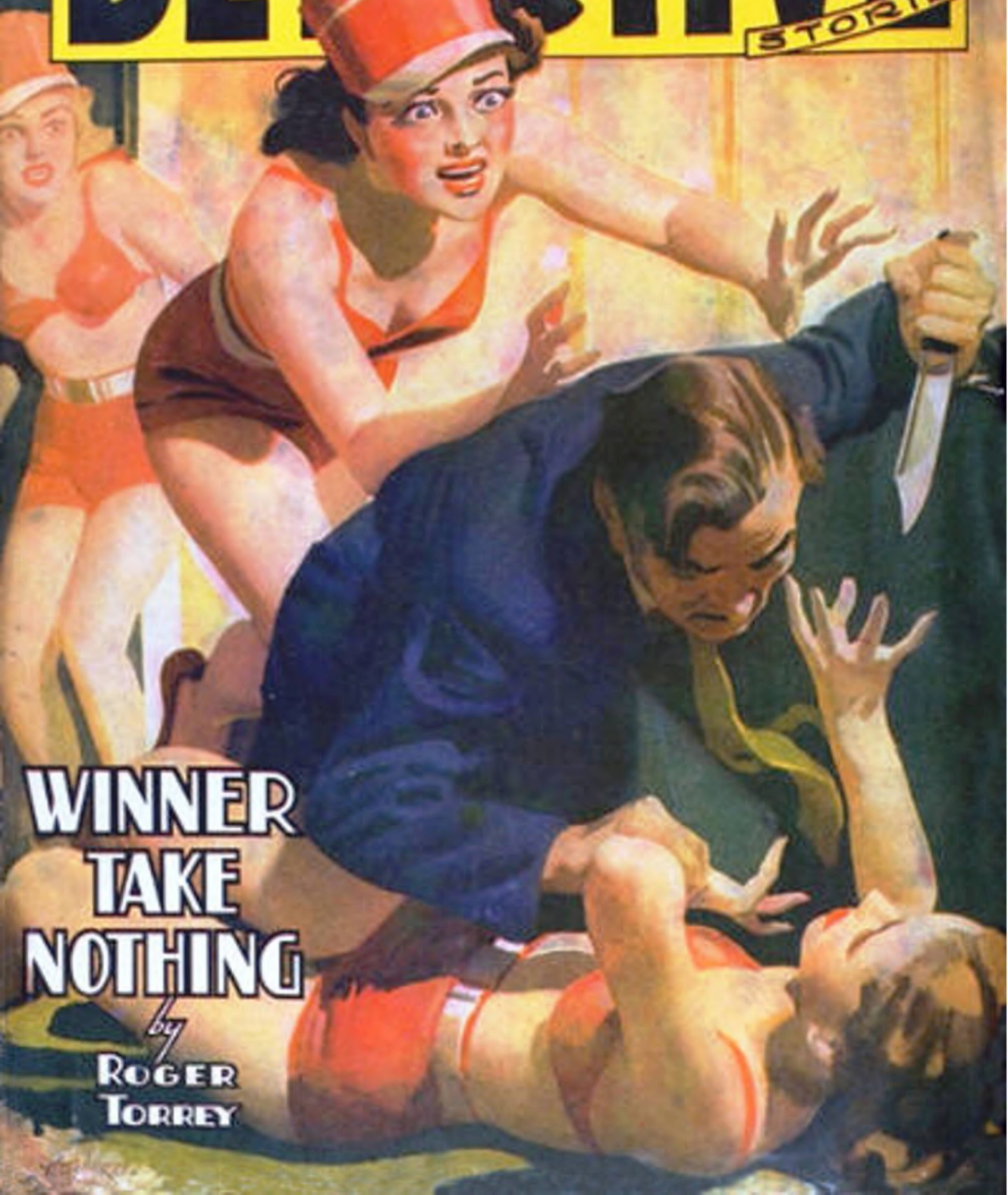


May 15¢

PRIVATE

DETECTIVE

STORIES



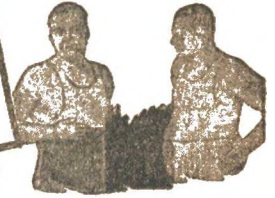
**WINNER
TAKE
NOTHING**

by
**ROGER
TORREY**



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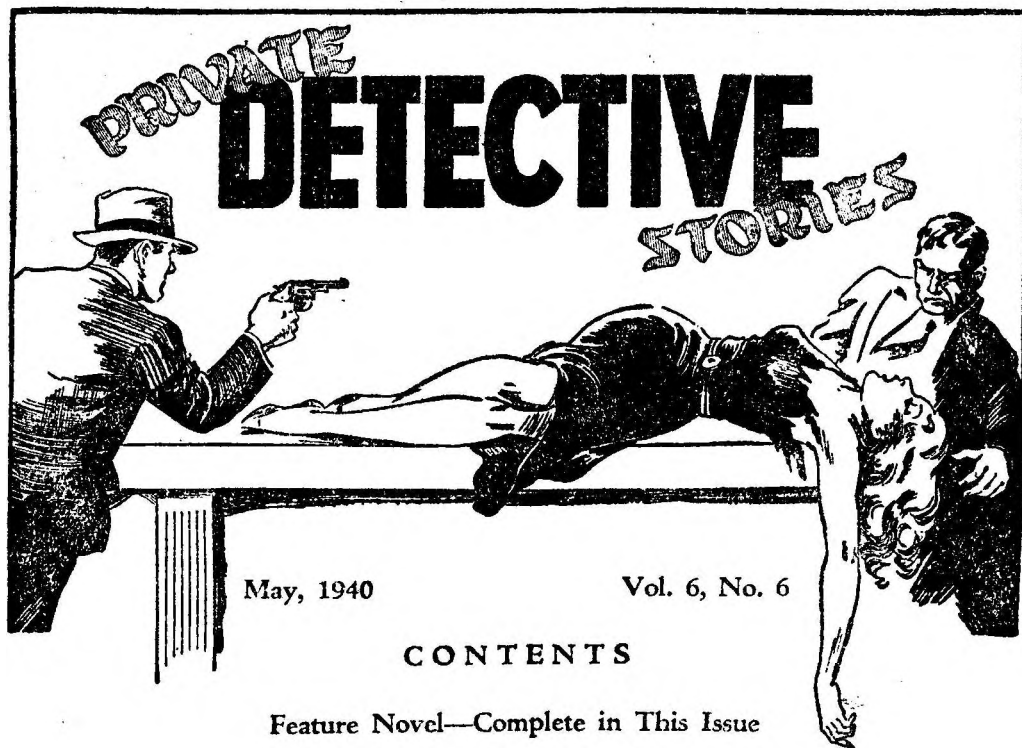
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■ Waistline fat often stretches and weakens abdominal muscles, allowing stomach and intestines to fall forward and downward. When these muscles are comfortably supported with a Vito Belt you will feel more like going places and doing things.



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May, 1940

Vol. 6, No. 6

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The names and descriptions of all characters appearing in this magazine are entirely fictitious. If there is any resemblance either in name or description, to any living person, it is purely a coincidence.

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FOOT ITCH

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*Send Coupon
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According to the Government Health Bulletin No. E-28, at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

HERE'S HOW TO RELIEVE IT

The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to destroy the germ; whereas, upon contact, laboratory tests show, H. F. will kill the germ Tinea Trichophyton within 15 seconds.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's Foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. H. F. gently peels the skin, which enables it to get to the parasites that exist under the outer cuticle.

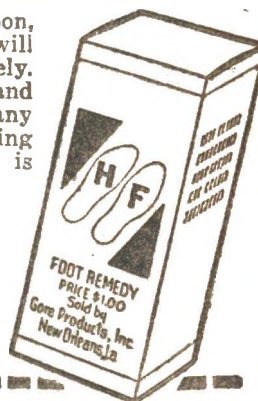
ITCHING OFTEN RELIEVED QUICKLY

As soon as you apply H. F. you may find that the itching is relieved. You should paint the infected parts with H. F. night and morning until your feet are better. Usually this takes from three to ten days, but in severe cases it is well to consult a specialist.

H. F. should leave the skin soft and smooth. You may marvel at the quick way it brings you relief. It costs you nothing to try; so if you are troubled with Athlete's Foot, why wait a day longer?

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Blue Ribbon



AL VERNON awoke to the jangling of the telephone. He reached up, turned on a reading light, and lifted the handpiece. It was five minutes after midnight by the clock on the phone table.



"Hello?"

"Mr. Vernon?" The voice was scarcely audible. "Is this Mr. Val Vernon, the private detective?"

"That's right. Speak a little louder, please."

"This is Brenda Caldwell of the Braymore Kennels, Mr. Vernon. Can you come at once?"

Val looked at the clock again. "I'm afraid it's rather late, Miss Caldwell. Can't it hold over until morning?"

"No, it's terribly urgent. Please, come. You can drive here in an hour. I'll meet you in the village. How soon can you leave?"

"Well—er—within a half hour, but can't you tell me what it's all about?"

"I'm sorry but I can't tell you over the phone. Believe me, it's a matter of life and death. You'll hurry, won't you? I'll give you directions."

After he had hung up, Val cursed

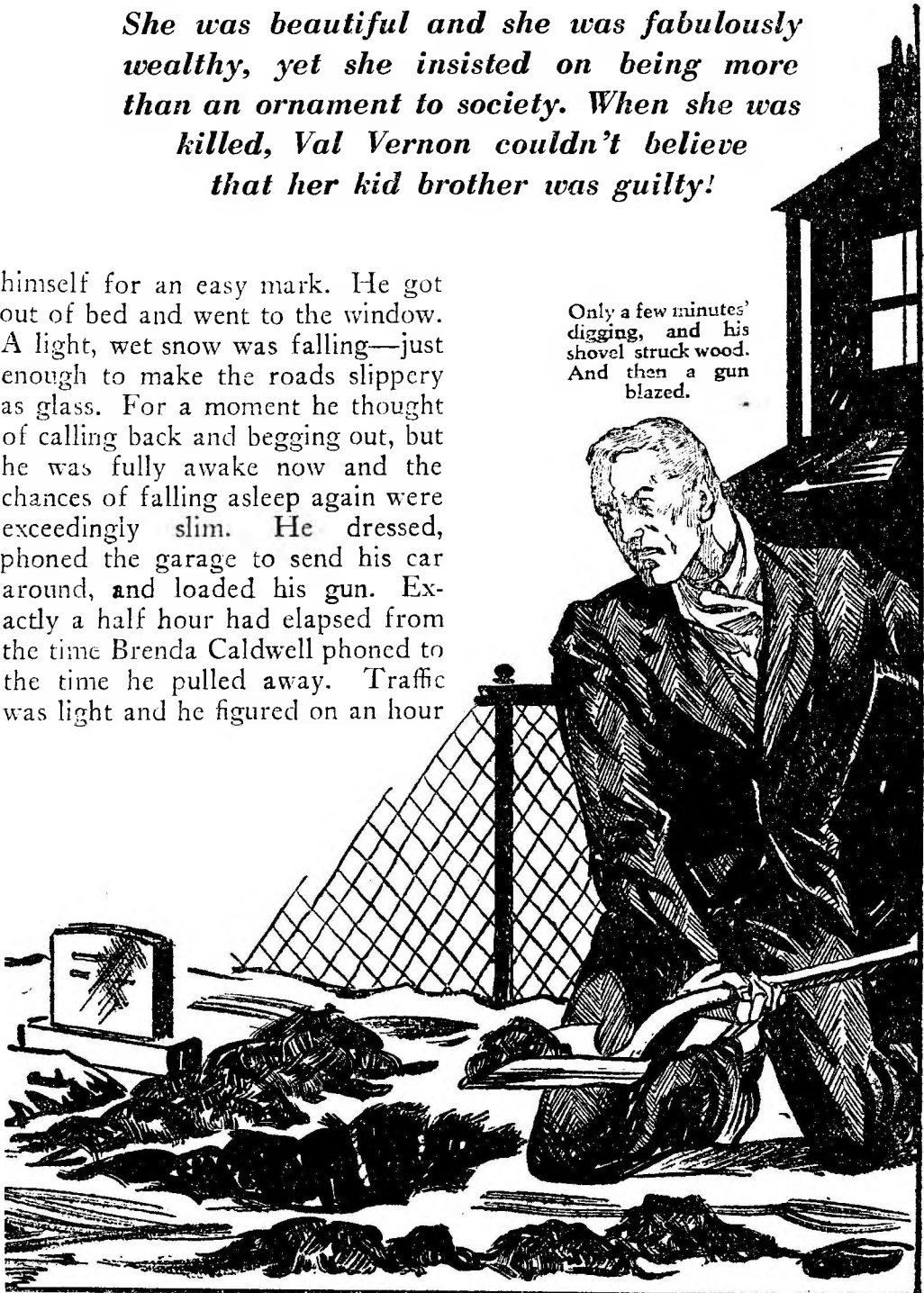
Murder

By ARTHUR WALLACE

She was beautiful and she was fabulously wealthy, yet she insisted on being more than an ornament to society. When she was killed, Val Vernon couldn't believe that her kid brother was guilty!

himself for an easy mark. He got out of bed and went to the window. A light, wet snow was falling—just enough to make the roads slippery as glass. For a moment he thought of calling back and begging out, but he was fully awake now and the chances of falling asleep again were exceedingly slim. He dressed, phoned the garage to send his car around, and loaded his gun. Exactly a half hour had elapsed from the time Brenda Caldwell phoned to the time he pulled away. Traffic was light and he figured on an hour

Only a few minutes' digging, and his shovel struck wood. And then a gun blazed.



to Cedarville where the Braymore Kennels were located.

IF IT had been almost anyone else, Val would have turned the assignment down without thinking twice, but, somehow, he had the feeling Brenda Caldwell wouldn't drag him out in the middle of the night on a fool's errand. He had never met her personally but he had seen enough photogravure pictures of her to know her anywhere. She was a gorgeous creature, with dark hair and a slim, high bosomed figure that showed to best advantage in jodhpurs and a jersey pullover. Her looks were not her only claim to fame.

Val recalled how, as sole executor of her father's strangely worded will, it had been within her power to dispose of it as she thought best. More than three million dollars in cash and securities was involved, equal parts of which she was to share with a younger brother and sister if she so decided.

The details were hazy in the detective's mind, but he seemed to recall that Brenda Caldwell had placed every penny of the legacy in trust until her brother and sister proved they were self-supporting. She had established a fashionable kennel specializing in the breeding and raising of show dogs and had taken her brother and sister in as partners. When the business, through their efforts, began to pay, they would receive their patrimony. If, however, either of them proved unworthy of the trust, the money would go to charity.

All in all, she was a curious paradox in a civilization where a costly

début and a permanent membership in café society is the goal of every feminine blueblood. Hence, Val Vernon's interest. Certainly, nothing usual had happened to Brenda Caldwell that would prompt her calling him out at midnight.

Beyond the city limits Val found the road dry. He kept his car at an even sixty and in somewhat less than an hour picked up a road marker that read: *Cedarville—Town Line*. Slowing down he passed over the mill bridge she had mentioned and rolled along the main street. A blue coupé with its dimmers burning was parked in front of the post office. Val pulled up behind it, turned his motor off, and got out. It was snowing again, light, feathery flakes that melted the moment they hit the pavement. Val turned his collar up and walked over to the coupé. A girl was behind the wheel, slumped down in the seat, her head lolling.

Val didn't blame her a bit for catching a nap. The dark, deserted village was a lonesome meeting place. He opened the door and said: "Miss Caldwell." There was no answer. Reaching in, he tapped what he thought was her shoulder. Something thick and wet stuck to his fingers. Drawing his hand back he brought out a pocket flash and directed it at his fingers. *They were blood-stained!* He swung the beam of light at the girl. It was Brenda Caldwell, all right, but not the way Val had expected to see her. Her mouth was hideously agape, her eyes were staring, and *the bone handle of a hunting knife protruded from her breast!*

He needed no doctor to tell him she was dead. The problem was how to get in touch with anyone—the police or the Braymore Kennels. None of the Cedarville stores were open at this hour of the morning and it was an odds on bet that all of the rustic population had long since gone to bed. He closed the door of the coupé and looked around. There wasn't a light visible. To all intents and purposes he might just as well have been in the middle of the Gobi Desert.

THEN, out of the darkness, came the faint but welcome sound of an automobile motor. Val stepped to the middle of the road and turned on his flash, waving it back and forth.

An old station wagon came over the crest of a hill and thundered down into the village. Loose brakes chattered and squealed as the top-heavy conveyance swung into the curb and skidded to a stop in front of Brenda Caldwell's coupé. A man and a woman got out.

Val intercepted the woman before she could reach the coupé. The beam of his flash swept across her face and he knew she was Brenda Caldwell's sister. "I wouldn't go near the car if I were you," he said.

She was breathing rapidly and an open trench coat revealed the tumult of her young breasts under a tight, crew-neck sweater. "What do you mean? I'm Claire Caldwell. My sister—"

Val swung around. The man had opened the coupé door and was looking inside. "Don't touch that body!" the detective cried.

"Body?" the girl echoed, turning

ghastly pale. She tried to slip by Val but he gripped her arms.

"Your sister is dead, Miss Caldwell," he said evenly. "She's been murdered!"

He felt her shudder violently as though a strong electric current had gone through her. Then her knees buckled and she collapsed. Val lifted her up and carried her to the station wagon. The man who had come with her ran over and opened the door so that she could be stretched out on the front seat. He was short and stocky and rather oldish, with iron-gray hair protruding from under the brim of a battered felt hat. The skin of his face was wrinkled and weather-beaten like old, dry leather.

"Who did it?" he gasped. "Who killed Miss Brenda?" His pale blue eyes were watery, perhaps from the tears in them.

"I don't know," Val replied. "That's how I found her. Who are you?"

The man sniffed. "Jason Horton, kennel manager at Braymore." He shook his head sadly. "I knew no good was coming of this. I told her."

"What did you tell her?"

"Not to go against human nature. Now what has she got? What?" He croaked the last word hollowly.

Val realized it was neither the time nor the place for questioning. "How do we notify the police? Miss Caldwell has a brother, hasn't she?"

Jason Horton nodded dazedly. "He'll take it hard, Mr. Guy will. Always fighting and carrying on, but he loved her just the same, him and Miss Claire. She could have had the best man living but she turned them

all down for those two kids. Oh, it's terrible. First the dog and then her."

"What dog?"

"Toffingham II. Finest stud setter in the world. Someone poisoned him. It broke Miss Brenda up terrible. Treated that dog like a baby, she did."

"You can tell me all about that later, Horton," Val said. "The police must be notified. How can I reach them?"

"Raynor Wickham's the police. Got to go to his house."

"Take my car," Val said. "I'll wait here."

THE kennel manager drove off just as Claire Caldwell stirred on the seat of the station wagon. Val watched her regain consciousness, helped her to sit up. She passed the back of her hand over her eyes. "What—what happened?"

"You fainted, Miss Caldwell."

The blank uncertainty went out of her eyes and anguish took its place. "I remember now," she said dully. Brenda is—is dead! You said *murdered!*"

"I'm afraid so, Miss Caldwell."

Her lower lip trembled. "Why—why should anyone have wanted to kill Brenda?" Hysteria gripped her with amazing suddenness. "No!" she screamed. "It's a lie! Let me go to her!"

Val slipped an arm around her slim waist, held her close. Her auburn hair was like scented silk against his mouth and he could feel the taut curves of her youthful figure against his chest. She fought to free herself and each movement of her body brought her closer.

"Please try to keep calm, Miss Caldwell," Val said. "You can probably help a lot more that way."

She stopped fighting. "Then—then it's true? Brenda . . . is . . . dead?"

Val nodded. "What brought you into town at this hour?"

"Jason told me her car was gone. I knew she was heartbroken about the dog and I was afraid something might happen to her driving around alone! I asked Jason to bring me down in the station wagon."

"When did the dog die?"

"Early this evening—just after Mr. and Mrs. Forrester arrived. Mr. Forrester offered to buy Toffingham for five thousand dollars. Guy—my brother—wanted Brenda to sell him. You see, the money would take the kennels out of the red. They had a violent argument—Guy and Brenda. About an hour later Toffingham was dead—poisoned, Brenda said. She and Jason buried him." Claire Caldwell looked up at Val. "Why am I telling you all this? I don't know you!"

Val introduced himself and explained how he happened to be in Cedarville. "Is Mr. Forrester a kennel man?" he asked.

"Yes, in Canada. Guy met Steve and his wife on a ski trip to the Laurentians. I don't like either of them, but they have money."

Two cars came over the crest of the hill. One was the detective's, the other a ramshackle Ford which, when it stopped, disgorged a plump, red-nosed man, still half-sleep. Raynor Wickham was not accustomed to getting up in the middle of the night. Neither was he accustomed to murder. One look at

Brenda Caldwell's face was enough for him.

"This'll have to go to the county seat at Tarton," he gulped. "Can't handle it here nohow. Got to call the coroner and the state's attorney. You say you're a detective?"

"I'll be at the Braymore Kennels if you need me, Mr. Wickham," Val said. "May I suggest that you have the car gone over carefully for fingerprints? And another thing. I'd like to see the body before it's embalmed, if you don't mind."

"Don't bother me none. You figger to do a little detecting on this case?"

Val smiled. "As much as I can."

"We got to get the whole story. How she come to be here this time of night and the like?"

"I'll get that at the kennels. Don't forget the fingerprints. You'll probably find some on the knife handle."

Raynor Wickham mopped his brow. "Got me sweatin', this has. He strode over to the station wagon. "Mighty sorry about this, Miss Caldwell. Reckon I could borrow Jason to run me a couple of errands?"

Claire nodded vacantly. "Of course, Mr. Wickham. Anything you want."

"I'll drive you back to the kennels in my car, Miss Caldwell," Val said.



IT WAS less than a mile from Cedarville to the Braymore Kennels. As he pulled into the driveway of the main house, the lights of Val's car picked out a man and a woman crossing the lawn. Claire Caldwell's fingers dug into the seat.

"That's Mr. and Mrs. Forrester," she said quickly. The couple disappeared behind a clump of evergreens. A woman's high-pitched giggle rode on the still night air, then a door slammed. "They were drinking when I left," Claire Caldwell explained. "Would you like to see the kennels, Mr. Vernon?"

"That can wait until morning," Val said. "Since the Forresters are up, I think I'd better have a word with them. Your brother, too."

She came close to him, her dark eyes pleading. "Must you tell Guy tonight? Can't that wait until morning, too?"

"I suppose it can."

She managed a wan smile. "Thank you so much. Shall we go in now? You must be tired after your long drive."

Val followed her into the large, rambling house. As he entered the foyer, he heard a woman voice a feeble protest. "No, honey, not now. Someone might walk in."

Claire Caldwell flushed crimson and stepped to the arched entrance to the living room. "Oh, it's you," she said.

"I think it was damned rude of you and Brenda to bob off and leave the Forresters here alone!" a man inside the room said angrily. "You knew Steve had a headache and went to bed at ten o'clock! Where the hell were you?"

The flush faded from Claire Caldwell's cheeks and gave way to waxen pallor. "I—I had to meet a friend of mine." She motioned to Val who joined her at the entrance to the living room. "Mrs. Forrester, Mr. Vernon. My brother, Guy."

Val nodded to the tall platinum

blonde and young Caldwell. They had both been drinking and it was obvious that liquor had inspired other diversions. Mrs. Forrester's almost flaxen hair was disarranged and of the five rhinestone buttons that closed the form-fitting bodice of her black satin dress, the top three were open, exposing a milky-white throat and a provocative hint of full curves below. Guy Caldwell's weak mouth bore a trace of raspberry lipstick.

"You probably want some sleep after that long drive," Claire said. "I'll show you to your room."

"Have a drink with us, Vernon," Guy suggested. "The night's young."

Val smiled. "I think I'll turn in. See you in the morning."

ALONE in a large bedroom on the second floor, Val made a note of the few important things he had already learned. It was quite evident Claire Caldwell had obstinately lied when she identified the figures walking across the lawn as Mr. and Mrs. Forrester. She knew Forrester had retired. Her motive was clear. Aware, no doubt, of what was going on between her brother and the platinum blonde, she was trying to keep it quiet.

Or maybe there was more to it than that. Off-hand, he didn't see the connection between the poisoning of the dog and Brenda Caldwell's cold-blooded murder although it was evident Brenda had summoned him to solve the poisoning. Someone was trying to prevent that solution being made. Val went down the list of people involved, but failed to see how any of them would benefit by the dog's death. Forrester, if he had

offered five thousand dollars for the animal, certainly wouldn't want him dead. In the same light, neither would any of the Caldwells. He was afraid the dog was a red herring and he dismissed it from his mind.

Brenda Caldwell's murder was another matter. Both her brother and sister stood to gain, in that their father's fortune would now come into their hands. Guy and Brenda had argued about the sale of the dog to Forrester—"violent" was the word Claire had used when she blurted it out. Could he have followed her into town and killed her? Despite his promise, Val decided to question him immediately. Sober, he might be a tough nut to crack. With a few drinks in him, there was a chance of his tongue slipping.

The detective tip-toed out into the hall and listened at the head of the stairs. All he could hear was the slow, heavy ticking of a grandfather clock. He started down, stepping heavily as he reached the bottom, not wanting to surprise them. To his amazement there were no sounds from the living room. He coughed three times to announce his presence but still no response. Val moved to the entrance and looked in.

Guy Caldwell was sprawled out on a divan, one leg dangling. There was no sign of Mrs. Forrester. For a moment the detective thought he had another killing on his hands, but closer examination showed young Caldwell has simply passed out. However, even that seemed a little strange. He hadn't looked that pie-eyed less than ten minutes ago. Val shook him. He was out cold.

The faint creak of a door hinge and then the louder click of a latch

brought Val around. Through the arched living room door he saw Mrs. Forrester stealing into the foyer from the outside. She had evidently been running. Her hair

He scraped some of the dark stain from beneath her nails.



was wind-blown and her breath came in audible gasps.

"Aren't you afraid of catching cold, Mrs. Forrester?" Val said.

She wheeled, startled, and her cheeks went pale under her rouge. "I—I had to have some air!" she gulped. "It got terribly stuffy in here."

Val sauntered out to the foyer. "You don't expect me to believe that, do you?"

Her blue eyes widened. "What do you mean?"

"You know exactly what I mean! You've been running. You're out of breath. You sneaked in here like a criminal. What's the answer?"

She drew herself up, eyes narrowed now and flashing, her full bosom straining at her bodice. "I don't see that I have to answer to you for anything, Mr. Vernon! Good night!"

She started up the steps but Val caught her wrist. "Just a moment, Mrs. Forrester. I'm not through."

"Take your hand off me!" she cried. "My husband—"

"Your husband might be interested in a few other things that happened here tonight," Val interrupted.

She tried to jerk loose. "Don't you threaten me! I'll scream unless you let me go at once!"

"I wouldn't advise that, Mrs. Forrester. Not until you learn why I'm here. You see, I happen to be a detective." He watched her taut, angry face. "I've come from the city to investigate *the murder of Brenda Caldwell!*"

If he had expected a startling reaction, he was doomed to disappointment. She merely stared at

him, her coarsely attractive face absolutely blank. Val followed up his declaration. "Miss Caldwell was stabbed to death in her parked car. How much do you know about it?"

"I—I don't know what you're talking about!" Her husky voice carried. "Let me go!"

Val brought her down to his own level. "This isn't any joke, Mrs. Forrester. It's murder—and you're a suspect! You'll have to explain every moment of your time. Now, do you want to explain to me or would you prefer waiting for the police? You have your choice."

BEFORE she could reply, the doorbell rang stridently. Val released her to answer it. Raynor Wickham came in accompanied by Jason Horton and two other men. They were introduced to Val as Brown, the state's attorney, and Henderson, chief of county detectives. Brown, a small, nervous little man, peered at Mrs. Forrester through thick-lensed glasses.

"I've got a warrant for Guy Caldwell's arrest," he said. "Where is he?"

"We figure Caldwell killed his sister to get his hands on the money," Raynor Wickham explained. "Don't seem to be no other answer."

"What about fingerprints?" Val questioned. "Did you check?"

"Weren't any," Henderson replied. "Not on the knife handle or on the steering wheel."

Val's eyes flickered. "That means she was killed before she got to town and someone else drove the car into Cedarville and parked it."

Brown looked up. "How come?"

"The wheel showed no prints.

That means it was wiped. If she drove it, there wouldn't have been any need for wiping it."

"That still don't let Caldwell out," Henderson said. "Horton, here, told us they had a fight over whether to sell one of their dogs. Anyway, we want to talk to him. Where is he?"

Val motioned to the living room. "In there—dead drunk."

Brown and Henderson filed in but Raynor Wickham lingered. "They got their minds pretty much made up," he confided. "Can't say as I see eye to eye with 'em, but it ain't for me to object."

"Where's the body?" Val questioned.

"In the undertaker's down to Horton. Doc Blake, the coroner, looked her over. Said the knife killed her instantly. Found some scratches on her neck like one of her dogs pawed her."

"I'd like to see the body," Val said. "Can you drive me down? We'll take my car."

"Sure thing."

Mrs. Forrester came over to Val. "I'd like to talk to you—alone."

He shook his head. "Too late now."

Henderson came out of the living room carrying a glass. "He's not drunk. Someone slipped him a knockout drop!"

Val glanced at Mrs. Forrester. She was ghastly pale. He introduced her to Henderson. "Maybe she can throw some light on that. I'm going down with Mr. Wickham to look at the body. I'll be back shortly."

There was a thin coating of snow on the ground when Val stepped

outside. "How long has it been snowing like this?" he asked Wickham.

"Close to an hour."

"Wait a minute." Using his flash he studied the foot and automobile tracks on the driveway. One set—a woman's footprints—led across the lawn toward a group of low buildings. Val followed them easily with Wickham on his heels. They ended at the door of one of the buildings, a two-story frame structure.

"These are the kennels," the constable said. "This one's where Jason Horton lives. Reckon it's got an office in it, too." He tried the door, but it was locked.

"That's all right," Val said.

THE Tarton mortician had gone back to bed but Raynor Wickham routed him out. Under a yellow lamp in a room that smelled of embalming fluid Val examined Brenda Caldwell's sheet-wrapped body. He noted the scratches on the neck but was more interested in the dark stains on the tips of her fingers and beneath her nails. Using a pen-knife he scraped some of the matter from under her index fingernail. It looked like ink. He wiped the knife on a clean handkerchief. It was either ink or black paint, but he had to make certain.

Leaving the mortuary, Val had Raynor Wickham take him to the home of the local druggist who, the constable said, did chemical testing. An hour later he had confirmation. The black on Brenda Caldwell's fingers was stove polish!

The Caldwell house was ablaze with lights when Val and the constable got back. Henderson had suc-

ceeded in bringing Guy Caldwell around and was plying him with questions. Claire and Mrs. Forrester and a big, gray-haired man Val took to be the blonde's husband, were in the room. So was Brown, the state's attorney, and Jason Horton.

"He won't talk," Henderson grunted. "They're all trying to tell me he didn't leave the house to-night."

"Well, he didn't!" Claire cried heatedly. "I know he didn't!" Her eyes met Val's for an instant before they dropped guiltily. He could see her dig her fingers into her arm and press the inside of her elbow against her breast.

"I think it best to start at the beginning," he said quietly. "Who discovered the dog was poisoned?"

Jason Horton answered. "I did. About twenty minutes after he was fed."

"You fed him?"

"I feed them all."

"What time was that?"

"When I fed him or when I found him dead in his cage?"

"Both."

The kennel manager took his time. "He was supposed to be fed at five, but I held it up because Mister Guy brought Mr. and Mrs. Forrester in to see him right about then. I guess it was five-thirty when I fed him. Then I went to the south kennel and, when I came back, I found him stretched out stiff. I ran over and got Miss Brenda, but it was too late. He was dead. We buried him about ten o'clock."

"Was it snowing when you buried him?"

"Snowing? I guess a little."

VAL swung on Mrs. Forrester. "What were you doing around the kennels at two o'clock this morning? After you slipped those knock-out drops into Guy Caldwell's glass?"

"Don't answer, Dolly!" her husband barked.

"Evidently you have something to hide, Mr. Forrester," Val said sarcastically.

"We're not hiding anything, Mister. We're not answering questions, either. I came here as Brenda Caldwell's guest and I don't intend to be cross-examined by any cheap dick, see? We don't know anything about the crime. Is that clear?"

"Not as clear as it could be. You offered five thousand dollars for the dog that was poisoned, didn't you?"

"What if I did? Is that against the law?"

"It might be."

Forrester snickered. "Then I'm crazy, Mister." He pointed at Guy Caldwell. "Why don't you ask *him* who poisoned the dog? I heard him tell his sister he'd shoot the damn' mutt!"

"That's a lie!" Claire screamed.

Guy Caldwell lumbered to his feet. "I'll punch your head off, Forrester!"

Henderson pushed him back. "Take it easy, all of you."

"Did you threaten to kill the dog, Caldwell?" Val asked.

The youngster glowered sullenly. "Maybe I did, but I didn't mean it! I was sore because Brenda wouldn't sell. That five grand would have—"

"Guy!" Claire Caldwell's voice cracked like a whip.

There was a moment of deadly silence. Then the state's attorney

said: "We've had enough foolishness. You've got a warrant for Caldwell's arrest, Joe. Take him in."

"You can't do that!" Claire cried.

Val stepped over to her, took her arm. "Don't worry about it. They won't hold him long."

"Everyone of you has to appear before the coroner's jury tomorrow at ten," Brown said. "Raynor, you stay here and see that none of them leave the premises."

Henderson led Guy Caldwell out. Brown followed them. "You folks can turn in now," the constable said. "Ain't no sense stayin' up."

FORRESTER took his wife's arm and marched up the steps. "I bunk over above the kennel office," Jason Horton said. "If there's anything you need, just let me know."

"One thing before you go," Val said. "How did you discover Miss Brenda Caldwell had left?"

"I heard a car go out and it was pretty late so I got dressed and went down to the garage. I found her coupé gone, so I came over to the house and told Miss Claire. I didn't like the looks of it, her driving out at that hour."

"I guess that's all," Val said. "Good night."

Jason Horton left. "Better get some sleep," Raynor Wickham suggested. "They'll be askin' a lot of questions at the coroner's jury tomorrow."

Claire Caldwell, weary and beaten, moved to the stairway. Val walked up with her, motioned to her to come into his room. He closed and locked the door. "I don't want you to eat your heart out about your

brother," he said. "I think I know who's responsible for all this trouble. You can help me get to the bottom of it by answering a few questions, but honestly."

She drew a deep breath, swelling her lovely bosom. "The only reason I lied was to protect Guy. I'll tell you anything you want to know."

"Good. Your sister called me at midnight. Did you or anyone in the house know she phoned?"

"I didn't and I was reading in the living room. Mr. Forrester had gone to bed. Guy and—and that woman were out driving. There's only one phone in the house—in the hall. I would have heard her making the call."

"That means she telephoned from some other place. Where?"

"The kennel office has a phone. It's an extension of this one."

"Horton would have heard her. He said nothing about it. We can ask him in the morning. Now, what do you know about the Forresters? Why were they so anxious to get that dog?"

"For stud purposes. Toffingham was best of breed in the American Kennel Club show. He held nine blue ribbons." She bit her lip. "I—I don't like to say this but—but I think Guy might have poisoned the dog in anger, just to spite Brenda. of course, I may be wrong, but—"

A light knock sounded at the door. Val hurried Claire Caldwell over to a closet before responding. It was Dolly Forrester. She had changed from the black satin dress to a pink silk negligee trimmed with maribou. "May I come in for a moment?" she asked sweetly.

Val nodded. He noticed her lips

were freshly rouged and she had combed out her hair so that it hung almost to her shoulders. There was nothing under the negligee—nothing but the warm, voluptuous curves of her very feminine body.

"I just wanted to apologize for being rude," she murmured, her voice low and husky. She ran a hand over a sleek hip and dropped her eyes. "You'll forgive me?"

Val watched her bosom rising and falling in the slow, even rhythm of her breathing. "I'll forgive you if you tell me what you were doing at the kennel office and why you spiked young Caldwell's drink."

She tried hard to resemble the soul of innocence—even to the extent of managing a blush. "He was too persistent. I—I was afraid something might happen. After all, I *am* a married woman."

"Do you make a habit of carrying knockout drops to repel ardent men?"

"It—it was a capsule I happened to have. A sedative I sometimes use when I can't sleep. It's rather strong."

"I should think so. Now, what about your stroll over to the kennel office?"

SHE moved closer to the detective. "Just a walk. You must believe me." Her hand dropped intimately on his arm, fingers working. "I wouldn't want my husband to know about Guy's behavior. I realize he's just an emotional boy but Steve might not understand. You'll keep my secret, won't you?"

Val's head swam with the odor rising from her almost bare bosom. She was so close to him now he

could feel her warmth through the thin silk of the negligee. He tried to back away but her arm slid around his neck.

"You know," she whispered. "I rather like you. You're type appeals to me." Her lips parted and her breath blew across Val's mouth. "Hold me close!" she panted. Her eyes fluttered languorously. "You must think I'm terrible, don't you?"

Val stepped away. "Mrs. Forrester, I think you're the cheapest, most detestable liar I've ever had the doubtful pleasure of meeting! Go back to your husband and tell him it didn't work!" Taking her by the arm he pushed her to the door, opened it, and sent her stumbling out to the hall.

CLAIRE CALDWELL emerged from the closet. "If I hadn't heard it I never would have imagined it was true," she said bitterly. "That woman is the lowest of the low!"

"Forget her. We have work to do. Can we get out of this house without going through the front hall?"

"Yes, there's a back stairway."

"Good. Now, do you know where the dog is buried?"

"I imagine in the plot Brenda set aside for a cemetery. She buried two still-born pups there last month. Why do you ask?"

"Because I want to exhume the dog. Can we get a shovel?"

"There must be one in the garage but I can't go out this way. Both my coats are downstairs."

"Throw mine over your shoulders," Val suggested. "We won't be long."



HE beam of Val's pocket flash against the white layer of snow provided sufficient illumination to guide them from the house to the garage and then across a field to the dog cemetery. A

freshly turned mound of earth indicated where Toffingham II had been buried. With Claire Caldwell holding the flash, Val set to work. In



five minutes his shovel struck wood. Down on his knees he uncovered a small pine box and was freeing the earth around it when a gun blazed out of the darkness and a bullet struck Claire Caldwell.

Val caught her as she crumpled, but the flash fell from her hand and went into the dog's grave. A second shot sent lead whizzing by his ear. Crouched low, he drew his gun and waited for the spurt of flame that would mark whoever was shooting but it never came. A dog howled and then another and another. Groping, Val pressed the palm of his hand against the yielding under-curve of Claire Caldwell's breast. The rhythmic thud of her heart was a welcome feeling.

He opened the coat and found blood trickling from a wound in her shoulder. Lifting her in his arms he started for the main house just as a light went on in Jason Horton's apartment above the kennel office. A window shot up and the pajama-clad kennel manager looked out.

Val kept going. When he reached the house, Raynor Wickham was coming down the porch steps brandishing a .45. He recognized Val and his eyes popped. "What—in the name—"

"Open the door for me!" the detective snapped. "She's been shot and she's bleeding!"

In the living-room he stretched the girl out on a divan and ripped away the front of her dress. The bullet had pierced the hollow of her shoulder and gone clean through, miraculously missing the scapula. It was only a flesh wound with a few torn blood vessels.

"Who did it?" the constable panted.

"Never mind that now! You'd better call a doctor. It's not serious but it needs cleaning."

While Raynor Wickham hurried to the phone, Val found the kitchen and a pan of warm water. He wiped the blood from her breast and tried to staunch the flow with a knotted handkerchief. He was getting it to clot when Jason Horton, carrying a shotgun and wearing a mackinaw over his pajamas, came in.

"I heard shooting and—" He stopped short. "My God, what happened?"

"Someone fired at us at the dog cemetery. Miss Caldwell was hit. She'll be all right—just a shoulder wound."

The constable returned. "Doc Blake'll be right over. She still bleedin'?"

"Not so much. Horton, you hold this knot over the wound. Wickham, you'd better go up and check on the Forresters. Bring them down. I'll take a look around."

"Maybe I better go along, Mr. Vernon," Jason Horton said. "I know the land pretty well."

"You stay here. I'll take your flashlight."

OUTSIDE, Val Vernon made a bee-line for the kennel office. The thought that had been working in his mind ever since he had noticed Brenda Caldwell's black-stained fingers was now ripe. A green-shaded desk lamp was burning in the office when he reached it. He turned the knob and opened the door. A man with his coat collar up was kneeling at an iron safe. He shot to

his feet and the circle of light from the detective's flash struck him full in the face. *It was Guy Caldwell!*

Even Val was momentarily taken aback. He looked for a revolver in the boy's hand but there was none. "How did you get here?" he questioned.

Guy Caldwell shielded his eyes from the brilliant light of the flash. "Never mind that! You can't stop me from being here!"

"You were under arrest. Henderson took you away on a warrant."

"I gave him the slip and I came back to get some money. It belongs to me."

The headlights of a fast-moving car swung into the driveway. Guy Caldwell's cheeks twitched and he stiffened. "That's Henderson now," Val said. "You'd better give up without—"

The boy leaped like a cat, his outstretched hands reaching for Val's throat. The detective saw him coming, but it was too late to duck. He braced himself, clubbed his gun and aimed the butt at the side of Caldwell's head. There was a dull, hollow thud as metal struck bone. Caldwell collapsed in a heap, shuddered and lay still. Val stepped over him to the desk and studied the buff blotter that partially covered the polished surface. He tore off a small piece of it when he found what he wanted, dropped it into his pocket. He was about to proceed to the upper floor when he heard the sharp crack of a dry twig outside the door. Backing into a corner he crouched down. The door swung open, but nobody entered. Val's finger tightened on the gun trigger as he saw a foot feel for the step. The next

instant Jason Horton lunged into the room, pointing his shotgun. The body on the floor threw him off guard for a split second, but it was time enough. Val came out of the shadows.

"Drop that gun, Horton!"

The kennel manager looked up, raised the deadly weapon and pointed it at Val Vernon's chest. The small room shook with the explosion of a shot but no smoke curled from the muzzle of Jason Horton's gun. It was Val's automatic that sent gray wisps to the ceiling.

VAL VERNON faced a strangely assorted company in the living-room of the Caldwell house. Claire's left arm was in a sling and Guy wore a turban of bandage. Dolly Forrester was still wearing her pink silk negligee, but her husband was fully dressed and fuming. Raynor Wickham stood at the arched entrance holding his gun ready while Henderson, the chief of detectives, watched the proceedings, chewing on a matchstick. Only one face was missing—the kennel manager's.

"As you all must realize by this time," Val said, "it was Jason Horton who murdered Miss Caldwell. Fate, rather than the law, has seen to it that he paid for his crime. He turned to the Canadian dog breeder. "Mr. Forrester, you and your wife arrived here yesterday afternoon at Miss Caldwell's invitation. You planned to buy some dogs, is that right?"

"Yes," sullenly.

"You made an offer of \$5,000 for Toffingham II which was refused. Did you plan to pay for the dog by cash or check?"

"I always pay cash."

"Then, of course, you have the money with you. May I see it?"

Forrester paled. "I don't see where it's any of your damn' business!"

"You will—shortly. May I see the money?"

"No."

"You're obstructing justice, Mr. Forrester! In this country that happens to be a punishable offense."

Henderson came over. "Show him the money, Mister."

Forrester brought out a fat wallet, flipped it open. "Here, does that satisfy you?"

"May I see one of the hundred dollar bills?"

The Canadian tried to get the wallet back into his pocket, but Henderson was too quick. He snatched it from his hands, removed a hundred dollar bill and handed it to Val.

"You can't do that!" Forrester screamed. "I know my rights!"

Val reached into his pocket and brought out a sheaf of bills—all new currency like the one from Forrester's wallet. He compared the serial numbers. "Just as I thought." He waved the sheaf of currency. "This money—two thousand dollars—was hidden in a drawer in Jason Horton's room. Do you know how he happened to have it, Mr. Forrester?"

"How should I know? This is an outrage!"

"I'm afraid you know too well because you gave Jason Horton the money! The numbers are from the same series as your bill! Now, do you want to tell us your story?"

"I have nothing to tell!"

Val smiled. "Then I'll tell it. You made an offer to Miss Caldwell for the dog. She turned you down. Evidently you had previous acquaintance with Jason Horton and so you approached him with a proposition to get the dog for you in return for two thousand in cash. I assume he did. Where is Toffingham II?"

Forrester snickered. "Dead and buried! Wouldn't I be the sap to pay for a dead dog!"

"You didn't. You paid for a live one! The dog that was poisoned was *not* Toffingham II!"

Claire Caldwell started. Henderson's eyes narrowed. "You're crazy!" Forrester snapped.

"Not so crazy, Mr. Forrester. Horton had to think of some way of getting Toffingham II for you so he substituted another setter with the identical markings. He poisoned its food and together with Miss Caldwell, buried the animal. It was snowing at the time and evidently the dead dog's fur became wet. Horton, in order to duplicate Toffingham II's markings on the spurious setter, had used stove blacking. Some of it came off on Brenda Caldwell's hands. It seems to have taken her two hours to decide what the black on her fingers represented. No doubt she discussed it with Jason Horton, but he had no logical reason and she probably suspected chicanery. She called me at midnight from the kennel office. I know that because I have here the piece of the desk blotter on which she wrote my telephone number.

"Horton, when he realized a detective was being summoned, got panicky. He offered to drive Miss Caldwell into town to meet me.

Either en route or when he reached Cedarville, he killed her and walked back here to tell her sister he had heard a car going out."

Forrester's thick lips were dry. "You can't prove I gave him any money. Where's the real dog?"

"That worried you, too, Mr. Forrester. So much so that your promiscuous wife doped Guy Caldwell's drink and hurried over to the kennel office to find out what Horton had done with Toffingham II. In all probability we'll find the dog crated in the woods or hidden in some shack. Unfortunately, although you are morally responsible for Brenda Caldwell's death, the law can do nothing to you. I would suggest, however, that you get out of here as fast as you can before something happens to you!"

THE Forresters had gone. Henderson and Raynor Wickham loaded Jason Horton's body into the tonneau of a car and drove away. For a long time the living room was heavy with silence. Then Val said: "Might as well drive back now. Dawn's coming up."

There were tears in Claire Caldwell's eyes, but she blinked them away. "Can't you stay on for a few days? We'd so love to have you."

Guy Caldwell rose. Overnight he seemed to have gained stature and maturity. "I'm going to bed," he said. "See you in the morning, Mr. Vernon."

Alone with the detective, Claire looked up at him. "You'll stay, won't you?"

There was no refusing the invitation in her eyes.

"Drink, Disorderly, and Dead"



a complete novelette featuring Dan
Turner, ace Hollywood detective, will
appear in next month's issue of

..Private Detective Stories..

WINNER



AS JOE KENT knocked at the door his hat tipped ahead nicely by itself and covered his left eye. He gave a startled look at the round hole that had suddenly appeared in the door at head level, and then heard the flat *spang* of a rifle. He let out a yelp and dropped to the porch floor, and Charley Morris said, from behind him:

"Hey Joe! That sounded like a gun."

Kent was crawling backward, not taking time to turn around. He went down the steps like a frightened crab, saying:

"It *was* a gun."

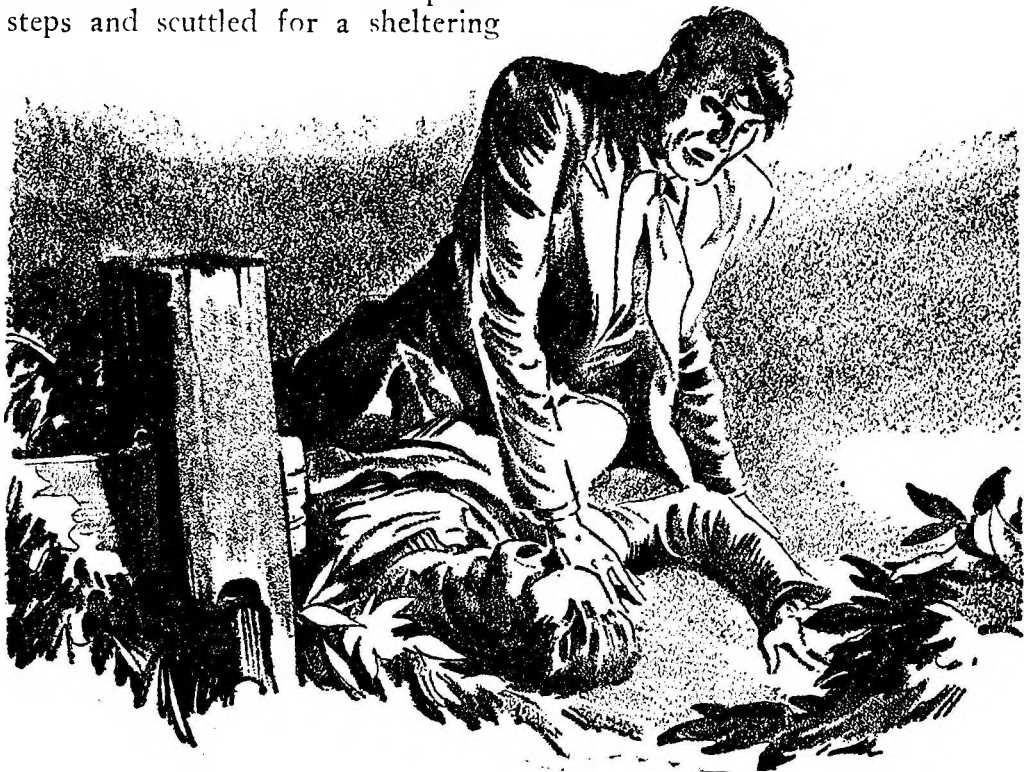
He fell down the last two porch steps and scuttled for a sheltering

bush, and then took stock of things. He really hadn't had time before for this.

One of the two newspaper men with him was Charley Morris, who looked like a well-dressed Cupid. Charley was standing upright and was staring around with a stupid expression on his chubby face. The other, Abe Goldstein, lean and sardonic and looking like a rag-picker's advertisement, was already under the bushes on the opposite side of the walk.

Abe said: "Get down, Charley, get down! I heard that slug hit the door. Get down, you dope."

Hymie Schultz, cab driver and Kent's part-time helper, called from



Take Nothing

By **ROGER TORREY**

Kent was usually susceptible to ladies with lure; but he couldn't fall for this girl who was callous to the torture-death of her own mother. She was just a lovely bum and he had a murder to solve



"She tries to shoot him with Joey's gun, after all he does for her!"

his hack: "Hey, Joey boy! Was that meant for us? Hey, Joey?"

"For *me*," Kant called back.

It finally dawned on Charley Morris that he was a possible target. He wailed and fell on top of Abe Goldstein, who had a hand stepped on in the excitement. Goldstein started talking about this, profanely, and then Kent got up from the ground and ran around the corner of the house. He was stooping almost double and his gun was in his hand. Charley Morris started to follow, but Goldstein caught him by the ankle and yanked him back down again and said:

"Hey, dope! You got to cross the walk to get there. Don't give the guy a target."

Hymie Schultz, with a sublime disregard of the hidden marksman, clambered from his cab and dashed around the house in the direction Kent had taken. He had a tire iron in his hand, and he called to the two newspaper men as he passed them:

"I heard it, the same as Joey heard it. It was a door slamming in the back of the place, somewhere, you guys."

Goldstein said: "To hell with the door."

IT WAS five minutes before Kent and Hymie got back. Kent called from the corner of the house:

"Hey! You guys come over, one at a time. We got something here."

Goldstein looked at the wide walk between the sheltering bushes on the other side and said:

"Not me. I've been shot at before. What you got?"

Kent said: "She's dead."

Goldstein said: "Well, in that

case," and made the dash across the walk with no further argument, to be followed a moment later by Charley Morris. Goldstein was calm and cool but Morris was the exact opposite. Morris panted out: "Jeese! It's like the Wild West. Like shooting galleries."

Kent showed them all the hole through the crown of his hat and said bitterly: "It cost me seven-fifty only day before yesterday. An inch lower and it would have creased me. It's somebody on that hill across the road sniping at us."

"But why?" Morris asked, in a bewildered voice.

Kent said: "Well, for one reason, there was somebody in the house. The guy across the road didn't want us to find him there and we didn't. He ran out the back while we were playing hide and seek in the bushes."

"I wasn't playing hide and seek in the bushes, Joey boy," said Hymie. "I was just sitting in the hack waiting for you guys, is all."

"Shut up," said Kent. "Well, anyway, the gal's inside and she's dead and somebody was going through the house. You boys get headlines—it's that kind of a murder."

Goldstein said: "I *knew* there was something wrong when that dame didn't answer her door. Any time that dame passed up a chance for a write-up there's *bound* to be something the matter."

Charley Morris said: "That's why we got you to come along with us, Joey. A cop, even if he is only a private cop, can get into places a newspaper man can't crack."

"I should have known better than to come along, too, you lug," Kent

said. "Now I'm out a seven dollar and a half hat. Besides getting damned near scared to death. Maybe one of you guys can put it on the old expense account. Hey? If I hadn't come here with you I'd still have it, wouldn't I?"

"Maybe," said Goldstein cautiously. "Now maybe. Now my brother-in-law has got a clothing store and he's got as good a stock as anybody in town. Now maybe if you'd buy it from him and if Charley will go halves with me why . . ."

Joe Kent agreed to buy the hat from Goldstein's brother-in-law, if and providing Abe and Charley Morris got the deal through on their expense accounts.

And then he led the way into the house, through the open back door.

MISS ARLENE ADAMS was in the big room at the right of the main hall that led through the house. She was in a chair, tied there by wrists and ankles and with an added piece of rope around her shoulders to keep her upright. Her head had slumped forward on her chest, but Kent, by stooping, could see her face. He said:

"Somebody's certainly beat hell out of her."

And then he looked around and saw Morris and Goldstein fighting for possession of the phone. Abe got it and frantically dialed, calling back over his shoulder at Kent:

"How's this for a headline, Joey? Attacked, then murdered!"

Kent said: "Well, you work for that kind of a paper—I don't suppose anybody's going to dispute the facts."

Charley Morris wailed to Gold-

stein: "We're in this together—how d'ya get that way? You grabbed that phone right out of my hand."

Goldstein began talking rapidly into the phone and Kent said: "Let it go, Charley—you'll have next turn. I've already called the cops. You boys had better figure a reason for calling me in on this. The cops are going to want to know why you thought there was something wrong. Have you guys got that figured out?"

Goldstein was talking with his city editor. He waved a hand at Kent and said: "Shh-sh, Joey! That part of it's okey," and went on with his phoning, and Kent gave a disgusted snort and muttered: "Damn' ghouls!" and went back to his inspection of the dead woman.

Arlene Adams had been on the stage, twenty years before, and she'd apparently been made up for the big love scene in Act. 3. She wore a negligee that featured black lace with a trimming of ostrich plume, and her face had been made up to almost an enameled state. But the negligee had been almost entirely torn from her and the bruises she'd acquired blotched dully under the rouge and powder. . . . She bulged where she'd once curved and to Kent she was just pitiful.

He'd noticed her at different times in night clubs, always squired by a too young and too good-looking man, and he had put her down for a fat old fool buying the romance she'd lost with her youth. She looked now like a female Buddha—a Buddha staring down at her own bulging lap.

And then he noticed her hands, tied to the arms of the chair, and

he whitened a little and said: "You guys! Look at this."

It was then Charley Morris' turn at the phone. Abe Goldstein went over and Hymie Schultz, from the doorway, said brightly:

"Yar, Joey boy, but I don't like to look at dead women. I like mine alive and up and coming. What's it, Joey?"

Joe Kent waved toward the body and headed toward a stand that plainly was intended to hold liquor. His heavy beard showed black against his cheeks, and Hymie asked:

"Hey, Joey boy! You sick—you look all white?"

Kent waved again toward the body and poured himself a heavy drink. He took this down and gagged and said:

"I'm sick. Take a look at the old girl's hands."

Goldstein looked and rushed for the phone. He shoved the indignant Morris away from it, dialed his own office, and blurted out:

"Hey! Abe again! Change that lead—because there's a torture angle here. Somebody burned the Adams woman's fingers. It looks like they held matches under 'em."

Hymie Schultz had also looked. He said: "The dirty stinkers!" and headed for the whiskey bottle.

CHAPTER II

The Other Story



HE State Police, the Sheriff, and a lot of their technical assistants came—and found nothing. They searched the hill from where the rifle bullet had been fired, to no avail, and they took Abe

Goldstein and Charley Morris apart and put them together again with as little result. They left both Kent and Hymie Schultz alone, after both Goldstein and Morris had explained why Kent had been asked to go along with them.

Arlene Adams had been an actress, or rather a show girl. One of the glorified kind. She'd married money—and her husband had died. She'd repeated and her second husband had divorced her. Which had been a most expensive thing for him. She'd married for the third time—an equally wealthy man—and this fortunate one had died of heart trouble six months afterward. It had been a hectic six months for him, if the columnists could be believed.

Arlene had then retired in her glory—and with an infamous collection of friends—to a country home her first husband had bequeathed her—and the friends had gradually drifted away. Again according to the columnists, Arlene was hard to get along with while in her cups—and she was in them frequently.

Kent listened while the Sheriff wormed out this information from Goldstein and Morris, and brightened when the Sheriff asked:

"What was all the rush about you guys seeing her? When nobody answered the door what made you think something was wrong and go get a private cop?"

Goldstein looked at Kent, and Kent saw the drooped eyelid. Goldstein said glibly: "It's like this, Sheriff. The old gal was nuts about publicity. Good or bad it didn't make any difference—just as long as

she was in the papers. We called her up and told her we were coming out and she was just tickled to death about it."

"She didn't die from being tickled to death," the Sheriff said. "You saw her—you should know that."

Goldstein sure looked properly abashed. "I didn't mean it that way—I was just talking along. "Well, anyway, when we came out and she didn't answer the bell, we thought maybe something was wrong. We thought we'd get help on it so we picked up Joe Kent."

"Why didn't you call *my* office?"

Goldstein shrugged. "You know why. We thought we might have a story. If we called you every newspaper man in the country would have come along. We wanted it alone—besides we weren't sure anything *was* wrong."

"And that's all?"

"That's all."

"Why would anybody shoot at you?"

"I told you we heard a door slam at the back of the house," Kent said. "But by the time I got there, nobody was in sight. The guy on the hill shot at us so his partner would have time enough to get out of the place. I went through the house then and found Miss Adams. Somebody had shaken the house down in a big way . . . we broke that up."

The Sheriff grumbled: "I can see that," and looked around the disordered room. Drawers were pulled out with their contents strewn on the floor, the carpet was pulled up around the edges, pictures were awry, and the whole room showed that an extensive search had been made. Kent said:

"I don't know what they were looking for, but they didn't get any dope from the old girl or they wouldn't have had to turn the whole place upside down and over. I wonder what it was?"

He was facing Goldstein again and again he caught the warning wink. He added, smoothly:

"Somebody probably thought she had a bunch of money or jewelry or something like that around."

The Sheriff said that was probably the answer—and then they heard the startled shout from the basement.



THIS time it was Arlene Adams' personal maid, Felice. She'd been hit in the forehead with the hatchet found by her body—and her fingers showed she'd gone through the same burning torture Arlene had suffered. The Coroner said:

"Miss Adams died of heart failure. Her heart wasn't strong—I understand she drank heavily—and she died of fear and shock without question. But here, apparently, the victim was killed with intent."

Kent said: "What's the difference? It's murder, just the same. They were both killed, weren't they? One's murder in the eyes of the law just as much as the other one, isn't it?"

The Coroner agreed to this. Kent turned to the Sheriff. He asked: "All right if I go back to town? I'll be back for the inquest, of course."

The Sheriff agreed and Kent went to Hymie's cab. Both Goldstein and Morris followed, after an argu-

ment with the Sheriff, and Kent sighed and settled himself in his seat and said:

"I'm off you two birds for life. I don't mind a plain ordinary murder—much—but I draw the line at this torture killing stuff. There was no reason for it."

Morris said thoughtfully: "Hell, there *wasn't* a reason for the killings. You certainly didn't believe that yarn I gave the law and order, did you? What d'ya think we went to see the old gal about?"

"How would I know?"

Goldstein leaned forward impres-

sively. "Did you know she had a daughter? Did you know she had a son? *That's* what we went to see her about. Ain't that something?"

"What have they got to do with it?"

Kent whitened and said: "You guys—look at this!"



"Plenty."

"Why didn't you tell the Sheriff about 'em, then?"

Goldstein looked complacent. "And maybe have him spoil what may mean plenty to Charley and me? Hell, no! D'ya think we're nuts? We want to work it out ourselves—and keep it to ourselves until we break it."



KENT said: "As soon as I get to a phone I'm going to call the Sheriff and tell him this. That woman was tortured and so was her maid. If the son and daughter had anything to do with it, the Sheriff's going to know about it right now."

"Now Joe, don't go off half cocked," said Morris. "We want

you to help us on it—you can do more than the Sheriff can, right at this stage of the game. That's why we wanted you to go along with us. We want you to break it—all we want is to know exactly what's going on."

"What's the son and daughter got to do with it?"

Goldstein said: "The daughter hasn't got a thing to do with it. She's the oldest—she was Jarn's kid. Jarn was Arlene's first husband—the one that died. She's supposed to marry George Pall this fall, sometime, according to my society editor.

This Pall is a big time playboy. But the boy . . . oh, my!"

Hymie turned in his seat and asked: "Where you guys want to go, hey? Joey boy, d'ya want to go to the hotel or to go and see this gal you've been chasing around with lately. You know who I mean, the new one. Not the blond—I mean the one with black hair."

"Hagh!" said Morris. "Women! She got a friend, Joe?"

Hymie said to Morris: "If she had, guy, Joey wouldn't introduce you to her. He'd be after her himself on account of making up a harem. No one at a time stuff for Joey, I'll say."

Kent said: "What's the rush to drop me, anyway?"

"It's like this, Joey," Hymie said. "I got a date myself. I can't be riding you guys all over town. And who's going to pay me for this trip, Joey, on account of gas costs money. To say nothing of oil and wear on good tires and my time. Hey, who pays?"

Kent said: "The newspapers will pay you, Hymie. Of course you got to collect it, which is a trick in itself. Now Abe, what's this you were saying about the boy. Arlene's boy, I mean."

"It's like this," said Goldstein. "The kid was supposed to belong to Oliver Williams; that's the second husband—the one that divorced her. The one that's still alive. The boy was supposed to have been born a year after her marriage to Williams; I checked it with the Bureau of Vital Statistics. Part of her divorce agreement with Oliver was that he should keep the boy. Got that straight? The girl's by her

first husband and the boy's by the second.

"I get it."

"All right now. It comes out there's a doubt about who is the boy's father. Arlene told Oliver she could prove the boy belonged to her first husband, who died before the boy was born. We got wind of it and that's why we wanted to see her."

"What's the difference? And why did she tell Oliver the boy was his in the first place?"

"**T**HAT'S where the money angle comes in. Her first husband left the baby that was already born—that's the girl, you understand—one hundred and eighty thousand bucks. The rest went to Arlene. But the will also provided that if another child was born to them, the child was also to get a hundred and eighty thousand. Which means that if Arlene could pass her first husband's kid off on her second, she'd save herself a hundred and eighty grand. She wouldn't have to give the kid what was coming to it from the first husband because the kid would belong to the next husband. Clear?"

"How come this Williams didn't know whether the kid was his or not? Couldn't he read a calendar?"

Goldstein looked pained. He said carefully: "Now Joey! Charley and I have put in a lot of work on this and we've gone over everything. Williams happened to be in Europe at the time this kid was born. For months before and for months afterward. Some business deal—Charley and I dug it out of the files—he was front page stuff at

that time. Now look how perfect it is. She was married to Williams and the boy gave her a hold on him. She could do better with him when she or he got a divorce—she could use the kid as a club on him. It gave her the hundred and eighty grand that her first husband had left the kid, that is, in case the kid was born. It provided a hundred and eighty grand for any possible issue of the marriage—the girl got hers and the boy didn't. She had every reason to pass the kid off on Williams."

"Then what was she squawking about it to him now for? It's all over—he's got the boy. If she'd made a fuss she'd have been the one in bad, wouldn't she?"

"Now look," Goldstein said. "I don't know why she did. Maybe she was broke and thought she could shake him down? He'd pay to avoid a scandal. Maybe she figured he was nuts about the kid and would give her dough to keep her mouth shut about him not being the father? I'm no mind reader—all I know is we got a lead and we worked on it."

"Where'd you get the lead?"

"It don't make any difference but we got it from the sister's maid. She called us up and asked if a bit of scandal like that would be worth anything and we gave her fifty bucks for it. I guess maybe the sister's trying to find out if she's got a full brother or a half brother—I don't know."

Hymie said, from the front seat: "Hey, Joey boy, we're in town. You want out at the hotel or at the new lady's. D'ya want out here on some corner, you guys? Hey, what about it?"

Kent said: "Let us all out at the hotel. I don't get the idea, Hymie. What's all the rush?"

"I tell you, Joey, I got a date with an angel. With a honey, no less. She's got everything."

"D'ya mean that, guy?" asked Goldstein, in an interested voice. "D'ya mean that? She's really got everything?"

Hymie said firmly: "Everything."

"Money?"

"No money," said Hymie, not so firmly.

Goldstein said: "Oh, hell! I thought I'd go along, but there's no use if she hasn't got any dough. I'm damned if I'd pay my own way. Let me out with Kent."

Hymie said: "I wasn't going to take you along, anyway. I introduced myself out of too many girls already, in my time. Yar! Too many times I done that."

Kent said: "Here's the hotel. Come on up to the room and have a drink, you guys. I want to hear you tell me more about this screwy mess."

CHAPTER III

Visitor with Chips



JOE KENT lived in the farthest room down the left hand corridor, on the fourth floor of the Hotel Waldron. After three drinks around and half an hour's further talk, he walked back to the elevator with Morris and Goldstein, and he said to the first:

"Lord, Charley, I wish to God you'd get a suit of clothes that didn't make you look as though you were

keeping book in the back room of some cigar store."

Goldstein said: "Charley, if you want, I'll take you down and meet my brother-in-law. He can fix you up good—nothing shoddy but an honest value."

"You took me down there once when I was drunk," said Morris. "Once was plenty."

Kent said: "Well, I'll check into this business as soon as I can. And if you guys have as many feelers out on it as you say you have, you should get a line on where she had safety deposit boxes and all of that. She was well known—a lot of people must've seen her going into banks."

"We're doing that, Joey," Goldstein said. "She'd certainly have kept some record of the right birth date of the boy, and she'd have kept it safe. She just didn't report it at once, when she should have, and then she made a false report. That is, if we're right on this thing. And if what she told Oliver Williams was true."

Kent grumbled: "I don't see why he's so worried about it. If the kid isn't his, why should he want him? I've heard about him and I wouldn't have him as a gift. Not young Williams. Not *that* louse."

Charley Morris giggled and said: "There's no accounting for tastes, like the old lady said when she kissed the cow. Maybe Oliver just happens to like heels, like the kid is."

"And I'm interested in the daughter, too," said Kent. "You say she's going to be married to young Pall and in *my* book, young Pall is *another* heel. Have you talked to the girl or just to the maid?"

"We talked to the maid at the

office. The girl don't know anything about that—she'd fire her if she knew the gal was giving out that kind of information. We talked to the girl, too, didn't we, Abe."

Goldstein kissed his finger tips and blew the kiss in the air from them. He said, in an enthusiastic way:

"Ah-h-h! If it wasn't for what my old mother would say if I brought home a goy, would I like to bring that one home."

Charley Morris said: "You're drunk, Abe. Or you'd know she wouldn't even look at you. Now me . . . why Joey, we got along together right from the start."

Goldstein laughed and walked into the elevator. He leered at Kent, jerked a thumb toward Charley Morris, and said confidentially:

"And now he thinks he's a lady's man. The next damn' thing he'll think he's maybe a newspaper man."

Kent heard them wrangling through the closing elevator doors, and he grinned and muttered to himself: "The two fools!" He walked back to his room, went through the door he'd left open for his return from the elevator, and whirled when someone said from behind him:

"Well, Pally!"

KENT saw a dark, thin man standing flat against the wall at the side of the door. The man wore a pleasant smile, had a hearty confident voice, but his eyes were a light and slaty gray and looked as hard as glass. He held a small automatic, negligently pointed at the floor, but Kent noted the safety was latched

off and that there was tension in the finger through the trigger guard. He said harshly:

"What's the idea, Jack?"

"The name's Collins, friend. I just came in to give you a chance to get a new set of money. That's all, Pally."

"Going to force it on me with a gun, hunh?"

"Need you be forced?" the thin man asked, closing the door with his free hand. "From what I hear, money is the mostest thing you ain't got any of. Stop me if you've heard that one, Pally, I think it was from Amos and Andy."

Kent was in shirt sleeves and his gun was in its shoulder rig, lying on the dresser. Beside it a bottle of Four Roses and a tray with ice and a siphon bottle on it. He looked at these and grumbled:

"Held up in my room by a guy that wants to give me money. That should call for a drink." He ambled toward the dresser and the thin man drawled at him:

"Make me one, too. I got thirsty, waiting around the hall until your friends had gone. I took the shells out of that young cannon you're so anxious about, just in case you've got ideas."

Kent said: "You win," and poured out two drinks. He retreated with his to a chair, waved at another, well across the room, and said:

"You might as well sit down and tell me about it. Your drink's on the dresser. You don't have to worry; I'm not walking into any gun."

"Now that's smart, Pally," the man said, securing his highball.

"Now that's what I call smart. I'm trying to be smart, myself, which is why I'm giving you a chance to cut in."

"Just how? And in what?"

THE man waved a hand—the hand that held the drink. The other, the gun hand, was resting easily on his knee with the muzzle pointing at the floor between him and Kent. It could be tipped up from there very fast, as Kent well knew. The man said:

"Now look, Pally! Those two dopes that took you out to the old girl's place this afternoon have maybe got something. I think maybe they have. Now you're in with them, sec. Now suppose you and I, we get together. You'll know what they know just as soon as they know it. We get first crack at what turns up—just you and I."

Kent said: "Tell me something. How is it that you talk like a mugg part of the time and then forget yourself and use good English? What did you do—take a correspondence school course or something?"

"Hardly, Pally, hardly." The thin man grinned. "I had a couple of years of college—and it might surprise you to know which one. But a dead life, Pally. No excitement at all. Life's never dull for me now—except possibly for the few short months, now and then, when a jury of my so-called peers disposes of my time against my wishes. If you see what I mean. A man can only be lucky so long at a time."

"A loser, eh?"

"But not on *this* deal," the man said, losing his grin. "I'm in it too

deep to lose out now. Are you with me or against me?"

"You'll have to give me more than you have," said Kent. "I've got to know more than that. I won't work blind with anybody."

"The hell you won't—you're working blind right now. What in hell d'ya think the old girl was worked over for? Who the hell d'ya suppose had that done? Speak out, Pally, if you know so much. What screwy yarn did the two wise boys give you?"

Kent decided the thin man would surely know about the question of the dead woman's son's birth date and he could see no harm in mentioning it. He did, saying:

"I take it there's a question of just who young Williams' papa is. They're trying to find out and I'm helping on it."

The thin man laughed. "And d'ya think old man Williams had her knocked off to keep her from making trouble about *that*? He'd like to know the truth, all right, but he wouldn't go that far to find it. Hell, man, there's money behind this. Money for you and for me. The money her first husband left her. The money that will come to this son, if it can be proved her first husband was his father instead of Williams. *That's* what's behind it."

"How do *we* get the money?"

"*We* don't. Not at first. Young Williams does. Then we get it from him. Now d'ya begin to understand?"

Kent felt a little sick. He said slowly: "I take it then, that young Williams was back of having his mother worked over. As well as

the maid. And that you figure you can shake him down for money on the strength of it. I still don't see why the maid was killed."

"She'd been with the old girl twenty-five years, that's why. She was with her when the kid was born. She knew too damned much. Now do you go along with me? Do you work with those two guys and the cops until you find out where the old gal kept her dough and the stuff about the kid? Do we tip off the kid then and take him for the works, when he puts in his claim for the dough that's his from his real father?"

"An even split?"

"Even-Stephen."

"What about who's in it with you? You weren't alone out there."

THE thin man showed his teeth. "Let him look out for himself. *I'm* the guy that followed you here from the old gal's house. *I'm* the guy that found out who you were and doped out your angle on the thing. *I'm* the guy that doped out the play. And *I'm* the guy that's coming out of the deal with a peck of money. Now do we play?"

"I'll make another drink," said Kent, standing and going to the dresser. He picked up the siphon bottle, which was new and fully charged, and turned, shaking the bottle as he did. He said doubtfully:

"Now I don't know. The hell of it is about the maid and the old girl getting knocked over. That's murder, and juries are so narrow-minded about it. I could be charged with accomplice after the fact and I could do a lot of time for it. Of

course, if there's enough in it, why . . ."

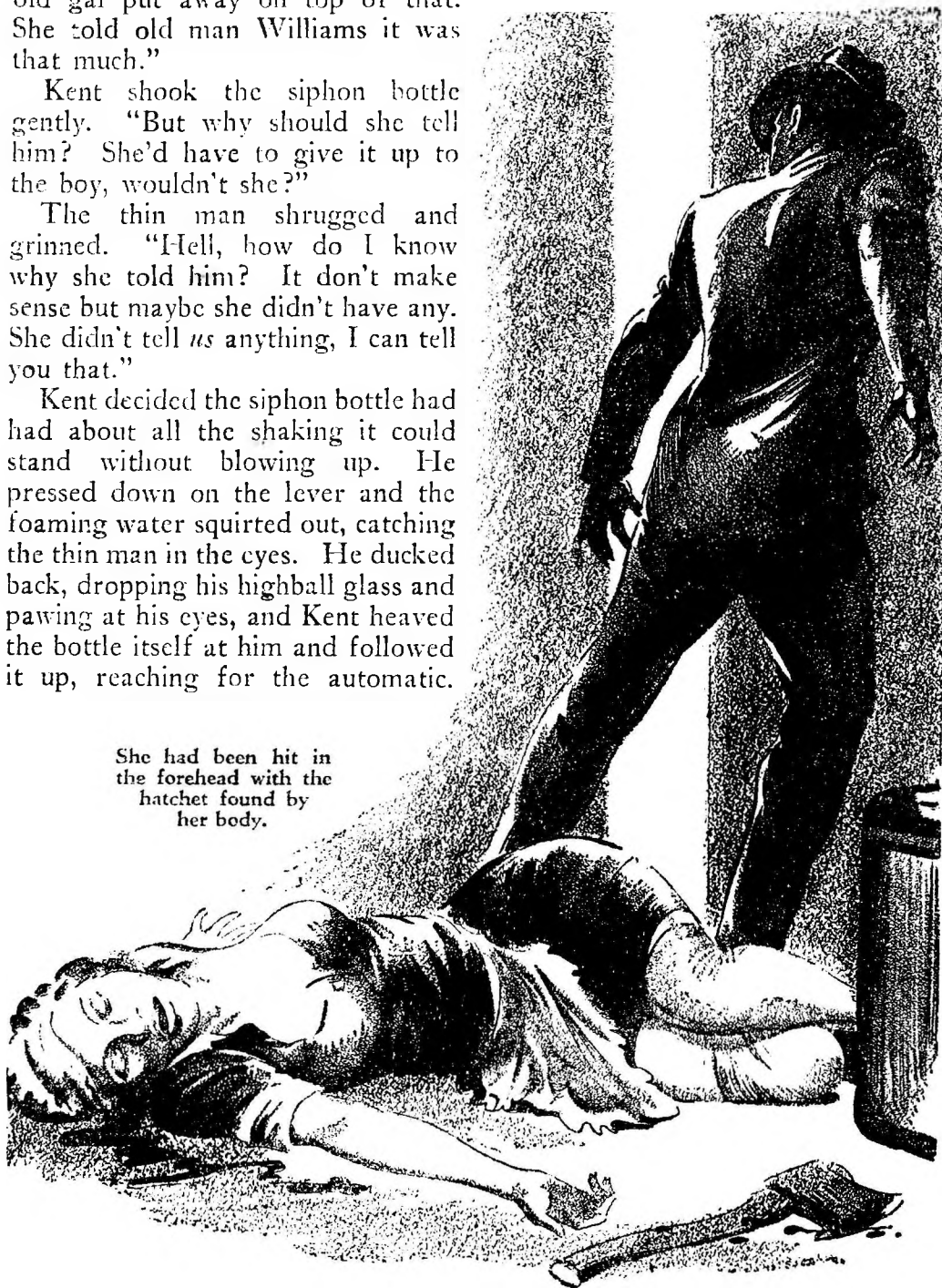
"There's a hundred and eighty grand in it. Beside whatever else the old gal put away on top of that. She told old man Williams it was that much."

Kent shook the siphon bottle gently. "But why should she tell him? She'd have to give it up to the boy, wouldn't she?"

The thin man shrugged and grinned. "Hell, how do I know why she told him? It don't make sense but maybe she didn't have any. She didn't tell *us* anything, I can tell you that."

Kent decided the siphon bottle had had about all the shaking it could stand without blowing up. He pressed down on the lever and the foaming water squirted out, catching the thin man in the eyes. He ducked back, dropping his highball glass and pawing at his eyes, and Kent heaved the bottle itself at him and followed it up, reaching for the automatic.

The bottle had caught the thin man on the chest and then had dropped to the floor, and Kent stumbled over this and went to his knees. He



She had been hit in the forehead with the hatchet found by her body.

pawed out at the man in front of him, and the man reached down and slammed the side of his gun against Kent's jaw.

And Kent went down and out.

CHAPTER IV

Lovely Bum



HE CAME back to life and found himself lying over the siphon bottle and for a moment he didn't know where he was and couldn't remember what had gone before. And then he groaned and arched himself and hauled the bottle from beneath him. Then Hymie Schultz said, from the open door:

"Yar, Joey boy! You drunk, hey?"

Kent felt his swollen jaw and managed to sit up. He didn't answer, but the look he turned on Hymie must have meant something to him, because Hymie said, in an injured voice:

"Well, hell, Joey boy, here you are, rolling around on the floor like you was playing with the kiddies, only there ain't no kiddies. How'm I to know you're not falling down drunk?"

Kent said: "Shut up!" and staggered to his feet and to the dresser. He poured himself a quarter tumbler full of straight whiskey and downed it rapidly, and Hymie complained:

"Hey, Joey boy! Am I an orphan or am I an orphan?"

Kent groaned again and motioned toward the whiskey bottle. He staggered to the bed and sat down, and asked, without caring:

"What happened to you? I thought you had a date."

"Yar, Joey boy, I had one. But the tramp must've thought I was made of money, Joey, 'cause she says she wants to go and eat and then go out and drink and dance at the Trianon. The first thing she says this. *Me*, at the Trianon, Joey boy, where I understand it costs you two bucks and a half to sit at one of the tables even. So I say to her, Joey boy, just like this. I say 'If you want to go to the Trianon, Skibooch, you go to the Trianon. By yourself, see. And you know where you can go after that.' So she tells me how I'm a cheap lug, Joey boy, and she says to hell with me and I walk out on her. So then I think that maybe you want to go riding some more tonight and I come back and come upstairs and here you are doing tricks on the floor. Say, will them guys pay me for this afternoon, Joey boy, or is that just a stall about them putting the bite on their expense accounts?"

KENT said: "You're giving me a headache," and waved toward the whiskey bottle. He was still caressing his aching jaw, and Hymie saw the swelling, already starting to show, and said anxiously:

"Hey! You hurt? Somebody bop you?"

"Somebody did," agreed Kent. "And like a fool I just the same as asked them to do it."

"How's that," asked Hymie, bristling. "Who done it, Joey boy? You tell me who done it and I'll look him up for you. I ain't working tonight, any way, and I'm sort of sore besides, on account of being stood up

on my date. I'd just as soon look up the guy as not. Or rather. Who done it, Joey boy?"

Kent waved at him for silence and picked up the phone. He got Martha Waring's number and then Martha, who was the blackheaded girl Hymie had spoken of to Goldstein and Morris. Kent's current flame—or at least the strongest. He said:

"What d'ya know about a gal named Alice Jarn, hon?"

"What about her?" Martha said. "Is that why you didn't call me, the way you were supposed to do?"

"I'm not fooling, kitten. It's really business."

Martha's voice came thin and clear over the wire. "Well, I hear she's supposed to marry George Pall. She's pretty—I've seen her and I know that for sure. And the lady is a tramp, if *that* means anything to you. And knowing you, I don't doubt in the least but what it does."

"I'm not fooling, hon, it's business. Don't go kitty-cat on me now."

"That's about all I know about her. Her mother was Arlene Adams, who was an actress. The girl's father left her quite a bit of money, which she's spent. Her mother was just killed—I just read it in the papers. Are you mixed up in that, Joe? Is that it?"

"And how, lover. And how!"

"Your voice sounds funny. Is anything the matter or are you just drunk?"

Kent felt of his jaw. "Well, outside of just about getting my jaw broken—because of losing my temper in the wrong place—I feel just swell. Of course I can't talk and I probably won't be able to eat any-

thing but soup for a week or so, but outside of that I feel just fine. It should be a lesson to me—I should never lose my temper and start something I can't finish."

"Oh, Joe! What happened?"

Kent said: "Well, I got thinking about Arlene Adams having her fingers burned while she was tied in a chair. And of how her maid went through the same sort of performance before being hit in the head with an ax. I didn't think anything about Arlene being attacked, because I don't doubt but that she didn't mind that. But I thought of the other and of how one of the men who did it was sitting right in front of me. So I started to play hero and played merry hell doing it. That's about all there was to it, baby."

"Joe, I'm coming over."

Kent said: "I was hoping you would. Stop at the liquor store and get some Four Roses on your way here. What's that, Hymie?"

He listened to what Hymie had to say, then said into the phone: "Never mind the hootch, lover. Hymie's here and he says he'll be glad to run the errand. He sounds as though he wants a drink. He won't stay long after you get here, sweet."

The phone said thinly: "I'll see that he don't—don't you worry about that."

ALICE JARN'S maid let him into the apartment—and Kent knew at once why both Goldstein and Morris had hedged about admitting where they'd gotten their information. Knowing the two of them, he knew that both had designs on their informant—and that

the designs were surely improper. She was small and demure and innocent looking—but Kent lost all impression of this innocence when she rolled her eyes at him. She said:

“Miss Jarn is dressing, sir. Will you wait?”

“Sure,” said Kent. “Now listen to me. I want to see you just about as bad as I want to see her. I’m at the Waldron—Room 468. You just come up when you’re through work tonight—don’t stop at the desk or anything. It’ll be all right—I’ll leave word. It’s 468 and my name’s Kent.”

The maid looked more surprised than shocked. She finally managed to get out: “But . . . but *I* don’t do things like that. *I* don’t go to strange men’s rooms.”

“You will mine,” said Kent. “I’m not such a stranger. I get around the *Evening Press* and I get around the *Daily Sun*. In fact, I know where you got fifty bucks for yourself and a play from both Charley Morris and Abe Goldstein. I’ve got things I want to talk to you about and I can’t do it here. So you come up tonight when you get through here.”

“I—I can’t. I’ve got a boy friend.”

“So what! I’ve got a girl friend myself. Several of them, if it comes to that. When are you going off shift?”

“It . . . it would be between twelve and two, depending on whether Miss Jarn brings home anybody with her. But really—I can’t do that.”

“I’ll look for you between twelve and two then,” said Kent. “I’d hate to have to talk to Miss Jarn about things like fifty dollars. Though I

know she’d like to hear about things like that.”

The girl said: “I’ll make it as soon as I can. It’s 468. Don’t tell her—she’s a devil.”

She stepped away and hurried in the other room, and Kent sat down with a satisfied grin on his face. He didn’t know the maid’s name and he didn’t care—he knew she was pretty. And he knew she was frightened . . . and he wasn’t sure but that she’d have made the appointment without the threat. She’d been wavering, but he’d tossed in the threat to make sure.

Kent hated to be stood up on a date . . . and he took no unnecessary chances on it.



LICE JARN was as blond as Martha Waring was dark and they were as different in every other way. Martha Waring was small and fiery; Alice Jarn was calm and placid. Kent liked both types. Looking at Alice, Kent formed a picture of what her mother, Arlene Adams, had been like twenty years before. He decided that Alice Jarn, under her pink and white exterior, was as hard and ruthless as her mother had proven herself to be, and he wasted no words but said:

“It’s about your mother, Miss Jarn. I’m doing a little research work on the case and you can help me out.”

The blond girl said indifferently: “And if I can, why should I? May I ask who you are working for?”

“The *Evening Press* for one. The *Daily Sun* for another. And when you’re working for newspapers you

can ask for a lot of co-operation and expect to get it, Miss Jarn."

Miss Jarn didn't change expression while she thought the veiled threat over. But she said, with her voice holding not as much reserve:

"Of course I'll be very glad to help you. But you know I had very little to do with my mother. She didn't want to bother with me while I was a child and after I was of age I didn't . . . well, you know something of my financial affairs, I judge."

"Some. The papers have ways of finding such things out."

"Mother was supposed to be the trustee of some money my father left me. She gave me an accounting when I became of age. It was far from satisfactory. A person . . . well . . . hesitates about having trouble with their own mother about such a sordid thing as money, but frankly, the matter would have been threshed out very shortly in the courts. It's hard to explain to a third person, but I felt justified in taking this action. There are things about the matter I can't tell you."

Kent said smoothly: "I think I understand. You had reason to believe the accounting she gave you wasn't correct."

"That's exactly it. And it isn't as though she was ever in any actual need of the money. Her last two husbands left her amply provided for. Mother was—well, mother wasn't exactly honest."

Kent thought of the dead woman and of her poor burned hands and suddenly felt he'd heard about all he could stand. Being human, he wanted very much to make a play for Alice Jarn. But now he had an almost irresistible urge to slap the

calm and smiling face in front of him and he had to actually clench his hands to keep from doing this. He gritted out:

"The last time I saw your mother, Miss Jarn, she was dead. She'd been horribly tortured and hadn't given out the information the torturers were after. Her maid had apparently been as faithful . . . and had been brutally killed after going through the same tortures your mother suffered. Can you give me any reasons why these things happened?"

THE girl said, almost indifferently: "I can not. I saw mother—I had to because of someone in the family having to identify her to satisfy some legal formality. I realize what occurred. Felice, the maid, knew nothing. I'm sure of that, even knowing mother as little as I did. Mother wasn't the type to confide in anyone, much less her maid."

Kent argued: "But the maid had been with her for so many years. She'd naturally know a good deal about your mother's business . . . she couldn't help it."

"You'll forgive me I'm sure—I don't care to talk about it. I am going to make a claim to the estate for the amount due me from my father, of course. I feel it's mine and that I'm entitled to it. I suppose the papers will have a lot of comment to make about my action but that can't be prevented. Of course I will help you in any way I can if you are trying to find who treated Mother in that horrible fashion, but there's nothing that I know that can explain it. Is there anything else, Mr. Kent?"

Kent said, through his teeth: "Yes, there is. I've got good friends on the papers and I'm going to make a particular point in seeing they do everything but crucify you from here on out. If you've got any friends, say good-by to them. I'm going to see that you're shown up for the dirty little bum that you are, if it's the last thing I do in this life."

Miss Jarn said: "I'm sorry you feel that way about it. I believe I'm only doing what's fair to myself. I've had to look out for myself since I was a kid . . . my mother didn't do it for me. I'm naturally bitter about it. And I can't see that it's any affair of yours, one way or the other."

KENT said: "I was with the cops when they looked over your mother's room. She'd kept a scrap book with everything you've ever done clipped out and pasted in it. She'd written comments on most of them. She'd saved the shoes you wore when you were a baby. She was hard in a lot of ways but she worshiped you—and you talking about her as though she was the dirt under your feet. Your own mother."

"If that's true, why was I raised by strangers?"

"You fool!" said Kent, bitterly. "She knew what a reputation she had. She knew she was a drunkard, and man crazy to boot. She knew what it would do to you, living the way her own faults forced her to live. Her reputation kept her away from the people she wanted you to know—she let you go to give you a chance in life. She'd have done better to have tossed you in the gutter where you belong."

He started toward the door and

Alice Jarn called after him softly: "But that *still* doesn't alter the fact of her taking my money. *My* money, not hers."

KENT was almost at the door. He threw back, over his shoulder: "You dirty little blond tramp." She caught him as he opened it. She said:

"I won't let you go like this. You must stay. There's things you don't know—things I can tell you. Please—I don't want you to think such things about me. Let's be friends, at least, even if we can't be more."

"I take it you realize what a sob sister that wanted to throw the harpoon into you could do to you. That it?"

The blond girl admitted: "Partly, of course. I'm to be married, you know—I wouldn't like anything like that now."

"How bad wouldn't you like it?"

"Well, not at all. You know that. If I could only talk to you—could only tell you my side of this without your losing your temper. I'm really not so bad."

Kent's mind had been thinking about two things at the same time. About how close the blond girl was to him and how he wanted to make love to her in spite of hating her. And about what the blond girl might possibly know. He said:

"You're really not so bad, baby, you're better than good. You've even got *me* going—and I'm supposed to be hard-boiled. I'll tell you—I'm going to be busy tonight. So we'll make it tomorrow night. I live at the Waldron—Room 468. You come up there tomorrow night—you tell me about what time you'll

be up right now—and we'll talk this over."

"Why can't you come here?"

"Well, for one thing you're going to be married and I wouldn't like to have your sweetie walk in on us. An-

other is, I like my own place best—it's more home-like, if you know what I mean."

"I know what you mean," said Miss Jarn.

"Then what time shall we say?"

He pawed at the man and the man reached out and slammed the side of the gun against his jaw.



The blond girl studied over this. She said thoughtfully: "I've got to go to a dinner and then to a dance. I can't go into your hotel wearing a dancing gown very well—I couldn't get out in the morning. So I'll have to come back here and change. But I can leave the dance early and it won't take long to slip into a street dress. Suppose we say twelve-thirty;

not later than one. All right?"

"All right."

The blond girl stood closer and said: "That tongue lashing you gave me is a funny start toward love making, but I bet we do all right just the same. What d'ya think?"

"It won't be for the lack of trying on my part," said Kent, opening the door.

Miss Jarn called after him, in a startled voice: "But I forgot—I didn't ask. I don't know who you are—I mean what your name is. How could I find you if I forgot the room number."

Kent ticked off on his fingers, "The name is Kent, the hotel is the Waldron, and the room's 468. You won't forget?"

She said: "No I won't forget. I'll be thinking about it all day tomorrow."

CHAPTER V

One Down



OLDSTEIN was waiting at the Waldron for Kent. He got out of a lobby chair, hailed him, and said:

"You hear about it yet?"

"Hear about what?"

"About Charley. They got him last night about midnight. He went out of a bar, next to his office, and two guys ganged him. He's in the hospital."

"Bad?"

Goldstein looked troubled. "Plenty bad. Fractured skull. Possible internal injuries. They let me see him this morning but he was still unconscious. And you know how they breathe when they got a cracked

head, Joe—they sort of wheeze. It got me—I think a lot of Charley Morris."

Kent said: "I guess maybe somebody isn't fooling. Well, there's enough money in this thing not to fool about. A hundred and eighty grand and maybe more. The old gal was killed because she wouldn't crack about where it was hid maybe. And it's all mixed up with this argument about the boy's parentage. It's a sweet mess but I'm starting to get ideas."

"What kind?"

"I'll know more about it after tonight and tomorrow night," said Kent, grinning widely. "Every now and then detective work's a positive pleasure. I got a proposition from the opposition right after you and Charley left last night—which is news for you."

"The hell you did," said Goldstein.

"The hell I didn't. The opposition knocked me for a loop and went away. That's because I tried to wreck him with a seltzer bottle. You can take it from me, Abe, a seltzer bottle isn't enough to go up against a gun with. I know, for a fact."

"I wouldn't think it would be," said Goldstein, staring. "Tell me what happened?"

Kent did. He gave an exact description of the man who'd been in his room the night before, and Goldstein said, in an excited voice:

"That fits one of the two guys that beat Charley up. Did you turn it in to the police?"

"I wanted to talk to you about it first. I thought we'd better go up and tell 'em all about it. But I wanted you and Charley with me."

GOLDSTEIN said: "With Charley in the hospital, I'll go. Before, it was just something to play around with—I didn't know any of the people and cared less for them. But now it's different. I got poor Charley into this, by letting him talk to that maid of the Jarn girl! Are you going to keep on it with me, Joey? It don't look as though there'll be any money in it for you?"

"There's other things than money," said Kent, thinking of his date that night and the next. "I'll tell you what I'll do, Abe. I'll trade. I'll go along with you if you'll do me one favor and get the rest of the boys to do it."

"Sure," said Goldstein, grinning. "Sure. I'd rather do favors than pay out money any time. You know that, Joe."

"I want this Jarn girl crucified, but not until after tomorrow night. Maybe then you won't have to . . . maybe I'll change my mind or maybe something will break. But if I don't. I want that brat spread all over the front pages every time she does something she shouldn't. I want her played up the wrong way in a *big* way. Is it a deal?"

Goldstein looked pained. "Aw, Joe! That little blond honey!"

"That little blond tramp."

Goldstein looked Kent over carefully, then shook his head in a puzzled way. He said: "I don't see any black eyes or any bruises."

"Why should you?"

"Then what are you sore at her for? Didn't you maybe make a pass at her and maybe didn't she cloud up and rain on you?"

Kent said firmly: "They don't cloud up and rain on papa, Abe. No,

no. The sun comes out and there's soft breezes and wild flowers and all the rest of it. No, it isn't that. And mind you—maybe I may change my mind. Maybe there'll be no need of a rousting around in the papers."

Goldstein murmured: "Time alone will tell, eh? Like that, hunk?"

"Like that," said Kent. "Let's go to the station."



IT TOOK an identification expert just two hours and sixteen minutes to discover who Kent's caller of the night before was.

Dark slim men were as common as sunshine in summer, but those with the start of a college education weren't so ordinary. The expert said fretfully:

"Here you are, Kent. Now if you'd have used your head and kept the glass the man had used, I could have told you who he was in ten minutes. But no! You give me a description that could fit half the men in town and walk up and down here like a wet hen while I check it out for you. The man's name is Marty Weil and he's a two-time loser. Auburn and Joliet. He's a smart baby, but he loses his head now and then and goes whacky. The only thing he's ever done time for has been assault . . . and he's been up for a lot of other things. If it wasn't that he goes nuts when he sees a woman we'd never lay a hand on him."

Kent studied the picture shown him and explained to the expert that he'd been thinking about other things than preserving prints on glasses the evening before. That, as a matter of fact, he'd been too mad to think at

all. He finally ambled over to the Homicide Room and to a friend, Detective-lieutenant Beard, and he said:

"Hi, kid! D'ya suppose the forces of law and order could locate a bird named Marty Weil for me? He's got a record a mile long—a lot of arrests and two convictions. If he's in town, somebody should know of it."

Beard asked: "D'ya want us to pick him up?"

"No. Hell, no. I just want to know where I can get in touch with him."

Beard was supposed to be a smart cop. He proved it when he said: "Hagh! He's mixed up in this Arlene Adams case, eh? That's what you're working on, ain't it?"

"Well, yes."

"Goldstein told me that. He was in looking for a permit to pack a gun."

"Did he get it?"

"Sure. Why not?"

Kent shrugged and said: "Arming a citizen when they don't know anything about what they're armed with is a foolish business and I'll go on record as saying so."

Beard laughed. "Abe Goldstein knows more about a handgun than most policemen. He was in the army and he acted as instructor for his company's pistol team. You don't have to worry about Abe, Joey, he'll get along all right. He'll get along where the rest of us would starve."

"He's done all right so far. How's Charley Morris getting along?"

Beard said: "Not so good," and looked worried. "If he don't snap out of it pretty soon, he'll be a case for my department. The medico

says there's no change at all and that's bad in these head cases. You and the boys must've dug up something pretty fast, eh? Or why would they work over poor Charley?"

"You dig up Marty Weil for me, eh?"

"I'll get at it now," Beard promised, and started on the inter-office phone. He called men in all departments, told them what and who he wanted, and then said comfortably to Kent:

"They'll shove the word around. Every stool in town will be looking for him. We've got a system in this town, boy. We'll have him fingered for you in six hours."

"I'll get in touch with Goldstein then and tell him to lay low for just that long."

Beard said thoughtfully: "You think this Marty Weil might do things to Abe, hunh?"

"I've that idea."

"Maybe Abe would do things to him—you never know. Then maybe this Weil is the one that put Charley Morris in the hospital?"

"He could have been one of the two that did."

Beard swore and said: "I'll put a pick-up on the — then."

Kent said earnestly: "If you do, it'll screw things up. I know—I got it figured out. All Abe and I want you to do is tell us how to get hold of the guy."

"Okay!" Beard grumbled. "I might have known you'd have some dopey plan. But don't forget what happened to the Adams woman, Joe. These guys play rough. I'd hate to see you smeared all over the streets or something."

Kent said: "You should live long

enough to see that. I'm not forgetting anything—nor missing such a hell of a lot."

CHAPTER VI

Cause for Cops



OR apparently had Marty Weil forgotten Kent. Kent said a long good night to Martha Waring, at the door of her apartment but he'd made an early date so that he could keep the one he had with Alice Jarn's maid. He still had plenty of time. He worked his passage down on the tenant-operated elevator, and stepped out of the apartment building in time to meet two men face to face. Marty Weil, and a thick bodied blond man who measured up to Kent's own six feet of height. Weil said:

"Hello, Pally!"

The blond man with him asked: "Is this the guy, Marty?"

Weil said: "This is the guy."

Kent said: "Just a tip for you, Weil. The cops are looking for you right now. Don't blow your cork here on the street because they'll tag you for that as well as the other."

"You mean the Adams thing?"

"I mean slugging Charley Morris."

"Oh, him," said Weil, thoughtfully. "He isn't hurt much. D'ya mean to say you didn't put 'em on me for the Adams thing yet?"

Kent said: "I started thinking about that. I got sore up in my room because you were holding a gun on me. I don't take that from anybody, from you or anybody else."

"And you didn't put the cops on me for the Adams thing?"

"Hell, no! I tell you I wanted to think it over. It started sounding good, but I got sore on account of the gun."

Weil said: "You lying—"

The big blond man took a gun from his sidecoat pocket and asked Weil: "Do we take him here or later?"

Weil thought this over. "Let's take him out in the car. Out in the country. I want to find out what he knows."

Kent said to the blond man: "This guy is crossing you, buddy. He came up and propositioned me to go in with him. You weren't in the play, the way he figured it."

"I'm in it now," the blond man said. He waved the gun and added: "I'm in it all the way. Get moving; the car's down the street."

"Wait," said Weil. "He's got a gun. I'll take it—there's no reason for giving him a chance for an out with it."

"Go ahead and get it—but he's got no out."

WEIL stepped in from the side and reached a hand out toward Kent's coat, with the idea of throwing it back so that he could snatch Kent's gun from its clip. And Kent, who was a fair amateur wrestler and prided himself on keeping in trim, caught the hand and drew Weil ahead of him with the same motion. The blond man cursed and stepped to the side, trying to get a clear shot at Kent, and Kent wrapped his free arm around Weil's middle and held him as a shield. Weil, his left arm caught in such a manner he couldn't twist free, and with the pain of this added to his efforts, gasped out:

"Whitey! Break him loose!"

Whitey said: "Yar!" and kept circling to the side, trying to get a chance to use his gun.

Then Hymie Schultz came boiling out of his cab, fists already swinging, and shouting out:

"Hold him, Joey boy! Stay with him."

Whitey, the blond man, turned and shot and Hymie slid to the pavement with a startled shout of protest. Kent shouted also, even as he loosed his hold on Weil's wrist and tried to get at his gun.

Hymie! Stay down!"

Weil broke loose and started down the street on a run, shouting back over his shoulder:

"Whitey! Come on."

Whitey, apparently, was no fast thinker. He'd started shooting and it didn't occur to him to stop. He'd shot at Hymie and Hymie was down. But Kent was still up and on his feet and so Whitey turned his big gun and body toward Kent—and Kent, thinking Hymie, was hurt, shot him three times through the body before the big man hit the sidewalk. And he landed ten feet away—the three big slugs pushing him back as though he was struck with a giant hammer.

Kent ran to Hymie, crying out: "You hit, kid? Where'd it take you?"

Hymie said, in a disgusted voice: "Nah, Joey boy, I ain't hit. But am I supposed to stand up and let that big hooligan shoot me full of holes, Joey? Hey, am I supposed to stand there and let him shoot me?"

KENT turned again and saw Weil almost to the corner. Weil had his head low and was covering

ground like a chamois. Kent shouted at him and raised his gun and sighted, and then a knot of people boiled out of the apartment house between him and Weil. They saw the fallen man by Kent and came running toward him, and Kent lowered the gun and swore bitterly and said to Hymie:

"Damn those people. I could have winged him if I could have leveled on him while he was twenty feet this side. Now he's still loose."

"This one ain't," said Hymie, pointing at the blond man, who was bleeding through the mouth and nostrils and kicking his feet against the pavement.

Kent said: "He won't live until the ambulance gets here. Not with the amount of lead I put through him."

And the blond man proved Kent a prophet. His feet slowed in their drumming beat against the sidewalk. He made a gasping, bubbling sound that made a froth of blood on his lips and then arched his body—and died.

Kent listened to the wail of a prowler car's siren and looked at his watch. He said thoughtfully:

"I can still make it if I don't have to talk to each one of the nine hundred and forty-two cops that are going to be here. So stick around, Hymie, stick around. I got a date at my hotel I want to keep."

"We just took her home, Joey boy."

"Another gal, Hymie."

Hymie thought this over and said: "It's like being a Turkey in a harem, they way you live. It ain't decent. And what did you mean by saying if you didn't have to talk to



She said: "If we could only talk it over without your losing your temper. . . . I'm really not so bad."

nine hundred and forty-two cops?"

Kent was staring at the blond man, who looked much smaller in death. He said: "That's how many there are on the force, Hymie. I read it in the police bulletin. They'll all be here, you watch and see."

"Let 'em come," said Hymie. "I ain't done nothing—they ain't looking for *me*."

CHAPTER VII

Women—and More of 'Em!



SOE KENT got back to the hotel not over five minutes before Alice Jarn's maid got there. She knocked, not timidly, at his door, and when he opened it she slipped in looking behind her. Kent said:

"What's the matter? You're all right here—you don't have to worry."

She smiled at him and said: "It isn't you that I'm worried about—it's the boy friend. He was to meet me but I ducked out on him, but I thought he might have followed me. As soon as he finds out I've gone he'll go to where I live and he'll picket the spot until he has to go to

work in the morning. He's what you might call jealous."

"Well, that's no sin," said Kent, taking her coat.

"It is in *this* case. I can't very well go home when he's prowling around the house. He'd ask where I was at that hour of the night and what could I tell him. If I don't see him tonight, I can tell him I stayed with some girl friend, and he can't prove different."

"Do I look like a girl friend?" Kent asked.

"You don't," the maid said, watching him mix drinks. "I should have met you before I got tied up with the guy I've got. Oh, well, what's the difference? What he don't know—or can't prove—can't hurt him, can it?"

Kent said: "That's always been my argument. Now take this drink, and the next three I'm going to make for us, like a good little girl, and answer me when I ask you questions. The first one is how long have you worked for Alice Jarn."

The maid pouted and held up pretty lips to be kissed. She said: "Must you ask these questions now? Can't they wait until we get better acquainted. Honest, I'm going to be easy to get acquainted with."

"I was hoping you'd be," said Kent. "The only thing is—if I wait to ask you the questions later—you'll be too drunk to answer them probably. And I'd be too busy to ask them for sure. Now, don't that make sense, Honey?"

Honey thought this over and nodded. She snuggled over in the big chair she was in and made motions at Kent to share it with her, and she said:

"Okay, baby! Just go ahead slow or fast. I don't care. All right, I've been working for that gal for a year and a half. And I mean working. . . . I do everything but scrub the floors."

"What does she think about her brother?"

"She don't like him."

"Her mother?"

"She don't like her, either. She don't like anybody except this guy she's going to marry—and she treats *him* like a dog."

"Does she step out on him?"

"And how! With anybody that will go for her. He knows it but he can't do anything about it—she just tells him that if he don't like it he knows where he can go and what he can do when he gets there."

Kent slipped lower in the chair and got one arm around her. He sighed blissfully, took a sip of his highball, and said:

"I can see, Honey child, that you and I are going to get along."

"Why not?" said Honey child.

Kent then thought of more questions. And then he thought that, after all, he had the rest of the night to think of them, so why hurry?

KENT didn't catch young Williams in until four the following afternoon. He hadn't gotten up as early as usual and by the time he'd called at the Williams' place young Williams had left. But now he was facing him in the library of the Williams' home, and trying to analyze just what he was facing.

Young Williams was as blond as his sister and resembled her in his placidity. But his blue eyes were friendly instead of suspicious, al-

though this might have been caused by the highballs that had preceded the one he was holding. He said to Kent:

"Yeah! Tough about my mother is right. But then I never knew her very well, so I suppose it doesn't hit me as hard as it might've if things had been different."

"I see what you mean," Kent told him, sipping from his own glass.

"You see Dad wouldn't let me see her . . . that was part of their agreement when they split. That was a long time ago but he don't forget things."

"Then you didn't know her?"

Young Williams looked cautiously around. He lowered his voice and whispered: "Hey, not so loud. The Governor's light on his feet and he's got ears as long as a hound's. Yeah, I saw her. Every now and then. I'd sneak away some place and phone her and meet her."

Kent looked puzzled. "But you just said you didn't know her."

Young Williams winked, and Kent realized the blond boy was so drunk he could barely sit in his chair without going sideways. He whispered: "Yeah, I said that 'cause I thought the Governor might be listening in on us. I was just telling out loud what I was supposed to do—or not to do. How would that be—to do or not to do. Well, anyway, sure I used to see her every now and then. I was out at her place a few times and did she put on parties. For that matter, so did Alice. I met her out there a time or so or three. After all, y'see it was our own mother. I should fret about what the old man don't know—as long as he don't know it. And then I fret plenty."

"You got something there, all right," agreed Kent.

"Yeah! The Governor's sore as a goat . . . or was sore as a goat I should say, at her. He claims mother stuck him for a bunch of dough when they busted up. Me, I don't know about it one way or the other. But, y'see, after all, she's my own mother. And Alice's mother, too."

Kent said: "Then what are you celebrating? Her being killed?"

THE blond boy threw glass and highball at Kent—and he only missed with the first. He lurched out of his chair and followed it up, jumping at Kent, who was wiping whiskey and soda from his eyes. Kent caught him by the wrists and held him for a short and spirited moment, and then the blond boy sagged and said:

"You shouldn't say things like that. That got me sore. After all, y'see it's my own mother."

"Who got you sore enough to hire Marty Weil?"

"Who's Weil?"

Kent put pressure on the wrist he was holding and the blond boy cried out: "Hey! Quit that! Hey!"

A dignified voice said: "What's the meaning of this commotion? What does this mean?"

Kent let his wrist lock go and looked toward the door. He said to the man standing there. "It was just a trick I was showing the boy, Mr. Williams. That's all."

Young Williams said: "Yeah! That's all, Governor. Governor, I want you to know Mr. Kent. This is my dad, Mr. Kent."

Kent said: "I was just leaving, Mr. Williams."

Williams said: "It might be as well, sir. My son is weak-willed enough, God knows, without drinking and carousing with an older man. His friends of his own age seem well able to act as companions in this sport."

Kent said: "I'm sorry. I was just asking him if he knew where I could find Marty Weil."

"No doubt in some bar, sir. Most of my son's companions seem to be in them the greater part of their time."

Kent picked up his hat and started for the door. He caught young Williams' eye and the blond boy looked hastily away. Kent said, and put meaning behind every word:

"Well, when I find him, it's going to be interesting to see who he knows and what he knows about it. And that crack can mean something to anybody here."

Williams Senior demanded: "What's that, sir?"

Kent said: "Oh, go to hell!"

ALICE JARN got to the hotel at half past twelve and she was already half seas over. She held out both her hands to Kent, looked him over critically, and said:

"No, Alice, it was all right. You didn't make a mistake—he looks like he did the day before yesterday. How are you, sweets?"

She stood on tip-toe and kissed him, then tossed her light coat on the bed and said: "And now what about a drink? Must Alice starve and thirst when she goes calling? How would it look in the society column, sweets, if they reported "Mr. Joseph Kent had Miss Alice Jarn as house guest late last evening. Miss Jarn

enjoyed her visit very much." How'd that look, hey, sweets? D'ya think Alice is going to enjoy her visit? Aren't you going to help her enjoy it?"

Kent kissed her, thoroughly, then mixed drinks. He made hers very light, thinking she'd already had plenty to drink, but she caught on to the trick with the first sip she took of the highball. She said:

"Little Alice is drinking clear cold water again, I see. Alice should have brought her own whiskey, I see."

Kent sighed and filled up her glass, and she looked at him brightly and said: "I know what you're thinking but you don't have to worry, sweets. I won't get *too* drunk—I never get too drunk for that."

Kent, seeing a long session ahead of him, double-shotted his own drink in self-defense the next round. And for several after that. He could see a long hard night ahead of him—but he rather looked ahead to it. He knew he'd learn things—things even not connected with the case. Alice Jarn's manner had already told him that.

CHAPTER VIII

Fresh Air Fun



HE first night's vigil at the Arlene Adams' house seemed unending—and the second night's twice that long. It seemed time was geared to that doubled ratio, because at one o'clock on the third night, when Kent had sneaked a look at his watch and whispered the hour, Goldstein groaned:

"My Lord! I'd have sworn we've

been here three days instead of hours. I'll be an old man soon."

"Can't take it, eh," jeered Kent.

"I am taking it. That's what's hurting me."

"I ain't going to take it much longer, Joey boy," Hymie Schultz put in. "It ain't as if I could sort of take a nap now and then, because as soon as I do you won't let me rest none. You wake me up all the time."

"You snore. I have to."

"I *don't* snore," Hymie argued. "Never do I snore. And this not making any noise gets me down, too. Joey boy."

Kent said: "You're making plenty now."

"I hear something," Goldstein whispered. "Listen, you guys."

Hymie said: "I don't hear nothing."

Kent whispered: "Shut up, you dope. That was a car stopping up the road."

HE MOVED in the big chair he was sitting in and the moonlight came through the window behind him and glinted on the gun in his hand. He said softly:

"Let 'em in as we planned. Then Abe, you turn on the lights. I've got the Sheriff fixed—he'll keep out of our way—there'll be no trouble."

Goldstein said: "I get it."

Hymie said: "Jeese! D'ya suppose it's really them?"

They heard cautious feet circle the house, then a creaking noise from the back of it. Hymie said:

"That's a window, Joey boy."

Kent said: "Sh-h-hshsh!"

"I was just telling you," whispered Hymie.



Whitey started shooting and it didn't occur to him to stop.

They heard more footsteps, now from inside the house and toward the back, and then they caught the questing beam of a flashlight through the open door. The light flicked in, just missing Kent where he was crouched

in the chair, and then someone said:
"This is it, Joe. The old gal's bedroom."

Then Goldstein snapped the light switch and Kent said:

"Hold it, you!"

The man in the door held his pose. But Weil, behind him and with the flashlight, turned and ran. Goldstein, who was by the door and switch, stepped ahead and clubbed his gun down, and the man in the doorway sprawled ahead on his face. And Kent leaped over him and into the hall and called:

"Weil!"

Weil was at the front door—and was having trouble opening it. He was in shadow there—and the flash from the gun he fired put him in even more blackness. Kent slid to his stomach on the hall floor, and lying there he placed three shots at the door, spacing them across it as well as he could in the darkness, and then the door opened and showed Weil outlined against it for the second Kent needed. He shot once more and Weil fell and rolled down the steps.

Kent turned and called back: "Watch the guy out here, Abe!" and turned and raced toward the back door. He went through it like a gusty wind and he rounded the corner of the house with such speed that he skidded and almost fell. He was fishing for loose cartridges in his pocket as he ran, and was listening, as best he could, for the sound of a car starting away. He knew there'd be one—that there *must* be one.

And he heard it when he was yet a hundred yards from it.

He saw headlights flick on just down the road, and he stopped

as the car swung broadside to him turning onto the main road. He shot the two good shells still remaining in his gun, and had the satisfaction of hearing one of them scream off into the night as it ricocheted from the car body. He ran ahead for another hundred feet while he latched out the cylinder of his gun and stuffed it full, and then he stopped and settled himself as though for target practice. The car, now lined out on the road, started to pick up speed in second gear, and Kent played safe and put the first two slugs through where he thought the gas tank ought to be.

And then two more toward where he thought the driver should be seated.

The last of these did the trick. The car yawed on the road and with the motor still screaming went into a concrete retaining wall. It balanced there, back wheels spinning in the soft dirt, and then shied away from the wall as the back wheels found solid purchase. It dove for a tree then, and the motor gave one last tortured wail as it struck.

Kent went up to it very cautiously. He had the rank smell of burned and unburned gasoline in his nostrils and a very good idea of what he'd find in the car. He circled it, reflection from one still burning headlight giving him direction, and then called out:

"Hey! Pall! Come out of there."

He heard a strangled moan from the car and then a weak: "I can't move. My leg's caught. Get me out—it's going to catch on fire."

Kent managed to pry open the door next the wheel and found someone huddled behind it. The wheel itself was bent at an angle, and he

was forced to haul the figure out. He laid it on the grass and stooped over it and said:

"It's all over but the shouting, Pall. It's the clean-up."

Pall didn't answer, but Kent heard two things at practically the same time. One was his own gun, and the slug from it caught him between the knee and hip of his left leg and spun him down and on top of Pall. The other was a *whooshing* sound caused by the gasoline from the punctured tank hitting the crashed motor. He was in a blaze of light now, with the fire from the car almost on him, but he lay there a second, too weak and dizzy from the shock of the .45 slug to move.

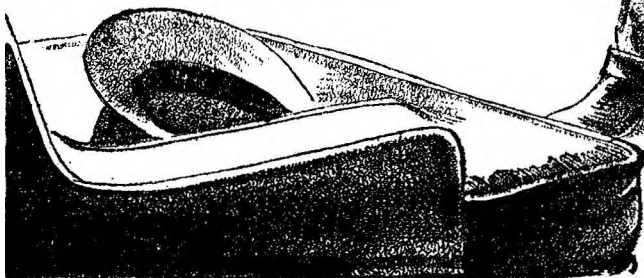
And then he heard another voice scream out: "Help! Help! Get me out."

Kent tried to stand—and couldn't—and the effort took what little strength was left him. He mumbled to himself, as the voice kept screaming on:

"It serves you right, you slut. It's what you did to your own mother's fingers."

And he was still insisting on this when Goldstein came running down the road in the glare of the burning car.

He said: "What's the matter? You don't have to worry—you're all right here."





HARLEY MORRIS, his face very white under its neat bandage, grinned over and said: "Hey, this sharing a room was an idea, if I say it myself that thought it up. I get to see all your company and you get to see all of mine. And I get to drink on the whiskey your company brings you and you get to drink on mine. Let's do this often."

Kent grumbled: "But your company never brings any whiskey," and stretched his injured leg. "And when it does the damn butcher, that calls himself a doctor, won't let me drink it."

"Well, mine won't let me drink it either," said Morris. The company always just sits here and drinks it up themselves, but we can watch them do it, can't we?"

"You're getting so you talk just like Hymie Schultz."

Morris said: "Heaven forbid," devoutly. "But he's around the place so much I believe I'm getting the habit."

The nurse bustled in and said: "It's company for you, Mr. Kent."

"If it's Mr. Hymie Schultz, tell him I'm not in. Tell him I went out for a walk. He's been here twice today, already. Telling me what a hero he is."

"It's Mr. Oliver Williams."

Morris said, in an excited tone: "I bet he's come to put silver and gold in your hand."

"Not *that* boy," said Kent. "Let him in, sister."

Williams, bald and fat and dignified, came in and took the straight chair offered him with an embarrassed air. He said:

"I'm here . . . agh . . . on behalf of myself and my son. To thank you, sir."

"Thanks, eh? Going to let it go at that?" asked Kent.

"I . . . agh . . . under the circumstances I am. After all, the boy believes me to be his father and I see no reason at all to tell him differently. His mother and I had all that arranged at the time we parted, you understand. He's my boy, in the sense of my having raised him."

"A fine job you did of it, too," said Kent. "Suppose you tell him, Charley."

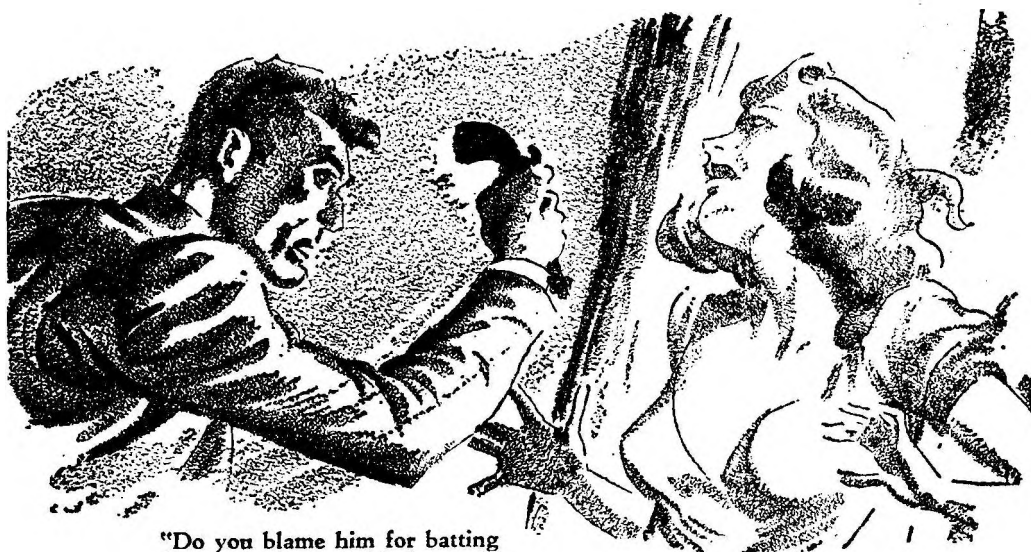
"And glad to do it, too," said Morris, cheerfully. "I'm in the newspaper business, Mr. Williams. I have a working arrangement, if you would call it that, with a rival on another paper. So we'll both be out with the news at the same time. That'll be tomorrow, after we've had a chance to play up the mystery angle on the affair a little more fully. That will also give us an opportunity to change a lot of people's opinion about Miss Adams, if you know what I mean. She'll be a heroine in real life, instead of on the stage, if you gather my meaning."

WILLIAMS snapped out: "Do you realize what you'd be doing? I've raised that boy from the time he was a baby."

Kent called: "Nurse!" and that white-clad lady came in. Kent waved at Williams, then, and said:

"Show the heel the front door we've got. Then kick him out and down the steps."

The nurse looked startled and Williams said: "I don't understand that, sir."



"Do you blame him for batting her across the pan with the gun?"

Kent said: "Oh, hell! Suppose Goldstein and Morris and I just shut up about the kid not belonging to you. Then, naturally, he won't get the one hundred and eighty thousand bucks from his real dad's estate. Arlene Adams had saved this for him, for all these years. According to her will, if he isn't told about who his real dad is, the hundred and eighty is to go to his half sister, and she's supposed to keep an eye on the kid and dole him out part of the one eighty any time she thinks he should have it. She gets the balance of Arlene's dough for herself—about forty-eight grand, I understand. Now that makes it nice; the half sister looking after the half-brother. No one could complain of that—there'd be no scandal about the kid or the girl or anybody."

"Well, what harm is there in that?" demanded Williams. "The girl would then have the money, wouldn't she? That's the way Arlene wanted it. The girl would help her brother out, if he needed the

help, wouldn't she? I can see nothing wrong in that proviso."

"Except this, Williams. If the girl is dead or dies, during the year it will take the will to be probated, then *you'd* get the one eighty to look after, for the kid. You'd also get the forty-eight grand given you."

"You just got through saying the girl would get it."

"She can't collect it if she's in jail, can she? Or if she's swinging from a rope? Well, that's what she'd be doing—she was behind the torture murders right along. She was the brains of the outfit. They'll stick her for it and she hasn't got the least chance for an out and you know it. She'll be dead or sentenced to life by the time that will's probated, and either case she can't collect under the terms of it. That leaves you on the honey spot."

"I . . . agh . . . I didn't know I was mentioned in Miss Adams' will."

Morris said: "You're a dirty old nasty bald-headed liar. My friend tells me he saw your attorney check-

ing with the executors of Miss Adams' estate. We will certainly tell the boy, and prove it for him, who his father is. He'll get the one eighty and you'll get out on your ear. He'll also get the forty-eight thousand that's left over—he'll sue for it and he's kin and you're not. And we'll prove you guilty of attempted fraud if you argue about it. Nurse, heave him out. And open the windows then, will you? We need fresh air after this."

The nurse had finally decided Oliver Williams wasn't wanted there and she suggested his visit come to a close. She came back, after showing him out, and said:

"This time it's Mr. Goldstein and Mr. Schultz and Miss Waring. Shall I kick them down the front steps, too?"

Kent grinned at Morris and said: "Oh, let 'em in, nurse. Charley and I can always stand a laugh."

CHAPTER IX

No Winnings



YMIE said admiringly: "Jeese, Miss Martha, there was Joey. Sprawling all over this Pall, that he gets. And then there's the wench in the car, yowling like a cat. And then there's me, tying a business around this guy Weil's leg, so's he don't bleed himself to death, and I got to keep an eye on the stupid that Weil picked up to help him, too, at one and the same time. And here's Abe—you call him Mr. Goldstein and you're the only one that does—here's Abe busting in the car and dragging the wench right out through the fire and all. And then

she tries to shoot him with Joey's gun, after all he does for her. Do you blame him for taking it away from her and batting her across the pan with it?"

Martha said: "He should have flattened her nose with it and then when she fell down he should have kicked it out through the back of her head. I know things about that girl—I've heard things. I believe, Joe, that you'd have let that girl burn up in the car and never would have made a move to save her. Answer me, Joe! Wouldn't you have?"

Joe Kent said: "Well, why not? She wasn't anything to me."

Martha said coldly: "I've heard different. It just happens that my younger brother happens to know one of the bell boys at your hotel. The bell boy recognized Alice Jarn's picture in the paper and told John it was one of the women who went up to see you. He even told John when she'd been up there—just three days before you left her to burn up in that car."

"Hell," said Kent. "She was just up in my room on business. I was stalling her, trying to find out how deep she was in the mess."

"Did that take all night," asked Martha, sweetly.

Kent said: "Now listen, Martha. Don't be sore at me—she and her bum sweetie, Pall, were behind the whole thing. If her mother was dead, she'd have control of her brother's one hundred and eighty thousand bucks, and she'd have forty-eight grand for herself. She had to get the proof though, about him really being her brother. Then she could tear it up and nobody could prove that he wasn't her half-

brother. You see. If he was supposed to be her half-brother, her mother's will gave her the chance to look after him with his own money. If he could prove he was her full brother, then he'd get the money for himself, because his dad had left it to him in trust with his mother. I was just trying to figure out all the angles — had to see who was going to win if the thing went either way—whether the kid had one father or the other."

Goldstein said: "Then Weil was working for her all the time? In spite of telling you he was working for the boy?"

"Sure. If he was working for the boy, he wouldn't have told me about it. He'd have bled him himself, without cutting me in the way he said he would. He was just trying to play both ends against the middle."

"How did you know he was?"

"He was that kind of a guy, chump."

MARTHA said: "I can hardly believe the girl would do that. Not even a dirty bum. . . ." She looked intently at Kent with this . . . "like she is. Or like anybody is that would have anything to do with her. Just imagine! Hiring somebody to torture her own mother."

Kent shrugged and said: "Well, maybe it was Weil's idea, or maybe Pall's. They both claim it was the other one that did it—though the attack charge will stick against Weil because of his past record. He's a cinch on that. On the torture it's an even break. You can't believe either one of them on a stack of Bibles, so it's pay your money and take your choice."

Goldstein said thoughtfully: "I believe they were both in on it and that the girl knew it and let them go ahead. But you know, I didn't think she was that kind. She certainly was pretty."

Martha tossed her head and said: "If you happen to like that chippy type, I dare say she was."

Charley Morris said: "Abe thought she was a pip until she took a shot at him with Joey's gun. Then he didn't think so much of her. But she was a honey until then. Ain't I right, Abe?"

Goldstein reddened and growled: "You went for her yourself."

"Sure, why not. But she didn't shoot at *me*."

Martha said sweetly: "She went for Joe and Joe went for her, but she shot him just the same. I don't see how a sane man can fall for a tramp like that."

"There's reasons," said Goldstein.

"Sure," said Charley Morris. "She had a million dollars worth of reasons. Or reason, I should say."

Martha got red in the face and started to tap her toe up and down, and Kent said hastily: "Let's quit the ribbing. It's all over now. The two guys *did* torture the mother and they *did* torture the maid. They both died. So the two guys'll get the rope and the best the girl can get is life, as being the head of the thing. Anyway, she'll get a piece of what's coming to her."

"And what we'll get out of it is a nice little piece of news," said Goldstein. "Already I got a bonus."

HYMIE SCHULTZ had been frowning at the ceiling. He said now, to Goldstein: "And what

I'll get out of it, or know the reason why, is a nice piece of taxi fare. Nobody's paid me for that first trip yet. I hear a lot of talk from you guys about putting it on an expense account but I ain't got it yet. I got expenses too. Ain't I got expenses. Joey—you tell 'em I have for me."

"I'd sue 'em," Kent said.

Hymie said darkly: "I got a way of getting it, Joey. I got it figured."

"How?"

Goldstein looked sorrowful, after winking at Kent and Martha Waring. He said: "I tell you, Hymie, the office just won't go for that charge. They told me so."

"Okay, wise guy, okay. D'ya know what I'm going to do? I'm going down to this brother-in-law of yours that runs a store that sells clothes. I'm going to buy something that costs five forty-five. That's what the tariff on that trip was. And then I'm going to say to him just like this. 'Okay, Mister, charge that to your brother-in-law, Abe Goldstein. He knows what it's for . . . he'll pay it.'"

Goldstein said: "If you can put the bee on my brother-in-law for big dough, like five forty-five, I'll not only pay the bill but I'll pony up another five forty-five out of my own pocket besides. He does strictly a cash business and brags about it."

Kent said thoughtfully: "I've got a hat coming from there, too. Weil put a slug through the one I had, didn't he, when he was waiting across the street for Pall to go through the house and see what was in it? And you told me I'd get a new one, didn't you, Abe?"

Goldstein said promptly: "I'll make you the same proposition I made Hymie. Take it or leave it."

Kent said: "I can't win."

Martha said tartly: "Nobody wins who plays around with tramp women all of the time. That isn't decent. It doesn't look to me as though anybody won anything but trouble."

Charley Morris and Abe Goldstein said in unison: "We got some news, didn't we?"

"Weil and Pall will win a piece of rope around their necks, don't they? And don't the Jarn gal win free board?" Hymie thought this over a moment longer, then added:

"And me—I get stood up for a fare. That's all I win. Me and Joey, all we did was lose."

Joe Kent said nothing. But he thought of Alice Jarn and Alice's maid—and of the latter's address in his pocket. He thought that maybe he'd won something after all—even if it *was* only the chance to go calling some evening.



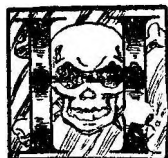
Watch for ROBERT GARRON'S

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PRIVATE DETECTIVE STORIES!

Girl in Grave

By **TOM B. STONE**



WE HAD stopped for a red light at the corner of Marburgh Avenue and Fifth. I hadn't seen the blonde yet. Or the hearse.

Kati Morse was driving. It was her car. It was expensive. Kati had won about a hundred thousand on the Irish Sweeps the previous October. We'd been working on the same paper, and I'd asked her: "Are you going to quit the job now, Kati?" She'd said: "Quit? You're damned right. What the hell do I want with this weekly breakfast-money when I got a hundred grand on the ice?" She should never have been a newspaper gal, couldn't write a decent line, but she had a flair for crime stuff.

She'd gone on a spending binge for a while, but when the excitement was all over, she realized that quitting the job had been a mistake. It had all been like a big drunk. She was dying on the vine. So she'd opened a private-detective bureau. She was hot, too, a tough female shamus and a good source of news. She was running us newshounds up to her private swimming pool that

afternoon. None of us liked swimming much. But all of us liked Kati in a one-piece.

A hearse pulled up alongside a few seconds before the light changed. All of us yelled out to Jim Forrest, the undertaker, who was on the seat with the driver. Jim had his silk hat on his head. And a few belts of rum in his belly, if I know Jim. His face was red.

Flash Harter, photog for the *Star-Union*, looked back at the few coaches. It was a small funeral. Flash screwed up his weak little mouth. He said, "And we think *we* are the wise guys. We make a few lousy bucks a week that a garbage man wouldn't look in the face without getting sick. Heh! Heh! Heh! There's a little bitter laughter in it all. Jim Forrest's the real wise guy. He'll net two or three hundred bucks on this little funeral today."

Bing Corey made a cheer with his lips. Bing had been hitting a bottle of rye, and anyhow he was always aggressive and picky and fighty. Maybe that's what made him a good reporter. He was catnip to women. Most of us were carrying the torch for Kati, the oomph girl of Mar-

Death poured from a hearse and death came back from an open grave, but nobody was buying a blanket of roses for Kati Morse's funeral! Kati had what it takes, and Kati had figured the score exactly!

burgh. Bing treated her rough and borrowed dough from her.

He'd even panicked the glamorous and notorious Toots Darrell, for that matter. Toots Darrell. Yes, the front-page space-hog, the only real and authentic gal mob-leader I'd ever met. He'd made Toots flop for him. He'd turned on the charm for Toots, got barreled up with her plenty, then sold a lot of inside stuff on her. At one time it had been said that Toots was gunning for him; after all, he'd used her and then needled her. But bad weather swept a wave of pneumonia into Marburgh about that time. Toots got down with it, and the mob bought a nice bronze casket for Toots. Some thought that pneumonia epidemic had done Bing Corey a great big favor. But I'm not so sure. For on this very afternoon I'm telling about, Bing's handsome face was to be chewed into pulp by machine-gun bullets, and that graceful panther body of his cut right in two.

WE HIT another red light at Marburgh and Ninth. Bing took a gander out the window. "Do you see it?" he yelled. "Heels, do you see it?"

We saw it. She was a lot of woman in a sports roadster. Maybe five nine. Dress model, maybe showgirl, maybe a swell keptie from the Marburgh Towers Apartments. Young. Hair between maple and platinum. A tight sweater didn't hide any of her allure. Right then she could have walked in on any floor show and captured the hearts of all the boys at the tables.

She smiled over at Bing Corey. I supposed it was Bing. Bing sup-

posed so, too. Maybe he reasoned that no gal would smile at Flash or me while he was around. Maybe he was right.

"A killer-diller, for my last million!" Bing gasped. Then he pulled one of his acts. He grabbed Flash Harter's Speed Graphic. He said, "I'll get a candid shot of that babe." But the girl turned her face away quickly.

"Let that box alone!" Flash snarled. He snatched away the camera. He and Bing were throwing punches at each other. They were stepping on Hap Bolster, who had a desk job on the *News*. Hap couldn't take it; the first few belts of rye had made him sleepy-drunk, and he had slid to the floor to spread out more efficiently. He was snoring. He never moved or complained.

Kati and I broke up the brawl. The light changed. The blonde dame made a left turn, down Ninth. She twisted around in her seat, waved at us to follow her. She just idled along. Bing was all for getting acquainted. We gave him the bird on that. Kati kept straight along Marburgh. "Heh! Heh! Heh! Marburgh's Glamor Boy," Flash Harter said. Flash and Bing didn't care for each other.

It was about three minutes later that Flash looked through the rear window. He said, "Here's that man again."

I looked back. The hearse was right behind us. Forrest's hearse. It drew alongside, passed us to the left. But the guy on the seat with the driver, although he wore a high silk hat, was not Jim Forrest. There was a new driver, too. The rear doors opened when the hearse got in

"I'll plant this one," the hood offered. But Kati wasn't finished yet.



front. A guy was straddling the flower-covered coffin. He'd disarranged the flowers. He didn't like flowers, I guess. He had a tommy-gun. Pointing at *us!*

KATI trampled the gas, shot us ahead so that the first burst missed us. The slugs chewed away one of our tires. A whistling sound shrieked through the chatter of the tommy. Our car slewed to the curb.

Rubber squealed as the hearse stopped short. I had the right-side door open by then—I was sitting in front, next to Kati—and plucked

Kati right out from under the wheel and through the door with me. Kati fell on me, and then we rolled over and I was on top of Kati. My face banged hard against a fire-hydrant. I saw the gush of blood. I was thinking was I shot or was the blood coming from my nose and mouth?

In an instant, Kati and I were behind the hydrant. I saw Kati's gun in her fragile little hand; she always toted a 9 mm. Luger. The hood straddling the coffin folded up and flopped across the flowers, like he was going to sleep. But another hood materialized from the front

part of the hearse and straddled the first hood, and I heard the weird gobble of that tommy again. The windshield of Kati's new sedan was dissolving into white powder.

Kati and I had the sparse shelter of the hydrant and part of the car. Kati fanned out her clip. She was yelling something to Flash and Bing, and besides, the slugs were coming our way in little spurts. She missed, and the gent with the tommy started going to town. I could hear that Brrrrrt! . . . Brrrrrt! . . . Brrrrrt! . . . Brrrrrt! . . .

Flash and Bing, trying to pile out, ran smack into the fourth or fifth Brrrrrt! I saw their faces practically disappear under the impact of that gush of lead coming like water from a hose.

Bing's long body jack-knifed and sagged along the running board in a big sticky blob. Flash was right beside him. They looked like two pals, these guys that hated each other's guts.

Kati and I squirmed back, to get the full shelter of the car. I brushed against the torn bodies. I got sick as hell.

We had a little more protection now, hugging the ground like snakes and screened by the car. The water was gushing from the radiator which was ripped as if by a big can-opener. The front tire on our side looked like spaghetti. The hearse drew ahead a few more feet. The tommy-gunner was trying for a better angle on us. We edged farther back.

Somewhere I heard the wail of a prowler car. The guy in the hearse dropped the tommy and was starting to close the rear doors. Just then Kati grabbed at something near the

hydrant. Flash had dropped it when he fell. It was Flash's Speed Graphic, and might still work. Kati got the shot she wanted. The hearse doors closed. The hearse shot away with a snarl of the exhaust. I felt like someone was beating a drum inside my head.



WHEN I came to, there was a crowd that could fill the grounds at the World's Fair. Two big guys were lifting me into an ambulance. A siren was screaming somewhere. The ambulance gonged and slid through the mob. I looked up. Kati was sitting in the ambulance. Believe it or not, she was putting on lipstick.

She put her compact away. "We were covered with horseshoes," she said to me. She could cover that fire inside her with a sheathing of ice. But I knew she felt terrible about the boys. Bing and Flash were both friends of Kati.

I asked Kati was Hap Bolster killed.

"Don't be redundant," Kati said. "Hap wasn't even scratched. He slept through most of it, I guess. Drunken guys don't get hurt. Let that be a lesson to you," Kati said.

AT St. Joseph's Hospital they fixed me up and gave me a hypo. Some newspaper guys came in and interviewed me. It seemed funny, *me* being interviewed. They gave me the score on what had happened after I passed out. The hearse was found about half a mile down the road. The hoods had evidently been picked up by a fast coupe that was tailing the hearse—except the

tommy-gunner that Kati had drilled; he was picked up from the pavement near Marburgh and Twelfth. Nobody knew him. An importation from Chi, the newspaper boys thought.

The general opinion was that it was Kati Morse the killers had been out to get. Kati had put the finger on several wrong guys from Marburgh's underworld, had gone to town on them both as a newspaper investigator and a private detective, and there were a good many hoods that would have gone for the biggest blanket of roses in town, if they could only make a funeral for Kati. In trying to get her, it seemed, they didn't mind risking the erasure of a few newspapermen.

The reason the killers used the hearse was that they had stuck up Jim Forrest at Ninth and Marburgh, had thrown off Jim and Jim's driver, then had come after us. Just where the big armful of blonde entered the picture, I couldn't quite see.

Kati came back in where I was. She said to me, "Well, are you going to flop here for the night like a Big Sissy, or are you coming with me?" She asked me would I like a drink. We went out to the nearest place and I had three Scotches.

Kati parked me at a table and told me to wait. She went out, and in a few minutes I heard a horn honking outside and looked out the window, and there was Kati getting out of a crummy-looking little coupe. I met her at the door. "Where'd you pick up that heap, Kati?" I asked.

"Over at the Drive-It-Yourself," she said. "Wait till I make a phone call, then we're taking a ride." She made the call and we went out to the

jalopy. Two tough guys that looked and smelled like hangovers were in the rear seat. One had a naked lady tattooed on the back of his hand. The other was red-headed and had shoulders like a stevedore. They didn't say anything.

After Kati had turned off Marburgh Avenue into a side street, I asked her what was the idea.

Kati said, "Maybe it's the screwiest idea that ever came out of a woman's skull." She flipped on the lights. It was dark now. "I'm going to dig up a hot story for you."

I couldn't steam up so much enthusiasm on that. Hot stories didn't seem so important when I thought of Bing and Flash. I knew Bing better than Flash, admired him more, even though he was always shoving his weight around and bragging. He had something to brag about. He was big and handsome and an ace reporter. Now he and funny-looking Flash Harter were even forever. It was a good draw.

Kati stopped in front of a package store. "I'll get you boys a pint," she told the tough-looking guys. "Okay?"

The red-headed one said, "A quart'ud be O.K-er."

In the store with Kati, I asked her who the guys were. "Well, do they look like architects?" was all Kati said.

We listened in on a news broadcast that the storekeeper had turned on. One of the two escaped hoods had been killed by a pair of cruiser cops in a running fight. "Washes things up a little," I remarked.

"A little is right," Kati said. "There's still a few stains that have to come out."

WE WENT back to the car and doled out the liquor. The tough guys gulped it and made faces. We rode down along the waterfront and Kati turned over toward West Marburgh. She stopped before one of the side gates of Ferndale Cemetery. I went with her while she talked with a man in a uniform who unlocked the gate—evidently the man she'd telephoned from the Bar & Grill.

"I don't like it, Kati," the cemetery attaché said. "Might mean my job, and a stretch up in college besides. If I didn't owe you plenty—if you didn't get my son Danny out of that rap—I wouldn't even bother to listen."

"Get this now, Mike," Kati said. "You got a real out. If we're caught, we hopped the fence. You were away up in the old part of the cemetery and didn't see us. Those bums over there in the car are sailors on the beach. They're getting a boat out tonight. They won't talk. And this fellow here's a sort of a boy friend of mine. Get going now. Don't worry. It makes gray hair."

Mike grumbled, said something about it all being screwy. Kati called over the tough guys. Mike let us in, locked the gates and disappeared. Kati led us up to the new, wilder part of the burial grounds. Near a grave were a few shovels and two picks and a pair of lanterns.

There was no headstone on the grave. It was a fairly new grave, and the ground hadn't settled yet. The grave looked shabby. There was a scum of dirty snow over it. No flowers, no care. I'd never seen a more pompous funeral than Toots Darrell's. But the boys that bought the expensive bronze casket for the

girl Big Shot seemed to forget her after the funeral.

THE red-headed guy balked. "I'm thinkin' I don't want any part av it," he said. He had a brogue. "You said the job was to dig a grave—not to dig some wan *out* of a grave."

"That's better than putting someone in, isn't it?" Kati came back. "Listen. This dead man below was buried with an important document in his pocket—a document I want." She showed her special shield. "You can see I'm on the right side of the law."

"That badge may be a phony," was the retort. "And annyhow, I don't give a damn if you're Mrs. J. Edgar Hoover," the redhead said. He was stubborn. He had one of those shamrock jaws.

"You made a bargain," Kati rapped out. Now, keep it." She yanked out the Luger. "Dig, you terrier."

The Irishman grinned. "You win," he said, and went to work. He worked hard. He seemed to want to get it over with fast. The other guy, the quiet one, was a good worker also.

It was pretty terrible, the dank smell of the earth, the smell of death. The moon had drifted from behind ribby clouds, and with the light from the moon and the lanterns I could see the two guys sweating as they worked deeper and deeper.

Suddenly one of the picks thudded against something. I'd never heard that sound before. But I knew just what it was. The Irishman climbed out. He got all muddy. "I said diggin'—but not handlin'," he told Kati.

Kati said O. K. She passed some bills to each man and they scrambled fast. Down in the grave I could see the grubby pine box that contained Toots Darrell's casket. I asked "Now what?" and Kati said we were slipping down and opening that coffin.

I didn't want any part of it. I felt creepy, like a ghoul, thought of black deeds on Hallowe'en in the dark of the moon, recalled passages I'd read in Dickens about Resurrection Men. I nearly shot the cookies when I saw a big fat worm wriggling slimily in the light from the lantern that Kati and I took down into the grave. But I'd always gone hard for Kati Morse. I had to go through.

My pick splintered the pine box, tore off a section of the wood. It smelt mouldy. I wished I'd stayed at St. Joseph's Hospital. At Kati's direction I kept belting away and prying pieces off the box until we could see the head of the casket. Some of those bronze caskets aren't solid bronze, this one had silver trim, now tarnished, and rosewood inset between the heavy metal edges of the lid.

Sweat was dropping off me, and it wasn't all from exertion. I took a deep breath and swung the pick hard. It sank with a spongy sound into the casket. I forced myself to keep at it. I got most of the cover off. What seemed like a bad case of jitters came over me. I didn't want to see something that I'd remember all my life. . . .

Kati held up the lighted lantern. The rays shone on the face in the coffin. Toots Darrell looked pretty angelic.

"It's a funny thing," I started to say, "but—"

"Keep hold of that lantern and that pick—or you both get it right in the guts!"

The voice came from above us. A woman's voice. We looked up. I kept hold of the pick-handle. Kati kept hold of the lantern.

The girl at the edge of the grave laughed. The bore of the roscoe she held on us looked about the size of a hole in a doughnut from the angle where I stood. The gleam from the lantern we'd left at the top of the grave highlighted that automatic and made it look almost like a sawed-off shotgun.

"Like graves, huh?" the girl said. "Well, you can stay in that one."

The light from the lantern shone on her face.

The broad was the one who'd been big-cying Bing Corey at the corner of Marburgh and Ninth.



ING had called her a killer diller. She was a killer, all right. She had hair that didn't go with black eyes, or maybe with any eyes. She was like a big golden rattlesnake—beautiful, horrible, deadly. And there wasn't any anti-venom for that sting she had in her right hand.

In another second we saw that she had a guy with her. The guy also had a handful of automatic. He said, "Come out of there, you two. We'll have a friendly chat."

We started to climb out. We knew the guy and the dame were going to put us back in again, they wanted the Luger they knew Kati had on her. They realized she'd

pull it at the first shovelful of dirt sent down on us. They knew Kati's reputation for nerve. Kati didn't have any chance to pull the Luger now, with the muzzles of those two rods pointing at us.

When we got to the top, the guy made us put our hands up. The dame covered us from the back while the hood took Kati's Luger. The hood was a little guy, a little package of poison. He was the hearse tommy-gunner that got away, the one Kati had mugged with Flash Harter's Speed Graphic.

The dame didn't look quite so hot close up. The lantern light picked out some dark streaks underneath the maple-platinum hair. She was a beauty-parlor cutie. She laughed out loud. She thought it was pretty funny. "I'm going to help shovel you two lugs in myself," she said. "So you got smart to the set-up, huh, Kati Morse?"

"What do *you* think?" Kati said.

The dame said to the little hood, "It'll be fun shoveling them in, hah, stooge?"

"It'll be more fun than givin' a guy the hotfoot," the hood said.

"Smart you are, huh?" the blonde taunted Kati again.

"Smart enough," Kati admitted. "Who brought you here? Where's Toots Darrell hiding out?"

The question sounded pretty screwy after what I had seen down in that grave. But it didn't sound so screwy after the woman walked out from behind the lilac bush on the grave opposite.

"Yeah, I get around," the woman said. She was smiling. She, too, held an automatic.

I had seen Toots Darrell maybe

half a dozen times around Marburgh. I had seen her lying in state in a bronze coffin, banked by a fortune in flowers.

I saw her now!

TOOTS DARRELL was as beautiful as ever. Her eyes were like black satin. Her features had cameo clearness. Her teeth were very white darting from that poinsettia mouth in a cruel smile. She was a South Europe type, probably the "Darrell" was a phony. She was dressed quietly, but she was every bit as sumptuous as in the days when she had a finger in every nitery, every hand-book and numbers racket, in the sporty city of Marburgh. But she didn't give *me* any thrill. I was slated to go down with the worms. I felt lightheaded, like some backward student in a Silly Seminary.

"It'll be fun being an honorary bearer at your funeral, Kati," Toots giggled.

"You always had a swell sense of humor, Toots," Kati told her.

"What the hell we waiting for?" the big blonde dame asked. "Let's start shoveling them in."

"Aw, we're having fun," Toots said. The cruelty fairly oozed out of her. "Nice around here, Kati. Pretty scenery, eh?"

"I wouldn't know," Kati said. "I'm a stranger here myself."

The little hood was getting an eyeful of Kati. He looked like a hoppy. "I'll plant this one," he said. He grabbed Kati, tore the front of her waist down, tore the slip. Kati put her hands down, as if to cover herself with them.

"Lay off that, stooge!" the big blonde snapped. "Shove her in, but

you don't have to be so damned—”

Kati's foot went out and kicked some of the grave dirt into the little tommy-gunner's face. With the dirt in his eyes, the little hood's shot missed, then I'd kicked him in the groin and tumbled him down into the grave. Kati was on Toots Darrell like a tigress. I whirled toward the blonde, moved my head to the side as she blasted a shot at me—an awful good thing for my head. The slug came close. Then I laid a hundred and eighty on her chin, and she fell, and the gun toppled from her hand, and I grabbed the gun and made for Toots. It was fifty-fifty between Toots and Kati at the moment. They had hit the ground, Toots on top. But Kati's left hand had a grip on Toots' right wrist. Toots was trying to bring the gun around. How it would have come out is a question, but I brought the barrel of the blonde's gun down on Toots' skull. I gave her all I had. That did for Toots.

A shot came up from the little hood who had tumbled into the grave, but he was shooting at a bad angle. I knelt down and took a bead with the blonde's gun and let him have it through the skull. He flopped prone over the coffin.

“Look out!” Kati shrieked. I whirled. The big blonde—one tough baby—was coming for me. She got me around the knees from the back. Then we were both on the ground legging one another.

This dame had been wrestled about before this, no doubt about it. She was a squirmy bundle of woman until I smashed a handful of knuckles into her face. Even then she didn't go out. She was yelling. She had a

vocabulary, some new ones that I can't use here. I knocked her cold with the next smash. I got up, slipped down into the grave and got the hood's gun, in case he was only wounded and tried another shot. But he was a done-for hood. He was squirming around, and had rubbed a lot of the wax off the mask that was on the dummy doubling for Toots Darrell's corpse.

The big blonde came to just as the cop on the beat, who'd heard the shots, came running up. She had even a bigger vocabulary than I thought. She called us some names that no respectable bartender in a waterfront saloon would stand having used in the place. She called us louses. Not lice, but louses. Somehow it sounded lousier, the way she said it.

Toots Darrell was still out from that sock on the skull. I guess she'd never done so much sleeping at night in years.

And the funny part of it all was that when the excitement was over, Kati passed out. She'd fought like a tigress, she'd faced being buried alive. And she passed out—swooned like some old-time crinolined prunes-and-prisms belle who'd learned her sweetheart had stopped some round-shot at Appomatox. Woman, real woman, after all. And what a woman!

OF COURSE, right after Toots Darrell showed up at that graveside, I'd doped out what the racket had been. But I didn't get the full shadings until I'd made Page One with the story and dropped into Kati's apartment.

Kati was lying on a daybed in red

lounging pajamas and let me mix my own drink. She was a little pale, but she was beautiful; she always was and is beautiful.

"Soon as I saw that blonde dame in the car at Marburgh and Ninth," Kati said, "I figured her as bait for Bing Corey. It was an odds-on chance that Bing would leave the car and get picked up by her. You know how lonesome it is down that part of Ninth—gas-tanks and open lots. Those hoods would have followed the gun-moll's car in their coupe, and they'd have had a field-day tearing Bing apart and throwing the pieces to the flies. But Bing didn't take the bait—or, rather, we wouldn't let him—so the hoods grabbed Jim Forrest's hearse, snuk through the busy traffic of Marburgh Avenue that way."

Kati had noted the number of the blonde's car. It didn't add up to anything until after the mobsters had tommied our sedan. Kati had phoned from St. Joseph's to have the number put on the teletype. But it was a hot car, of course. The blonde had ditched it down near the gas-house district and scrambled.

"It got me thinking," Kati went on. "That dame surely knew that I wouldn't follow her. And she must have known that Flash wouldn't. And you haven't a reputation for chasing blondes. Or have you?" Kati asked, and seemed pretty damned coy, for her.

"Go ahead," I told her.

"Well, then it was Bing's number that was up, wasn't it? And Bing didn't have an enemy in Marburgh's underworld. Toots Darrell had sworn to get him, though, hadn't she? But Toots was dead. Yeah.

Maybe. That's the way I doped it.

"Toots was in too deep, was smart enough to know she couldn't beat a prison rap any longer. She'd had a world-famous film hero sending her an orchid every morning, she'd had a famous sculptor model her, she'd broken up the home of that big Wall Street man. But she knew she couldn't big-eye the tough D. A. here in Marburgh. If she just lammed, she'd been picked up. But the pneumonia epidemic gave her a real out. She could 'die' awful conveniently, wash off the whole score with the law, then disappear. You remember that New Yorker who was carrying the torch for her?"

"The banker?" I asked.

Kati got up from the daybed, put her hand on my head. "Do you ever use that thing inside there," she asked. "That big sculptor, of course. Toots made her men her slaves. When she said 'Jump'—they jumped. Money, murder, prison—anything. I figured that sculptor could have made a convincing mask for her. And there was no inquest; she'd had medical attendance all along. And, if you recall, the real showy, public part of that funeral was after the casket had been closed."

"But how about the medical certificate?" I asked.

"Yes, how about it? I'd looked that up before I acted. Dr. Alvin Stock, wasn't it? I found he'd beat an insurance-racket rap in Illinois six years ago. He did a bit for malpractice in Joliet. And he's the doctor for most of the junkies in this town. And Jim Forrest was called to lay out the corpse, wasn't he? Jim Forrest—the same guy that was

stuck up so easy today and had his hearse taken from him!"

I asked Kati if she thought Jim Forrest was crooked.

"Jim Forrest," Kati said, "would sell his mother's tombstone to make a buck. Or the hoods may have scared him into keeping his mouth shut on that dummy stand-in for Toots' corpse. Looks like Jim's going to serve a little semester up in college."

I felt pretty dumb. I had covered Toots Darrell's funeral. Naturally, I hadn't touched the "corpse" but I'll bet Bing Corey or Kati would have seen through it all if they'd been in town at the time. They hadn't been; when Toots "died" they were on the Coast covering a big crime-wave with a Marburgh angle to it.

But Kati never needled me on

that. Just as I got a Scotch-and-soda mixed, she came pretty close to me. "You were swell in that fight tonight, Jim," she said. "Maybe I can make a shamus out of you."

Then Kati came closer. "Another thing, Jim. I'm afraid you always had the idea that Bing Corey meant something to me. He didn't—not that way. Bing was a great boy, a great personality. I'll never forget him. But he was too handsome to marry. He could never have been a one-man woman—like you, Jim, darling."

Sometimes I'm not the fastest thinker in the world. But suddenly I saw that Kati's eyes were shining strangely.

"Why, Kati!" I gasped. "I—"

"You dope!" Kati said.

I still don't quite know whether I kissed her or she kissed me.

Meet Dan Turner

Hollywood Sleuth

in next month's issue!

Death Dances On Dimes

As Told to LAURENCE DONOVAN

I loved a thief... and I wouldn't give him up. Not even when I woke up with a corpse—the body of the dance-hall girl he was accused of murdering!



I SAW Amy Dutton's black, dead eyes staring at me. Her dead face, blue and bloodless under the thick rouge, was gruesome, upheld on her rounded arms. She had been placed in a chair and her arms lay on a table with the hands outstretched.

I saw Jimmy lying on the floor with blood still oozing from a cut on the back of his head. I had come there, desperately hoping to dissuade Jimmy from stealing Amy Dutton's hundred grand worth of diamonds.

When I saw Amy's cold face and the ivory-handled knife sticking in her throat, the furniture started to swim in slow circles. For that knife belonged to Jimmy. I had never seen another like it, and I was quick to think of many others who had seen the knife.

Well, I must have passed out for a few minutes and caught at a chair across the table from the corpse. When the room came back and quit whirling, I was so close I could have touched the murdered girl.

One dim light was burning. The corridor door to the apartment had been unlocked when I had tried it, so I had walked in. Now I caught the odor of lilac perfume before my eyes began to get everything in its place again.

My stomach was turning over and I had to hold onto the chair to keep from falling. Amy Dutton always was a smelly cat with that lilac stuff she used. She may have been social register, but she didn't have much taste. Perhaps that was what made her a strip teaser who always held a good spot in the candid shots of the tabloids.

A stripper was Amy Dutton who didn't leave anything much to the imagination of her audiences. Nobody but a society dame could have got by the cops with half the snaky stuff with which she had panicked night club audiences before she had walked into the spot at Loveland the week before.

Was it only a week? I shuddered and looked at the dead girl. I looked at Jimmy lying on the floor with the blood staining his thick red-

Seven short days ago I had never met either Amy Dutton or Jimmy Doyle, the thief. In that time I had come to hate the one and love the other. Tonight the society strip teaser was sitting here murdered. And Jimmy Doyle was my husband.



"You little street twist!
I'll see you don't work
here any more!"

dish hair. It seemed impossible that all of this could have happened in a week.

Amy's terrible dead eyes seemed to be talking inside my head.

They said, "You hated me, Patsy Gregg. You wanted me dead. So you sent Jimmy to murder me. How could you do that to me?"

As my head quit buzzing everything was awfully quiet. Too quiet. Until I screamed. Just once. Stopping it with my hands gripping my cheeks and holding my jaws together.

Then for an instant I was seeing something not in that room. The dead face of the strip teaser vanished. In its place the table seemed to become a cement sidewalk. On this was a brownish blotch as if someone had spilled red paint and it had dried.

Red paint under a copper's flashlight. Just as I had seen it under the seventh floor window from which Lucille, the best pal I or any girl ever had, had jumped. That seemed to me now to be ages ago, and yet it had been only the night before.

That horror of dried blood, all that the coppers would let me see of what had been Lucille. Yes. If I could have found Amy Dutton within the following few hours, I might have killed her myself.

The fearful vision faded and Amy Dutton's staring eyes came back. The room was filled with classy furniture. One little light by the dressing table was burning. Under it spilled the gleaming sparkle of icy jewels. The real ice of diamonds.

A BRACELET lay on the floor in front of the dresser. Were these the diamonds that Jimmy had come to steal, or were they the phony ones that Amy had been wearing at the dime dance barn for the past couple of nights?

I knew he had intended coming here, that he was a thief, because he had told me so himself. He said he had been given a straight tip that the real Dutton diamonds were in Amy's apartment and that she was wearing the phonies. So, when I learned that Amy Dutton had suddenly been called by phone, and had left the dance barn two hours ahead

of time I had been put into a panic.

Anyway, I had tried to talk Jimmy out of "making this one last haul" as he had said it would be. And even tonight I believed if I could reach him, I could stop him. I was afraid for him, too, knowing that Amy Dutton had already left the dance hall.

It was all adding up. The cops knew Jimmy to be a thief who had served time. The spilled ice on the dresser table. Amy with the knife in her throat. Yet there was something inside me that said, "Jimmy didn't do it. Jimmy could never have killed her. Jimmy was kind. He was my husband, though he had been that only since this morning."

All of what I am telling passed through my mind less than a minute. You can see all of your lifetime they say when you are falling to death. I tried to keep my eyes from turning to Amy's dead face. Suddenly I leaned closer.

Leaned closer and looked at the dead girl's fingernails. She always kept them perfectly. They were tapered and painted as red as blood. But one of her fingernails now was torn halfway across. Something had caught in it and it was another color that showed across the carmine polish.

For an instant my heart sang, but not for long. Jimmy had not killed her. But who would believe that? Anything I might say would be worse than saying nothing at all. Many persons would be ready to tell how I had hated Amy Dutton.

Now I had but one wild thought. I must get Jimmy out of here. The door through which I had come was still unlocked. Possibly the police

already had been called, were on their way.

I got over and tried to lift Jimmy's shoulders. He opened his eyes and his lips whispered, "Patsy—Patsy—what are you doing here?"

"Never mind that!" I cried out wildly. "We must get out of here! Jimmy, why did you do it?"

But he was lifting himself, staring past me. He had seen the corpse sitting rigidly in the chair with the dead face held gruesomely on the stretched arms.

"What—who did it?" he gasped. "Patsy, you—"

It sickened me to think that Jimmy could even have such a thought. But I said, "Jimmy, get your knife out of her throat! Hurry! Once we get outside we'll talk!"

Jimmy staggered as he walked, and he said, "Good God! It's all been a frame! I'll get the knife, Patsy!"

He was over beside the corpse reaching for the ivory-handled knife. If we could get out I thought there was no one who had seen me enter the small apartment building and come up. Perhaps Jimmy hadn't—but he had not told me how he had been knocked out.

Jimmy's hand was touching the knife.

"Hold it right there! Don't move either of you! Keep that hand right where it is! Well, if this ain't the sweetest damn setup!"

I clenched my teeth in my hand keeping back a scream. The doorway was full of cops. The one speaking was big and Irish, and I learned in a little bit that he was Sergeant Carney of a precinct homicide squad.

I saw a face over a copper's shoul-

der, and I knew from the cap it was that of the janitor. I heard him speak, "Yup! Just like I first saw her when I sneaked in on that fellow and rapped him one!"

I said wildly, "Jimmy didn't do it! He—"

"Save it, sister!" snapped out Sergeant Carney, taking in my cheap dance-barn costume with one blue-eyed glance. "I ain't askin' any questions yet! Here, Haggerty! Snap him just as he is!"

That must have been what the coppers call a sweet shot to have. A cameraman pushed forward, pointed a big black box, and when his light flashed he had the picture of Jimmy with his hand still stretched toward that knife in Amy Dutton's throat.



RAP 'em both up!" ordered Sergeant Carney as the cop doctor began examining the corpse.

I shivered as I heard handcuffs snapped on Jimmy's wrists. One of the dicks said to me, "Hold out your hands!"

The janitor was standing there, his cap in his hand and scratching his partly bald head. He had a flat face and he must have had a one-track mind. It was the last that saved me.

"Wait a minute, Mister," he said with a puzzled voice. "This dame ain't got nothin' to do with it. She just walked in here a minute ago, after I clocked this bozo an' saw that Miss Dutton had been murdered. I heard her scream when she saw what had happened, so she—"

"Makes it different," cut in Sergeant Carney, giving me a longer

look. "But how come you're right on the spot like this—"

Jimmy said quickly, "You're not asking me, but I'll tell you. I told her I was coming up here after the Dutton's girl's rocks, and she tried to talk me out've it. She followed to stop me, but—"

"That'll be enough, Doyle!" snapped Carney. "Sure, we've been hopin' you'd see the light after your last stretch! Well, this'll be your last one!"

Jimmy's face was white and set, but his voice was steady.

"I didn't kill the girl, if that's what you mean," he said. "I didn't even see her, not until I come out of the ether after being sapped from behind. I didn't see Amy Dutton sitting dead in that chair either before I was socked. But I ain't sayin' she couldn't have been there, because I was looking at the ice there on the table, an' I got it quick."

"Yeah?" came from Carney. "Of course that explains why you were about to pull that shiv outta her neck? Maybe you thought that would bring her back to life or something?"

All of the dicks in the room, and it seemed full of them, turned and looked at what Jimmy said next.

"That happens to be my knife, copper. It didn't seem smart to leave it there."

"Well, I'll be damned!" exploded Carney. "Sure, you know your prints are all over it, so you're being real nice about tellin' us, huh?"

The cop doctor was a little old man. He had a clipped mustache and a sense of humor.

He said slowly, "The woman died of strangulation, so I wouldn't put

too much emphasis on the knife, sergeant. She had been dead long enough before the shiv was pushed in so that the wound didn't bleed, and it should have bled plenty."

"Yeah?" grated Carney. "Wasn't sure she was dead, eh, Doyle? So you had to use the shiv after you choked her? The prints'll tell that. Take him along, boys, and we'll hold the dame as a material witness."

The flat-faced janitor said, "He must-a seen the body, Mister," meaning Jimmy. "He wasn't lookin' at no jewelry when I clunked him. He was comin' away from the table where the corpse is sitting."

"Thought so!" rapped out Carney. "All right, boys! Take them both along!"

I guess I've never been a fast thinker. You wouldn't expect a dime dance doll who goona-goods for a living to be quick that way. But maybe it was the few old-fashioneds I had swallowed before I went after Jimmy. It seemed to me there was something being overlooked, and I pulled at Sergeant Carney's sleeve.

SOME of the coppers were over by the body, some taking fingerprints and others looking around.

I said to Carney, "If you'll give me one little break, copper, maybe I can show you something. Something that'll change your mind about Jimmy. He didn't kill Amy Dutton, and I can prove it if I've got the time. Look Jimmy over an' then tell me if there's anything about him like I'm gonna show you."

"What the—" began Carney, then I found out he had a human streak. "Well, what do I look for on Doyle?"

I told him and his blue eyes darkened a little. He gave Jimmy one quick glance and then he said, "The other?"

"There it is," I pointed, and he looked at Amy Dutton's broken fingernail. He had the photographer take a close-up picture of the fingernails before he said, "It could be something, Patsy. But I don't think it's important enough to save Doyle from the hot seat."

My teeth were biting into the back of my hand when he said that.

"This dame is the society stripper, and she dances with a lotta guys at that Loveland mill every night, doesn't she?" added Carney.

I nodded, because I couldn't speak.

"Then that could have come offa any guy," said Carney. "I hear this dame was kind-a violent in her hotsytotsy hoofin'."

I was thinking hard, and I said, "Suppose, sergeant, I could find out where that came from, and it was on some fellow who never danced in the Loveland barn with Amy Dutton, and who wasn't there tonight?"

"Well, who is he? Spill it? I'll have—"

But I had a sudden idea. I said, "Hell, Sergeant! Spread the word around and it gets into the news rags, so what! How about you lettin' me try to find the guy that wore what that come off of, an' you keepin' it under cover?"

"Meanin' you know who you're lookin' for?" snapped Carney. "If you know that much, spill it!"

I shook my head stubbornly. "That won't work," I said. "I've got to do this on my own."

"You think a helluva lot of

Jimmy Doyle, don'cha?" cut in Carney. "There ain't one chance in a million, but damned if I ain't gonna give you a break on it, Patsy. Remember, you ain't runnin' out on me."

"I might run out on you, Sergeant Garney," I said. "But so help me, I'll never run out on Jimmy."

Jimmy burst out with, "What's all this she's telling you, Carney? You got plenty on me, even if I didn't kill the Dutton dame, but I'm not lettin' Patsy run into trouble."

"Shut up, Doyle!" rapped out Carney. "I'm runnin' this show! You come up here to steal the dame's rocks, an' the janitor sees you beside her corpse and saps you down! You've got a record and—want me to draw you a picture of a case that's all wrapped up for the jury on the first ballot?"



IT DID not seem as if anything could save Jimmy the way the news rags rapped into him. Amy Dutton, the society strip teaser, was big news mostly on account of a lot of pictures unfit to print. Then she had dough, too, something like five millions.

Jimmy's record as a thief was no recommendation. I read some of it and it made me so sick I quit looking at the headlines. They had overlooked one little thing that was between Sergeant Carney and me. And one other little thing, about me being Jimmy's wife.

It was these two little things that might give me my break.

I had to go over the past week in my mind, and recall several things that had happened. Back to the

first night I had seen Amy Dutton and made a snappy effort to scratch her eyes out. Back to the reason for my pal, Lucille, doing the Dutch.

That night, a week ago, I had breezed into Loveland forty minutes late.

"You gotta su-prise waitin' for you, Patsy," said Tony Santo who runs the barn.

"Got some customer that won't blow garlic down the front of my neck and mountain-climb my knees?" I sparked brightly.

"Wait'll you see, Patsy," said Tony. "Did'j'ever hear-a Amy Dutton? Well, she's takin' Lucille's place on the spot tonight."

"An' what the hell's Lucille gonna think of that kind-a tripe, Tony?" I comes back. "She'll quitcha and she's the swellest—"

Tony Santo grinned at me with one corner of his mouth.

"Lucille ain't quittin', Patsy, on account of she was in this afternoon an' blowed the joint when I told her. After all I done for her. But Amy Dutton now, wait'll the tabs get it an' we'll hafta put up the riot lines."

I didn't say another word. Who hadn't heard of Amy Dutton if they read the tabs. She was a hot little number. Society with a big S. She had made two night clubs famous because she would go that last few inches of the strip which left practically nothing for the camera boys to imagine.

So Tony had let Lucille quit! There was a special damn in the back of my mind as I thought of who would be buying the cakes and java for Lucille and me. We roomed together in a seventh floor walkup.

I high-heeled across the barn

floor, seeing my legs in the dance wax mirror. If I say so myself, they are nice legs. The swing musicians were already in the box. Jute, the front man who pitches them into the big oompah, is waiting with his conductor's stick and looking at his watch.

Some customers were already around the birdcage buying dime tickets. The barn was cold, but I had a creepy feeling like I was walking through a morgue. The same way I got it that night a new little frail from the country went out to a chop suey joint with a big bimbo, and comes back to take poison and do the Dutch right in the dressing room.

Lucille was on my mind. She had been my room-mate in the seventh floor walkup for six months. We always got along swell, us both having the same ideas about staying on the up and up. Neither of us liked the jives, the barnacles who bought dime tickets, then wanted a lot of other privileges besides bruising your knees and breathing down your neck.

The jives could take us out to the chop suey joints. We called them the laundries. If the girls wanted to go other places more private, that was all right with the house as long as the jives paid enough tickets to cover the empty stretches.

Lucille and me never went farther than to some open laundry. More than one jive complained and Tony Santo would tell them, "Well, what the girls does on their own is up to them, brother. This ain't one-a-them-kind'a joints."

We got plenty of laughs from the others on the dime dance chain gang for wearing backyard cat as neck-

pieces, and getting most of our eats in sandwiches some jives would buy us off the counter between the dance stretches.

So I was not thinking of a thing but Lucille as I went into the dressing room, holding the door wide open and having a look around.

THE first thing I heard was fat Mom Kelly's voice, saying, "Now that's what I calls class. Wouldja look at them real minxes, girls?"

A glossy neckpiece of real mink was strung over the peg next to mine, where Lucille had always hung her cat pelt. In spite of it being past time for the oompah to pull the jives in off the avenue, half the girls were still sitting around in their half-and-halves.

They didn't even look around, knowing I was holding the door open for the musicians and the customers up front to have a lock-in at the gang in nothing but brassieres and panties. All were looking at Amy Dutton.

Mom Kelly says, "Patsy, shut that door. We ain't givin' a free show."

I had one look at the snaky curves and the flat white shoulders then being powdered by this Amy Dutton, and I says, "The hell we ain't, Mom!"

Amy Dutton turns her snobbish pan and looks at me out of bright, black eyes. She didn't miss the frayed cat I was wearing. She smiled at me with her chin lifted and it was like a slap in the face. It was right then my fingers started itching.

Then I saw the dame had spread her wardrobe around. A Fifth Avenue dress that would have kept Lucille and me eating for six months

was over on my peg. I ripped it down, and I mean ripped it.

"It's one of the rules, babe," I says sarcastic, "to keep your rags on your own hook."

Amy Dutton was holding the powder box and she slammed it between my eyes.

She blazed, "You little street twist, I'll see you don't work here any more!"

"Any more than my pal!" I yelled. "My pal who has to eat, and loses her spot to a slimy little society teaser like you!"

I went after her, both hands clawing. Mom Kelly was too quick for me, and she said, "Tsk! Tsk! Patsy!" as she puts a grab around my stomach and makes me miss the scratch by a couple of inches.

At that instant the big oompah started on the trombones and the clarinets out in the barn. Tony Santo opened the door and beside him is a tall silk hat like you never see around Loveland.

The silk hat was tall and dark-haired, with a nice easy smile. He saw Mom Kelly holding me, and he looked over the scantily clad frails, his eyes lingering on my own shapely legs.

He said, "Well, well, Mr. Santo! What goes on here?"

I expected to lose my job, so I wailed out, "What goes on is that I'll tear the eyes outta this Dutton louse if she don't get wise to herself!"

"Yeah?" snarls Tony Santo. "You're out, Patsy! Get your duds!"

"Just a minute, Mr. Santo," interrupts the silk hat. "My cousin, Amy, is a little difficult at times, so I wouldn't want you to be firing this

girl called Patsy. Suppose we talk it over."

"Well, if you say so, Mr. Hopper," says Tony, glaring at me.

"That's right, Arthur," dripped the Dutton dame behind me. "See that she doesn't lose her job because of me. She's your kind, cousin, and maybe she'd let you buy her something to take the place of that backyard sable she's wearing."

Mom Kelly had to get her fat arms around me again as I yelled, "I'll strangle her for that!"

ALL of the chain gang was trooping out of the dressing room. The tall blonde and the Italian frail were last, and they smiled at me sadly. They were sure I would be fired. I wasn't, though.

The rest of the gang had been picked off by the first jives when I reached the line. Amy Dutton was putting on a goona-goo that was low-down and mean, doing a snake twist all the way from her white shoulders to her feet, which did not move.

This Arthur Hopper, Amy's cousin, came toward me with a strip of tickets. I said, "Okay Mister, and thanks for the good word to Tony."

He said, "That's all right, lovely. Forget it."

The red pash lights were on now and the swingers were putting on the dreamy stuff. Arthur Hopper had a gentleman's touch. I mean he did not squeeze my waist like some jive going to town, he did not step on my feet and he neglected to try any mountain climbing with his knees.

I goona-gooed for him though, and he liked it. I never looked into his eyes. You get that way in a

dance-barn. It is only a dime's worth, so you let them drag you along and you don't see anything of the jives but their vests and their neckties.

Come the first stretch, Arthur suggested orangeade and a sandwich.

At the table he said, "I take it you don't care much for my cousin Amy?"

He had been nice, but I boiled over, "I guess she's all right. I'd feel that way about any dame that squeezed my pal Lucille outta her spot. Lucille needed the job, and your cousin's society."

Arthur's eyes were dark and he looked at me with slow approval.

He said, "I've tried to talk her out of taking jobs of girls that need them. Amy's really a swell girl, and you're a swell looker yourself. How about a real meal after a while?"

I nodded. Why not? He wasn't the type to make a reach for you in public. And already I was thinking how little this being on the up and up was getting either Lucille or me. Poor kid! She hadn't come home this afternoon, not wanting to tell me she had lost her job.

Amy Dutton was putting on one of her strip acts then that was panicking the customers. I didn't say anything, but the way Arthur Hopper looked at me, I knew he got it that I still hated his fair and flexible cousin.

Well, I went out to a laundry with Arthur and he was nice. Before we came back he did tilt up my chin and kiss me, and he said, "Patsy, you're a lovely little thing. I could go for a girl like you." That kiss was the kind that proved what he meant, too, so I laughed it off.

Dancing with Arthur, I missed a lot of pawing over I usually got from the cheap jives. Before I went out to the laundry I called my landlady. Lucille had not come in. I was worried about that. I knew she would be making all the spots trying to find a job.

Arthur said before the final number, "Ever have a night off, lovely?"

When you have been pawed over for months by cheap jives who expect a dime doll to be worth about that much on the hoof or off, it is something to have a society swell like Arthur Hopper act nice about everything.

"Any night could be a night off as long as the tickets are covered," I murmured, and he gave me a little squeeze.

"That would be okay," he said. "I've bought a piece of the joint, you know."

I had suspected that when he had called off the dogs so fast with Tony Santo.

"You're a Sweetheart" was being played. It was the closing number. Arthur had me in a little corner and the way he kissed me would have gone all the way to the heels of some of the gang. It left me cold, but I gave a good imitation of liking it.

I COULDN'T be blamed for thinking that maybe I would accept Arthur Hopper's invitation. There was Lucille to consider. We had to eat and two can't do it on dime dance tickets of one.

I limped home and wasted next day's breakfast on a pint of ice-cream. But Lucille was not there. I watched the ice-cream get all hot and gooey. It was around four A. M.

when I heard slow feet dragging up the stairs.

Little Lucille put out her hands and fell into my arms. Her dress was torn off one shoulder and there was a deep scratch across her throat. She was sobbing her heart out and before she spoke, I said, "Who did it, baby? Who was the guy?"

She raised her big, brown eyes to mine, and something was gone out of them forever.

"I was looking for a job, honey," she sobbed. "A fellow in a night club gave me a West Side address, and said he might have a spot for me if I'd see him after the show."

"So he—"

"Please, Patsy! Please don't hate me! It wasn't all his fault! I thought we'd have to quit each other! Now I know I'll never feel decent again! I can never go home—"

I stripped off her torn clothes and slipped her a dream powder. I could have killed the bimbo who was responsible for Lucille sobbing now in her sleep.

"Amy Dutton! Damn her!" I was thinking.

I had just recalled that the society teaser was wearing a flock of ice that helped panic the customers, and those rocks hadn't come off any ten-cent counter. They were the real thing, and Mom Kelly had said Amy had boasted they were worth a hundred grand.

Her cousin, Arthur, had mentioned to me himself that the ice was the real McCoy. Poor, little Lucille, out looking for a hoofing job, and Amy Dutton sporting enough diamonds to have made any dame independent for life.

I don't know how long I had been asleep beside Lucille when I awoke from a nightmare in a cold sweat. Lucille was moaning, and then I became scared. I had been dreaming about the society stripper, and my hands had been gripping Lucille's white throat.

I didn't sleep any more. Lucille was still out when I started for the night's drag-around.

I DREW one cheap jive after another that night. They were doing more goona-gooing with their belt buckles than their feet. Amy Dutton had all of them trying to imitate her snaky hips. The barn was jammed with society swells, so I knew the tabloids had done their stuff.

Arthur Hopper came in and danced a few numbers with me. I liked him, in spite of him being Amy's cousin. They were playing, "You're a Sweetheart," when Arthur bent his head and said, "How about tomorrow night, lovely?"

Many is the jive who had made that same proposition. But it never had meant a thing. I thought of Lucille waiting in the room, so I nodded and said, "Why not?"

He gave me a squeeze, but I walked out alone. Lucille was still awake, sitting by the window. I looked at her white face and her staring, brown eyes and shivered.

Lucille said, "I can't stay here living offa you, Patsy."

I replied cheerfully, "Aw, go jump in the river. Maybe I ain't so much on the up and up as I've always pretended. We'll get along swell."

What I had said didn't mean a

thing, but how I was to think of that a little later.

The third and the fourth night of Amy Dutton at the Loveland were a little more of the same, with more swells and a jammed barn. Arthur Hopper came in that third night, but he said, "I've a call out of town tonight, lovely, and I won't be back for a few days. But I'm not forgetting."

"Neither am I," I whispered, giving him the goona-goo with a bright smile.

Amy Dutton was jingling her ice and snaking her hips in special tease strips so that the cops who were watching had to speak to Tony Santo about it. The lowdown teaser smiled at me once, too, on the floor, and I was wide awake this time when I dreamed I had my hands on her nice, white throat.

I had been keeping Lucille in and going without meals. I was so desperate by this time I imagined I would like to see Amy Dutton's slick, stream-lined curves laid out on a marble slab.

It was the fourth night when I found myself dancing with a jive who wore a green necktie. A dime doll seldom bothers to see them above their neckties. This guy danced with his feet and he held me like I might have been his sister.

Nobody ever could have made me believe that when it came to me, it would be a jive who bought his goona-goo by the dime's worth. But that's the way it was. That's the way I met Jimmy Doyle, and he was nothing but a green necktie to me until we were half through the number.

He stopped suddenly. He said,

"We'll go over and finish this one on a ham an' egg sandwich, baby. I guess you girls get plenty tired stringin' around with dumb eggs that think they've bought themselves a hula-hula for a couple-a nickles."

NOW that was the oldest line in the business. The old come-on. A lot of soft talk. "How did a nice girl like you ever get into this racket?" Then a little ride in his car, or a dinner over at one of the laundries where they have private dining-rooms with keys on the inside.

And the next thing—well, you know how it is with a dumb dame, she's giving plenty with nothing to show for it but a lot of soft talk.

I thought of that. But there we'll skip it. He told me his name was Jimmy Doyle. One of the girls had told him about Lucille and me. Maybe she couldn't tell him how hungry I was, but he guessed that, too.

He had reddish hair, freckles and smiling blue eyes. His mouth was broad, but he had nice teeth when he smiled. After he had been quiet a long time and we had sat out three numbers he talked a little.

"They tell me you're on a hunger strike on account of your pal, Lucille," he said finally. "Anything I can do about it?"

I said, "Nothing, Jimmy," and I couldn't let him. Because I was feeling suddenly warm inside. I don't know how to explain it, but Jimmy Doyle and me were looking at each other, and both of us knew how it was.

There was only one catch. When Amy Dutton was doing her stuff, Jimmy Doyle lost his smile. His

mouth hardened and he kept his eyes on her.

Well, he did not suggest taking me out that night. In fact he never did. But he put up the tickets and doubled them to stick by me through, "You're a Sweetheart."

That night was the first in weeks that I had looked at my own face in the dressing room mirror. Not bad, I hoped. My hair was natural honey color. All the curves were in the right places. I stretched out one slim leg and it looked good enough to get by.

My face was heart-shaped and my eyes were kind of green.

Mom Kelly was watching me with an Irish grin on her pan.

She said, "Who's the guy, Patsy? Never thought you'd take a dive."

I snapped back, "Guess again, grandma. A bozo just slipped me an extra buck on tickets."

JIMMY DOYLE and me were in one of the laundries that has private rooms. No. He hadn't asked me there. I had asked him. This was near the end of Amy Dutton's week. Tonight I had seen a cop touch Jimmy on the shoulder. They had quite a talk before he came back to me.

It took just that, just that sudden stopping of my heart, to make me know I would go places with Jimmy, any place. He hadn't smiled much after talking to the cop, and he wasn't smiling at me here in the private dining-room.

For two days Lucille had not been eating. She had put on a hysterical act. I had put her to bed and made her promise to stay there before I went to the barn.

Jimmy said, "I don't hit it much, but we'll have a couple-a cocktails. Then maybe you'll tell me what's on your mind?"

We had several drinks before I walked over and turned the key in the door.

"Stick around, Jimmy, I ain't a gold-digger," I said. "I want to know something though, something that scared me. What did that cop want to see you about?"

Jimmy looked me squarely in the eyes.

"Funny thing, Patsy," he said, "but I'm going to tell the truth. It's the reason I haven't said more to you. It's the thing that will always keep me from having a girl like you. Patsy, I'm a thief. I've served two stretches. I'm not hot now, but the boys have their eyes on me. So—"

It came like a flash. "So with that Dutton stripper splashin' around in a hundred grand, the cop thought maybe he oughtta speak to you about it. And that's the reason you haven't said any more to me?"

He nodded slowly, "That's it, Sherlock."

"Jimmy," I said, "maybe I've thought a lot about them rocks myself. But don't you do it, Jimmy. I know I ain't worth a hundred grand, and you can have me now or any other time for a dime or nothing. I don't want you to take that chance."

"You don't know what you're saying, Patsy," stated Jimmy. "You don't think I would take a girl like you—"

"You'd better, Jimmy Doyle!" was my reply. "I don't care if you're a murderer, that's the way it is!"

I had my arms wrapped around his neck by this time, and I put everything I had ever learned into that kiss. His arms gradually tightened around me. That kiss contacted the fire that had been in both our hearts.

"Jimmy," I whispered, "I don't care what you are. Lucille was tricked into stepping out though she didn't mean to do it. Jimmy! I know what I'm doing. One way or another I intend to have your love. I may be a dime dance dame, Jimmy, but you're the first."

Jimmy tried to put me away from him. But I held him tightly and he finally said savagely, "Damn you, Patsy, I love you! Will you go down to the City Hall with a thief tomorrow morning?"

Would I go? I said, "Jimmy, I'd follow you to hell and through it."

I could not foresee just then that was exactly what lay before me.

It was minutes later when Jimmy said, "I'm taking the Dutton diamonds, baby. She don't need them and we can use them. It'll be my last time, Patsy, I promise. I'm pullin' it tomorrow night before the Dutton stripper gets back to her apartment. I've had an underground tip that she's wearing phonies and the real rocks are in a safe at her place."

"No, Jimmy, please," I pleaded.

But I couldn't shake him on that. He held me in his arms a long time. As we were leaving, he peeled a century from a roll in his pocket. He said, "Patsy, this isn't for you. It's for Lucille, the pal you've been willing to starve for. It will send her home. That's what got me in the first place, when that dame told me about you and Lucille."

"I understand, Jimmy," I said, tears in my eyes. My Jimmy was a thief, but he was a swell thief. "I'll send Lucille home. I'll go with you to the City Hall in the morning."

"Okay, honey," was his reply. "I'm taking the Dutton stuff at about ten o'clock tomorrow night, then I'm taking you out of the damn barn forever."

I didn't like that, but . . . I loved him, whatever he was.

IT WAS two A. M. when I breezed out of a taxi in my own block. I had fallen for a thief and I was going to marry him. I had shamelessly offered myself to him. My whole world was cock-eyed. And I was the happiest girl in the Big Town.

I stopped in an all-night delicatessen and loaded up with groceries and a few bottles of beer. It would be great to see Lucille smile again.

I came around the corner. There was a car standing before our rooming house. A couple of uniformed coppers were there in the light from the door. I had a cold chill of apprehension. All I could think of was Jimmy.

Had someone spotted us in the laundry and heard us talking? Or maybe they were looking me up because everyone at the barn had seen I was Jimmy's girl?

A big Irish copper stepped in front of me at the entrance.

"Maybe you'd be Patsy Gregg?" he said.

"Why—why, yes, I'm Patsy Gregg," I stammered.

The Irish cop said quietly, "Maybe I'd best tell you before you go up to your room. The girl with you,

Lucille Cooper, well, she won't be there."

My heart stopped, picked up, and I gasped out, "Something's happened to Lucille? Tell me?"

The other copper flicked on a flashlight. Its beam played across the sidewalk. I'll never forget that horror as long as I live. It was like somebody had spilled a bucket of brown paint on the concrete.

I ran headlong into the big Irish cop and he put his arms around me. He said, "There now, Patsy—there now—"

I was seeing Lucille sitting before that seventh floor window. Day and night. Not talking. Refusing to eat. The cop holding me said, "Switch off that damn light, Murphy."

I WAS Mrs. Jimmy Doyle when I walked into the barn that next night. I was not wearing my ring because I didn't want Tony Santo and the others to know.

I saw Amy Dutton goona-going out on the floor, and I had to get hold of myself hard to keep from rushing out there and tearing her to pieces. The rest of the chain gang took one gander at me and didn't say anything. They had heard about Lucille.

Tony Santo came over and his fat, greasy face had worried lines.

"It's tough, Patsy," he said. "You wouldn't believe it, but it's tough on me, too. You know how I've always felt about you, Patsy. I told you once any time you wanted to quit this racket, you could—"

Tony had little, black button eyes. He was always making a play for one of the chain gang, and he had

once made it strong with me until he was convinced I wouldn't play.

I didn't say a word now. I couldn't. The first jive that pushed out a ticket wanted me to go to a laundry. I felt like it. I must have had half a dozen old-fashioned. I was dizzy and seeing red when I got back.

I noticed it was not far from ten o'clock. Jimmy would be making his stab at the Dutton diamonds. I didn't see Amy Dutton on the floor. Mom Kelly said she had had a telephone call and gone out in a hurry.

That was when panic hit me. I almost ran out. I stopped to tell Tony Santo I was sick and quitting for the night, but the cashier said Tony had gone home with a headache.

So I grabbed the first taxi and gave the driver Amy Dutton's address. I had to stop Jimmy, or warn him the strip teaser might be on her way home.

That was how I came to walk into Amy Dutton's apartment.



All of these things were in my mind after I gave Sergeant Carney my word I would never run out on Jimmy. Somehow Carney managed to keep me out of the murder stories. I was free to go back to the barn any time I wanted to.

It came to me that if the real truth of that murder came out, the flat-faced janitor who had knocked Jimmy out would come into it somewhere. I found out later that smart Sergeant Carney thought so, too, but he left the janitor on his own, though he put a dick on his trail. He had

me shadowed, too, though I didn't know that.

I waited until next morning, lying awake all night. I read all the first editions carrying the story of Amy Dutton's murder. It was mentioned that Arthur Hopper would have a few hundred thousands increased to several millions by his cousin's death. Arthur Hopper had not been reached, the stories said, having gone on a fishing trip.

But during the day I called Arthur's apartment number several times on the chance he had read the newspapers and hurried home. The men who answered, up to late in the afternoon, said that Mr. Hopper had not been heard from.

I was afraid all that I felt could be read in my face as I went into Loveland for the night's drag-around. The opening oompah was already on. Like I should have known it would, the connection of the murdered stripper with Loveland had packed the place early. Everybody was goggling for a view of the "place where she had danced."

The eyes of the chain gang bored into me. I had not been mentioned in connection with the murder, and no smart reporter had dug up the marriage record at the City Hall. But every dame in there knew Jimmy, and that he had practically taken me out of circulation.

Tony Santo stopped me before I went to the dressing-room. His black eyes were sharp and I thought he must know something of where I had been the night before, even if the news rags hadn't spillied it.

"You don't look so good, Patsy," said Tony. "Maybe you'd better

take a couple-a nights off. I don't feel so good about Lucille, an' I guess you was kind-a over the line for this Jimmy guy they caught up in Amy Dutton's apartment, huh?"

I was tense all through. But I said, I'd rather have the body dragged around, Tony. Maybe it'll keep things off my mind."

I WAS the big spot of the night for the jives. They had heard about Jimmy and me, and I could almost feel the morbid interest they took in goona-gooing with a dame whose sweetie was headed for the hot chair.

I refused to go out for drinks tonight. I had to keep my head clear. Somehow I expected Arthur Hopper to show up before we came to "You're a Sweetheart." So I gonna-gooed with one necktie after another.

Some of the jives were offering me whole strips of tickets for one drag-around. Little Patsy was having a big night. And I had no feeling whatever from the neck down. If they tapped on my feet I didn't know it. I could not even smell garlic or the hot close breaths on my throat.

I just looked at one necktie after another and goona-gooed.

It seemed a year before Jute pushed the swingers into "You're a Sweetheart." I hummed it as I danced with a red necktie rubbing my forehead. "You're a sweetheart, if there ever was one—"

"Jimmy! Jimmy!" I was thinking. "It all depends on me. Such a little thing, Jimmy. The torn fingernail of a murdered girl may be all that stands between you and the electric chair."

Then, just as the last round of music eased off, I saw Arthur Hopper come into the barn. He saw me on the floor and waited.

Arthur smiled and said, "You look ill, Patsy, but I'd like to talk to you tonight at my apartment. I have to go over some books with Tony, but would you mind taking a taxi out there and waiting?"

I thought quickly and said, "I'll go, Arthur." I didn't mention I had tried to get him several times that day. He was quick and nervous, like he had more on his mind than my own shapely person.

"I'll telephone and my man will let you in, Patsy," he said. "Have him mix you a drink or two while you're waiting."

His dark eyes were searching me as if he suspected something, and he wasn't smiling.

When I reached the sidewalk I could see light in Tony Santo's office on the second floor of Loveland. I hurried into a drugstore and a phone booth. I called police headquarters and asked to be connected with Sergeant Carney at the precinct.

Then my breath stopped. "Sergeant Carney may not be in for several hours," I was told. Everything so far as I knew was between Carney and me.

I said quickly, "Leave a message for him that Patsy Gregg has gone to ——" I gave an apartment address and number.

I came out, grimly determined I would find what I sought, even if I had to go the limit. That couldn't be unfaithful to Jimmy, I thought. It might even be the means of saving him from the chair. The night extras were on the street.

A headline hit me between the eyes.

JANITOR IN AMY DUTTON MURDER
FALLS TO DEATH IN ELEVATOR

I grabbed a paper. I learned that Thomas Larkin, janitor, had been found dead at the bottom of an elevator shaft in the apartment where Amy Dutton had been murdered. The flat-faced man who had pinned the rap for murder squarely upon Jimmy.

I thought, now the police won't have his testimony. Then panic seized me. The janitor's story was already on record, and with him dead it could never be changed. If he had lied, the lie stood. And I was sure he had lied.

I started toward a taxi stand. And I saw Arthur Hopper standing in the doorway of the Loveland watching me come from the drugstore. I realized he had been watching and he could see right into the drugstore where I had used the telephone booth.

Another man detached himself from the shadows and walked close to me. Then it struck me I had seen this man several times. He had been in the barn during the night's dancing. I've been around enough to know a dick when I see one.

I climbed hastily into the taxi and when I gave the address I made it loud enough for the words to carry to the dick. I was right. Another taxi swung out right behind us and I watched its lights for several blocks. Then suddenly the second taxi was held up by cross traffic when my driver shaved a red light, and I didn't see the cab again.

All I could think of was that

Sergeant Carney might not get my message for hours. If the dick in the taxi had been following me, he had lost the trail. I didn't think then that he might call Headquarters and get the address I had given.

The man who opened the door of the third floor apartment looked more like a mobster than a servant. His eyes narrowed suspiciously.

"I'm Patsy Gregg," I said. "It's all right. I'm to wait."

He let me into a big, disordered living-room. I had to act fast and I said I could use a drink. The man had remained, watching me. He seemed to be acting on the idea I had come to rob the joint.

But he muttered and went into the kitchen. A bedroom door was half open and I had to take a chance. I darted inside.

The necktie rack was beside the dresser. I had this in mind. If the little gold-thread pattern I had seen caught in Amy Dutton's broken fingernail had been missed, then one swell imported tie would not be upon that rack. It would have been destroyed.

I fumbled quickly through the ties. There it was. I realized how smart Sergeant Carney had been in keeping that single clue from the newspapers. The murderer of Amy Dutton had not discovered the pattern was missing, and the tie was strung on the rack with the others.

How I wanted that tie, but I knew it must be found here. Anything else might look like a plant on my part. Where could I hide it? Then I heard ice tinkling and the man coming back from the kitchen.

I had it now. I could leave that tie right where it was. If I tried

to hide it and were discovered, anything might happen. But I didn't get out of the bedroom quickly enough.

"So you did have something on your mind, you damn double-crossing, two-timing twist!"

Snapped a voice from the doorway and dark eyes bored into mine.

"Grab her, Joe! Don't let her scream!"

Joe dropped a tray and rolled toward me. But I did scream once before his thick hands closed on my throat. The dark eyes of Tony Santo were like shiny, gleaming points before my face.

"What did you want in my bedroom? Frisk her, Joe!"

I tried to speak, but my breath was shut off. The man Joe obeyed that order to the letter. A police matron couldn't have been more thorough. There wasn't a detail of anything I was wearing that hadn't been explored when he finished.

"What did you want in there, Patsy?" came the hard voice. "Do you tell me or do I find out some other way?"

I could talk then, and I said, "Why, well, I was just waiting for you. I was looking around."

"Yeah? Now you start talkin'!"

A flat, brutal hand struck the side of my head. My brain buzzed to dizzy nothing as I fell down. I tried to fight back, but a minute later I was lying on the bed in the room. My wrists and my feet were tied to the bed's corner post.

"Okay, Joe!" came an order that had deadly, mocking meaning. "You have a look around outside! I'll take care of her!"

He was standing over me, his

hands twitching. Joe hadn't bothered to replace the clothes he had torn off me. I could see a gleam come into the dark eyes.

"You're a nice piece of work, Patsy. It'd be a shame to hurt you. You didn't think I knew you were married yesterday. Now what did you come in here to find? Spill it or that Jimmy Doyle will never see you again. But first I'm—"

He bent over me and crushed my lips with his mouth until they bled. I twisted away and gritted, "Don't! I didn't come to find anything! Yes, I was lonesome tonight without Jimmy! I expect I'll never see him again!"

"Yeah? You won't be lonesome long! Do you talk or do I find out in my own way?"

I clamped my teeth together. I could see no hope. Carney never would get my message in time. Sure, he would have the address to trace me afterward. But what good would that do me, or Jimmy?

For back of the other purpose in those gleaming eyes I could see murder written. Perhaps the same kind of murder that had come to Amy Dutton. Then I wasn't thinking at all.

A thumb was pressed into my throat and the two hands vised onto my ears. It was horrible. I had no breath to scream.

I could feel consciousness fading out. I could feel the skin of my ears tearing.

Though he was choking me, he was forcing a brutal kiss upon my lips at the same time. He was letting up a little on the pressure upon my throat. I heard quick movement in the outside room.

"Hold it, Tony!" snapped a voice. "Let's find out what this is all about?"

The brutal hands of Tony Santo let go of my ears and he was turning. Arthur Hopper was standing in the doorway of the bedroom. Yes. I had come to Tony Santo's apartment. That had been the place I knew I must search.

My last, faint hope faded out. I knew there would be no more mercy in Arthur Hopper than in Tony himself. Arthur started into the room.

Behind him there was a crashing blow. Then the cold voice of Sergeant Carney rapped out.

"Yes! Let's find out what this is all about? Get 'em up, both of yuh or I'll take the greatest pleasure in blasting you! Over by the wall, Hopper! And you, Santo!"

So my message had got through because the dick who had lost my taxi had phoned in, just in time to catch Sergeant Carney himself. Dicks poured into the room and they freed me and wrapped me in the bed covers.

When I could speak, I said, "Sergeant Carney, you'll find the black tie with the gold thread patterns still hanging on Tony's rack. Anyone around the Loveland mill can tell you that it's his tie, and he never noticed one of the gold patterns had been torn loose."

Carney held the tie in his hand, and he said, "By hell, Patsy! You win! I never saw a woven pattern like that anywhere but in the broken fingernail of Amy Dutton! Now she would hardly have been putting on a wrestling match with her boss at Loveland!"

I said, "I told you Tony had gone. He wasn't there. He left a little before Amy Dutton was called by phone. Tony's one hobby is imported neckties. I'll bet there isn't another one like that in the Big Town. He strangled Amy Dutton, and he helped frame Jimmy into going after the diamonds. Then he took Jimmy's knife and pushed it into the dead girl's throat."

Carney nodded. "You happened to be seen around just before that janitor fell down the elevator shaft today, Tony. All right, how much did Arthur Hopper pay you for the job?"

Well, Tony sang then. He was that kind. He put the finger on Arthur Hopper. For a mere ten grand put into Loveland, he had framed and carried out the murder.

SERGEANT CARNEY walked down the courtroom steps with Jimmy and me. I have said Carney was human. When he had finished telling the judge all of it, the court reluctantly paroled Jimmy "in the custody of his wife."

Sergeant Carney put one hand on Jimmy's shoulder at the door.

"Doyle, if you don't go straight for this girl, I'll personally use the rubber hose on you the next time they bring you in," he said.

Jimmy grinned a little.

"That's all right with me, Carney," he said. "By the way, you can have fresh eggs all for nothing if you drive out around Bay Edge, Long Island, any time. I bought me a chicken farm out there yesterday. That's where we're going, Patsy and me."

And that's where we went.

ENOUGH TO CONVICT

By **ARTHUR FINCH**



IT WAS really none of Jeff's business. He didn't even know the girl—at least not to speak to—but he was sure he recognized her face. It started when he came out of the bar at Seventy-second.

She was headed, about as fast as her high French high heels would let her, up Broadway. The breeze moulded her clinging skirt to her legs and thighs, pulled it tight against her bosom, in a way that would make any man turn for another look. Jeff was no exception. He took a second look, and then a third.

Her fur collar was tight around her neck, with her head sort of pulled down into it, so that it half obscured her features. But he was

sure he'd met her somewhere. He'd already taken a couple of steps after her before he placed her.

Unless he was tremendously mistaken, she was Solange Sert, the new movie star! Before Jeff had opened his detective agency, he'd spent a summer in Hollywood, and he was willing to swear he'd met that girl at half a dozen parties. Of course, she hadn't been a star in those days.

Jeff continued to follow her. Detective business was terrible and there wasn't any particular point in hurrying down to his office. Maybe if Solange remembered him, he could buy her a drink or so, and then—. Well, maybe the day wouldn't be completely wasted.

She turned in the street entrance to the Hotel Lovett's cocktail lounge, Jeff right behind her. She was al-

Jeff knew the girl well—he'd met her at half a dozen parties—and yet when he spoke to her, she denied ever having met him! That aroused Jeff's curiosity, and when the shooting started, he was prepared for almost anything!

ready seated in one of the red leather-lined booths when he slid into the opposite seat.

Jeff leaned toward her confidently. "Hello," he said. "I know you. You're Solange Sert."

She turned level eyes on him that had ice in their depths. Her face was expressionless and her voice was low and even. "You are mistaken. And I don't know you."

Set back on his heels, Jeff tried to grin. "It's okay with me," he said, sure that she was lying. "I thought you might remember a couple of those Hollywood parties."

Her voice was tight, as if she were not finding it easy to control it. "Will you leave me please?"

JEFF shrugged and turned to go when he saw the two men come in. The tall fellow in the lead, wearing the tan top coat, was a stranger. But he did know the man who followed, Stanley Ellis. Ellis' usually smiling countenance was grim and purposeful. Jeff had seen him in a score of hot night spots, always care-free, always with money to burn, always the life of the party. But today the notorious playboy wasn't playing.

His hat was pulled low over his face and both hands were deep in his coat pockets. His eyes never left the man ahead of him. Somehow, he reminded Jeff of an animal stalking its prey.

Jeff cast a glance back at the girl. Her face was white and tense. She sucked in a startled breath that lifted the bodice of her dress. Jeff spoke matter-of-factly: "It looks like fireworks, kid! Better keep your seat."

She ignored his warning and

surged suddenly to her feet. Jeff intercepted her with an arm around her waist and swept her toward the side door. Her purse spilled from her grasp and he caught it in mid-air.

Then he heard Stanley Ellis' voice. "Bill! Bill Youngtree! Turn around!"

The tall man in the tan coat stopped and turned curiously. His face went pale. Ellis' right hand was out of his pocket and it held a gun. The man called Youngtree cried: "Put that gun down! For God's sake, put it down, Stanley!"

His only answer was three evenly spaced shots. The impact of the lead threw him backward, folded him up, and deposited him neatly in a pile from which blood seeped redly.

The lounge was hideous with the screams of women, but Jeff wasn't having any of it. Already he had propelled Solange through the door to the sidewalk on the side street. "Even if you aren't the movie star," he said dryly, "I don't think you'll want the kind of publicity that's coming out of that place."

FOR an instant she stood so close to him that he could feel each separate tremor that shook her. Then, with a jerk, she'd pulled free, and was running madly. Before Jeff could start in pursuit, Stanley Ellis, gun in hand, had come tearing from the door behind him in a rush that threatened to bowl the private detective over. He swerved and avoided Jeff but failed to miss a girl who stood rooted in paralyzed fear at the curb.

She went to her hands and knees, screaming. Her skirt swirled high,

Jeff was straining to catch her whisper when the ceiling fell.



revealing flesh that was startlingly white in contrast to the black silk of her dress. The killer's hat was jarred to the back of his head and he shoved it in place with a wild stab as he slid behind the seat of the powerfully motored coupé that awaited him. His gun skittered to the sidewalk, but he made no move to retrieve it.

There came the roar of his motor and he was off.

Jeff stood undecided for a moment. It was useless now to try to find the girl who said she wasn't Solange Sert. The police were already swarming through the Lovett bar and lobby. Crowds were collecting. Jeff glanced down and saw that he still had the girl's pocket-book under his arm. A slight grin trickled across his face. Somewhere in its contents he was sure he'd find the answer to why Solange wasn't Solange! He whistled a cab in to the curb.

On his way downtown to his office which was in the building where he had his apartment, Jeff tried to figure things out. He was sure he'd never seen Bill Youngtree before—but he had a feeling that he ought to know the name. As far as the murder itself went, there seemed to be no mystery connected with it. There'd been twenty witnesses. All the police had to do was find Stanley Ellis. And that shouldn't be hard.

And yet Jeff wasn't satisfied. Was it just coincidence that had placed Solange—Jeff would have sworn that she *was* Solange Sert—on the scene?

His mind turned to the killer. Stanley Ellis had been featured in gossip columns and in the scandal

sheets ever since he'd been graduated from college. Yet up to now his pranks had been extravagant and silly, but never harmful to any one. The man must have gone suddenly nuts, the private detective decided.

His taxi pulled up before his destination. Jeff paid the driver and hurried into the building.

Tossing Solange's pocket-book on his desk, he reached for his telephone. He thought he knew where he could get some of the information he wanted. But the instrument rang before he could pick it up.

"I want to speak to Jeff Dakin, the private detective." It was a woman's voice.

"I'm Jeff Dakin."

"I'm calling for Solange Sert. She wanted me to thank you for helping her out of that place this afternoon. I'm her sister, Constance."

"Forget it," Jeff said. "I didn't do anything."

"Solange seems to think you did. She's here with me now. She would like you to come over here. And if you still have her bag, could you bring it over?" She spoke with what seemed a suggestion of anxiety, and waited.

Jeff lifted his eyebrows. "Oh, yes. Of course! The Grinnell Arms, you say?" He put the receiver down thoughtfully.

Still with a puzzled look on his brow, he picked up the phone again and dialed a number. "Hello, Susan," he said when he got his answer. "It's about that screen column you write. Does Solange Sert have a sister?"

"Aren't you the business-like man?" Susan laughed. "Always want help, but never a date! But

let it go! No, there's only one little girl in the Sert family."

"Thanks," Jeff told her. "And it is a date if what you've told me works out the way I expect it to."

The girl-reporter laughed again. "Such an honor!" she exclaimed. "For that I'll give you a piece of sisterly advice. Don't fool around with that gal, Jeff. She's dynamite. She never takes a step anywhere that she can't walk on broken hearts. Want to know more? For all the trick name, she was born in Brooklyn. She's twenty-two . . . one brother. Her parents have money, and she'll get most of it when she's twenty-five.

"Nobody seems to know much about the brother. Either he's dead or lost or something. And I know a guy who knows and who says that Solange has the cutest birthmark on her right hip—"

Jeff chuckled. "Bet it's the left one!"

Susan hung up on what sounded like a razzberry.

Jeff opened the pocket-book and spread its contents on his desk. The usual stuff a woman carries. A few bills, lip-stick, compact, a comb, some keys—nothing that seemed to mean much. He jammed the bag into his coat pocket.



HE WAS on his way out when a knock sounded at the door. His visitor proved to be a stranger, a well-built, much-tanned man, about thirty. Jeff looked at him inquiringly.

"Are you Jeff Dakin?"

"Yes."

"I'm Clark Newsome. I'm going

to be married to Solange Sert. She told me how you helped her escape some unpleasant publicity this afternoon, and I dropped around to thank you."

"Come in," Jeff told him. "I was just going out, but that can wait."

Newsome took off his hat, revealing his thick, blond hair, and now Jeff could place him. He'd seen his picture a dozen times in the newspapers and newsreels. Clark Newsome had been born with money, but he hadn't let that stop him. Already he'd won considerable fame as a traveler, explorer, writer, and lecturer.

Jeff poured drinks for each of them. "I didn't really do anything," he said easily. "And I'm surprised that Solange recognized me. We'd met in Hollywood—but that was quite a while ago, and she's gone far since."

Newsome lit a cigarette. "From what she said, I gather she wasn't really sure who you were until she'd left you." He blew out smoke. "As a matter of fact, I dropped by for two reasons. First, to thank you. Second, Solange asked me to pick up her bag which she forgot in the excitement this afternoon."

Jeff whistled and grinned. "There's not much I can do for you right now. To tell you the truth, I was just going after the bag. Coming down here from the Lovett, I got careless and left it in my cab. Fortunately, the driver remembered me and he just called to say I could get it at the company's office."

Newsome's mouth got thin and hard. His right hand came out of his pocket holding a business-like gun. "You're a liar!" he snapped.

"The damn' thing's sticking halfway out of your pocket! Give it to me!"

Jeff backed up a couple of steps. "What the hell's the idea?"

"Quit stalling, Dakin! Solange left quite a lot of money in that bag. No cheap private detective is going to get away with it. Give!"

Jeff appraised the set expression on Newsome's weathered face; he noted the steady purposefulness of the man's gun hand; and he surrendered. He tossed the bag.

Newsome caught it easily, and his aim hadn't wavered. "That's being reasonable!" he commented, stuffing the bag unopened into his pocket. He backed slowly out the door, still covering the detective.

The door slammed shut and almost at once Jeff heard his car take off from in front of the building.

Though there was a fine dew of perspiration on Jeff's face, he managed to grin. It would be funny when Newsome opened the bag and found it empty!

Jeff seated himself behind his desk and brought out once more the bag's contents which he had scooped into the top drawer, before starting out.

Curiously he went over the assortment again. Either Newsome had been misinformed or was lying, for there wasn't enough money to tempt one very much. The other junk seemed ordinary enough. Jeff put it back in his desk, locked up, and started out again.

HE SAT across the room from the girl who called herself Constance Sert and regarded her through cigarette smoke. The apartment was unostentatious. The girl seemed not quite at ease.

She said, "I'm sorry Solange couldn't wait. She really wanted to thank you herself. . . ."

Jeff grinned at her. "It doesn't matter." The girl was older than Solange, but not too old to be interesting. Her hair was black and wavy; her figure was a little too voluptuous. Where her dress was cut lowest in front, Jeff could glimpse the intriguing shadow that marked the beginning of the valley of her bosom. Everywhere in the room was the highly personal, exciting fragrance of her perfume.

Jeff's grin widened. "Why don't you tell the truth? What's it all about, anyway?"

Her eyebrows rose in a startled, inverted V. "What do you mean?"

"Listen, baby. I know Solange Sert. She never had a sister!"

Anger glinted in the girl's eyes. For a moment Jeff thought she was going to fly at him. But she relaxed, chewing her sensual under-lip. "Somebody has misinformed you. Look, I can prove what I say."

Jeff got up and followed her into an adjoining room. She bent over a dresser drawer. Jeff stepped nearer but recoiled suddenly when she whirled—and a gun was in her hand.

"Take it easy!" Jeff said. "That thing is dangerous!"

"Dangerous to you," she answered. The way she held the gun backed up her words. "Sit down in that chair behind you."

Jeff sat down gingerly. Beside the chair was an end table and on it lay a package of cigarettes. Without taking his eyes from her face, Jeff managed to take a cigarette from the package and stick it in his mouth.

"Now, wise guy—" the girl began.

Jeff interrupted her and his voice was calm though his heart was pounding. "Have a cigarette." With the words he tossed the package directly at her. Old as the gag was, she fell for it. Her eyes went to the cigarettes, her gun wavered and Jeff lunged.

The gun flew from her hand and she was slammed to the floor. Jeff was on her at once, both hands on her wrists, pinning her to the rug.

She writhed and twisted, legs flailing, and for a minute Jeff really had to put his weight into holding her down. Soft, luscious curves undulated against him, warm flesh burned him, her fragrance was like a heady wine. Impulsively Jeff lowered his head and kissed her parted lips. At first he thought she was going to bite him, but a change came over her at the fierce pressure of his mouth, and suddenly he was aware that her expression of anger had vanished. Her panting breath was sultry; her legs on which her skirt had skidded high, were no longer kicking.

After a while Jeff drew back. "Now will you tell me what's going on?"

She slid slender white arms slowly around his neck and drew his ear down to her lips. Jeff strained to catch her whisper—and the ceiling fell on him!

CONSCIOUSNESS came back slowly. Jeff put both hands to his head to see if it were all in one piece. It was agony to touch it. Weakly he opened his eyes.

The first thing he saw was the pair of feet—a man's feet. His gaze

crept up the man's legs, all the way up to his face. It was Clark Newsome.

Newsome dangled a gun carelessly in one hand. He said: "You've got a concrete skull, Dakin." He laughed.

Jeff groaned. "And I think you've busted it!"

"I didn't wallop you." He gestured carelessly with the gun. "Your little sweetheart did it."

With painful effort Jeff managed to turn his head so that he could see the girl. She was lying on the floor, her body in a grotesque sprawl. Her dress was rucked up almost to her hips and the bodice was torn. A long bladed knife protruded from a spot almost directly in the center of her breast. Where blood had streamed, the whiteness of her skin was vivid by contrast.

Jeff felt sick. "And you did that." He wasn't asking; he was stating a fact.

"Certainly. But don't think that you're going to make anything of it." He was devilishly matter-of-fact. "In just a minute I'm going to transfer that knife from her to you!"

With every passing tick of the clock, strength was returning to the detective's muscles. Newsome's casual statement of his intentions was like the tonic that fear will sometimes bring. But he bided his time. "I don't get it, Newsome. Are you mad?"

"Maybe. It won't matter to you. You played a trick on me in your office. I don't like practical jokers."

Jeff did his best to stall. "Aren't you even going to tell me what you're killing me for?"

"Sure. Because you know too much." His lips were snarled back from strong, even teeth.

Jeff propped himself loosely on one elbow. "Hell, I don't know anything!" As he spoke, his foot shot out in one desperate last chance—and Newsome's gun went flying from his fingers!

The explorer started after it, but he was slow. Jeff's hammering attack carried him past his goal to the wall. The detective was still groggy from the blow that had put him out, and Newsome was big and strong—but he was awkward, and obviously knew nothing about boxing. Jeff landed a glancing smash on the cheek that brought a flow of blood, and Newsome wiped at it stupidly with the back of his hand.

It was Jeff's chance for a haymaker. He brought one up from his ankles—and doing so, slipped to one knee! Newsome butted him, hard. Jeff was bowled over, and, before he could quite make his feet again, Newsome had torn the knife from the girl's body and was coming at him in an insane rush.

Jeff slipped to one side and dove for Newsome's gun on the floor. The explorer whirled after him. Jeff shot him twice through the belly.

Newsome grunted and sat down suddenly. His face relaxed and seemed tired. He closed his eyes and slumped forward.

THERE was silence while Jeff wondered how long before the sound of his shots would bring the police. They were there within two minutes! With them was an inspector whom Jeff knew.

He said: "Listen, Inspector; if

we work fast, we may get this guy to talk." He went down on one knee by Newsome.

Newsome contrived to grin. "I'd tell all of you to go to hell if it weren't for Solange!"

Jeff said: "Solange Sert?"

He nodded painfully. "You see, she's my sister. I changed my name years ago after a quarrel with my father. He disinherited me at the time."

Jeff was feeling his weakening pulse, trying to urge him on. "According to Dad's will, Solange was to get all his money—provided she was unmarried at twenty-five. But she has been married for a couple of years. Married secretly to Bill Youngtree.

"A few months ago I returned from an expedition and learned of the marriage. It burned me up. Solange was doing well enough so that she didn't need the Sert money personally, but I knew that, if she got it, she'd back me on another exploration trip. I asked Youngtree to divorce her. He could remarry her after she inherited, for all I cared. Otherwise the estate would all go to silly charities. Bill laughed in my face. So I killed him."

The inspector drew back in amazement. "You're crazy, man! Twenty people have sworn they saw Stanley Ellis shoot Youngtree! We've got Ellis locked up down at Headquarters now!"

Newsome's explanation was becoming very weak. "People should not believe everything they see. I tell you I shot Youngtree. I knew that my sister was going to meet him in the Lovett Bar and I knew that Ellis was stuck on her.

"I faked a message that got Ellis to my apartment. I doped a drink that knocked him out. I took his clothes, used a little make-up. . . and that's the whole story. Even Youngtree thought I was Ellis. That's what I wanted people to think."

The inspector was horrified. "But we might have electrocuted Ellis!"

Newsome's voice was a whisper. "What of it? He means nothing to the world. After the murder, I took him, still drugged, out of my apartment and left him walking around in a daze. I knew the police would pick him up.

"Solange never suspected me. When I called her, she was nearly hysterical." His voice trailed off and a froth of blood appeared on his lips.

Jeff bent very close. "Who's this dead girl, Newsome?"

"Solange's secretary," he gasped and died.

JEFF told the inspector what he knew. "What I can't understand," he concluded, "is what's so damn' important about the pocket-book." They'd gone back to Jeff's office, and now he got out again the bag's contents. "This is all that was in it," he said.

As he pawed through the stuff, the compact rolled off the desk and fell to the floor. It sprang open and a cloud of dusty powder rose. Jeff's eye was caught by a folded paper that had come from the back of the

thing. He opened it and whistled. He passed it to the inspector.

"I think I see everything now," he said. "It's a crude map of an unexplored section of South America. And if you look near the center, you will see a spot marked 'diamond cache'. Evidently on his last trip Newsome was scared away from something valuable. That's why it was so important to get money for another expedition. Apparently he gave the map to his sister for safe-keeping."

"That sounds reasonable," the inspector agreed, "but how does this dead girl fit into the picture?"

"She must have found out about the map. Perhaps she figured if she could get it, she could sell it to some one. She found out I had the bag. And then Newsome, trailing me, broke in on her.

"You know, Inspector," he said in a sudden burst of confidence, "I had the whole secret in my hands from the beginning—and was too dumb to use it! When Newsome rushed out of the Lovett after the shooting, he bumped into a girl and knocked his hat off. I knew Ellis well enough to know that his hair was black! And yet I saw this guy's blond dome, and nothing registered!"

The inspector shrugged. "Probably you're too dumb to rush around and offer consolation to the Sert girl," he said. But Jeff, grinning broadly, was halfway out the door before he'd finished speaking.



Alibi De Luxe



IT WAS a dull day in the city room and Bonner shrugged and accepted the assignment without grousing. If the *Graphic* wanted to waste its star reporter on stuff like this, it was no skin off his back!

On the way up the elevator in the Frazier Building, he speculated mildly over what sort of interview he'd get. A private secretary in the offices of Glasby & Doyle had signed a contract to sing on the radio! So what? So the *Graphic* was sending its best man out to interview the kid! It was after five and she'd probably gone home anyway!

Bonner pushed open a door, saw nobody at the reception desk, pushed open another door, and came upon a tableau that froze him in his tracks!

Hilton Penn, a chap he knew who worked as draftsman for Glasby, was bending over a girl's body on the threshold of an inner office.

Bonner said, "What the hell!" and strode rapidly across the floor.

Penn looked around over one shoulder. His face was drawn and frightened and greenish. "Murder!" he said simply.

Bonner whistled involuntarily. The girl had been beautiful and, even in death, she was lovely. She was young and fair, girlish and yet intensely feminine. Her position on the floor had pulled her dress high above her knees, revealing exquisite-ly rounded thighs of gleaming white.

Bonner said, "Well, Hilton. What happened?"

The other had difficulty speaking but finally said, "I don't know."

Bonner raised his eyebrows. "She hasn't been dead very long."

PENN found his voice. "All I know is that I found her like this not more than two minutes ago. I came up to see Glasby about some extra work he wanted me to do. I found Molly lying like this. Honest, that's all I know!"

"Molly? You know the girl?"

"Sure. She's worked here for more than a year. She was a swell kid!"

Bonner picked up a phone from the nearest desk and found that he was connected outside. He dialed Police Headquarters and asked for Ryan of Homicide. He said: "I'm in the offices of Glasby & Doyle. Hurry up here! . . . No, everybody's gone home apparently. There's nobody here but me and a chap who makes drawings for the firm, and a dead girl. Yes! I said *dead* girl. No, I haven't touched the corpse but there's a spot in her curls that looks like a bullet hole." He hung up.

Hilton Penn looked as if he were going to be sick any minute. Bonner said, "We'll have to wait for the cops. Tell me more about this Molly while we wait." He drew the younger man to a chair behind a desk almost out of sight of the body.

Penn cleared his throat. "Well, her name was Molly Pierce. She was a very quiet, pleasant sort of girl." He hesitated as if he were going to say more, but suddenly shut up.

By MALCOM ROSE

The cops were sure Penn had killed the girl, but something that happened in a barroom gave Bonner a different idea. There was no way for him to bring the dead girl back to life, but he might be able to avenge her killing, if he could get the right kind of cooperation from a girl still living!



Penn clapped a hand to his head, looked as if he were going to be sick any minute.

"You act as if you had a crush on the girl," the reporter told him sharply. "The police are going to ask you a lot of questions. Because you were the first to find the murder, they're likely to handle you like a suspect. Ryan's a nut on circumstantial evidence. Quit shaking! Buck up!

"Try to figure what kind of alibi you can give for the last half hour. It's a cinch the girl wasn't killed until every one had left for the day."

"But I didn't have anything to do with it," Penn protested wildly. "You don't think I did, do you?"

Bonner didn't answer, but he didn't think so, nor hadn't thought so. He took a quick check-up of the office. Beyond the reception room was the large floor-space covered with desks for typists and office help, and from that opened Doyle's and Glasby's private offices. It was on the threshold of Glasby's office that Miss Pierce's body lay.

Bonner looked beyond the girl's corpse into the office. It was large—at least thirty feet each way. A large Oriental rug covered the floor, and the wall was hung with paintings that were obviously valuable. The furniture was heavy mahogany, costly.

IT WASN'T until now that Bonner suddenly plunged a hand in his pocket to check on a memorandum there. Molly Pierce! The dead girl was the girl he had come to interview, the girl who had just signed a contract to sing on radio!

Before he had hardly digested the fact, there was a commotion in the reception room. Ryan, accompanied by a uniformed policeman from

Headquarters, burst in. On their heels was Hugh Lester, a reporter from the *Globe*, the *Graphic's* chief competitor.

Ryan cast an experienced eye over the place, looked at the murdered girl. "How'd you get here, Bonner?" he asked as he worked. Without waiting for an answer, he gestured toward Penn. "Who's this lug?"

"He works for Glasby."

"What's he doing here?"

Bonner smiled sweetly. "The girl at the information desk has gone home. Why not ask him yourself? You're going to anyway."

Ryan snorted. He swung around on Penn. "Sit down, young fellow!"

A look of worry and distress on his face, Penn slumped into a chair.

To Bonner listening, it was old stuff. In a rapid-fire series of questions and charges, the detective accused the young draftsman of the murder, suggested he had thrown the murder gun out of the window, charged him with a dozen other assorted crimes.

He got exactly nowhere. As a matter of fact, Penn's nervousness began to leave him during the inquisition. By the time Ryan had finished, he was pale and tired-looking, but thoroughly composed.

Ryan drew Bonner to one side where neither Penn nor Hugh Lester could hear. "Let's hear a little more about this dame," he said.

"I can't tell you much," the reporter answered. "She'd won this singing contract, but apparently she wasn't sure of herself. She wanted to hold on to her office job until she was certain she was going to click. That's why, I guess, that my interview was set for after hours. I was

going to ask her all the usual bunk: How does it feel to win a national radio contest? Questions and things like that."

"Know anything about this guy Penn?"

"Not anything more than I've told you. He seems to be a nice young fellow. You'll probably find his fingerprints all over the place, but you'll find the prints of a hundred other people, too. I'd recommend that you don't push him too hard. He's not the type to break down under any third degree. Personally, I think he's as innocent as any one of us here."

Their conversation was broken off by the arrival of the medical examiner with two men with the long basket. The M. E.'s preliminary report was brief. Shot from above. Powder burns on the scalp. Dead about an hour. Say five-twenty.

Bonner and Hugh Lester each rushed for a phone.

When Bonner came back, Ryan was talking to Penn. "You're coming downtown with me," he said. "You be where I can find you, too, Bonner."



BONNER sat in a bar across the street and drank martinis moodily. Fifteen minutes later a newsboy calling extras came in and he bought a paper. It was Lester's *Globe*, and its front page was splashed with the story of the beautiful singer who had been murdered. Bonner grumbled inwardly that his own paper wasn't yet on the streets. And then something burst in his brain like a bombshell.

He tore out of the saloon and

whistled for a cab. To be on the safe side, he directed the driver downtown, then swung east on Fourteenth, north again on Irving Place, east on Seventeenth, back down on Fifth Avenue. He didn't know whether he was being followed, but he wanted to be safe.

Half an hour later he pulled up on West Forty-seventh to the bewilderment of his driver.

The door on which he knocked was the fourth floor walk-up of a building that had seen better days. Bonner had no sooner knocked than he discovered the door was unlatched. He walked in.

A girl in filmy negligee whirled at his entrance. Bonner grinned cheerfully, relishing the view of feminine charms revealed by the swirling garment. "Hello!" he said.

The girl's little fists were doubled and her eyes were furious. "Get out of here, you damn' louse!"

Bonner sank into a chair. "Ought to keep your door locked if you don't want visitors," he remarked.

For the moment speechless with rage, the girl continued to advance on him. With each step that she took a shapely leg emerged from the folds of diaphanous silk. Her firm bosom danced with her excitement. Bonner's blood pressure went up. The girl's anger heightened the natural allure of her figure, gave her an added spice and piquancy.

She stopped so near to him that he could breathe the fragrance of the bath salts she had been using, could, it seemed to him, feel the warmth of her body. "Get out of here quickly—or you'll never live to get out!" she warned him in a low, husky voice.

For answer Bonner shot out a hand, caught her wrist, and jerked her down onto his lap. "Think I'm afraid of your boy-friend?" he asked. His heart was hammering, not altogether from the contact with her loveliness.

He put both hands on her shoulders and held her for a second. "Going to be good, or should papa spank?" he asked. He exerted a slight pressure as if he were about to turn her over on his knees.

She squirmed and fought and he drew her closer, not caring if his grip was bruising her. "Who is this boy-friend?" he demanded. "You never used to be like this."

Unexpectedly she relaxed in his arms and cuddled against him. Both slender arms slid sinuously around his neck. "You roughneck! I hate you!" she whispered. Her lips, soft, moist, and tremulous, came up to meet his mouth. Bonner knew that he had won. He kissed her feverishly. . . .

A LITTLE later he asked her again, as if from mere curiosity. "Who's the new flame? I can't say that I can hand him much!"

She made a moue. "Your old pal, Hugh Lester, if you insist on knowing."

Bonner laughed. "I thought you were getting interested in the famous Mr. Glasby."

"That's all over," she said, pressing herself against him.

Abruptly Bonner pushed her from his knees, letting her drop to the floor. He stood up. "Have you forgotten that I'm a married man?"

Her curses followed him all the way down the hall.

BONNER now felt that he was headed definitely in the right direction. He caught a cab and said, "Police Headquarters" to the driver.

He found Ryan playing pinochle with a couple of other officers in the back room. Hugh Lester of the *Globe* was kibitzing. Bonner asked for permission to go to the cell-block to see Hilton Penn, and his request was granted. "Have yourself a time," Ryan told him. "That boy's going to crack pretty soon, and that's all we need!"

Bonner found a picture of dejection in Penn's cell. The young draftsman sat, elbows on his knees, his head bowed in his hands.

"Hiya!" Bonner said cheerfully. "Have you got a lawyer?"

"No. What's the use?"

"As a matter of fact, there isn't any. You'll be out of here by morning."

It was amazing how his words perked the youth up.

"What do you mean? What's happened?"

Bonner disregarded his questions. "You loved Molly Pierce, didn't you?"

Penn froze, and pain etched his face. After a minute he said in a low voice, "So what?"

Bonner's reply was equally low-pitched. "I've found out who killed her."

The prisoner was off his bench in a flash. There was fire in his eyes. "Who? If I can get out of here, I'll get him with my bare hands!"

Bonner quieted him with a gesture. "I can't tell you now. You'll learn soon enough. And don't worry; the killer will be taken care of. But I came here to ask you a favor."

"What can I do, locked up like this?"

Bonner leaned forward. "Listen. When I go out, I want to tell Ryan that you've decided to confess. He'll be in here on the doublequick. I want you to tell him that Molly had gone upstage on you, was ditching you for a guy who made more money. Say you must have gone crazy. But say you shot her!"

Penn swung around. "What kind of doublecross is this? I wouldn't have hurt Molly for anything, I tell you!"

Bonner put a hand on his shoulder. "Take it easy, kid! I know you didn't kill her, but we're up against a pretty tough situation. You'll have to trust me. You're in bad enough now so that you've nothing to lose. Trust me."

"Okay," Penn nodded weakly.

BONNER'S announcement in the back room broke up the card game at once. Ryan looked triumphant and smug; the other cops looked relieved; Lester thumbed his nose at Bonner in a manner that might have meant almost anything.

Bonner stopped at a bar long enough to absorb five drinks. Then he went to a booth and called Ryan at Headquarters. "Hello, shamus," he said, "I handed you a confession; now I've got something even bigger for you. Meet me on Forty-seventh Street in twenty minutes." He gave the address of the walk-up apartment house where he'd had his afternoon session with the girl in the negligee, and hung up.

Ryan got there almost as soon as he did. "What's the dope?" he demanded.

Bonner chose to be mysterious. "Follow me," he said. He led the puffing officer to the fourth floor and tapped softly on the door of the apartment next to the one he'd visited that afternoon.

An old man opened the door and, at Bonner's gesture, Ryan flashed his badge. "We're not interested in you," the reporter explained. "But we want to get out on your fire-escape, and we don't want to attract a lot of attention."

The old man sat down, speechless, while the two of them crawled out his window and disappeared in the direction of the apartment next door.

Bonner whispered to Ryan: "There's a dame lives here named Swift. You're going to stay here and watch her for a few minutes while I set the stage."

Through the lacy curtains they could see the girl at her dressing table. At the moment she was doing something to her hair. Bonner saw Ryan's eyes on the lift of her bosom as she raised her arms, saw his gaze caress each enticing line of her figure, and decided he would stay put for a while. "Remember I'm your pal," he whispered. "Play along with me on this and it won't hurt you downtown!"

He himself crawled back the way they'd come. He walked down the corridor to the girl's door and knocked. She opened it a crack to investigate, and his foot was inside before she could slam it shut. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Forgotten me already?" He pushed the door open and forced his way past her.

Suddenly she seemed no longer to

resent his visit. She smiled. She'd left her negligee at her dressing table and was clothed only in sheer underthings, but she made no move to put anything more on. "I was sure you'd be back," she told him. Both her arms went around his neck.

Bonner disentangled her arms and pushed her away. He started toward the dresser, praying that Ryan wasn't asleep on the job. There was a sound like a cork being pulled from a wine bottle; something exploded on his head; and, as he fell to the floor, he saw the window go to pieces before him.

HE WAS out only a matter of seconds. When he opened his eyes, Ryan was in the room, slamming a man's head against the floor. The girl was astride the officer's back, tearing at his hair with raking fingers.

Bonner conquered his dizziness enough to get to his feet and drag her away. He put a hand to his bloody head and discovered a furrow on his scalp that would hold a pencil. On the floor in a corner lay a silenced gun, and the girl saw it as soon as he did. She got there first, but Bonner's slap on her jaw made her drop the gun. She was no trouble after that.

The reporter turned back to Ryan. The man held by the officer was the *Globe* reporter, Hugh Lester! And Ryan had him under control now. He was unconscious, his face a battered pulp.

"That's that!" said Ryan with satisfaction. "But what's it all about?"

"I'll tell you in a minute," Bonner groaned, and fainted.

HE REGAINED consciousness between clean sheets in a strong odor of cleanliness. He looked around. He was in a hospital and several figures were standing around. He squinted at Ryan, at the next man, his boss on the *Graphic*.

He grinned. "What happened?"

"You nearly cashed in," Ryan said soberly. "When you feel strong enough to talk, I want to hear where you got your idea that Lester killed the Pierce girl."

Bonner drank from a glass beside his bed. "That's easy! You know, when you arrested Penn and took him downtown, the *Globe* was out in twenty minutes with a murder extra. Only twenty minutes! It was exclusive, and it was too damn' fast.

"That made me think Lester had an inside track somewhere. I knew that the Pierce girl couldn't have meant much to him because she and Penn were sweet on each other. There had to be another angle. So I looked up the Swift dame, who was second in the radio contest. I went to work on her and she admitted that Lester was her boy friend. That made it easy.

"Either Lester got the screwy idea that, if the Pierce girl were out of the way, his sweetie would get the contract, or she put him up to it. Either way added up to the same thing.

"I persuaded Penn to confess, figuring that would send Lester chasing up to his girl's house if I was right. You know the rest."

Ryan scratched his head. "You win all along the way," he marveled. "Lester admitted everything when we got him downtown. He had a date to interview the Pierce gal fif-

teen minutes before you. He did his stuff, and then came back when you'd called Headquarters, innocent as a babe."

"What about the Swift gal?" Bonner asked curiously. In spite of everything, there *was* something alluring about her.

Ryan laughed. "I doubt if we can tie her into the case seriously," he said. "Maybe you'd like her paroled in your custody? You'll be all right in another day."

Bonner turned over to sleep. Even if Ryan was joking, maybe that wasn't such a bad idea!

Becky was drunk, no doubt, but that was hardly enough to account for her public disrobing in the night club. And certainly the drinks she had weren't the occasion for her spectacular suicide leap.

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PRIVATE DETECTIVE STORIES

Homicide On the Range

By **GEORGE SHUTE**



BIG BEN stiffened from fear when the shot rang out, crashing through the heavy air, echoing through the thick timber. The bay gave a low neigh, ears pricked up, nostrils quivering and pointed in the direction from which the sound had come.

He had never liked guns, not even the one I wore in the line of duty. This distaste of his gave me plenty of concern during the hunting season. If it's possible for a horse to act like a jitterbug, that's the way Big Ben used to act.

"There, there, boy, hold it now!" I patted his velvety nose and wondered who in hell was shooting out of season. To me, there could be only one answer: some damn dude from the Dude Bar-O. The shot hadn't come from far away and I decided to take a look; although, strictly speaking, it was the game warden's business, not a forest ranger's.

Big Ben had tugged the reins from my hands a couple of minutes earlier when he smelled the rivulet that trickled from a clump of lady ferns concealing a spring. He was too nervous now to drink and he kept muzzling me, anxious to get out of the evergreen forest away from the guns he hated.

I plunged ahead on foot, cursing the hunted. Thick needles of lodgepole pine made our progress almost noiseless. Smells of pine and spruce mingled in familiar fragrance and I kept my fingers crossed, hoping the dope wouldn't shoot again before I got there.

Big Ben picked his way nervously after me. Then, about a thousand feet ahead I came upon the scene of the shooting. And, in addition to the man who was lying on the ground, there was a girl!

And she was running, hell bent for heaven!

I CUT through the timber and grabbed her. "Hey, what's the rush?"

She saw the shield on my shirt. "It's Mr. Pratt," she gasped. "I was going back to the ranch for help. He's... he's..."

Her eyes rolled and closed and she slumped to the pine needles.

She was blonde and very pretty, with a figure attractive as J. P. Morgan's bank balance. The riding habit she had on brought out some very luscious lines and the white silk blouse that complemented the rest of the ensemble clung to her small, firm bosom, now quivering slightly. I felt my pulse tingling as I rested the girl's head in the hollow of my arm.

I'd gone into forestry service for my health, but the prospects looked anything but healthy. Instead of going to the ranger station, I had to cart a corpse back to a dude ranch, while escorting a beautiful but hysterical doll!

I remembered having seen her around the dude ranch.

Now, I slapped her face vigorously and, in a moment, she stirred, her eyelids fluttered and then opened. There was fear in her face as she whispered: "Mr. Pratt?"

I drew her to her feet, my arm still around her, intending to walk back to the body with her. She pulled away. "No," she gasped. "I can't look."

I said: "Wait here until I've had a look."

The late Mr. Pratt was lying face down. A .30-30 bullet had gone into his heart. A carbine was in front of him, and blood dripped from his corduroy shirt, blood flecked with powder marks. His horse was standing close by, pawing the ground nervously.

I whistled and Big Ben poked over. I loaded Mr. Pratt on his back. The bay looked at me quizzically and let out a little neigh. He didn't like the idea.

I went back to the girl. She was sitting down, still wearing a look of



"It's Mr. Pratt," she said.
"He's—he's dead!"

fear. I asked her: "What happened?"

"We were walking along when he stumbled. His gun went off." She buried her face in her hands and her shoulders shook.

I didn't say anything for a minute. Her white face was stained with tears and her eyes were red-rimmed. I was wondering how come Pratt happened to be carrying the gun when there was a sheath on his saddle.

Gun accidents aren't unusual. But this was the first the dude ranch had suffered. They wouldn't like it at all.

I didn't care whether they did or didn't. That place had been a nuisance to me ever since it had opened, a year ago. For almost a year and a half prior to its coming, I had enjoyed myself. The doctors had told me that if I wanted my bad lung restored, high air would do it. So I had tossed up my job in the Los Angeles Homicide Squad and found a spot with the forestry service. The doctor's advice had been as sound as my lung now was.

FOR a year I had loved being in the Montana hills. And when I say loved, I mean it, because Peggy Folsom was around, too.

Then, in the valley below the junction of the Beaverhead National Forest and the Gallatin Range, the dude ranch had sprung up, bringing with it society dames and playboys and everything I didn't like. Nothing but trouble came with the dudes. And, when the chief had told me to give up my cabin and make my headquarters in the Dude Bar-O (which is a helluva name to give a place in

Southern Montana) I had felt myself becoming nothing but a combined cop and Boy Scout, with accent on the latter.

And now more trouble. Instead of going out to the ranger station for the usual daily look around, I had to cart a corpse back to the ranch, while escorting a beautiful but almost hysterical doll who wasn't inclined to talk too much, and I didn't blame her.

We had to walk back, part of the way, picking our path through shrubby cinquefoil, at this time of year almost bare of yellow blossoms. The terrain was still pretty though, with here and there open stretches dotted with scarlet paintbrushes and late-blooming buttercups. After we'd passed the timber-laden elk trail we were able to mount, me on Pratt's horse, the girl on hers, with Big Ben following, bearing his dead burden.

From the little the girl said, I learned her name was Rose Spellman. She had a job as secretary in an auto company's plant in Detroit and had come out to Montana for a vacation. At the ranch, she had struck up an acquaintance with Pratt. They had been on their way to a small lake, about a quarter mile away from the spot where the accident happened. They were going to try to land a few trout, she said.

When we came to the clearing that led to the road that wound up at the dude ranch, I asked her to go on ahead. I wanted to deliver Pratt around the back way, avoiding as much as possible anyone seeing us. I told her to keep quiet about the accident.

I managed to get Pratt in without any bother. The manager was plenty

flustered. "He was such a nice, quiet man!" He clucked. "It always happens to the good ones, doesn't it, Wilkins?"

I agreed with him, and said that I had to make a report. Which meant I'd have to drive into Sphinx where the sheriff's office was located.

"We'll have to notify his relatives," I said. "Where did he register from?"

The manager didn't know. He left to find out. While he was gone, I unstrapped the gun belt Pratt had been wearing and then went through his clothes, bringing out a knife and a wallet. I dumped the contents on a table. Whoever he was, he had plenty of dough on him. About six hundred bucks to be exact. There were a few calling cards and a folded piece of paper with a lot of numbers on it. I was stuffing the lot back in his wallet when the manager returned.

"He's from New York," he said.

"Yeah," I said sarcastically, "either the state or the city. That's a lotta help."

Preston, the manager, looked helpless. "That's all we know about him." Then, he glared at me. "We don't cross-examine our guests, Wilkins. Oh, this is awful!" His tone changed: "You'll keep this as quiet as possible, won't you, Wilkins. The ranch, you know."

I said I would. "You'd better make arrangements to have him taken into town to an undertaking parlor. I'll call the sheriff and report it."

Preston nodded gratefully and bustled out. I picked up the phone, called the sheriff's office. He was out. I gave the message to one of

the deputies. "We're sending the body into town," I said. "Tell Sheriff Walton I'll get in touch with him as soon as I find out some more about Pratt."

But I didn't find anything more. The guy had no personal letters, no nothing. He must have traveled a lot, though. His clothes showed that. The three suits he had in the closet all bore different labels from tailoring firms in New York, Washington, and Chicago.

There was a knock on the door. And Peggy came in. Her face was white and taut. I got scared then, too. Peggy Folsom and I were old friends, from way back when. At least a year ago.

"What's the matter, Peggy?" I asked.

Her eyes strayed to the bed. "I've been looking for you. Who . . . who . . .?"

"A guy named Pratt," I said. "One of the guests."

I thought for a moment I was seeing things; the relief that came over her face so suddenly was that apparent. She sank down in a chair and, before she could get her breath, I asked: "What are you afraid of?"

"Afraid?" She sort of snapped the words. Then, nervously. "I thought maybe you had been hurt, Harry." She smiled, a weak sort of smile.

I grinned, my eyes on the patch of flesh that showed above the stockings she was wearing. I always told her that that buckskin skirt was too short. Not that I minded. I was worried about some of the lads she guided from the dude ranch.

For a guide, female variety, Peggy was plenty attractive. She had black hair and mysterious black eyes and

one of the most intriguing smiles you ever saw. She was trim as a racing yacht, too. And now, as she sat there, her breast heaving slightly, I felt that same bumpity-bumpity going on in the region of my heart. She grabbed my hand as I stood alongside her and her fingers were like ice! And if ever anyone missed a cue, I missed mine then. Because Peggy Folsom wasn't the kind of girl scared easily.

WHEN her father had died, three years earlier, she had kept their place in the hills. She was a wonder in the great outdoors and made quite a bit of dough for herself in wild game pelts. The dude ranch, when it appeared, more than helped her income. She took out only the more important parties, and was plenty expensive. She showed me her bank book once and she had done all right for a little girl in the wilds. And alone in the world except for a brother up north some place.

She noticed me looking at her hands. Quickly, she said: "I heard about it downstairs. But I thought maybe you had been hurt, too. What happened?"

I told her about finding the body and the Spellman girl. I could have kicked that manager all over the lot for letting news leak out.

She had just come back with a fishing party, she said. "But I've got to go back to the cabin now." She was still nervous. "You're not riding out that way, are you?"

I wanted to go. And like that song Jimmy Durante sings, I wanted to stay. Finally, I decided on the latter. My chief wouldn't like my report in its present form. Maybe

the Spellman doll, I decided, could give some dope on Pratt.

I could tell Peggy was upset still when we said good-by.

WHEN Rose Spellman opened the door for me, in response to my knock—I must have waited a minute or two while she was talking to someone on the phone—I blinked.

She was wearing one of those negligees as filmy as a spider's web. And just as beautiful in its workmanship. Yep, it was filmy and frilly and made her look like a walking dream in the soft lights that glowed behind her. The way she was built, though, she would have stirred my pulse in any kind of light. Through the transparent material I could almost feel the hinted softness of her flesh, the sleek lines of her hips, and the charlotte russe texture of her enticing skin. There was an elusive scent in her hair, too. Expensive perfume even to my untrained nostrils.

Sleek and beautiful and calm. That fright had gone out of her eyes and she teetered just a little bit as she flashed a radiant smile, disclosing rows of small, sharp, pearly teeth. The Scotch bottle and a siphon, along with a jug of ice, were on a small stand near a chaise longue. She giggled: "Gosh, but you're handsome."

I began to think that no matter how the day had been, this was my lucky night. First Peggy and now Rose.

She said: "How about a snifter? It's great for the nerves."

"I gotta lot of nerve," I said.

She laughed: "You must have to be out there with all those wild animals." She shivered a little. "Isn't it dangerous?"

I poured two drinks. She took a hefty sip of hers and sat down, crossing her silken-clad legs. Until the third drink I didn't get around to the subject in hand. Mr. Pratt. By this time, I was feeling warm and cozy and wishing that the whole thing was over. In a measure I was grateful. Here was a doll that had paid no attention to me before. And now . . .

"Look, honey," I said. "How about this guy, Pratt? Did he ever tell you anything about himself? His business? Anything like that?"

Her eyes seemed to cloud. She sipped her drink, then:

"He was in the brokerage business, I think. He said he came out here for his health. I met him in the bar one night. He was an awfully nice man."

She didn't know anything about his office, whether it was in New York or where. "He was very lonesome, though. Maybe that's why I went out with him." She shook her head. "Yes, I guess that's why." Then, noticing my grin, she laughed: "Fresh. Today was only the second time I'd gone riding with him. If you can call walking a horse half the way riding."

Suddenly she burst into tears. I was stunned. "It's awful," she said. "I can't bear to think of it. One minute we were walking and the next minute he fell, the gun went off, and he was dead."

I put my arm around her shoulders and thrilled as I felt the warm softness of her against me. "He shouldn't have been carrying a gun carelessly," I said. "As a matter of fact, he shouldn't have been carrying that gun. He was wearing a pistol."

She looked at me, wet-eyed. "I

think he was afraid of bears or something."

I admitted that the range had plenty of man-killers. But they'd have to be roused before they'd turn on full steam. "He must have been plenty clumsy on his feet to trip over that pine carpet."

I could feel her stiffen. "You shouldn't talk like that," she said. "It's not nice to talk about the dead." She squeezed my fingers reproachfully. I felt my insides tingle as she turned her blue eyes on me and I saw the invitation in them. The next instant her soft arms had snaked around me and I could feel her mouth, warm, and moist and eager, pressed fiercely upon my own.

"OH, let it ring," she said, later, as the phone bell jangled. I was all for that but I remembered the switchboard girl knew I had asked for Miss Spellman's room number. It might be for me.

I took the receiver off the hook and at the first words had to take the carpiece away quickly before it shattered my ear drums. There was only one voice in the state as strident as that. And its copyright owner was giving it all he had.

"I just got in," Sheriff Walton screeched. "I got to see you, Wilkins. That guy Pratt. Very important." I looked over at Rose, who had risen and was pouring herself another slug. She could take anything that girl.

"Stop shouting," I said. "I can't hear you."

"Who's shouting?" He was indignant, but he toned down to a shrill soprano. "I don't want to talk over the phone," he said. "There's

something you ought to know, private. I got something to show you. What'll I do? Bring it out? You wait for me."

He hung up before I could say any more. Rose was looking intently at me. "My God," she said, "that's the first time I knew a parrot could carry on a conversation."

"That," I laughed, is our esteemed sheriff. I think he was elected to office so that the voters wouldn't have to listen to his campaign speeches."

Rose smiled. I started mixing another drink. She held up a finger. "No more, little man, you've got work to do and I've just got to take a bath."

It was a very expert brush-off. So what could I do. Oh, yes, I suggested back-scrubbing but that didn't work so well.

Anyone could see that, because ten minutes later I was on the veranda in front of the dude ranch, listening to the music from the radio. Some couples were dancing inside on the small dance floor by the bar.

I was just lighting a cigarette when Preston came over. Even in the hills of old Montana that guy was determined to wear evening clothes. And, if it had been warm enough, I'll bet he'd have shown up in a mess jacket.

He said good-evening, just about the time I was thinking about how he had talked too much. He was the guy who wanted this thing kept quiet, yet he had told Peggy and heaven knows how many others of the accident. Besides, Sheriff Walton's excitement was giving me a little concern. An accident was taking on too big proportions for my

trained nose. I was feeling just the way I used to when I cracked murder cases back in L. A.

So I snapped: "What's good about it?"

He jumped. "What's the matter, Wilkins?" He looked at me suspiciously. "You been drinking again?"

That made me sore. Because the guy was right. I had been on three lulus since the ranch started, getting all of them there. And getting set down plenty, later, by the chief.

"The trouble with you, Preston," I said, "is that you talk too much, you pay too much attention to looking like a clothes dummy instead of to business, and you haven't got too much sense, anyway."

He started spluttering. And I started to enjoy myself. "First of all," I rasped, "you've been talking about the accident. Then you go ahead and let a guest take a rifle out when you know there's no shooting this time of the year."

I thought he'd burst a blood vessel.

"Now listen here, Wilkins," he said, "the taxpayers give you your salary. You've got no right to talk to me like this. And when your boss comes around, I'm going to tell him so." He added, in an injured tone: "I didn't tell anyone. And, furthermore, I never gave poor Mr. Pratt a rifle. If he got one, it must have been his own." His face lightened: "And in addition, he never took one before, because I had told him we wished our guests wouldn't."

I couldn't say a thing. And he knew it. Suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, the picture of Pratt's belongings flashed before me. He had had only two pieces of baggage—a

Gladstone and a kit bag! There had not been any rifle case!

I brushed past the staring Preston and went upstairs. I had locked the gun in the room along with the body. My eyes almost jumped from their sockets. I hadn't looked closely at the .30-30 carbine before and now, as I did, I almost wished I hadn't. For there, burned in small letters on the gun butt were the initials: "R. F."

The gun had belonged to Peggy's father. And was hers now!

For a moment, I couldn't think. Then I heaved a sigh of relief. With the heavy sugar Pratt carried he would be considered a job for Peggy. Perhaps she had acted as guide for him, carried her gun, and forgot to take it back.

I put the rifle back in a closet and, as I was just about to go out, my eye caught Pratt's wallet, which I had placed on the dresser. Remembering the dough it contained, I stuffed the leather case in my pocket. The idea had just hit me that maybe by some accident, on purpose, it would get stuck to a bellboy's fingers.

Then I went downstairs, figuring on getting a drink at the bar. Peggy, I had already decided, was going to hear a few things. If she hadn't left that gun around, the guy might be alive today.

THE bar was crowded, as usual. The Dude Bar-O does good business along into the Fall, and tonight was no exception. Disgusted, I went outside to the veranda again, sort of hoping that maybe Rose Spellman would come down.

I was sitting there smoking and waiting for the sheriff when I heard

a car start with an awful racket. I jumped to my feet and yelled: "Hey, Peggy."

The noise of the motor drowned my voice and the car bumped along the dirt road, heading toward town. Hers was a car that would identify itself anytime, just by noise. It was one of the earliest of the Ford jalopies when Henry switched from the Model T.

I cursed to myself and settled back to wait for Walton. If I had only known Peggy was around. . . . I figured she'd stopped off to have dinner and then decided to drive into town. Often, she went in at night, usually for supplies. She liked eating her own cooking rather than the ranch's, and I can't say I blame her.

By the time I had smoked about seven cigarettes and brushed off a couple of dowagers who came buzzing around, I was fit to be tied. Walton was one of those guys who can't be hurried and the past had taught me not to expect him any place on time. But the way he had sounded excited had led me to believe that he'd step on the gas in the twenty mile ride from town.

Preston came out again. He seemed to be over his peeve and inclined to talk. I wasn't. So I asked him to keep a lookout for the sheriff while I drove down a ways to see if I could meet him. There was only one other way he could come and that would be over a road worse than the regular one. It ran back of the dude ranch, ending there, just about where the forest began. I didn't think he'd take that way. I climbed into my flivver, which, like Peggy's, was kept parked at the dude ranch. Nothing but a horse or

a man could go through the forest, so it was useless taking a car past the lodge.

After I had gone about six miles, I began to wonder whether Walton had changed his mind. A mile further I discovered someone had changed it for him.

There was a bend in the road and both sides were bordered with trees. If I hadn't been driving slowly, I would have missed seeing the car. The moon hadn't come out yet and the stars didn't provide much illumination.

Walton was lying alongside the car, an ugly welt showing on his head as my flashlight ran over his face. He was quite colder than a speech by a D. A. R. member. But not quite as dead. Whoever had conked him had done a swell job of it. I uncocked the gasket beneath my radiator and filled my hands with warm water. It didn't help. He'd need a doctor to pull him out of it. I decided to take him back to the hotel as soon as I wiped some of the blood from the side of his face.

As usual, I had forgotten my handkerchief. He didn't have one either. Then I remembered he had a habit of keeping his car polished. He had bought it only last year and was very proud of it.

I fiddled through the side pockets. His gun was in one of them, along with some reward posters. I threw the stuff on the seat. A couple of clean rags were at the bottom of the pocket. I wet one and applied it to the bump. He groaned but didn't open his eyes. Even without dead weight he would have been heavy. I almost broke my back putting him on the floor in back of his car which

I had decided to take, mine being a coupé.

I was climbing into the front seat when the rays from the lights of the dashboard hit the top poster on the pile I had placed there.

I KNEW one of those faces. Larry Hart! Larry, the Hop, we used to call him in L. A. He was a very handy guy with a gun and dangerous even when he wasn't coked up. I had sent him up for three years once. And here he was back in harness again. He and some lug named Brophy were wanted in connection with a bank holdup in Helena some three weeks ago.

Seeing the poster recalled the case to me. I had heard it over the radio. They had gotten away with almost two hundred grand, sneaked out from under the tri-state alarm like a pair of Houdinis. Their disappearance had interested me and I had followed the news flashes for a couple of days. Hart may have been a hop head with an itchy trigger finger, but he was plenty crafty, too. I remember that at the time the news commentator revealed the teller had disappeared a couple of days later, I figured it was an inside job. And now Larry and his pal were on the lam and Uncle Sam was offering five G's apiece for them dead or alive.

I stuffed the papers back, wishing I had my hands on that ten G offer. I could have a helluva lot of fun in Honolulu with that. And maybe Rose Spellman.

On the way back, I drove slowly, trying to keep from giving Walton too much of a jouncing, of which he couldn't stand any in his condition. We crawled along at about ten miles

an hour and it was almost midnight when I got back to the dude ranch. I was amazed to find Preston on the porch. And more amazed when I discovered he had been waiting for me.

He had a smug look on his face until he saw that I was lugging Walton. Then the expression changed to one of horror. I told him to get Dr. Simpkins and a boy to help me drag Walton to bed. He ran for the doc and a boy came out. Together we got Walton to the second floor and were just taking his clothes off when Preston bustled in, followed by the doc. Preston chased the bellboy, who was staring open-mouthed.

"I've got something to tell you, Wilkins," Preston started to say.

I told him to keep quiet until the doc got through. In a few minutes, the sheriff started groaning and then he opened his eyes. Another minute and he was able to understand where he was, and when I asked "what happened," his answer floored me.

"I was driving here when I saw a car stuck across the road. There was a girl bent over the engine, so I stopped. The next think I knew somebody had slugged me."

A horrible fear came over me. "Did you recognize the girl?"

Yeah, even though I knew what he was going to say, I still didn't want to believe it. But he said: "It was Peggy Folsom!"

I knew then that she must have turned up the side road. I had passed no other car on the way out. And if that was the case, her car would be outside, perhaps back of the lodge.

Walton started talking again: "Pratt," he said, haltingly—his head must have been paining terribly—

"what I wanted to tell you. He's a secret service man!"

"A what?" I bit off the words in my excitement.

"He had a lead on those Helena bank robbers," Wilkins said. "He asked me to take care of his mail. He was working incognito."

I could hardly believe it. "You're sure of this?"

Walton nodded. "His identification's in his wallet."

The doctor and Preston exchanged glances. They both started to say something as I fumbled with the wallet, dumped out the dough and the cards I had seen before. I turned the limp leather inside out before I saw the tiny nickel catch that opened the secret compartment. It was there all right. A card attesting that the bearer, Bernard McCann, was a member of the United States "T" men.

"What ails you?"

Preston was dancing up and down wildly.

"I've been trying to tell you. After you left, Dr. Simpkins came back from fishing and I took him up to see the body. He says that poor Mr. Pratt didn't die accidentally."

I stared at the doctor who was nodding affirmatively. "That's right, Wilkins. The way the bullet was lodged in him shows that the gun was held at hip level. He certainly didn't fall and throw the gun up that high."

There was nothing I could say for a minute. Three pairs of eyes were boring into me. And in my mind was the thought that it was Peggy Folsom's gun. And Peggy had done quite a bit of lying to me already tonight.



UT then, somebody else had lied, too. Rose Spellman! Preston voiced my thoughts: "Maybe Miss Spellman didn't tell you exactly what happened." He seemed embarrassed.

I said: "That's just what I'm going to ask her."

Preston's face fell. "You can't," he said hollowly, "she isn't here." There were two patches of red on his cheekbones.

"What do you mean she isn't here?" I yelled. "Where is she?"

He stammered. "Right after you left she borrowed my car to go into town. Said she wanted to get off a package on the eleven-thirty train. I offered to drive her in." He was plenty confused. And so was I when I learned she had taken the regular road.

Because like Polly Folsom's car, the one driven by Rose hadn't passed me either!

"What'll we do, Harry?" Walton was sitting up in bed. He groaned, reached for his coat.

An expression of dismay came over his face. "Oh, my God! They got it. That's what they were after. The telegram."

He went on: "That's why I was so anxious to see you. A wire came for Pratt. He had told me if one came to get it to him right away." He groaned again.

To me, there was only one answer. I turned to Preston. "Has Peggy come back?" He shook his head. "I didn't see her."

I ran outside. The car was there, in back of the house! Then she had come back. I hot-footed it over to the stable. I knew in advance her

horse wouldn't be there. But it did prove one thing. She had gone home.

And that, precisely, was where I was bound. Even over Big Ben's protests. He neighed in disapproval as I saddled him and headed for the forest.

I didn't relish the trip. Going through that country at night is no picnic, particularly if a couple of bears happened to be on the loose. And pine martens have a uncomfortable way of jumping from trees and sticking their nice sharp teeth into you. I had had one experience with them before.

I stuck a couple of extra flashlight batteries in my bag and borrowed the biggest flash the hotel had. It gave me a comforting feeling as I led Big Ben along when we came to the underfoot part of the forest, where riding was more or less impractical due to the low hanging branches that had plenty of cutting power.

IT MUST have been a little after two when I finally drew close to the familiar outlines of Peggy's cabin. The moon was high enough now to afford some light. There was none in the cabin; and I found myself wondering whether Peggy was there.

I dropped the reins over Big Ben's head and proceeded cautiously, an entirely unnecessary precaution because the pine needles I was stepping on absorbed all sound.

I pushed open the door of Peggy's cabin. I jumped, reached for my gun, as I heard the laugh of a loon in the distance, breaking the eerie stillness.

It was dark inside the cabin as I

stepped in. I snapped on my flashlight, directing it over the kitchen. The cabin had one other room, a bedroom.

A slight noise caused me to turn. Then, the room was ablaze with fireworks, red, green, pink, orange.

And then they went out!

SOMETHING soft and velvety was against my cheek when I came to. I imagine there must have been a silly smile on my face because I had been dreaming of a gorgeous girl with the hair of Rose Spellman and the eyes of Polly. The bright sunlight hurt my eyes and my head was splitting.

Big Ben finally must have taken it into his head to see what had happened to me. It was his nose that was muzzling my cheek. I groaned, tried to get up, fell back and lay there feeling very, very foolish.

My hands and feet were tied and there was a connecting rope between ankles and wrists that wouldn't let me move. Whoever had socked me and then tied me up had done a swell job of it.

Big Ben, looming enormous in the small kitchen, was wearing a what-do-we-do-now expression. The same thing was puzzling me. I knew from past visits that Peggy kept her knives in a drawer over by the stove. But the way my knees had been bent for the tying, I couldn't do anything but roll.

And when I did that, Big Ben supplied the answer!

When I was a cop on the Coast, I used to be nuts over cowboy pictures. I still am. And one of the things that had intrigued me was the way the hero used to train his horse

to untie knots. I never believed it at the time. But when I got my ranger job, and then Big Ben, I used to amuse myself to train him to untie my hands. And the sonovagun actually got so that he'd bite through the rope when he found he couldn't unloosen it.

And that's just what he was doing now!

The taut rope snapped easily and I hobbled over to the kitchen drawer where the knives were kept. In five minutes, and a lot of sweat, my hands were free. And I had a chance to think.

I didn't believe Peggy had slugged me. She's a husky wench but that wallop was man-sized. There was a lump as big as the war debt on my dome.

I ran outside. My gun had been lifted but there was another in my saddle bag. Half-hearted, I tried to find a trail but it was practically impossible.

Then my heart leaped. I was sure, all of a sudden, that Peggy hadn't slugged me. Someone had been waiting for me in that cabin. I had an idea that Pratt's hunch had been more than right. That's why he had been murdered!

Before I got my ranger's job, I had passed a pretty stiff examination in woodcraft. I could tell a trail when I saw one. Peggy must have left it. It was a forked stick, pointing North.

I tethered Big Ben and followed it on foot. Carefully but fast. A few hundred yards away I came across the next clue, a piece of cloth. She must have been dropping the trail unnoticed in the dark while she guided somebody to wherever he was

going. The chatter of a pine squirrel caused me to look up. At first I thought the speck in the sky was an eagle. Then I recognized it for a plane. Probably a mail ship.

When I came across the match booklet, I suddenly remembered something. The old bear cave! That must be where Peggy had been going. I was sure of it. Old Man Folsom used to use it to store his furs and pelts. And if anybody wanted to hide. . . .

I RUSHED in that direction as fast as I could, my heart pounding every step of the way. I didn't know Peggy's connection, with what was going on. But whatever it was, there was plenty of danger!

I moved cautiously as I approached the spot. There was a roar above me. I looked up and gasped. About a quarter mile away the plane I had seen was descending. The pilot was crazy!

Then, my eyes picked out the whirling blades atop the fuselage. An autogiro. He wasn't crazy, he could do it all right because there was a lot of space between the trees, right about that spot, where the cave was located.

I ran like the devil toward the cave, ignoring branches that cut into my face and the beating I took whenever I stumbled, which was often.

The pilot was just getting out of the plane when I got there. Three people were running toward him lugging bundles. And one of the three was a girl. The sunlight glinted on her yellow hair. Rose Spellman.

There wasn't time to talk. I knew who they were all right. And they wouldn't have given me a break if

my back had been turned. The pilot ran for the plane as my shot brought one of the men to his knees. I came on, gun blazing. They were a couple of hundred feet from the plane. I guess the other guy realized he couldn't make it. He started shooting.

A slug went into my shoulder. My next shot hit him. He made as if he was walking toward me, then he stopped! I saw Rose fall as she looked at Larry Hart's face, which was wearing a surprised grin. Then he pitched forward.

The plane was sailing over the treetops as I looked up.

I ran into the cave. They had done a swell job on Peggy besides tying her up. Her clothes were ripped to pieces. I guessed she put up quite an argument and even then I wondered why, especially after she had helped these loogans do in the sheriff. She was moaning on the floor, her face battered and bruised. There were scratches and welts all over her white skin, her whole body. I went to work over her with the water jug in the cave. That mob had holed in for quite a spell, judging from the provisions.

My pulses started pounding as she opened her eyes. After all, my arm was around quite a bit of her. "You found the trail?"

I said yes. "And your pals are ready to be carted away, all but the dame," I said, bitterly.

She looked at me, her face red. She made a feeble effort to draw the tattered clothes around her body before she spoke. Then she said, weakly: "I had to do it, Harry. For Tommy's sake. And when I found out he was dead, it was too late to

tell you. They had made plans for a getaway."

"Tommy?" I didn't get it, and said so. "And what do you mean too late?"

She told me. And proved it.

"My brother, Tommy," she said. "He was the teller of the bank. He had lost a lot of the bank's money in a gambling house in Helena. And when Larry Hart threatened to squeal, he agreed to work with them on the stick-up. He was the one who suggested I help them hide. The girl, Rose, came here with a letter from Tommy, telling me the whole thing. I had to do it, and then when some of the other members of the gang kidnaped Tommy, intending to hold him until they made a getaway on that plane, after the excitement died down, I didn't dare say anything."

Peggy buried her face in her hands. "But they killed him. The Treasury men traced Tommy and raided the hideout. That's what was in the telegram to Pratt."

"Then they knew Pratt."

She nodded. "Rose Spellman recognized him. She brought him into the forest and Larry Hart shot him with my gun. Then you came along and upset things. I tried to sneak away tonight, after I had read the telegram, but Hart suspected something. He stayed in my cabin, figuring you'd be along."

I rubbed my head. "He figured right." Then, still puzzled, I said:

"But what I can't figure out is how they got to Sheriff Walton."

She got to her feet. "Come on, I'll show you." She walked unsteadily outside. The girl was still in a faint.

Peggy pointed out one of the packages I had seen the guys carrying.

I looked. "Holy smokes! A two-way radio. Short wave."

I could have kicked myself. Rose Spellman had been talking to them even while I was rapping on her door. I didn't give Hart enough credit. The guy was a genius. An autogiro for a getaway. And a two-way, short-wave set to keep in touch with Rose. She had heard the sheriff and told them to hotfoot it in. And Peggy had gone home and was forced to go back.

She was looking at me, a queer smile on her face. "What are you going to do now, Harry?" Honest, I never thought she would be that meek.

The blonde was stirring. I walked over and picked up the canvas bag alongside her before I answered Peggy. The dough was in there all right.

"Do?" I said, looking blank. I couldn't keep up the pretense. Peggy looked as though she'd bawl any minute. I grinned: "Peggy," I said, "after I quit and collect that ten grand reward, how would you like to go to Honolulu?"

It was a swell trip, by the way!





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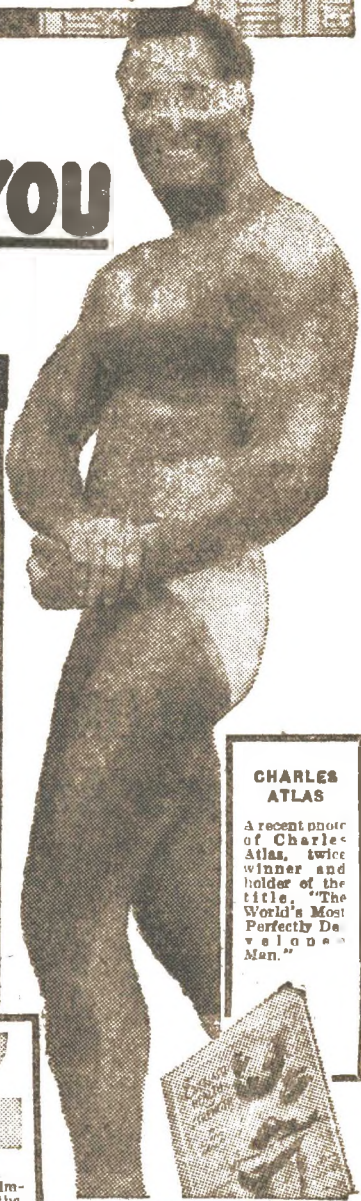
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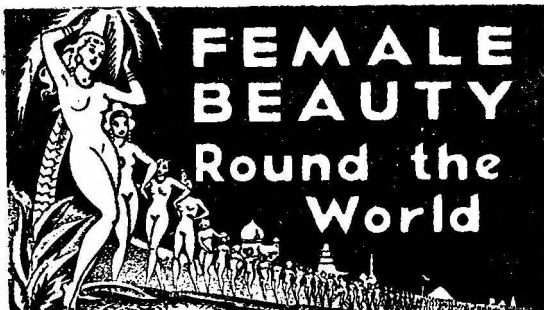
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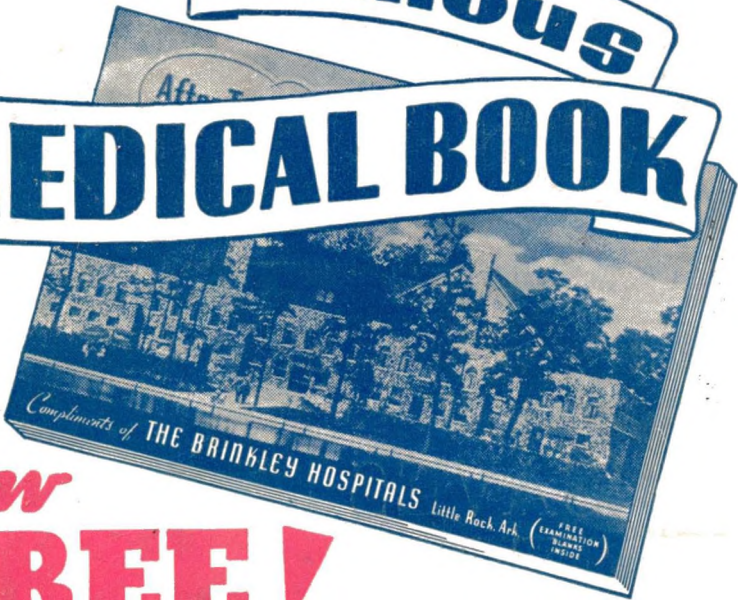
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