. For one funny moment he was the boss and I was a stooge working for him. He said, "Drop the idea, Desmon. I don't like it."

"But why? I should think it would please you."

"Just say that I don't like to bowl with people. Maybe I blow up under pressure. Put it any way you want, but don't go talking up my game. Understand?"

I almost said, "Yes, sir."

He walked off into the night. I shrugged and went back to the books.

All of that should have been a tipoff. I should have gotten wise, maybe, the night when Billy Carr came in. Billy has the sort of reputation that makes me wish I had the nerve to tell him not

to come back. He's young and tall and sleek, somehow like a big cat. He had two of his boys with him. He's considered locally to be a pretty hard lad. Anyway the three of them came in, got shoes, shucked off their coats, changed shoes down at the semicircular bench, ready to do some bowling.

JOHNSON was walking down the alley pushing the wide brush, wearing the lamb's wool mitts over his shoes.

I was too far away to stop it. Billy Carr grabbed a ball off the rack and rolled it down at Johnson. Johnson heard it coming. He looked around and sidestepped it, but it hit the brush and knocked it out of his hands.

He turned and walked slowly back up the middle of the alley toward where Billy stood laughing.

Between laughs, Billy said, "Did I scare you, pop?"

"You scared me plenty," Johnson said mildly. He grabbed the front of Billy's shirt and tossed him into the rack. Billy tumbled over it and landed on his shoulders. One of the hired boys reached for a sap as he moved in on Johnson. Johnson caught his wrist, ripped the sap out of his hand and belted him flush across the mouth with it. The hired boy sat down and began to spit out teeth.

The other hired boy was reaching. "I wouldn't!" Johnson said in a low voice. And the boy didn't.

Their sole remaining gesture of defiance was to throw the shoes at me as they went out.

I said to Johnson, "That wasn't smart. They might give you a bad time outside."

He gave me a look of surprise. "Those three? Grow up, ki—Mr. Desmon."

They didn't bother Johnson and they didn't come back.

Last week I woke up and there was a man sitting on a chair beside my bed. I shut my eyes hard and when I opened them again he was still there.

"Good morning, Joe," he said.

"How did you get in here? What do you want? Is this a gag?"

He handed me a picture. A double picture. Full face and profile. With numbers. "Know this man?"

"Johnson. He works for me."

"Not exactly Johnson. Dan Brankel is a better name. Wanted in five western states for armed robbery and murder. One time associate and business partner of Ma Barker. Did some work with Pretty Boy Floyd. That was a long time ago. He skipped the country with a fat bankroll. He's been where we couldn't touch him. By we, I mean the F.B.I. A while back we got a tip that he had moved. Since then we've been waiting for him to show up. We've been checking bowling alleys. That was his passion in the old days. So with your help, Joe, . . ."

I was a wreck all day. I tried to charge people for more games than they'd rolled. I cussed out the pinboys and one of my best ones quit on me. I even broke down and drank some of my own beer during business hours.

While the leagues were on, I was worse. No matter how tightly I held onto the edge of the desk, my hands still shook.

But I couldn't hold the clock back. The diehards finally pulled out, the last of them, at quarter to two. I grabbed the last pinboy and said to Johnson, "Game tonight?" I barely managed to keep the shake out of my voice.

He nodded and went to get his ball and shoes. Somehow he'd managed to buy them out of his pay. When he came back, I said, "Back in a minute. Got to check the doors."

Just the three of us were left in the place. I went to the side door, slammed it hard, then opened it silently and put the little wedge in it to hold it open.

The light controls were near my desk. I killed everything except the small light over the desk and the light on the one alley we would use. My heart was swinging from my tonsils.

Johnson popped his thumb out of the hole on the ball, lined his sights, and swung a sweet ball down the alley. It made a low drone as it rolled. Then it hooked into the pocket and the pins went down with a single smash.

The rack crashed down, and I took my first ball. Even though I had used a lot of chalk, my hands were still greasy with sweat. The ball slipped, hung on the edge all the way down and plinked off the ten pin.

Johnson said mildly, "Getting the hard one first?"

I laughed too loud and too long and stopped too abruptly. I got eight more on my second ball and Johnson marked the miss.

A nightmare game. I didn't dare turn around. I was afraid I'd see one of the men slipping silently in and my face would give me away. Johnson was bowling like a machine. I piled up misses and splits and I even threw one gutter ball. Each ball he rolled was just right. Once in the sixth frame one pin wavered and threatened to stay up, but finally it went down.

We had never talked much while bowling. I had to bite my tongue to keep from babbling to him. It might have made him suspicious.

It didn't hit me between the eyes until he marked up his eighth straight strike. And suddenly I realized, that if he kept on, I might see the first perfect game I have ever seen. It was a little bit easier then to forget the figures silently closing in.

He put in the ninth strike and the tenth. I had a miss on the ninth, for a score to that point of one twenty-one. Worst game of the past three years.

AFTER the tenth strike he said softly, "You know, this might be it. I never had one of those fat three hundred games before. I've always wanted one."

"Don't jinx yourself talking about it," I said.

He put the eleventh ball in the pocket for a clean strike. "One more," he said. The ball was trundling back up the rails when I saw the little flurry of movement down near the pin boy. That was my signal.

I said, as nonchalantly as I could, "Wait a second. Got to get cigarettes."

As I turned and walked up the stairs he took his ball off the rack, walked slowly back and chalked his fingers, pulling the towel through them.

I ran the last few steps to the desk, wiped my hand across the light panel, turning on every light in the place.

They had crept up in the darkness. They were in a half circle around him. He looked very small and old and tired standing down there.

"Okay, Dan," one of them said. "End of the line. All out. Put the ball down slowly and lay on the floor, your arms spread."

A dozen weapons were pointed at him.

In a weary voice he said, "You win. Let me heave this last ball down the alley."

Before he could get an answer, he moved over and turned to face the pins. From the angle where I stood, higher than the others, I saw his left hand flick from his belt up to his mouth. He swallowed something.

He stood for a long second, then started his stride. Halfway to the foul line his smooth stride wavered. The ball thumped hard, bounced and he went down on his face across the foul line.

He was a dead man when he hit the floor. Even I knew that. I dimly heard the hoarse shout of anger and disappointment.

But I had my eyes on the ball. It rolled with pathetic slowness. It wavered in toward the head pin, hit the head pin on the left side. The pins toppled slowly, all but the six pin. It stood without a waver. A pin rolled slowly across the alley, nudged the rebel and tumbled it off into the pit.

(Concluded on Page 145)

MAID FOR MURDER

or, SARAH CARRADINE'S CAREER

a true story by

LEO MARR

THERE is a generally accepted idea as to the world's oldest profession. But the idea may be wrong. The oldest profession may be, after all—marriage

In September of the year 1761, a journeyman carpenter by the name of Thomas Daniels was arrested in London for the murder of his wife, Sarah. The charge against Daniels maintained that

The case of the marriage that wasn't made in Heaven!

during a quarrel in their home, the carpenter did stab her and then flung her from the window. Persons in the street outside were said to have heard the unfortunate woman cry out, "Oh save me, save me!" several times before her body hurtled into the street.

Mr. Clark, the arresting constable, who was upon the scene in a matter of moments, found no knife in the bedchamber, but did find a sharp and jagged piece from a broken saucer and with this he confronted Daniels under the supposition that it was the murder weapon.

Thomas Daniels was taken to the Compter and his hearing set for September the 21st, 1761.

Then did the story of Daniels, the carpenter, and his wife Sarah become known. And if murder had indeed been committed, never did a man in this world have more provocation. Never had a man been so made the fool as had Thomas Daniels by the wife of his bosom.

It could not have been funny to Thomas Daniels. But from a safe distance of nearly two hundred years, the story is inescapably comic. And there is a certain flip audacity about Sarah Carradine which almost compels admiration, even as it must have been infuriating to her victims. . . .

Carpenter Falls for Sarah

Thomas Daniels met Sarah Carradine in the year 1757. He was then a journeyman carpenter, employed by his own father. Sarah, an unusually pretty girl, worked as a servant in a public house.

Daniels met her and fell like a ton of bricks. He went to his father.

"I love her and would marry her an she have me," he declared.

The older Daniels threw a fit. "A girl who lives in an alehouse!" he exclaimed. "I will not have it. She will not make you a fit wife! No, Thomas, your mother and I will never give our consent!"

Thomas was crushed. But not defeated. He went back and held a council of war with Sarah and her mother.

"I cannot live without Sarah," he said, "and will not. Perhaps if we were together, my father would see that we are meant to be thus and will remove his objections."

Sarah's mother was not too finicky about the legalities and, to her, the carpenter was a catch. She gave her blessing to the arrangement and forthwith hastened out and procured a lodging for the couple. Thomas Daniels then quietly removed his things from his father's house and moved in with Sarah. When the elder Daniels discovered this he was wroth indeed. There was a furious quarrel with his son and the old man sent him packing.

"Obstinate and wicked ye are!" he thundered. "Your ways are the ways of sin and nothing but evil will come of this arrangement. Mark my words!"

Headstrong Thomas paid him no attention. But he was out of a job, for the angry old man would have none of him. And Thomas on his part, was so wroth with his father for the things he said about Sarah that he was equally willing to sever their relationship. So he joined the ranks of the unemployed.

Still life was sweet with his loving Sarah, even though he tramped the streets of London looking for work. As he made the rounds he met some of his friends who had signed aboard the privateer *Britannia.*

"Come along with us, Thomas," they urged him. "It's a good berth and good pay."

Thomas signed on the *Britannia* and came home to tell Sarah. She burst into violent tears.

"It's only for six months, love," he consoled her, "and I'll make my fortune. When I come home we'll be married regular."

"But what shall I do meanwhile?" she wailed.

"Well—perhaps you should go into service again. That will keep you busy

and pass the time."

Unhappy Thomas! He could scarcely have made an unwiser choice. In service Sarah was exposed to all sorts of temptations. In modern terminology, there were more men around to make passes at her. And Sarah was never one to block a pass. In fact, having already slipped, the original barriers and fears which are a girl's strongest defenses, were down.

Under such conditions and this aggravated by her loneliness, she was in a mood to lend a willing ear to the advances of one John Jones, who had been a close friend of Thomas.

Jones made violent love to Sarah. He clinched his arguments with the fervent promise to marry her if Daniels did not return. Sarah fell from grace again.

They Get Married

Presently came Thomas Daniels home again, having been eight months upon the high seas. He went to the White Bear, where Sarah had worked and inquired for his common-law wife. Mrs. Archer, who kept the tavern, referred him to Jones.

"Aye," said Jones. "Sarah is living with her mother." He guided Daniels to an alehouse near the Bridge Foot where he found Sarah again.

But he had come home almost empty-handed, having failed to make his fortune. And marriage seemed as far away as ever. Meanwhile Daniels took a room in the same house with Jones, for this rascal, knowing the circumstances, avowed great friendship and discussed the couple's problems fervently.

"I would marry her, Thomas," he counseled. "Money or no money."

He accompanied Thomas on his visits to Sarah every evening and offered to stand up with Thomas in place of the girl's father and give the bride away. He could have given her away in quite another sense, but kept his mouth shut.

"I would marry her," Daniels said, "but we have no money."

"You have a watch," Jones suggested. "Pawn it."

Daniels agreed and Jones himself took the watch and pawned it and brought back the money. So Thomas and Sarah were at last married. They lived at first in furnished lodgings, but Sarah's mother persuaded them to move in with her at Catherine Wheel Alley, Whitechapel. This brought Sarah under her mother's guidance or protection and Thomas soon discovered that they had a common front against him.

More and more, when he came home from work, he found his wife absent. When she did pull in, much later in the evening, she was generally three sheets in the wind and sailing under full canvas. Thomas had never seen her drink like this and was bewildered by it.

"Oh, she's been to see some young lady friends of hers in Spitalfields," her mother explained. "They're high-spirited girls, you know, and probably took a drop of something against the weather."

Daniels was hardly satisfied with the explanation. He kept his eyes open and soon discovered that upon these nocturnal expeditions Sarah was usually accompanied by his dear friend Jones. He followed them one night to an alehouse and after watching them drink at a table, he confronted them and ordered his wife home.

She was drunk and cursed him roundly, but he stood his ground and ordered her sternly out. She went and then Daniels had a few choice words to say to his friend.

Two Shrews—One Man

He then followed Sarah home, where both his wife and her mother fell upon him like shrews. In the midst of the quarrel Sarah screamed that she'd had enough and ran out of the house. She was gone all night.

Next day everybody felt a little contrite about the whole thing and Daniels was easily persuaded to make up the

quarrel and be friends again. He had accumulated a little savings now and with it he proposed to buy a little shop in the Minories for Sarah, to sell pork and greens and other things.

And Sarah? "I'll be good," she promised tearfully. "And I'll never see that John Jones again."

The promise was as short lived as her first commercial venture. Daniels came home early one day and found her with Jones again. There ensued another quarrel—another patchup. He rented a house at Hare Court, Aldersgate Street, and tried another shop for his wife.

The second attempt lasted no longer than the first. She neglected the business, took up with Jones and his crowd more openly than ever and finally went off and left Daniels altogether.

The long-suffering carpenter was not cured yet. He missed her and grieved for her and when Sarah had temporarily had enough of carousing and came back with more promises of good behavior, he took her back eagerly.

He tried in every way to hold her, to keep her interested, to please her. But it is a sad truth that in any human relationship, the partner who cares the more is the whipping boy, while the other wields the power. And too much love, freely given, is too often an invitation to abuse. It was, in a larger sense, probably not Sarah's fault. She could no more help wiping her feet on Thomas than he could help being a doormat for her.

On a Sunday, trying to keep her entertained, he took her to Ilford that they might have the day together. They had dinner at the White Horse and Sarah, as was her custom, drank a great deal. When the bill came she took exception to it and half drunk, got into a violent and shrewish quarrel with the landlord.

Daniels tried to shush her, whereupon she turned upon him like a virago.

"Milksop!" she screamed. "I'll not go home with you—you're no man. I'll go with the first person who asks me—with the first man who passes by!"

She brushed Daniels aside as though he were an insect. A chaise rolled up to the door with an officer in it and Sarah went boldly up to it and asked the man if she might ride home with him.

"Gladly, my dear," smirked the officer and lifted her into the chaise.

Daniels was left standing alone. He walked home by himself and when he reached there, found, as he had expected, that Sarah had not returned. He sat up waiting for her until late, but finally gave it up and went to bed.

About two o'clock in the morning there came a violent pounding at the door. He got up and opened it and found his wife there, so drunk she could hardly stand, but held up by her mother. Resignedly, he let them in and helped the old lady put Sarah to bed. It took the two of them to handle her, for Sarah was as floppy as a rag doll.

It was shortly after that the smouldering violence came at last to a head. Thomas had gone to see Mr. Clarke, the timber merchant in St. Mary Axe, to solicit some work for the India Company. He got home about half past nine.

Sarah Is Alone, for Once

He went in the back door which was fastened only by a single latch, and up the stairs to their bedroom. It was locked from the inside. So he came down the stairs again and out into the street. There was a disturbance over in Aldersgate street and he had an uneasy fear that Sarah might be mixed up in it, for her drinking had now formed the pattern of breaking out in mob scenes. However, Sarah was not in the crowd.

Daniels stood around for awhile and then went in his back door again and up the stairs. As he climbed up, he heard his wife cough and so knew she was home. He tried the door; it was still locked. He knocked and called and knocked again, but there was no answer.

"Sarah," he called, "Sarah, I know

you are at home and I desire you will open the door. If you will not I will burst it open."

There was no answer and his temper was rising. He heaved his shoulder against the door and forced it open. At the crash Sarah jumped out of bed.

Daniels came in grumpily and began removing his coat and waistcoat.

"Sarah," he said, "What makes you use me so? You follow me wherever I go, but only to abuse me. Then you lock me out of my lodging. Why? I have never served you so."

With superb logic, Sarah flew upon him. "Dog! Scoundrel!" she panted. "I suppose you have been with some of your loose women!" She clawed at him and ripped his shirt clean down the front.

Daniels pushed her away and she nearly fell. She ran to the chimney corner and snatched up the poker, with which she tried to strike him, but Daniels wrested it away from her. She picked up several other articles to hit him with, all of which he took away from her. In the struggle, they knocked over a table and a screen and battled around the room. Sarah got hold of a brush and hit him several blows with it and Daniels grappled with her and twisted it out of her hand.

"Enough!" she cried. "I will do no more!"

Thomas got the brush away from her and gave her a smack with it and she sat down on the floor. Her shift had been torn in the struggle and in temper she ripped the whole thing from her.

Panting, Daniels sat down on the bed. He watched her hurl the torn pieces of the shift from her in a fury and tried again to placate her.

"Sarah," he said, "please don't be a silly girl. Why don't you be easy?"

With that she leaped to her feet and catching him by surprise, gave him a blow on the head with some hard object which knocked him off the edge of the bed where he had been sitting. He fell against the bedstead with his head against the folding doors.

Sarah took fright at that, having perhaps struck harder than she intended and suddenly afraid she had killed him. She ran to the window, crying, "Oh, save me, save me!"

The next moment, to Daniels' utter fright, there was a scream and she had gone through the window. In terror, he leaped up and still dazed by the double blow on the head, ran down the stairs and then, not knowing where he was going, ran up again and sat down on the bed. He was still in this position when Mr. Clarke, the constable, followed by divers citizens, came into the room and confronted him.

"Daniels," said Clarke, "you have stabbed your wife and flung her out the window!"

"No!" cried Daniels in horror. "Mr. Clarke, I have not. She threw herself out!"

Constable Finds No Blood Stains

Clarke lit a candle and made a minute search of the room. He found no bloodstains. He examined the windowsill and found the broken piece of saucer and holding it out to Daniels asked what it was.

"It is the saucer I feed my pet squirrel in," Daniels said, as though dazed.

The trial for murder of Thomas Daniels opened on September 21, 1761, as already noted. In the presentation of evidence it was brought out that the window of the Daniels' bedroom had two casements folding against each other, with flower pots in front of them.

Customarily only one of these casement windows were opened, the other being kept shut. The open portion therefore was at the most, sixteen or seventeen inches wide. For a man to pick up a violently struggling woman nearly as strong as himself, and thrust her through this small opening was a feat which could hardly have been accomplished quickly and easily. The struggles and screams of the woman would

have easily been seen and heard from the street below—the flower pot would surely have been overturned. It is conceivable that some of the panes might have been broken by her flailing arms and feet and that the broken glass would have cut its mark upon her naked body. For she had torn off her only garment and her skin would have gathered bruises, scratches or marks from that last vicious struggle.

But there were no such marks upon Sarah Daniel's lovely and faithless body—none but the last bruise of her final fall.

Justice moved swiftly in this case. By royal authority, Thomas Daniels was declared innocent of the charge of murdering his wife and was acquitted.

And so ended his experiment in marriage and the career of his astonishing wife Sarah.

"You Got Pictures, Sure—But Why Didn't You Report the Crime?"

IT WAS a sensational break. John Quincy, former newspaper man, now television newsreel man, suddenly ran into a gang killing on his way to work—and got a complete film record of the proceedings. It was terrific—the biggest "extra" in years. Sure it was, except for one thing—the pictures were snatched before they could be developed! And now Police Lieutenant Walter Kowski was telling Quincy the facts of life.

"You could have called me," said Kowski. "Then maybe we'd have those films. You realize the kind of evidence they'd make? Now, you've gone and spoiled the whole case against those hoods. You've got to remember all you can about that killing, Quincy, I want descriptions!"

"I'm sorry," said Quincy. "I just didn't notice anything. I was trying to take a picture at the time. There were bullets flying around—"

"Yeah," said Kowski. "Well, you're in a spot now. You're my little bait-goat, pal. The killers know you were a witness to the thing. They might be interested in making sure you'll never testify. . . ."

In trouble with both police and gangdom, there's only one course for John Quincy to take! Follow him as he turns sleuth and tackles the case himself in—

SIX MINUTES OF MURDER

A Complete Book-Length Mystery Novel

By WALT SHELDON

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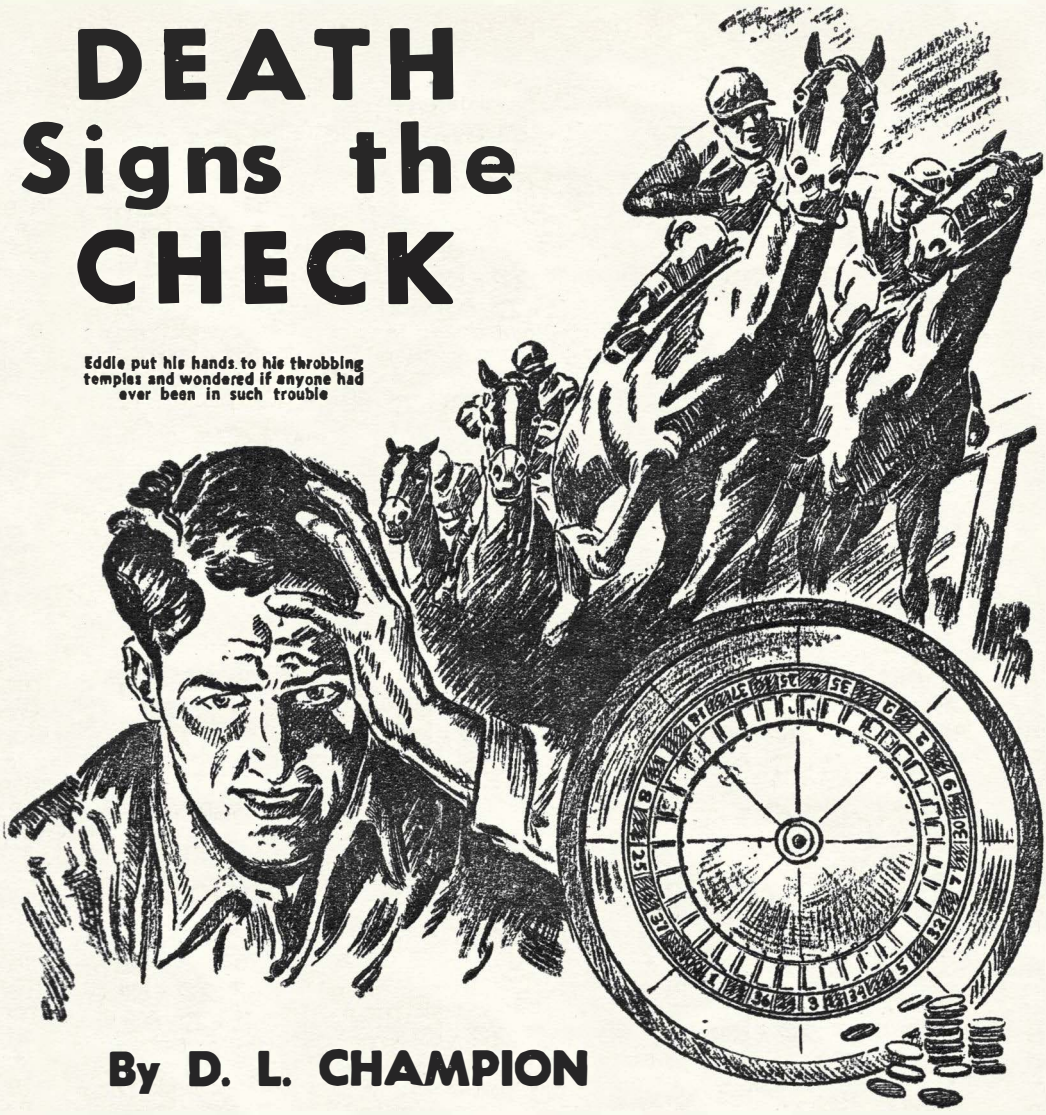
DEATH Signs the CHECK



Eddie put his hands to his throbbing temples and wondered if anyone had ever been in such trouble

By D. L. CHAMPION

ON WEDNESDAY afternoon at 3:45—just half an hour before post time for the fourth race at Atlantic City—Eddie Mossmere was an up and coming young man. At least according to his standards.

Now, Eddie's standards were not those of a scoutmaster any more than his morals were those of your Great-Aunt Harriet in Dubuque, Iowa. However, as he considered his present condition, Eddie Mossmere became pleased with himself to the point of smugness.

He was twenty-seven years old. There was a cold fourteen hundred dollars in his bank account and he had never done an honest hour's work in his life. Furthermore, Echnor had noticed him, had smiled upon him and been friendly of late. And to a guy with Eddie's am-

$1400 Starts a Race—With the Grim Reaper!

bition, Echnor was important.

For Echnor owned the north side of the town—at least he owned that section of it which was devoted to racketeering, gambling and other assorted vices. If a young guy looking for the main chance had an in with Echnor, he was well on the way up.

Eddie Mossmere sat on the chromium bar stool and sipped his drink meditatively. In the large room to the right of the bar the little roulette balls clicked and the dice rattled against the wooden railing of the green baize table.

On Eddie's left a radio blared results and an anxious group stood about a shirt-sleeved man who sat at a desk littered with bank notes.

Two men stood next to Eddie at the bar. They were drinking beer and conversing in hoarse whispers. One of them, a fat man in a flannel suit said, "Blue Fedora. The fourth at Atlantic. It's a shoo-in. Pay at least twenty to one."

His companion nodded, secretly and solemnly, as if he had just been told the key explanation of the atomic bomb. Eddie lifted his glass. His thin, tight lips curled in a sneering smile.

Horse players were suckers. Any wise guy knew you couldn't beat the book's percentage of seventeen points. You couldn't tout Eddie a horse even with an affidavit from the mare who'd dammed him. He turned his head slightly to see what these suckers beside him looked like.

Even as he did so, the fat man spoke again. "Echnor's got the dope on it, pal. He put down ten G's on it. Phoned the bet into New York. I was standing right by the phone when he did it."

Eddie Mossmere's glass was suddenly suspended in mid-air. A tip was one thing and seventeen percent was another. But if Echnor was betting ten grand, Echnor knew something. Echnor had something fixed. This wasn't gambling. This was a sure thing—sure as a poker game with marked cards, a past-time with which Eddie was not entirely unfamiliar.

He glanced at his watch. He had about twenty minutes before the race was off. He took his wallet from his pocket and opened it. In it were three twenties and a ten. Seventy bucks at twenty to one was fourteen hundred dollars. With a single bet he could double his bank balance.

Now, if Eddie Mossmere had stopped his financial calculations there and then he probably would have spent the next forty-odd years swelling some life insurance company's profits with premiums. But he didn't. There was an innate avarice in him, an overwhelming desire for speedy profits. In addition he had a sense of irony which could do him no good at all in his particular social and professional circle.

The avarice in him conceded that seventy times twenty was fourteen hundred. It then made another arithmetical suggestion. Fourteen hundred times twenty is— It took Eddie a few seconds to work this one out. Fourteen hundred times twenty is twenty-eight thousand.

TWENTY-EIGHT grand! The figure staggered him. Then as he was still mentally encompassing the idea of all that dough, he looked up and saw Echnor himself standing over by the window. It was then that his sense of irony asserted itself.

Echnor, of course, owned the handbook which was now functioning on Eddie's left. As a matter of fact Echnor owned every inch of this elaborate, dining, dancing, drinking and gambling establishment.

Naturally, Echnor wasn't betting against himself. He'd phoned his bet in to a big bookmaker in New York. It struck Eddie that it would be most amusing to win his twenty-eight thousand dollars from Echnor's book. To win a fortune from Echnor on his own tip.

He grinned, finished his drink and slid from the bar stool. He walked across the room to the window, where

Echnor held earnest conversation with Louis Begom.

Echnor was a big man of middle age. His black hair was gray at the temples and his eyes were like frozen ebony. Louis Begom, who was his cousin, looked like a midget beside him. Begom was short and wispy, half bald and with watery blue eyes. Exactly what his connection with Echnor was, no one quite knew. However, it was clear enough that he and his agents held the usury concession at all Echnor's gambling joints.

And that was a lucrative concession indeed. No one goes broke faster than a gambler. No one is more ready to borrow fresh cash and the hell with the rate of interest. These customers Begom stood ready to serve. His interest ran one percent per day and he asked neither notes of hand nor security for his money. It was a very simple deal. You paid what you owed when it was due or one of Begom's hoods killed you. It was an established fact that Louis Begom had no living debtors.

"Hi, Eddie," said Echnor cordially. Begom nodded a glum salutation.

"Hello," said Eddie. "I was kind of thinking I'd like a little action. I'm short of cash though. Will you cash my check?"

"Sure," said Echnor. "Any time, Eddie. Louis'll cash it for you right now."

Eddie smiled. "He doesn't charge interest for that, does he?"

Echnor grinned. Begom said humorlessly, "I only charge interest on loans. I cash checks for friends, provided Echnor guarantees them. How much you want?"

"About fourteen hundred," said Eddie casually.

"Fourteen hundred?" said Echnor. "So you're really going to hit me?"

"I'm going to try," said Eddie and his eyes glinted with amusement.

Louis Begom reached into his trouser pocket and produced a roll of bills that rather resembled the invention of the late Count Zeppelin. He counted off several notes with practised fingers. He handed them to Eddie.

Eddie looked at his watch. There was still ten minutes to post time.

"Thanks," he said. "I'll buy you guys champagne out of my winnings."

He crossed the room to the desk of the sheet writer. There he picked up a slip of paper and scribbled on it. He handed the paper and the roll of bills to the clerk. He said, "Blue Fedora. Fourteen hundred. On the nose."

The sheetwriter took the money and the paper. Eddie moved closer to the radio and waited the happy news that he was a capitalist with twenty-eight thousand dollars.

Exactly eight minutes later, he was staring at the radio with utter incredulity stamped on his thin features. Blue Fedora had run second by half a length. True, he had paid $16.80 to place but that did Eddie Mossmere as much good as a broken arm.

It took him a long moment to realize that he was not the proud possessor of twenty-eight grand. It took him another thirty seconds to become fully aware that he was broke. That he no longer had fourteen hundred bucks in the bank.

There was a sickening sensation at the pit of his stomach. For a moment he was furiously angry at Echnor. Then he remembered that Echnor had lost ten grand. He turned the anger on himself. He'd been a sucker—a consummate sucker. Nothing was certain in a horse race. Even a fixed race could go haywire. Anything could happen with a dozen stamping animals charging around a rail for six furlongs.

He walked over to the bar. He said thickly, "Give me three double ryes."

The bartender looked at him, saw the black rage in his face and filled the order without comment. Eddie poured the raw whisky down his gullet. His fingers shook and the glass rattled against his teeth.

His sense of loss was a searing thing. The alcohol in his bloodstream fed his

impotent rage, drove him to a reckless desire to recoup what he had lost. The click of the roulette balls, the rattle of the dice from the other room permeated his consciousness.

His jaw set grimly. He turned from the bar and approached Louis Begom.

"Louis," he said, "lend me a grand."

Begom took the wad of bills from his pocket, counted off ten hundreds, handed them to Eddie.

"A grand," he said flatly. "One percent a day. You'll pay me Saturday."

Eddie Mossmere turned on his heel and headed for the gambling room. As he entered, a gaunt man, with a dour expression nodded to him. This was Doxie, one of Echnor's top executives.

"Hello, Eddie," he said sadly. "Have I got trouble? Sickness in the family. I—"

Eddie said, "Yeah, yeah," with irritation. This was not his day for condolences. He brushed past and made his way to the roulette table.

An hour and ten minutes later, he had returned to confer with Louis Begom. Before the day had gone, he had accomplished a total of four transactions with the money lender.

At three o'clock in the morning, Eddie Mossmere was in his own utility apartment. The liquor he had drunk had spent itself. His mouth was dry as death valley and infinitely more sour and acrid. His temples pounded and somewhere at the back of his skull Gene Krupa was beating an iron drum with a sledge hammer.

But these were minor discomforts. Raw reality presented itself in the knowledge that he owed Louis Begom five thousand dollars, plus fifty a day interest, all of which was due to be paid on Saturday.

And Eddie was broke. Flat broke. He could raise a few hundred dollars, no doubt, but that would barely pay the interest. And Louis Begom had nothing in common with your local bank. He granted no extensions. He harkened to no sad luck stories. He didn't leave it to any attorney to handle. You either paid Louis or you never ran into debt again—save, perhaps, to the undertaker.

There was a swirling vacuum at the pit of Eddie's stomach and he knew he was scared, more scared than he had ever been in his life. He groaned, put his head in his hands. He thought desperately.

Suddenly he sat upright again. There was his Uncle Harvey. Of course, he'd borrowed from Harvey before and never paid him back. But after all, Harvey was his own flesh and blood—his dead mother's brother. If Harvey knew it was literally a matter of life or death, he couldn't refuse. He *couldn't.*

HARVEY CARNES dwelt in a small white frame house on the outskirts of the city. A picket fence surrounded the structure and its neat, well-kept garden. He was a widower of some sixty years, a former railroad worker who had retired on a pension and whatever income his savings yielded.

On Thursday morning he was seated in his living room watching his garden gradually turning to autumn's gold, when Eddie Mossmere knocked at the front door and entered.

Carnes' greeting was friendly but not ebullient. "Hello, Eddie," he said. "Sit down."

Eddie Mossmere sat down. His face was white and there were dark shadows etched beneath his eyes. He had spent a restive night and a gnawing nervousness was within him. He said, without preamble, "Harvey, I'm in a jam."

Harvey Carnes sighed. He ran his fingers through his iron gray hair. He said quietly, "Eddie, you're always in trouble."

"What's gone before," said Eddie, "now comes under the head of boyish pranks. This time it's serious."

"You said that last time and I lent you five hundred dollars." Carnes paused for a moment and added gently.

"You haven't paid it back yet."

"Look," said Eddie and his voice was tense, "you know Louis Begom?"

"I've read about him. Usually in editorials denouncing him and his cousin, Echnor."

"All right," said Eddie. "I owe him five grand. I got to pay it Saturday."

Carnes sighed again. He lifted his shaggy eyebrows and said, "So?"

"So," said Eddie, "I ain't got the dough."

Carnes shook his head commiseratingly. "I imagine that will be unpleasant."

"Unpleasant?" Eddie's voice broke two points this side of hysteria. "Do you know that they'll kill me?"

There was a moment's silence. Carnes leaned forward in his chair. He spoke very seriously.

"Eddie," he said, "listen to me. As you know I have a little money. I have five thousand dollars. As a matter of fact, I have about twice that much. Not only do I need the interest on my principal to eke out my pension but, as you also know, my young grand-daughter is an orphan. I am paying for her board and keep. When she's grown and I'm gone I want enough to send her to college."

Eddie Mossmere listened to him desperately.

"They'll kill me," he repeated. "You're condemning me to death."

Carnes shook his head. "You're condemning yourself to death, Eddie. I've warned you before this. I've helped you and you've never repaid me. I must think of others besides you."

For a moment the fear in Eddie Mossmere translated itself into a flaming rage at the older man. He glared at his uncle. His knees trembled. His fingers flexed and there was murder in his heart.

He fought his emotions. Killing Carnes was no way out of his troubles. Had it been he would not have hesitated. He stood up. "That's your final word," he said thickly.

Carnes nodded his head and spoke reluctantly. "I'm afraid it is, son."

Eddie walked to the doorway and stood there for a moment. His eyes met those of his uncle. He uttered a single obscene epithet, then turned on his heel and strode from the house. As he returned to his apartment his face was ashen, his eyes bloodshot and his nerves were like red-hot steel springs. All in all he looked very much like a man who was facing death. Which, as a matter of cold, hard fact, he was. . . .

It was Saturday afternoon. Eddie Mossmere was still in his pajamas. His face was dark with bristle, his eyes mere holes that seemed bored in his head. His appearance was that of a man at least ten years older than he actually was.

For the past forty-eight hours he had not slept. He had hardly eaten and he had drunk far too much. He had begged and borrowed from all his acquaintances, with a total financial result of something well under four hundred dollars.

He paced the floor of his small living room, pausing from time to time to lift a pint bottle with a trembling hand and place it to his colorless lips.

There was no time now to raise any cash even if that had been possible. All he could do was to stall. He knew he couldn't do that by any appeal to Begom's collecting agents, but he had a plan. It wasn't much of a plan but it would at least give him another forty-eight hours—forty-eight hours more in which to scheme, to plan for his life.

A buzzing sound came from the kitchenette as the doorbell rang. For two days now he had answered neither the doorbell nor the phone. He was interested in neither girls nor the card games which ordinarily comprised his social life. But he knew he'd have to answer now. This was the Piper coming for his pay.

He crossed the floor and took the lock off the door. Rocco came into the room and said cheerfully, "Hi, Eddie."

Rocco was a thick-set man with a scar on the left side of his face. His clothes were expensive and well cut. His pin-stripe suit fitted perfectly save where the bulge of his shoulder holster bunched the fabric.

Rocco took a piece of paper from his pocket. He consulted it and said, "According to my sheet you're in for five grand, plus three days' interest. Total eleven fifty. Right?"

"Yeah," said Eddie dully. "I'll give you a check."

He went to the desk and picked up a pen with unsteady fingers. He made it out laboriously and handed it to Rocco.

"Okay," said the hood. "So long, Eddie. See you around."

Eddie said good-by, well aware that the next time he saw Rocco, the gunman might well be paying a professional call. He locked the door after Rocco had left, emptied the bottle and resumed his endless pacing.

He had achieved a forty-eight hour reprieve. Of course, the check was no good. There was no cash in his account to cover it. That was a fact which Louis Begom was going to discover on Monday when the check was presented for payment. Eddie now had the week-end to make it good.

But what good was that, he asked himself? He put his hands to his throbbing temples and wondered if anyone had ever been in such trouble. Then by a swift association of ideas he recalled the dour Doxie muttering: *Do I have trouble?*

And in the next instant he had the answer. He would kill Doxie. The thought steadied him. He stopped pacing and sat down on the edge of the unmade bed. His brain became more stable. With the cunning of a ferret he began to plan.

Doxie stood high in the combined councils of Echnor and Louis Begom. He was their chief accountant and cashier. Among his other duties was that of delivering to the bank each day the gross receipts of the combine.

Minor collectors picked up the take from the far-flung joints and delivered them nightly to Echnor's headquarters at the Rastus Club—the same establishment where Eddie Mossmere had picked up his unfortunate tip on Blue Fedora.

On the following morning, the routine called for Doxie to deliver all the cash and checks to the bank. Because of the week-end the Monday deposit would be greater than usual. Moreover, on that day Eddie's bad check would be in Doxie's money bag.

Hence, if he killed Doxie, he not only would get his own check back before its rubberized qualities became evident, but he would also acquire only Heaven, Echnor and Begom knew how much cash besides.

But he knew he couldn't simply stick up Echnor's right hand man with impunity. He must plan it carefully. If he could only make it look as if Doxie had taken a powder, had crossed his bosses and eloped with the dough.

He knew quite well that Doxie was trusted. He also knew that in the world of rackets no one is trusted absolutely. No one knows better than the criminal that there is no honor among thieves. If Doxie scrammed with Echnor's dough, Echnor would doubtless he sore, be shocked, but he would hardly be incredulous.

EDDIE MOSSMERE knitted his dark brow and thought harder than he had ever thought in his life.

He had never planned a murder. He approached the problem coldly. He marshaled what facts he possessed and essayed to twist them to his advantage. Within half an hour he thought he had the scheme perfected.

He slept well that night. On Sunday he frequented his usual haunts. The fear had gone from him. He felt quite normal. The fact that he was about to become a murderer bothered him not at all. He was only happily aware that he was taking the heat off himself, retrieving his bad check and picking up

quite a bundle of cash into the bargain.

He went into action late Sunday night—to be precise at four o'clock of Monday morning. He picked up his phone and called the Regal Hotel. That was where Ruth Dayton lived and she was Doxie's girl.

When he got the hotel operator, he said, "I don't want to disturb Miss Dayton at this hour but I'd like to leave a message. Tell her that Mr. Doxie is going away. Not to worry. That he'll get in touch with her."

He hung up, picked up the receiver again and this time called the Hotel Imperial, where Doxie himself had a suite of rooms.

There he left another message, after assuring the operator he didn't want to wake Doxie. "Leave a message in Mr. Doxie's box telling him that the tickets have been bought and the reservations made. Everything's okay."

He put down the phone, went to the kitchenette and poured himself a stiff drink. Of course, when Doxie received the message it wouldn't make any sense to him. But after Doxie was missing and Echnor investigated it would make a lot of sense to *him.*

It would give a strong impression that Doxie had planned to scram with the receipts. And when Echnor learned of the other message—the one left for Doxie's girl—it would corroborate the impression.

Just before dawn, Eddie Mossmere took his automatic from the desk drawer. He examined it carefully and filled the magazine. He slipped it in his pocket and went out into the crisp October morning.

He walked briskly to Doxie's hotel, entered the parking lot at the rear of the building and searched for Doxie's car. He found it without much trouble. He cast a swift glance about through the murky dawn to make sure he was unobserved. Then he lifted the door to the trunk compartment and crawled inside.

He closed the door behind him and sat there, cramped and patient, with his right hand on the cold butt of the automatic. He waited quietly and warily, like a panther lying in ambush for its prey.

It was almost three hours later, when Eddie heard a footfall at the side of the car. He heard the door open and slam shut again. The coupe vibrated as Doxie stepped on the starter. Eddie Mossmere sat still and cramped, his heart thudding against his breast as the car moved forward.

Some time later it halted. Eddie knew that he was now parked outside the Rastus Club. The door slammed again as Doxie got out and went inside the club to obtain the bag of receipts. Eddie drew a deep breath and his hand tightened on the butt of his gun.

The Rastus Club was set well back from the main highway. A dirt road, flanked by trees, led from the state road to the club entrance. At this hour in the morning it was almost certain that the road would be deserted. That was a point on which Eddie must gamble.

He heard Doxie come back to the car, heard him cough wrackingly as he got back in the driver's seat. Then the car moved on again.

When Eddie Mossmere estimated that the car was halfway down the drive, he pushed open the door of the trunk compartment. With some difficulty, he managed to climb around until he stood on the running board.

Doxie looked around suddenly and an expression of surprise came over his dour face. He jammed his foot on the brake before Eddie ordered him to. He stared at Eddie and said in amazement, "Eddie, what are you doing here?"

He spoke in a thick hoarse voice. Then he turned his head aside and coughed hackingly. He said, "Curse this cold." When he looked at Eddie again he saw the automatic.

"Move over," said Eddie Mossmere. "Get away from that wheel."

Doxie's eyes bugged in alarm. "Eddie," he said hoarsely, "you're making

a mistake. I tell you—"

What he was about to tell, Eddie Mossmere never found out. He pressed the trigger of the automatic and a sudden ugly hole appeared in the side of Doxie's head. He slumped over crazily. Eddie thrust the gun back in his pocket. He pushed Doxie's inert body to one side and slid in behind the wheel. He stepped on the accelerator and the car shot forward.

He turned into the main highway and headed away from the city. He stopped the car for a moment and arranged Doxie's body so that any casual observer would think the dead man was merely dozing. He noted with satisfaction the neat brown leather bag on the floor at Doxie's feet. Then he started the car again and headed, well within the speed limit, for the old quarry.

The quarry had long since been abandoned. Its deep crater was now filled with black water of unfathomable depth. Several years ago it had been freely used for swimming purposes. But the Board of Health, finding it contaminated, had condemned the area.

Now, the road approaching it was thick with weeds and the woods were slowly encroaching upon it. The coupe laboriously made its way through the tree-lined trail until at last Eddie parked it at the quarry's edge.

He climbed out of the car. He took the bag and put it on the ground. Then he released the brake and pulled out the hand throttle. The wheels turned slowly. The car moved toward the edge of the cliff. It teetered there for an instant, then plunged down into the black water, taking Doxie's body along with it.

Eddie Mossmere watched it fall. He wiped the cold sweat from his brow. Then, hastily, he snatched up the leather bag and tried to open it.

A moment later the woods were loud with his curses. The bag was solidly locked and in his haste he had completely forgotten to take the keys from Doxie's pocket.

He stood for a moment in nervous thought, then came to a simple decision.

It had been his original intention to walk along the highway to the town of Hampton, some two miles away, there to get a bus back to town. Since he didn't want to be seen in the city carrying Doxie's bag—someone might recognize it—it would be easy enough to buy a cheap suitcase in Hampton and put the stolen bag inside it.

He tucked the bag under his arm and walked briskly toward the main road.

THE hand which held his newly purchased suitcase was wet with sweat as Eddie Mossmere disembarked at the city's bus terminal. He walked swiftly from the building out into the street and headed for his apartment.

He was halfway there when a voice said cordially, "Hello, Eddie. I'll buy you a drink."

Eddie Mossmere looked up to see Echnor, smiling at him. Eddie blinked and said, "I'm in a hurry. I—"

"Come on," said Echnor genially. "There's always time for a quick drink. For the luvva Pete, you look as if you'd lost your best friend. Come on."

Eddie bit his lip and suffered himself to be led into a nearby saloon. Echnor ordered two rye whiskies. He looked at Eddie, shook his head and said, "Too bad about Doxie. Have you seen him lately?"

A swift tremor of fear ran down Eddie Mossmere's spine. Echnor couldn't know. *He couldn't!*

"Not since Wednesday," mumbled Eddie. "I seen him at the club last Wednesday."

Echnor nodded and made a clucking, commiserating sound with his tongue. "His mother's dying," he said. "And Doxie isn't a well man either. He's a very sick boy."

Eddie Mossmere was seized by an overwhelming desire to get home and examine his loot. He said nervously, "Yeah, he's sick, all right. He ought to see Doc Collins. He's a crack specialist."

Echnor looked at him oddly for a moment. Then he emptied his glass and said, "Well, so long, Eddie. I've got some things to attend to."

Eddie said his good-by with relief. He hurried out of the bar and walked rapidly home.

He entered the apartment, slammed the door behind him. He tore open the cheap suitcase and removed the leather bag. He went into the kitchenette and procured a keen-bladed carving knife. He cut savagely into the brown leather.

He turned the bag upside down and dumped its contents on the table top. Then he stood there staring, staring with blank, desperate amazement.

He was looking at two shirts, two pair of shorts, some socks, a toothbrush, a razor and various assorted toilet articles. Frantically, he grabbed the bag and thrust his hand inside it. There was nothing more inside it.

He took a step backward and fell into a chair. He was breathing hard now. With tremendous effort he forced his brain to think, to examine the situation.

He knew quite well that Doxie took money to the bank every morning. Where then was the cash? How come he had murdered a man for five bucks' worth of second-hand clothing and a dollar razor?

How long he sat there with his mind reeling, with a cold mantle of apprehensive fear upon him, he never knew. But at last he was aroused by the ringing of the doorbell. He stared at the door and was aware of a terrible premonition. The bell rang again.

After a pause, Echnor's voice sounded. "Open up, Eddie. I got the Law with me. We'll break the door down if you don't."

Eddie Mossmere got up. He approached the door on leaden feet. He opened it with a chilled hand.

Echnor came into the room, accompanied by a copper in uniform and Lieutenant Barkley who was in plain clothes.

"All right, Eddie," said Barkley. "Where's Doxie?"

Eddie blinked. He said weakly, "Doxie? How would I know?"

Echnor crossed the room and stood by the table. He picked up the ripped leather bag. He said quietly, "This is the bag, all right. Doxie had it this morning."

"We've got you dead," said Barkley. "You may as well talk, Eddie."

Fear seized Eddie Mossmere now. All the strength and fight oozed out of him. He felt sick and exhausted. All he could say was, "But how—? What—?"

"Tell him, Echnor," Barkley said.

"Well," said Echnor, "Doxie wasn't going to the bank this morning. He got word that his mother, who's been sick, was dying. He drove over to the club to tell me to have someone else make the deposit today. He used the bag he customarily uses to carry the dough in, to take what he needed for his journey."

Eddie Mossmere stared at him with dull, blank eyes.

"Then," continued Echnor, "I ran into Eddie and bought him a drink. He told me he hadn't seen Doxie since Wednesday. Then I mentioned that Doxie was a sick guy. As a matter of fact he has cancer and it's killing him. Eddie didn't know this, though. He said that Doxie ought to see Doc Collins."

Echnor paused. He took a cigar from his vest pocket, bit off its end and lit it with deliberation.

"Now," he went on, "Doc Collins is a crack specialist, all right. But he's a nose and throat specialist. There'd be no sense in sending him a cancer case. Eddie was talking about Doxie's cold, his bum throat. But Doxie only developed that cold overnight. He didn't have it yesterday. And Eddie said he hadn't seen him since Wednesday."

"So," said Barkley, "you figured there was something screwy, that Eddie had seen Doxie this morning."

"Right," said Echnor. "And when I called the club and found out that the doctor who's attending Doxie's mother had phoned asking where the dickens Doxie was, I got thoroughly suspicious. Rats, Doxie's old lady only lives twenty miles away. He should have been there hours ago."

"So," said Barkley, "Echnor got in touch with me, Eddie, and we decided to pay you a visit. We find you with Doxie's bag."

Suddenly the blandness went out of his tone. He took a step forward, seized Eddie Mossmere by the coat collar and snapped, "Where is he?"

Eddie wilted. He knew then he was as dead as he ever would be after they'd hung him. "The quarry," he mumbled. "Out in the quarry."

"Come on," said Barkley. "We'll go out there."

EDDIE MOSSMERE sat in the visitor's room of the penitentiary, a uniformed guard beside him. He stared blankly as Harvey Carnes regarded him with melancholy sympathy.

"Eddie," he said, "there's nothing I can do for you now. Make your peace with God, Eddie. You can't fight it any more. It's fate."

Eddie Mossmere glared at his uncle sullenly. "Fate!" he said bitterly. "What do you mean, fate? You've killed me. You did it when you wouldn't let me have that five grand."

Harvey Carnes shook his head sadly. "But I did let you have it, Eddie. I got to worrying about you after you'd left."

Eddie blinked. "What the devil are you talking about?"

"On Thursday morning, I deposited five thousand dollars to your bank account. I kept phoning you to tell you about it, but the phone never answered."

There was a moment's silence. Then for the last time in his life Eddie Mossmere's sense of irony asserted itself. He threw back his head and roared with bitter laughter. Carnes stood up uneasily and left the room.

Eddie Dossmere's wild laughter followed him down the bare stone corridor, wild, hysterical and discordant.

RABBIT! RABBIT!

Blood dripping from my hands, I lunged forward

By PHILIP KETCHUM

When they pinned that murder on Baker they expected him to take it like a rabbit—not fight back like a wildcat!

THE third day after I was arrested, and while I was still feeling dazed and bewildered and sort of like it was all a bad dream from which I would soon awaken, some reporter came to my cell. After beating around the bush for a while he came out and offered me a thousand dollars for the story of my life.

I guess I must have looked at him a little blankly, for after a minute or so he said, "All right, we'll make it two thousand, cash on the barrel head. And you don't have to write a word. I'll write it all for you. All you'll have to do is sign it."

I still couldn't get the idea and I told him so.

The reporter fellow leaned forward and said, "Look here, Mr. John Baker. My publisher has a notion that there might be something in your past history, something in your early life, which, if brought to the attention of the public, might help them to understand you better. Maybe you didn't have a chance as a kid, maybe you're a victim of environment? See? What we want is a word picture of your youth, your marriage, everything leading up to the afternoon you killed Lola Simpson."

"But I didn't kill her," I insisted.

The reporter laughed softly. "Save that for the jury. Don't try to kid me, Baker. If there was ever an open and shut case, this is it! You haven't got a chance! You better think of that wife and kid of yours and grab this two thousand bucks while the old man still thinks the story's worth it."

I got a little mad, then, and ordered him to leave but he didn't go.

"Listen here," he said. "Did you or did you not go to Lola Simpson's apartment the afternoon when she was found dead?"

"I went there," I admitted. "But—"

"And you had gone there practically every afternoon for two weeks before that?" he interrupted.

I nodded. "But it was to take her a manuscript from Mr. Ward. She was typing it for him. It was on my way home and it was more convenient for me to stop at her place than Mr. Ward."

AGAIN the reporter laughed. He said "Listen here, chump. Your boss wasn't sending Lola Simpson any manuscript. He couldn't write a book if he had to, and she couldn't type it for him if he could write one. That gal wouldn't have known a typewriter if she met one on the street. You met her at the Thirteen Club, didn't you, where you used to drop in for a glass of beer and where she hung out between men? And maybe the going got a little steep for a guy on a bookkeeper's salary. Or maybe that wife of yours got suspicious. The woman next door to you says that you and your wife had a devil of a fight the night before."

I had almost forgotten about that argument with Mary and when the reporter brought it up I suddenly felt a little sick. It hadn't been any "devil of a fight," just an argument in which we both got mad, the kind of an argument which married people sometimes have. This one had started over a letter I had forgotten to mail, and before it was over it included a few other things like such quarrels usually do.

"Well?" insisted the reporter.

I got up from the stool on which I was sitting and said stiffly, "Get out of here!"

The reporter tried to argue but I wouldn't listen to him any more, and after a while he left me. And then a minute later Detective Hendershott came down the hallway and leaned against the bars of my cell.

"What did he want?" Hendershott asked.

I told him and Hendershott wanted to know my answer, and when I said I had turned down the two thousand dollars Hendershott looked at me curiously and said, "A man's family could do a lot of things with that amount of money."

"I can still look out for my family," I answered.

"Insurance?" he asked.

"No," I snapped. "Work!"

Hendershott drew a deep breath. "You're a strange man, Baker," he said. "Sometimes, in spite of everything, I think you're innocent. Maybe I ought to have my head examined."

I wanted to talk to him for a while but he seemed impatient to get away and wouldn't stay long. His brief visit, however, had taken away some of the sting of what the reporter had said, and after he had gone I started pacing back and forth across my cell, recalling how he had acted the night I had been arrested.

I'll never forget that night. We were just sitting down to dinner when the

knock came at the door. Mary was pouring my coffee.

"I'll answer it," she said. "It's probably the woman for the laundry."

Junior had scooted out of his chair and started for the door. I called him back.

"Sit down, Junior," I said sharply. "And don't get up again."

Junior's face tightened angrily. "Why can't I ever answer the door, Daddy? Tom Allison always answers the telephone and the doorbell at his house and he's only eight and a half. I'm past nine."

"That'll do, Junior," I said sternly. "I don't want—"

My voice broke off. The heavy tones of a man's voice sounded from the hallway. I looked up, startled. Mary said something but I didn't catch her words. I stood up. Two men were marching forward across the parlor. I didn't know their names, then.

Later, I learned that the bigger of the two men, the one with the red face and the heavy jaw, was Detective Neely and that the smaller man was Detective Hendershott. But at that moment all I knew was that something was terribly wrong and that I was frightened. I hate to admit that, but it's the truth.

Both men came into the dining room with Mary following after them, and Mary's face was very pale. My jaw worked up and down and I tried to say something but my throat choked back the words. Neely moved up to where I stood. His eyes swept me from head to foot and a sneer twisted his thick lips.

"Well," he snapped suddenly, "why did you kill her?"

I swallowed a couple of times, blinked, moistened my lips.

"K-kill whom?" I stuttered.

"Lola Simpson," Neely barked. "Come on? Why did you kill her?"

I shook my head. "But I didn't kill her." Then something within me stiffened and I demanded, "Who are you, anyhow? What do you mean by coming here this way?"

Neeley put his hand against my chest and shoved me down into my chair.

"Come on," he growled. "I want some straight answers and I want 'em right now! Where's the gun?"

"What gun?" I asked.

Neely's hand slapped out and struck me across the face. "The gun you used to murder Lola Simpson!" he shouted "Where is it?"

SUDDENLY the detective's figure was half brushed aside as Junior, both his fists clenched and tears streaming down his face, charged into him.

"Leave my father alone," he was sobbing. "Leave him alone, I tell you. Leave him alone!"

One of Neely's hands reached down and caught Junior by the shoulder. Junior screamed, tried to twist away. Mary came running forward and grabbed him just as Neely let go of him.

"What's the mater with you, anyhow?" Neely growled at Hendershott. "Can't you handle a woman and a kid?"

Hendershott was scowling. "Better let up, Neely," he advised. "This isn't the place to try any rough stuff."

Neely laughed. "The devil with you! I'm gonna get a confession out of this bird before some shyster buttons up his lips."

"Better let up, Neely," Hendershott said again.

Mary was standing over against the wall, her arms around Junior. Junior was sobbing, his face pressed against Mary's dress. There was a blank, white look on Mary's face.

"Well, speak up, Casanova!" Neely shouted, whirling around to face me. "Speak up, or I'll smash that stubby nose of yours all over your cheeks!"

A thousand times since that night I've thought of the ways I ought to have acted. Sometimes it seems to me that I should have jerked out of my chair and punched Neely in the face. Sometimes I've thought that I should have stood up and said in a cold, dignified manner that I didn't kill Lola Simpson and that

if I was under arrest, hadn't we better go on down to the jail and clear up the mystery.

A thousand times I've lived over that night in the manner I should have liked it to be. But I didn't do any of the heroic things that I have thought of since. Instead, I just sat there in my chair as though I was glued to it, while Detective Neely shouted at me, threatened me and stomped up and down the room like a mad man.

Somehow or other, nothing about what happened that night seemed at all real. There wasn't even any reality to it when Neely grabbed me by the arm and started dragging me to the door, and when Mary, releasing herself from Junior, came running up to my side and threw her arms around my neck.

Neely pried her away. "Cut it out," he snapped. "This man's under arrest."

Hendershott moved up to Mary's side. He said, "I'm sorry, Mrs. Baker, but it's true. You put the lad to bed. I'll be out and see you later."

I don't know what I said. Maybe I didn't say anything at all. Anyhow, a few minutes later we were in a car and then a little while after that we were in the jail. Then, still later, Hendershott and Neely and a lot of other men had me in a bare, unfurnished room somewhere in the city-and-county building and were taking turns questioning me.

The occasional deep silences in that room, the repetition in the questions, the bright light burning overhead, and the coarse brutal looks on the faces of some of the men all added to that illusion of unreality. I don't know when they let up, don't know when it was that they dragged me off to a cell and left me.

Most of what happened after they took me away from home is just a blur in my mind. In fact, everything up to that third day in the courtroom is like a part of a horrible dream that envelops a person but still doesn't touch him.

I don't mean, of course, that I didn't appreciate what I was up against. I did. And I began to appreciate it even before I talked to that reporter.

YOU SEE, the line-up was like this: Lola Simpson had been found dead in her apartment about five-thirty on the afternoon of the night I had been arrested. She had been shot. The gun which had killed her wasn't in the apartment and so there wasn't any possibility that she had committed suicide.

Lola's reputation, it seemed, wasn't any too savory. She had no folks, wasn't married. She worked occasionally—"between men," as the reporter put it. But it seemed that she had never had any trouble with any of her men. At least, she never had so far as the police were able to discover.

At the apartment house where she had lived for a couple weeks previous to her death, both the elevator boys and the janitor said that so far as they knew I was the only man who called on her. They said that she didn't go out much in the evening and that when she did she went alone and came back alone.

In the apartment they found a scarf of mine and a fountain pen, and in the drawer of my desk at the office they found an extra key to her door. The police had all that against me—the key, fountain pen and scarf and the fact that I was the only man who called on her.

Beside that, there was the evidence of the quarrel I had had with Mary as reported by the woman who lived next door to us. That Mary said the quarrel hadn't amounted to anything and that I insisted that I had lost my fountain pen and scarf and knew nothing about the key, didn't seem to cut any ice with the police.

One more thing. My boss, Arthur Ward, denied absolutely and bluntly that he had ever sent me to Lola Simpson's apartment, scoffed at the notion that he was writing a book, and said that if he was he certainly wouldn't send a manuscript to a girl who didn't own a typewriter!

During the weeks before the trial, De-

tective Hendershott got into the habit of stopping by my cell every day or so. From what he told me I could gather that so far as the police were concerned, the case was closed. On the face of things, there didn't seem to be any question about my guilt. I know that my own attorney thought me guilty. He had even stopped coming to see me. But for some reason or other I felt that Hendershott was on my side.

Once he said to me, "Baker, is that a true story about Ward asking you to take manuscript copy to Lola Simpson's apartment?"

"Absolutely true," I answered.

"It'll sound like hell in court," he answered. "In fact, I think it's the weakest alibi I ever heard. How come no one else in the office knew about it?"

"Ward didn't want anyone to know," I replied. "He seemed a little embarrassed over the fact that he was trying to write a book. He asked me not to tell anyone about it."

"Huh? And you're just the type who wouldn't," Hendershott grunted. "Tell me. What would this Simpson girl say when she got the copy?"

"Nothing much. She just took it."

"Did she ever invite you into the apartment?"

"Yes, she usually did. Sometimes she said that she wanted to look over the copy before I left."

"And didn't it ever occur to you that there was something phony about the whole thing?"

I shook my head. It hadn't. Ward's request that I drop the copy by on the way home seemed reasonable and I could understand how he might be a little embarrassed at the thought of the office force thinking of him as an author.

Hendershott leaned forward. "Baker," he said, "Either you or Ward is a liar. If you're a liar, you're a darn poor one."

I knew what he was thinking, for I had figured it out that way, too. If I wasn't the murderer, and I wasn't, then the murderer was Arthur Ward. It was hard for me to come to that conclusion, for I had always rather looked up to Ward. But there wasn't any other conclusion possible.

HENDERSHOTT came right out and said that to me the day before the trial started. "Baker," he said, "either you or Arthur Ward killed Lola Simpson, for if you're telling the truth about acting as his messenger, then in view of his lie, Ward is the murderer and you are beng framed. Now, look here. Because of your story, absurd as it sounds, the police checked Ward's alibi and it's a good one. Of course the alibis of guilty persons always are. But in addition to that, and on my own, I've gone deeper into the case and have arrived at exactly nowhere.

"Ward seems to be happily married," he went on. "There's no evidence that he ever played around with women. There's nothing to tie him to this Lola Simpson. No one ever heard of him planning to write a book. Now, do you know what's going to happen in about a week?"

I shook my head.

"You're going to stand up in front of the judge and hear yourself condemned to life imprisonment, maybe the chair. Only a miracle can save you."

"I didn't kill Lola Simpson," I said stubbornly.

"Then for Pete's sake, do something to help yourself! What happened to all that manuscript copy you took to the dame?"

"She typed it, or at least I thought so. Then she mailed it to him. At least, that's what I understood she did."

"And you never told a soul what you were doing?"

"No," I told him.

"Not even your wife?"

I shook my head again.

"You didn't see anyone that last night when you called on the dame?"

"No one," I answered. "I waited in the hall for a while, then rolled the copy and put it between the knob and the door. After that, I left."

Hendershott drew a deep breath. "Baker," he said slowly, "Do you think you can beat this rap on the basis of what we have against you?"

I bit my lips, aware of a hollow, aching pain in the pit of my stomach. All through the weeks of waiting I had been clinging firmly to the belief that in the end the fact that I was innocent must somehow or other come out. Hendershott, however, had shaken that faith, and I felt some of the numbness which had paralyzed my thinking in the first few days after my arrest come stealing back over me now.

"I'm innocent," I said hoarsely. "They can't convict an innocent man."

"Don't think they can't," Hendershott snapped. "You watch and see!"

And so we came to the trial. And from the moment when I was brought into the courtroom and heard the hissing whispers which spread over the crowded chamber, I knew in my heart what the result of the trial was going to be. Innocent or not, I stood convicted. That feeling settled over me as I took my place at the table next to the attorney who was to defend me, and as I looked into Mary's eyes.

Brave eyes, those were. I'll never forget that. They looked into mine confidently. And there was just the hint of a smile on Mary's lips. She sat very straight, held her head very erect. She seemed to be trying to pass some of her strength on to me, as though she knew I needed it, knew how I felt.

It didn't take long to select the jury. From the time when the judge came into the courtroom and when the bailiff hammered for order, a sharp intensity seemed to grip the court and I felt that everyone there was anxious to rush things, to get to the end.

Once, at the end of the morning, the attorney who was to defend me turned to me and said in a low voice, "Mr. Baker, why not tell me the truth? It's not too late to change the plea. That absurd story of yours will never go down with the jury."

I shook my head. "It's the truth."

My attorney shrugged. He had lost interest in the case, I knew.

ALL DURING the rest of that day, and during the day which followed and the morning of the third, I sat there at the table next to my attorney and listened to what went on and tried to realize that when some witness was talking about Mr. Baker, it was me to whom they referred.

Now and then I would glance over at Mary, but most of the time I just stared out of the window across the room. From where I sat I could see the tops of several trees on the lawn in front of the city-and-county building. The treetops were leafy and green and now and then a breeze swayed them, and once or twice I caught a glimpse of a bird.

Somehow or other I got to thinking about the trees I had climbed as a boy and about birds and about swimming in the summertime and about fishing—about all the things I used to do when I was just a kid. I don't know why I got to thinking about things like that. I just did, that's all.

Suddenly I heard a voice say, "Mr. Ward, will you take the witness chair?"

I straightened a little, stared out across the courtroom. Mr. Ward was walking forward. He was a tall, heavy-set man with a big face. His usual jovial look was gone and had been replaced by a stern, set expression. He reached the witness chair, took the oath, sat down and started answering the questions asked him by the prosecutor. His voice was clear and strong.

"You know the defendant?" asked the prosecutor.

"I thought I did," Mr. Ward answered. "He has worked for me nine years."

"What would you say of his character?"

"He did his work satisfactorily," Mr. Ward replied. "I know very little of him beyond what I could observe in the office."

The prosecutor leaned forward. "Did you know of his acquaintance with Lola Simpson?"

"I did not," Ward answered bluntly.

Under the table my hands clenched until my fingernails bit into my palms. I think that right up to that moment I had believed that when the time came, Mr. Ward would explain, in some way or other, how he had happened to send me to see Lola Simpson. Now I knew that he wouldn't. I was staring at him but he didn't look at me.

"You didn't ever send him to Miss Simpson's?" asked the prosecutor.

"I did not," Ward replied. "As it happens, I didn't know the lady in question."

A murmur of whispered conversation ran over the courtroom. My eyes caught sight of Hendershott standing close to the window, scowling. The prosecutor went on asking Ward more questions, but I hardly heard them or heard Ward's answers.

A sudden, sharp anger had gripped me. I wanted to get up, charge across the room, smash my fist into Ward's face, grab his throat between my hands and choke the truth out of him. It was all I could do to keep seated.

Ward was excused and he passed within a few feet of where I was sitting, but he still didn't look into my face.

He passed through a little gate, said to a man just beyond it:

"I'm going home, going to try and dodge the reporters. Telephone me later."

The man, a friend of his I suppose, nodded and Ward left the room.

Other witnesses were called and the case went on, but I still didn't hear what was being said. A chant was running through my mind, over and over again:

"Ward's guilty. Ward killed Lola Simpson. He's going home, going free. I'm going to the chair." I couldn't still that voice, couldn't think of anything else. "Ward's guilty. Ward killed Lola Simpson. He's going home, going free. I'm going to the chair."

Suddenly I swung around to face my attorney, a crazy, insane thought in head.

"Listen here," I whispered. "Tell the judge I have a statement to make but that I'll make it to no one but him. It's important."

My attorney blinked at me and I repeated my request. Then he nodded, got up and walked over to the judge's bench and began to whisper to him. I've figured out, now, why my attorney agreed so easily. He saw it as a way out for himself. He guessed that I was ready to make a confession, and if I confessed he wouldn't be in the position of losing a case.

MAYBE he was a good attorney. At any rate, he convinced the judge that it would be wise to see me, for after he had talked to him for a while the judge announced, "Court is recessed for ten minutes." Then he motioned to me and turned toward his chambers.

I got up and followed him. My attorney went along, too, and so did the prosecutor and the two men who had brought me in from the jail.

The judge's room wasn't very large. A table took up most of the space. There were chairs around it and bookcases lined the walls. When we all got into that room, the judge turned to me.

"Well, what is it, Baker?" he asked.

My throat was so dry I could hardly speak. I was perspiring and was breathing heavily. I was excited, too. I could feel my pulse beating in my temple.

"I—I wanted to talk to you—alone," I stammered.

"What about?" rasped the prosecutor.

The judge lifted his hand, said, "Keep out of this, Bert." And then he said to me, "Suppose we move over to the other end of the room. I can't very well send these people away. This is highly irregular, anyhow."

The judge turned and walked down the room, and I followed him and then turned and looked back toward the courtroom door. The men standing there were watching us curiously.

"Well?" demanded the judge.

We were standing near a window and it was closed, but there was a book on the corner of the table. It was a big, heavy book. I leaned against the table, close to it, stared at the window.

In the instant which followed, I didn't think of any of the things which might ordinarily have occurred to a man planning to do what I had in mind. I didn't think of the fact that the guards in the room were armed, that it was a twenty-foot drop to the ground, that if I got through the window and wasn't stunned by the fall, I still had to get away across the lawn.

All I could think of was Arthur Ward, safe at home, waiting to hear of my sentence.

"Well, Baker?" said the judge again irritably.

My hands closed on the book. I said, "Look here, Judge. Watch this," and I lifted the book and hurled it through the glass of the window.

The judge gasped, his mouth dropping open. I heard someone yell from the other end of the room. Putting out a hand, I shoved the judge aside and scrambled for the window. A jagged piece of glass tore at my trousers as I went through and more glass cut the palms of my hands as I gripped the window ledge and lowered my body toward the ground. Then I let loose and the earth seemed to rush up and hit me.

Half stunned by the fall, I still managed to roll over and get to my feet. I started running.

Someone was yelling at me from the window of the judge's chambers and I heard the sound of a shot. Out on the street, auto horns started blowing. People on the sidewalk in front of the city-and-county building scattered as I drew near them. Some woman screamed and fainted.

There was blood all over my face and I must have looked horrible, but I didn't know that then. All I knew was that I had escaped and that out at his home, without even being aware of it, Arthur Ward was waiting for me.

A taxi was rolling down the street and I grabbed at it as it went by, swung into the seat next to the driver. I don't remember saying anything to that cab driver, but later he swore that I threatened to kill him if he didn't do as I ordered. Maybe I did but that isn't important, anyhow. What is important is that the taxi swung around the next corner and headed toward the section of the city in which Arthur Ward lived.

I've tried and tried to figure out what made me lose my head and act like a madman, and I still don't know the answer. From the time when I was arrested up until that moment in the judge's office, I had never given any indication that I would suddenly go crazy. Hendershott says that is what made my escape possible.

"People expect rabbits to stay rabbits," he insisted later. "They don't look for 'em to become wildcats."

Maybe that did make my escape possible. But I'm still confused about it myself. Of course, I knew that Ward was guilty and that I was doomed in his place. But even that doesn't explain things to suit me. Temporary insanity is about all that will cover it.

I DON'T remember much about the ride out to Arthur Ward's. I only know that after a while we got there and I got out of the taxi and rushed up to the door. I didn't ring the bell. I just shoved the door open and pushed inside. Then I started running down the hall.

Ward must have heard me coming. Anyhow, he appeared suddenly from a room to one side. At the sight of me the blood went out of his face and he dropped a glass which he was holding and then started backing into the room.

"You!" he gasped. "You—how—"

I followed him into the room and suddenly I heard myself yelling at him, calling him names, calling him a murderer.

He cringed away from me and for some reason or other I wasn't surprised. I knew he was guilty, and he knew that I knew it. And I guess the blood dripping from my cut hands, some of which I had wiped on my shirt and face, didn't hurt any either. It must have made me look much more terrifying.

"Get away!" he screamed. "Get away!"

I shook my head, advanced on him.

"I'll tell them about her," he cried. "I'll tell them everything!"

A sudden, crafty expression came into his eyes and he whirled toward a desk in the room, jerked open a drawer, whipped out a revolver. I saw it but I lunged forward just the same. There was a shot and then another and another, and after that Ward and I were down on the floor rolling over and over.

I had my hands on his throat and was trying to dig my fingers through the flesh of his neck. He didn't fight back. He just lay there and blubbered.

Someone grabbed hold of me, pulled me off him, and I heard a voice saying, "All right, that's about enough. Take it easy, Baker. I'll look after Ward."

The speaker was Detective Hendershott and there was a flushed, excited look on his face. I staggered over to a chair and sat down. I started to shake. I tried to stop but I couldn't.

After a while Hendershott got up from where he was kneeling over Ward, crossed to where I was sitting.

"I sort of figured you'd come out when you grabbed that taxi, so I didn't waste any time," he said. "Just made it, though. That was some ticklish shooting I did over your shoulder when Ward pulled his gun."

In a dazed sort of way I realized, then, what had happened; why all those shots had sounded and I hadn't been

(Continued on Page 143)

A Bargain IN CRIME

by SAM SLEUTH

THE best mystery novels that have ever been published in book form at $2.00 and $2.50 are now available in reprint editions for a mere quarter. But—a word of caution. A $2.00 dud is still a dud at two bits, and mixed in with the outstanding whodunits are some that, frankly, are not so hot. To help you get only the best of these handy little volumes, we've carefully gone over the current selections now available at neighborhood newsstands, and here, in our opinion, are the prize-winners!

Reviews in Brief

THE CHUCKLING FINGERS by Mabel Seeley

For months someone had been playing malicious tricks on the Heatons at their Lake Superior estate. There was the fire in Bill's bed, the acid burns in his suit, his slashed shoes. Each trick pointed to Jacqueline, his wife. Then Fred, Bill's son, was killed and Bill himself was shot. And after that Bill's car, seemingly moving of its own volition, plunged into the lake with still another victim. It was then that Ann Gay set a trap for the murderer, using herself as bait, luring the killer to her room. A superior story of taut suspense and thrills.

●

THE KEY by Patricia Wentworth

Michael Harsch was inventor of a new explosive. It was a secret worth a fortune—in money, power and human lives. When Harsch died, the coroner's verdict was suicide. But secret agent Garth Albany knew it was murder. A church key missing from Aunt Sophy's bureau, a splinter of glass imbedded in a heel, the curious behavior of Miss Brown, were clues that pointed to one man—but not until another killing and the arrival of Miss Silver to take over the case could the tables be turned on the desperate murderer. This is one of the famous "Miss Silver" mysteries.

THE EVIL STAR by John Spain

Lieutenant Steve McCord of the Los Angeles police could never get enough of Charity Martin. He loved her even though he knew she was using him to win protection for her sister, Hope, who was wanted for murder. There were three Martin girls—Faith, Hope and Charity. Hope, a bubble dancer, possessed knowledge that made her dangerous to the underworld. She vanished, and then disaster stalked her sisters. Charity was kidnaped. Faith was arrested for strangling a recluse. Homicide runs amok in Los Angeles before Steve can smash the evil forces that menace the Martin girls. Dramatic and thrill-packed!

●

SHE'LL BE DEAD BY MORNING by Dana Chambers

Jim Steele had spent the day checking into the strange deaths of wealthy George Kinsolving's son and daughter. Returning to his apartment, Steele found Lisa, his wife, missing. It was then that the phone rang and a rasping voice told him to get on a train for Chicago and stay on it if he wanted Lisa back in one piece. "If you don't," the man added, "you'll never see her again." Steele figured he had to take the train for Chicago. But he thought he had a foolproof plan for getting off it again without anyone being the wiser. A hard-boiled mystery filled with suspense!

RABBIT! RABBIT!

(Continued from Page 141)

hurt. The shots had come from the detective's gun and had been aimed at Ward.

"Is he dead?" I asked.

"Not yet. You're lucky, Baker. Not once in a million times could a person pull a stunt like you pulled today and have it come out like this. Ward just confessed to me that he killed Lola Simpson. He planned it when he started sending you to her place. She was insisting that he leave his wife and run off with her. He didn't want that, knew that he had to kill her to avoid it, and he picked you as the victim. A sure victim is always the best out for a murderer, and you fitted in nicely.

"He explained your visits to the woman by letting her think that the papers you brought were important documents which you were smuggling out of the office for him. Of course, Ward may try to deny all this when he gets over the shock of his wounds and the surprise of seeing you in the hall. But he's talked too much. He even told me where he hid the gun. If he doesn't die on us, he'll fry sure!"

I heard all that and realized what it

[Turn page]

meant, but I went right on shaking just the same. And when I heard the sound of a police siren getting closer and closer and guessed that the taxi driver had reported where he had taken me, I got to feeling a little sick inside.

"That'll be Neely," Hendershott said grimly. "You stay here. I'm gonna tell him a thing or two."

I sat there, waiting, and got to thinking about that reporter and the two thousand bucks I had turned down, and about the funny look on the judge's face when I tossed the book through the window, and about the way Junior had jumped on Neely, and everything got all jumbled up in my mind.

Then I remembered Mary and the way we had quarreled the night before I was arrested. That started me crying. Funny. I should have been happy, but I wasn't. Hendershott came back and a lot of men were with him. He walked up to me.

"Come on, Baker," he said. "Back to court."

"Back to court?" I gasped.

He grinned. "Sure, but just for a while. I'll have you out in no time at all. You'll have to pay for a window, though. Can't stand for people destroying public property!"

DEAD ON THE PIN

(Concluded from Page 116)

As though I was walking in my sleep, I went back down the stairs, took the black crayon, marked in the last strike and drew the 300, making the zeros fat and bold.

I knew he was a crook. I knew he was cruel and lawless. They told me about the way he shot the Nevada bank clerk in the abdomen. But I also know that he was a homesick guy who came back to the only thing he liked to do and scrubbed out lavatories for the privilege of doing it.

Maybe there's something wrong with me.

Because I don't think I'm ever going to like the game as much as I used to.

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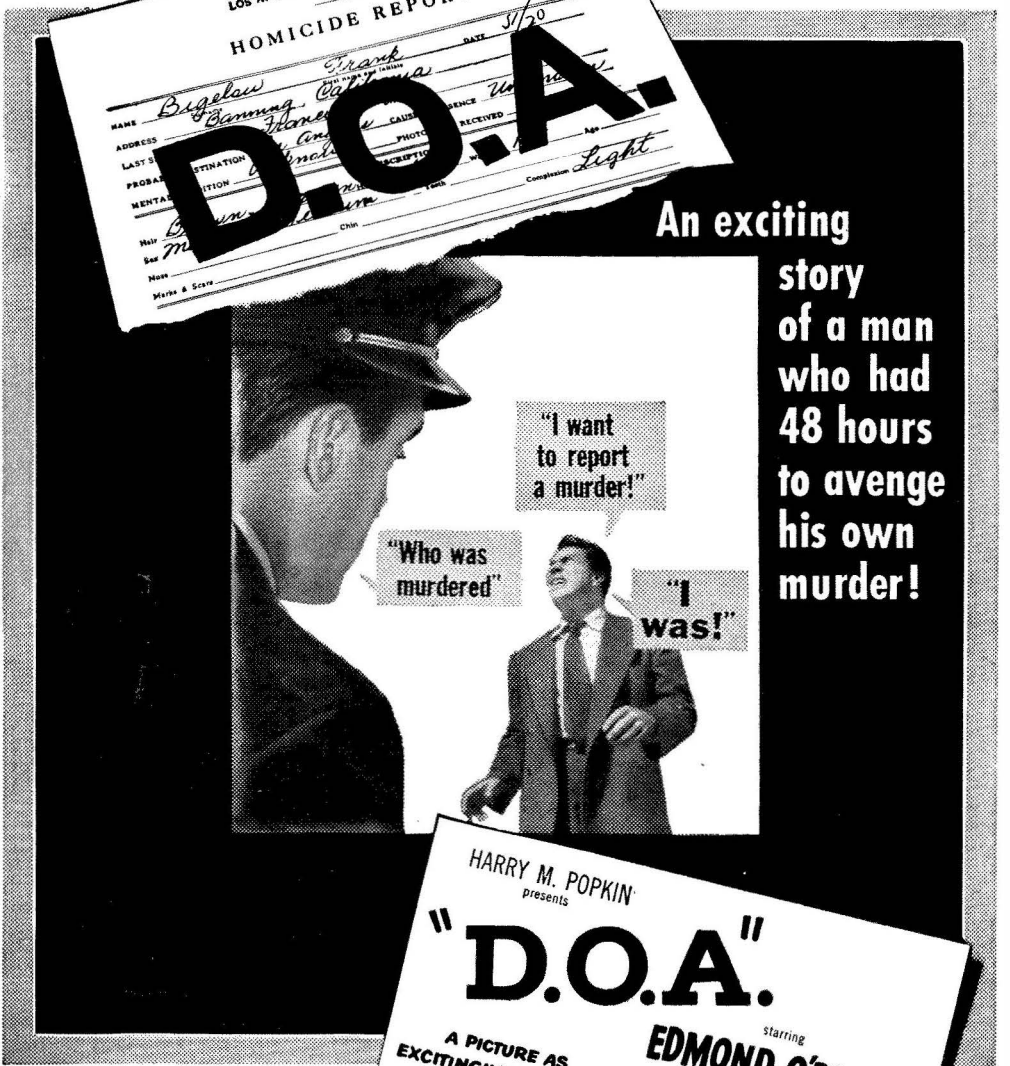

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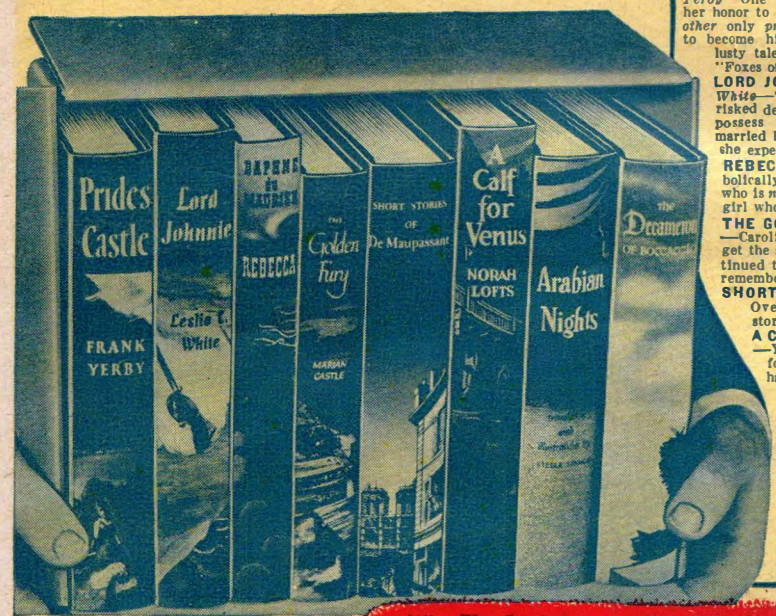

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