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**GEE-GEE
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*A MR. MADDOX
NOVELETTE
by T.T. FLYNN*

**C.W.M. HARRISON
DALE CLARK
JULIUS LONG
AND OTHERS**

"I've Got Ideas"

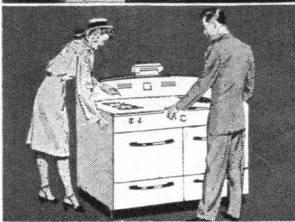
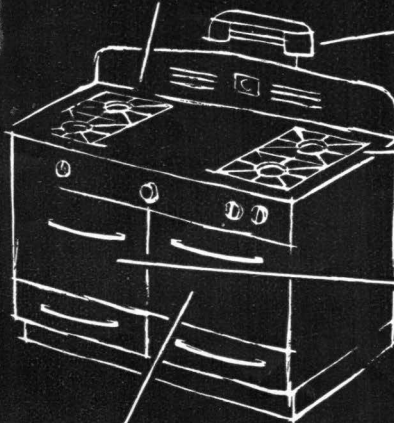
LOTS OF ROOM
FOR POTS AND PANS

LIGHT MUST
COVER ENTIRE
TOP

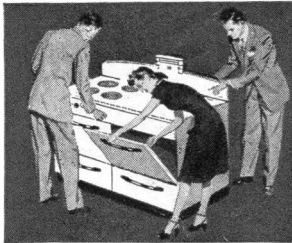
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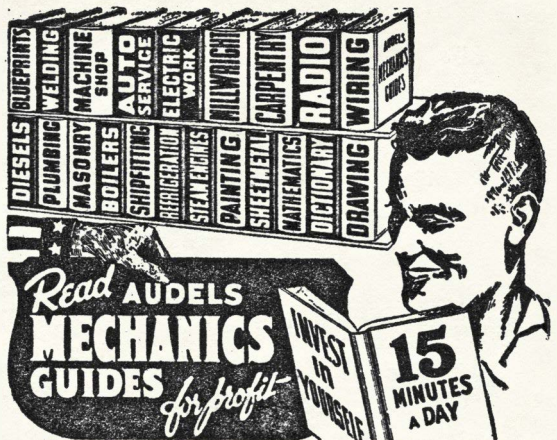
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Vol. 51

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No. 2

4—THRILLING COMPLETE SERIES-CHARACTER NOVELETTES—4

Help Mr. Maddox prevent a

Gee-Gee Doublecross.....T. T. Flynn 8

Bluff had helped the bland Buddha of the bangtail circuit out of many tight spots before, but the men he was up against now—men who were after big money and thought nothing of murder—couldn't be stopped so easily. A dose of their own medicine was what they needed and Maddox was just the boy to hand it out.

Watch Hannibal Smith recite "Tibia or not tibia" with

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The luscious brunette had a problem: someone was stealing her bones! The fact that the date was April 1st made the whole thing smack of an April Fool's joke, and Smith found plenty of funny business, all right, but—outside of the corpse that died laughing—none of the humorous kind.

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A SMASHING SHORT DETECTIVE STORY

Don't deposit a plug nickel when you

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My duties to Old Man Oldershaw covered a wide field but they didn't include my becoming the victim of a hit-and-run killer. Now, in addition to a hangover, I had an assortment of bumps and bruises and a great animosity toward people who try to run over other people with cars.

AND—

We want to know if you're

Ready for the Rackets.....A Department 6

In this revealing series giving the lowdown on currently popular swindle schemes. Here's a chance to test your ability as a reporter and win \$5.00 at the same time.

The June Thrill Docket..... 6

A preview of some of the sure-fire hits scheduled for production in next month's DIME DETECTIVE.

Cover: "A bone had been the murder weapon, a bone like several others lying around the corpse . . ."

From: *The Bones of Barnaby Bliss.*

The June issue will be out May 3rd

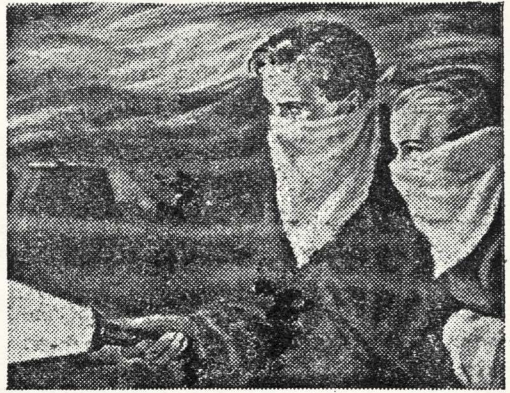
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How to Fight the Menace of FIRE

...A Wet Towel and a Flashlight may save your life!
—says the National Safety Council



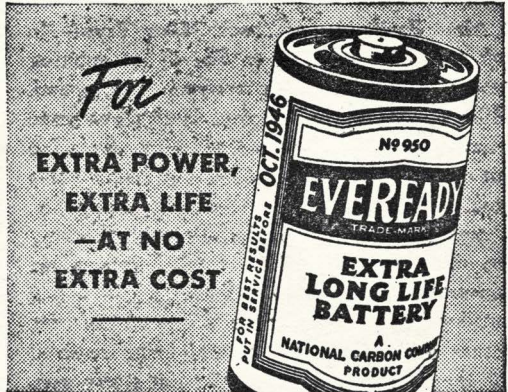
1 Fire is always dangerous—especially dangerous at night, when you may be asleep. And most fires do occur at night! If you smell smoke, reach for your "Eveready" flashlight first. Feel doors before opening them, for a single breath of fiery air can kill you! If a door is hot, don't open it!



2 Wet a towel or cloth; cover your face and arms. Close doors to reduce drafts that may fan the flames. If heat is severe, remember that heat rises—crawl! If trapped on upper floor, make a rope of bedclothes. As a last resort only, throw out a mattress and jump down onto it.



3 To avoid danger, you have to see it—so keep your flashlight with you until you're safe! Watch for collapsing ceilings... But the best way to avoid fire is to prevent it! Your flashlight—with fresh "Eveready" Batteries—gives a much better light than matches or a candle, and it's much safer too!



4 To help fight fire—or for any flashlight need—rely on "Eveready" Batteries. Ask your dealer for them by name. The days when you had to accept "second choice" batteries—or none—are past. "Eveready" Batteries have no equal—that's why they're the biggest-selling flashlight batteries in the world!

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THE JUNE THRILL DOCKET



NO. 1 in the Hearse Parade—that's the spot in which Bill Brent found himself as soon as Monica Grenville got herself snatched by the mysterious lady in black. And why wouldn't that hard-boiled newspaper-reporter-turned-advice-to-the-lovelorn-expert be leading the mourning caravan? Hadn't the kidnaper delegated Lora Lorne—whose heart-throb niche Brent filled on the staff of the *Recorder*—as intermediary for the ransom payment? And wasn't that paragon of respectability, old Mrs. Kolbe, the only witness to the abduction as well as Lorne's staunchest admirer? No wonder Bill found himself between the devil and a deep, blood-sea. *Here Comes the Hearse* is Frederick C. Davis' finest novellette yet in this perennially popular series.

Alan Farley brings back Mike Trye—*No job too odd for Trye to fill*—in an exciting new novelette with an unusual background. Mike was no musical genius. He'd taken some lessons on a trumpet once when he was a kid but couldn't play *Come to Jesus* in whole notes now, so it was a little on the crazy side when a client walked in and offered him a smacking fee just to go and listen to the Symcowski concert. Things began to liven up a bit when murder hit the stage in the middle of the *Fire Dance* concerto, however, and Mike realized for the first time how odd the job really was.

Julius Long, in *Excuse My Homicide*, introduces us to X. Ray Smith, another type in his long roster of unusual legal detectives.

William R. Cox permits Malachi to go Hollywood in Florida in another thriller in this popular short series.

And Tom W. Blackburn gives us an unusual novelette of labor racketeering in the movie capital.

All in the great JUNE issue—out May 3rd.

Ready for the Rackets A Department

Racketeers and swindlers of all sorts are lying in wait for you, eager to rob or cheat you of your hard-earned cash. All you need to thwart them, guard against them, is a foreknowledge of their schemes and methods of operation. Write in telling us your own personal experiences with chiselers and con men of various sorts. It is our intention to publicize—withholding your name, if you wish—the information you have passed on, paying \$5.00 for every letter used. No letters will be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope, nor can we enter into correspondence regarding same. Address all letters to The Rackets Editor—DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, 205 E. 42nd St., N. Y. 17.

A BRAND-NEW twist has been given the old mail-theft racket. There are fewer allotment checks these days, but the racketeers are ready for the change.

The Rackets Editor
DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE
Dear Sir:

In this case a slick crook steals what is usually perfectly harmless mail of no monetary value—a personal letter from some member of a household who is away, Mr. Smith, we'll say. The crook may filch several letters to obtain personal references and hints about Mr. Smith's family life, the names of friends he might inquire about, the mention of an incident or two—and of course the place to which Mr. Smith has gone and often a hint as to why he has gone there.

The crook will then return to the house and present himself as a friend Mr. Smith had met while he was away. No matter how suspicious the relative may be the first moment, the crook suavely disarms him. He mentions some of the people, places, and incidents that Mr. Smith "has told me about." Soon the householder is greeting the crook like an old friend, inviting him in to chat for a moment—a suggestion the crook will subtly see to. Inside the house the crook takes great interest in everything, praising it from living room to kitchen in warm, friendly, hearty terms. He mentions that Mr. Smith is getting along well on the business deal that took him out of town, and presently invites the householder to dinner that night.

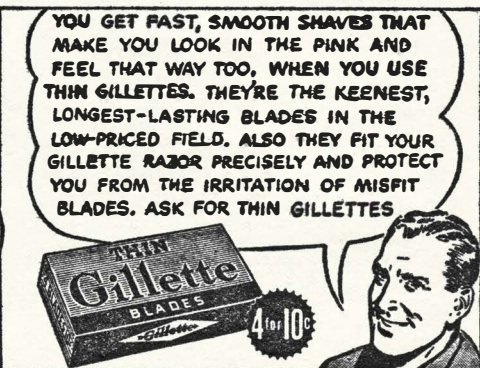
Then the crook will suddenly "remember" a business engagement he has, but a moment later will brighten and add: "But why don't you meet me at my hotel? I'll try to be back from my engagement at seven, and will be in the lobby. But if you don't happen to see me in the lobby, just have a seat and make yourself comfortable—I'll be there presently."

With much talk of what a wonderful dinner he will provide for the family of Mr. Smith, the crook takes his leave.

At seven, the householder is waiting in the lobby of the hotel the crook had designated. At seven-thirty he is still waiting, and some-

(Continued on page 92)

ILL WIND FOR MATT, UNTIL...



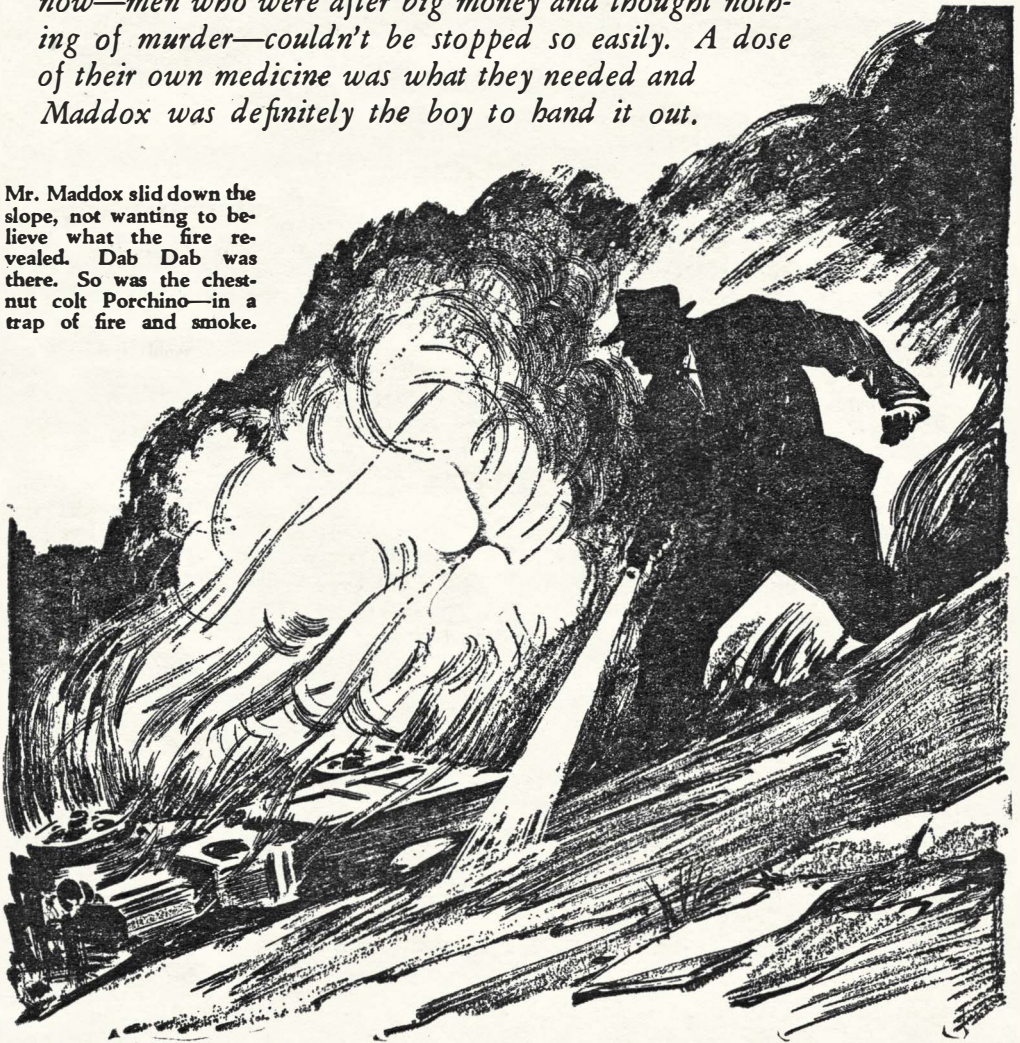
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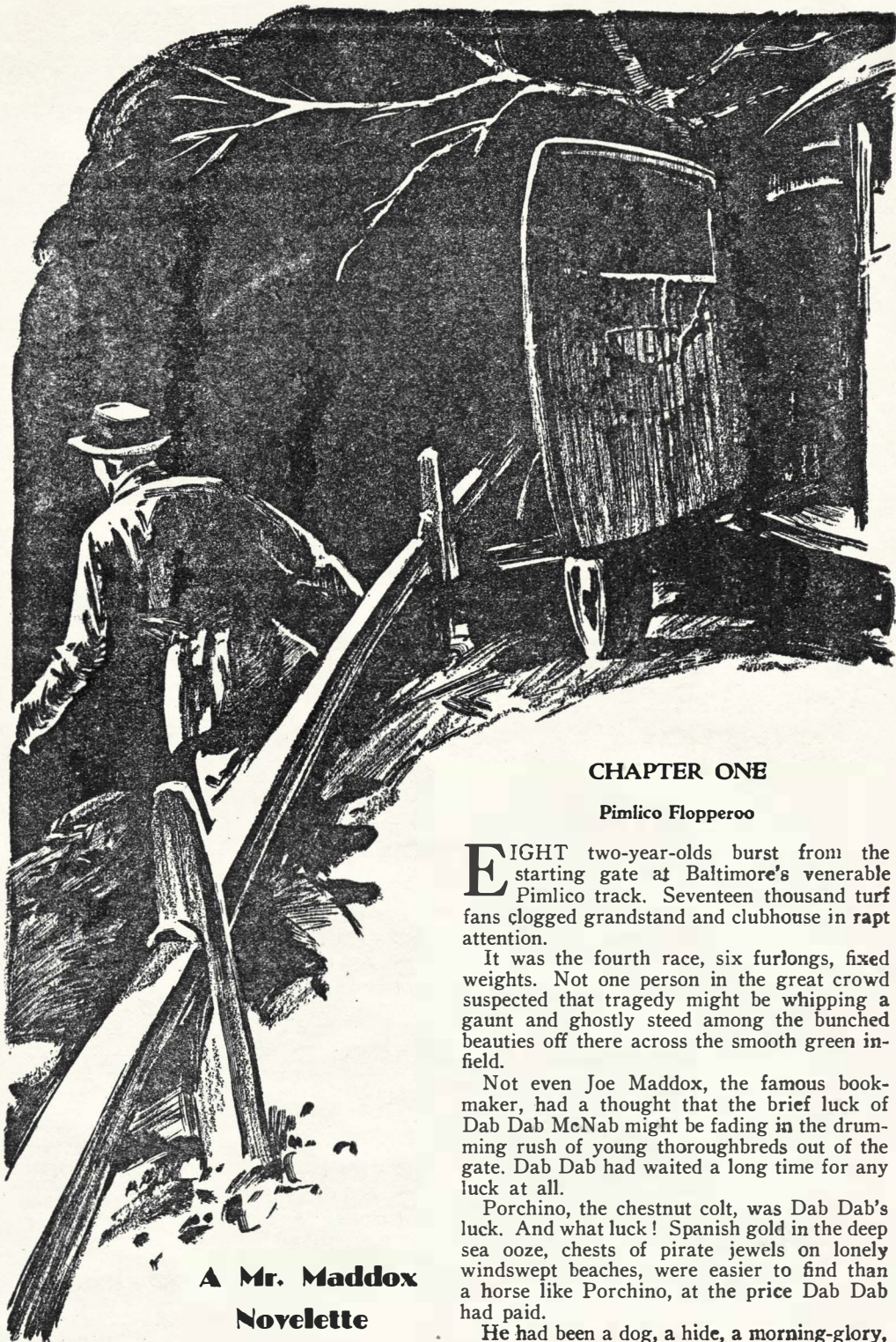
By T. T. FLYNN

Author of "Murder in the Saddle," etc.

The Pimlico meet was over and Joe Maddox was heading west to sunny Santa Anita. Just drifting along when, all of a sudden, there was Dab Dab McNab dead as a Christmas goose down the mountainside. Of course Maddox had to jump in and take charge. And from then on, all the bad luck that had dogged Dab Dab his whole life seemed to be transferred to the big bookie's broad shoulders. Bluff had helped Joe Maddox out of many tight spots before, but the men he was up against now—men who were after big money and thought nothing of murder—couldn't be stopped so easily. A dose of their own medicine was what they needed and Maddox was definitely the boy to hand it out.

Mr. Maddox slid down the slope, not wanting to believe what the fire revealed. Dab Dab was there. So was the chestnut colt Porchino—in a trap of fire and smoke.





**A Mr. Maddox
Novelette**

CHAPTER ONE

Pimlico Flopperoo

EIGHT two-year-olds burst from the starting gate at Baltimore's venerable Pimlico track. Seventeen thousand turf fans clogged grandstand and clubhouse in rapt attention.

It was the fourth race, six furlongs, fixed weights. Not one person in the great crowd suspected that tragedy might be whipping a gaunt and ghostly steed among the bunched beauties off there across the smooth green infield.

Not even Joe Maddox, the famous book-maker, had a thought that the brief luck of Dab Dab McNab might be fading in the drumming rush of young thoroughbreds out of the gate. Dab Dab had waited a long time for any luck at all.

Porchino, the chestnut colt, was Dab Dab's luck. And what luck! Spanish gold in the deep sea ooze, chests of pirate jewels on lonely windswept beaches, were easier to find than a horse like Porchino, at the price Dab Dab had paid.

He had been a dog, a hide, a morning-glory,

that Porchino. Even blinkers would not cure him of shying. He was temperish, nervous, sulky. He was that lowest of the low, a quitter. When the going got hard, when another horse looked him in the eye and the jockey made his move, Porchino would quit running.

Banjo Witsell had entered him nine times in spring and early summer meets. Nine times Porchino had dogged it among the also-rans. The charts said, *No excuse*.

The end came on a hot morning. Porchino had kicked Banjo Witsell due north of south with a hind sticker shoe that had left a deep print. Banjo, furious and swearing, had crawled out of a pile of fresh straw and stable manure. Pop Harvey, trainer of Joe Maddox' small stable of horses, gleefully witnessed Banjo's vitriolic exhibition and had later told Mr. Maddox.

Limping, exploring torn trousers seat with a tender touch, Banjo had screamed incoherent oaths. "I'd ship you to the tumbleweed tracks if you was good enough!" Banjo had yelled. "Your sire was no good! Your dam was no good! You ain't no good, you yellow-bellied quitter! I'll have you knocked in the head! I'll sell you for dog food an' glue!"

Dab Dab McNab, among the happy witnesses, was the only one who had spoken out. "How much for him, Banjo?"

That was another matter. Banjo Witsell loved a dollar with unwholesome devotion. But his brains and emotions were suffering under that hind sticker print.

"Got six hundred cash?" Banjo had yelled in purple-faced fury.

Seven hundred cash would have stymied Dab Dab. But for six hundred he had bought a horse. The witnesses felt sorry for Dab Dab. Joe Maddox, too, had felt sorry when he heard about it.

For as long as any man could remember, Dab Dab McNab had been on the perilous teeter between a busted bankroll and feed and shipping bills. Sometimes Dab Dab vanished into the limbo of half-milers out in the county-fair districts. But sooner or later Dab Dab would show up again on the big-time, with one to several sorry platers, so bad they were safe from being claimed.

The haltermen and turf veterans like Joe Maddox understood Dab Dab. He was a horse-man to the heart—to the big, soft, understanding heart. The shabby, silent little man loved horses, knew horses. All he needed was a little luck, which never seemed to come.

Banjo Witsell must have writhed over the luck he had tossed Dab Dab for pennies. Heart, understanding, perhaps a little magic, were Dab Dab's training recipe for Porchino. He all but slept in the colt's stall.

Late in the summer Porchino had started cold in a Grade E Allowance race and had

won by three lengths. After that, luck took the bit in its teeth and ran away for Dab Dab McNab.

This was Dab Dab's sixth running of Porchino. Four of the outs had been wins. Each race had been in better company. Porchino's temper had vanished. He had forgotten what it meant to quit. Swiftly, the chestnut colt was soaring up into the ranks of those few horses who promised to be great three-year-olds.

The luck of Dab Dab McNab was turning into a saga of rags to riches. When the starting bell had locked the totalizator machines on this fourth race today, Porchino had been odds-on in the betting, heavy favorite, certain to win.

ALL that was in Mr. Maddox' mind as he stood, big and prosperous-looking, in the clubhouse crowd, binoculars on the horses sweeping around the last turn to the head of the stretch. Porchino had the rail. He was half a length ahead.

Mr. Maddox could almost have called the race in advance. When the field came booming into the stretch, Porchino would uncork a burst of speed that would bring him to the wire in another of those easy finishes which were adding to his fame.

Porchino's win would cost Mr. Maddox money. Dab Dab McNab, somewhere nearby in the clubhouse crowd, had bet five thousand with Mr. Maddox. Others, too, had liked Dab Dab's horse. Joe Maddox' book was loaded with Porchino money on the nose. Yet, for all of that, Mr. Maddox was rooting for Porchino. Dab Dab had earned his luck through the long, lean years—it was his time now, his turn. Any man who could root against Dab Dab lacked heart and understanding. Joe Maddox was not that kind.

There they came into the stretch. Mr. Maddox could see each detail vividly through the glasses. He saw a horse under heavy pressure shoot out of the pack and come up fast on Porchino. Drama was suddenly in the race. Mr. Maddox whistled softly. Most of the crowd was ignorant of what was happening. A few like Joe Maddox knew and it was a safe bet they, too, were excited.

That horse bolting into the lead under a hard whip was Banjo Witsell's Rickyrac. He was an outsider. He belonged in the dust of the field. Wise handicappers had wondered why Banjo had even bothered to enter Rickyrac in this race. And yet there he was, straining into the lead with a speedy burst that looked dangerous.

For breathless seconds the two horses held together, neck and neck. Then Cad Lomax, Porchino's jockey, went to the whip.

Mr. Maddox saw it clearly through the

strong glasses. Rickyrac held that breath of a lead for seconds, then suddenly he seemed to spurt ahead. Porchino had dogged it again.

The whip did not help. Cad Lomax was doing his best. Dab Dab's colt was quitting again like a cheap plater. The pack raced by him.

A massed groan surged from the watching crowd. There went the odds-on money. Gone win money . . . second money . . . third money. All the tote tickets on Porchino were suddenly no more than trash. Dab Dab's horse faded back and back despite all that Cad Lomax could do.

And to add insult to disaster, Rickyrac also was done after that one short burst of speed. He had lasted just long enough to bring out the yellow in Porchino.

Mr. Maddox lowered the binoculars. Any other time he would have felt good. This was the kind of racing luck that made profit for a bookmaker. But, somehow, Mr. Maddox was sorry about this. A horse bordering on greatness did not turn yellow. If Porchino quit today, it meant he would quit again and again. It was an evil omen over the luck of Dab Dab McNab.

Mr. Maddox turned back into the clubhouse. He was dropping the binoculars in the leather case slung from a big shoulder, when he saw something just ahead that made him move faster.

Banjo Witsell's dry, pinched features were grinning broadly at Dab Dab McNab. Banjo was saying something. It must have been the wrong talk to give Dab Dab at the moment.

Dab Dab had a taut, pale look of rage. Shaking rage. Dab Dab was the smaller man but he looked dangerous. Mr. Maddox' purposeful strides got him close enough to catch Dab Dab's seething rep'.

"Think it's funny, do you? You won't get another chance to laugh! An' here's what I think of every greedy dirty part of you!"

Dab Dab had to stand on his toes and swing high to hit Banjo Witsell's smirk.

Mr. Maddox' huge, stern figure shouldered between the two men. "Break it up!" he snapped. "Want a Masterton man here on your necks and a party before the racing commissioners? This is a hell of an advertisement for clean racing!"

"He hit me!" Banjo choked, clapping a handkerchief to the blood on his mouth.

"A barn louse like you was due to get hit sooner or later," Mr. Maddox answered bluntly. "Maybe it'll make you realize that a lot of people don't like you, Banjo."

This was not the way to make friends. Banjo Witsell glared. Mr. Maddox met it with a forbidding look. Banjo's mood abruptly changed. He looked at the blood on the handkerchief and smiled. Mr. Maddox and Dab Dab were included in the smile.

"Lost my temper for a minute," Banjo said. "A punch like that hurts. Thanks, Maddox. I don't want trouble. If I can't be friends with a man, I'll stay away from him."

BANJO walked away. Mr. Maddox steered Dab Dab the other way. The crowd swallowed a few staring spectators.

"So you lose a race and blow your top!" Mr. Maddox accused.

Dab Dab sucked an unsteady breath. He was meek, uncomfortable. "Losing this one hit me hard, Joe. An' then Banjo gives me the berry."

"Forget Banjo. You can't win them all."

Dab Dab nodded glumly.

"This is the last day," reminded Mr. Maddox. "When do you want me to pick up the five grand you owe me?"

"I haven't got it, Joe."

"Didn't expect you to have it in your pocket," said Mr. Maddox amiably. "You can bring it to the hotel, or Oscar can drop around and pick it up."

"You don't understand, Joe." A lump slid up and down in Dab Dab's throat as he swallowed. "I haven't got it."

"Haven't got it? You're broke, Dab Dab?"

A nod was the best Dab Dab could do.

Mr. Maddox was no longer huge and amiable. "Dab Dab, you've won plenty of purse money, plus some other bets on Porchino. *Why haven't you got it?*"

Dab Dab had not splurged on clothes. He was still a shabbily dressed little man, with a bony face that looked as if his belt had often been pulled tight over a hungry stomach. As it had.

"I thought," said Dab Dab, and he had to stop and swallow again, "I thought this race was in the bag, Joe. It was a clean spot for Porchino. He had everything over the other entries. An' he was sharp. I swear he was sharp, Joe."

"Cut out the blah, Dab Dab," said Mr. Maddox coldly. "Why haven't you got the five grand you bet with me on credit?"

"I didn't want to race Porchino again as a two-year-old," Dab Dab explained haltingly. "He's too good a horse to risk over-racing, Joe. His legs are good now. He's sound. I meant to van him over to Ohio, to my brother's farm, for the winter, an' build him up for his three-year season. I had to have a hunk of cash, Joe. So I bet everything on this one today. An'—an' then I seen you at the barns an'—an' I thought another big bet would just pull me through on the short odds I knew we'd get. It looked like a sure . . ."

Dab Dab's voice trailed off as Mr. Maddox seemed to dilate. His broad face had gone harder, sterner, than most people had ever seen it. His big hand dropped hard to Dab Dab's arm in disgust and anger.

"You bet your cash with other books, Dab Dab, and hooked me for five thousand on the cuff?"

"Joe, I thought—"

"You little chiseler!" Mr. Maddox grated. "I ought to break your neck!"

"Joe, I—" Dab Dab's miserable look froze as it went past Mr. Maddox' shoulder. Dab Dab licked his lips.

A hand loaded with authority dropped on Mr. Maddox' arm. A sarcastic voice urged: "Break his neck right here, Joe. We'll call the stewards down to watch."

"Cassidy!" Mr. Maddox exclaimed with greater disgust. He released Dab Dab's arm, plucked Cassidy's hand off his own. "Beat it!" Mr. Maddox invited the newcomer.

Cassidy was big and blocky, with a squarish face. He might have been a businessman at the track for a relaxing afternoon. Actually, Cassidy was one of the crack Masterton detectives who guarded all the big race meets.

Pickpockets and crooks had little chance when Masterton men were sifting through the crowds. Owners, trainers, jockeys, were watched by the Masterton men. Also bookmakers. Above all else the Masterton men had orders to stop bookmaking around the tracks.

For better than thirty years Joe Maddox had been one of the top bookmakers of the country. He was a friend of movie stars, politicians, big businessmen. They knew him as a gentleman whose word was sound, whose honesty was known from coast-to-coast. Joe Maddox always paid off, track odds, any amount. Large bets which would break the odds sought Joe Maddox.

Year after year Cassidy had tried to catch Mr. Maddox laying against money at the tracks. He had never found proof that would hold in court, but he aimed to keep on trying. Meanwhile, Cassidy and Mr. Maddox were longtime friends, in a guarded and careful sort of way.

Now Cassidy reached in Mr. Maddox' top coat pocket and plucked out a fat black cigar. Such was the friendship between them.

"First," said Cassidy, rolling the cigar between thumb and forefinger, "that Witsell gets smacked in the mush. I didn't see it, but I heard about it quick enough. So I look around, and I find Dab Dab about to get his neck broken." Cassidy shoved the cigar in the side of his mouth and snapped past it: "What's going on here?" That was the grimly official side of Cassidy.

"Nothing," said Dab Dab hastily.

"Plenty, as far as you're concerned, Dab Dab," corrected Cassidy coldly. "If the stewards don't ask why your horse folded with all that dough on him, they don't know their business."

"A horse," reminded Mr. Maddox, "can't win all the time."

"Keep out of this, Joe," ordered Cassidy curtly. "That fourth race stank. Porchino's been trying in his recent races. But when he starts odds-on, he losses. I had a ten-buck ticket on that flopperoo. Now I'm curious."

"Ten bucks—and you're crying about it?" Mr. Maddox chided.

Cassidy lit the cigar and gave Mr. Maddox a sour look. "I ain't crawling with easy bookie money. I don't buy fifty-cent cigars. Ten bucks is ten bucks to me. Why were you going to bust Dab Dab's neck right after he blew this race? Did Dab Dab doublecross you?"

Mr. Maddox brought a tote ticket from his pocket and showed it to Cassidy. He was chuckling. "I had fifty on Porchino's nose. Can't I scream, too?"

Cassidy snorted. "Fifty is peanuts to you, Joe!"

"I'm a short sport like you," said Mr. Maddox, chuckling. "Here's a suggestion. You take one of Dab Dab's ears—I'll take the other. We'll break his neck together."

"That," said Cassidy with irritation, "ain't humor."

"It was only an idea." Mr. Maddox chuckled, and tore up the tote ticket. "Going my way, Dab Dab?"

"I gotta see a guy," said Dab Dab hastily, "Good luck, Joe. I won't forget you." Dab Dab almost scuttled away.

CASSIDY frowned after the little man and then wheeled on Mr. Maddox.

"That race still doesn't suit me," said Cassidy ominously. "I won't forget Dab Dab. And I won't forget you, either, Joe."

Mr. Maddox was regretful. "Now that we're alone, Cassidy, can I speak confidentially?"

"Speak any way you want to."

"Do I get your word that it's just between us? Between friends?"

"Is it about Dab Dab and the race?"

"Yes."

Cassidy could not hide his interest. "O.K. Just between us."

"Friends?"

"Yeah, Joe. Friends."

Mr. Maddox held a match to one of the fat black cigars while Cassidy waited with growing impatience. Mr. Maddox drew luxuriously and looked at the cigar with appreciation.

"Well?" urged Cassidy impatiently.

Mr. Maddox looked cautiously around before he stepped close to Cassidy. He lowered his voice. "I don't think that race suited Dab Dab either," said Mr. Maddox mysteriously. He walked away, chuckling.

Mr. Maddox drove downtown. He left orders at the hotel garage to gas and grease

the big blue sedan by dinner time, and went up to the suite. He was not chuckling as he poured himself a drink of Scotch and gulped it down neat.

"We're leaving for California tonight," he told Oscar, his assistant.

"Tonight? What's the idea?" Oscar protested.

A wizened, shrewd little man, Oscar had come through life the hard way. It showed in hard, cynical face lines. Oscar had few illusions, little trust. But he was a wizard at handling the telephones and betting sheets when Mr. Maddox was making a book, and was utterly loyal.

"I want some clean country," Mr. Maddox said. "There's a moon tonight. Good time for driving."

"I ain't a tom-cat," reminded Oscar. "I sleep just as well on moonlit nights." Oscar lit a cigarette and got up from the table where he had been penciling betting sheets. "You got some other reason," he guessed.

"Cassidy's gunning for us again."

"That ain't a reason—it's a habit," grumbled Oscar. "We were leavin' tomorrow anyway. Why move it up? You didn't even finish the afternoon at the track."

"I got clipped for five grand and I don't want to sit around and think about it," Mr. Maddox admitted. "Clean up the book as soon as you can. I'll start packing."

That evening on the way out of town, Mr. Maddox stopped at the track to give final orders to Pop Harvey. Pop and the four Maddox horses were going to share a horse car to California in a few days. At the last moment Pop remembered to hand Mr. Maddox a sealed envelope.

"Dab Dab McNab said I should give this to you," said Pop. "He hauled out afore dark, drivin' an old horse van he owned. He sure looked low in the mind."

They were standing at the end of the barn row. Mr. Maddox moved out under an overhead light and read the penciled note with some difficulty. Dab Dab had not had too much schooling.

Dear Joe,

I gess I am a skunk on account of the way I done you. I swear I never ment no harm. You no how long I been without dough. Times I worried so much for money I would have shoot myself if I did not have plenty to think about. I would almost have quite racing horses Joe. Honest. But I got a real horse now. He will be a stake horse next year Joe. He will win plenty. That is not promises on the cuff. I want you not to keep trying to break old Dab Dabs neck. Joe. It aint much of a neck nohow but I sure need it. I am heading to my brothers farm north of Peltersville Ohio care Jno. McNab, same town Joe. Next year I will unlock that gold

pot at rainbows end. Hoping you are the same Joe and don't stay sore at me all winter.

Respf. yrs.

Dab Dab (Daniel D) McNab.

With the letter was a bill of sale conveying half-interest in the colt Porchino to Joe Maddox, for money paid in hand and acknowledged.

CHAPTER TWO

A Wreath for Dab Dab

"THE son of a gun," said Mr. Maddox softly. He was smiling as he folded the papers. "Pop, did Dab Dab say what road he was taking to Ohio?"

"Through Hagerstown, on Forty, Joe. Dab Dab said he felt so low he was goin' to drive right on through to Ohio with his horse." Pop gnawed a large bite off a twist of tobacco and looked at Mr. Maddox curiously.

"It ain't none of my business, Joe, but that Masterton snoop, Cassidy, was driftin' around afore dark askin' innocent questions about you an' Dab Dab. A guy over at Holt and Greer's stalls gimme the tip."

"Cassidy has to keep busy," Mr. Maddox said wryly. "See you in California, Pop." Minutes later, the big blue sedan was heading out of Baltimore.

West through northern Maryland the big car lolled. Mr. Maddox was driving fast. Ahead on Highway 40 was the lumbering old horse van with Dab Dab at the wheel. Mr. Maddox hoped to overtake the truck tonight.

Dab Dab had done great wrong in wagering money he did not have. But if Porchino could be cured of dogging it in the stretch, next year he might well be worth twenty or thirty thousand dollars. Or more.

Mr. Maddox wanted to return the bill of sale personally, tell Dab Dab to pay when he could, and wish him luck. That lonely little man who had never known luck until recently was all right. The half-share in Porchino proved it.

Oscar snored on the seat beside him. Mr. Maddox drove silently, cigar clenched in the corner of his mouth. Moonlight flooded the landscape.

They stopped at Hagerstown for coffee. Oscar got out yawning, drank coffee with little comment, and went back to sleep when they rolled on.

The grades began to rise and drop, steeper as the miles ticked off. Woodland became more frequent, Mr. Maddox' wristwatch moved toward midnight. At the edge of Cumberland, Maryland, he stopped for gas.

"Seen a horse van heading west in the last few hours?" Mr. Maddox asked the station man.

"Plenty trucks past here, mister—I never notice what they got inside."

"This truck was pretty old," said Mr. Maddox, remembering Pop Harvey's description. "Painted black."

"Seems to me I did see an old one like that go by an hour or so ago." The man eyed Mr. Maddox curiously. "Something wrong?"

"Friend of mine driving it," Mr. Maddox explained amiably. "He was going to follow Forty on through to Ohio."

"If that was him, you'll catch him on the grades ahead," the station man promised.

Cumberland dropped behind and the night became lonely. The Maryland-Pennsylvania mountains were thrusting higher, higher, as the miles unreeled.

Forests began to line the steep road grades. Blackness clotted the thick undergrowth and gears were needed on the down-grades. Mr. Maddox dropped into second going up more than one mountainside. He overhauled a big new trailer truck, barely crawling up the grade. Mr. Maddox drove carefully, eyes glued on the headlight path probing around sharp curves. Dab Dab would not be making much time through here.

Oscar snored on. Mr. Maddox looked at the little man and chuckled, then yawned himself. He could have used more coffee. This was not the time or place for a driver to take forty winks at the wheel. Infrequent gas stations were closed. The few houses they passed were dark. Traffic had dropped off to an occasional thrust of headlights that blazed toward them and rushed past. Mr. Maddox was driving so fast that cars did not come up from behind and pass on ahead.

The sedan surged swiftly over the crest of another steep grade. The road curved left around the shoulder of the mountain, high bank on the left and forested slope above. On the right, a ravine dropped away into pitchy depths. In gear again, engine racing, the heavy automobile dropped swiftly down the sinuous descent.

Mr. Maddox yawned again, braked, yanked on the wheel to swing around another curve. Halfway around the curve he went alert as a red glare danced against treetops farther down the mountain.

Two more curves had to be taken before the fire came in sight. Mr. Maddox jogged Oscar hard. "Trouble!" he snapped.

"Wh-wha'?" Oscar stammered. He looked wildly around and at the fire glow ahead.

A last sharp curve and there it was, down the slope, blazing in undergrowth that had been broken and mashed as the wreck plunged down.

"Truck went off!" Oscar gulped.

Mr. Maddox brought the sedan to a screeching stop. He grabbed a flashlight out of the

dash pocket and bolted to the road edge. Ignoring whipping branches and uncertain footing, Mr. Maddox jumped and slid down the slope. He didn't want to believe what the fire only too clearly revealed.

He began to shout: "Dab Dab! Are you there, Dab Dab?"

He got no answer. But Dab Dab was there. So was the chestnut colt Porchino. Gasoline and oil, plywood, rubber tires, bedding straw and leather tack were throwing fire, sparks and smoke around the spot.

SICK inside, Mr. Maddox stood panting and helpless. Oscar stumbled down and joined him.

"Joe, why couldn't we have gotten here sooner?"

"Cut that kind of talk!" Mr. Maddox ordered harshly. "We couldn't have done much even if we had. Dab Dab was trapped in that mashed cab. Probably unconscious when it stopped rolling, or dead. His old truck evidently didn't have the brakes for these grades, or he went to sleep."

"Are you sure it's Dab Dab?" Oscar asked weakly.

"Who else could it be?" Mr. Maddox retreated up-slope from the heat. He halted, looking somberly at the wreck. "All we can do is report it," he decided.

Oscar looked at the red light wavering against undergrowth and trees. He was depressed, uncertain. "Who'll we report it to?"

"There's a small town about seven miles ahead. You might wait here while I drive ahead and report."

"I'd better go with you," Oscar hastily decided.

Mr. Maddox did not insist. They drove on, fast. Mr. Maddox was lost in sober thought. He couldn't get his mind off Dab Dab McNab, tired and low in spirit, driving through these lonely reaches to his death.

If they had caught up with Dab Dab a little sooner, things might have been different. But that was only a guess. Looking back, one could see that Dab Dab's luck had vanished in that fourth race at Pimlico. When luck went, anything could happen. If not a wreck, some other disaster might have hit Dab Dab. Bad luck was like that.

The town was named Gateston. Corner lights glowed wanly along the short length of the main street. All business was closed for the night. The residents were asleep.

"What do we do? Find a fire bell an' ring it?" Oscar asked.

Mr. Maddox pulled to the curb at the main corner. He blew the horn, let the engine idle as he stepped out and looked around.

"You might scream," Oscar suggested.

"Shut up," Mr. Maddox ordered shortly.

A man appeared on the sidewalk. He must have been watching from a dark doorway. A badge was pinned on his coat. "Somethin' wrong?"

Mr. Maddox explained. The officer considered. "I'll go in Ed Wasey's store an' telephone the sheriff an' the State Police," he decided. "Wait here."

"Is there a hotel in town?"

"Better drive on to Uniontown, mister."

The man hurried off, and they heard him unlocking a store door.

Oscar spoke through the open car window. "I ain't sleepy now. Drivin' all night will suit me."


Mr. Maddox nodded. He reached in, cut off the engine, and paced back and forth in the street beside the car. A cigar did not help the restless, depressed feeling inside him. The sensation was almost as if Dab Dab's bad luck had now been transferred to him.

The officer returned. "Lonny Makin's a deputy here in town. He's comin'. A Road Patrol car is on the way. The sheriff wants I should write down what you know about the wreck."

The officer was copying Mr. Maddox' license number as he spoke. Mr. Maddox gave him the Ohio address of Dab Dab's brother. He explained how they had known Dab Dab was on

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the highway ahead of them, and had been trying to catch up with him.

"On business?" the officer asked.

Explanations on that subject would merely get complicated. "We were old friends," Mr. Maddox said. "I'm driving through to California and thought it would be nice to chat a few minutes if we met McNab."

That explanation satisfied the officer. An old coupe raced around the next corner and drew up beside them with squealing brakes. The deputy joined them. When he had all the facts, he asked Mr. Maddox: "Going back with me?"

Mr. Maddox hesitated. "I'd rather not. This is a painful business at the best. There's nothing much I can do now back there. It seems more to the point to stay here and arrange for the body to be sent on to Ohio."

The deputy agreed. "Mighty nice of you to think about that. Jody White does most of the buryin' around here. Bill can call him for you."

Bill was the night officer. When the deputy departed, Bill said: "I'll go telephone Jody White. Be back in a few minutes."

Oscar got back in the automobile. Mr. Maddox paced slowly back and forth on the sidewalk, smoking, lost in thought. The gloomy feeling was still weighing heavily on him. He paid little attention to the automobile which came roaring into town from the south. But when it braked to a quick stop at the corner and backed abreast of the sedan, Mr. Maddox stepped off the curb.

CASSIDY shouldered out of the car and confronted him. For a moment Mr. Maddox could only stare.

"Small world, ain't it?" said Cassidy. He peered past Mr. Maddox into the sedan. "Got your stooge along, I see."

Oscar leaned out the car window. "I thought it was a barn rat at first," he said critically. "I still ain't sure."

Mr. Maddox took the big cigar from his mouth. His broad bland face showed no surprise. "Too small a world," he commented. "Going somewhere, Cassidy?"

"Out for a little night air, Joe."

"And you got lost," guessed Mr. Maddox, "and drove over here in Pennsylvania looking for the way back to Baltimore."

"You took the words out of my mouth, Joe." Cassidy's stare was intent. "Did you notice the bonfire back by the road?"

"Why do you think we're parked here? That's Dab Dab McNab's truck."

"You surprise me, Joe." Cassidy turned his head and spat. "How come you happen to be around when Dab Dab burns up?"

"I don't like what I think you mean," Mr. Maddox replied coldly. "The sheriff and the State Police have been notified and the local

law is telephoning an undertaker. I'm going to see that Dab Dab gets sent to his family in Ohio."

Cassidy shook his head in admiration. "Joe, you think of everything. It kills me."

"I doubt that much luck," Mr. Maddox murmured regretfully.

"How did you say you happened to be along here tonight, Joe?"

"I didn't say. But it happens that we're on the way to California."

"Just drifting along to California," said Cassidy with heavy sarcasm. "And all of a sudden there's Dab Dab McNab dead as a Christmas goose down the mountainside. So Joe Maddox, with a heart like a cream puff, jumps right in an' takes charge."

Mr. Maddox thought that over. He looked big and calm, slowly tapped ash from his cigar. "Something on your mind, Cassidy?" he asked mildly.

"Not much, Joe." Cassidy was as tall as Mr. Maddox but not as heavy. A belt of shadow lay between the two automobiles. In that dark, Cassidy's bulk looked solid and threatening. His voice grated abruptly. "A little birdie told me Dab Dab wrote a letter to you just before he pulled out of Baltimore. What'd the letter say, Joe?"

"Ask the birdie," Mr. Maddox suggested.

Cassidy's hand went inside his coat and came out with a gun. It was unexpected, threatening, purposeful. When you knew Cassidy, of the Masterton Agency, you knew his gun meant unswerving decision.

"Don't move, Joe! You carrying a rod?"

"No, you fool! Put down that gun!"

"Quiet, Joe!"

Cassidy's hand lunged quickly inside Mr. Maddox' coat. He brought out a flat wallet and the envelope Dab Dab had left with Pop Harvey. The bill of sale was inside the wallet, which Cassidy returned.

"This," said Mr. Maddox, tight-lipped. "is a hold-up!"

"I'll make it official by asking the state to hold you," Cassidy offered. He backed off until the street light fell on Dab Dab's letter. Cassidy read swiftly. He put letter and envelope inside his coat and holstered the gun.

"So McNab was afraid of you when he lammed out of Baltimore," said Cassidy. "And you followed him, Joe!"

Mr. Maddox chewed silently on the cigar.

"Now," said Cassidy, "you're making arrangements to ship the body home."

"Well, Cassidy?"

"You stopped at a gas station in Cumberland, Maryland," said Cassidy. "You asked questions there about McNab's truck. You were in a sweat to catch him."

"In Hagerstown," said Mr. Maddox, "we had coffee."

Cassidy shrugged that away. "Why was McNab afraid of you, Joe?"

"I should lose my temper," Mr. Maddox mused, "or get tough. Here you are, a lousy track cop, charging around in the middle of the night with your head full of fool ideas."

"Maybe," said Cassidy.

"You hijack a personal letter out of my pocket at the point of a gun. I think," decided Mr. Maddox, "I'll let you arrest me. It'll be a pleasure to sue the Masterton Agency for false arrest, defamation, robbery, and everything else a smart law firm can add." Mr. Maddox blew smoke into Cassidy's face. "And the lawyers will be smart, pal. What they'll do to you on the witness stand will be worth every dime it costs."

"Uh-huh," Cassidy agreed. "You would get good lawyers. You've got the jack to buy them."

Oscar spoke from the car window. "And I'll be there giving you the bird, sucker!"

Cassidy ignored that. "Joe, there ain't going to be any high-priced lawyers juggling around some disputable facts because I ain't going to pinch you—yet."

"Good. I'll take that letter."

"What I'm going to do," said Cassidy, "is take charge of McNab's body myself. I want an autopsy. Then I'll take McNab home to his folks and see him buried. And while I'm doing that, I'll root out every fact the family and friends might know that'll bear on you and Dab Dab. I'll find out why Dab Dab was afraid of you, and why you chased him all the way from Baltimore. I'll find out why you're in such a sweat to get the body and bury it quick. How does that sound, pal?"

"It smells like a frame-up! It's persecution!" Oscar blurted from the car.

"I'd call it delusions," Mr. Maddox suggested. "Keep the letter, Cassidy. Take charge of Dab Dab, and welcome. Here's a thousand to see that he gets home and buried in the right manner. Buy a big wreath for Joe Maddox and have it at the funeral. Or can I trust you for that little detail?"

Cassidy took the money. "A big wreath from Joe Maddox," he promised. "And if I find out what I think I will, my own dough will buy a second wreath, Joe. For guess who?"

"Tell me when you know," Mr. Maddox invited blandly. "I'll be at the Santa Rita, in Hollywood."

"Don't worry about that," said Cassidy. He was irritable, grim.

And that, as far as Mr. Maddox was concerned, was the end of Dab Dab McNab. This night would be a sad, unpleasant memory. But Dab Dab's bill of sale was proof of innocence, if needed. Life had to go on. California was ahead. Sunrise found Mr. Maddox and Oscar driving on into the West.

CHAPTER THREE

Like Father Like Daughter

MIDNIGHT, New Year's Eve, in the celebrated Rose Room of the Hollywood Santa Rita, was always one of the high points of the year. Names and faces known around the world made it a "must" to be seen in the Rose Room this night of nights.

Mr. Maddox was in the party of Julius Longberg, who made good movies and raced good horses. Some twenty others were in the Longberg party. Oscar, sadly enough, was getting thoroughly stinking all over Hollywood and Los Angeles.

The New Year's bender was Oscar's yearly indulgence. The result was always the same. Oscar's hangover was terrible and pathetic. Pallidly, weakly, remorsefully, Oscar pulled through and faced the new year a steadier and soberer man.

Midnight, sweeping across country hour by hour from the initial roaring welcome in Times Square, struck Hollywood and the crowded Rose Room tonight with an impact that broke all records.

Mr. Maddox wore a paper hat over one ear. He had a cardboard horn in one hand, a rattle in the other, and as midnight brought pandemonium, Mr. Maddox found himself being whirled around and hugged and kissed by two of the most famous darlings of the screen. There was too much noise to hear what anyone else was saying, or even hear the notes of the top-ranking network band. No one listened or cared.

It was a roaring ending to a history-making year, an explosive opening of the new one. What mattered a little lipstick, a few undignified antics? Mr. Maddox stood vast and chortling, a beauty on each arm, not a worry on his mind.

In that bubbling moment Mr. Maddox saw Cassidy standing inside the Rose Room entrance, regarding him. Cassidy's thin smile was sarcastic. This was the first sight he'd had of Cassidy since the night of Dab Dab's death back in Pennsylvania. Foreboding struck Mr. Maddox. Cassidy never smiled like that unless he meant trouble for someone.

Some minutes later, Cassidy was gone. A degree of sanity had returned to the Rose Room. The voice that spoke politely in Mr. Maddox' ear belonged to a waiter.

"A gentleman wishes to see you, sir."

"Tell him to call in the morning," Mr. Maddox directed.

"He's very drunk and difficult. Shall we put him out?"

"A small man?" Mr. Maddox hastily questioned.

"Yes, sir. He won't listen to anyone. He in-

sists on seeing you. In fact," said the waiter, getting blunt, "he's raising hell."

Mr. Maddox got up. Julius Longberg saw him and came around the table, portly and smiling. "Leaving, Joe?"

"I must, Julius. Sorry. It's a swell party. Doubt if I can get back."

Julius Longberg lowered his voice. "Tomorrow, in the third, my colt Dareska starts. Confidentially, he will win. If I could bet about three thousand . . ."

"Want me to take it?"

"I don't want so much of your good money, Joe. So I warn you, Dareska will win. But if you could place the bet for me . . ."

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Julius, they don't always win. I'll lay you on the nose, track odds."

"You were warned, Joe."

Mr. Maddox nodded, smiling. But when he turned and followed the waiter, the smile vanished. In a back corner of the lobby, Ben Larkin, the glum, heavy-set house detective, had Oscar by an arm.

"He won't go up to bed or listen to reason," complained Larkin. He released Oscar's arm, then grabbed it again as Oscar's rubbery knees started to fold. "Says a ghost is followin' him around. If you ask me, he'll be climbing the walls next."

Oscar was wild-eyed. "Gotta see Joe Maddox! Gotta see Joe! Gotta tell Joe 'bout ghos'!"

"I'll take him," said Mr. Maddox. He gripped Oscar's arm. "This is Joe, you balmy lush. Last New Year's you rode home in a hearse with seven drunken midgets! Now you stagger in raving about a ghost! Come upstairs!"

"Gotta see Joe!" Oscar insisted hoarsely. "'s Dab Dab McNab's ghos'!"

"Enough is enough," said Mr. Maddox curtly. "Shut up and get in the elevator with me or I'll clout you!"

Upstairs in their suite, Mr. Maddox thrust Oscar under the shower. "This will Dab Dab you!" Mr. Maddox snapped. He turned the water on full and cold.

Oscar yelled and fought. Half-drowned, choking, he finally returned to reality.

"You're killin' me, Joe! Lemme out!"

"Are you through with ghosts for this year?"

"Yes—no! I'll show you, Joe. Lemme out an' I'll show you!"

"I'll bite," said Mr. Maddox disgustedly. "Show me a ghost, or back you go under the water."

Oscar staggered on the bath mat. He pulled a damp copy of the racing form from his hip pocket.

Mr. Maddox snorted. "Plenty of ghosts in that paper," he conceded. "But no one recog-

nizes them until they race the next day. You'll have to do better."

Oscar fumbled the wet paper open to the Santa Anita past performances. He had to bring the type close to bleary eyes. His finger shook as he pointed. "There, Joe! Look! He's here again!"

Mr. Maddox looked. A mare named Bellacleve was entered on the following day. D. McNab was listed as owner and trainer. Mr. Maddox' memory turned back a year. Dab Dab McNab had owned and trained the mare Bellacleve during that period.

"Dab Dab's back from his bonfire!" Oscar groaned. "He's a haunt! He's come to make trouble because he wasn't pulled out of that wreck!"

Mr. Maddox suppressed an impulse to glance furtively over his shoulder. There it was in cold print—D. McNab, racing his mare tomorrow. Her first start in months. Queasy uncertainty began to raise questions in his mind. Could they have gone off and left Dab Dab still alive in the burning wreck? Impossible! But here in the paper was the entry for tomorrow.

"It's after midnight and no time to go into such foolishness," said Mr. Maddox sternly.

"Midnight!" Oscar gulped. "He's walkin', Joe! I gotta hunch he's close!"

"I," said Mr. Maddox coldly, "have a hunch Cassidy is behind this. We'll see in the morning."

OSCAR was noisily snoring at dawn when Mr. Maddox departed for the track. He stopped for coffee on the way. The sun was thrusting rosy light over the bold mountains beyond the track when Mr. Maddox reached the horse barns.

Santa Anita is one of the great and beautiful tracks of the world. This season the infield held masses of brilliant flowers. But Mr. Maddox had no eye for beauty as he stalked among the long barn rows, astir with early activity. He asked questions and came after a few minutes to the stalls occupied by the McNab horses.

A stable boy was opening a bale of straw. "Where is McNab?" Mr. Maddox asked.

The boy pointed to a stall beyond them. Mr. Maddox walked a few feet, almost bumped into a girl who was coming out of the stall.

"Sorry, sister. I'm looking for McNab."

He guessed the answer even as he spoke and saw no one else in the stall.

"I am Dorothy McNab," the girl replied.

"I should have guessed," Mr. Maddox told her. He was smiling now at the thoughts which had run through his mind the previous night.

One who had known Dab Dab could guess that this girl was a McNab. She had the look, but not the meek and rather unfortunate look that Dab Dab had usually borne. This kid—

and she was just about that—bloomed with spirit. In sport shoes, blue woolen skirt, dull-yellow coat sweater, she had a windy active look, with blond hair swirling off her forehead. Nice forehead, too.

She said: "I am Daniel McNab's daughter." Her voice was clear and emphatic. Mr. Maddox guessed she had a will and a temper. She stood off, looking at him. "Your name is Maddox."

"Good guess." Mr. Maddox chuckled.

"It isn't a guess," said Dorothy McNab. "Only one man could look like you." Her tone was not complimentary—she didn't like him. She swallowed and made it clear. "Big and greedy looking," said Dorothy McNab. "Cruel and heartless and—and—"

"Isn't that enough?" Mr. Maddox asked, no longer chuckling. He met the dislike in her look. "Do you really mean all that?"

"You're the man who hated my father before he was killed," she said, and huskiness entered her voice.

"I didn't hate him, young lady. I was his friend."

"You, his friend! The one who got all his money!"

"I didn't win your father's money," Mr. Maddox said gently. "And I'll make a guess that the man who said I did is named Cassidy." Mr. Maddox shook his head. "Cassidy was wrong."

He might as well have spoken to the bale of straw behind him. Dorothy McNab ignored the protest.

"I've been wanting to see you," she said unsteadily. She was pale as she took a small leather billfold from her sweater pocket. The check she handed Mr. Maddox was on an Ohio bank, certified for a thousand dollars. "Your wreath," Dorothy said, "was burned on the trash pile. What a mockery to send flowers to the funeral and—and money to his family!"

Mr. Maddox slowly folded the check and pressed the crease. If he had ever hated Cassidy, it was now, at this moment. The big

Masterton detective had neatly turned decent impulses against Joe Maddox. Here in the brightening California dawn Cassidy was getting his pay-off.

"I tried to do what I could," Mr. Maddox said slowly. "I'm sorry the family misunderstood."

"No one misunderstood *you!*" Dorothy McNab flared shakily. "The day my father left Baltimore he wrote to me. I was here in California, in school. Daddy told me he'd lost all his reserve cash, and would have to spend the winter in Ohio without money. And when I flew home for the funeral, I heard the rest of it."

"From Cassidy?"

"From Mr. Cassidy!"

"Did Dab Dab—your father, I mean—did he write you that I'd won his money?"

She threw it at him. "Daddy didn't have to write it, after what Mr. Cassidy told us! Daddy's letter was plain enough. He told me how he had been cheated and tricked in the race on which he lost his money!"

"Cheated?" Mr. Maddox repeated sharply. "Did your father write that? Cheated?"

"I'm not going to talk about it. Not to you."

Mr. Maddox put the check in his pocket. "Tell me this," he asked seriously. "Did your father mention my name in his letter?"

"He didn't have to. Mr. Cassidy showed me the letter Daddy wrote to *you* the same day. It—it was the most pitiful thing . . . Poor Daddy . . ." She bit hard on her lip and turned away. She was crying silently as she rushed into the stall.

Mr. Maddox started to follow her, but his arm was caught and he was jerked around.

THE young man who faced Mr. Maddox was built like a football tackle. Handsome young fellow, and seething.

"I don't know what you've done to her," the young stranger said furiously, "but I don't like it! I'll teach you not to bother her again!" He hit Mr. Maddox furiously.

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The fist smacked hard into a big palm that was suddenly between them. Surprise flashed on the young man's face. He hadn't expected the big, clumsy-looking man to move so fast, or to be holding his fist in an iron grip.

"Son, never talk while you're slugging," Mr. Maddox advised. "Calm down. I wouldn't hurt that girl for the mutuel handle today. Go tell her so."

Mr. Maddox released the fist. The young man glared at him, torn between trying it again and rushing to Dab Dab's girl. He chose the latter and strode to the stall door.

Mr. Maddox walked away. He was seething also, from a sense of injustice and regret that innocent people had been hurt because of him.

Cassidy, malignantly in the background, with innuendo and partial facts, was wrecking everything Joe Maddox had stood for in over thirty years of square dealing. A matter like this could spread by gossip and letter, until the whole turf world would hear and believe.

When you knew Cassidy, as Joe Maddox did, you could see that the Masterton detective, with his usual relentless patience, was going to pin the death of Dab Dab McNab on Joe Maddox one way or another. That ominous feeling he had had back in the Pennsylvania night was coming true. Dab Dab McNab's bad luck had leaped to Joe Maddox.

Pop Harvey had the four Maddox horses several barns over. Mr. Maddox walked there. Pop was watching Kopper King being cooled off after a dawn gallop on the track.

"You sure look like thunder over the mountains, Joe," Pop commended, peering through steel-rimmed spectacles that always sat a bit crooked on his nose. "If it's a hangover from last night, I got a tooth of the dog that gnawed you. Real tonic. You c'n see the Kentucky corn tassels a-wavin' over it."

"No thanks," Mr. Maddox hastily declined. "Save that hillbilly dew for a rainy day." Pop looked hopefully at the sky, and then over the lenses of his spectacles as Mr. Maddox asked. "Do you have any idea how Dab Dab McNab could have been cheated out of a win in that last race Porchino ran at Pimlico?"

Pop took off the spectacles and polished them with a big blue bandana. Pop's wrinkled old face was alert. "Was he cheated, Joe?"

"I don't know. How could he have been cheated?"

"I seen that race from the grandstand fence," Pop recalled. "Porchino ran all right to the stretch. Didn't look like he had a slow pill in him, or anything else wrong. He was a quitter. That's one reason Banjo Witsell sold him. I'd say Porchino just quit again in that race, Joe." Pop spat and shifted his chewing tobacco to the other cheek. "How come you're around on a mornin' like this, a-worryin' over a dead hoss?"

"I *am* worrying," Mr. Maddox admitted. "The family thinks there was something crooked about that race. They believe I had something to do with it. They think I won all Dab Dab's cash on the race—and won it crookedly."

Pop almost swallowed his chew. "Never heard of such damn foolishness!" Pop spluttered. "Ain't they got no sense? Don't they know you? Hell's fire! You never touched a crooked race in your life!" Pop spat again and chewed fast. "Gets me!" he said indignantly. "Dab Dab wa'n't no fool about hosses. If he thought he was crooked outa that race, he musta had a reason. Dab Dab lay it on you?"

"I don't think so," was the most Mr. Maddox was willing to admit.

"Course he didn't!" Pop snorted. "Dab Dab knowed you."

"I'm beginning to believe there was something sour about the race," said Mr. Maddox. "And if there was, I want the truth. I'm going to get the truth."

"Why don't you talk to the jockey?" Pop suggested. "Lemme see—Cad Lomax rode him, didn't he? Cad checked in for the meetin' here. His agent was around lookin' for mounts for Cad."

"Who is Cad's agent?"

"Limpy Agee."

"That little crook?"

"No one ever proved Limpy was a crook," Pop reproved. "Not even when Limpy had good footin' an' was a jockey hisself. Don't do no good to sling mud at the dirty little crook, Joe."

That was good for a chuckle. Mr. Maddox needed the bit of humor.

"You're right, Pop. We won't call the little crook names until we're sure of our facts. I wonder if Cad Lomax is out this morning."

"Agee is. Seen him about twenty minutes ago."

"I'll find him."

LIMPY AGEE was a middle-aged ex-jockey. Long ago a field of horses had run over Limpy and chopped him to tatters. The left side of Limpy's face was scarred, twisted. He limped strongly. They met between the barn rows. Limpy's twisted grin looked more like a leer than a smile.

"How's tricks, Maddox?" Limpy cocked his head up at Mr. Maddox' bulk. "Got anything in your stable Cad Lomax can bring in handily?"

"Could be," said Mr. Maddox blandly. "How's Cad doing?"

"In the groove lately. We're asking a fifty-buck side bet for Cad if the horse is ready to go. It's worth it. Cad delivers with a real ride."

"Jockeys used to give a real ride without a

side bet," Mr. Maddox commented. "And with movie cameras taking every foot of a race and a jockey judge to each rider, watching every move, these California tracks are going to educate a lot of prima donna jockeys."

Limpy grinned. "Cad ain't worried. He's good."

"He'll be better if he rides around Los Angeles much," Mr. Maddox stated. "I'd like to talk to Cad."

"If it's something special, I can decide for Cad." Limpy Agee's grin was knowing.

"There's no money in this for Cad unless he's got some information I can use." Mr. Maddox bit the end off one of his thick black cigars. He hesitated purposely. "But there might be a chunk of dough if Cad can satisfy me. Were you his agent at Pimlico this fall?"

Limpy Agee had gone alert at the suggestion of money. He shook his head reluctantly. "Sandy Howard had Cad then. Sandy's ticker conked out right after Pimlico."

"No use to talk to you then," decided Mr. Maddox. "I want to ask Cad about a race he rode. Where is he?"

"Went to Frisco yesterday. Should be back this evening." Limpy was restlessly eager. "I'll ask him. If it takes dough to make Cad talk, I can work on him. What about the race? Which one was it?"

"Never mind. Where's Cad staying?"

Limpy was annoyed. "Cad's using a borrowed cabin up a little canyon beyond Altadena. Blue Canyon. He likes to rough it alone sometimes."

"How do I find the place?"

Limpy gave directions, and he was curious and still annoyed when Mr. Maddox left. The hint of money had him afire with interest.

There were more instructions to give Pop Harvey.

"Learn what you can about Dab Dab's daughter," Mr. Maddox directed when he rejoined Pop. "How does she happen to be training and racing? And that young man who seems interested in her. I'd like a line on him."

Pop knew all the old-timers. He could gossip around casually and collect a surprising amount of information.

Cassidy didn't seem to be at the track this morning. It was just as well. Violence was the only fitting greeting Mr. Maddox could offer the big Masterton man just now. The new year had started badly. This dawn visit to the track had gone from bad to worse. Mr. Maddox turned the facts over glumly in his mind as he drove away. A superstitious person might well view with alarm what lay ahead. Mr. Maddox was not superstitious, but he was getting wary.

The afternoon had some bright spots. One of the best was the third race. Julius Longberg's Dareska was beaten in a photo finish by a colt named Frecko.

Mr. Maddox strolled to Julius Longberg's box after the numbers went up. Julius was lamenting the race to his guests, who included Barry Wells, an Oscar winner three years running.

"You can't win all the time," Mr. Maddox reminded when Julius included him in the lament.

"The money I don't mind," Julius answered. "If I lose the money I bet, that's fine. But when a colt like Dareska is beaten by something like that Frecko, a man wonders why he spends a fortune for breeding and blood lines. Did you see Frecko's record? Last year he ran at Dade Park and River Downs! Not even good enough for the big tracks!"

"He was a two-year-old," said Mr. Maddox amiably. "You can't tell what they'll do as three-year-olds. Some go bad, some find themselves and turn into balls of fire."

"Then I should sell my stable and start claiming cheap two-year-olds off the small tracks," Julius grumbled as he scrawled a check for the lost bet.

"Or hire Frecko's trainer," Mr. Maddox suggested, chuckling.

Julius glanced at his program. "Ivan Bramm. Never heard of him. Who is he? Where'd he come from?"

Joe Maddox knew most details pertaining to the turf world. He was not at a loss in this matter. "Bramm is a halterman who seldom reaches the big tracks. I suppose he discovered he had something good in Frecko and shipped here this winter to try for some of the big purses."

"He should race somewhere else," Julius grumbled. "Fireballs no one else ever heard of don't make me feel any better."

"Someone heard of Frecko or had a nice hunch he was ready," Mr. Maddox said, smiling. "Did you notice the chunk of cash that went in on the Bramm horse in the last minute? There was a thousand or two at least. The odds were knocked down considerably."

"So we got smart betting, too," said Julius wryly. "Maybe I'm an innocent about this game."

"Who isn't?" Mr. Maddox asked. But as he left the box, he made a mental note about the race.

AN HOUR later Mr. Maddox saw Pop Harvey walking away from the paddock and motioned him to one side of the streaming crowd.

"Did you notice the nice one Ivan Bramm slipped over in the third, Pop?"

"It was a beaut," Pop said, nodding. "Wa'n't surprised, knowin' Ivy long as I have."

"It was a set-up for someone," said Mr. Maddox. "Money went in at the last minute."

"Never heard of Ivy Bramm racin' fer his health."

"You'd better keep an eye on Bramm and his horse," Mr. Maddox ordered. "I don't want to be caught holding a big bet on any more beauts that Bramm might be slipping over. A long-shot like Frecko could make a dent in the bankroll."

Pop grinned. "You wouldn't be the first who got hooked on one of Ivy's hosses, Joe. You ever know Ivy real well?"

"No."

"You missed an eddication," said Pop. "Ivy used to be one of the slickest drugstore trainers the catfish tracks ever knowed. Oncet in New Orleans Ivy got drunk an' offered to bet he could take a stuffed hoss hide an' his special 'improver pills' an' break any track record that was named."

"Some pills, Pop."

"One pill, one length faster on the mile, Ivy claimed. He had an old plater named Jubilo who got at a handful of Ivy's pills afore one race an' et 'em all. Ivy swore Jubilo run around the track so fast he butted into his tail just leavin' the post. One judge lost his mind tryin' to decide whether Jubilo won the race or got left at the post an' ran last."

Mr. Maddox chuckled at the story but was deadly serious about present facts.

"Ivy doesn't dare try any dope at this track. But that still leaves him a hatful of tricks."

"It's a mighty big hat, too," agreed Pop. "Ivy'll fool most folks. He got ruled off the Kentucky tracks for a year an' married a widder-woman outa a church choir. Brought religion back to his racin'. I remember Old Jake Handlestan that year at Sarvotoga a-laughin' one night over how Ivy was a Bible-shoutin', sin-hatin', horse-racin' son-of-a-gun." Pop scratched his head. "Come to think of it, the widder-woman he married was named Agee. Wonder if she was any relation to Limpy Agee?"

"You might find out," Mr. Maddox said. "And how about Dab Dab's girl?"

"Knowed there was somethin' I wanted to see you about," said Pop. "Wa'n't hard to find out about her. The men is all sold on her. She was out here at school when Dab Dab was kilt. Seems Dab Dab had sent her to school in style—plenty money for his daughter even if his britches was patched."

"Dab Dab would be like that."

"Well, after the funeral, they wa'n't no money," said Pop. "But Dab Dab had some of his old platers restin' on the farm. The gal shipped 'em west to the ranch of a girl-friend's daddy. Aimed to sell 'em at private sale or outa claimin' races. Her friend's daddy helped her get a trainer's license. She's pertendin' like she's racing for Dab Dab."

Mr. Maddox smiled with understanding.

"Got it in her blood, I'll bet, Pop, even if she doesn't know it. What about the young man?"

"He's her gal-friend's brother," Pop winked. "He's been hangin' around with a dyin' calf look an' he don't get no encouragement a-tall. Billy Beeks stables next to her. Billy knowed Dab Dab and he's right friendly with her. Billy says she's downright disencouragin' to the young feller. Billy thinks she oughta grab him. So do I. His old man is Julius Longberg."

"What?" Mr. Maddox exclaimed.

"Uh-huh. *The Longberg. Vallejo Ranch Stable. The movie feller.*"

CHAPTER FOUR

Death Is a Back-Seat Driver

MR. MADDUX was disturbed. "I thought there was something familiar about that boy," he muttered. "He's young Bob Longberg whom Julius is always boasting about."

"His name's Bob," said Pop.

"Dorothy McNab has her horses with the Vallejo Ranch horses?"

"Nope," said Pop. "She stayed at the ranch for a time an' put her hosses into trainin'. Now she's on her own. Full of spit an' pride, Billy Beeks says. Billy guessed she was dern near broke from things she let drop, but he says she won't borrow a bit of tack or even a straw bale from the Vallejo bunch."

"Amazing!" Mr. Maddox said slowly. "I wonder what Julius thinks of all this. He has great plans for that boy, and I'm sure they never included a love affair with a broken-down halterman's daughter."

"The gal ain't broken-down," said Pop, pointedly. "I'd say she was a filly to please any poppa."

"That's not the point."

"It's liable to be," Pop observed. "Old Longberg won't be the first poppa to wake up an' find Cupid a-thumbin' his nose at him over the back fence. Anyways, from what Billy thinks, young Bob ain't told his folks how he feels."

Mr. Maddox opened his well-stuffed billfold. He looked for a moment at the certified check Dorothy McNab had given him. He was still disturbed and thinking hard.

"Keep an eye on those two kids, Pop," he said, pocketing the billfold. "This business is muscling into some of my plans. Might make trouble for me."

"Don't see how it can. You ain't in love with her," Pop stated. "But you're the boss, Joe."

At dinner time that evening the matter was still on Mr. Maddox' mind. Dorothy McNab evidently had not shared her opinion of Joe Maddox with the Longbergs. Certainly it hadn't reached Julius Longberg or there would

have been no invitation to the New Year's Eve party.

Julius Longberg was a fair man. He was also just and rigid in matters of honesty. His was one of the blazing names among wealthy breeders and horse owners. Let Julius Longberg be convinced that Joe Maddox had any part in a crooked deal in which Dab Dab McNab had suffered, and Julius would be bluntly outspoken to the turf world about it.

Score one more for Cassidy. The Masterton detective knew about Dorothy McNabb and Bob Longberg, of course. It explained Cassidy's sarcastic smile as he had watched Mr. Maddox at Julius Longberg's table in the Rose Room.

The more Mr. Maddox thought about the new twist of events, the less appetite he had. Cad Lomax was more important than ever now. If the jockey knew anything about that last race on Porchino, he had to talk.

Mr. Maddox went upstairs. Oscar was in bed with a cold towel around his head and a bottle of aspirin on the bedside table.

"Feeling better?"

Oscar groaned hollowly.

"Good," said Mr. Maddox callously. "You asked for it. I'm going to be out this evening. Take any messages."

Oscar groaned again. Mr. Maddox left him to retribution. On the drive toward Pasadena there was more bad luck. A tire went flat and not a filling station in sight. Mr. Maddox put the spare on himself and drove on with a heightened sense that luck was running against him.

He had some difficulty finding Blue Canyon in the San Gabriel foothills, even after asking directions in Altadena. A small wooden marker pointing off the boulevard had been knocked around. Mr. Maddox parked and got out with a flashlight to make certain before he turned up the narrow canyon road.

Back in the car, he waited a moment for a speeding automobile that was coming out of the canyon. On the chance that it might be Cad

Lomax, Mr. Maddox watched closely as the car passed through his headlight beams and turned on the highway.

It was a gray roadster with a canvas top. A young man and a girl were in it. The man was too big to be a jockey. Mr. Maddox had a startled instant of delayed recognition. Then it came to him—the driver looked remarkably like young Bob Longberg. The gray roadster wheeled fast and was gone. Mr. Maddox caught the first three numbers on the license plate and never did see the girl's features.

He was curious as he drove up the canyon. Suppose that couple had been Bob Longberg and Dorothy McNab. They must have been to see Cad Lomax—and not about riding one of the McNab horses. Limpy Agee attended to such matters. That left only one logical reason—the same reason that was bringing Mr. Maddox—Cad's ride on Porchino at Pimlico. If that were true, then Joe Maddox must have the right hunch.

The narrow canyon road was a succession of curves, climbing steadily. The feel of the lonely mountains ahead began to close in on him. Busy streets, endless miles of homes, the teeming pressure of the city, dropped magically behind. Cad Lomax wasn't doing so badly after all in staying back here in the hills.

About three miles from the boulevard, the rustic two-story lodge appeared on the right. It was set back against the slope, in a little nook off the road. There were several trees and some banks of bushes, a garage at one side of the house and a long spacious veranda across the front.

Lights were on in the house. A coupe was parked in front of the open garage doors. Mr. Maddox walked up on the veranda and knocked. No one answered his raps. He tried the door. It was unlocked. Mr. Maddox opened it and called: "Cad Lomax!" Then he called again.

There was a chance that the back door might get results. Mr. Maddox went there. He knocked, found the back door also unlocked,

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and poked his head in. The dim flame of his cigarette lighter showed the dark room to be the kitchen.

Cad Lomax was evidently around, but not receiving visitors. Mr. Maddox swore softly under his breath at the long drive he had wasted. He lighted a cigar and stood quietly in the darkness behind the house. If Cad were playing possum, he might move around.

An automobile passed down the road. Another came up the canyon several moments later. Its headlights swung in and stopped behind Mr. Maddox' car.

This was probably Cad Lomax, returning from a brief drive with a friend. Mr. Maddox walked out beside the house as the headlights were switched off. They came on again, glaring at him.

THE man who got out was too big to be Cad Lomax. Mr. Maddox recognized him as he began to speak. "This gets good. How often do you hang around out here with Lomax, Joe?"

"Ask him, Cassidy," Mr. Maddox said shortly.

"I will. Is he at the back of the house there?"

"I don't know where he is."

"That's his auto in front of yours, isn't it?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Maddox blandly.

"Lomax lives here, doesn't he?" Cassidy exploded.

"Can't prove it by me. I haven't seen him here."

"Joe," said Cassidy, "sometimes you annoy me."

"You usually annoy me," Mr. Maddox replied chuckling. "The lights are on but no one seems to be home. You may have better luck than I did."

Cassidy muttered something, walked up on the veranda and knocked hard on the door. He did no better than Mr. Maddox. Cassidy opened the front door and called in, then went on in.

Mr. Maddox stood out front, smoking, trying to guess what this latest move of Cassidy's might mean.

"Joe! Come in and join the party!"

"Find him?"

"You might say so." Cassidy was coming down the veranda steps as he spoke. "We'll find him together," he said harshly as he reached Mr. Maddox. He pulled his gun as he spoke. "Get in there ahead of me, Joe!"

"What's wrong in there, Cassidy?"

"Go on in!" Cassidy ordered.

They entered the big front room of the lodge in silence. Cassidy's finger pointed to a disarranged Navajo rug in front of a stone fireplace at the left. On the waxed floor beside the rug was a small pool of blood.

"Where is he, Joe?"

"I haven't been inside the house," said Mr. Maddox slowly. His broad face was bland, manner calm—but inside him the ominous feeling was tight, heavy. All bad luck and getting worse.

Cassidy stood behind him and made a quick, expert frisk of Mr. Maddox' person. "Follow the drops, Joe!" he ordered with the brusque, cold edge of authority. His finger indicated a trail of blood drops.

With Cassidy behind him, gun against his back, Mr. Maddox followed the trail to a door at the back of the room. Back through a hall, back into the kitchen. He had to pause and fumble for the kitchen light switch.

The blood trail went to the back door. Mr. Maddox felt himself perspiring. This was getting worse. Had he been standing back there in the night near a body?

"Your hands are dirty, Joe. Did you cover him up outside somewhere?"

"I had a flat on my way here and changed the tire." It sounded like a pretty lame excuse, even to Mr. Maddox. His hands were silent accusation.

"Open the back door, Joe, and try that switch. It must be an outside light."

The switch turned on light behind the house and over the open garage doors. The blood drops were on the narrow flagstone terrace behind the house, and down several steps toward the garage.

Blood marked where the body had rested a short time at the bottom of the steps. The trail seemed to end there.

"Where is it, Joe?" Cassidy prodded for emphasis.

"Easy with that gun," Mr. Maddox protested evenly. "I'm seeing all this for the first time. I don't know any more than you do."

"Walk to my car. I'll get my flashlight."

Back with the flashlight, Cassidy searched the ground. The trail ended where the body had rested. There was nothing in the garage, or in the coupe standing just outside the doors. Cassidy had already looked in Mr. Maddox' car.

"Unlock your trunk compartment, Joe!"

After that Cassidy began to search out from the house, his temper growing shorter.

"This ain't helping you, Joe! I saw you come from behind the house! Did you lug him up the hill somewhere?"

"I knocked on the back door. Didn't have the gall to walk in as you did."

"You're stalling, Joe! And it ain't getting you anywhere! Why'd you kill him? He doublecross you?"

"I wanted to ask Cad some questions. His agent told me where he lived."

"What kind of questions?"

Limpy Agee would tell that as soon as he

heard Cad Lomax was dead. "I wanted to ask Cad about a race he rode the last day at Pimlico."

Cassidy's satisfaction was almost savage. "That ride on Dab Dab McNab's Porchino, I suppose?"

"Exactly. Dorothy McNab told me her father was certain there was something crooked about that race. Cad would be the one to know."

"So we're back to Dab Dab McNab again—and another dead man!" Cassidy swore. He was rough, accusing, then, abruptly, almost regretful. "I've known you over thirty years, Joe! Even today, if someone had told me you'd go bad like this, I wouldn't have believed it! Two in a row and God knows how many more!"

"Thanks for nothing," Mr. Maddox said shortly. "You're a fat-head, Cassidy. I'm doing to take my shoes off. Watch that gun."

"Shoes on or off, it's murder, Joe."

Mr. Maddox held the shoe soles up in front of Cassidy's flashlight. He was not certain himself until he had looked, and then he almost whistled with relief.

"Not a sign of blood on the bottoms, Cassidy. Doesn't it mean anything to you that a shoe stepped in that blood at the bottom of the steps?"

"You walked all over before you thought of it. Got everything wiped off."

"There'd be something showing. Send 'em to a laboratory. I've got slippers in my car that I wear when I'm driving cross-country." Mr. Maddox warned again: "I'm going to take out my billfold."

"Bribery won't work, Joe."

"Did it ever occur to you," said Mr. Maddox blandly, "that I might have wanted Dab Dab McNab to live and his horse Porchino to race again?"

"Don't make me laugh."

"This will make you cry. I had a hunch today I might need this, so I got it out. Take a look, sucker. If there was one man in the world who wanted Dab Dab's truck and horse alive and safe, it was Joe Maddox. Porchino probably would have been worth fifty grand-up this year and next. I was half-owner of Porchino when Dab Dab drove out of Baltimore."

CASSIDY read the bill-of-sale. He sounded dumfounded. "You never told me about this, Joe."

"I was saving it for a little surprise if you had the nerve to haul me into court over Dab Dab's death," said Mr. Maddox grimly. "Thought I was bluffing, didn't you? A good lawyer would have laughed you off the Masterton payroll for thinking I wanted Porchino or Dab Dab dead."

"How do I know this is the McCoy?"

"You've got Dab Dab's letter to me. Let handwriting experts pass on it."

"I don't get it," Cassidy admitted uncertainly.

"You will, when all this goes into court," Mr. Maddox promised. "And I'm telling you as straight as I told you about Dab Dab, I didn't know Cad Lomax was dead until you called me inside. If he is dead."

"Somebody's dead!"

"Find the body—but stick to facts. I came here, just as you did. I tried front and back doors and was ready to leave when you drove up. If there's been a murder here, the homicide men will run down the killer. Are you going to make an ass of yourself by laying it on me, and then have facts prove you wrong?"

"I'd like to believe you, Joe."

Mr. Maddox jeered. "You're afraid not to believe me. Keep those shoes. Call the cops. Tell them the truth. I was wondering why Cad didn't answer the door. Then you drove up and investigated. Three cars went down the canyon as I drove up here. The killer and the body may have been in any one of them."

"I think I'm being a sucker but I'll bite," said Cassidy. "I saw a phone in there. Come on."

"I'll just drive on about my business."

"Oh, no! Come on, Joe. Give the homicide men your own answers."

Mr. Maddox let Cassidy have his way rather than invite more suspicion. He was a big, bland Buddha-like picture of unconcern as Cassidy went from room to room while they waited for the police.

In a bedroom upstairs they found a traveling bag fully packed. There seemed to be no private papers about. The traveling bag was the only evidence that Cad Lomax had returned from San Francisco. Mr. Maddox had a sudden thought.

"Neither one of us felt the radiator of that coupe."

"So what?" Cassidy countered.

"Just an idea. Be back in a minute."

Mr. Maddox had news when he returned. Cassidy had walked down the living room and was scowling about. "Stone cold," Mr. Maddox informed him. "Try this on your massive brain, pal. If Cad drove that car from the station, there'd still be some heat in the radiator. And if someone brought him from the station or he came in a taxi, why is the auto standing outside the garage?"

"Maybe it was parked there while he was in Frisco."

"I doubt that," differed Mr. Maddox dryly. "Think it over."

Cassidy grunted.

The police came quicker than seemed possible. Newspaper men and photographers raced up the canyon road after them. Murder and

mystery were on the record and rushing into the headlines. From the first rapid-fire questions, the first wink of flash bulbs, it was evident the case was going to get a big play. Cad Lomax was nationally known and news was rather dull anyway. All the case lacked was a pretty girl. Police and newspapermen seemed to expect one would turn up. A neat little hide-away like this up a quiet canyon road called for a nice welter of romance and violence.

Mr. Maddox answered questions frankly. He had a reason for his visit that could be checked. He became a witness like Cassidy, for the time being not much more suspect than the Masterton man, but still open to suspicion, investigation, if the case was not quickly solved.

Men searching out from the house failed to locate a body. Newspapermen telephoned their stories. Photographers hurried away with pictures. More cars arrived as the news reached radio sets. The big mystery of the night was flashing over the Los Angeles area. Where was the body of jockey Cad Lomax?

Mr. Maddox was patient. When he was allowed to leave, he drove away almost reluctantly. He drove without haste down the canyon and through Pasadena, making as certain as possible that no car was trailing him. When he did begin to drive swiftly, purposefully, his face was grim and he did not relish what lay ahead.

Julius Longberg lived well but not ostentatiously in Beverly Hills. Some of his own studio stars had far more luxurious mansions and grounds. But as Mr. Maddox swung into the Longberg driveway, the lonely open feel of Cad's foothill lodge was replaced by the sleek quiet of moneyed security.

Mr. Maddox had only been here once before, several years back. The big stone garage was back of the house, with a wide concrete turning apron in front.

Somehow from the first Mr. Maddox had been certain what he would find here. His headlights reached back to the garage, and there it was—gray roadster, canvas top, the first few numbers on the license checking with those he had briefly sighted on the canyon road.

Mr. Maddox was afraid of what he knew as he shut off the motor and removed the flash-light from the dash pocket. He hoped he was wrong but somehow had the heavy feeling that he was not.

He played the flash beam over the back of the roadster. The rumble seat was closed. But, as if he had known all along what he would find, Mr. Maddox brought the light beam close to a single crimson smear on the polished body beside the rumble seat.

A sharp demand came from the front corner of the house. "Who is that?"

"Bob?"

"Yes! Who is it?"

"This is Joe Maddox."

"What the devil are you doing around my car?"

In the reaching beam of the flash, Bob Longberg had the same husky, athletic look. He wore a light pullover sweater. His dark hair was carelessly curly. He came striding fast with angry determination. Beyond him the flash picked out Dab Dab McNab's daughter, coming uncertainly in sight at the front corner of the house. The two youngsters must have been sitting on the front terrace.

"Is your father here?" Mr. Maddox asked.

"No! What's so interesting about my car?"

"I see Miss McNab is here. This where she's staying?"

"She's here tonight visiting my sister. Not that it's any of your business."

"Take it easy, son," advised Mr. Maddox calmly. "Did you kill Cad Lomax?"

MR. MADDUX would not have been surprised at violence. But what he got was stunned silence. Then an explosive: "No!" And as an afterthought: "He's the jockey, isn't he? Are you crazy?"

"Went to see him tonight, didn't you?"

"What makes you think that?" Bob Longberg retorted. He tried to sound rough, but his voice was strained and unsteady.

"The police and newspapermen are all over Cad's place," Mr. Maddox told him. "They can't find a body. Everything points to murder and it's going to be splashed in the headlines."

Dorothy McNab had joined them now and her hand went to Bob's arm. She was standing mutely as Mr. Maddox turned the light on the smear. "That's blood, Bob. Is there more of it inside on the rumble seat?"

Dorothy gasped, she whimpered: "Bob! It can't be!"

"Blood?" Bob Longberg repeated. He sounded stupid. He stepped to the fender and looked close. "Th—that's got no business there! It c-can't be blood!" He was stammering.

"Open the rumble," Mr. Maddox ordered.

"All right, fellow! And then I'll ask you how you happen to be snooping around here with such insane ideas!"

Bob yanked open the rumble seat. He was beside Mr. Maddox as the light beam probed inside. For frozen seconds they both stood looking at the huddled body in the bottom of the compartment.

"Bob!" Dorothy begged sharply. "There isn't anything on the seat, is there?"

"I don't believe it!" said Bob Longberg on a strangled note. "We didn't do anything! We were only there a few minutes!"

Dorothy craned past them and saw. She said

thinly: "But I don't understand—" She turned away, and suddenly she was sobbing. Very quietly, deeply, terribly, her slender figure shaking.

Bob caught her close with a protecting arm. They clung together as if in all the world there was no comfort, help, strength, but each other.

Mr. Maddox watched them somberly. He thought of the pride in Julius Longberg's voice when he spoke of this boy. He could reconstruct the pride and tenderness which Dab Dab McNab had felt for his girl.

Dab Dab was dead. Julius Longberg would soon wish he were dead. Here, clinging together in the starlight, was the tragic smash-up of young lives and old hopes. And for what reason? Bob's temper?

"Did Cad start it?" Mr. Maddox asked them, and added: "Cad Lomax was known to have a mean temper."

"We didn't see him," Bob denied. He could hardly speak.

"Son, you're wasting time trying to convince me," said Mr. Maddox sadly. "It's the jury, the judge, the newspapers and public, you'll have to convince. Cad Lomax can't tell about it, but there aren't enough words in the book to stop what his body in your car will shout."

"I know! God, don't I know! This will break Father's heart! And Dorothy—hasn't she had enough grief?"

She stepped away from Bob and pushed his arm back. "It's all my fault," she said. Each word had a forced, desperate huskiness. "I've been telling you to stay away from me. I knew it wasn't fair to your family. They've been too decent to me."

"Quit it, Dorothy! We've been over all that!"

"I didn't see any harm in letting you take me to this jockey's place, but I won't let you be brought into it. I could have borrowed your car. There's *some* way I can get you out of this."

"It might work the other way," Bob muttered. "This man might keep his mouth shut to help you. I can swear I went there all by myself."

"You kids come down to earth," Mr. Maddox ordered heavily. "You'll make it worse than it really is. What happened between you two and Cad?"

"Nothing!" Bob Longberg answered desperately. "I tell you we didn't even see the fellow!" He smacked a fist wildly into the other palm. "Before God, I tell you we didn't see anyone there! The house was lighted, but no one answered my knocks."

"Did you open the front door?"

Bob hesitated. "Yes."

"See anything inside?"

No answer.

"Tell him," Dorothy urged wretchedly. "It can't be any worse than this."

"I did open the door and call. It seemed so obvious someone was there," said Bob haltingly. "A car parked in front of the garage, the house lights on. There was a rug kicked in a pile near the fireplace and—and blood on the floor. I stepped in and made sure."

"I thought you had something on your mind when you saw me back here at your car," commented Mr. Maddox.

"That was all. I swear it was. Oh, I know we should have gone to the police. But the headlines—Father's a natural target for such things. I didn't know what had happened or how we'd be caught up in it. Since we were innocent, and no one knew we had gone there, I thought it best to get away and keep out of things. That was your car at the mouth of the canyon, wasn't it?"

"Bob," said Mr. Maddox gently, "I've known your father some years. He's my friend. I'd like to believe you. But you see, Bob, you brought the body away with you."

"I keep telling you we didn't know it!" Bob caught Mr. Maddox' arm and shook it. "Someone's got to believe us! Would we have brought a body home, and sat on the terrace

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talking while it was here in the car? Listen! My father's house is the last place I'd bring a corpse! Dorothy and I aren't fools! If we were cold-blooded enough to kill a man and load his body in my car, we'd get rid of it before he came home!"

MR. MADDUX reached for a cigar. "I can understand talk like that, Bob."

"Why the devil would we carry the body away?" Bob asked harshly. "If no one knew we were there, and I'd killed the fellow, it would have been just as safe to leave him and get away fast. Can't you see?"

"Yes. Also I can see Cad Lomax in your car. Why'd you two go there tonight?"

"I wanted to ask him about Porchino's last race," said Dorothy miserably. "There wasn't much chance to talk privately with him in the mornings at the track."

"I can understand that reason," Mr. Maddox admitted. "Did you both go to the front door and both step inside the house?"

"Yes," said Bob.

"How long were you away from your car?"

"Several minutes, I guess."

"Where, exactly, was your car parked?"

"Behind that black sedan standing in front of the garage," said Bob. "I turned in the yard, ready to drive out, before we went to the front door."

"Sedan? You mean coupe, don't you?"

Bob thought. "No. It was a sedan."

"Bob's right," Dorothy said. "It was a black sedan."

"There was a coupe there when I arrived," Mr. Maddox said with heightened interest.

"The garage was closed. I don't know what was inside," said Bob. "But I know a sedan was parked there when we arrived and when we left."

"Can you swear the garage doors were closed?"

"Yes," Dorothy also was certain.

"If that's so, you two kids were framed as cold-bloodedly as Cad Lomax was killed," said Mr. Maddox slowly. "You must have arrived about the time the body was being carried out of the house. There's some blood to prove where it was put down for a while behind some shrubbery at the rear corner of the house. Your rumble seat was backed up near there and it was dark. While you two were at the front of the house, Cad could have been dumped into your rumble seat. And away you drove with him. With luck you might not have opened that rumble seat for days. You saw a car parked in front of the garage. So a car was left there for the police to find. It must have been in the garage and was backed out before the automobile you saw drove away. That explains how the radiator happened to be cold. Whoever switched cars didn't stop to

close the garage doors again behind him."

"Mr. Maddox, I love you like a father! Dorothy, I knew there was some way out of this!"

"Hold it! All this rests on your word about the sedan and the closed garage doors! With that body in your car, all you'll get is a laugh at a clumsy alibi. And if I'm not mistaken," said Mr. Maddox grimly, "the police are going to get an anonymous note or phone call suggesting they look at your car. Probably in the morning, after Cad's name is in the headlines. That will be the payoff for the frame-up. The police will have Cad's body and the killer, and no need to investigate any further."

"I knew it was too good to be true," said Bob dully.

Mr. Maddox' cigar glowed and waned. In the starlight he was a big, brooding form staring at them. Bob and Dorothy drew close again, hands clinging. Mr. Maddox sighed.

"Where's your family, Bob?"

"Father's staying late at the studio. Mother is asleep. Liane is reading a script in bed."

"Dorothy, if you thought it would help Bob, could you go in to bed and wipe out of your mind everything that's happened tonight? Not even think about it, much less talk about it to Bob?"

"I'd try if I thought it would help Bob."

"Go in and do it," said Mr. Maddox.

There was so much calm authority in his manner that she didn't ask a question. Bob kissed her quick and hard, watched her slender figure walk quickly to the front of the house and vanish. They heard the front door close.

"Do you have a chauffeur or any servants in the house, Bob?"

"No chauffeur. The servants sleep out."

"I want a stack of old newspapers."

Bob brought them out of the garage. Mr. Maddox liberally papered floor and seat in the back of his car. He was businesslike and brusque as he faced Bob.

"We'll put Cad in my car. After I'm gone, drive your car in the garage, get a good light, soap, water, lye if you have it, and clean every square inch of the back of your car, outside and in. Then wax heavily over it. If you miss one incriminating spot, it may make things even worse than the body would. When you're through, put everything away, and wipe it out of your mind as completely as Dorothy promised. Can you do that for her? Not talk about it to her? Not lose your head if you are questioned? Not look guilty when you aren't guilty? Not even admit in your own thoughts you ever thought of going near Cad Lomax?"

"I can do that," said Bob with harsh assurance. "Anything that will keep her clear of this."

"Kind of sweet on her, aren't you, son?"

"Who wouldn't be? I'm going to marry her, no matter what happens."

"Your father know it?"

"He will when the time comes." Bob's suspicion returned. "Why are you doing this?"

"Perhaps because her father would have done it if he were here," said Mr. Maddox slowly. "And I don't like frame-ups, Bob."

A few minutes later, the big blue sedan rolled smoothly from Julius Longberg's driveway. The man at the wheel, cigar in the side of his mouth, had a calm and rather lonely look as he drove off into the maze of city streets.

CHAPTER FIVE

Hitch-Hike to Danger

AT breakfast in the Santa Rita grill, Oscar, still wan looking, glanced at the morning paper and choked on his toast.

"Joe! C-C-Cad Lomax! Murder! No body! You w-was *there*! S-says so! Las' night!"

"That so?" said Mr. Maddox blandly. "No corpse yet?"

Oscar pushed back his eggs and bacon. "More trouble!" he groaned, reading on. "They're lookin' for a dame or her boy-friend! Joe, how come you was there?"

"I wasn't walking in my sleep," said Mr. Maddox. He poured more coffee. His broad face looked free from care. "Cad liked to step out," he recalled. "And by the way, I'm going to be busy today. We won't take any bets."

"I guess not, with your name in the papers. An' *Cassidy* in it, too," Oscar muttered, reading avidly. "Joe—we oughta go to Florida."

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "You talk as though we knew where the body was."

Oscar groaned again. "If we knew that, I'd hop a freight an' keep goin'. It's murder, Joe."

"Unfortunately," said Mr. Maddox, "it seems to be. We'll sit tight and see what happens."

When Mr. Maddox drove out to the track that morning, he found the Lomax case on every tongue. Detectives had been sifting through the stable area since daybreak, asking questions about Cad Lomax.

Pop Harvey was talking to Buster Lee, a young apprentice jockey, who had evidently just worked Mr. Maddox' Kopper King. Fiddlefoot, the lanky Negro groom, was walking Kopper King under a blanket to cool him out.

"The King breezed a mile in 1:45-two," Pop announced with satisfaction. "Buster says the King is edgy now an' actin' sharp." Pop looked sharply over his steel-rimmed spectacles. "Everythin' all right this mornin', Joe?" he asked innocently.

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "As far as I know, Pop. Any more news about Cad Lomax?"

"Detectives snoopin' behind every sack of feed," said Pop. "A man opens his mouth to spit an' gets a list of questions thrown in to answer afore he knows ary stranger is about."

"I might as well ask a few, then," Mr. Maddox decided, smiling. "Since Cassidy and I were first at the scene of the crime, I'm interested." Mr. Maddox spoke to Pop and Buster Lee. "Does either of you know anything about Cad? Had he done anything unusual since he arrived here at Santa Anita? Had words with anyone? Said anything?"

"I been asked all that," Pop said. He shook his head. "I never paid no attention to Cad Lomax. If he done anythin' unusual, I'd be the last one to know. Buster an' the other jockeys seen him most."

"How about it, Buster?" Mr. Maddox asked. "Think hard."

Buster Lee was a fresh-faced, clean-eyed kid, eager to win a place in the ranks of top jockeys. He grinned self-consciously. "I ain't paid much attention to anything but my riding engagements." Buster hesitated. "Cad telephoned old Zack Ritto, his valet, Monday night, from Frisco. Cad was drunk and wild. He could hardly talk. He told Zack he'd been looking at the entries, and if that horse Frecko went to the post without his jockey carrying a whip, Zack ought to get a hundred down on Frecko's nose."

"Did Frecko's jockey ride without a whip?" Mr. Maddox asked, frowning. "I didn't notice."

"He sure did," said Buster. "Zack Ritto thought Cad was full of drunken foolishness and didn't pay no attention. He was kicking himself all over the place after Frecko won without a whip. Cad sure had a hot tip."

"No whip," Mr. Maddox muttered. "And Cad knew it meant something. That race was in the bag. Had to be. An outside horse like Frecko running with no whip, was either in that race for the exercise, or was known to be so good he didn't need a whip."

Pop grunted. "He busted fust from the gate and kept out front. He was runnin' to win."

"Does Cad ride for Ivan Bramm?" Mr. Maddox asked.

"I've got an idea about that," said Pop. "Buster, we'll be seein' you." When the little jockey was out of earshot, Pop spat. "Ivy Bramm married an Agee woman. Cad's agent is Limpy Agee. Cad coulda knowed that-away."

"Very interesting," Mr. Maddox said thoughtfully. "It gives me a rash of ideas. If Cad didn't have some solid money on Frecko, he was drunker than I think he was."

"Think he come home from Frisco with a wad of dough he won on Frecko—an' got kilt over it?"

"Could be. Pop, get to some chart books

and see if Frecko always runs without a whip. Ivy Bramm's tricks are worth study."

Ivy Bramm had brought three horses to Santa Anita. He was not around when Mr. Maddox strolled to the stalls. A groom said: "That'n on the end is Frecko. . . Yes, sir! He's a sweet'n he is."

The chestnut colt nuzzled Mr. Maddox' hand. "So you're Frecko?" said Mr. Maddox amiably. "The running fool who took a tuck in Dareska?" Frecko whinnied softly. The groom had lost interest in the visitor. "Running with quality horses this year," said Mr. Maddox. "Putting them in their place without even a whip laid on you." Mr. Maddox petted and talked. The colt's ears came forward time and again with interest.

Mr. Maddox gave a final pat and strolled to the groom. "I notice his front legs are banded."

"Uh-huh. He's got some soreness. Mr. Bramm ain't takin' chances."

"Been with Bramm long?"

"Just since he shipped here."

"You wouldn't know then if his wife is any relation to Limpy Agee, the jockey agent?" Mr. Maddox asked idly.

The sallow-faced groom shrugged. He needed a shave. He'd had a drink or two already this morning. On pay-day he'd probably have a bottle or two. "Don't know anything about Bramm's wife," he said. "I see that jockey agent and Bramm talkin' around some." He looked at Mr. Maddox narrowly. "That's Lomax' agent. You askin' more questions about the Lomax case?"

"I'm Joe Maddox who helped discover that trouble last night."

"Sure, I know who you are."

"Ever see a hundred-dollar bill?" Mr. Maddox asked idly. He produced one, folded in his big palm.

The groom licked his lips. "Here comes Bramm!" he suddenly husked, looking past Mr. Maddox.

"Why don't you get friendly with my trainer?" Mr. Maddox asked calmly as the money vanished in his coat pocket.

IVY BRAMM had a long, solemn face, drooping black mustache, a coat hanging loosely from bony shoulders. "Brothers, was that money I saw between you?" he asked harshly. He wagged a long, bony finger. "You're Maddox, the gambler! I'm a Bible-followin', God-fearin' man, who don't hold with the likes of you! Get out!"

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Ivy," he said blandly, "did Jubilo run by the Bible or the pill box?"

"Get out, Maddox! You're a corruptin', evil influence!"

"Where there's smoke, there's fire, Ivy,"

Mr. Maddox said blandly. "And you're smoking nicely. See you later."

Before Mr. Maddox reached the end of the barn, Cassidy cut across to intercept him. "Watching me?" Mr. Maddox greeted.

"Could be," said Cassidy. "Wasn't that Ivy Bramm you were talking to?"

"He says I'm a corrupting influence," Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Have they found Lomax?"

"No. They've located the owner of that canyon lodge. He's in Mexico City and doesn't know anything about Cad's affairs." Cassidy scowled. "They can't find how Lomax got home from the railroad station. No clues. His jockey agent didn't meet him. Agee is crying on everyone's shoulder over losing his meal ticket. He clears you on the visit last night. Says you told him you were going to drop in on Cad."

"Did Limpy mention why I wanted to see Cad?"

"No. I didn't bring it up, Joe, or say anything about that bill of sale McNab gave you, either."

"I wouldn't boast about that either if I were you," Mr. Maddox said with amusement. "By the way, Cassidy, you never did tell me the results of the autopsy on Dab Dab. Was one made?"

"Not exactly, Joe. The coroner and another doctor examined the body carefully. McNab's skull was fractured. The smash-up could have done it. No bullet holes or anything like that."

"But you kept after me."

"I had that letter Dab Dab wrote you. And didn't I hear you getting tough with him that afternoon at Pimlico? Then he wrote his daughter that last race was crooked. Furthermore," said Cassidy, "I still ain't sure about you, Joe. Something tells me you ain't as innocent as you act. You're just slippery."

"Confession is good for the nerves," Mr. Maddox countered. "Something tells me you aren't as smart as you think you are."

Cassidy snorted and walked away. Smiling, Mr. Maddox went back to his own thoroughbreds. Pop had not returned. Mr. Maddox watched Fiddlefoot working in slow motion. The Negro paused now and then and crooned low talk to his charges. The horses acted as if they understood.

Mr. Maddox knew what all veteran horsemen knew. No man with a white skin could get as close to a thoroughbred's heart, or understand a horse, like one of the Negro stable hands. Ragged clothes, lack of education, ignorance of the world, had nothing to do with it. There was an instinctive bond between horses and Negro handlers. Something deeper than man-given learning.

"Fiddlefoot," Mr. Maddox called abruptly, "come here."

"Yassuh, Mist' Joe," said Fiddlefoot, grinning. He was a lanky, coal-black man with large feet and hands, broad flat nose, big ears, and a generous-lipped mouth that could cut his face in half with a grin. Fiddlefoot was usually grinning. He stayed happy. He did a bit of a tap routine over the straw-littered floor as he shambled to Mr. Maddox. "Been plenty long since Ah chomped down on one o' them bank-boy seegars, Mist' Joe. Them fifty-centers. They calls me the ten-nickel boy when Ah blows that smoke far an' wide."

Mr. Maddox laughed and handed over two of the fat black cigars. "They're a dollar now."

"Hotsy-damn! Ah's in the twenty-nickel class now. *Ummmmmm*—they smells twicet as good. Tha's a fac'!"

"If I told you to bet on a horse the first time he went to the post without the jockey carrying a bat, what would you think?" Mr. Maddox asked.

Fiddlefoot did not hesitate. "Ah think that hawse skeered o' a whip, Mist' Joe. So mebbe he fixin' to run that day. Ah spec' Ah bet him on the nose."

"Thanks, Fiddlefoot. I had the same hunch."

Pop Harvey came back a few minutes later. "Joe, I checked on every race that Frecko has run. He sure wasn't much. Got one win an' two thirds outa eighteen starts last year. He carried whip an' blinkers every race."

"Did he show any flashes of speed?"

"Nope," said Pop disgustedly. "He busted his maiden at Dade Park in as sorry a field as I ever seen charted. A Mexican jackass coulda gone sleep-walkin' in that race an' got rid of his maiden. Frecko just lasted under plenty whippin'. The chart says he led that race on the backstretch, dropped back to fourth, an' then rallied in the stretch under hard punishment an' lasted to the wire."

"So he can rally and run under the whip," Mr. Maddox murmured.

"Yep," said Pop, spitting copiously. "He come up to third next race under more hard punishment."

"Fiddlefoot!" Mr. Maddox called. And when Fiddlefoot joined them, grinning, Mr. Maddox asked: "Suppose that horse's charts showed he had rallied under the whip several times? That the only times he ever showed anything was under a hard whip? Then suppose I told you to bet him to win the first time the jockey left his whip behind? Would you put your dough on him?"

"Nawsuh! Then mah dirty dollar-bills stays right in mah shoe," said Fiddlefoot, wagging his head. "Does it take a whip to make him run, then it takes a whip. That hawse jes' laugh does he race without a whip. 'Soft stuff,' he say. 'Ah run now? Don' be foolish, jockey-boy. Where that whip? Haha! This the race Ah snoozes around an' yawns back to that good oat bucket.' Nawsuh, Mist' Joe, that ain't the hawse Ah is bettin' on."

Mr. Maddox stared dreamily at Fiddlefoot. He took the rest of the cigars from his front coat pocket. "Fiddlefoot, you've got something there."

"What hit you, Joe?" Pop asked with amazement as Fiddlefoot shuffled off, passing the cigars under his broad nose.

"I'm crazy," answered Mr. Maddox dreamily. "Be nice to that groom of Ivy Bramm's." Mr. Maddox tore a hundred-dollar bill in half. "Tell him I might want to look Frecko over on the quiet and ask a few questions. If I do, without Bramm knowing it, the groom gets the other half of the hundred. You know how to fix it up."

Mr. Maddox walked away. He made a point of passing the McNab stalls. Dorothy was there. Bob Longberg was not. Mr. Maddox doffed his hat. "Nice morning," he greeted pleasantly.

Dorothy swallowed, nodded. She had promised to sleep, but she had the look of a girl who had cried some into her pillow and found sleep elusive. An agony of questioning was in her eyes and when Mr. Maddox passed on without further words, he left a thoroughly

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unhappy girl behind. But she evidently had no news. Prying eyes this morning could not report much friendship between her and Joe Maddox.

Mr. Maddox drove back to the hotel. Oscar was in the lobby. A jerk of Mr. Maddox' head brought Oscar into the same elevator. In the suite, Mr. Maddox poured himself a drink of Scotch. When he had gulped it down, he took off his coat.

"I want to talk to the boys we lay off with in New York, Jersey City, Chicago, Frisco, St. Louis. I want to know if anyone got hooked on that Frecko race. If so, how much and who won the money. I want all the low-down it's possible to get, and I want it by to-night."

Oscar pursed his lips and whistled noiselessly. "What for, Joe? What makes you think there's a low-down? We didn't lose any. You meddlin' in somethin'?"

"I have a hunch," said Mr. Maddox. He poured a second drink and breathed deeply as he put the glass back. "But I still don't believe it," he admitted. He sat down at the writing table and scrawled a long telegram. "Send this, too."

Oscar looked at the message. "If your hunch is what this wire seems to mean, I think you're loaded with booze, or else you're slug-nutty or somethin'!"

"Who asked you to think?" Mr. Maddox replied calmly. "Get on that telephone! I'm in a hurry."

BY post-time Mr. Maddox had talked to key men from San Francisco to New York. They were men who knew every handbook of size, who could trace the streams of betting money, identify sizable winners and losers. They would be calling back until dinner time with information. Oscar waited at the hotel to take the calls.

Mr. Maddox was restless. He had heard enough over long-distance already to make him thoughtful, and his nerves were taut with a sense of impending crisis. He drove to the stable area at the track. Pop Harvey was over at the grandstand. Mr. Maddox did not waste time searching the great throng of spectators. The third race was coming up, and Pop would be watching the saddling with a critical eye. That was where Mr. Maddox located him.

"Wondered where you was, Joe," Pop said without surprise, and when they stepped aside, Pop lowered his voice. "That groom of Ivy Bramm's kinda snuck by. Took the bait you left for him. Says you c'n see the hoss most any night. Bramm never shows up after ten at night." Pop shook his head. "That groom's a booze-head with a shifty eye. Bet you he's a bad'n. Wouldn't trust him too much, Joe.

If he won't crook you, he'll get drunk an' talk." "Have to trust him, Pop. He's around the horse."

"You got me curious," Pop confessed.

"I'm twice as curious," Mr. Maddox replied.

"That Cassidy's around. He asked where you was."

"He usually does. See you later, Pop."

Julius Longberg, Bob and Dorothy were in the Longberg box. No guests today. Julius had a disturbed, fretful look when Mr. Maddox stopped for a pleasant word.

"Picking them right today?" Mr. Maddox asked.

"Just looking, Joe," answered Julius, and added: "Bob, I didn't know you knew Joe Maddox."

Bob Longberg had silently gripped Mr. Maddox' hand. He now released it and looked guilty over the slip he had made. Mr. Maddox covered blandly.

"I met Bob over at the barns. Fine son you have, Julius. I knew Miss McNab's father." Mr. Maddox chuckled. "He wasn't like you, Julius. He never let on what a charming daughter he had."

"Boasting I have to do about Bob," confessed Julius. "Dorothy doesn't need it. Look at her blush, Joe. Since when do I see a girl blush natural like that?" Julius looked grave and shook his head. "Queer you should drop by just after we got here. You wouldn't guess what was tried on these youngsters."

"A screen test?"

"No, no. I'm telling you because I see by the papers you're interested in the matter. That jockey who vanished last night—some enemy of mine, someone with a grudge, sent a tip to the police to look at my automobiles. Trying to get a smear against my name in the newspapers."

"Must have been a crackpot, Julius."

"Why pick on me?" Julius complained. "Detectives come to my office. My wife telephones that detectives are at the house. I have to rush home. Before I get there, word has come that the dead jockey has been found, shot through the back of the head."

"Where was he, Julius?" Mr. Maddox asked with quick interest.

"Out near San Fernando, under some trees."

"Surprising," Mr. Maddox murmured.

"To make it more upsetting," said Julius, "last night Bob and Dorothy drove out for a little fresh air. If the jockey hadn't been found, that malicious tip to the police might have gotten their names in the newspapers."

"That," said Mr. Maddox, "would have been bad." Bob and Dorothy were looking at him with mute gratitude, still not entirely free from apprehension. Mr. Maddox smiled

broadly at them. "They don't look like the kind who'd shoot a man in the back of the head, eh Julius?"

Bob smiled painfully. Julius Longberg threw a hand up helplessly at the idea. Dorothy turned away, teeth caught over her lower lip. You could see she was thinking of what might have happened.

Mr. Maddox was smiling as he left them. A few yards away, he met Cassidy loitering in the aisle. The smile hardened.

"I'm not surprised," said Mr. Maddox. "I could almost smell you snooping around."

"Lomax was found out near San Fernando," said Cassidy.

"The Longbergs just told me."

Cassidy showed no surprise. He evidently knew about the tip to the police.

"Joe, I was just thinking what a coincidence it is, you being so palsy-walsy with the Longbergs." Cassidy helped himself to a cigar from Mr. Maddox' coat pocket. "The police have been looking for a girl angle in the Lomax business. And there's Dab Dab's girl and young Bob Longberg. Sort of fits in, doesn't it, Joe?"

"In where?"

They were standing to one side of the crowded aisle. Cassidy looked out at the horses parading on the track for the third race. He spoke from the corner of his mouth, idly, when he looked back.

"I'm not exactly sure what fits where, Joe. But I'm more curious about it than the police. They don't know about Cad Lomax riding Porchino that last race in Baltimore."

"I doubt if they'd know what to do about it if they heard," Mr. Maddox replied. "Where can I reach you this evening if I want you?"

"Why?" Cassidy asked alertly.

"I get lonesome now and then."

"Leave a message at the Marview," said Cassidy. His smile was narrow and frosty. "I'm a comfort on a dark night, Joe."

Cassidy was smiling as they parted there in the aisle. Mr. Maddox was smiling. Each in his own way was looking forward to the evening ahead.

OSCAR had reports from several cities when Mr. Maddox got back to the hotel. Mr. Maddox studied the memo slips, commenting on them. Jack French's book in Philly lost nine thousand on Frecko's race. Staley, in New York, paid out over fifteen grand to one man. Charley Price, in Jersey City, dropped fifty-three thousand in lay-off money he held on Frecko. Some of it came from St. Louis. And in St. Louis, Dan Parker was hit for twenty-two thousand. Nick Nitto, in San Francisco, covered a thousand for Cad Lomax, and paid it before Cad left town. Cad was drunk when

he made the bet. In Chicago, Billy Beeber knows of two large books that were tapped heavy on Frecko. Doesn't know exactly how much."

"It was a steal," Oscar said.

Mr. Maddox nodded slowly, chewing an unlighted cigar, frowning as he went back over the memo slips. "Notice who won the money from Jack French and Staley?"

"Something familiar about those two names," Oscar admitted.

"Bill Stutz and J. K. Niven," Mr. Maddox read from the slips. "Sounds like Whitey Stutz and Preacher Niven who hijacked those big dice games in New York eight or ten years ago, and ended up by cutting back part of the money and muscling in with the gambling mob. They were laying three-to-one on Broadway that Stutz and Niven would be blasted inside of thirty days. Any answer to my telegram?"

"Not yet, Joe."

"I should have telephoned. Got to have that answer and quick." Mr. Maddox poured himself a drink. He was nervous and showed it, which was unusual. "I'm going down to eat," he decided. "Stay here by the phone until I get back."

Dinner was good. Mr. Maddox finished the last of a thick steak with a sigh of pleasure, mind at peace for the moment. He was reaching for the black coffee when he heard a bell-hop paging him. Mr. Longberg was telephoning.

Julius Longberg had never sounded this way before..

"Joe, they're going to arrest my boy!"

"Who is, Julius?"

"A man named Cassidy! A detective! He comes here to my house with a cast of an automobile tire track, and says it proves the roadster Bob used last night was at the place the jockey was killed! He's trying to make Bob confess now!"

"What does Bob say?" Mr. Maddox demanded.

"He won't say anything! Makes it worse!"

Mr. Maddox started as a hand jogged his elbow. It was Oscar, with a telegram. Mr. Maddox talked and read the telegram at the same time. "Is Cassidy there now, Julius?"

"Yes! He claims you know something about this business, Joe! He says Dorothy McNab is involved, too! This is terrible! I'm sending for my lawyers! But this is *murder* he's talking about!"

"Tell Cassidy I want to speak to him." Mr. Maddox read the telegram again while he waited. Oscar watched uneasily.

Cassidy's greeting was not reassuring. "Well, sucker, you weren't slippery enough."

"I won't argue with you," said Mr. Maddox

coldly. "But I'll give you one chance to avoid making an ass of yourself. This is bigger than you think."

"I'm thinking plenty," said Cassidy.

"It's bigger than Cad Lomax," said Mr. Maddox. "I told you I'd probably want to see you tonight. I think I can unravel this whole business before we go to bed."

"So do I," agreed Cassidy. He was sarcastic. "What do you think I'm doing now?"

"Acting like a fat-head as usual. Meet me at my tack room at the track before you do anything about Bob Longberg. I'll set you back on your heels."

"Look, Joe! I ain't in any mood for kidding!"

"Nor am I. Your cast of tire tracks will be good tomorrow. This is your last chance with me."

The line was silent for a moment. "I'm a sucker," Cassidy finally said. "I know I'm in a sucker. And Joe, if you doublecross me—"

"A little before ten," Mr. Maddox interrupted.

"You'd better be there," was Cassidy's final irritable warning.

Oscar had listened to one end of the conversation with growing uneasiness. "What's wrong, Joe?"

"I forgot a tire track might interest Cassidy," Mr. Maddox said shortly. "Now there's hell to pay."

"A guy called an' wanted to know if you was goin' to make a book tomorrow," said Oscar. "Fellow named Witsell."

"So!" exclaimed Mr. Maddox alertly. "*Banjo Witsell!* And he wants to bet tomorrow! I didn't know he was in town. See if the entries are at the newsstand."

They were. Mr. Maddox rapidly scanned the entries. "I thought so! Frecko's running again in the fourth. Trying to repeat that win while he's sharp." Mr. Maddox smiled grimly as he put the folded paper in his coat pocket. "Banjo's appearance sews it up. If Frecko starts tomorrow, we'll take every dollar offered. And lay-off money if any shows. Only I doubt if Frecko starts," Mr. Maddox added dryly.

"Witsell wanted to talk to you."

"Never did like him." Mr. Maddox looked at his watch. "I'm going out to the track. Turn in when you feel like it."

"I'm scared, Joe."

"Enjoy it," Mr. Maddox advised.

But driving out Sunset Boulevard, Mr. Maddox was deadly serious. He was thinking of the tragic consequences facing young Longberg and Dab Dab's girl, through no fault of their own.

Joe Maddox had lived a full life. So had Julius Longberg. They could weather trouble.

It was different with youngsters. In this business you saw all kinds of life. Sometimes greed and crookedness appeared that sickened a man, made him fighting mad. As he drove toward Santa Anita track, Mr. Maddox had that feeling.

He was a little early, so he swung up through Glendale and took Colorado Boulevard to Pasadena. He was on the boulevard when the motor began to miss and then stopped.

Mr. Maddox swore softly as he pulled over to the side of the road. The gas tank was more than half full. The starter whined patiently but nothing happened.

Automobiles were speeding by in both directions. Mr. Maddox looked at his watch. Not time enough to get a mechanic or a tow car and meet Cassidy on time. No telling what Cassidy would do if forced to wait. Probably blow the lid off everything in a burst of irritation.

Mr. Maddox tried the starter once more, stubbornly, until the battery began to weaken. He left the parking lights on, stepped out on the highway and waved down approaching car lights. The automobile stopped beside him.

"Any chance of a ride into Pasadena?"

"Hop in."

Mr. Maddox was half in beside the driver when he saw two other men in the back seat. It seemed queer to him that they should both be sitting back there when the seat beside the driver was empty. Mr. Maddox looked hard at them.

He felt the seat give way under quick movement. In that same moment he recalled that this was a black sedan. Bob Longberg had seen a black sedan at Cad Lomax' place.

In that instant the driver slugged Mr. Maddox.

CHAPTER SIX

Gee-Gee Doublecross

TIED, gagged, blindfolded, stuffed down on the car floor in back—all these impressions crept in through flashes of head pain.

The black sedan was speeding through the night. Mr. Maddox swallowed a groan and moved. A shoe toe kicked his ribs.

"Want to get slugged again, Maddox? Keep quiet!"

That told the story. The car which had stopped so conveniently to give him a lift had not been an accident. This black sedan coming along when it did had not been chance. The car's occupants knew who Joe Maddox was, and step by step they had known what would happen.

Wise in the ways of the underworld, Mr.

Maddox knew now the gas tank of his locked sedan had been tampered with. Probably doped with sugar or some such agent. He had been followed—everything neatly planned and most successful.

Cad Lomax had been callously shot through the back of the head. Joe Maddox need not expect any better treatment.

Mr. Maddox huddled quietly in the darkness. Only the occasional light of a passing automobile was visible under the edge of the hastily applied blindfold. That and the car speed put them out in the country.

The head pain was bad. Almost as sickening was the thought of Cassidy, young Longberg and Dab Dab's girl. All that had blown up. It was now too late to help anyone.

It was useless to try to guess the direction the black sedan was taking. Mr. Maddox did not know how long he had been unconscious. He judged half an hour had passed since he had come to. The other men in the car were not talking. The sedan swung off paved road, went slower over dirt ruts for several minutes, stopped apparently for a gate to be opened, then drove a short distance further, and stopped in a garage.

Someone already on the spot closed the garage doors. "Out, Maddox!" A gun prodded. A hand reached in and helped Mr. Maddox out of his cramped position. Flashlights were being used. He was guided through a door into light. He heard the soft hissing of a gasoline lantern.

"Any trouble?" the men who had brought him were asked.

"Naw. Just like we planned."

The blindfold was stripped off. Blinking, Mr. Maddox recognized a barn feedroom, dusty, cobwebby, with the look of long disuse. A bright gasoline lantern hung against the rough board wall. The first thing Mr. Maddox recognized was the bruised, puffy, unshaven face of Ivy Bramm's groom. The man sat hunched forward dejectedly on a box, wrists lashed behind him with old frayed rope. His mouth was taped shut.

One man had evidently left the automobile while Mr. Maddox had been unconscious. Mr. Maddox did not know the other two. Their type was familiar. They were easterners, young and well-dressed, hard, brittle. The man who had closed the barn doors wore overalls and a wide-brimmed western hat, but he still looked like an easterner.

Mr. Maddox surveyed them without expression. "Where's Ivy Bramm?"

One of the well-dressed young men took two halves of a hundred-dollar bill from his coat pocket.

"This punk had one of these after talking to your trainer. The rest of it was in your billfold."

"Coincidence, isn't it?"

He caught a nodded signal. The young husky in overalls slapped Mr. Maddox half a dozen times with full-armed blows that rocked Mr. Maddox and made his head spin with new waves of pain.

"That's for talking out of turn," his questioner said shortly. "Now what were you up to?"

Mr. Maddox shrugged.

"Work him over, boys."

They went to work on Mr. Maddox with fists and doubled lengths of old harness strap. He staggered against the wall, still bound, helpless, with the salt taste of blood in his mouth and their unsmiling faces etched deep in his memory.

He was reeling and half out when they stopped—and it had all been useless. The young leader, who had a scar at the right corner of his upper lip, produced Mr. Maddox' telegram.

"You dope," he said, "we knew anyway. You know what's going to happen to you for sticking your nose in other people's business?"

Mr. Maddox spat blood. He chuckled and a gun wouldn't have caught more of their attention.

"It's not what's going to happen to me, you cheap thugs," Mr. Maddox told them. "It's what's going to happen to you and Bramm and Banjo Witsell." Mr. Maddox worked his jaw, which felt loose and swollen. "And Bill Stutz and Preacher Niven," he added. He spat blood again and smiled at them.

That blood-smeared grin from the big, bruised prisoner effectively backed his words, which had struck consternation into all three men.

"Dave, you hear that?" the man in overalls demanded. "What's this guy got on the ball?"

"Nothing you can stop by getting tough here tonight," said Mr. Maddox. It was hard to recognize his own voice out of the battered mouth.

"Get it out of him," ordered the young leader.

This time Mr. Maddox went down, groggy, half-conscious. They kicked him but stopped, baffled, when the leader warned: "Don't kill him. We got to find out what to do."

THEY left Mr. Maddox there on the floor and stepped out of the feedroom. A few minutes later, the automobile drove away. The man in overalls came back, sat down on an old wooden chair, and said: "The first one of you guys bothers me gets sapped with a rod." He lit a cigarette, opened a comic magazine, and ignored them, save for a watchful look when either stirred.

Mr. Maddox closed his eyes and tried to

think. Bluff was all right, if there was any hope of backing it up. But in this case there was scant hope. Joe Maddox had all the knowledge that would back up the bluff. He could worry them, could make them hold off a little. But men like these, after big money, who thought nothing of murder, couldn't be stopped that easily.

The gasoline lantern hissed softly. The slow hours dragged. By now Cassidy must have gone into action. Bob Longberg and Dab Dab's daughter were probably under arrest. The young couple would probably have to talk. By now the police might be looking for Joe Maddox. They would like to get their hands on the man who had gently placed Cad Lomax out there under the trees in San Fernando.

There was a sardonic twist in the fact that the police would be welcome now. An approaching police siren would be the sweetest sound that could fill the night.

The automobile came back, stopping outside. The time was somewhere between midnight and dawn. The young man who came in was Dave, the one with the scar on his lip.

"You're to keep 'em both here," he told the guard. "The boys think he's bluffing, because he never paid this other punk the rest of the hundred."

"Everything goes through then?"

"Yeah, it's too big to drop. As soon as everything clicks, these two guys can be settled."

"Don't I get no sleep?"

"After me," said Dave. "I'm going in the house and knock off a little shut-eye. Move the car inside, and then you damn well better keep awake until I'm ready to take over."

"Don't worry about that."

The groom had stretched out awkwardly on the floor. His mouth was still taped. He was a picture of mute terror. Mr. Maddox had pretended to doze. The guard drove the automobile in the barn and came back with a half-filled point of whiskey he had evidently found in the car.

He drank and belched. "I should be losing sleep over you two bums," he grumbled. But he stayed awake.

He was watchful when dawn came and sunshine grew over the world outside. He was wide awake well after breakfast time when Dave came in, yawning.

"O.K., I'll take 'em," Dave said. "Get it while you can. There'll be plenty to do after that fourth race is run."

"Water," Mr. Maddox mumbled.

"Why waste it on you?" Dave refused indifferently. "You're a stiff already, or don't you know it?"

"You're going to like the gas chamber," Mr. Maddox said with a rusty chuckle.

Dave cursed him, and finished it off by

slamming the empty whiskey bottle at Mr. Maddox' head. His aim was poor. The bottle broke against a two-by-four behind Mr. Maddox and the broken glass showered against his back.

"Next time," said Dave, "I'll use a club! Keep quiet!"

The slow hours dragged. Now and then Dave went out into the sunshine. There was a dusty window with a broken pane through which he looked every few minutes while he was out.

Mr. Maddox dozed uncomfortably on the floor. Now and then he moved aching muscles and bones. There was no comfortable position on the rough board floor with wrists tightly bound behind and ankles roped. The guard had tied the ankles of both prisoners before daybreak.

By the sun's position outside the window, Mr. Maddox judged that it was noontime. The traffic would be getting heavy at Santa Anita about now. Gay thousands would be filling grandstand and clubhouse. At the barns, activity would grow around dozens of horses who would race today. The eastern tracks were already running. In the big eastern cities betting was rising to the day's peak. The Santa Anita bets would be starting in those eastern books.

Dave came in for a few minutes. He was restless, and he needed a shave. After a while he went outside. Several times he looked through the window, then walked around to the front of the barn and came in again.

The groom's eyes widened. He twitched and stirred with fright as Mr. Maddox heaved silently to a sitting position and brought his hands stiffly around to the front with frayed rope ends falling off.

Mr. Maddox smiled thinly, gestured with the jagged broken neck of the whiskey bottle. His wrists were raw and scratched from working the jagged edges of glass against the rope. But there was nothing wrong with his hands. Several quick strokes with the broken glass freed his ankles. Mr. Maddox groaned softly as he stood up, staggering for an instant. He knew what he wanted, and he picked it up from the floor. He was waiting beside the low feedroom door with a length of the old harness strap in his hand when Dave stepped in.

The looped strap jerked tight around Dave's neck. A yell dwindled to a gurgle as the strap bit deep around his neck and he was yanked helplessly against Mr. Maddox' lifted knee.

"When I said gas," Mr. Maddox grunted, "I meant gas, friend. For murder!"

OSCAR answered the telephone. His voice broke in relief. "What happened, Joe? Where are you?"

"Never mind. Talk quick. I'm in a hurry."

Do you know if you are being watched?"

"I don't know. But my nerves are givin' out, Joe. That Cassidy turnin' me out in the middle of the night, askin' questions. Both of us worryin' about you."

"Cassidy worrying about *me*?"

"You call it that," said Oscar. "An' the dough comin' in on that Frecko. Banjo Witsell bet eight grand to win an' ten to show."

"Just a minute!" Mr. Maddox said sharply. "Have the police been there looking for me? Anything about me in the papers? Or Bob Longberg's arrest?"

"Don't know what you're talkin' about," said Oscar. "Cassidy had an alarm put out for your auto. It was found parked on Colorado Boulevard, an' not even a house near. Cassidy says somethin' happened to you."

"What did you tell him?"

"Nothin'," said Oscar. "First I see your body, then I talk to Cassidy. He keeps callin' back about you, and wants me to telephone the Masterton office if I hear from you."

"Call the Masterton office and tell them I've been on an unused chicken ranch out toward San Bernardino. I'm calling from a phone booth at a drugstore. I don't think I can reach the track before the fourth race starts. Tell them I'm almost certain there's crooked work in that fourth race. The stewards can prove it if they order Frecko's jockey to carry a whip and use it."

"That sounds screwy, Joe!"

"Tell the Masterton Agency to have Cassidy or some of their men meet me at the main gate. I'm bringing two hoodlums who held me prisoner last night, and the car that was used by the killers of Cad Lomax. And that," said Mr. Maddox, "isn't screwy. If I know the Masterton people, it'll get action out of them."

The black sedan was parked around the corner from the drugstore from which Mr. Maddox had phoned. The nervous groom clutched an automatic and watched the two men sitting stiffly in the back seat. They were not blindfolded or gagged but their wrists and ankles

were bound firmly together with baling wire.

Mr. Maddox gave them a bland look as he slipped behind the wheel. "Boys," he said, "cheer up. We're going to the races."

Cassidy and four other Masterton detectives were waiting at the main gate when Mr. Maddox wheeled in. Cassidy showed the effects of a sleepless night, but his jaw dropped when he looked in at Mr. Maddox.

"Joe, were you in a wreck?"

"I was wrecked." Mr. Maddox chuckled through swollen lips "Those hoods in the back did it. Has the fourth started?"

"Just about now. That jockey's carrying a whip. I went out on a limb there with the stewards, Joe. Do you know what you're doing?"

"We'll see. The other fellow is Ivy Bramm's groom—he was snatched, too. The guns these hoods carried might be of interest. Take the lot of them."

"The race, Joe! The race!"

"Let's watch it," invited Mr. Maddox. "I want a glass of cold beer."

Cassidy had a roadster by the gate. The other detectives took charge of the sedan, and the roadster rushed Mr. Maddox and Cassidy across the great parking space. The afternoon sun was bright, the track was beautiful, and Mr. Maddox talked sober facts.

"What about Bob Longberg?"

"I been waiting," said Cassidy. "When you didn't show up last night, I almost went back to get him. But I thought I'd get you first. When your car was found where no guy in his right mind would leave it—well—I started to worry."

"Thirty years knowing you—and you finally worried about me," said Mr. Maddox with a wry smile.

Cassidy looked embarrassed. "I have to be a dope now an' then. What about that black sedan?"

Mr. Maddox told him about the sedan that had been parked in front of Cad Lomax' garage. "Those two kids had no more to do

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with Cad's death than you or I. Cad evidently was killed because he was dangerous. He knew something."

They were out of the car now, entering the clubhouse enclosure. "What did Lomax know?" Cassidy asked impatiently.

A low massed roar lifted from the great concrete stands. Mr. Maddox glanced at his watch. "There they go," he said, and he was tense and worried. "Let's see what happens."

Cold beer forgotten, they edged through the crowd to a point from which they could see horses racing into the stretch turn. The loudspeakers were blaring—"Dulane is leading by half a length . . . Frecko is second . . . Cadwin is gaining third . . . Prince Tartar fourth. . ."

And then into the stretch—"Dulane has the rail by half a length . . . Frecko and Cadwin neck and neck, bearing out into the stretch. . ."

"That Frecko gets it again if he's got another finish like the last one," guessed Cassidy. "Who's that other one coming up fast? Prince Tartar?"

The crowd was beginning to shout. Cassidy was caught by the excitement. Mr. Maddox, big, battered, intent, watched horses and jockeys grow in size as they rushed nearer through the stretch.

The loudspeakers cried it—"Frecko is second . . . Prince Tartar third by a head and gaining. . ."

Jockeys were whipping their mounts. Frecko's jockey went to the whip, and then it happened. The voices coming over the loud speakers were impersonal about it. "Prince Tartar taking the lead . . . Cadwin is second . . . Dulane is third . . . Frecko is fourth—correction, Star Catch is fourth. . ."

Mr. Maddox sighed softly. He joggled Cassidy's arm. "Frecko loses. Take me out there on the track. And get word to the stewards to hold up the mutual prices for a few minutes. I think there's going to be a refund to some ticket holders."

"Joe, do you know what you're talking about?"

"I think so."

"I'll take a chance. God help us both if you don't."

A MASTERTON man could get quick action at a track. Massed thousands in the stands were milling about, waiting for the official results to flash. Only idle curiosity was given the handful of track officials who, with Cassidy and Mr. Maddox, gathered about the horse Frecko.

Bandages were unwrapped from Frecko's front legs at Mr. Maddox' direction.

"I wired the Registrar's office of The Jockey Club for Frecko's description and markings," explained Mr. Maddox. "He's a dark chestnut,

with a star on the forehead and no marks on coronets, fetlocks, or front legs."

The bandages came off. Wade Johnson, one of the stewards, said rather impatiently: "Well, Mr. Maddox, we have here a horse with a star, and no marks on fetlocks, coronets or front legs." And then Johnson said: "What's in that bottle?"

Mr. Maddox was applying liquid to his handkerchief. "Chemical," he said. "Bought it at a drugstore on my way here." Mr. Maddox knelt, grunting from stiff muscles. He gave Cassidy a glance. "Brother," he said, "try prayer. This tells the story." He began to rub the wet handkerchief on the inside of the horse's right front leg.

The cloth began to turn dirty brown. Soiled white hairs began to show in a narrow stripe on the inside of the leg. Mr. Maddox stood up with a great sigh of relief.

"I thought those bandages were fakes," he told Wade Johnson. "The horse didn't need them. They merely served to cover up that leg. My wire to the Registrar's office also asked about a horse named Porchino who was killed last fall in the wreck that killed Dab Dab McNab. Porchino was a perfect match for Frecko, except for a thin stripe inside his front leg. And in Porchino's last race at Pimlico last fall," said Mr. Maddox mildly, "he quit in the stretch when Cad Lomax used the whip. Porchino was afraid of a whip and wouldn't run when it was used."

The silence had stunned depth.

Cassidy sounded hoarse. "Joe, do you know what you're saying?"

"You keep asking that," said Mr. Maddox calmly. "Wake up. You saw this horse upset all his previous form and win as a long-shot without a whip. You just saw him quit under the whip, the way you saw Porchino quit at Pimlico. Do I have to draw you a picture?" Mr. Maddox spoke sharply to the horse. "Porchino!" Ears came forward with interest. "He knows his name," Mr. Maddox said to Wade Johnson.

Cassidy still sounded hoarse. "I saw that dead horse in the wrecked truck. McNab started from Pimlico with Porchino. If this horse is Porchino, he was taken out of McNab's truck before the wreck. That means the wreck was faked! Dab Dab was murdered!"

"Banjo Witsell got greedy when he saw what he'd sold Dab Dab for peanuts," decided Mr. Maddox. "He guessed what Dab Dab had discovered. A whip was what made Porchino dog it on the track. Banjo bribed Cad Lomax to use a whip in that Pimlico race, against Dab Dab's orders to Cad. Porchino quit again. Banjo had proof that Porchino was a great horse if he wasn't whipped. Dab Dab guessed Banjo was behind Cad Lomax using the whip

and losing the race. That's why Dab Dab was sore at Banjo, and why he wrote his daughter he was crooked out of the race."

"Murder!" said Cassidy.

"Banjo must have looked hard to find a horse almost exactly like Porchino, and an owner willing to gamble for big money," said Mr. Maddox. "Ivy Bramm had the horse and was the man. No doubt he and Banjo had the proper gambling contacts. Dab Dab must have been followed as he left the track. The rest was easy, with the proper hoodlums to do the work.

"Dab Dab was stopped and killed, and the horses switched. Then Dab Dab's truck was set on fire and run off the road. What fool would ever suspect Ivy Bramm, here in California with his own horse, of having any connection with Dab Dab McNab? The gamblers were all set, the money was put out with the big books, and Bramm's horse upset the form sheets. Only this time," said Mr. Maddox grimly, "no one was taking a chance. The jockey was given strict orders to ride without a whip."

Wade Johnson had a hard, stern look. "We'll refund to ticket holders on this ringer," he said. "Mr. Cassidy, you'll take the necessary steps?"

"Some of them have already been taken," said Cassidy. "The rest is duck soup. We know the guy we want, even for the murder of Cad Lomax. Cad either guessed this horse was Porchino, or figured he was like Porchino and afraid of a whip. Cad let it out when he telephoned his valet from San Francisco.

When the valet told it, Cad's number was up. He was evidently met at the train; or the killers caught up with him as soon as he got home."

"All that's up to you Masterton men," Johnson said. He hurried away.

"I've got to find Julius Longberg and tell him his future daughter-in-law owns a valuable horse," said Mr. Maddox. "Tear up that bill of sale, Cassidy, and forget you ever saw it. She owns all the horse."

"Why not tell her instead of Longberg, you dope?"

"Because," said Mr. Maddox ruefully, "I've solved myself out of three grand I've got to refund to Julius Longberg on a race that was won by this ringer. Julius didn't lose honestly."

"So you admit taking a bet?"

"I don't admit anything you can't prove." Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Did you get any sleep last night?"

"No."

"Then I did unravel this whole business before we went to bed, as I promised. It all worked out very neatly."

Cassidy stepped close, lowering his voice. "Not all of it, Joe. How did Cad Lomax' body get out where it was found?"

Mr. Maddox chuckled again as he turned to leave.

"I don't admit anything you can't prove, Cassidy. And don't try to prove that. You'd only make an ass of yourself."

Cassidy made the great gesture. "For once," he said, "I believe you. Good luck, Joe."



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THE BONES OF BARNABY BLISS

By **C. WILLIAM HARRISON**

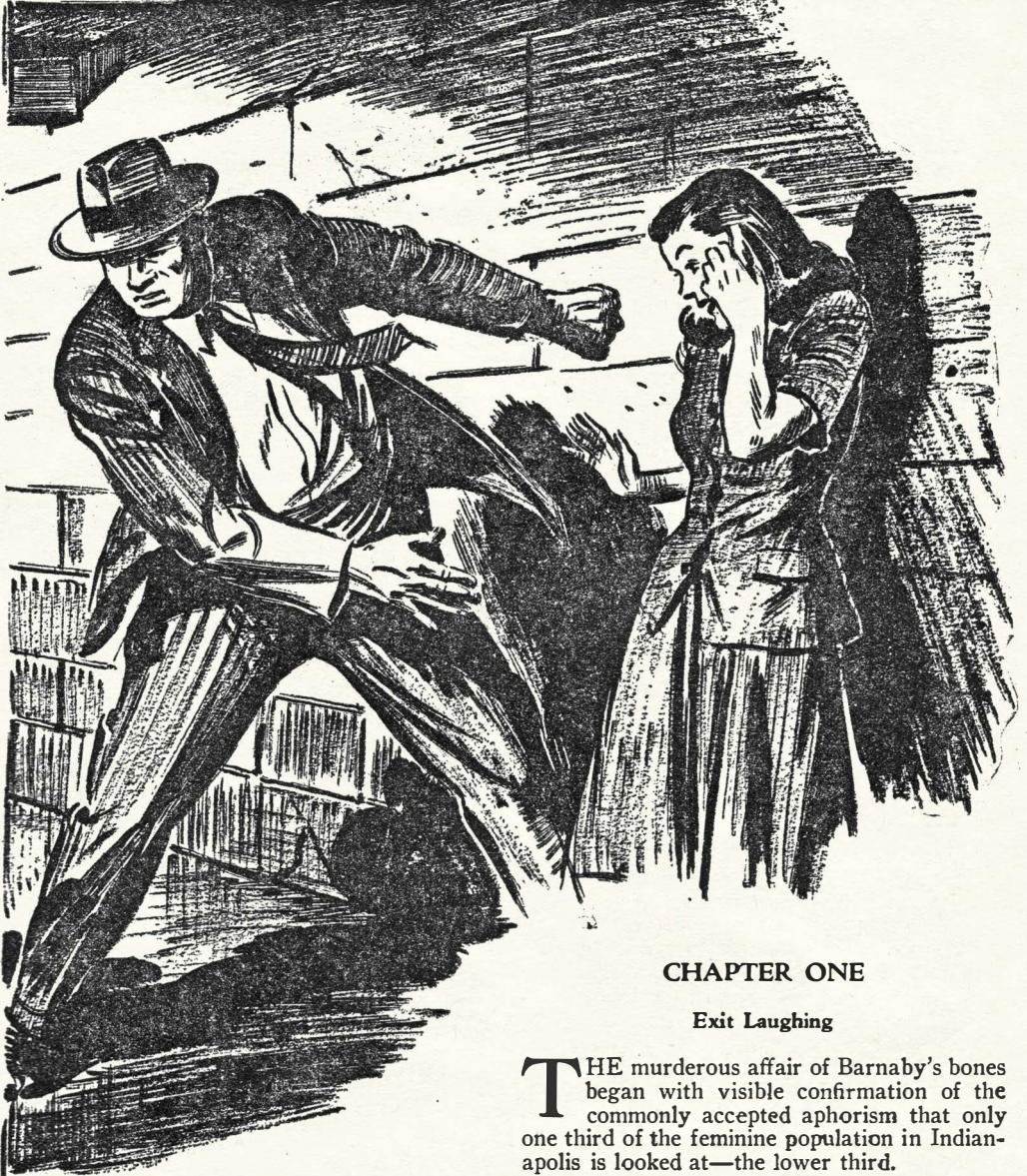
Author of "Bring Your Own Coffin," etc.



The man yelled and lunged toward them. Hannibal Smith pushed the girl to one side, stepped past her, slowed the man's rush with an outstretched hand.

A Hannibal Smith Novelette

Hannibal Smith's thoughts were placidly wandering ten years and ninety pounds back into his past, and then his office door opened and the legs walked in. The legs—attached to a luscious feminine torso—had a problem. Someone was stealing her bones! The fact that the date was April 1st made the whole thing savor of an April Fool's joke. Smith soon found plenty of funny business, all right, but—outside of the corpse that died laughing—none seemed to be of the humorous kind.



CHAPTER ONE

Exit Laughing

THE murderous affair of Barnaby's bones began with visible confirmation of the commonly accepted aphorism that only one third of the feminine population in Indianapolis is looked at—the lower third.

Hannibal Smith was comfortably seated on the small of his back, with his legs bridging the distance between his tilted chair and the edge of his desk, a living picture of Buddha in Repose. The scrapbook with its faded clippings and news photographs was propped on the bulge of his ample stomach, while his mind idly recalled the vanished glory of his old ring days. He was, as it was the nature of this fat man to be, thoroughly at ease. His thoughts were placidly wandering ten years and ninety pounds back into his past—and then the outer door of his office opened and the legs walked in.

Peering over the dog-eared pages of the scrapbook, Hannibal Smith saw the feet first. Small feet daintily clad in heelless, toeless and, he thought idly, almost shoeless shoes. It cost a lot of dough to pay for so much of so little leather, he reflected. The feet hesitated just inside the door, one toe nervously tapping the hardwood floor.

Hannibal Smith lifted his eyes appreciatively. Because he was fat, forty and futile, he could unrestrainedly enjoy such beauty. Well-turned ankles tapered gracefully to beautifully rounded calves.

"Hello," he said to the legs.

He raised his eyes, and then said hello to the girl. What he saw was a fitting accompaniment to the legs. Her features were nice enough to wear in any kind of company. Nice lips, nice eyes, nice hair. Very nice.

She said in a tone that was faintly uncertain, definitely anxious: "I'm looking for Mr. Hannibal Smith."

His glance walked into her gray-blue eyes and got lost. "I'm Smannibal Hith," he answered.

He took his feet off the edge of the desk, and pushed himself erect in the chair. He shook his head. "I'm mean I'm Hannibal Smith." He had never talked like that before. He decided it was because of something he'd met.

The corpulent owner of the House of Smith studied the girl as she took the chair he offered. She was, he decided without knowing why, a girl who was acquainted with wealth as well as the necessity for earning her own living. Her beryl-colored suit complimented her dark russet hair, and its simple cut was infinitely more than simple solely because she was wearing it. She took a cigarette out of a purse large enough to hide a corpse, lit it, then sat there watching Hannibal Smith with a disconcerting directness, clearly troubled by something but not knowing how to tell it.

Finally she said in a tone that was low and agitated: "I'm so glad you were in, Mr. Smith."

It was nice to hear, but it meant nothing. She was tied up with a case of nerves, just

making words, and so Hannibal Smith played along with her, just making words. He was in no hurry. He could spend time as easily as if it were another man's money.

"I'm glad, too. If I hadn't been in, I'd be out, and when I'm out I get tired and my feet start hurting. Do your feet ever bother you, Miss . . ." He was just fishing.

"Audrey Bliss," she furnished.

"Do your feet ever bother you, Miss Bliss?"

She frowned impatiently, and shook her head. Her hands were tightly pressed together in her lap, and the strain in her interlaced fingers whitened her knuckles. Her cigarette lay forgotten on the desk ashtray.

Hannibal Smith went on placidly, speaking in his lazy, matter-of-fact tone. After all he was just making noises, trying to talk the tension out of her.

"Mine do," he said equably. "They hurt all the time. Friends tell me it's because I'm a little overweight, but what they call fat is just an elliptical illusion."

She didn't smile.

"I've tried *Symmmmm*-pathy Foot Balm—that's how they pronounce it on the radio—but it doesn't do any good. Doesn't anything at all bother you?"

He gave her the opening, which was what he had been sparring for, and she took it.

"Yes," she said quickly. "Something *has* been bothering me. It's why I came to see you—my bones, I mean."

HANNIBAL SMITH sagged perceptibly. He rubbed his ears, and wondered if his past had finally caught up with him. But he didn't feel like a punchdrunk ex-pug. He felt fine. At least he thought he did.

"My bones—that's why you've got to help me, Mr. Smith. Someone has been stealing my bones!"

Hannibal Smith just sat there and looked at her. It was all he could do, just stare. Inside the frayed brick structure which housed Hannibal Smith's Sales, Service, and Loan office, you could sooner or later witness everything from the antics of pawned penguins to the unmitigated mayhem of the athletic teams sponsored by the fat man for the benefit of the underprivileged lads from the seedier sections of the city. Hangover Hall or Hannibal's Half Acre, as it was frequently called, was the panacea for boredom, but Indianapolis' triple-chinned, triple-threat businessman had never before been visited by a young lovely with the complaint that her bones were being stolen.

Smith looked her over carefully. She had all the standard equipment, but her fixtures were strictly deluxe. Nothing missing. Nothing at all.

Someone has been stealing my bones!

"Oh, come now, Miss Bliss!" Hannibal Smith scoffed gently.

She caught his meaning, and it brought a flush into her cheeks. She managed a slender smile.

"I didn't mean *my* bones," she told him quickly. "I'm afraid I didn't make myself clear. But I've been so worried . . . What I meant was that someone has been stealing my *father's* bones."

Hannibal Smith took a tight grip on his cigar. "That's better," he breathed. "Much clearer, Miss Bliss. For a moment I was afraid I didn't understand you. As a matter of fact," he added grimly, "I still don't."

He had a way about him, this fat man of Indianapolis. If a customer got tough, Hannibal Smith could be tough. He could, if necessary walk on eggs for any timid client who came to do business with him.

But Audrey Bliss was different. She was tied in knots by an anxiety so real to her that she thought he should be able to read between the lines of her confusion.

He said gently: "Let's start this all over again, Miss Bliss. You've said hello to me, and I've said hello to you. You've told me your name, and we're old friends. I read newspapers and things, and I have a memory like last year's Democrat. You're the daughter of Barnaby Bliss, aren't you, who died about a year ago?"

She nodded.

"And he was an ethnologist?"

"An anthropologist," Audrey Bliss corrected.

"Those 'ology' sciences always did throw me," Smith grumbled. Then he became serious, business like. "Are you trying to tell me someone has been looting your father's grave, Miss Bliss?"

His bluntness startled her. "No—nothing like that!" It all came out of her then, in a swift, breathless rush.

"It was just about two years ago that my father headed an anthropological expedition into a little explored region of southeastern Utah. It was that area north of the Arizona line and west of the Colorado state line, a particularly inaccessible region. It was there that one of my father's associates, Roger Gilchrest—" She broke off.

"What?" Hannibal Smith asked.

"Disappeared." She said it sharply, impatiently.

"Ah."

Audrey Bliss said firmly: "It was simply one of those unfortunate desert accidents. Roger Gilchrest was in camp with all the rest that evening, and the next morning he was gone, vanished. He'd apparently taken a walk during the night, and become lost. No trace was ever found of him." She hesitated

briefly. "He was one of father's closest friends." Was she making it a point to impress Hannibal Smith with that fact?

Smith said nothing. He nodded, made an "of course" rumble in his throat.

Audrey Bliss went on. "Roger Gilchrest's disappearance two years ago has nothing to do with my coming here. My reason is this—Father's expedition discovered an ancient native settlement whose inhabitants had all died off hundreds of years ago. Father found conclusive evidence proving that this settlement had grown out of only five Indian men and their squaws. That is the reason for the scientific value of Father's discovery."

Hannibal Smith lifted a shaggy brow. "Come again?"

Audrey Bliss explained. "For some reason, these five Indian men and their squaws had been banished from their tribe. They had been forced to live alone and like it. They had raised children during the years following, and their children had raised children, and no outside reinforcement had been given to the original stock. Discovering that lost colony gave modern science a rare opportunity to study the results of nearly a century of inbreeding. Father unearthed their skeletons, five hundred of them, and brought them home with him. It is those bones that someone has been stealing from me."

Hannibal Smith relaxed. So that was all there was to it, a simple case of larceny. He wagged his round head.

"There, you told it after all. Simple, wasn't it?"

"No, it isn't," Audrey Bliss told him quietly. "Because those bones are of no earthly value to the person who has been stealing them. He couldn't sell them, and a few incomplete skeletons would be worthless for study. So why should he be willing to do murder to get them?"

Smith's small eyes puckered at their edges. "Is he?"

"Apparently," the girl said plainly. "At least he tried to kill me last night. And I don't want to die, Mr. Smith."

THE Barnaby Bliss home was a nice place if your taste runs to solid practicality rather than to modern frailty. It was old enough to have a lot of atmosphere, and had enough rooms and time ahead of it to collect a lot more. It had been built to last a couple of hundred years, and probably would.

It was a broad brick structure with a deep front porch, tall gables and leaded windows. Its red tile roof, well washed by rains, was of a color that no longer existed in the brick walls, long since blackened by Indianapolis smog. Smog is another name for the stuff folks breathe from air in the Hoosier capital.

Just plain, ordinary smoke and fog to you.

Towering elms and a huge sycamore crowded the sloping front lawn, adding age and aristocracy to the faded horse-and-carriage glory of the place. The house itself was large enough so that you would need a map and compass to find your wife's room at night. Hannibal Smith decided he didn't like the house. It was big, as he was big, but without a feeling of well-filled comfort. Its large windows were like the empty eyes of the dead watching him. He liked houses that smiled. This one frowned.

Audrey Bliss braked her coupe in the side driveway.

Hannibal Smith observed: "You must do a lot of rattling around, living in a house of this size."

She gave him a curious glance. "But I don't live here alone. Mrs. Gilchrest is with me."

"Who?"

"Mrs. Myrna Gilchrest, the wife of the man who disappeared on Father's expedition. Myrna has lived with me since she sold her house a few months ago."

Smith reached for his pipe, but hesitated, thinking that in its day of glory this old mansion had been a fifty-cent cigar residence. He loaded his pipe anyhow, just to be stubborn.

"Mrs. Gilchrest sold her home? Is she that hard up?"

"Myrna is worth in the neighborhood of a hundred thousand dollars."

Hannibal Smith's small eyes widened appreciatively. "That's a nice neighborhood. Then how come she sold her home?"

Audrey Bliss paused at the side entrance to the house, her glance cool and level. "You can ask a lot of questions, can't you?"

"Uh-huh. There's a little jigger inside me that keeps saying: 'Ask a question, Handy.' I often get up in the middle of the night just to ask questions. How come she sold her house?"

"Myrna saw a nice chance to make a profit."

"Ah, an opportunist."

"She didn't really need her home. It was an expensive house, and she's been alone since the disappearance of her husband."

Smith got his pipe going. "No relatives?"

"No."

"Then who'll get her money when Mrs. Gilchrest is dead?"

"I wouldn't know. Before her husband disappeared, he was named in her will as her only heir."

The fat man frowned into his pipe smoke. He wondered if a shot of Latakia wouldn't improve the mixture he was smoking.

"Has she changed her will since Roger disappeared?"

"Really Mr. Smith!"

"It's that damned jigger inside me. Has she?"

"I doubt it. In fact I'm quite certain she hasn't. She'd have no reason even to think of doing so, although after two years she is positive her husband died somewhere out there in that Utah desert. Now if you'll silence that jigger long enough we'll go inside."

They went inside.

A stairway was just inside the door, climbing in easy stages toward the second floor, and the stained glass window overlooking the upper landing made rainbows out of the morning sunlight. The walls of the anteroom they were in were the color of old parchment. The woodwork was dark oak, and there was enough of it to give a housekeeper nightmares.

A short, muscular woman was on her knees near what appeared to be a door to the basement stairway, rubbing a long fresh scar on the woodwork with a wax cloth. She straightened as they entered the anteroom, turned with a hostile movement of her shoulders. She had a shape like a sawed-off barrel. She scraped Hannibal Smith with her sharp eyes, swung her eyes to Audrey Bliss.

"He don't look like much of a detective to me, Miss Audrey." The woman's tone fitted her figure, heavy and blunt.

Audrey Bliss smiled.

Hannibal Smith murmured: "Nor do you look like a housekeeper to me, little one. You're spring's first flower, a delicate blossom of romance. Hiya, Butch."

The woman scowled. "The name's Matilda. And watch where you put your big feet while you're in this house, mister. I've had enough woodwork scratched for one day."

She swung her heavy glance back to Audrey Bliss. "It was some delivery man, miss, with a big wooden box. I told them it was too big, but you know how men are—they know everything. They scratched hell out of the door."

"Matilda, please!"

"Well, they did," the housekeeper said stubbornly. "I don't know who sent the crate, but I had it put in the bone room, down in the basement. There must have been something funny about that box, because Mrs. Gilchrest went down to look at it, and I heard her laughing a few minutes ago."

Puzzlement clouded Audrey Bliss's eyes. "Laughing?"

"Laughing like hell, miss. Never heard the likes of it in all my born days."

THEY went down the stairs, Hannibal Smith and Audrey Bliss. It was a deep, cool basement, its first large room containing an oil furnace and laundry equipment.

"Dad converted the rest of the basement into a laboratory for his work," Audrey Bliss

said. "The skeletons are stored in one of the other rooms. I'll show you."

The basement had the cool soundlessness of a cave. They moved along a concrete-walled corridor, and then turned into another passageway. Hannibal Smith saw the man first. He was a vague shape in the dim light, curiously bent and backing out of one of the doorways. His hands were empty, and an almost animal tenseness was in his slow, jerky movements.

Smith heard the startled in-take of Audrey's breath. The man heard it, too. He whirled with sudden violence and saw them. His eyes were wide, his face gray with panic.

Audrey Bliss cried out: "Bix!"

Her word didn't even touch the man. He suddenly yelled, a thin, wild sound, and lunged toward them. Hannibal Smith moved with surprising speed for a man of his bulk. He pushed the girl to one side, stepped past her, a smooth liquid flow of muscles under their layers of fat.

He said: "What's your hurry, sonny?"

He slowed the man's rush with an outstretched hand. But not for long. The man twisted away violently, his fists slugging out wildly. But it took more than common skill to strike any of Hannibal Smith's three chins.

Smith murmured: "I haven't clipped a lip for a couple of days now."

What he did was not to his liking. He slipped inside the man's swinging arms, used his left fist expertly. The man sagged, went down.

Smith turned his glance toward Audrey Bliss. "You called him Bix. Bix who? Friend of yours?"

She nodded wordlessly.

"He's got a queer way of saying hello," the fat man grumbled.

Audrey Bliss spoke in a small voice. "I can't understand what came over him. I've know Tom Bixley since we were kids. He was the son of one of Father's fellow professors at the university. Bix has been working here, studying Dad's collection to gather material for a paper he meant to write for the Academy of Science. But why he should act as he did . . ."

Hannibal Smith moved his head toward the closed door. "Is that the bone room in there?"

The girl nodded. "Mrs. Gilchrest must be inside. Maybe if we ask her, about Bix, I mean . . ."

Hannibal Smith eased the door open. He didn't go inside. He just stood there looking into the room, seeing everything with his first brief glance. Then he stepped back quietly, and closed the door.

"Mrs. Gilchrest wouldn't answer any question you asked her," he said. "She wouldn't answer you at all, Miss Bliss."

The girl's lips parted, and her fingers pressed hard against them.

"She—she's dead?" A low, halting voice. A statement more than a question.

Hannibal Smith nodded. "Very dead," he answered quietly. "Murdered!"

CHAPTER TWO

Tibia or Not Tibia

EVEN in the gray half-light of the basement corridor, Hannibal Smith could see the word make its impact upon her. Shock struck first, then some deeper emotion pulled her eyes to the unconscious man on the floor, and fear ran into her eyes.

The fat man said gently: "Don't jump at conclusions. Maybe it wasn't Bixley."

She looked up sharply, defensively. "Of course it wasn't! Bix couldn't do a thing like this." But she seemed none too certain. She asked: "How was it done?"

"All I know is what I saw in that short glance. The wooden crate, the one your housekeeper mentioned, is standing across the room. This Mrs. Gilchrest—is she tall, slender, fifty-ish, gray hair?"

Audrey Bliss nodded.

The fat man was satisfied. He said: "She's lying on the floor in the middle of the room. Whoever killed her wasn't very nice about it. He simply picked up one of those old bones lying around in there, and let her have it. The bone is lying beside the body, with blood on one end. Mrs. Gilchrest's head—you wouldn't want to see how it is now."

He shrugged his meaty shoulders. "We might as well get the police here."

Fright ran into the girl's eyes. "Police—but must we?"

"It's customary when there's been a murder."

The girl's hands fluttered, like anxious birds. "But you're a detective. Can't you—" She didn't finish.

"Hide the body?"

"I didn't mean that. Only when the police come, they'll think—they'll think Bix did it."

"That's what I think."

"But he couldn't have!" she cried out. "If you knew Bix, you'd know he couldn't have."

Smith answered grimly: "All I know is how he acted coming out of that room. He was scared, and he tried to break away from us. A man doesn't act that way without good reason. Now suppose you run along like a good girl and phone the police."

Audrey took a quick step back from him. She said: "No."

"Then I'll do it," Hannibal Smith snapped.

He started past her, but her voice reached out and pulled him to a halt. "Don't try it,

Mr. Smith." A very soft voice, smooth and clear, yet firm. The fat man turned.

He said: "You're irresistible, sweetheart. Where did you get that gun?"

"From my purse."

"You wouldn't really shoot an innocent little fat man like me, would you?"

"Do you want to take a chance on that?"

He declined, watching her narrowly. She was cute as a kitten with a ball of yarn. But her mouth was firm, her eyes all defiance, and she was gripping the right end of the gun.

He lifted his meaty shoulders philosophically. "All right, it's your funeral. What's on the program?"

She said plainly: "You're the detective. Do what I hired you to do—detect."

The fat man smiled weakly. "What do you want me to solve, a master crime or something nice and simple?"

"Don't be facetious."

"I'm not, never was. All those guys died with Mussolini."

"Don't be funny."

His tone roughened. "What the devil do you expect, lady? There's a murdered woman in the next room, and police don't like murderers. I don't like murderers. You shouldn't like murderers, but you're protecting a damn good candidate for one."

"I don't think so," she answered steadily.

"You love him—you're putting your heart before the corpse." The fat man's pipe was dead, and he started to reach into his pocket for a light. Her hand tightened dangerously on the gun. He said plaintively: "All I wanted was a match."

He got his match, and put fire to the tobacco. "Don't be a fool, sis. Let the police decide who is or isn't guilty."

"No."

Smith pulled deeply on the briar. He didn't like the taste of the smoke and coughed it out. "All right, lady, I tried to put you straight, only you wouldn't have it. I'm a peaceful guy. I like to sleep nights without having cops bust in on me. I don't like killers, I don't like corpses, and I don't like to work for a client who pulls a gun on me. So I quit. I resign."

He touched the brim of his hat. "I hope I don't see you again sometime."

But it wasn't as easy as that. She didn't let him turn away. Her mouth tightened, and desperation ran wildly into her eyes. The fat man felt his stomach muscles crawl. He didn't like desperate women with guns in their hands. They might shoot without really intending to, but a victim of an accidental shooting was buried just as deep as one who had been willfully killed.

"Take it easy, lady," he said with a quick hoarseness.

She said grimly: "You're not going anywhere, Mr. Smith. You're going to stay right here and detect, and I'll be with you all the time."

He tried to soften her. "All the time?"

"All the time, Mr. Smith."

The fat man said: "This is going to be embarrassing for one of us. There are times when a man wants to be alone."

When that time comes," the girl told him, "you can be alone. There's only one door to that room, and I'll be waiting outside it."

SMITH took young Tom Bixley with them, dragging the unconscious man by the feet. The laboratory was not a large room, perhaps twenty by thirty feet in dimensions. A work table ranged around two sides, built flush against the concrete walls. A desk and large filing cabinet were in one corner, and nearby were several paperboard cartons about thirty inches long and half as wide and deep. Smith walked to them, pried one carton open. He saw age-yellowed bones inside, an empty skeletal head that leered up at him. He leered back at it.

"Same to you, bud," he muttered. He closed the carton, and prowled around the lab, looking at everything just the way the books said to do. He glanced around to find Audrey Bliss staring in fixed horror at the body on the floor.

He said: "It's not nice, is it?"

She backed away as he approached the body, the small gun in her hand following him warily. He would jump her at the first opportunity and get that gun, but he didn't want to crowd his luck that much now. He bent over the dead woman, hating this part of the job. He hated murder, the sight of life so suddenly and cruelly ended. It sickened him.

But more than that he hated murderers. He hated men who schemed and plotted and struck without warning. They were men who would not stand up and fight according to the rules. In the ring they would have used gouging fingers, the rabbit punch, the knee blow, and all the other dirty tricks. Hannibal Smith had only a deep contempt for all that.

He couldn't tell from the position of the woman's body which way she had been facing when the murderer struck her down. She was in the middle of the room, and the large wooden crate the housekeeper had mentioned was a short distance away.

A bone had been the murder weapon, a bone like several others lying on the laboratory table. A long bone, strong and yellowed by age, with fresh blood on one knobby end. Hannibal Smith's knowledge of the human structure was pretty vague but it looked like an upper leg bone to him.

A single blow had sufficed, a blow that had been swiftly and expertly executed just above the woman's left temple. There was little blood. Smith took a laboratory apron from a wall peg and spread it across the woman's face, then resumed his slow prowling of the laboratory.

He followed no definite pattern for this kind of work. His methods were so oblique and unorthodox that he was often as surprised at the results they brought as the onlooker. He was a lazy man whose rules for operating consisted of thoroughness but with a minimum of effort.

The entire length of the table was littered with scientific paraphernalia—trays and stacks of record cards, calipers and accession registers, a bottle of India ink, a dusty copy of Gray's *Anatomy*. There were miscellaneous bones on the table, each neatly labeled and catalogued by measurements and Latin words the fat man could not have sneezed, let alone pronounced.

Smith turned to the girl. "I thought you told me your father's collection consisted of about five hundred skeletons."

She nodded. "Five hundred and two, to be exact. They are all stored in the next room, where Tom Bixley worked. That is, all but the eleven which were stolen from me."

Smith murmured: "Mother Hubbard could have fed a lot of dogs with what you say are in the next room." He glanced toward the unconscious man on the floor. Tom Bixley showed no indication of coming to.

The fat man turned away, rounded the end of the table. He opened the door and went into the next room, followed closely by Audrey Bliss.

This was a somewhat smaller laboratory equipped much the same as the one in which Mrs. Gilchrest had been murdered. It contained a lot of bones, but no dead bodies. Paperboard cartons were stacked like cordwood about the room, each carton containing the remains of some ancient relative of the skeletons in the main laboratory, each waiting its turn to be examined, measured, and then filed away for future study.

There was a small desk in one corner with an open file cabinet near it. The desktop was littered with small bones, a disorder of scribbled notes. Smith picked up one of the papers. It bore Tom Bixley's name and the title: *The Physiological Aspects of . . .* The fat man closed his eyes to the rest of it.

He stood there, trying to get the picture of that instant when death had struck down Mrs. Myrna Gilchrest. Tom Bixley had been working at this desk, so he must have heard, muffled by the closed door and concrete walls, Mrs. Gilchrest's strange burst of laughter, perhaps even the sound of the murder blow

being struck. If that were so, and young Bixley had been working at the time of the murder, what then? Hannibal Smith didn't know. He was trying to build up a new theory on the assumption that Tom Bixley was innocent, and nothing added up. He was trying to say up was down, and getting nowhere fast.

HE turned impatiently to the girl. "Is there any other way out of this room or the outer laboratory?"

She shook her head.

Smith said almost harshly: "Then for the love of Moses, what more do you want, Bixley was within twenty feet of Mrs. Gilchrest when she was murdered, and we were at the top of the basement stairs. We came down in time to see him slipping out of the room. There can only be one answer. Bixley is it."

The girl shook her head. "I've known Bix since we were kids. We're to be married next month. He couldn't have done it."

"Stop tripping over your heart," the fat man snapped.

"Stop straining my patience," she snapped back at him. "Bix is innocent, and you're going to prove it even if I have to—" She motioned with the gun. "See what I mean, Mr. Smith?"

He did, but he didn't like it.

She said: "Even if Tom had murdered Mrs. Gilchrest, he would never have tried to kill me."

She brought back into the fat man's mind what she had mentioned in his office about an attempt having been made on her life. He had glossed over that at the time, attributing her statement to the too vivid imagination of a worried girl. Now he wanted to know more about it.

She said quietly: "About a week ago I noticed that five of the skeletons were missing from Father's collection. I asked everyone about them—Matilda, Tom Bixley, Martin Duvall . . ."

"Who is Duvall?"

"He's curator of a large eastern museum, the man sent here to buy the Bliss collection. He is authorized to pay thirty thousand dollars for it if the collection is intact. But he'll only pay a fraction of that—five thousand—if any of the skeletons are missing."

"That's a big knock-down."

Audrey Bliss went on. "I even asked Mrs. Gilchrest and Richard Milner, who is my family attorney, but no one knew anything about those missing skeletons. The next day I made another count, and six more were gone. I knew then somebody was stealing them. Why I don't know, because those few skeletons would be worth little if anything at all.

"The next night I hid here in the room to watch. If the thief came in again I intended

to turn on the light and see who he was."

Smith murmured: "You have more nerve than sense."

She continued: "Shortly after midnight I heard someone come through the door. I punched the light button, but whoever he was he had pulled the switch in the main box. I couldn't get any lights, but he heard the button click. He jumped for me, almost caught me. He had a gun, and shot at me."

Smith's eyes hardened.

"He shot at me twice, and when I screamed he ran."

"Did you report this to the police?"

She shook her head.

The fat man growled: "You don't believe in cops, do you, sis?"

"It isn't that. I just didn't want to—" She didn't seem to know how to finish it, so Hannibal Smith did it for her.

"You were afraid they might actually track down the man who tried to kill you, the one who had been stealing the bones. You thought he was someone you knew, but you didn't want to be certain. Is that it?"

She nodded hesitantly.

"Who?"

She didn't answer.

Smith said softly. "You don't have to answer that one. A woman doesn't try to protect a man unless she loves him. It was Bixley."

A reluctant word. "Yes."

"Why?"

She held her silence.

Smith exploded "You have some reason to suspect him. For heaven's sake, lady, cooperate. I can't pull rabbits out of a hat. Give me something to work with."

SHE told him then, slowly, uncertainly. "A number of years ago Tom Bixley's father was a fellow professor of Dad's at the university. Dorance Bixley made an expedition into the interior of Asia, and brought back what he pronounced to be the 'missing link.' His theory got publicity all over the country, but my father and Roger Gilcrest—Myrna's missing husband—examined Professor Bixley's discovery and proved it to be nothing more than a clever fake made up of human bones and ape bones. Some assistant of Professor Bixley's had undoubtedly done this as a joke, but had gone too far. No one believed Dorance Bixley had tried to put across a fraud, but having his widely publicized theory exposed as false ruined him. He was an old man, and he died a short time later."

Hannibal Smith said: "Ah." Then he went on forcibly: "Young Bixley grew up hating your father and Roger Gilcrest. He wanted revenge, but before he could have it Roger Gilcrest disappeared in the Utah desert and

he was frustrated again when your father died. So he took out his hatred on you and Mrs. Gilcrest.

"He knew the Bliss collection was worth a lot of money to you intact, so he stole several skeletons to kill the value. Then he murdered Mrs. Gilcrest either because that was part of his plan or more probably because she happened down here today while he was preparing to steal some more of the Bliss collection."

Audrey Bliss said stubbornly: "I won't believe it."

Smith's small eyes hardened. "Then I'll give you so much evidence you'll have to believe it. His fingerprints are on that bone used on Mrs. Gilcrest—I'll bet on it. And I'll wager we'll find the stolen skeletons hidden somewhere at his home."

Having the gun in her hand, the girl refused to waver. The telephone rang in the outer laboratory. She backed through the open doorway, followed by the fat man.

"You answer it," she ordered.

He did. It was the housekeeper's voice on the other end of the wire. "Where's Miss Bliss?"

Smith looked at the gun in the girl's hand. He said: "She persuaded me to take this call."

Matilda barked at him. "Tell her it's them express men here again. They said their office told them they'd delivered that box to the wrong address. They want to pick it up."

Smith passed on the message to Audrey Bliss. She said impatiently: "Have them come back later."

Smith relayed this to the housekeeper. Matilda's glare was effective but unladylike. "Come back later my eye! They scratched the woodwork once when they took that box down there. If they scratch it again getting it out, I want to be around to give them hell. I'm sending them on down."

Smith cradled the phone. He said dryly: "Matilda, it seems, has a mind of her own. The express men are coming down, and they'll just love to see the body lying there on the floor. It'll give them something to talk about when they phone the cops."

Audrey Bliss answered grimly. "They won't see the body."

Hannibal Smith's eyebrows lifted in an expression of exaggerated curiosity. "You know a good way of making bodies disappear?"

"I know a good way to make boxes disappear out of a room," she answered. "A fat man could do the trick nicely."

It was a large crate, about four feet high and equally deep, with boards set tight together and a sign that said: *This side up. Handle with care.* It weighed close to a hundred and fifty pounds, and Hannibal Smith

did not handle it with care. He put his weight against it, slid it through the door Audrey Bliss held open, and brought it up sharply against the wall of the outer corridor. He felt whatever was in it shift under the impact. The two express men came down the corridor, followed by the housekeeper.

One of them asked: "Did you ever have an Acme Development Company crate delivered here before by mistake?"

Audrey Bliss shook her head.

The man peered at the shipping tag. "It's got your Meridian Street address on it, but whoever shipped it phoned the office and said it should have gone to the same number on Meridian Place. It's mistakes like that what break the backs of freight hustlers."

They lugged the box back down the corridor, followed belligerently by the housekeeper. Audrey Bliss was reaching toward the closed laboratory door, and what Hannibal Smith did appeared like an accident. He turned toward the door, seemed to stumble, and pitched against the girl. He didn't catch his balance easily, and his weight carried her back against the corridor wall. He heard her quick, startled cry, but he didn't take his weight from her. She struggled frantically, but he wouldn't let her get her hand out of the coat pocket.

"I'll take that gun now," he said softly.

But when he got it, he could have blushed. It was only a trick cigarette holder.

He said, still softly: "If you care enough about young Bixley to risk a bluff like that, I'll string along with you, lady. I'll show you just how wrong you were about him."

CHAPTER THREE

Come Home to Die

THE furniture in the drawing room was massive—old but nice. It was a room where you could call in a lot of friends, smell a cork or two, and have yourself a time without worrying about breakage. A large, solid, airy place that had been little touched by modern design. With its huge cut-glass chandelier, its deep-toned walls and broad stone fireplace, there was about this room a quiet and ever-present memory of elegance and gentle breeding, of bustles and old lace.

Young Bixley sat in one of the heavy chairs, his head in his hands. Audrey Bliss stood near him, as though her mere presence would protect young Bixley from what was coming.

A feeling of impotent anger had been rising strongly in Hannibal Smith since they had locked the door of the murder room in the basement and come upstairs.

Tom Bixley's story had been simple out not easy to take. He claimed he had been

working in the second lab at the time of the murder. Yes, he had heard Mrs. Gilchrest's strange burst of laughter but he had been too engrossed in his work to be curious. No, he had not heard the sound of the murder blow being struck—the heavy oaken door between the two rooms had been closed. He had known nothing about the murder, he claimed, until he had gone into the main lab to borrow some calipers to use in the measurement of a bone he was studying.

He had discovered Mrs. Gilchrest on the floor with the side of her head caved in, and he had bent over her, feeling for a pulse that did not exist. Yes, he had picked up the murder weapon, the bone—he didn't know why. It was the first time he had ever seen a murdered person, and the sudden cruel violence of this had knocked all reasoning out of him. He had picked up the bone, and dropped it instantly in horror. All he had thought of afterwards was escaping from that room. His mind flogged by panic, he had wanted only to get away from that dead, staring face.

Hannibal Smith glanced at Audrey Bliss, and saw a girl too much in love to be reasoned with. He picked up the phone, dialed police headquarters, and asked for Sam Webb, of Homicide. He reported the details of the murder, and listened to the lieutenant's derisive snort.

"Bliss and Gilchrest are two of the oldest family names in the city, and they don't go in for murder," Sam Webb scoffed. "What is this, Handy, another of your fool jokes?"

"Not this time."

"You know what today is, Handy?" the lieutenant jeered. "It's April first—Fool's Day. Last year you telephoned you had a man locked in the can at your place, and it turned out to be Prince Albert. Report some other murder, Handy, and I'll believe you."

Smith cradled the phone. "I tried anyhow." He looked grimly at Tom Bixley. "Let's have a look at your house," he said.

It was a modern little frame-and-stucco job, just large enough to play dolls in. They searched the house and basement, and in the garage they found what Smith had known they would find. The missing paperboard cartons containing the eleven skeletons were stacked in one corner of the garage, and pulling the tarpaulin covering back, Smith saw young Bixley's face go white.

Bixley said: "I don't know anything about them. Someone must have put them there to frame me."

The fat man's grin was frigid. He looked at Audrey Bliss. Strain was in her face, but she wouldn't give up.

Smith said savagely: "He could tell you the sky was red, and you'd believe him. All

right, sweetheart, I'll put every dirty page of this story in front of you, and then maybe you'll listen to reason. But before I do that, we're taking this killer back to your house and lock him up. I may have a love-blind girl following me, but I'm damned if I'll have a murderer on my coat tails."

Martin Duvall and Richard Milner were waiting in the drawing room when Hannibal Smith and Audrey Bliss came down from the attic where they had locked Tom Bixley.

Martin Duvall was a small, round man with a bald head and a sparrow's bright eyes. He had a prim mouth, a man conscious of the dignity of his position. He looked like what he was—the curator of a large museum.

Duvall said with precise disapproval: "Mr. Milner and I have been waiting nearly an hour to see you, Miss Bliss. We'd like to draw up a contract for the sale of your father's collection."

The girl said: "I'm sorry." She made introductions, and Hannibal Smith felt the quick bright curiosity in Martin Duvall's glance. Richard Milner, the Bliss attorney, showed no great degree of interest, a tall, tweedy man with a sprinkle of gray at his temples. He looked like an advertiser's conception of a mint-julep-drinking gentleman.

He said: "I'm glad to know you, Mr. Smith."

The fat man conceded modestly: "Most people are—at first."

The lawyer smiled politely. "At first?"

Smith answered: "I make enemies too easily. I don't know why. Even my best friends won't tell me. I Lux my undies and guard against bad breath. I just say the wrong things to people, I guess."

Milner's smile was curious. "I don't understand."

"You will. You were the executor of Barnaby Bliss's will, weren't you?"

The lawyer nodded.

"And you control the trust fund Mr. Bliss left to his daughter?"

Another nod.

"And if Audrey Bliss marries young Tom Bixley, she will take over the control of the trust fund?"

Milner's smile began to fade. "Of course. What are you driving at?"

Smith answered calmly: "I was just thinking that as long as you are in control of the trust fund you are in a position to manipulate it to your own profit, if you're so inclined. In other words, you might not want Miss Bliss to marry young Bixley. You might try to do something to prevent that marriage."

THE lawyer stiffened. He said in an outraged and pompous tone: "I don't like your insinuations, sir."

"I didn't think you would. That's what I meant when I said I make enemies easily." He turned his attention to Martin Duvall. "As curator of a museum, you have undoubtedly heard of Professor Dorance Bixley's much publicized discovery a few years ago of a so-called 'missing link' skeleton, the one which Barnaby Bliss and Roger Gilchrest exposed as a fraud?"

Martin Duvall nodded. "Certainly. It's my duty to keep posted on all phases of natural science."

There was an animosity and guarded vigilance in this small bald man that Hannibal Smith could see and feel, but he refused to let it bother him.

He went on placidly: "I understand your museum authorized you to pay thirty thousand dollars for the Bliss collection of skeletons, providing the collection was intact. Is that right?"

Duvall answered stiffly: "Certainly. But what affair is this of yours?"

Smith ignored that question. "And if any skeletons in the Bliss collection are missing, your price automatically drops to five thousand dollars. Correct?"

Duvall nodded. "Naturally. The value would lessen if the collection were not complete for thorough study. But I don't see—"

"Don't you? I'm just going out of my way to make another enemy, that's all. In other words, I'm suggesting that you might have stolen eleven skeletons out of the Bliss collection in order to knock down the price. Having closed the deal with Miss Bliss for five thousand, you could then secretly recover the missing skeletons, making the collection again complete for your museum. If you worked it right, you could slip a neat profit of twenty-five grand into your pocket, and no one would ever be the wiser."

For such a small, meek-appearing man, Martin Duvall had a surprising temper. He cried out: "Why, damn you, sir!" And then he swung on Hannibal Smith. The fat man dodged the inept blow. He put his hand on Duvall's chest, pushed the man back.

Richard Milner spoke up roughly. "You can put him in court for those insinuations, Mr. Duvall. I'll be glad to represent you."

Hannibal Smith had been walking on thin ice, and he knew it. But there was nothing delicate about the fat man's method of working. If he had to strike a blow, he struck hard. He hit where it hurt, and then stepped back to survey the results.

Both Richard Milner and Martin Duvall were angry—that much was certain. He had touched a sore spot in both men, but whether it was injured pride or something else—startled anxiety, a swift grab of fear—he could not tell.

He had struck his blows and seen their results, and now he turned away. He went to the telephone stand, opened the directory, looking for the Acme Development Company. There was none listed.

He thought drily: "It would just be a waste of time running down that hunch anyhow."

But he was a stubborn man who didn't give up easily. If he had felt curiosity as to the number of steps in Indianapolis' towering monument to the Civil War dead, he would have climbed, fat as he was, to the observation balcony just to count the steps.

He telephoned the information office, but they had no listing for the Acme Development Company. He felt his curiosity sharpen.

He said to Audrey Bliss: "I've got someplace to go. You can wait here, if you like."

She shook her head, unsmiling and serious. So she went with him. She opened her mailbox as she went out the door, took out several newly delivered letters. She rifled through them, uttered a startled cry.

"Why one of these is for Mrs. Gilchrest. It was mailed from a small town in New Mexico, not far from the region where her husband disappeared. Do you think—"

"Sure," the fat man answered. "Open it."

He watched her eyes go wide as she read the letter. She looked up sharply. "Why, this is from Roger Gilchrest, Myrna's husband! He's been suffering from amnesia since he disappeared that night on the desert two years ago. He just recovered."

Hannibal Smith took the letter from her hand. It was a short message, the few scrawling lines containing all of one man's hope and eagerness.

My darling Myrna:

At first I didn't intend to write this. I planned just to walk in and surprise you. But, coming home again after all this time, I was afraid the shock might be too great for you.

I don't know exactly what happened that night on the desert two years ago (has it really been that long?). There was so much excitement that night over Barnaby's important discovery that I couldn't sleep. I went for a walk and as it is so easy to do on the desert, became lost. I walked all that night and the next day, trying to find my way back, and the hot sun must have done something to me. I don't remember anything after that until yesterday when it all suddenly came back to me.

I have been living, my calendar tells me, for two years in this small town in northern New Mexico. I don't know how I got here. All I know is that it is unbelievably wonderful to be free again of all the doubts and fears of these last two years during which I suffered from amnesia. I will mail this at once, and then board tomorrow's train, which

will arrive in Indianapolis at 10:27 on the night of April 1st.

It will be wonderful to be home again. It will be even more wonderful to be with you again, my dear.

Roger.

P. S. Tell old Barney hello for me.

Hannibal Smith folded the letter. He said: "April first—that's today. But he said he was taking a train the day after he mailed this letter. This should have arrived yesterday."

Audrey Bliss pointed to the face of the envelope. "Roger has suffered from amnesia for the last two years. He had no way of knowing my father was dead, or that Myrna had sold their home. He mailed his letter to their former address. It took an extra day to be forwarded here."

Her tone softened. "And to think it has to be like this! Roger was such a nice little man, so kind and devoted to Myrna. He'll come home eager and happy, only to find Myrna dead, murdered. Mr. Smith, we've got to meet his train, break it to him as gently as possible."

Smith turned away, gripped by a sudden bitter impatience to have this job over with. He climbed into Audrey's Bliss's coupe, slid under the wheel, and she got in beside him.

HE BACKED out of the driveway, into Meridian Street. He turned at the first side street, going west, his small eyes narrowed against the yellow glare of the warm late afternoon sun. He came to Meridian Place, swung north, looking for the number which was identical to Audrey Bliss's Meridian Street address. He couldn't find the Acme Development Company. There was no such address. Now the thought that was in his mind began to drive deeper, the gnarled and ugly growth of a murderer's planning sinking roots like twisted tentacles into his brain.

By some miracle, he found parking space near the express office. He climbed out of the coupe, the girl following him with irritating closeness.

He found a clerk in the express office, and asked to see the wooden crate which had been delivered by mistake to Audrey Bliss's address.

The clerk was a lean, sharp-faced man. He had a lean, sharp voice. "If the crate's been delivered, why look for it here?"

Smith explained patiently: "It was delivered by error to the Meridian Street address. Later it was picked up and delivered to the same address on Meridian Place. But there is no such number on Meridian Place."

The clerk looked at him blankly.

Smith said again, using the man's own vocabulary: "There ain't no such number on Meridian Place."

The clerk said: "Oh, *that* shipment! I remember now. Another damn fool shipping a box without the right address on it. Did you ship it?"

"I'm a different damn fool."

The clerk shrugged. "We didn't have no address for the shipper. All we know is somebody phoned about eight this morning and asked us to pick up the box on the corner of South and Capitol Avenue. He said our freight charge would be in an envelope tacked on the box, and it was. We didn't have no luck delivering it the second time after he called back about noon. It's back on the dock now."

He led them through a door, and out on the long freight dock. He looked at the bill of lading in his hand, and went to a section marked *B-3*. He searched through piles of crates and cartons yet to be delivered, then turned back.

"It ain't here. Leastwise, I can't find it. There's one box that ain't got no shipping tag or nothing on it. Maybe that's it."

Smith said maybe it was.

There was no shipping tag on the box the clerk pointed to, nothing to identify it, but the crate had a familiar shape and dimensions. Hannibal Smith put his weight against it. It slid easily across the rough floor.

He said: "It's empty."

He reached down, exploring for loose boards. The side nearest him was tight and secure. He skidded it around. The boards on the next surface seemed loose, and he grunted softly. He bent lower, gripped the boards, pulled upward. This entire surface of the box lifted quite easily. Smith scratched a match. The flare of yellow light showed hinges on one end of the lid, and on the lower end were two strong eyehooks set so that the box lid could be locked securely from the inside.

The clerk confided: "Never seen no crate built like that before."

Smith answered grimly: "And I hope you never will again." He dropped the hinged lid. "Thanks, bud."

He turned away, and the clerk trotted after him. "Hey," the man called, "if that's the box you were hunting, what was in it that ain't in it now? That thing weighed a hundred and sixty-two pounds when we weighed it in. What was in it?"

"Cat feathers."

"What?"

"Feathers from an extinct breed of goomba cats found only on the Upper Amazon. Feathers that evaporate on contact with the air. You'll probably be sued for a thousand dollars for not delivering that crate in a vacuum truck."

"Vacuum truck? We ain't got no—"

"You should have," Smith told the man. "Cat feathers are very valuable merchandise."

THE 10:27 train rolled into the station thirty-eight minutes late, which made it the 11:05. Hannibal Smith and Audrey Bliss stood beneath the huge dome, watching the streamliner as it groaned to a halt. A hundred lights held back the night, and even at this late hour there was a bustle of activity, red-caps threading through the crowd, the confusion of voices and the grumbling of luggage car wheels, the metallic drone of the train caller's voice coming through the speaker system. A train was pulling out of Track Five, and smoke rushing against the dome lights sent shadows flitting through the station.

Smith said: "See him?"

Standing on tiptoes, Audrey Bliss shook her head. "Not yet. There are so many getting off the train."

"Don't watch me so much, and maybe you'll have some luck. I'm in this now, lady, and I'm not going to skip out."

He said to himself: "This is a hell of a way to do business." Here he had discovered murder, and a girl had used a fake gun to bluff him into trying to solve it. He had reported the murder to the police, but they had remembered his liking for little jokes, and refused to believe him. An April Fool's Day joke, hell! He wished it were.

His feet ached, and the meal he had eaten had not satisfied him. He wanted a mug of beer and a good cigar. He wanted rest, a quiet session with a good book.

He wondered what Lieutenant Sam Webb would do when he learned that this Fool's Day had really brought murder and not mirth.

He saw the girl stiffen, then turn quickly toward him. "We'll have to hurry. I just saw Roger get off the last car."

They tried to hurry, but the crowd would not let them. They went downstairs into the station's waiting room, with Audrey Bliss trying desperately to keep Roger Gilchrest in view. The man was turning toward one of the side doors.

They pressed through the crowd, came to the side door, and outside was the unbroken darkness of late night. They looked in both directions along the narrow dim street, and saw him vaguely fully a hundred feet away in the gloom.

But the man wasn't moving. He was standing quite still, and there seemed to be another figure close beside him. Something in the shape of the two figures struck fear into Hannibal Smith.

He murmured: "That's funny." He caught the girl as she started to move impatiently

ahead. "Stay behind me. There's something going on up there—"

And then he saw Roger Gilchrest's empty hands rising to shoulder height, higher. He knew what it was then a stickup. It seemed unbelievable that this could be happening here in the heart of the city. But there was no doubt of it, nor was it entirely surprising. Indianapolis, during the past months, had been gripped by a wave of sluggings, stick-ups, and drunk-rollings. Roger Gilchrest had used the side door to avoid the crowds in the station's main doors. He had walked out into this dark street, just asking for it.

Smith started forward silently. But he didn't get far enough to do any good. He only got close enough to make what happened seem even more cruel and bitter.

He heard Roger Gilchrest's outcry, a sharp, wordless sound. Then he heard the heavy blast of a gun. Gilchrest stumbled backward, fell. The gun blasted again.

Smith shouted harshly, broke into a run. The murderer spun toward the sound of Smith's voice, startled, then threw up his gun and fired. He fired again, and Smith heard the close-passing bullet. He veered to one side, thinking: "Damn my appetite. I make too big a target."

He stumbled against some unseen object in the darkness, pitched forward off balance. He struck the pavement, rolling, like a boxer hard hit but not greatly hurt. He plunged to his feet, ran three more paces, then halted. The killer was no longer in sight.

Smith listened for the pound of running feet. He heard nothing but the shouts of alarm rising from within the train station. Somewhere a whistle was blowing shrilly.

He thought savagely: "He must have ducked down one of the side alleys."

Or maybe the killer was cornered and hiding in some darkened doorway. Smith couldn't tell, but he had to know. He moved cautiously forward, cursing the darkness, cursing that object which had caused him to fall, cursing the night and everything it had brought.

A police siren was wailing on some near street. He came to an alley slotting between tall buildings toward the east, and thought: "This is how the gunman got away. He had a car parked somewhere close."

He turned back as a prowling car squealed to a halt at the mouth of the narrow street, its spotlight stabbing through the darkness. The light picked up Hannibal Smith, and a voice shouted: "Get your hands up, you!"

Smith got his hands up. Audrey Bliss came running to his side, and he said warningly: "Don't do anything careless with your hands. Cops get nervous sometimes."

Another police car whipped into the mouth of the street, its lights flaring fan-wise through

the darkness. Confusion and excitement gripped the crowd swiftly gathering behind the cars. A uniformed cop ran to the body of the small man so pitifully huddled on the pavement.

He said in a clear, cool voice: "He's hit bad—shot twice. One of you guys call the ambulance."

"It's already on its way."

Two officers angled warily toward Hannibal Smith and Audrey Bliss, their guns leveled. Recognition broke out on the face of one of them.

"Why, that's Hannibal Smith! What are you doing here, Handy?"

"Trying to keep from getting shot right now. A minute ago I was trying to catch the killer. He got away."

Near the body another cop was saying: "Looks like a stick-up, all right. Pockets empty, turned inside-out. Not even any identification. But the initials R.T.G. are on his suitcase."

Smith offered: "His name is Roger Gilchrest."

A patrol sergeant turned toward the fat man. "You know him?"

"I know of him. His wife was murdered this morning."

The sergeant frowned. "I never heard of any Mrs. Gilchrest being murdered today. What are you talking about?"

Smith said: "It's a secret, just between Lieutenant Webb and me."

CHAPTER FOUR

Dark Waters

THE hospital corridor was a place of silence and antiseptic smells and starched nurses who hurried in and out of the door of the emergency room where Roger Gilchrest had been brought.

Lieutenant Sam Webb, of Homicide, was on a bench outside the door, seated beside Hannibal Smith and Audrey Bliss. Stephen Gilchrest, the dying man's only brother, paced anxiously along the hall.

Sam Webb was a tall, spare man grown old in his job. He had a wide, flexible mouth, and looking on the seedy side of life for thirty years had turned his eyes grave and cynical. He was a blunt, direct man who refused to allow either friendship or a personal dislike for an individual to interfere with a job.

He said: "You saw the holdup, Handy. How big was the gunman? Tall or short?"

"That street outside the station was dark as a killer's soul. I couldn't tell."

"Thin or heavy?"

Smith shook his head. "All I know is he had a gun."

Webb pointed out: "For a businessman who has a habit of getting mixed up in murder, you didn't see much this time."

Smith's answer was unruffled. "I'm ashamed of myself, Lieutenant. If I were the Man of Tomorrow, I could have seen clearly in the darkness and caught him in spite of his bullets. But I'm the Man of Today, like you, Sam. I can't see in the dark. Can you?"

"No."

"Neither can I."

Sam Webb pried stubbornly: "One of the prowl car boys said you mentioned this Roger Gilchrest's wife being murdered today. What about it?"

Smith said: "I reported it to you." He watched the detective's face redden. "Remember, Sam?"

"I thought that was just another example of what you call a joke."

"But it wasn't a joke, Sam. There wasn't anything funny about it at all. Mrs. Gilchrest didn't think it was funny to have her head caved in. I didn't think it was funny either, but you did."

Anger got into the detective's face. "Don't try to needle me, Handy. I've known you a long time, and usually I like you, but don't try to ride me. I can run you in if you ask for it."

"On what charge?"

"Operating without a private eye's license."

"You couldn't make it stick. I've never claimed to be a detective."

"Interfering with the police, then," Webb snapped.

The fat man grinned. "This time you did your own interfering with yourself, Sam. I did what I was supposed to do. I reported the murder, but you wouldn't believe me. You want to forget all this now, and start over?"

"All right, all right," Webb grumbled. "Now what about Mrs. Gilchrest's murder?"

"She was murdered, that's all, just as I reported," the fat man answered. "It happened this morning around eleven o'clock in the basement laboratory at Audrey Bliss's home. Mrs. Gilchrest was killed by a blow on her left temple, the weapon a thigh bone or something out of the Bliss collection of skeletons. Everything—the body, and all the bones—is still as we found it, untouched. We locked the door." He handed a key to the detective.

Lieutenant Sam Webb looked like a candidate for apoplexy. He said hoarsely: "And I thought— Then this *is* on the level!"

"It's very level, Sam."

"All right, give me the rest of it."

Smith said: "There isn't much more to tell. A young scientist named Tom Bixley was working in an adjoining laboratory at the

time of the murder. He claims he didn't do it, but when we first saw him he was slipping out of the murder room and he looked as guilty as hell."

He glanced at Audrey Bliss, looked quickly away from her bitter, accusing eyes.

"I asked questions and found out young Bixley had motive enough." He told the detective about Professor Dorance Bixley's much publicized "missing link" skeleton, and its subsequent exposure as a fraud by Roger Gilchrest and Barnaby Bliss.

He went on: "Young Bixley could have held this against the Bliss and Gilchrest families. He could have planned to murder Mrs. Gilchrest, but more likely she caught him attempting to steal some more skeletons out of the Bliss collection. We found eleven of them hidden in his garage."

Webb said impatiently: "Where can we find this Bixley?"

"We locked him in the attic of the Bliss home," Smith said. "He's there just waiting for the police to come into this case."

Sam Webb returned a few minutes later from making a phone call to Headquarters. His face was still uncomfortably red.

"Have you got any ideas on this Roger Gilchrest shooting?"

Stephen Gilchrest halted his anxious pacing. He was of medium height, about fifty years old and had the beginning of a paunch. He had smooth features and a high forehead and thinning dark hair. He looked like a minor official in a department store, which was what he was.

His plea was soft and bitter. "If you know anything that might help us find that gunman, don't hold it back, please."

Smith said gently: "Miss Bliss and I waited at the station hoping to tell Roger Gilchrest as gently as possible what had happened to his wife. He lost us in the crowd, and got shot. That's all I know, except that when the ambulance arrived he was conscious enough to ask for his brother, you."

Webb looked at Stephen Gilchrest. "Do you have any idea what your brother wanted to tell you?"

The man's voice was rough with indignation. "Roger and I were always very close. He must have wanted me to break the news to his wife as gently as possible, that's all."

The door of the emergency room opened, and the doctor thrust out his head and shoulders. He motioned them in. "We've given him a hypo. He's conscious now, but he can't live more than a few minutes. He has something he wants to say, but be careful not to excite him."

They filed into the room. Roger Gilchrest lay on the operating table, a small, round-faced man with sparse gray hair. Once he

must have had a healthy color, but now his features were sallow and shrunken. There was a feverish light in his eyes as they stared up toward the ceiling.

Lieutenant Webb asked softly: "Is there something you want to tell us, Mr. Gilchrest?"

But his words did not touch the dying man, who looked steadily at Stephen Gilchrest.

"You try it," the lieutenant suggested.

Stephen Gilchrest bent over the table. He said, "Rog," but got no response. He lifted the corner of the white sheet covering his brother's body, slid his hand under it touching the shoulder. He said again, softly, urgently: "Rog, it's me, Steve!"

The dying man's eyes groped in Stephen's direction. Something came into them, recognition, an appeal, some lost, bitter thought that lived only in his own mind. Hannibal Smith, watching closely, could not catalogue it.

The dying man parted his lips. "Steve—"

Stephen bent closer his face almost as white as that of the dying man. His hand under the high-pulled sheet moved across his brother's shoulder reassuringly. He bent still closer. Hannibal Smith watched, listening. Lieutenant Webb watched, listening. Audrey Bliss was sobbing softly.

Stephen Gilchrest urged: "Who was it, Rog? Who shot you? Can you describe him?"

The dying man opened his mouth. He seemed to be struggling weakly for breath that wouldn't come. He died.

THEY got into the police car, Hannibal Smith, Stephen Gilchrest and Audrey Bliss. Lieutenant Webb drove, turning north on Meridian Street toward the Bliss home.

Swinging into the stream of late traffic, he said: "If young Tom Bixley had reason to hate the Gilchrest and Bliss families, maybe he did this shooting."

Smith reminded: "Young Bixley is locked up in the Bliss attic, remember?"

"Locked doors have been opened before."

Hannibal Smith considered this against what had been nagging him for the past several hours. He had as little to go on as any man could have and still add it up to murder. He had no evidence to give a solid foundation to what was on his mind. He had nothing real or tangible to work with.

He said: "All right, suppose young Bixley did get out of the attic and do this shooting. You'd have nothing against him." He tied a knot in what the detective had been about to say. "Bixley is a scientist, and he would know what chemical to use on his hands to prevent the paraffin test from showing anything against him."

Webb spoke stubbornly. "We'll find the murder weapon someplace. Guns aren't the easiest things in the world to hide."

"They're not the hardest things in the world to hide either."

They were nearing the bridge across Fall Creek, and Hannibal Smith reached under the lieutenant's coat, pulled the gun out of its holster. They were moving up on the first rise of the bridge.

He said: "A man has just committed murder, and still has the gun on him. He wants to get rid of it." Smith reached through the open window of the police car. Not more than a dozen feet distant was the parapet of the bridge, with Fall Creek's dark waters glinting dully below.

Smith said: "All the killer would have to do to get rid of the murder gun is this." He sent the gun sailing through the air, across the parapet, down into the water. "That's all, Lieutenant."

Sam Webb roared: "Dammit, that was my gun you threw away!"

The fat man groaned. "Oh my gosh, I was so anxious to convince you that I was carried away completely. I'm sorry as hell, Sam. But you can have some of your men drag the river for your gun in the morning. It's shallow there by the bridge."

Sergeant Mathers was an ex-marine, and he had the situation well in hand at the Bliss house. He had set the photogs and print men to work in the murder room, and listened to the coroner's preliminary report. Then, at Lieutenant Webb's telephoned orders, he had gathered Richard Milner and Martin Duvall together in the drawing room, and had brought young Bixley down from the attic.

He turned as Lieutenant Webb came into the room, and spoke like a top kick in a Marine camp. He pointed a knobby finger. "This is Richard Milner, the attorney, and over here is Martin Duvall, who works for some large museum back east."

Duvall interjected: "I'm curator of the museum, if you please."

"That's all right," Mathers said calmly. "We won't hold that against you."

He took a quarter turn, and identified young Tom Bixley. "He was in the attic all right, but I jimmied the lock and brought him down here just for the company."

Audrey Bliss ran across the room to the chair young Bixley was in. She cried out: "Bix—oh, darling!"

Sergeant Mathers went on his rock-steady voice. "The tech men have finished and gone, Lieutenant. This Myrna Gilchrest was killed by a single blow from one of those old bones they keep down there. Bixley was working in the next lab, not more than twenty feet away, at the time of the murder, and his prints are on the murder weapon. Add that to what Handy Smith told you, and I guess you've got your killer."

Audrey Bliss and young Bixley listened to this in silence. Stephen Gilchrest made a weary movement with his hand.

"Then it looks as though my brother was killed by an armed bandit after all. I know you'll do everything possible to apprehend the murderer, Lieutenant. But if there's anything at all I can do to help, please call me."

He passed a hand before his eyes. "Even yet I can hardly believe that this has really happened." He put on his hat, and moved heavily out of the room.

Sam Webb turned to young Bixley. "You see how it is, sonny? You're it. We might as well be going now. Or do you want to confess while you're here?"

Bixley's eyes were dull, weary. "I didn't do it."

"Where you're going," Webb said with gentle coldness, "you'll have plenty of time to change your mind about that."

HANNIBAL SMITH shifted the weight on his aching feet. "As a matter of fact, Sam, young Bixley didn't do it," he said quietly. "You want me to tell you about it?"

He didn't wait for the detective to reply. He went on, his usual placidity changing to cold brittleness. "Tom Bixley is not the murderer, nor did he steal the eleven skeletons we found hidden in his garage. That was done by some other man who wanted to pile more evidence against Bixley.

"The murderer made a cute trick out of this killing, and he was playing for a lot of dough—about a hundred thousand dollars. He almost got it. The only thing that kept him from getting it was a couple of bullets."

"Couple of bullets!" Sam Webb broke in. "Are you trying to tell me the man who murdered Mrs. Gilchrest was her own husband—Roger?"

Smith nodded. "Something like that. Remember that wooden crate which was delivered here supposedly by mistake? That wasn't a mistake, because Roger Gilchrest was *inside* that box all the time. Roger is a small man. He might have been a little cramped spending six or eight hours in a box, but that discomfort was worth what he expected to gain.

"Two years ago he walked out of that Utah camp and disappeared. Nothing was heard from him until his letter arrived today, in which he claimed to have been an amnesia victim. It was a good gag and it almost worked. He wrote his letter, telling his wife he had regained his memory and was taking a train the day after he mailed the letter. Actually he took the same train that carried the letter. What he was doing was making it appear that he was arriving *after* his wife was murdered.

"He mailed his letter to his wife's former address, knowing it would take an extra day for the letter to reach his wife here. He needed that extra day to commit the murder and cover up. He must have arrived in town sometime last night.

"Early this morning he phoned the express company to pick up the box on the corner of South and Capitol Avenue. He had the shipping tag made out and fastened to the box, also an envelope containing the shipping charges. He was inside the box when it was picked up and delivered here. He planned, once inside the house, to climb out, locate his wife, and murder her. But she made it easy for him. She went into the basement to look at the box which had been delivered a few minutes before. She saw him climb out, and the shock brought some sort of hysterical cry from her. The housekeeper and Bixley called it a strange laugh. Gilchrest picked up that old thigh bone, murdered her, then climbed back into the box and waited to be picked up again."

Lieutenant Webb broke in. "How was the express company to know they had delivered the box to the wrong address?"

Smith said: "There's a phone in the main laboratory. Maybe Roger Gilchrest himself phoned them that the shipping tag had been wrongly addressed. Or maybe it was some other person."

"What other person?"

The fat man shifted his meaty shoulders. "Even if I knew for certain—which I don't—you'd have to wait for proof. Anyhow stop burning your britches before you're out of them. We're talking about Roger Gilchrest right now.

"He murdered his wife, climbed back into the crate, and again locked it from the inside. The crate was picked up for re-delivery, but the express men found there was no house on Meridian Place having the same number as the Bliss home. They returned the crate to their shipping dock. When he had a safe opportunity, Roger Gilchrest slipped out of the box, removed the shipping tag so the crate could not later be identified. He caught a west-bound train, went to Terre Haute or some other city where he could make proper connections, and climbed onto the train he had written his wife he was taking. You want proof of all that? Your tech men will find plenty of Roger Gilchrest's fingerprints inside the box.

"Want more proof? Have Gilchrest's body weighed, add that to the weight of the crate, and you'll have the one hundred and sixty-two pounds the crate weighed in at when the bill of lading was made out."

Webb asked: "What about those stolen skeletons?"

Smith answered calmly: "Either Richard Milner or Martin Duvall might have stolen them. Both had a possible motive—Milner to prevent Audrey Bliss's marriage and his subsequent loss of control of her trust fund, and Duvall to chop down the price of the Bliss collection so as to make a profit for himself."

Milner said harshly: "You can't prove a thing against either of us."

The fat man smiled faintly, said nothing.

Lieutenant Webb's mouth was a thin, hard line. He said sourly: "Way this case worked out, I ought to let you wear my badge. Maybe I should hire you to find the man who robbed and murdered Roger Gilcrest."

"We might make a deal at that," Smith said calmly.

The detective's eyes narrowed. "You mean you know who murdered Gilcrest?" he demanded harshly.

Smith nodded. "Use your influence at Headquarters to get a street roped off for my gang of kids to play in after school, and we'll call it a deal, Sam."

They climbed, all of them, into the police car. Hannibal Smith drove, turned south on Meridian Street, and half a block from the Fall Creek bridge pulled in at the curb. The street's traffic was thinning out at this late hour, and low-hanging clouds blackened the night. Smith led them into the shrubbery and down the steep slope beside the bridge. Somewhere far off an owl explored the darkness with its sad cry.

THEY made no sound as they went down the steep, grassy slope. They came to the river's edge, paused, Smith's eyes searching

the heavy darkness that lay upon the river. He listened intently, but could hear nothing. Could he be wrong in what he had expected to find here? No, there was a small sound, coming furtively through the night's darkness, the soft murmur of disturbed water. He moved to one side, guarding his footsteps on the rocky river bank. He bent, eyes probing the darkness just out from the edge of the bridge, mid-stream. He pointed.

Lieutenant Webb spoke acridly. "Just some guy night-fishing. Sure, I see him. Well, what of it?"

They waited, listening to the silence, watching that vague figure fifty feet out from the river bank moving methodically back and forth. Then the movement of the figure changed direction, started toward the shore, only the hushed whisper of water telling of his presence. The heavy darkness gave no detail to his shape.

Hannibal Smith backed into the shrubbery, motioning the others to follow him. He pressed Audrey Bliss and young Bixley to the ground, waved Martin Duvall and Richard Milner down beside them.

He whispered to Sam Webb: "Got your gun ready?"

"You know damn well I haven't. It's out there in the river where you threw it. What is this, anyhow?"

Smith didn't answer. The man came into shallower water, now hurrying his strides. He came up on the gravel bank.

Smith's voice cracked through the silence. "Did you find it, Stephen Gilcrest? The gun you murdered your brother with, I mean. Did you find it?"



Carmen was the kind of cutie, I thought, who'd keep Cupid doing a land-office business. But what I didn't know was that Cupid's arrows were destined to become red hot slugs. For Carmen's past—and my future—was all tied up with murder!

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The killer's oath came in a low strangled cry of panic. He jerked around, searching wildly for the source of Smith's voice. He could see nothing through the darkness. He whipped up his gun, fired blindly into the bushes.

Smith said: "I'm over here, Gilchrest." And then, behind the screening shrubbery, he moved quickly to a place a dozen paces to one side.

Stephen Gilchrest's gun roared again. Lieutenant Sam Webb called out sharply: "Put down that gun, damn you! This is the law talking."

Gilchrest swung his weapon savagely in this new direction, and fired. Hannibal Smith's bulky frame broke through the shrubbery like a miniature tank, rushing heavily toward the killer.

He saw Gilchrest swing his gun in panic, saw the wicked flare of muzzle flame. The blast of the weapon had an impact of its own, so close to the fat man that its roar was a solid thing that jarred against his eardrums. He didn't feel the wind of the close-passing bullet, nor did he slow for an instant his headlong rush.

His right fist was in movement by the time he was near enough, slashing out and knocking the weapon to one side. He drove his left fist into the killer's middle, and the blow giving him a deep feeling of satisfaction. He brought his fist back, just far enough, and whipped it to the shelf of Gilchrest's jaw. The killer never knew what hit him. He stumbled back, and fell loosely into the shallow current of the river.

Hannibal Smith was blowing on his knuckles when Lieutenant Webb came rushing up. He said: "It was Stephen Gilchrest who worked with Roger on this job. Myrna didn't change her will during the two years Roger was missing, and once she was dead, Roger would have inherited her money. But Stephen had a plan of his own.

"Roger Gilchrest was in New Mexico until a few days ago, but Stephen was here to help set Roger's plan into motion. Stephen prepared the wooden crate for Roger to use. And it was Stephen who stole the eleven skeletons we found hidden—planted—in young Bixley's garage."

Webb asked: "Why all that rigmarole with the skeletons?"

"To help snarl up the case by pointing suspicion at Milner and Duvall. But that was a minor point. Mainly, Stephen's and Roger's plan was to wrap a frame around young Bixley, to give you someone to pin the killing on. They wanted it to appear that Bixley had stolen the skeletons just to take a crack at the Bliss family. They wanted the murder of Mrs. Gilchrest to look like a by-product of

Bixley's hatred for the Bliss and Gilchrest families."

"But where did Stephen Gilchrest come into this?" Lieutenant Webb insisted stubbornly.

"On the gravy train—that's where he planned to come in," the fat man answered. "He helped lay the groundwork for Roger's murder of Mrs. Gilchrest. Then he met Roger at the train, shot him, and emptied his pockets so it would appear to be a simple case of murder committed during a robbery. Roger was his wife's heir for a few hours, and then Stephen committed murder so he would be Roger's heir—a case of killing Peter to collect from Paul.

"After the shooting, Stephen had to get rid of the murder gun as quickly as possible. But that angle didn't occur to me until we were in the hospital room, and even then I wasn't certain Stephen was the killer, though I had a strong hunch about it.

"Remember how Stephen stood when he was questioning his dying brother? He had his hand under the sheet, apparently gripping Roger's shoulder reassuringly. Actually, when he asked Roger to name the killer, he made certain Roger couldn't answer by pressing down on his brother's throat. I could only guess that by the position of Stephen's hand under the high-pulled sheet, and it took so little to hasten death that I had no chance to stop him. What he did was hurry Roger's death. This was vital because Roger's whispering of Stephen's name was not an appeal for us to call his brother but an attempt to accuse him. He had to be finished, quick, before he could talk.

"Even then I had no proof against Stephen." Smith went on grimly. "But I figured he must have got rid of the murder gun at his first opportunity. Driving home from the train station, Fall Creek would be his first and best place to rid himself of the gun. So that's why I tossed your gun into the river, Lieutenant.

"Gilchrest knew you would recover your gun tomorrow morning, and he couldn't take the chance of your accidentally finding the one he'd thrown in. So he came here tonight to recover it first. And finding him here gives you all the evidence you'll ever need to convict him."

Lieutenant Webb considered this thoughtfully. "It sounds good enough." Then he said quickly: "Pull that killer out of the water, Handy. You want him to drown?"

The fat man bent, thrust an exploring finger into the water. "Br-r-r, it's too cold for me," he said. "You wouldn't want me to catch pneumonia and die, would you? Go ahead, Sam, you do it. I'm sure you'd make a better looking corpse anyhow."

BETTER LATE THAN CADAVER

By
DALE CLARK

Author of
"Slay Close to Me," etc.

The sleuth dropped to one knee. He was horribly certain Miss Gail had never known what hit her.



A "High" Price Novelette

Three murders in a row right on his birthday gave "High" Price a cold, creepy feeling. Perhaps he shouldn't have looked his gift-hearse in the mouth for this thing was moving into what the atomic scientists would call a chain-reaction. It had all the looks of a true touch-and-go proposition—one touch, and you go to your grave!

CHAPTER ONE

Gift Hearse

HIGHLAND PARK PRICE narrowed his suspicious gray eyes at the package on his office desk. It was done up in gift wrapping paper, and not the ten-cent store variety either. This paper was silk-textured, and its cord was gossamer gold. Price wondered: "What gives?"

Beulah Randy, his secretary, had placed the box on the desk. She smiled, said: "Don't you even know what day this is?"

"Yeah. It's Thursday, the seventeenth. So what?"

"Well, according to your detective license," the girl responded, "the seventeenth is your birthday."

The detective seemed surprised to hear it. He was a lean-cheeked, rawhide-and-rattan tough private cop who'd long ago quit being sentimental about his birthdays. The passing of time meant nothing to him, except as a commodity he could charge up to his clients at his usual exorbitant rates. That's why he was called "High" Price—according to his rivals, the police. Also according to the police, Mr. Price frequently charged the same day's work to half a dozen different clients. Bitterly, they alluded to him as a slippery sharpshooter and a shakedown shamus.

Right now, High Price's customary, coldly commercial stare softened as he peered at his secretary. This wasn't because Beulah Randy happened to be beautiful, blond, and built.

"Gosh!" he ejaculated. "So this is why you wanted an extra hour off for lunch—so you could buy me a birthday present."

The thought affected him deeply. He'd always played the lone-wolf in life, acting the role of hard-boiled heel so expertly that he could count his friends' on his noses. It warmed his heart to realize that a girl like Beulah Randy sensed that in addition to being a crook-catcher he was a normal human being. "Go ahead," the blonde urged, "and open it."

Price chuckled. "You wrapped it up so darned pretty, it's almost a shame to spoil it," he offered gallantly.

"Oh, but you have to open it. I had to guess at the size. If it's not long enough, I'll have to take it back."

High Price's wiry fingers fetched up a pen-knife from his trouser pocket. Deftly, he flicked the blade through the gossamer cord—carefully, he undid the delicate wrapping. Then his fingers froze, his face hardened, as he raised the box lid and peeped inside.

Color fanned into his cheeks, the sulky redness of inner wrath. A slap in the face would have reddened his face the same way, would have brought the same nasty gleam into his eyes, too.

Across the desk, Beulah Randy said in quick dismay: "Why—why—you don't like it?"

Highland Park Price showed big teeth in a cold leer. "Hell, I don't mind. I can enjoy a laugh on myself, ha-ha. It's just—well, I don't mind the rest of the world calling me a chiseler! I figure it's good for my business to have a rough, tough, shady reputation. But, angel-face, a gag like this coming from you leaves a slightly sour taste."

The sleuth canted back in his swivel chair, shook his head dourly. "I must be slipping!"

he beefed morosely. "Here you had me thinking you were a sweet, sincere kid, when all the time you were having a horselaugh up your sleeve—"

That's as far as he got before his beautiful blond secretary broke in. Beulah was furious. She said: "I've never been so insulted in all my life, and for nothing! I don't know where you get your evil-minded ideas, but I can tell you this much—I'm quitting, and I'm taking your darned birthday present back to Farnum's and get my money—"

That's as far as she got, as her hand flew out, snatched at the box, and naturally caught only the lid. The lid came off, leaving the opened box right there on the desk.

The girl gulped, rounded her blue eyes at the glimmer of steel in the bed of tissue paper.

SILENT seconds ticked away before the girl found her voice again. "Why . . . what—what on earth is *that*?"

"You should know, it's a chisel. A wood chisel for the would-be chiseler," High Price interpreted glumly. "That was the gag, wasn't it?"

Beulah Randy wailed: "But I bought you a belt. A size thirty-six brown leather belt with a monogrammed silver buckle. The store made a mistake. I'll prove it to you. I'll show you the sales slip."

Skirts aswirl around shapely legs, she dashed out of High Price's private office to her own, receptionist's desk. She came back slowly, though, her blond brows creased in a frown.

"Gee, I'll say it's a mistake. This isn't even my sales slip—I mean it's not for what I bought. Look, it says, *Deliver to John R. Woody, Jr., 700 Crestline Drive.*"

Price glanced sharply at the sales slip, noting that the purchaser's name wasn't on it. The sale had been for twenty-five dollars cash.

Beulah Randy reached for the box. "Anyway, they'll have to take it back. I'd better hurry"—she consulted her wristwatch—"to get there before closing time."

"Wait a minute, angel-face." Price reached for the box ahead of her, weighed the chisel in thoughtful fingers. The tool had a hand-sized wooden handle, sturdily built to stand up under mallet blows. The rest was six inches of high-quality steel that narrowed down to a half-inch of extremely keen cutting edge. The shamus studied it with absorbed interest.

Just at present, Price's one-man detective agency was fresh out of paying clients. He thought of this now and said: "On second thought, you won't have to return it. This is just what I wanted for my birthday."

"You wanted?" Beulah quizzed. "Well, you certainly didn't act like it."

"I resented the gag, but it wasn't a gag, so

I take back all I said. A chisel's a handy thing to have around. You can't tell when one's liable to come in mighty handy."

The girl shook her blond head. "Yes, but this means some other customer is going to get your monogrammed belt, and—well, he'll take it back and demand his chisel."

"He can settle for a different chisel then. This one is from you to me, and I'm already feeling mighty attached to it." Firmly, High Price swept the tool into the tissue-packed box, buried the box in an inner coat-pocket, picked up the sales slip. "I'll stop in Farnum's on my way home, Beulah. Something tells me I know how to handle these little mistakes."

Farnum's was a high-styled emporium. It had thick-carpeted floors, recessed lights, and de luxe merchandise priced in Chinese inflation figures. You didn't just walk into Farnum's and make a purchase. Instead you were first welcomed by a professional greeter. Price walked into the shop and the greeter was glad to see him. "Something we can show you, sir?"

"I wanna buy a wood chisel," the sleuth replied.

The floorwalker's welcome went cold. "I'm sorry, but we haven't anything in the hardware line. Perhaps you'd better try one of the department store basements or an auto supply store."

That Farnum's didn't stock carpenter tools, Price had suspected all along. He curled his lips in a jack-o'-lantern grin. "O.K., I'm also interested in a monogrammed belt."

"Yes, sir. You'll find the belt department on the second floor."

The sleuth paced down the carpeted aisle between glass showcases displaying such odds and ends as imported pipes, cufflinks, and jeweled lighters. The passenger elevator was pretty with plastic. Price headed for the second-floor belt counter, found it supervised by a tall, supercilious, and slinky brunette. "I'm a detective," he disclosed, "and I'm interested in a couple of belts you sold today. I'm especially interested in this one."

The brunette examined the sales-slip High Price pushed across the counter. "Oh, yes, I remember the gentleman. He'd been in before and bought a belt. Today he came in and ordered another."

"And so," the sleuth prompted, "did a blond girl. She was in here at approximately the same time, I bet."

The salesgirl remembered Beulah Randy. She said: "Yes the little blonde was looking around for a present for her boy-friend. I told her I'd just sold a customer two belts, and she decided to buy one, too."

"Uh-huh. But when you came to wrap up these belts as gifts, maybe you got the boxes switched?"

The brunette went haughty, said: "Goodness, the sales personnel never wraps packages. All we do is take the purchase to the dumbwaiter to be carried down to the wrapping desk."

"But these two belts went to the wrapping desk one right after the other, probably within five minutes of each other?"

"Yes—I mean, no. I remember now. The red light was on the first time I went back, meaning the dumbwaiter was in operation. So then, a few minutes later, I sent both belts down together."

PRICE headed back to the elevator. As a rule, he didn't like the long arm of coincidence tapping his shoulder, but the way the the brunette explained it, Beulah Randy's purchase hadn't been a coincidence at all. Beulah had wandered into Farnum's, because Farnum's was the kind of a store in which anybody would naturally shop for birthday gifts. She'd heard of a satisfied customer buying two belts, so she'd settled on the same idea. All very natural so far—but then, downstairs in the wrapping department, suddenly one of these belts had turned into a carpenter's chisel. . . .

Price's gray eyes were alertly bright as he emerged from the elevator and took a quick left turn around a rear partition. He was backstage now, where the carpeting changed to rubber matting underfoot, and the recessed lights were replaced by flyspecked green cones dangling on dropcords.

The sleuth pulled up at a shelf-and-window, peered in at a grubby, smock-clad girl who was doing up a package. He watched as she whipped cord around it, slid a pink sales slip under the knot, carried the completed parcel to a wooden slide at the far wall. She shoved the slide back, pushed the parcel inside, pushed a wall button that said 3. A ruby button glowed as the faint drone of electrically operated machinery reached the sleuth's carefully attuned ear.

"So that's how it's done." Satisfied, Price walked on until he reached a door whose lettering proclaimed: *J. J. Benquard, Manager*.

Benquard was a wasp-waisted little man with a gardenia in his lapel and a touch of perfume behind his ears. That was just to fool the customers, because Mr. Benquard's eyes and voice went totally cold as he listened to Highland Park Price.

"It's preposterous! Such a mistake couldn't happen! If you think I'm dumb enough to refund you twenty-five dollars because you claim you got a chisel by mistake, you can guess again!"

Price's stare grew flinty, and his tone as rough as a rasp on steel. "If you think this is a mere twenty-five-dollar shakedown, friend,

you're a poor guesser. These little mistakes are liable to prove costlier than that. Already your error has all but broken up a beautiful friendship and almost cost a working girl her job! Someday you'll deliver the wrong package to the wrong customer, and you'll land in court listening to a judge expound the law of negligence."

The wasp-waisted manager sprang to his feet. "You're bluffing! You're trying to frighten me!"

"You're wrong again," the sleuth scoffed, and scaled a calling card across the manager's desk.

Benquard picked up the pasteboard, puzzled. "You're a dick?"

"I'm a criminal investigator, luckily for you. You don't seem to realize it, but marriages have broken up because of such mix-ups as this, reputations have been ruined, and careers counted out cold. I'm reminded," High Price went on, "of the jeweler who put the diamond wristwatch on the wrong charge account, causing a jealous wife to hurl some acid, leading up to a fifty-grand lawsuit."

The manager wetted his lips. "That's different. Nobody can say this mix-up is our fault. We don't even sell chisels—"

"Precisely my point. It's no mistake, it's a frame-up. Deliberately and on purpose, the twisteroo is being put on your business!" High Price poured it on hard. "A few hardware tools wrapped up and delivered to innocent customers may be just the build-up, setting the stage for the big blow-off. Once you let yourself shrug off these little shenanigans, you'll be as helpless as a tin duck in a shooting gallery on the Navy's day off. Ignoring the frame-up is the same as going to sleep on a stack of dynamite with the fuse already lighted and burning short."

Price kept right on pouring predictions of impending evil fate. In three minutes, the little wasp-waisted manager was flowing perspiration. When the desk phone rang, interrupting Price's discourse, the other had to paw twice to locate the instrument.

Benquard listened, blurted, "Miss Gail? Oh, my God!" and bolted past Highland Park Price.

Price followed at his heels. Just back of the partition was a stairway labeled *Employees Only*. The manager sprinted up the steps, came out on the second-floor salesroom carpeting.

The excitement was at the belt counter. Price burst through the knot of people there, found the slinky brunet salesgirl sprawled on the floor behind the counter. Highland Park Price's birthday had proved her death-day.

The sleuth dropped to one knee. He was horribly certain Miss Gail had never known what had hit her. As a matter of fact, the

murder instrument was a thin-bladed knife of the ham-slicer variety. Price growled: "What happened here? Who found her?"

A frightened salesgirl answered. "I did—but I didn't hear or see anything. It's almost closing time, and I was totaling up my salesbook for the day. I—I happened to look over toward the belt counter, and I saw her legs sticking out as though she'd fainted, I thought."

Price straightened, stared at the wasp-waisted Benquard. "Well, are you convinced now? Or do your employees' lives and limbs mean nothing to you?"

"I—I don't know what to say . . ."

"You can say it with your checkbook," High Price clinched his argument. "Because what you need is a good, reliable criminal investigator to put a stop to these hellish goings-on. As it says on my card—your troubles are over when you tell 'em to me."

CHAPTER TWO

Dead Storage

HE HAD a new client, and he was on an expense account, but these circumstances failed to fill the shakedown shamus with the usual warm glow of contentment. Price's brain was as methodically busy as the ticking meter of the cab which carried him across the city.

Miss Gail's death proved his hunch had been right, but the proof was hard to take. Her life had been snuffed out, apparently for the sake of her salesbook—the salesbook had been nowhere around when High Price looked for it. That, and the belt-and-chisel switcharoo seemed to be all part of a well-laid plan which somehow had slipped a gear in the going. That the plan involved high finances, Price felt sure, because Crestline Drive was where some of the best families had their mansions.

Number 700 was a far cry from a fine old family mansion, though. The house was as modern as a flat roof, topping off a series of ship-like decks, could make it. The walls appeared to be all window and glass brick. An architect with advanced ideas had perched the structure on a canyon-side, most of it below the street level.

Lots of people don't like advanced modern architecture, but Price had no old-fashioned prejudices. So often, the old-time mansions merely represented Gay Nineties wealth which had long ago melted down to a lingering mortgage or two! But folks living in glass houses like this had to be of recent cash solvency, since a bank probably wouldn't lend money on such a neo-modern extravagance.

The sleuth skirted his way past a cactus

garden, squeezed through the limousines and cabriolets ranked bumper to bumper in the driveway. A party was in progress, and he had a hasty hope that maybe one more guest wouldn't be noticed. Without ringing the bell, he pushed open the bleached birch door, glided five strides along a blond mahogany-paneled hallway, and right-turned into the middle of the gaiety.

The room was glass-walled, full of Alice-in-Wonderland modernistic furniture and mushroom-like modernistic lamps, and full of guests crowded in like night-club patrons. There was even a kind of a floorshow going on, in the person of a gray-templed, shirt-sleeved man who was walking up and down the middle of the floor on his hands. Nobody seemed to be paying any attention to him.

Price spotted an abandoned Martini parked on top of a stainless steel, Chinese puzzle bookcase. He made for it, felt secure the instant he'd wrapped his wiry fingers around the glass's stem. At a party where a guy could peel down to his shirtsleeves and do handstands on the rug without being the center of interest, Price figured nobody would pay any attention to a stray male holding a half-emptied cocktail in his hand.

That's what he figured, but in no time at all a slim, silk-sheathed girl was beside the detective. Under a mop of fire-alarm red hair, her greenish eyes were full of suspicion. "That's funny, I'd have sworn I put my drink down here!"

"I've lost three drinks that way myself. It must be gremlins." He pretended a keen interest in the parlor rug athlete. "How long can he keep that up?"

"Oh, Ralph. He fell in the fireplace a while ago. Bruised himself and had to lie down in one of the bedrooms for a while."

"How cute."

The green eyes inspected Price. "You're cute yourself," the redhead decided. "And I'm not saying that because I'm drunk. I'm not drunk. It's just that the fenestration makes me dizzy."

"Yeah. I always feel sort of unfenced after a few shots myself."

She giggled. "That isn't what it means. Fenestration is the up-to-date word for windows. The windows make me dizzy. I always want to jump out."

She waved a hand toward the plate-glass, ceiling to floor windows, and the wave finished with a wild, frantic grab at Price's coat-front. The redhead swayed against his chest, said limply: "Hey, they're going around. You better get me out of here! Let's go down to the patio, I need some fresh air or else!"

Tottering slightly, she made for the paneled hallway. At its far-end, kidney-curved stairs wound down to a lower hall. The redhead

hugged the stair rail with one hand, clung to Price's coatsleeve with the other. From the end of the lower hall came the subdued rattle of dishware being washed. She headed that way.

High Price quizzed: "We have to go out through the kitchen?"

"It isn't a kitchen in a house like this. It's a Food Preparation Area, and we're not going that far." She pulled up at a side door. "We'll pay a little call on the wine-cellar first."

She opened the door, reached in, said: "Damn it, the bulb's shot. Have you got a match?"

"I've got a flashlight." Price plucked the fountain-pen style one from his breast pocket.

"All right, you go first. Watch the steps."

Price went first, the slender pencil of his flashlight playing onto biscuit-like, composition walls. The steps he didn't see yet. They must be around the doorway just ahead.

An air current tugged at the nape of his neck as he advanced. He said, "Hey, what the—" and swung around. She'd slammed the door on him. The door, he saw amazedly, had that same biscuity, composition—insulation, or whatever it was—quilted over it. There wasn't even a doorknob on the inside.

HE JUMPED, pounded his fists, yelled: "Hey, you!" The insulation drank up the sound of his knuckles, drank in his voice, too. A man could yell his lungs out without a whisper being heard by the cocktail crowd in the other, upper end of the house.

Price turned slowly, hardly able to believe what his flash showed him. The place wasn't a wine-cellar at all. It was a twin-celled prison, a small room opening into a slightly larger one as windowless as the first, and both of them utterly soundproofed. Even Price's agile wits didn't get it—why an architect would have designed a glass-house upstairs, and this medieval dungeon underneath.

The flashbeam stopped in a corner of the second room. As it did so, the wry puzzlement left the shamus' lean features, and a grimace of horror came instead.

There was a dead man in the corner.

Price came closer and centered the light beam on the corpse's face. The dead man had been a little guy with day-old whiskers on his chin. There was something foxlike about his pointed nose and small, still eyes.

High Price ejaculated: "I'll be damned! It's Tagger Gibbon!"

If he'd been astonished to find a dead man, he was even more surprised to discover that the corpse was an old acquaintance.

Tagger wasn't the guy's name, really. It was a handle he'd won through his professional dexterity. He'd been a summons-server, and

he'd been aces at the game for a long time.

Highland Park Price sprayed the flash slowly over the small, sprawled figure. Tagger Gibbon had made good money, but the necktie he wore was shiny and frayed. His lapels were unpressed, and one of them sported an Army discharge button—though Tagger had seen no military service. His vest had lunch-counter style soupstains on it.

There was another stain on the left side of the vest, this one wet and recent. A stab wound, Price thought. A shot wouldn't have ripped that kind of a triangular rent in the vest fabric.

In thought-surcharged silence, Price recalled what he knew of Tagger's career. The little guy owed his profession to the state law which said a plaintiff couldn't sue anybody until the defendant had been handed a court writ. Therefore, one simple way of avoiding lawsuits was to avoid writs. If you could duck the summons, the other guy couldn't prosecute his case against you.

Tagger Gibbon had been an expert at reaching people with legal papers they didn't want. He'd been known to dress up as a theater doorman to slap a summons on a theatrical star in a dressing room. He'd been known to dress up as a hotel waiter to serve a summons concealed in a room-service menu folder. He'd even been known to sneak into exclusive private hospitals carrying the writ in a physician's black bag.

Down on one knee, Price raced his wiry fingers over the shabby costume. He found it tucked away in the coat's inner pocket—the regulation form, signed by the clerk of the district court. Price's stare skipped the print, picked up the typed names—Frank F. Vogel and John R. Woody, Jr.—and the impressive sum of money at stake, \$26,182.

It wasn't answer enough. Price muttered: "Yeah, Tagger, but why cool *you* off—"

He stopped, in a grimace of partial understanding. Tagger Gibbon's death remained a mystery, but at least it had flashed upon the sleuth that this medieval dungeon wasn't a bit medieval. He now realized it had been designed as an ultra-modern deep-freeze chamber.

The soundproofing wasn't soundproofing at all. It was insulation intended to bottle up zero temperature in the storage chamber and ten below zero in the quick-freeze room.

Turning from the dead man, Price played the flashlight around until he found what he'd overlooked in his first hasty glance—some shiny, snaky knots of electric cable nested in wall outlets.

He figured the war had come along before the house was finished, and priorities had canceled out the electrical supply market. So the builder had merely roughed in the wiring. The

carpenter crew doubtless hadn't been able to get the special hardware for the insulated, triple-thick door. So they'd just installed an outer lock, and the whole thing had been left as so much dead space until the post-war future.

It made a hideout in which a corpse could become a skeleton before it was ever found—maybe. High Price naturally wasn't going to stick around that long to see.

The shamus reached into his coat's inner pocket, muttering: "I knew a chisel would come in handy one of these days!"

Gouging a hole through the composition board and insulation was child's play. When he got down to the hardwood door-frame, though, the real work began. Fifteen minutes, twenty, passed as he toiled to excavate the lock.

When, finally, he got the door open, Price had pink blisters on his fingers. He had perspiration and a look of bitter bad humor on his face, too. His mood was all-out ugly as he climbed back up the kidney-curved stairs.

If he'd been in less of a temper, he'd have noticed something amiss sooner.

The house had gone queerly, deathly quiet. Price's lean figure came to a full, astonished stop in the modernistic living room's doorway. The guests were as lifeless as shapes on a picture postcard. In the middle of the scene loomed a shiny blue serge suit full of the biggest cop in town.

SERGEANT WARREN of Homicide was as hefty as a side of beef, and now, as he glimpsed Highland Price, his complexion assumed the same rare color.

"Hey, there you are!" Warren glowered. "Can't a murder happen anywhere in the city without you beating the cops to it and trying to shake somebody down?"

High Price was just as unfriendly. "If you're alluding to Miss Gail's death, I'll thank you to remember I was working on that before any murder happened."

"Don't tell me what I'm alluding to, you sharpshooter. Come in, I want to converse with you on a private subject."

Sergeant Warren steered Price down the kidney-curved stairs again, but at the foot of the steps, he turned in the other direction to thrust open the door of a master bedroom.

There was a dead man stretched out on this room's floor, too.

With respectfully grim curiosity, the shamus studied corpse Number Three. This one must have been rather a good-looking chap in life. He'd met his death stripped down to his undershirt and trousers, and wearing only one shoe.

Price suspected the victim had been bend-

ing over, either putting on or taking off the other shoe when the blow fell. It was a nasty stab wound in the back ribs.

"Who is he?" Price muttered.

"According to what they tell me," Warren replied, "he was Captain John R. Woody, Jr., just back from occupation duty in Germany. That's what they tell me, and I guess that much of it at least is true."

Price looked up at the others in the room. Two cops were here, one of them off in a corner with the gray-templed man who'd been doing the handstands upstairs. He was fully dressed in tweeds now. A young woman, seated in a chair, was quietly weeping into a handkerchief that concealed most of her face. Price couldn't mistake her fire-alarm red hair, though.

The big surprise, though, was the little wasp-waisted man paired with the second cop.

"Benquard!" High Price exploded. "You're mixed up in this killing, too?"

The store manager scowled. He was back in his flinty phase. He said: "After you left, I did what I should have done in the first place. I called the police. It appears, Mr. Price, that your professional reputation is none of the best. I'm informed you're a two-timing trickster, and your so-called detective agency is an out-and-out shakedown racket!"

The red-headed young woman looked up out of her handkerchief. She asked thinly: "You're a *detective*?"

Price grinned. "Yeah, but, shucks! I'm not as good as Benquard makes out. I couldn't have killed Miss Gail with one hand behind my back while the rest of me was talking to him in his office . . ."

Sergeant Warren rumbled: "Shuddup, and quit complimenting yourself. Right now, I'm slightly more interested in solving a couple of murders." He aimed a forefinger at Price. "I wanna know what you've been doing here!"

PPRICE said: "Well, it all goes back to that belt-and-chisel mix-up. My birthday present came with a sales-slip made out to John R. Woody, Jr. I thought maybe John R. Woody got my belt with my monogram on the buckle."

Sergeant Warren said slowly: "I thought that's what you'd think. But you're wrong as hell. A package was delivered here, all right, and Mrs. Grace Woody signed for it. She left it right here in this room. Didn't you, Mrs. Woody?"

The red-haired young woman said: "Yes. That's it, on the bureau there."

High Price swung and looked at the package. It had been opened, but apparently the original paper and cord had been identical with those containing Beulah's birthday remembrance.

"Is there a belt in it?" he asked.

"Yeah," said Warren.

"With my initial?"

"No," the sergeant said. "It's a plain buckle with no monogram at all. How do you go about explaining that?"

Price said: "I'm still working on it. I'll find out sooner or later."

"You're not working on it at my expense!" J. J. Benquard snapped. "Thank heaven I found out in time you're a phony!"

"That's good news." The gray-templed, tweed-clad man stepped forward. "Mr. Price, my name's Ralph Ellenby. I'm Mrs. Woody's cousin. In her behalf, I want to hire you to investigate John Woody's death."

Benquard turned, gaped at the tweedy man. "Are you crazy? Didn't you hear what I just said? This High Price is a bloodsucker. He's strictly a shark. He'll take you, but good."

Ellenby said softly: "Exactly. He's a shrewd, brainy operator, or he couldn't get away with it. I have an idea it'll take a shrewd smart operator to get to the bottom of this case."

The words of praise widened Benquard's eyes. The little wasp-waisted manager thought fast and said: "Not so fast. After all, I hired Mr. Price first. I don't know whether I'll let him go."

The shakedown shamus chuckled. "Don't fight over me, boys. You can both consider yourselves my clients."

The words acted as a red flag to Sergeant Warren. He towered up, incensed. "You can't get away with it, High—"

"Why not? Doctors have more than one patient at a time. Lawyers aren't limited to one solitary case on a court calendar." Price grinned at Ellenby. "In other words, you can write me out a retainer check—at my usual rate in homicide cases, five hundred bucks plus expenses."

Sergeant Warren's features changed color, from rare beef pink to boiled lobster red. He yelled: "That proves it! You give Price an inch, and he takes five hundred dollars!"

Ellenby had a checkbook out. "Five hundred dollars," he mused, "is about twice a detective-sergeant's monthly pay. Obviously, Warren, you'd be a private investigator yourself—if you had brains enough to earn eight weeks' pay in one evening."

Sergeant Warren fumed and fired up: "O.K., be a sucker! I can't keep you from throwing your money away. But this I'll tell you—the homicide is gonna be solved by *me*. And you're gonna answer *my* questions. Price ain't gonna coach you how to answer. He ain't even gonna be standing around taking a free hinge at the evidence." He made thumb motions at Price. "Scram, sharpshooter!"

The shamus hesitated. "Before I go, Sarge, there's a detail or two I could tell you about."

"Absolutely," Ellenby chimed in. "This is no time for mere professional jealousy, Sergeant. You ought to be glad to avail yourself of Mr. Price's superior experience and powers of observation."

"When I want High Price hanging around," Warren blew up, "I'll send for him—probably with a warrant!"

Price walked out of the room, pausing in the upper hallway only long enough to ascertain that the telephone directory listed a Frank F. Vogel at 450½ Tyler Street. He phoned, then, for a cab.

CHAPTER THREE

Ten-Grand Shakedown

TYLER STREET was one of those backwash thoroughfares where no zoning law keeps chicken runs and rabbit hutches out of the backyards. Four hundred fifty and one-half was a backyard address, behind a brick dwelling with a *Rooms for Rent—Vacancy* sign in its front window. It had a vacancy, it was that bad. High Price followed a footpath between the chicken runs and rabbit hutches, up to what had once been a garage. He knocked. A querulous voice invited: "Come in, come in, don't stand out there and let it get cold!"

Price thrust open the door, was greeted by the pungent odor of wood shavings and fish-glue. The shavings were littered all over the floor, the glue-pot stood warming on a potbellied laundry stove at the rear. A workbench along the wall supported an assortment of tools. A ragged-blanketed bed against the opposite wall must have been for sleeping purposes, since it certainly wasn't there for looks.

The one electric bulb in the place burned down on an old-style, man-tall grandfather's clock which leaned against the workbench. Price could make out only the head and shoulders of the man who was tinkering with the decrepit timepiece.

"Put it down, put it down, I'll pay you tomorrow," the workman mumbled without looking up.

High Price said: "Maybe there'll be no charge."

At his voice, the other straightened slightly, showed a narrow face with steel-rimmed bifocals and a tangled, ear-to-ear beard.

The bearded man blinked behind his bifocals. "Oh, I thought you were the kid with my dinner. What do you want?"

"I'm looking for Frank Vogel."

"I'm Vogel, what's left of me." The man pushed himself away from his clock, using a

straight-arm gesture. He didn't rise because, as Price could see now, he was seated in a wheelchair.

Price's lean-cheeked features darkened a shade. He said tonelessly: "There's no time to be tactful about this, Vogel. What disease put you in this shape?"

"It wasn't a disease. I had an accident. I used to be a professional window-washer, and I made a damned good living at it, too. Then I fell and somehow I hurt my back. I figured at first it was just a bad sprain, but it got worse and worse, and now I couldn't take a step if my life depended on it. I shouldn't be working in a wheelchair, either, but a man has to live."

"You're a clock repairman now?"

"Clocks, chairs, cradles, kid's toys—I fix anything that can be pieced together with wood, or patched with glue."

Price said: "You weren't working when you fell? You couldn't sue your employer for damages?"

"I was working, all right, but on a private house. I didn't know at first how bad I was hurt, and by the time I found out, the guy who owned the house was in the army. It's pretty hard to sue a soldier who's overseas. Even if you get a judgment, his lawyers can always stall until he's back in the country. He's got ninety days to re-open the case, according to the G.I. Bill of Rights."

Price nodded. "So you waited until Woody was out of the service to sue him, is that it?"

"Well, I—" Vogel suddenly choked up. He gripped both hands on the arms of his chair, bent forward to peer intently at his caller. "Who told you his name was Woody?"

"A cop did."

"A cop!"

"Yeah. I've got some news for you. Woody has gone where no court summons can reach him. He's dead."

"Dead!" the bearded man exclaimed incredulously. "He can't be. He just got back from Germany. His wife was throwing a reception for him today."

"The reception came to a bad end. He died during the merrymaking."

Vogel's hands dropped onto his knees. He brooded briefly. Finally, he said: "I don't know where the hell that leaves me. Can I sue his heirs and assigns? I'd better call my lawyer and find out."

High Price seemed horror-struck by the idea.

"Don't you throw away your hard-earned money on lawyers. What you need is a good, reliable, confidential private investigator—and by private, I mean one who can keep his mouth shut." The shamus got down to cases. "I'll show you an example."

With sleight-of-hand swiftness, his bony

fingers extended the chisel. "You recognize this?"

"Sure. I mean, no. I mean, I recognize it's a chisel. I never saw it before."

"It's not yours?"

"It couldn't be mine. It's practically brand-new. All the tools I've got here used to belong to my brother." Vogel fell silent. He combed fingers through his beard.

"What's his name?"

"Theodore. Why?"

"I'd like to ask him if he recognizes the chisel."

Vogel's beard hid his expression, but his voice suggested that it wasn't pleasant. "Theodore dropped dead a year and a half ago of heart failure."

Price picked his way through the gathering dusk to the cab. Indifferent to the ticking meter, he sat back in the machine and indulged in deep thought. Presently, footfalls came clacking along the sidewalk. A youth, balancing a metal tray in front of him, started toward 450½.

"Wait a minute, son." Price swung out of the cab. "How long's this been going on?"

"How long's what been going on?" the boy answered back.

"Delivering Vogel's meals like this."

"I dunno," the youth said. "More'n a year. Close to two years, I guess."

"I see. Before that, I imagine, his brother Theodore attended to the foodstuffs?"

He got a headshake. "I never knew he had a family. He's lived alone and had his meals fetched ever since he moved in, I can tell you that."

Price fumbled in his pocket, found a half-dollar, clinked it onto the tray. "That's for forgetting to come back and get his dirty dishes tonight."

The sleuth taxied back to his downtown office. Tucked away in a closet, among his materials for reloading his own cartridges, his tanks and chemicals for developing his own photographic evidence, Price kept a stack of old phone books. Old phone books, he had learned, make extremely valuable reference volumes.

Hurriedly flapping the pages, he found that the modernistic house at 700 Crestline Drive had evidently been completed late in '41. John R. Woody, Jr. was first listed at that address in the '42 directory. He wasn't listed in the book in '43, '44, or '45, and the '46 listing was in the name of Mrs. Grace Woody. There was also a Woody Wonder Box Company doing business out on Porter Street. There'd been a Frank Vogel at 4312 Dryden Street until '44, when he'd switched to 450½ Tyler. Theodore Vogel had never been in the book at all. Ralph Ellenby had worked up from a nondescript Fourth Avenue address in '42

to a swank Fairmont Circle number in '46.

Price jotted down and pocketed these addresses. He buckled on his armpit holster and went down to hail another cab. This last was a happy hunch.

Just as his rawhide-and-rattan figure shoved through the building doors to the sidewalk, the shooting started.

THE shots gave the effect of firecrackers bursting on the sidewalk. Price could have sworn the gun-flashes weren't six inches off the street level.

The sleuth's muscles responded with an instant headlong leap. He cleared the curb of the sidewalk, stretched out his hand as he did so, and snagged hold of a parking meter post. In a rounded, downward swoop, he banked to a face-down landing in the gutter.

True, the shooting hadn't seemed especially accurate. It hadn't come within yards of him, but gun-slugs aren't tied together, and a few wild misses didn't mean the next blast couldn't tear its victim apart.

Price tugged his own Detective Special from his armpit holster, raised his head out of the gutter and peered down the street.

High over the street corner, a neon sign advertised *Beer & Spaghetti Below*, with an arrow indicating steps down to the basement restaurant.

Anybody posted on these steps could have kept the entrance to Price's office under constant observation—and under fire. After shooting, the individual could dive down the stairs, sprint past the restaurant doorway, and race up a similar set of steps that right-angled down from the cross-street. It was a sweet setup, except for the fact that a guy hiding out of sight and throwing lead up a flight of steps would be more apt to hit the sky than anything else. From the gunman's position, Price had been a target consisting only of a rapidly moving head and shoulders.

From being attuned only to the sound of shots, the sleuth's ears now caught onto other noises. He heard screams, a wail of brakebands, and a familiar voice.

"I'll be damned! It's Price with his gun pulled out!" Sergeant Warren exclaimed.

The Homicide officer was heaving his bulk out of a black sedan that had braked short in the street. The two cops with him piled out, too, and made for the street corner.

"What's the idea of feuding in a public street?" Warren demanded truculently.

"Act your age! Can I help it if somebody takes potshots at me?"

"Somebody? Who?"

"I don't know, Sarge."

"You're lying," Warren accused. "You're playing shut-mouth again. Maybe a night in jail would improve your memory."

Price gestured. "I tell you, the shots came from down here."

He forced his way through the forming crowd, started down the steps. As he did so, he whisked out a handkerchief and brushed at his garments. A white object came out with the handkerchief, slipped through the shamus' fingers, and dropped onto the steps.

High Price said: "I'd say he was standing about here, pointing the gun up like this—"

"Hah!" Sergeant Warren ejaculated. He stooped, scooped up an oblong of folded paper. Smoothing it open, he stared incredulously. "700 Crestline is where one of those murders took place! But what's Dryden Street got to do with it?"

"You may well ask. I'll gladly go with you and inquire." Price craned his neck. "What else does it say?"

Sergeant Warren's hand closed hastily on the bit of paper. He said sternly: "You're lucky you're not going to Headquarters with me. I was going to take you in for questioning—that's how I happened to be here in the first place. I'd still take you in, but I've got more important matters on my mind now."

It hardly seemed to bother him that his fellow officers had raced around the corner too late to catch a glimpse of the fleeing gunman. He hustled them into the police sedan and was off, siren a-wail, toward Dryden Street, High Price figured. Warren would hardly have headed back to 700 Crestline, since he'd just come from there.

Reasoning thusly, the shamus hailed a cab and told the hackie: "700 Crestline and step on it."

This time he rang the doorbell, and a middle-aged maid led him into the modernistic living room. The red-haired Mrs. Grace Woody sat there, alone.

"I suppose you want to ask me some questions, since Ralph hired you to investigate John's death."

The detective chuckled dryly. "Let's talk downstairs. The fenestration here might make us dizzy. And a fall from one of these windows would be serious, wouldn't it?"

She colored dully. "I'm sorry I played that trick on you. I knew you weren't an invited guest, and I was afraid you were a process-server."

"I said let's talk downstairs."

SHE protested as Price took her arm. She protested again as he gripped the arm, propelled her downstairs and thrust her inside the insulated dungeon. She didn't really get excited, though, until he splashed the flashlight onto Tagger Gibbon. Her screams rocked then.

Price asked: "You didn't know he was here?"

"No! No, I never saw him before! I—"

"You're lying, Mrs. Woody. Lies won't buy you anything from me. My customary fee is five hundred dollars."

The red-headed widow gasped. "But Ralph already gave you a check!"

"That was for investigating your husband's death," Price said coldly. "You can't expect me to explain away two cadavers for the price of one. I'd be encouraging multiple murders if I operated on any such bargain basis."

She stared. "That sounds as if you think I killed this man. Goodness, I'd hardly have locked you up in the same room with a corpse I was hiding; would I?"

"You might have—so you could say you wouldn't have locked me up with a corpse you were hiding." The shamus laughed mirthlessly. He said: "I happen to know your husband was being sued for \$26,182 as a result of a window-washer falling off this fenestration of yours. I'm also aware this state has a five-year limit on personal liability suits of that kind. It must be nearly five years now since Frank Vogel fell and injured himself. You were afraid of process-servers, and that's what this corpse was—a messenger bringing you \$26,182 worth of bad news."

"You're twisting it all around." She shook her head helplessly. "Well, my checkbook's upstairs."

Price tucked the freshly inked check away in his wallet. It made a world of difference in his manner. He donned a wide and friendly smile. "Now, you can tell me the truth. Why was Tagger dolled up like a tramp with a discharge button in his lapel?"

She hesitated, said: "He came to the door and asked for me by name. He claimed to be a veteran of the Philippine theater—he said he'd known me there. I didn't remember him, but then there were so many thousands of men I wouldn't remember."

"You were out in the Pacific while your husband was in Europe?"

"Yes. I wanted to do something, and I got a job with the Red Cross. He told me a hard luck story, and I couldn't very well refuse him a bite of food. I took him to the kitchen and left him there with a drink and a plate of sandwiches. What happened after that I can't imagine."

Price said: "What happened after that is no strain on my imagination. He walked into the bedroom to hand your husband that writ. Excuse me while I see if any of those sandwiches are left."

The Food Preparation Area was spotless, gleaming tile. Tagger Gibbon had probably been parked with his sandwiches in the breakfast nook. Price turned the other way, into a pantry. The first drawer he tugged

open contained table silver, the next held a useful assortment of knives especially designed for carving roasts, steaks, fowl, and everything else under the sun except ham.

He went back to the modernistic living room. "While you and your husband were out of the country, who handled the Woody Wonder Box Company affairs?"

"Ralph—we gave him power-of-attorney."

"Then he's the guy to call. Tell him to meet us in front of 450 Tyler Street." As an afterthought the detective added: "If you want to drive your car, it'll be that much saved on the expense account."

Ralph Ellenby was there ahead of them. The tweedy man wriggled out of the coupe in which he'd been waiting. "What's up now? What kind of a place is this, anyway?"

High Price had a little joke. "It's a whiskeratorium. That's a place where a guy grows whiskers. I'm going to pull them. You two trail along and let me do the talking."

Finding the footpath with his flashlight, the sleuth guided his clients to the small, backyard building. He tried the knob. The door was locked.

A rough voice challenged: "Who's there? What do you want?"

Price made his voice nasal and juvenile. "It's me, for the dirty dishes."

"Damn it, kid, I told you always to knock first!"

Seconds passed before the door opened. High Price had his gun in his hand when it did. He sprang into the room, jabbed the Detective Special at the man in the wheelchair, said harshly: "O.K., Vogel, you can get up on your hind legs and walk, not ride, to the jailhouse. You really haven't been using this wheelchair, anyway."

"You wouldn't dare shoot a poor cripple," the bearded man whined. He bent forward. "You're lying! I'm an invalid! I've got the X-rays to prove it."

HIGHLAND PARK PRICE grinned dourly. He reached down, rapped his gun across the man's knuckles. "You made that same mistake before—grabbing the chair arms. If you were a genuine wheelchair patient, you'd have reached instinctively for the wheels. That shows you're not used to wheeling yourself around—you're accustomed to getting up and walking. The shavings on the floor tell the same story, too."

"The shavings?" Grace Woody wondered aloud. "Why, they're just ordinary shavings."

"That's right, they show no signs of having been crushed under the chair wheels. He merely scuffed them around as he shuffled around the place. They serve to deaden any tell-tale footsteps the neighbors might otherwise hear."

The red-haired widow exclaimed: "Then he never was really hurt by that fall?"

Price said: "Frank Vogel was hurt, but he isn't Frank Vogel. He's Theodore. It's really very simple. Frank Vogel died of a heart attack, and this guy wasn't willing to bury a large-sized lawsuit. He adopted the dead man's name and his wheelchair. Since the neighbors around 4312 Dryden Street would have seen through the hoax, Theodore was forced to change addresses. As further insurance against detection, he grew himself a full crop of face spinach. He's had his meals brought in for fear that somebody might recognize him on the street."

The man in the wheelchair rasped: "Lies! It's a pack of lies to swindle a helpless cripple. You're trying to scare me into settling out of court, ain't you?"

There was a half-hope in his eyes.

Price waved it away. "You're wasting your breath, Theodore. The cops are out at 4312 Dryden Street right now. Your one and only chance was that you'd get by on your beard and your bluff. You thought John Woody, faced with a \$26,182 lawsuit, might settle out of court for an easy ten or fifteen grand."

Grace Woody laughed bitterly.

The shamus turned to the redhead. "What's so funny?"

"You are," she said. "Ten or fifteen thousand dollars wouldn't have been quick or easy. Actually, it would have bankrupted us."

"The Woody Wonder Box Company hasn't been making money?" Price quizzed.

"What with war taxes and excess profits taxes there was very little left," Ellenby said. "It's really only a very small company, anyway."

High Price gibed: "Oh, you poor rich. You've never got a nickel left after paying taxes on your millions!"

"I'm not kidding," the tweedy man said. "After taxes, the net profits have averaged less than a thousand dollars a year. John Woody had to put his stock in hock to finance the house, and his payments came to more than a thousand a year."

Highland Park Price sighed: "If I'd known that, there'd never have been any mystery about who killed John Woody."

Ellenby said: "Of course not. Frank Vogel had washed windows at the box company for years. John knew him well. He'd have seen through this deception at once. That's why Theodore killed him."

The man in the wheelchair twisted half-up, met Price's gun with his chest and relaxed.

"It's a good theory," Price said. "I'd have gone for it myself, if Woody had been killed with a chisel as per the original plans. But he was stabbed with a ham slicer, like that poor girl at Farnum's."

Ellenby stared. "I don't see the connection."

"I see it—like this. The killer bought a belt in a gift wrapping several days ago, just to get a gift box and wrapping. That was so he could wrap the chisel up as a gift. Today he went to the store a second time, bought a second belt, and ordered it delivered to John R. Woody, Jr.'s home. As soon as he made the purchase, he slipped down the employees' stairway and pulled a switch in the wrapping department. He carried off the belt and left the chisel to be delivered by the Farnum delivery truck."

Ellenby stared. "You're joking. Why on earth would anybody go through all those shenanigans?"

Price said: "Don't be dumb. The guy was going to kill John Woody with that chisel. He knew the cops would try to trace the weapon. He didn't want them to trace it to him. In fact, he worked his head off trying to show everybody he was the one guy who couldn't possibly have a chisel in his pockets." The sleuth grinned at the tweedy man. "Wasn't that why you spent the afternoon doing setting-up exercises on the living room rug? To prove you weren't packing any concealed weapons?"

"Me?" Ellenby's tone rang with shock. "You're accusing me?"

"Yes," said Highland Park Price.

THE red-haired widow widened her greenish eyes. "Oh, no. It wasn't Ralph."

Price said: "It was, but his original scheme failed. The chisel wasn't delivered. However, the appearance of Tagger Gibbon forced his hand. He had to kill John Woody with a ham-slicer—and I'm afraid Tagger had the hard luck to walk in just in time to become a material witness. So Ellenby stabbed him, too, and chucked the body into the quick-freeze room."

Ellenby, wordless, backed across the room and sat down on the bed. He was shaking his head.

Watching him, Price said: "That's the trouble with the perfect murder game—it can't be played solitaire. Somebody else can make a move and spoil everything. You got panicky when you realized that, Ellenby. Falling into the fireplace and pretending to be injured was a ruse, so you could go to Farnum's and

silence the girl at the belt counter. You were afraid that chisel would turn up, and her identification would help hang you. When you found I had the chisel, you first tried to buy my silence temporarily, and then you tried to pay me off for keeps with lead slugs."

The redhead pleaded: "Ralph, answer him. This is serious."

"He's right," Ellenby said softly. "He's right about everything except one thing. I'm not the man." His eyes drove a slow, studying glance around the room. Suddenly he sprang up, crossed to the work bench, began jerking open drawers.

"Price, look! A set of chisels—and one of them, the half-inch one, is gone. It's practically a new set, too."

The wheelchair was far too slow. Vogel heaved out of it, bulled his way through the shavings toward the drawer. "It's a damn frame-up! I never saw 'em before in my life." He turned to Price. "O.K., I'll admit the faking. But, murder, no! I didn't commit no murder. Ellenby's a damn crook. He phoned I should come down to his office the other day—talked like maybe they'd settle out of court. He got me out of here so he could plant them chisels!"

Price said: "Of course. He knew all the time you weren't Frank Vogel. He played up to your imposture to use you as a fall guy in a killing he'd been scheming for a number of years."

Ellenby was smiling. He said: "Now, now. In the first place, why would I want to kill John Woody? I liked John a lot."

"You liked forty or fifty thousand dollars more," High Price snapped back. "Using your own figures, you're a robber to the tune of at least that much."

"Using my own—"

"Yeah," said Price. "Your figures show less than a thousand bucks' profit after paying the excess profits tax, you said. But, under the law, a corporation's first ten thousand dollars of excess profits was totally exempt. Therefore, you must have slipped that ten grand a year into your own pocket."

"In other words," the shamus challenged, "you reached through a loophole in the tax laws and nabbed yourself a nice young fortune. You thought Grace would never know the difference, but John Woody was a businessman

(Continued on page 97)



INSURE THE PEACE
BUY BONDS!



DIAL YOUR OWN MURDER

By **ROBERT C. DENNIS**

Author of "They're Coming Through the Door," etc.



Crouching over Henry's body, I had a glimpse of the radiator grille and the spinning front wheels.

THE whole world began to look flat, with fog leveling off every gully and ravine in the Hollywood Hills, except the one I was in. The anemic glow of the tail light on Henry Addam's car had been missing for several minutes now. For that matter, so had the road.

I stopped my car and got out because I thought I needed some fresh air anyhow. I was wrong. The fog hung about me like the breath of a swamp monster on a cold night, and one swallow caused my sensitive stomach to do a somersault. I collapsed over the front

fender and swore whenever I had the strength.

For the past two hours I'd been asking myself what I was doing here anyhow, but I always feel like that after I get one of the Oldershaw Family's peremptory telegrams.

That's how you say it—Oldershaw Family. With capital letters. In hushed tones. You think of all those millions of dollars and of all that power and then you think of young Paul Oldershaw and that's when you begin to wonder what it all adds up to. I roomed with Paul for three years in college and if he had had any good qualities, I think I would have discovered them. I never did. The only thing he'd ever done for me was to get me my job—and I've never quite forgiven him for that.

This last telegram from his old man had caught up with me in San Francisco a week before. I had promptly torn it into confetti, and sworn with my hand over my heart that I'd done the last dirty job I'd ever do for the Oldershaw Family. They paid me a fantastic amount of money for taking care of problems that their millions couldn't solve, and I had never quite accumulated the courage to throw it away. It was like hawking my soul at so much an ounce, and yet the price was too good to quit.

The telegram had read: REPORT ADDAMS LOS ANGELES OFFICE IMMEDIATELY. URGENT. REPEAT URGENT.

I had written out a dozen answering wires telling W. G. Oldershaw what he could do with his job. But I hadn't sent them. I'd gone on a terrific binge for a week but that hadn't worked either. All I'd got for my money had been a hangover that even hell wouldn't have and here I was doing another dirty job for the Oldershaw Family.

Only this time I didn't know what the job was. Henry Addams wouldn't tell me. I'd met him once before, a thin, nervous man with a face like a potato that had been left in the ground all winter, and I wasn't very happy over meeting him again.

But at that, the feeling was probably mutual because when I walked into his office earlier in the evening his thin nostrils had begun to quiver as if he were smelling something bad. Which he probably was. About fourteen straight whiskeys from the previous night.

"You're a week late, Kittrell," he had said crisply. "I'm afraid I won't need you. The matter is being properly taken care of."

"You haven't got me," I had replied unpleasantly. I was answerable to Old Man Oldershaw and no one else, a situation resented by most of the district executives. "What's the beef this time?"

He had winced at my coarse language. "One that I shall dispose of personally. It will cost W. G. ten thousand dollars but there will be no repercussions."

The implication that my methods brought kick-backs was a lie. Whenever there was a small-time chiseler to be scared out of a spot

of blackmail, or some poor Joe to be bought off for a tenth of what the court would have awarded him, I did a job that would stand almost any test. I wasn't very proud of the problems I had to solve but I had a lot of pride in the efficient way I solved them. Otherwise I wouldn't have been W. G.'s ace trouble-shooter for the ten years since I had left college.

"The old man must be losing his grip," I had said. "If you can square a beef for a lousy ten grand there was no need for him screaming for me."

I could afford to be casual with ten thousand dollars. It wasn't mine. It wasn't Addams' either but he was respectful of it. The very fact that he could throw away so much impressed him no end.

"I've made arrangements to settle the whole matter this evening," he had continued frigidly. "There's absolutely no need for you."

He believed that. I didn't—and I was responsible to W. G. Oldershaw, who demanded nothing less than complete success. So when Henry Addams drove north on Caluenga Boulevard at seven o'clock he was practically towing me. He never knew I was there. I could have tailed him right into his own bed, that's how dumb he was.

THEN the fog settled in and I stopped trying to follow his tail light. I was willing to settle if I could follow my own headlights. . .

For a time I just lay across the smooth curve of the front fender and tried to die from all that whiskey I'd been drinking on the way down from San Francisco. Finally I gave up trying and accepted the fact that I had to live on. When I reached that point I got back in my car and nosed it ahead, trying to pick up Henry Addams' trail again.

I didn't really expect to find it and I hoped I wouldn't. As long as I had a good and sufficient reason for failing, I could keep my pride. So, of course, I found it.

He'd turned off the highway onto a narrow dirt road that slanted upward into the fog. The marks of the tires were too clear-cut in the damp earth not to be fresh and no other cars had passed me in the last ten minutes. I pulled on past the turn-off, parked well up on the shoulder and walked back.

I had a feeling Addams wouldn't be very far up the narrow road. The whole set-up looked slightly off-color to me. I knew Henry Addams wasn't sticking his long, thin nose into anything that might be tough. He was too old and stuffy for that. But the pains he'd gone to, just to make a simple routine buy-off, made me wonder if he were stealing the secret of the atomic bomb while he was at it.

About a hundred yards up the gummy,

rutted road, which brought me about the same distance closer to heaven, I came on Addams' car. There was no one in it but he hadn't locked the doors, so I knew he wasn't far away. He wasn't. Another dozen steps farther on, I tripped over his body and fell flat on my face in the muck.

I knew without investigating that he was as dead as an empty beer bottle but I lifted his head anyhow. Immediately I wished I hadn't because it did Henry not the slightest bit of good, and I got my hand all covered with blood and with a sickening ooze that wasn't mud. He had been clubbed so hard there wasn't much left of the top of his skull.

I heard the rushing sound above and behind me at the same instant that I realized the assailant must be still around. There hadn't been time for anyone to kill Henry and come down the dirt road to the highway before I arrived to seal it off. And he wouldn't be on foot. I got that much tallied up just

I could have done in order to protect myself.

I crawled over and took another brief look at Henry Addams. His pockets had been turned inside out, relieving me of the job of hunting for the ten thousand dollars. I looked anyhow, not for the ten thousand, but for an indication of what the money was supposed to have bought. I didn't find a lead, with a single possible exception. Henry's billfold contained one of his own business cards with a phone number in his writing on the back. The number was Hollywood 1429. I knew it might be nothing more than a girlfriend's, a bookie's, or a laundry but I put the card in my pocket anyhow.

I was none too proud of my efforts for the evening so far. In addition to my hangover I had an assortment of lacerations and contusions, and a great animosity toward people who try to run over other people with cars.

I drove back down to Hollywood Boulevard, noting that it was now seven-thirty.

I wasn't very proud of the problems I had to solve for Old Man Oldershaw, but I did have a lot of pride in the efficient way I solved them. I was none too pleased with my efforts so far, however. In addition to my hangover I had an assortment of lacerations and contusions and a great animosity toward people who try to run over other people with cars.

as the car came swooping down at me out of the fog.

The headlights were out. The slope of the hill produced all the momentum necessary. Crouching over Henry's body, I had a fleeting glimpse of the grille on the radiator and of the spinning front wheels. Then I dove over Henry like a football player going after a fumble. Very vaguely I caught the impression that a woman was driving the car.

I got clean away except for one foot. My pants leg caught on the bumper. Instead of coming down face first in the mud, I was snatched back, bounced like a rag doll, and then dragged. . . I discovered that I'd been dragged when I woke up a good thirty feet from Henry's body.

That was sometime later. I discovered I was lying in the mud with the fog creeping inquisitively in around my face. The silence was so thick I thought I was dead. I felt like it when I tried to roll over. Then I counted my arms and legs and felt the top of my head. My hair was matted with mud, but it was mud! For that I was ready to pick up my marbles and call it a moral victory. Because if the driver of the car, realizing I'd been knocked stupid, had stopped to finish what he'd started, there wouldn't have been a thing

The fog wasn't so thick down here, which was unfortunate because I looked like a sandhog. But most of the mud was on my hands and face and my gabardine topcoat. I handled the situation by shucking the coat and ruining a good linen handkerchief with mud. Then I went into the Derry House where I'd managed to finagle a room, and wired W. G. Oldershaw in New York. Collect.

Decoded, the wire read: ADDAMS REFUSED TO COOPERATE. STILL REFUSES, BUT YOU CAN'T FIRE HIM. YOU ARE TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS DOWN. RUSH RULES ON GAME OR GET YOURSELF A NEW BOY. I DON'T WANT A HOLE IN MY HEAD TOO.

I was probably the only one of the old man's employees who could talk that way to him. But then everybody else wanted to keep his job. I wanted W. G. to fire me because I didn't have the courage to kick over that fantastic salary.

It occurred to me about that time that I had missed my dinner, so I went hunting for the dining room. I found it, but I couldn't get in because the Buyer's Convention had taken it over for a banquet. So I headed for the bar and took something for my pains. When I was pleasantly numb, a bright idea dropped

in. I found a phone booth and dialed Hollywood 1429.

A GIRL'S voice answered. From the moment she said hello, it never occurred to me that she might be anything else but young and beautiful and probably brunette. It was that kind of a voice.

I made a quick decision. If she knew anything concerning why Henry Addams had been killed I'd want to talk to her in person. If she didn't know a thing about Henry or the missing ten thousand dollars I wanted to talk to her in person anyway. I said: "Fern? Is this Fern?"

"I'm sorry. I'm afraid you have the wrong number."

"Isn't this Hollywood 1429?"

"Yes, but there's no one here named Fern."

"But there must be!" I put a lot of anguish into my voice. "She has a date with me tonight. I need her—I mean I need a girl."

The girl who wasn't Fern laughed a little. "Just any girl?"

"Yes, I'm going to a—a banquet. The Buyer's Convention banquet. I have to have a young lady. I'll be ruined!" I really turned it on, and I've had a lot of practice in such things, working for old W. G. "My boss will shoot me."

"Maybe Fern just couldn't stand the prospect of a Buyer's Convention banquet!" The girl had a sense of humor.

"Look," I said, trying to sound desperate, "will you help me out? All you have to do is wear a long dress, eat a little creamed chicken, and applaud when the others do."

She started to say she was sorry, she couldn't do it—meaning she didn't let strange men pick her up over the phone—but I interrupted her every time she got started. So finally she said she'd come, because her only alternative was to hang up in my ear and a girl with a voice like that simply doesn't hang up in people's ears.

"You're wonderful," I said. "I haven't started to dress yet so how about calling a cab and meeting me in the lobby. Just tell the doorman the cab is Steve Kittrell's and he'll take care of it."

"All right," she said. "My name is Janice Wray. I just hope you won't be disappointed in me."

Well, I liked her voice and now I liked her name. I'd take it from there.

I tipped off the doorman, ordered a corsage, put twenty bucks on the expense account buying an entree to the Buyer's Convention banquet, and had a quick drink for luck. Then I went up to my room and dressed.

Back in the lobby I realized I didn't know what Janice Wray looked like. I needn't have worried. I spotted her the instant she came

into the lobby. She fitted that voice—young, about twenty-three, tall and very lovely, and a brunette! Actually her hair was on the verge of being red and a slight rinse would have done the trick. Very few girls would have had the character to resist the temptation. I liked that, too. In my racket there's so much front and phony glitter.

The dining room was just getting nicely filled up. We had a get-acquainted drink and then, using my twenty-dollar credentials, we waltzed right in with all the other happy little buyers. We had the anticipated creamed chicken and, oddly enough, it was pretty good. The speeches were long and dull and so stereotyped it was like listening to a burlesque of such things, which seemed very funny to Janice Wray and me.

The fact was I had anesthetized my hangover and the pain of my sundry wounds to the point where almost anything would have been funny. When Janice asked me which one my boss was I pointed vaguely and said: "His name is Henry Addams." Then I almost fell out of my chair, laughing, because if Henry had been my boss he would have fired me instantly, but on the other hand he couldn't do that because Henry had a hole in the top of his head. It was terrifically funny, I thought. In words of fewer syllables, I was drunk again.

But I was clear enough to watch her when I said: "His name is Henry Addams."

She didn't turn a hair. "Sounds as if he would be a buyer," she said, laughing just a little. "I suppose I'll have to meet him?"

"Not if we ease out of here and go get a drink." I was feeling pretty light-headed because there was no doubt about Janice not knowing Henry Addams. I've seen too many people trying to lie, not to sense the truth when it's handed to me. "How about it?"

She wrinkled her nose at me and nodded. There was a bit of confusion right then as a speaker sat down to a burst of applause. We took advantage of it and left.

"For this W. G. Oldershaw pays me a thousand dollars a month," I said happily. "Let's go spend a month in an hour."

"Give me a minute to fix my face," Janice said.

I thought that nothing need ever be done to that face as far as I was concerned, but I granted her five minutes. She smiled, went off looking for the ladies' powder-room, and that was that.

She never came back. She didn't say good-bye and she didn't leave a little note with a bellhop the way they do in the movies. She just went.

In time I started looking for her but she was as gone as last Tuesday. I couldn't really blame her. She'd agreed to help me out on the

banquet but not to make a night of it. I was pretty high, too, and maybe she didn't go for luses. For a gal like that I even considered going on the wagon.

Maybe I should tell her that, I thought. So I phoned Hollywood 1429. There was no answer. I got a phone book and hunted for her name. There were a dozen or more Wrays, but no Janice and none with her phone number. I knew it was a waste of time but I called Information and tried to get her address. They wouldn't give it to me. They never do. I gave up finally.

All I had was an unlisted phone number and my memories. Then a bellhop came along with a telegram for me and I had more trouble.

It was from old W. G. and it read tersely: CONTACT PAUL 12342 CARLING ST. HOLLYWOOD.

I began to sober up right away. I hadn't known Paul was on this side of the continent. Now, all at once, several things became much clearer. Paul was in another mess. That was elemental. Where Paul Oldershaw was there was always trouble.

I wrote out five wires telling W. G. where he and his precious job could go—I was quitting. I had quit as of yesterday. As of ten years ago. I owed him ten years' salary that I'd collected, but wasn't entitled to, and just let him try to get it and to hell with the whole Oldershaw Family, particularly his son Paul, the rat. I went to sleep, fully clothed, with all five wires in my hand, still unsent.

THE next day about noon I contacted Paul Oldershaw at 12342 Carling Street. It wasn't a pleasant reunion with an old school chum because I had a lot of aches and bruises, a brand new hangover, and a short temper at my own lack of will-power. Also I couldn't stand the guy. He was as thin and nervous as ever and his pale face had as much character as an unbaked loaf of bread. He gave me the royal welcome, tried to pump my arm loose, and wanted to rush up a drink.

I said no. It was beginning to dawn on me that doctoring a hangover with another binge was like running around in a circle, trying to see the back of your own neck.

I tossed him his old man's telegram. "What are you mixed up in this time?" I asked wearily.

"I don't know what you mean, Steve," he protested, keeping his gaze fixed on the telegram.

"Look," I snapped, "W. G. sent me down here to see Henry Addams on a rush job. Addams said he was spending ten grand to clear up a mess. Well, he's disappeared and so has the money." I wasn't admitting any knowledge of Addams' murder, especially

since I hadn't reported it the previous night. "Now I get this wire. So spill it, sonny boy, and quick. What was Addams getting for ten thousand bucks?"

"I don't know." Paul squirmed and looked every place except at me. "I don't even know Addams. I do all my business with Turcott."

Meaning that's who issued his monthly allowance. For some of the scrapes Paul had been in, an ordinary family would have disowned, disinherited, and probably disfigured him. The Oldershaw Family merely gave him an allowance and rented hard-fisted characters like me to clean up after him before the papers had a field day. The Oldershaws had a family tree that reached back to King Solomon and they took it seriously.

I went over and grabbed a handful of Paul's fresh white shirt and shook him till his teeth clattered. "Don't give me a song and dance, you little rat. Come out with it."

His face was always too white to get pale, but his eyes nearly fell out of his head. He knew I'd just like an excuse to clip him. I suppose the real reason I disliked him was because he had what I wanted and couldn't have—although I was willing to take as much as I could get the easy way, instead of hunting up an honest job driving a truck.

"I'll tell you, Steve," he chattered. "Don't hit me—I'll tell you!"

I let him go. I was a great guy, I thought, ready to hit him for being just as no-good as I was myself.

"I'm getting married, Steve. Honestly, that's all there is to it. The old man blew his top when he heard about it. He doesn't know her. Thinks she's some tramp after the Family money."

"What's her name?" I asked. But I knew. Don't ask me how, but I knew what was coming.

Paul said: "Janice Wray."

I made myself go on with the question: "When are you getting married?"

"It was supposed to have been yesterday," he said reluctantly, "but Janice has been sick, so we postponed it a week."

She hadn't been very sick the night before, I thought. But now I was sick—sick and miserable and old. There was nothing wrong with the world that a higher death rate wouldn't fix, I decided.

I changed my mind about that drink Paul had offered me. When I finished it off, I said: "Where does she live?"

"Why?" His eyes were crafty now. "You aren't going to cause trouble, are you, Steve?"

"I want to talk to her," I said. "Where does she live?"

"I'll take you there—I'm going with you."

I shrugged. Maybe it was best that way. He'd see what kind of a girl she was—chiseler

and thief, perhaps worse. A nice voice, a pretty face, and a steady hand on a steering wheel when she wanted to run you down. I said: "Get your hat, sucker."

We drove to her apartment in my car. It was in a gray-fronted building on one of those little canyon streets just north of Hollywood Boulevard. I hadn't let Paul phone that we were coming, so that she wouldn't have time to prepare an act.

Paul rang the doorbell and before I even saw her, he got off a quick speech of warning, "Jan, this is my father's trouble-shooter, Steve Kittrell. Steve, meet Janice Wray."

I walked inside, said hello, and then did a double-take. It wasn't the same Janice Wray. This gal was blonde, sharp-eyed and her voice showed a need for a different brand of cigarettes. She looked a lot more like the kind who wouldn't hesitate to hit you with a car than the brunette of the previous night.

The arm of coincidence was just a little too long. You didn't run into two people with the same name in a deal like this one. I said: "You got a phone?"

"Yes, there in the corner." She was a little startled. Maybe she thought I was going to scream copper. But I didn't use the phone, I just looked at the number on the dial. Hollywood 1429.

"Unlisted?" I asked.

"No," she said.

"You aren't in the phone book."

"The—it's under my roommate's name . . ."

That did it. I tallied it up then and the full sum was ten thousand dollars plus murder.

"The game's over, baby," I said. "Three out in the ninth. I'll take the money you lifted from Henry Addams' body. And I mean now!" I could see that a little persuasion was going to be necessary, but I've had to do that before. I started for her. She started backing up, her gaze darting past me.

Paul Oldershaw said: "Stand still, or so help me Steve, I'll shoot you in the back!"

He meant it. So scared he could hardly hold on to the gun, he still couldn't have missed at that range.

"You little rat," I said slowly. "So it was *your* idea!"

IF I'D been as bright as the salary I get implies, I would have spotted it at once. Paul was always broke, I knew. No matter how big his allowance it was never big enough. Probably he'd gotten in debt and had needed some quick money. Trying to squeeze the old man was typical of Paul.

"Why did you kill Henry?" I asked. "He was going to come across anyhow."

"He was, till you showed up," Paul snarled. "I don't know what you said to him, but he decided Madge ought to settle for less."

That was just like Henry, I thought. He knew I would have done the job for a lot less than ten thousand and whatever I had said in his office yesterday had needled him into trying to cut the price.

I glanced at the blonde. "So this is Madge? Your pretty little roommate must be Janice. Why the switch?"

"We expected you'd be around investigating," Paul said shortly. "Janice could stand it better."

"Stop talking to him," Madge squeaked. "This guy will put us in the gas chamber."

"No, he won't," Paul contradicted. "I'll take care of him. I fixed Addams, didn't I?"

"That's what put us where we are now," she wailed.

"I'll fix Steve." Paul started to get glassy-eyed and I turned around. I didn't want it in the back.

That's when Janice Wray walked in. Paul's voice had drowned the noise of her key in the lock. The first thing any of us heard was the door swinging open. Then Janice was standing there, stupefied.

She saved my life, of course. Anybody with a one-track mind and a gun can kill and Paul was ready to shoot first and think about it later. Janice's entrance derailed him momentarily and before his eyes got glassy again, I waded into him.

I got the gun and almost took his right hand with it. Then I hit him squarely in the middle of his handsome, doughy face and he couldn't go and come at the same time. It should have been that brief but Madge landed on my back, like a panther out of a tree, scratching kicking, spitting. Strictly from panic Paul bounced back from the wall and came in grabbing for the gun.

I never knew whether it went off accidentally or whether I fired due to an instinct for self-preservation. But the bullet caught Paul through the breast bone, making a mess of his fresh white shirt. He sat down abruptly on the floor, clutched at his chest with both hands and then lost his balance and reeled over, limp and lifeless.

After that I reached over my shoulder and batted Madge dizzy with the flat of the gun. It was all over then. The world went on spinning and no one even came to investigate the sound of the shot.

"I came home early." Janice's voice sounded aimless in the sudden hush. "I got to thinking . . . I knew something was wrong last night when you said you worked for W. G. Oldershaw. You're a detective, aren't you?"

"Not exactly." I stared at Paul Oldershaw's dead body. "Paul and your girl-friend cooked up a deal to squeeze his father out of some money. Paul knew the old man wouldn't stand for him marrying somebody who might tarnish

the Family name. Which meant anybody who didn't have a pedigree as good as Oldershaw's. But Paul also knew I'd be called in to try and dredge up some dirt to hold over the girl. Madge's reputation wouldn't stand that, so they borrowed your name."

Janice moved around so she wouldn't have to look at the mess on the floor. "Once when she was drinking, Madge made a slip about some trouble back in New York."

"That's probably it," I nodded. "So when I went snooping into it I was supposed to investigate you. And when I couldn't find anything to intimidate you with, I would have to recommend a pay-off. It didn't come out according to plan because I didn't show up all week. So they put the pressure on Henry Addams. They could do that by moving the date of the marriage ahead to yesterday. Addams had to come through with the money or explain to W. G. why he'd failed. It would have cost him his job."

Janice said: "Something must have happened."

"It did. Henry got ambitious—wanted to impress W. G., I suppose—and tried to chisel on the pay-off. He met Madge up in the Hollywood Hills. The secret meeting was partly window-dressing to keep him from knowing Paul was behind the deal, and also to permit Paul to be there, unseen, in case anything went wrong." I skipped my part in that episode. "When Henry got tough on Madge, Paul lost his reason and hit him from behind."

"Paul, with his one-track mind, would never just stun someone. He had to cave Henry's head in."

"I found one of Henry's cards with your phone number on it," I said, not explaining where I'd found it. "I called you to find out if you were connected with this business. I had decided you weren't when Paul tried to palm Madge off as you. Then I caught on."

The whole scheme wasn't very bright, I thought, but what could you expect from a fool like Paul Oldershaw.

"What's going to happen to us?" Janice asked tensely. "We'll both be mixed up in it now."

"I can fix it," I said, watching her.

"How?"

"Never mind. Just say the word." I was a fixer from 'way back. I made a thousand dol-

lars a month for fixing other people's affairs. Now I was ready to fix something for nothing. Well, not exactly for nothing.

"Not dishonestly," she warned.

I raised my right hand. "First, you go someplace where you're known for the rest of the afternoon. Then meet me in the lobby of the Derry House at five. O.K.?"

"O.K." She even managed a smile. I saw her to the door. I wanted to kiss her but it was too soon for that. I patted her soft round cheek instead. Then I shut the door.

WHEN Madge came to I gave her the vital statistics. "This will probably cost you some kind of a rap," I said. "Of course you could hang the murder on him." I pointed to Paul with my foot. "I don't care what kind of a story you tell but keep Janice and me out of it. If you don't, I'll personally put you in that little room at San Quentin. Got it?"

She nodded, her eyes dull. She must have known she had only a slim chance if I didn't talk—and not a prayer in hell if I did. She had to take that one slight chance.

"Wait thirty minutes," I instructed her. "You can be thinking up a story." I wiped off the butt of the gun with my handkerchief and handed it to her. She was so numb she didn't realize that her fingerprints were on it now.

I left her that way. It wasn't noble or heroic and maybe not even legal, but at least there'd be justice. And what difference did it make in the way it was handed out.

At the first drugstore I called the telegraph company and dictated a wire. Decoded, it read: PAUL KILLED IN ACTION. NO WHITEWASH POSSIBLE. LEAVE IT THAT WAY AS SMELL GETS WORSE WHEN DISTURBED.

I paused and thought of Janice Wray. She was the only decent person in this whole, rotten mess. That's the way I'd wanted to be—clean and decent, only I'd never had the courage. Or maybe I'd never had the incentive. Now I did. I added another line to my telegram: AS OF NOW AM NO LONGER ON YOUR PAYROLL.

It was a very mild way to express what I'd been thinking for ten years but I was a gentleman now. Janice would like that, I thought. I wondered if she would consider marrying a truck driver.

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CHICANERY ROW

A Counsellor Mort
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Ross gasped, whirled and shot Mahan before he realized he had been fooled.

CHAPTER ONE

A Minor Matter of Murder

“TRIAL by jury is every citizen’s constitutional right,” said Clarence Dar-row Mort. “That means every man is privileged to place his life in the hands of twelve assorted mental defectives ranging from high-grade morons to unadulterated idiots.”

There was a moment of speculative silence, a rare occasion in the rear precincts of Milligan’s Saloon. The respectful gallery of toss-pots felt honored by the presence of the famous criminal lawyer. His words of wisdom fell upon the ears which, though often cauliflower-ered, were at least receptive.

“I take it you don’t think much of trial by

jury,” said Milligan, swabbing the bar with a rag that looked as if it had served as a doormat to a coal mine.

The lawyer bent his elbow and caused a double shot of Milligan’s most elegant bourbon to vanish. A waiter rushed hurriedly to fill the glass. Mort sighed and said: “True, Milligan. The jury system is a loaded cigar in the lips of justice. Every year of criminal practice convinces me that trial by jury is a tragi-comedy of errors. I used to say: ‘If a man is guilty he should ask for a jury, if innocent for a judge.’ Now I have lost faith in even that rule.

“I’m now convinced that if logic and evidence point to a man’s guilt he should ask for a judge—the contrary true, he should ask for a jury. This is because a judge will, barring political considerations and his wife’s preju-

By JULIUS LONG

Author of "The Needle and the Hook," etc.



Clarence Darrow Mort may not have been the biggest liar in the world, as claimed by some of his dearest friends, but he was notoriously given to high-shenanigans and fancy finagling. A good thing, too, since he needed all the tricks in his briefcase to get the better of the not so yokel local trio that was triple-threatening his client's life—and his fee!

dices, respect the law and the evidence, while a jury may send a man to the electric chair on nothing stronger than 'I knowed he was guilty the moment I seen his shifty face.'

"What's the matter with that?" asked Milligan, still busy with his bar-mopping. "The trouble with you lawyers is you want to set up a lot of tricky rules an' regulations so's a guy settin' on a jury can't vote the way he knows best. Take Matt Moore down the street that knocked off his wife. Everybody this end of town knows Matt done it, but he's walkin' around free as you an' me just because the courts throwed out the jury's verdict on the ground there wasn't no evidence ag'in' him. Where's the justice of that?"

The audience of tosspots eyed the little lawyer askance. They all knew about the Matt Moore case, and they all agreed with the hon-

est saloon keeper. They waited expectantly during the split-second required by Mort to think of an answer.

"The justice in that is, Milligan, that in our free country no man may be convicted without trial at the whim of a dictator. And public opinion is the most arbitrary dictator known to history. Our Anglo-American theory of criminal jurisprudence is founded upon the principle that it is better for a thousand guilty men to go free than for one innocent man to be punished. For that reason the rules are written for the benefit of the accused.

"It is popularly thought that juries are invariably hoodwinked by clever criminal lawyers. Actually, the contrary is true—the criminal lawyer's up-hill task is the defense of his client against the malicious stupidity of a dozen jurors who presume his guilt upon the

fact of his arrest. That's why I predict that more and more in the future criminal lawyers will waive jury trials and place their client's fate in the hands of a trained judge or judges."

There was a clapping of hands from the doorway. Everybody turned. Blackstone Jones, Mort's junior partner, grinned as he walked into the saloon. Mort frowned a little sheepishly. "Aren't you out of place, Blackie? I thought you didn't approve of saloons."

"This is business, C. D. We've a client—rather, the client's beautiful daughter. She's waiting at the office. I didn't try to call you because I knew Milligan would lie and say you weren't here."

"Fine thing, calling me a liar," said Milligan, showing no resentment.

Mort had pricked up his ears. "Beautiful daughter, you say? It's odd you even thought of bringing me in on the case."

Blackstone Jones shrugged. "She insisted on talking to you. I hope you're sober. I told her you were addressing the Ladies' Social Reform Club on the subject—'After Crime, What?'"

"Fortunately," observed Mort, "I was giving my time to a more intelligent audience." He rose to his feet. "Did you say the lady was a beautiful blonde or a beautiful brunette?"

"I didn't say. It happens that the color of her hair is brunette. Too bad—I just remembered that you prefer blondes."

"But not always. Come, Blackstone, let us hurry."

"Not so fast," said Milligan, picking up a slip of paper. "You owe me thirty-four-seventy."

Mort froze in the middle of what had started as a grand exit. He turned a lifted eyebrow to the saloon keeper. "Do I hear rightly? Thirty-four dollars and seventy cents for a few drinks of diluted liquor?"

"A few drinks for the house," Milligan corrected severely. "And my liquor ain't di—it ain't cut."

Mort turned a deprecating smile to his audience. "It's not cut, he says. Do you think Milligan keeps a fire in his furnace for the benefit of his customers? Of course not! He's afraid the liquor will freeze on his shelves!"

Milligan waited until the guffaw had died down, then said: "It's still thirty-four seventy."

Mort shrugged and reached resignedly into his pocket. A dumfounded expression distorted his ordinarily calm face as his hand emerged empty. Milligan's severe gaze grew darker, and Blackie groaned. "It can't be! It can't be! Don't tell me you're broke again when only last week your cut in the Bonner case was ten grand!"

"Don't look at me like that," Mort pleaded.

"This time it wasn't extravagance that cleaned me. It was Mr. Gripwinkle!"

"And what's Mr. Gripwinkle's racket?"

"Internal revenue. He's a deputy or something—he clipped me for eight grand with interest at six per cent. It seems you can't put saloon keepers and bartenders in your tax return as dependants."

"You don't mean—" Jones broke off wretchedly and turned away. He knew that his senior partner was an expert on income tax matters, but he also knew that Mort possessed an irrepressible sense of humor that internal revenue deputies could hardly appreciate. He walked over to the bar and paid Milligan. Meanwhile Mort went blithely out and settled himself in the front seat of his partner's car.

"WHAT'S it all about?" Mort asked, as they pulled away from the curb.

"About a minor matter of murder. Ever hear of a country town called Maple Leaf? I didn't think so. It's over near the western line in Logan County. The county seat—population about eight thousand. One of those places where a Big Man is somebody with ten houses besides the one he lives in. About the biggest guy in town was Grover Crompton."

"Was?"

"Yes. Crompton's the guy who was murdered. Lee Mansfield's the guy the local cops are holding for the job. They figure on convicting him without much opposition."

"But they reckon not with Mort & Jones. I take it Mansfield's our client."

"If you want the case. I wouldn't commit myself. That's why I bothered to look you up before I took a retainer."

Mort gave his junior partner a sidelong look. "I thought you said the daughter was beautiful. I never heard of you turning down a client with a beautiful daughter."

"Well, I didn't turn down this one. I only told Marilyn I'd have to see you first."

"Marilyn? I can see that you haven't wasted your time. Well, what makes you think we might not want the case?"

"It's a plenty tough one. It's like this: Mansfield is pretty much of a business flop, that is, he was until Crompton gave him a partnership in a bottling works. Mansfield had had lots of experience in the bottling business, and when Crompton got stuck with one in a foreclosure case, he took Mansfield in on a fifty-fifty basis. Mansfield was to run the business, and Crompton's contribution was to be the use of the bottling works."

"The use of the works?"

"Yes. Crompton kept title to the plant and equipment."

"I smell a rat. With Crompton still owning

the bottling works he could throw Mansfield out as soon as the business was on a paying basis—if the contract permitted termination. My bet is it did."

"You win your bet. Under the partnership contract Crompton could terminate the partnership at any time on thirty days notice. He did just that. His reason for doing so was that he had accepted an offer of fifty thousand dollars from a big nationally advertised soft drink concern. It was a blow to Mansfield, who'd worked day and night putting the outfit on its feet."

"So he lost his temper and knocked off Crompton."

"That's what the Maple Leaf law says. Anyway, the old man's in the jug, and the trial's set down for the first of the month."

Mort lifted his brows. "Why the rush?"

"No rush—Marilyn says her father's lawyer walked out on him only this morning and she came straight to see you."

"Why did the local lawyer walk out? Is the case that bad?"

"I'm afraid so. This local lawyer—his name is Dwight Mahan—says the only thing Mansfield can do is to plead guilty and throw himself on the mercy of the jury. It seems that Mansfield had made all kinds of dire threats against Crompton, and he was seen going into Crompton's house the night Crompton was murdered."

"So? Who found the body?"

"Two solid citizens. The secretary of the leading building and loan association in Maple Leaf—his name is Aldon Ross, and the second man was Tom Andrews, a rich farmer. They had a deal on with Crompton, who was buying Andrews' four hundred-acre farm with the money he was getting out of the bottling works deal."

"Very interesting. When did they happen along—I mean how long after Crompton had been dead?"

"The local coroner's guess was forty-five minutes to an hour. And it was about that long before that Mansfield was seen walking up the veranda steps at Crompton's house."

"Anybody see him come out?"

"No. What makes it bad is that the man who saw him go in was parked down the street for half an hour afterward, and he didn't see Mansfield come out. He would have, for he was facing that direction, listening to the radio while he was waiting for his wife. He was able to establish the time definitely by the radio programs."

"I see. What happened to Mansfield—he go out the back way?"

"Yes. He says he walked in and found Crompton dead. He got frightened and decided the smart thing was to leave by the back."

"Just like that?"

"That's Mansfield's story. I asked Marilyn why he went right on in—the door wouldn't be ajar, because it was November. She said her father'd gone there to give Crompton a piece of his mind and had burst right in."

"How was Crompton killed?"

"A blunt instrument as yet undiscovered."

"No wonder the local lawyer wanted Mansfield to take a plea! The prosecution will scream to the heavens that he went out the back way because he didn't want anybody to see the blunt instrument he was carrying!"

"I'm afraid you're right. What makes it worse is that Crompton, despite his sharp business practices, had no known enemies. No enemies, that is, who would be likely to kill him. Added to that, the local law checked the alibies of everybody Crompton was known to have bested in business, and every one of them had an air-tight story with reliable witnesses."

"But still you believe Mansfield innocent because his daughter happens to be a beautiful brunette."

"Dammit, C. D., I told you I hadn't committed myself. I thought maybe the case might appeal to you because it is so tough. Besides, the girl's scraped up five grand somewhere."

"Can't she scrape any more than that?"

"She says the five grand is all they've got, you soulless wretch."

"Well, sometimes popular people can scrape up attorney fees by subscription."

"You cold-blooded fish! Haven't you any human sympathy?"

"Has the Internal Revenue Department?"

JONES didn't answer. He had arrived at the building housing the firm's offices, and he pulled into an adjacent parking lot. The two lawyers took an elevator to their floor and entered Mort's private office by a side door. A moment later Blackie ushered in Marilyn Mansfield. Mort stared as the introductions were made. The girl eyed him curiously.

"Haven't you ever seen a girl before?"

"Sure. Lots of 'em—that's why I can appreciate you. I think some alchemist must have boiled down about a million beautiful girls and distilled a heavenly concentrate that turned out to be you."

The girl's eyes widened. Blackstone got out a notebook and began to write. "I'm putting that down, C. D. You're in rare form today—I'll use that one on the next date I have."

The girl said: "I didn't come here to accept crazy compliments. I want to know if you'll take my father's case."

"Of course."

"I've only five thousand dollars."

"Please don't mention the money," said

Mort grandly. "My junior partner looks after the more sordid details of business."

Blackie put away his pencil and notebook and eyed Mort as if witnessing the millennium. Mort was still staring pop-eyed at Marilyn Mansfield.

The girl ignored the accolade and said: "It's only three weeks to the trial. We haven't much time."

Mort shrugged. "If we aren't ready, we'll have it postponed. There's nothing to get excited about."

Tears streamed suddenly from the girl's brown eyes. Mort said hastily: "You've nothing to fear—I've never lost a case."

The girl snapped: "I don't care if you haven't, you conceited little pup! I want you to get busy and save my father!"

Mort winced and avoided looking at Blackstone, who was making the same kind of noises a baby makes in the act of swallowing a button. The little lawyer rose to his feet. "Very well. We will drive to Maple Twig today."

"Maple Leaf," corrected Marilyn, but she seemed relieved at Mort's change of attitude. "I can tell you all there is to know about the case on the way there."

Mort exchanged a glance with his partner. "Of course—all there is to know."

The trio arrived at Maple Leaf at five-thirty in the evening, and by that time Marilyn had added few details to the story that Blackie had already relayed. These details were unimportant save the fact that the local district attorney, a party hack named Elmer Stayrook, had hired one John W. Decker as assistant in the prosecution.

"Who's he?" Mort asked, bewildered by the girl's awesome mention of this incident.

She eyed him incredulously. "What—you haven't heard of John W. Decker? Why, he's the most famous criminal lawyer in miles! He always wins his cases."

"Then why didn't your father hire him?"

"Because Dwight Mahan, Dad's regular lawyer, wouldn't have anything to do with the case if he did. Mr. Mahan says Decker's an unscrupulous shyster who doesn't know enough law to tint a flea's eyelash."

"Then why does Decker win all his cases?"

"Mr. Mahan says it's because he always hires witnesses to testify to just the right thing. Naturally Dad wouldn't want to be acquitted on perjured testimony."

"Naturally. But if this John W. Decker can't win a case without a bagful of witnesses, what are you afraid of?"

"I'm afraid he may come up with some more paid witnesses even though he's working for the district attorney this time. He's boasted around town to people that if they

don't hire him to defend them, they'll find out he'll be the one to have them convicted."

"He must be a nice fellow. I'd like to meet him."

"You will."

Mort met the local legal colossus sooner than he had expected. Marilyn drove directly to the county jail, an old red brick pile on a side street and asked to see her father.

"You can't see him now," the turnkey said importantly. "He's in conference with John W. Decker, the prosecutor and the sheriff."

Mort said quietly: "Am I to understand that Mr. Mansfield asked for a conference with the attorneys for the state and the sheriff?"

The turnkey eyed him as if he thought he might be some poor relation, a conclusion perhaps justified by the condition of Mort's clothes, which had not been helped any by a week's bout in various saloons.

"Of course not. I reckon the sheriff and the attorneys for the state can talk with a prisoner any time they wanta!"

Mort groaned and turned to his partner. "Five will get you ten that when the trial comes off, both lawyers and the sheriff will testify as to incriminating statements Mansfield made in these involuntary interviews. Apparently the local counsel thinks legal ethics are anything you can get away with." He faced the turnkey. "Well, show us to Mansfield's cell."

The turnkey stubbornly shook his head. "Can't do that. Like I said, there's a interview goin' on."

Mort snapped: "I'm C. D. Mort, and this is my partner, Blackstone Jones. We're attorneys for Lee Mansfield. If you want to refuse admittance to his lawyers, I warn you that you do so at your own risk."

The turnkey's eyes popped. "Mort, did you say? You wouldn't be Clarence Darrow Mort, the big shot?"

Mort growled: "It so happened that my fond father was so indiscreet as to name me after Clarence Darrow. However, I caution you to address me as C. D. Mort. In that event I'll overlook your indiscretion for the nonce."

The turnkey, visibly impressed, started for a stairway. "Just follow me, Mr. Mort. I reckon the sheriff'll say it's all right for you to come up. Mansfield's in the women's cells."

CHAPTER TWO

The Old Cell Game

THE trio followed the turnkey up a flight of stairs that gave access to the residential part of the county jail. It was like most county

jails, with the sheriff's residential quarters occupying the front of the building. The women's quarters occupied a small portion of the second floor. It proved to be a steel-paneled room about twenty feet square with two small cells and appropriate plumbing.

The outside door was ajar, and Mort could see that Mansfield's visitors had crowded him into the far cell, where they towered over his abject wretchedness. He could get no very good view of Mansfield, but it was apparent that the prisoner was an unprepossessing little man in his fifties. He was in his shirtsleeves and wearing no tie.

Mort coughed loudly, and the three standing men turned.

"What you doin' out there?" a voice growled. It belonged to a fat man with a badge.

Mort smiled. "Calling on your prisoner, Sheriff. Any objections?"

The fat man scowled. "I'll say. Strangers ain't allowed. How'd you get by Cliff?"

"By walking. You see, Sheriff, your turnkey had an idea Mansfield's lawyers had a right to see him. Funny idea, wasn't it, for anybody to have in Logan County, especially when he's a turnkey?"

The fat man turned on the cringing prisoner. "That true, Lee? This guy your lawyer?"

The little man looked in dumb wonder and was about to shake his head when Marilyn Mansfield stepped up to the door. "It's all right, Dad. I've hired Clarence Darrow Mort to defend you. This is Mr. Mort and his partner, Mr. Jones."

The little man groaned. "Marilyn, you shouldn't have done it! Why, it'll cost every cent we've got. I want you to forget about me and save the money!"

"Dad! How can you talk like that! Mr. Mort's sure to get you off—he's never lost a case!"

The sheriff and his two companions had been eyeing Mort as if they didn't believe their eyes. A man even fatter than the sheriff whispered loudly to a smaller man who looked like a pickpocket: "It's him all right—I seen him once in Riverton!"

The little man looked frightened. The sheriff said: "Looks like you ain't been hired after all, Clarence Darrow Mort!"

Marilyn Mansfield was pleading with her eyes. Her father sighed and said resignedly: "I reckon Mr. Mort's my lawyer all right—if he wants to be!"

"Sure I want to be!" said Mort. "Open up, Sheriff, and let us in."

"We ain't through yet!" protested the sheriff.

His fat companion, obviously John W. Decker, nudged him. "Why, we'll be glad to

let you talk to your client, Mr. Mort." He walked from the cell and came forward with outstretched hand. "My name's John W. Decker. I guess maybe you've heard of me, too."

Mort ignored the hand as he stepped into the room. The little man babbled: "I'm Elmer Stayrook, district attorney of this county. We were just trying to clear up certain matters."

"Like getting a confession," Mort snapped. "Where's your rubber hose?"

The little man winced, and Decker said: "I can't say that you're being very professional, Mort."

Mort whirled on the fat lawyer. "Professional? You call it professional practice to gang up on an accused man, putting words into his mouth to quote against him when he's on trial? Why, I'll bet both of you prosecuting attorneys will take the stand against Mansfield! Both of you will testify that he said incriminating things today which amount to a confession of his own guilt!"

The fat lawyer snarled. He was three times the size of the little criminal lawyer, and his anger was unrestrained.

"Look here, Mort, you can't come down to Logan County and talk like that to me! Take that back, or I'll bust your damn face in!"

He had actually made a menacing gesture toward Mort when he was suddenly pinned from behind and lifted bodily from the concrete floor. Blackstone Jones, towering six feet, seven inches, had remained in the background before. But now he was manhandling the two hundred and fifty-pound lawyer as if he were a small boy.

"Make him put me down, Sheriff!" Decker screamed. "Arrest him!"

Elmer Stayrook was too stunned to speak, and the sheriff was too perplexed to move. Blackie continued to hold Decker a foot from the floor. Tears of anger flowed from the fat lawyer's eyes. He kept repeating his scream. Blackie abruptly tightened his hug, and all the wind left his prisoner.

"Do you promise to behave?"

Unable to talk, Decker nodded as vigorously as possible. Blackstone Jones dropped him to the floor, a thoroughly shaken man. He promptly jumped away from his tormentor. His face was crimson as he cried: "Ain't you going to arrest him, Sheriff? You seen what he done to me!"

The sheriff looked down his nose. "You really want me to do that, John?"

The famous local criminal lawyer reflected, then said: "No, I guess not. But I'll take it up with the bar association!"

Mort laughed in his face. "I'll bet your own standing with the bar association is twenty below zero!"

Decker reddened still further, then he turned to Stayrook and nodded toward the door. The two lawyers left, and the sheriff followed after them, carefully locking the door on the prisoner and his visitors. Mort waited until he had heard the trio descend the stairs outside, then he entered the cell containing his client.

THE little man got up off the thinly mattressed bunk and said: "I appreciate your coming here, Mr. Mort, but it's no use. Nobody can save me, not even you."

Mort shook the man's hand, asked: "I see you're wearing neither belt nor suspenders, not even a necktie. You haven't tried to commit suicide, have you?"

"No, of course not. But Sheriff Ringold said he wasn't taking any chances."

Mort looked around. "H'm—no books or magazines. Have you been in solitary confinement?"

"Yes. Of course they've let me see Marilyn."

"I thought you had a lawyer until yesterday—wasn't Mahan his name? Why didn't he see that you got something to read and a chance to mingle with the other prisoners?"

"He said it wouldn't do any good to antagonize the sheriff."

"I see. Perhaps he was right—if that fat slob gets mad at you he'll make his story worse than ever. As it is, he'll probably swear under oath that you confessed to killing Crompton."

"Well, I—"

Mort held up his hand. "Don't say anything. The room's wired for sound, of course. That's the real reason you're here in solitary confinement. This local gang of fascists has a record of everything you've ever said, even to your daughter."

Mansfield paled. "Do you really think so? I asked Mahan about that, and he said there was nothing to worry about."

"Not much. That fat shyster, Decker, will probably even try to get into the record what the mike picked up when you were talking to your lawyer. He looks as if he's dumb enough to think a judge will let him get away with it."

Mort raised his voice. "Are you listening, Decker, you small-town loud-mouth?"

Mort chuckled to himself as downstairs somebody swore shrilly. Then he turned to his partner. "Blackie, I want you to stay here and take a written statement from Mr. Mansfield. Give him plenty of time and have him write out his story in all its detail. But don't leave until he's finished—otherwise good old Sheriff Ringold may hijack it from him. In the meantime, I'm going to interview another of the local celebrities." Mort again

raised his voice. "All right, Sheriff, come and let me out!"

A very red-faced sheriff sullenly opened the door a couple of minutes later. Mort went downstairs to find the room empty save for the turnkey. Evidently the two ethical prosecuting attorneys had had enough for their ears. Mort grinned and went on out.

Maple Leaf was one of those county seats in which the business section is built facing the county court house. He had an idea it would be no trouble to find the office of Dwight Mahan, and the first man he questioned immediately pointed out the local lawyer's office. Mort hoped to find the man still there, but the place was locked. In the drugstore below he was told where Mahan lived, and he walked the distance, a matter of a few blocks.

A small boy answered the bell and advised Mort that "Dad don't see nobody after office hours."

Mort searched for a card, found none and finally said loudly enough for anybody inside the house to hear: "Just tell your father that it's C. D. Mort, the criminal lawyer from Riverton."

That brought Mahan, a newspaper in his hand. He eyed Mort nervously and held out a hand, which Mort shook as briefly as possible. "Come right in, Mr. Mort. Honored to have you, but somewhat surprised, I must say. I told Marilyn you'd never take Lee's case. Puzzles me that you did."

"Are you speaking from absolute knowledge or mere assumption?"

"Oh, I heard you were in town, Mr. Mort, and why."

"I see. News travels fast in Maple Leaf. I thought I'd call just to make sure that you were no longer in the case and not at all averse to my entry."

"Oh, not at all, Mr. Mort. Take that chair right over there. No, I got out when I saw I was in something that was too much for me. Of course I expect a lot of ignorant folks around here will criticize me for what I did, but I always say a lawyer has a right to withdraw from any case when his client won't do what he tells him to."

"Like pleading guilty to murder."

Mahan reddened. "Did you come here to criticize me, too, Mort? I don't have to stand for that in my own house!"

Mort smiled suavely. "I'm afraid, Mr. Mahan—to quote George Eliot—a tender palate is not so sensitive to grit as an uneasy conscience is to innuendoes. No, I didn't mean to be critical. I assume you behaved very admirably, returning the retainer and all that."

Mahan grew more crimson. "I don't know why I should return Lee Mansfield's retainer! After all, it was only five hundred dollars, and

I spent a lot of very valuable time on the case!"

Mort rose to his feet. "Very well, if you've kept the retainer, I'm entitled to the file in the Mansfield case. I presume you've kept your file intact. It will show how much work you've spent on the case."

Mahan fidgeted without rising. "Sure—sure, you can have the file. I'll get it for you in the morning."

"You'll get it for me right now, Mr. Mahan, or the state bar association will get a wire from me tonight."

Mahan popped to his feet. "All right, all right! I just didn't know you were in such a hurry, that's all."

Mort rode with the lawyer to his office facing the north side of the court house. Mahan fumbled for his key and finally let Mort inside. There were four filing cabinets in the reception room, and the lawyer nervously opened a drawer. He fumbled a while and finally pulled out a folder. It was paper-thin. Mort accepted it, scanned the contents and lifted his eyes in silent contempt. Mahan couldn't meet his gaze.

The lawyer's efforts, as revealed by the file, consisted of a few notes taken from interviews with Aldon Ross, the local building and loan association secretary, Tom Andrews, the farmer who had accompanied him when the pair had discovered Crompton's body, and Dr. Glenn Ebright, the county coroner.

The notes were so few and inconsequential that Mort already possessed more information about the murder of Grover Crompton than they supplied. He closed the file and said: "I'll take a check for five hundred dollars, Mr. Mahan. You can make it payable to Lee Mansfield."

Mahan's chin began to quiver. "The hell I will! I put in a lot of time on that case! I won't give Mansfield back a cent!"

"Either you write the check right now, or this file goes intact to the grievance committee of the state bar association as evidence of exactly how much work you did do on behalf of your client!"

Mahan gave him a venomous look, then turned on his heel, walked to a desk and removed a check book from a drawer. Silently and furiously he tore a check from the book, took it to the only typewriter visible in the office and filled in the blank spaces. As he signed it, Mort said: "You're rather good with a typewriter, aren't you?"

Despite his agitation, the lawyer said with visible pride: "I ought to be! I was court stenographer before I was admitted to practice!" He added as an afterthought: "I wish I could find an office girl who can type half as well as I can!"

Mort accepted the check and pocketed it. "Tell me, Mahan, do you represent Aldon Ross or Tom Andrews?"

Mahan snapped: "Not that it's any business of yours, but I represent both of them!"

"Which one asked you to get out of the Mansfield case?"

Mahan jumped to his feet. "Neither of them, damn you! See here, Mort, you can't talk to me like that in my own office! Get out before I throw you out!"

Mort got out, taking the file with him. Blackie was not present to insure respect, and discretion was the better part of valor. He stopped at the drugstore downstairs and looked up the county coroner in the phone book. Dr. Ebright was at home. He said he'd be glad to meet Mort at his office, and gave directions.

"Heard a lot about you, Mr. Mort," he said, unlocking his office. Mort preceded him as Ebright added: "Glad you're in the case. Lee Mansfield was well liked around here. He was a damn nice fellow—that was his trouble—he was too nice to people to get rich off them."

EBRIGHT was a young man, intelligent-looking and apparently eager to be of service. Mort guessed that he had gone out for the coroner's job because of youthful curiosity and a flair for amateur detective work. Without even waiting for the request, he got a copy of his report from a filing cabinet and passed it over to Mort. The little criminal lawyer sat down at a desk and carefully perused the report.

Half an hour later he closed the folder and looked up at the eagerly waiting coroner.

"A very complete report," he complimented the youth, thinking of the file he had carried from Dwight Mahan's office. "I noticed an interesting item about a letter from Mahan being found in the murdered man's pocket."

"Yes. I made a note of the contents. The letter was really a sort of note itself. As you must have noticed, Mahan told Crompton he had no news about whether Mrs. Andrews would sign a release of dower. Of course it was a shock to me to learn that there *was* a Mrs. Andrews. Everybody around here regarded Tom Andrews as a confirmed bachelor."

"What did Andrews have to say when the news about his wife got around?"

"It didn't. I figured it had nothing to do with Crompton's murder, and Sheriff Ringoid and Prosecutor Stayrook figured the same way. There was no use making something of the private affairs of a respectable citizen like Tom Andrews."

"Of course not. Where's Mrs. Andrews now?"

The coroner shrugged. "Nobody asked Tom, and he didn't say."

"Where's the letter, the note, as you called it?"

"The prosecutor's got it, I guess."

"Well, thanks. I must say you made a thorough investigation."

Ebright flushed with pride. "I sure appreciate that, coming from you. I guess you're just about the best criminal lawyer in the world, Mr. Mort. I read a magazine piece about you only last month. The writer said you're better than any actor on Broadway."

Mort betrayed his ample quantity of vanity in the excessive nonchalance with which he attempted to pass off the compliment. "I don't know how anyone can compare me with a Broadway actor. My talent is spent entirely on juries, which is to say that all my performances are given for imbeciles. The fact that I convince them gives me no greater distinction than a tent-show Legree deserves for drawing hisses from a tentful of hicks."

Ebright refused to take this seriously. "You can't fool me, Mr. Mort. You're on to something about this Crompton case, I can tell. I hope you get Lee Mansfield loose—even if he is guilty."

Mort thanked him and left the office. His next stop was a saloon, where he put away a quick one before phoning the county jail.

"Mr. Jones just left," the turnkey told him. "He said to tell you he was registering at the Palace Hotel."

"Thanks. Is Mr. Stayrook still there?"

"Sure."

Mort asked for the local D. A. Stayrook presently answered.

"I want to see the contents of Grover Crompton's pockets," he said. "Can you accommodate me this evening?"

Stayrook hesitated. There was a muffled conversation, probably with the sheriff. Then Stayrook said: "I don't reckon I have to show you no evidence, Mr. Mort. You'll have to wait till the trial."

"The hell I will," Mort snapped, and hung up. He found the Palace Hotel, which was not difficult, as it was directly across from the court house, and made his way angrily to the desk. An impressed clerk told him Blackstone Jones was waiting in Suite A. Mort climbed a single flight of stairs and knocked on the door of Suite A. Blackie opened the door.

He eyed Mort quizzically. "What's eating you, C. D.?"

"Plenty. This rube prosecuting attorney's got a letter from Mahan, the attorney who dropped out of the case. The letter was found in the dead man's pocket. I've got a hunch it may explain why Mahan suddenly dropped out of the case on such short notice. But Stayrook won't let me see it. The hell of it is he's within his rights."

"Well, you can force its disclosure at the trial."

"That may be too late. I want that letter now. I also want a line on Tom Andrews' wife."

"Wife? From information I picked up, he's an old bachelor."

"My information's better. It comes from Ebright, the coroner. Andrews is married all right—that's what the letter was about. Mahan was telling Crompton he still didn't know whether Mrs. Andrews would sign a release of dower on that farm he was selling to Crompton."

"Well, why don't you go to Andrews and ask him where his wife is—if you think that really has any bearing on the case?"

"I think it does. I've a big hunch that gal, whoever and wherever she is, could throw a big light on why Crompton was killed."

"Well, have you looked up Tom Andrews in the phone book?"

"No. You look. If he's got a phone, call him and try to find out about his wife."

Blackstone Jones consulted the local phone directory, got his number and gave it to the operator downstairs. A few seconds later he had Andrews on the wire. "Good evening, Mr. Andrews, this is Jones, of Mort & Jones. I have some information which would be of value to Mrs. Andrews, but unfortunately I don't have her address. I'm sure you'll be glad to give it to me."

Mort was watching his junior partner intently, and he read failure in the youth's sober expression.

"Well?"

"He hung up." Blackie put down the phone. "Evidently it's a delicate subject with Andrews."

"Damn! He's probably the only man in the state who knows where the woman is! I'll probably never find her."

"Why not put the Mayhew Agency on the job?"

"That costs money. But, never mind—phone the agency and shoot the works. I've got to find that woman."

As Blackstone Jones put in the long-distance call to Riverton, there was a knock on the door. Mort opened it. A Negro bellhop stood outside.

"A lady in 208 wants to see you, boss."

"What name did she give, George?"

"She's registered as Mrs. Smith, boss. Only the initials on her luggage are 'M. F.'"

"Nice work, George," said Mort, handing the bellhop a bill. "I may have more work for a bright lad like you. What's your real name?"

"Julius, boss, only if it's all the same to you, just call me 'George.'"

"Gladly," said Mort. "I know what it is to wear a monicker you don't like."

The bellhop led the way to 208, and Mort

knocked. A feminine voice told him to enter. Mort did so. A woman of fifty, well-preserved but care-worn and weary, looked up from a chair.

"You wanted to see me?" said Mort.

"So you're Clarence Darrow Mort? Well, if you can't help me, nobody can."

"That depends on what kind of help you want."

"I want help getting what's coming to me. Twenty-five years ago I married a rat. He deserted me, took another name and left me to starve. I never would have found him if he hadn't had his picture in a farm journal with a prize-winning hog. It was the good looks of the hog that attracted my attention—then I recognized Tom."

Mort said quietly: "You wouldn't by any chance be Mrs. Tom Andrews?"

"No. I'm Mrs. Tom Faulkner. That's Tom Andrews' real name. I'm Myrtle—Myrtle Faulkner."

She eyed Mort with curiosity as he laughed softly to himself.

CHAPTER THREE

Law and Disorder

"WHAT did you first do when you found out where your missing husband lived?" Mort asked, settling into a chair.

"Why, I wrote here to Maple Leaf to a lawyer. But he wouldn't take my case. Said he 'wasn't in a position to.'"

"And the lawyer's name was Dwight Mahan?"

Mrs. Tom Faulkner looked startled. "How'd you know that?"

"I know lots of strange things. Have you, by any chance, the letter Mahan sent you?"

Arching her brows, Mrs. Faulkner got up, crossed to a worn traveling case and searched through it.

"Here it is—though what you'd want with it I don't know. I only kept it so I'd know what lawyer not to see when I got to Maple Leaf. I didn't expect to find a famous lawyer like you. When the bellboy told me you were in the hotel I thought I'd see if you were interested. I figure Tom owes me plenty."

"Indeed he does." Mort studied the letter. It was a brief one, dated September 9th. The Crompton murder had taken place on the night of September 21st. Mort noted that there was no stenographer's initial—evidently the former court reporter had typed this note hurriedly and signed it in the same manner, for the signature was a careless scrawl. He thrust the note into his pocket.

Mrs. Faulkner's eyes lighted eagerly. "Then you'll take my case?"

"Sure."

The eagerness faded from the woman's eyes—feminine caution took its place.

"Wait a minute—how much money you going to want me to pay you?"

"This one, madam," said Mort grandly, "is on the house." He made his exit in the same grand manner and hastily returned to the suite.

"I've got the Mayhew outfit on the job," Blackie told him. "They say it'll be tough on what little they'll have to go on."

"Phone them back and call them off. I've just left Mrs. Andrews. Only she calls herself Mrs. Faulkner, which is Andrews' real name."

"What? She's here in the hotel?"

"The party in 208. My hunch was right. She's tied up with the Crompton killing some way. So's Mahan, Mansfield's ex-lawyer. I tell you, Blackie, I've got to see that letter from Mahan that was found in Crompton's pocket!"

The youth shrugged. "If you're thinking about having me steal it, that's out. I've broken and entered for the last time for you. Swipe it yourself if you want it so badly."

Mort chewed his lower lip. "There must be a better way." He snapped his fingers. "I've got it! Come on, Blackie, we're going to give Maple Leaf some excitement!"

The pair raced downstairs. In the lobby Mort spied the bellboy, Julius, and crossed over to him. "Where's a Justice of the Peace?"

"Right down the street, boss. Mr. Abel A. Parker, the real estate man. He's most always open nights."

Mort walked out of the hotel lobby, avoiding his partner's eyes. The pair walked in silence for a block and a half, then Mort said: "That must be it."

"That's the place, all right. Just what are you up to?"

"You'll see."

It was evident that Abel A. Parker, Real Estate, Notary Public and J. P., was either a man who possessed lots of midnight oil or a shrewish wife, for he sat behind a scarred and scorched table with the air of a man ensconced for the entire evening. He looked up with a hopeful gleam in his eyes as the two lawyers entered.

"You're the Justice of the Peace?" asked Mort. The man nodded, rubbing his hands.

"Yes, gentlemen, what can I do for you?"

"You can have Dwight Mahan arrested. I'll file the affidavit myself. I trust you have a proper blank."

Abel A. Parker half rose from his chair. His eyes popped. "Who's that you want to have arrested? Dwight Mahan, the lawyer?"

"The same. Now, about that blank affidavit . . ."

"But—but what's the charge?"

"Murder in the first degree. I think any ordinary affidavit blank will do. I'll fill it out my—"

"*Murder!*" Abel A. Parker had fully risen now. He stared at Mort as if he were an escaped lunatic. "Why, I can't do that! Why, Dwight Mahan's the most respected lawyer in this town! And I haven't even know you!"

"You will," said Mort. He introduced himself and his partner. The Justice of the Peace was too dazed to acknowledge the introductions. He finally found words. "But Mr. Mort you surely know, bein' a big shot criminal lawyer, that a Justice of the Peace can't just issue warrants for people unless there's reasonable ground! You haven't even told me who Mahan's supposed to have killed!"

"I'll supply the details in the affidavit. I'm charging him with the murder of Grover Crompton. As for reasonable grounds, what do you think of this?"

Mort drew Mahan's check from his pocket and passed it over to Parker. Parker's eyes, already half out of their sockets, bulged even farther.

"This," explained Mort, "is Mahan's refund of fees paid him by Lee Mansfield. Why else would an attorney give back five hundred dollars to his client unless he had a guilty conscience?"

"Well, sir, I don't know why, but still that don't seem enough grounds to charge a man with murder. After all, Elmer Stayrook and John W. Decker have built up a damn tight case against Lee Mansfield. If you ask me, Mansfield done it."

"I'm not asking you. I'm telling you that I'll offer proof that Mahan killed Crompton himself. His motive was to recover a certain letter he'd sent Crompton. After you hear the evidence I'll offer at the preliminary examination, you'll be convinced that I've either got the goods on Dwight Mahan or that I'm the biggest liar in the world!" Mort leaned forward with his hands on the table. "Now, you wouldn't call me the biggest liar in the world, would you?"

PARKER dropped his eyes. His chin quivered, he wavered on the brink, then he said: "Well, I reckon you know what you're doin', Mr. Mort. But I'll be laughed out of Maple Leaf if I issue a warrant for Dwight Mahan and it turns out you're wrong!" He turned away from his table and went into a back room, saying over his shoulder: "My blanks are in here. I'll have to ring up my constable's house and see if he's home. If he ain't there or at the Elite Poolroom, I won't know where to find him."

When the Justice of the Peace had disappeared, Blackie laughed quietly and said:

"It's his hard luck he doesn't know that you're the biggest liar in the world. You know you can't make this stick, C.D. Mahan will blow sky-high and probably sue you for malicious prosecution."

"That's fifty per cent right. Mahan will blow up, all right, but he'll not sue me. You can bank on that."

Parker returned with the affidavit blank, and Mort hastily filled it out. The Justice got busy with his warrant officer, after locating his constable. The constable almost spoiled the show by refusing pointblank to arrest the locally famous lawyer, but in the end he let Parker browbeat him into the deal. Half an hour later he returned with his prisoner, whose face was the color of a tomato.

"What's the meaning of this?" Mahan stormed. "Damn you, Abel Parker, I'll sue you and your bondsmen! I'll break you! I'll run you out of town! I'll—"

The abused J.P. cringed while Mort said suavely: "Take it easy, Mr. Mahan. The squire was acting within his rights. An affidavit was properly filed—I ought to know—I filed it myself!"

Mahan whirled on Mort. "You—you scoundrel! I should have known you'd be at the bottom of this! I'll sue you for a hundred thousand dollars! Accusing me of murdering Grover Crompton! Why, it's preposterous! I'll show you you can't come into Maple Leaf and ruin a man's hard-earned reputation with your shyster tactics. I'll see you disbarred!"

"If any disbarring's done," snapped Mort, "you'll be the one disbarred! You're going to have some explaining to do—about a letter you wrote to Crompton. The letter said his deal to buy Andrews' farm hinged on a release of dower by Andrews' wife. You killed Crompton to get that letter!"

Mahan started, then said vigorously and as if tremendously relieved: "So that's what this is all about! Well, that's fantastic! The letter was found in Crompton's pocket! Elmer Stayrook's got it now! Why don't you call him, Abel?"

The Justice of the Peace fidgeted. "I reckon I should have called the prosecutor first." He went to the phone. Presently he had Stayrook, and when he hung up, he said: "Elmer's comin' right over—and bringin' the sheriff with him. He's bringin' that letter, too."

Mort said: "As you're apparently holding a preliminary examination at once, Squire, I suggest that you have your constable round up Aldon Ross and Tom Andrews. They're the men who found Crompton's body and they will be material witnesses against Mahan."

Mahan raged. "Witnesses against *me*? Why, they're both my clients!"

Mort shrugged. "You've practised law long enough to know, Mahan, that a client's the

last person in the world a lawyer should trust." He turned to the J. P. "Going to get them, Parker?"

The part-time realtor and jurist sighed deeply and said: "I guess so. I'm in this thing so deep now I may as well go through with it."

"I'll say you're in deep!" snapped Mahan. "You'll never get out of this!"

Another half hour passed before the constable returned with Ross and Andrews. The latter, a stolid farmer, regarded the affair with puzzled interest while the building and loan association secretary took Mahan's viewpoint. Ross said: "I'm surprised at you, Abel, letting a slick city lawyer talk you into arresting a substantial leader of the bar like Dwight Mahan! Why, it'll even hurt my building and loan, having its lawyer arrested like a common criminal!"

Mahan elaborated on this as they waited for the prosecuting attorney and the sheriff. Both men arrived later in company with John W. Decker. It appeared that the latter had caused the delay, as Stayrook had been unwilling to proceed without him, and several phone calls had been made before Decker had been found at a roadhouse.

"Just what's going on around here?" the fat lawyer demanded.

"This fool says I killed Crompton to get a letter!" Mahan snorted. "For heaven's sake, show him that letter from me that was found in Crompton's pocket!"

The two lawyers and the sheriff went into a huddle. When they emerged, Decker said: "It's highly irregular—nobody has any right to see that letter, but if it'll help clear up this ridiculous mess, all right. The letter has absolutely nothing to do with the case so I can't see any harm in letting Mansfield's lawyer see it."

Mort waited impatiently as the letter was produced from Stayrook's briefcase. The Justice of the Peace accepted it, read it and looked up with obvious puzzlement.

"I don't know what in the world this letter could have to do with Crompton's murder, Mr. Mort! Why would Mahan kill him to get it back and then leave it in his pocket?"

"Just let me see the letter." Mort fairly snatched the letter from the squire's hands. He scrutinized it carefully, then took out the letter Mahan had sent Mrs. Faulkner. He held the two letters side by side and compared them carefully.

HE LOOKED up finally and said: "Gentlemen, I have here two letters, both on the letterheads of Dwight Mahan, Attorney-at-Law. The letter to Crompton is dated August 7, 1945, the other one, September 9, 1945. Both are signed, that is, Dwight Mahan's name

is affixed to each. Neither was typed by Mr. Mahan's secretary. As you know, he is an expert typist, having been a court stenographer. He frequently sits down to his typewriter and pounds out his own letters, especially the brief ones. These are both very brief, and as no secretarial initials are present, it would seem that Mr. Mahan did type out both letters.

"However, that is not the fact. Mahan typed the letter to Mrs. Faulkner, the wife of Tom Andrews, here." Andrews started, and Mort explained: "I got the letter from Mrs. Faulkner, Andrews. I really should call you by the same name, for she's your wife." There was a sound of startled gasps which Mort ignored. He turned to Mahan.

"You are right, Mr. Mahan, when you claim that you did not kill Crompton to recover this letter. The fact is you didn't even know he had it. A further fact is that you didn't even write the letter to Crompton or anyone else. A casual comparison of the two letters shows that you couldn't have typed the one to Crompton.

"Your letter to Mrs. Faulkner, the authentic one, shows the even typing of an expert. The one to Crompton shows the work of a fumbler who was a self-taught typist. This is evident in the irregular spacing of the letters and the varying density of the black coloring caused by hitting some keys harder than others.

"The letter to Crompton was not sent to him on August 7th as it purports to have been. It was ante-dated so it would appear that Crompton received it several weeks before his murder. It will be impossible to prove this from the ink of the signature, as no expert in the world can fix the date of a writing even within months.

"However, a record of the work done by Mahan's typewriter as disclosed by his office files may show—by the condition of the ribbon, if by nothing else—that this letter to Crompton couldn't have been written August 7th. My guess is that it was typed on September 21st, the day of Crompton's murder.

"Far from anyone killing him to obtain the letter, someone killed him to *plant* the letter on his person. The murderer's object was to make it appear to the whole world, especially Crompton's executor, that Crompton well knew Tom Andrews couldn't give a clear title to his farm. Am I right, Mr. Mahan, in saying that in his contract with Crompton, Andrews undertook to give a clear title by warranty deed?"

Mahan grudgingly nodded. "Yes, but if Crompton knew the whole deal was contingent upon Andrews being able to get his wife to release dower, he still wouldn't have to give a deed unless she did."

"Exactly. If it could be shown that Crompton knew all the time that Andrews was married and that there was a question as to his wife's willingness to release her dower right, then Andrews couldn't be sued for breach of contract.

"If Crompton had sued Andrews, he would have collected plenty—ten to twenty thousand dollars. That is, he would have collected unless it were shown that he had actual notice of the fact that Mrs. Andrews—that is, Mrs. Faulkner—might not sign up. So you see that letter was planted in Crompton's pocket to make it appear that he had such notice. And he was killed to prevent a lawsuit, the murderer knowing full well that the executor of his estate wouldn't even try to maintain a suit for damages over that contract."

Abel A. Parker was staring hard at Tom Andrews, who was wiping his florid face with a bandana handkerchief. Slowly the Justice of the Peace turned to Dwight Mahan.

"Is what he's sayin' true? Didn't you write that letter? Did somebody else write it?"

It was Mahan's turn to mop his brow. He stammered: "I—I don't know. It was on my stationery—I supposed I wrote it. It looks like my signature."

"But you know damn well it isn't!" Mort snapped. "You knew it all along. But you kent your mouth shut because you didn't want to lose a good client by exposing a motive for killing Crompton. At first you probably thought Lee Mansfield did the killing, then you must have realized that it was done by the man who planted that letter. Your duty was to tell the truth, but you compromised and merely got out of the case, even trying to hang on to your retainer of five hundred dollars.

"Now's your last chance, Mahan. A while ago you spoke of disbarment—I don't have to tell you what will happen to you if you don't come clean right now!"

Mahan's handkerchief became soaking wet as he wiped his face furiously. Finally he blurted: "All right—I didn't write the letter to Crompton, but I don't know who did! Somebody must have sneaked into my office and typed it out on one of my letterheads!"

"Of course somebody did! It's really odd, Mahan, that you can't guess who that was. What about Tom Andrews—who would have more motive than he had? He'd tried to hook Crompton by selling him a farm he couldn't give a good title to. Then he discovered through you, his lawyer, that his wife was on to him and would show up to expose the real facts. He'd have to get out of that farm contract deal some way, and the only way was to plant a letter making it appear Crompton knew about the wife before he signed the

contract. That is right, isn't it? The contract was dated *after* August 7th, wasn't it?"

"Yes," Mahan agreed miserably. "A couple of weeks. But I just couldn't believe Tom Andrews would do a thing like that."

"Nor could I," said Mort. "All the evidence indicates Andrews is a fourteen-carat heel, but somehow I can't picture him as a murderer. No, it had to be somebody else, somebody with ready access to your office and a flair for forgery. Now, I'd think Aldon Ross, here, would fill the bill. As a secretary to a building and loan association, he would be an expert penman. Fortunately, it'll be easy to prove whether he forged your name. An expert can easily tell not only whether a signature is a forgery, but who forged it."

EVERYBODY was looking at Aldon Ross, who was looking very white. For a moment it seemed he would vociferously deny the charge, then he came to an abrupt decision, whipping a Banker's Special from his coat pocket.

"All right, Mort, if you're so smart, why don't you tell them what my motive was?"

"Anything to oblige. At first the motive problem baffled me. I couldn't understand why you, a solid, substantial financial leader in your community, should murder a man merely to prevent another man from being sued for breach of contract. Then I decided that it must be because you wanted to stay a respected leader of your community and you couldn't if Crompton lived.

"That meant you were in on the swindle with Andrews. For a fee, probably a few thousand dollars, you were keeping quiet about his abandoned wife. Andrews would unload the farm, skip and go far away. But when it appeared his wife was about to show up, the whole swindle would be exposed. You knew, either from Mahan or Andrews, that she was about to appear. And you knew that the aggrieved lady would identify you as an acquaintance of the past, making it apparent to the whole world that you knew all along she was the wife of Tom Andrews. Am I right in assuming that you all three lived in the same town during the time when the Faulkners lived together?"

"You're dead right," said Tom Andrews sullenly. "Aldon was shaking me down for five thousand just for keeping his mouth shut. Myrtle always talked an awful lot—that's the main reason I left her—so she'd have fixed Aldon's reputation for good around here!"

"And I'm going to fix you for good!" said Aldon Ross, staring with glassy eyes at Mort. "They can't fry me any more for two killings than they can for one! This'll teach you to mind your own business!"

"Don't be a fool," said Mort calmly. "Can't

Chicanery Row

you see that Mahan there has you covered?"

Mahan, empty-handed, was out of the line of Ross' vision. Ross gasped, whirled and shot Mahan through the abdomen before he realized he had been fooled. The sheriff disarmed him as he tried to correct his error by drawing a bead on Mort. He was carried out, and Mahan was also carried out an hour later—dead.

"It wasn't very sporting of you," Blackie complained afterward, "sacrificing Mahan like that."

Mort snorted. "Sporting my eye! Mahan was willing to sacrifice a man to the death house just to cover up another client he considered more important! He knew damn well Ross had typed that letter!"

Blackstone Jones still shook his head, but Lee Mansfield and his daughter—especially Marilyn—thought Mort was wonderful.

"It was your knowing so much about handwriting that did it," the girl exclaimed in awe. "When Ross knew the signature could be traced he just gave up."

Mort shrugged. "That was when I really fooled him. It's true that a forgery can be proved, but it's absolutely impossible to prove who perpetrated a forgery by the handwriting alone. The act of forgery effectively conceals handwriting. Fortunately, Ross didn't know that. Evidently he'd read too many detective stories instead of Osborn's *Questioned Documents*, as I have. Osborn, you may remember, is the man who identified Hauptman as the writer of the Lindbergh kidnaping notes."

Marilyn Mansfield sighed. "I really don't know how we'll ever be able to thank you!"

"Very simple," said Mort, producing Mahan's check. "This check can't be cashed, but you can present the claim to the executor of the estate. Collect the five hundred due you, pay it over to me, and that'll make fifty-five hundred including the five grand you're going to give me right now."



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Ready for the Rackets

(Continued from page 6)

where along toward eight o'clock, he decides that he must pay for his own dinner.

When he arrives home, he finds that the dinner cost him considerably—the house has been thoroughly ransacked of all valuables, having been "cased" in detail by the crook on his visit that afternoon. Had the house contained little of great value the visit would have been insurance against the risk of burglary for stakes that were too low.

If you're really ready for the rackets, you'll ask some very neat questions of any stranger who presents himself at your door as a friend of an out-of-town relative or friend. For when you frantically check back in an endeavor to catch the crook, the police will probably tell you that he was doubtless using an alias, paid the hotel rent for one night in advance under that name, and simply never returned there, while his strategy, in addition to its other advantages, gave him definite knowledge of the exact time his victim's house would be unoccupied.

Mildred Powell
Brownsville, Tex.

SERVICEMEN and veterans take notice! Here are four rackets especially aimed at you. Be wary of that friendly stranger in the station, be sure you know what you're signing when you make your mark on the dotted line, and as a good general rule, be very cautious when you part with any of those hard-earned GI ducats.

The Rackets Editor
DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE
Dear Sir:

A racket known as the "station snatch" is becoming a great favorite with confidence men for swindling servicemen, and is paying good dividends. Very few men will tell their buddies how they were swindled because they do not care to become the laughing stock of the barracks. Consequently, most servicemen do not know about this one. It goes like this:

When you get that all important leave, chances are you will be standing in line before a ticket window debating whether or not you should buy a through ticket, or one for only a short distance, figuring you may be able to hop a bomber for the rest of the trip. A stranger will strike up a conversation with you while the line is moving up. He will learn of your problem, then exclaim: "Why, this is sure a break! You're just the fellow I'm looking for. You can help me, and solve your own problem at the same time."

Naturally, you're interested. He then goes on: "You see, I have to get my car out to California (or wherever you are heading for). My wife has been sick, so she is going on the train. She doesn't care to drive that far. I'm all tied up on business here. Drive my car out for me and you'll save the entire fare."

You have no reason to suspect trickery, so you accept the offer eagerly, and follow the man from the station to a spot nearby. On the way

Ready for the Rackets

the sharpster will snap his fingers, and frown as he begins to thumb through his wallet.

"Listen," he'll tell you, "it will save me considerable time if I buy my wife's ticket now. I'm about \$50 short. There is my car across the street (he will point to a nice shiny sedan). Loan me the fifty dollars and stick by my car until I return. I'll be right back and we can work out the rest of the arrangements. That will save me a trip back downtown."

Still you don't suspect there is anything wrong and you hand over the fifty. After you have been standing by the car for quite some time you begin to get suspicious. Your suspicions are confirmed when you see another individual unlock the door, climb in and drive off.

So be on the alert for this little racket, and tell your buddies to be on the watch for it when they get their leaves.

Hugh Ridenour,
Columbus, Ohio

The Rackets Editor
DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE
Dear Sir:

It's certainly embarrassing to admit being a "dumb bunny" and falling for a gag as I did, but maybe my confession of stupidity will save the next fellow the same embarrassment and a financial loss.

I was sitting in a railroad station in a metropolitan city on our Northwest coast, waiting for my train connection. I had two grips, a large suitcase and a hand bag.

A middle-aged man came along and sat on the bench alongside me and after a few minutes started a conversation. He seemed most friendly and, of course, asked me where I was going. Strangely enough he was going to the same place, and on the same train.

Then, another younger fellow came up and sat on the other side, and he, too, started an offhand conversation. Pretty soon, all three of us were exchanging information, news and conversation.

All of a sudden, we heard the sirens of the fire trucks leaving the fire-station which was located just around the corner from the railroad station. Of course, it was very exciting. The younger man leaped to his feet and shouted: "Let's see where the fire is—it sounds close by."

I told him that I couldn't go along on account of my baggage, and at that point the older of the two "con" men spoke up: "Go ahead, I'll watch your bags—at any rate we're going on the same train."

So, like a chump I fell for the gag and out I went with the young fellow. We hurried down the street in the direction of the fire, which happened to be about three blocks from the station. A crowd had gathered quickly, to watch the firemen work on the blaze. I staved quite close to my "friend", but he soon melted out of sight.

I looked around for him but with no success, then I hurried back to the railroad station. You guessed it! The older fellow was gone—and so were my bags containing all of my belongings.

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Ready for the Rackets

Sure, I reported my experience to the police—and received their sympathy and the news that I had been worked on by a couple of slickers. My loss was the third in a week, under similar circumstances. These two men had been working as a team in that vicinity. The police told me that this same pair had been working the same gag in other cities along the coast.

R. A. F.
 Nebraska

The Rackets Editor
DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE
 Dear Sir:

The returning serviceman, eager to buy a farm, must beware of the fraudulent itinerant real estate dealer who sells a farm, supplies a forged deed and then decamps with the money before his felony is discovered. The buyer finds he has spent his money for a worthless piece of paper.

This racketeer is usually well dressed. He stops at the best hotels and appears to be a prosperous businessman. He gets a copy of the patent on a piece of land owned by some single person in a different state. He then goes to a real estate dealer in the town in which the property is located, and tells him that he has an option to purchase this land. He asks the real estate dealer to find a buyer for this land. The land is offered for sale at a bargain price in order to get a buyer quickly.

When a prospective buyer is found, this racketeer appears with a forged deed showing him to be the owner of the land. He records the forged deed and gives the purchaser a new deed. He usually demands a large down payment or payment in full and then disappears. The buyer finds out that he has been swindled when he attempts to take possession of the land.

Thus a friend of mine was swindled out of \$500 which he made as a down payment on an eighty-acre farm in northern Wisconsin. The racketeer is still at large. In order to prevent others from being victimized by him, my friend has urged me to write this letter.

Theofil J. Cuhel,
 Lambertson, Minn.

The Rackets Editor
DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE
 Dear Sir:

While I was still in the armed forces I read an article in an army newspaper pertaining to the many schemes awaiting the discharged veteran. All of the cases mentioned were strictly big-time stuff involving up to ten thousand dollars. I jumped to the rash conclusion that inasmuch as I intended going into business for myself I had nothing to fear from any of these swindlers. But, and I hate to admit it, within twenty minutes after I had left my separation center I had donated my little bit to the rackets. Yes, I was prepared for the big-time stuff. When I applied for a GI loan it wouldn't be for investment in any phony business. No, sireee! But why didn't that army newspaper mention something about the petty swindles that were going on?

Ready for the Rackets

Right inside a crowded bus depot my little stumbling block was going full blast. Don't crowd fellows! Stay in line! We can take care of all of you! And they did. Taking full advantage of the fact that the newly received honorable discharge is the veteran's most cherished possession, these crooks were getting suckers, virtually by the busload, to fork over two and a half bucks for a photostatic copy of their discharges.

Since then I discovered that I could have the same service performed at the county courthouse for a dime (some counties for free) at any of several large clothing stores in the bigger towns for no cost whatsoever, or by a reputable photostat concern for fifty cents or less.

Incidentally, veterans, don't let the fact that your would-be swindler is wearing an honorable discharge button dim your wits. Ironically enough, the smiling young man behind the counter in the bus depot was wearing a "ruptured duck" too.

R. A.
San Luis Obispo, Calif.

TAKE heed, newlyweds, and be forewarned. Clip your own notices, lest ye be yourself clipped!

The Rackets Editor
DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE
Dear Sir:

Exactly a week after our marriage, my husband and I received in the mail, from what purported to be a newspaper clipping service, a mimeographed card, informing us that for twenty-five cents (five copies for a dollar) they would be pleased to send us a recent newspaper account of our wedding in which, they felt sure, we would be interested.

Since several of our relatives had expressed interest in seeing newspaper reports of the wedding ceremony, we mailed off the dollar.

A month later, our order was acknowledged with another form card from the clipping service expressing regret that they would be unable to fill our order at present, but assuring us that they expected to be able to do so within the next ten days. This seemed to us a rather lackadaisical way of doing business, but we filed the episode in the don't-give-it-a-second thought department.

The next communication six weeks later from our clipping service was to the effect that since "newspapers are still rationed" they would be unable to send any more than one copy. They suggested instead that perhaps we would like to order one of several booklets put out by them on a wide range of subjects, including getting your man and handwriting analysis—all, of course, obviously designed to induce the customer to spend more money than he had originally intended.

At this point we wrote the company a blistering note, informing them that we could get along very well without their inspirational booklets, and please to remit either the news story

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YOU**

Now comb away
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Gray hair is risky. It screams: "You are getting old!" To end gray hair handicaps all you now have to do is comb it once a day for several days with a few drops of Kolor-Bak sprinkled on your comb, and afterwards regularly only once or twice a week to keep your hair looking nice. Kolor-Bak is a solution for artificially coloring gray hair that imparts color and charm and abolishes gray hair worries. Grayness disappears within a week or two and users report the change is so gradual and so perfect that their friends forgot they ever had a gray hair and no one knew they did a thing to it.

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SEND NO MONEY We'll rush one to you with rods, helmet, operating instructions, and all necessary parts with the exception of a large jar and small pieces of extension cord; these most everyone has. Pay postman only \$1.06 plus few cents p/st'ge. If not delighted return Victory Model Handiweld in 5 days from receipt and money paid for it will be refunded promptly. Rush your order now.

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Ready for the Rackets

or our dough, if they wanted to stay in business for their health. This brought results.

The lady with whom we had had such intimate mimeographed contact had evidently turned over the complicated matter to her husband to settle. The water was too hot for her. Accompanying his illiterate letter was an unidentified clipping bearing no source or dateline which, we are willing to bet, never saw the light of day on any newsstand, written in an objectionable over-friendly style, plus 75c remittance on the order.

The whole business, from the mimeographed form cards and letters (both bearing different business addresses, incidentally), their too-glib use of "the paper shortage" as an out for not sending the clipping we had paid for, right on down to the clipping itself—amateurish and offensive in style—seemed to indicate that it was all a deliberate, planned fraud.

Anne Park
New York, N. Y.

P EOPLE have always fallen for gadgets and, as long as we can't all be engineers, probably always will. But here is one you can pass by next time, anyway.

The Rackets Editor
DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Dear Sir:

One of the slickest rackets, because the victim is seldom aware that he has been gypped until it is too late, is the sale of radio aerial eliminators.

I bought one and was quite pleased with the results until a friend of mine, an electrical engineer, saw it and burst out laughing, assuring me that it was a fraud.

When I protested that my radio worked better, he suggested that we take the gadget apart. Then, he offered, if I were not convinced that I was a sucker, he would buy me a new one.

Because the device was sealed, we had to boil it until the resin seal gave way. He won—I admitted that I was a sucker. The loop of black-coated wire at the top dead-ended in the resin at both ends. The red wire that I had connected to the radio aerial wire and the black wire that I had connected to the ground wire of the radio were joined in the center in the resin and the black wire came out the far end where it was connected to the ground.

As my friend pointed out, I could have connected the aerial wire to the ground without any "eliminator" at all. Reception would probably have been better because a good ground would give better reception than a poor outside aerial.

Later, I submitted my evidence to one of the consumers' research organizations which analyzed some twenty other so-called "eliminators" and reported that none was worth buying.

With war-born improvements, there may be some honest eliminators coming on the market, but you would do well to demand proof that you are receiving an honest value.

L. L.
San Francisco, Calif.

Better Late Than Cadaver

(Continued from page 70)

and you didn't dare let him inspect your juggled bookkeeping."

Ellenby moved fast, threw the box of chisels up at the solitary light bulb. Steel cracked on glass, drenched the room in instant, midnight blackness.

"You won't shoot, Price! You might hit Grace. You can throw your gun on the—"

He broke off, grunted. Price said softly: "That's my gun in your belly, friend."

Something clipped the shamus' shoulder, bounced away, struck on the floor.

Grace Woody wailed: "Oh, my God, I'm choking. Let me out of here!"

Highland Park Price was choking, too. With uncontrollable tears coursing down his cheeks, he turned and lurched for the door. As he stumbled over the sill into the open, fresh air, violent hands clutched him. He was yanked aside, his gun wrenched from his fingers, his body fanned for other guns. A flashlight blinked into his face, flashed off again.

Price leaned against the wall and gagged.

He heard, suddenly, Sergeant Warren's bull bellow. "That's him! Get 'em up, Ellenby! You're under arrest for murder!"

Price gagged some more. His voice was bitter when it came. He said: "That's wonderful, Warren! You could actually find an address after I wrote it down. I didn't even have to draw you a map to be sure you'd get here."

Sergeant Warren's bulky form loomed behind a flashlight. He was bitter, too. "We were here, listening! And what's more, we saved your life, didn't we? Don't we get any thanks for that?"

"Thanks?" High Price choked. He became elaborately sarcastic. "Yeah, thanks for tear-gas bombing me, you big chump!"

Sergeant Warren was equally sarcastic. "You can consider it a birthday present, pal. And here's wishing you many happy returns of the same!"

THE END

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618 South Dearborn St., Chicago 5, Ill.

Please rush my Litemaster with Lifetime Spun Glass Wick and three extra flints. If not delighted I may return in 5 days for refund.

CHECK ONE

I am enclosing \$3.50. Send my Litemaster POSTPAID

Send my Litemaster C.O.D. I will pay postman \$3.50 plus postage

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