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***There was a lake and a moon and just us two—too smart to believe that two can die as cheaply as one —and one of us too dead to care!***

## CHAPTER ONE

### Slayboy

IF SHE hadn't gotten that edge in her voice and hadn't started to think she had certain rights around the establishment; if she had just kept on as she

**By John D. MacDonald**

*When he hauled back to swing on me, I grabbed his wrist and spun. . . .*

started—placid, dumb, sultry and willing—she wouldn't have ended up beside me in the front seat of the Cad, out cold, her head bobbing against the inside door handle, her long pretty legs outstretched like the legs of a rag doll. When the street lights shone in through the window on her side, I noticed that her wool skirt had a long rip in the hem. Mike had probably caught it on something when he had carried her down into the drive and heaved her into the seat. I remembered how he had stepped back, grinning and dusting his palms together before he waved me off.

I knew the place for it. A patch of woodland beyond Concord. She moaned and shifted and from then on every exhalation made a bubbling sound in the corner of her mouth.

She didn't come out of it until I turned off the two-lane concrete onto the rutted dirt road, the headlights turning the scrub brush silver in front of the car. Suddenly she sat up, moaned again and felt tenderly of the lump over her ear. A little blood clotted the pale blonde hair.

I stopped, cut the lights and the motor, leaving the dash lights on. In the dim glow she looked almost as pretty as she had when she had met Mike a year before.

She was sore. "What the hell goes on, Al?" she demanded.

"Take it easy, Helen. Relax. Cigarette?"

She pushed the pack aside. "Where's Mike?"

"Better have a cigarette, Helen," I said, extending the pack again. She took one, bent over the flare of the lighter. The flame light wasn't kind to her. It made the shadows under her eyes look soft and pulpy.

She sucked the smoke deep into her lungs and exhaled it in a long plume that bounced off the inside of the windshield. The night was very still. The nights hadn't been cold enough to kill off the last of the bugs. They cheeped in a lonesome way.

I let the silence and the night go to work on her. Finally she asked, "What is this, Al? A necking party or something? Mike wouldn't like that." Her voice was beginning to tighten up.

Softly I said, "Mike doesn't like you any more, Helen. Mike doesn't care any more."

I saw the glowing end of the cigarette begin to tremble.

"What are you trying to tell me, Al? What is it? Tell me!"

Softly I said, "Mike, you might say, is *fini*. Tonight is kissoff. night, lambie." I put an edge in my voice. "Get out of the car!"

Her heels weren't made for woodland sprinting. I caught her in my fourth running stride. The new moon was pale bright. She made soft little whimpering sounds in her throat. I let her see the glint of moonlight on the blued steel barrel. Her voice turned into something that couldn't have been made by anything human.

She hacked at my face with her nails, but I pushed her away before she could do any damage. She stumbled and fell, crouching at the base of a big tree.

"Where do you want it, Helen? In the head?" I asked conversationally.

She was blubbering, "Anything, Al. I'll do anything. Please—please, Al." She saw me aim the gun at her face and there weren't any words any more. Just the animal sounds. The saliva ran down her chin.

I let her wait for a moment and then I lowered the gun. "Guess I can't do it, Helen. Maybe if you make a promise?"

"Anything, Al. I told you. Anything!"

"I'll give you fifty bucks and drop you off at a bus terminal on the Worcester Road. You go just as far from Boston as you can get and don't ever come back and never mention that you ever heard of Mike Muriak. If you do, Mike will find out and

somebody will come chasing after you."

Half an hour later I let her off a hundred yards from the place where the Worcester busses stopped. In the glare of the headlights she looked frail and pathetic, her face streaked, her shoulders slumped.

She was the third pigeon of Mike's that I'd had to brush.

WHEN I ran the Cad into the stall and walked back up to the big colonial house in Dedham, Mike was in the study, brandy on the table beside him. He grinned up at me, the floor lamp beside his chair making a harsh glare on his broad features.

"Scare the hell out of her, kid?" he asked.

"I ought to join a straw hat theater next summer, Mike."

I sat in a chair opposite him. Mike is a man who looks about seven feet tall when he's sitting down. His shirts and clothes have to be made special to fit the thick expanse of shoulder and the tan, strong column of his neck. He's about five and a half feet tall when he stands. His legs are bowed and his hands seem to hang below his knees. Anthropoid is the word for Mike Muriak. And with a great ape's sly, shrewd brain.

I yawned and stretched. "You never burn a bridge unless you've got a new bridge lined up, Mike. Who's the lucky lady?"

Mike's face went soft. "This different, kid. Real different."

"That ought to be refreshing," I said.

He looked at me sharply. Mike doesn't understand and doesn't care for sarcasm. He said, "Name is Ferris. Jane Ferris. But not plain Jane. Not plain any way you take a look. But no deal like with Helen. This has got to be creep up job. She comes to work day after tomorrow. She helps you."

"Oh, fine," I said wearily. "Can she type?"

"She says so."

"I hope she hasn't got an active curiosity, Mike. Some of the business details may fool her a little—or intrigue her."

He scowled. "That's your job. Harmless stuff I want her to do. Make up some work if you got to."

Michael Muriak is a businessman. His home area is Boston, and thus it is one of the few places in the country where the long arm of Michael Muriak does not rake in the cabbage. His business deserves a few words of explanation.

The Bureau of Internal Revenue would very much like to have proof of these facts. They have had creeps watching Mike for years. Mike does a cash business.

I am his confidential secretary and go-between. He has three division heads. Rush Morson runs the little factory in Chicago where we make the machines and the equipment. The machines and equipment are sold at a surprisingly low percentage of profit, but always with an unwritten clause calling for a fat under-the-table bonus, or a percentage of future gross—in cash.

Gunner Kline is contact man. He has a flock of salesmen who not only install the equipment, but also give advice to management about how to turn over the biggest amount on all the machines, right from the one arm bandits up to the fancy roulette layouts with the steel heart in the ivory ball. Kline even locates good spots and interests local talent and capital so as to provide a market for the stuff Rush Morson manufactures.

Moke Andresa is enforcement. He sees that the payoffs are complete once the merchandise is installed. As a sideline, he cuts little slices to the local law to keep the houses in operation.

At the last estimate, there were, in operation throughout the country, three and a half million dollars worth of equipment. As a rough rule of thumb, you can figure that each item returns four times

the capital investment each year. Thus, the total take all over the country runs about fourteen million a year, of which four million reverts to Mike's organization. Of this amount, expenses, of which I am one, eat up three million. The remaining million dollars is hauled in by Michael Muriak with great glee and even greater finesse. To be on the safe side, large hunks of cash have been planted in various South American banks and business enterprises.

As visible assets there are only the two places, the house in Dedham with the two Cads in the garage and the big summer place near Marblehead.

I have been with Mike for eight years. Ever since I quit college by request when a crooked roommate framed me for a theft in the football locker room. A month later I got in a saloon brawl in Memphis and was baled out by Gunner Kline who, at that time, was looking for new blood for the sales organization.

I can't explain what went on in my head to make me such a good man at placing the crooked equipment. Figure it this way. I had been decent, honest and earnest and one of the clean young men, when suddenly, for no fault of my own, I was on the outside and the others were on the inside. Something inside me turned lean and raw. It seemed as though by planting the machines, I was getting back at that smug world I'd been booted out of.

The war came along and Mike could have kept me out of it, but I went in. I decided one starry night on the beach at Iwo Jima that when it was all over, I'd go straight.

Six months after discharge, while working hard at a job that paid forty bucks a week, my employer tried to bond me and the old school record caught up with me. After a four-day drunk I was back working for Mike as his confidential secretary. And at a forty-buck taxable income, plus two hundred a week expenses on the side. Cash money.

I had a brandy with Mike and then went up to my room. It's a hell of a penalty to like nice things. I liked the fabric of the hundred-and-fifty buck suit when I took it off. I liked the sheen of the twenty-five dollar shoes, the feel of the silk underwear against my hide. I put the gold ribbed lighter, the gold bill clip, the gold fountain pen on top of the bureau. The bill clip was a little fatter. Mike had given me a hundred to kiss her off with. I figured fifty would take her plenty far. Mike doesn't like whining women that can't take the brush. He likes the brush to be good.

MY ROOM has a private bath adjoining. I took a long shower, singing softly to myself and then climbed into the sack with a book. I heard his lumbering step downstairs, and knew that he was making his usual checkup on our very complicated system of burglar alarms. They are his pride and joy.

The Dedham house is like a fortress. Besides Mike and myself, there is Hiram Kelly, an excellent cook, George Janocki, the chauffeur and Anna, our very capable housekeeper. The four of us boys can all shoot. George and Hiram have done time. They are out because Mike wanted them out.

Mike's heavy step came up the stairs. He shoved my door open. I looked up from the book. "Al," he said. "I forgot to tell you. Jane Ferris is going to stay here. It's more convenient than traveling back and forth. You move out of this room. Give it to her."

"Where do I go?"

"In the east wing with George and Hiram."

He pulled the door shut. I threw the book across the room, yanked out the light and pounded the pillow into shape angrily. Mike and his ideas. I decided that I'd better move George Janocki out of his setup. It was the most comfortable layout in the east wing. I began to go over in

my mind the affairs of the morrow. Moke would be in town with funds and I'd have to arrange a transfer spot. Mike didn't like Gunner's latest idea about a subsidy for some outfit in St. Louis and I'd have to get off a doubletalk letter to him. Rush Morson was plagued with increasing production costs and Mike wanted the price kept the same. I wanted to argue with Mike about allowing Rush to make a boost.

There was a stinging place on my cheek. I wondered whether Helen had really gotten me with her claws. I padded into the bathroom and pulled on the light. One little nick. There was enough alcohol in the after-shave lotion to kill any bugs I might have picked up.

The summer tan was burned deep and brown into my shoulders. Part of my job was the regular workouts with Mike in the cellar gym. I was huskier than I had been in the army. I studied my face in the mirror. Not a bad face. A face on a guy around thirty. Not much expression. Expression is a handicap. Two grey eyes, a nose with just the smallest tilt toward left field—a memento of the sales days with Kline. Mouth a shade loose. I firmed it up and made a promise that I'd remember to keep it a little firmer.

I crawled back into bed and lit a cigarette. Somehow smoking in the dark never gives you much unless there are two cigarettes glowing. I stubbed it out and went to sleep.

The next day Mike was full of the joy of spring. Even with winter coming on. He gave me a bad time down in the cellar. We use the sixteen-ounce pillows. I wear a face guard. You can't hurt Mike with an Irishman's pick. He whistled, sang and bounced me off the ropes with the greatest of glee. I took a great many, rolling with a lot of them, blocking and slipping and weaving.

There are no bells and no rounds. I began to feel the small hot glow inside me and I kept it under as long as I could. Finally he bounced me off the ropes and I came back with a short choppy right that I hung on his button. His knees sagged and his eyes glazed. I knew I ought to bring the left across, but something stopped me. Seconds later a pretty green pinwheel went off in my head, and I followed it as it roared down into darkness. When I sat up Mike was leaning on the ropes, grinning at me.

He had his gloves off. He touched his jaw and said, "You get ambitious, hey, Al?"

"Not for long," I said, climbing up onto hollow legs.

"Funny thing, Al. I hit you over the ear."

"Ha, ha," I said sullenly.

"You mad, Al?"

I was pulling the gloves off. I pointed my thumb at my chest, eyebrows raised. "Who? Me! Mad?"

He walked over and slapped me on the shoulder so hard my knees bent. He doubled a big fist and tapped me gently on the chin. It was all I could do to keep from lifting my knee into his gut. When he bent over I could chop him across the back of the neck and walk out of the lousy job. Walk into an early grave. I remembered the pale blue eyes on the Moke. A very early grave.

He bellowed hoarse laughter into my ear. "This too fine a day for to be mad, Al." He patted his hairy belly. "Come on, boy. I buy us biggest seafood dinner you ever see."

I sighed. I knew what that meant. Two drinks for Al and spend the rest of the day keeping Mike out of trouble. Cart him home, roll him into the sack and then have a free evening—maybe. And the next day the girl was going to show.

George Janocki had the black car out in the drive at four. I had on my steel-grey gabardine, a Sulka tie, one of the hand-made shirts. I held the door open

and Mike climbed heavily into the back and sat down.

George was sore at me. I'd made him move out of the room he had. He had a room without a bath and with only one window. I could see the knot of muscle at the corner of his jaw as he gunned the big black job out into traffic. Big Mike laced his frankfurt-sized fingers across his hard gut and hummed softly.

Another day, another dollar. I yawned and wondered if I needed a haircut and wondered how long Mike would last before I had to drag him home, and wondered what kind of a girl would agree to work at the Dedham house.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A Corpse Between Us

HIRAM KELLY edged into my room with the orange juice and coffee on a small tray. I opened one eye and said, "What the hell time is it?"

Hiram is a lean old man with a half-bald head and fingers like the talons of an elderly eagle. He smirked at me and said, "It is but ten, sire. Did the mahstah wish to be awaked a shade later? Just a shade?"

I sat up. "What's the corny gag, Hi?"

He dropped the accent. "There's a dish down in the library. She's getting twitchy. She says she works here. I thought you ought to take a look."

I stretched and yawned. Hiram spotted the new style fat eye I was wearing. "Lovely evening last night, I assume?" he said.

"The usual. Mike was his charming self with the entire contents of one of the lesser pubs. We managed to get the house cleaned and get into the car before the wagon came. Mike passed out on the way home. How about turning on the shower?"

After the water started to roar, I found my way to the bathroom and stood under it. My neck was stiff where somebody had tried to dent me with a bottle and missed. I hoped that the new dish would keep Mike working nights. Life was too energetic when he was between dishes.

I got down to the library within the half hour. She was standing by the windows that look down across the terraced yard. Dark suit. Starched white collar. Sensible hat.

She turned as I walked across the room toward her. The words that I was about to say didn't come out. She had a rather pale face framed with dusty blonde hair. Her mouth was large and grey-green eyes were hidden behind a pair of very staunch looking shell-rimmed glasses. Crisp is the word for her. Crisp and business-like.

"Miss Ferris?" I asked politely.

She nodded coldly.

"I'm Al. Mike probably mentioned me."

"How do you do. Mr. Muriak spoke of you. I take my orders from you, I understand. My first name is Jane." It was a cool, Boston voice. Beacon Street—or better.

"Do you have a suitcase with you, Miss—Jane?"

"A suitcase and a small steamer trunk in the front hallway."

I didn't get it. This wasn't anything Muriak should have wanted to be within eleven fathoms of. This was as crisp as good French dressing. Mike is partisan to women who rename themselves Dolores and Ivonne. This was plain Jane with a capital plain. And she looked bright. I began to wonder how well the make-work program was going to go over with her.

"Like to see your room, Jane?"

She nodded and I made an expansive gesture toward the hall and stairs. She went on ahead and as I walked behind her I began to see what Mike had seen. Some women have a jolty, wooden-legged

walk. Some swing and sway like the third from the left in the front row. Some drift like little wraiths. Plain Jane just walked. But she walked like a woman possessing all the key features and attractions. She couldn't help herself. When she moved, she put a tag on her femininity—not a price tag, but just a discreet little note-which plainly said, *See, this is a woman, and a very fine example of the sex, and if you can ever talk her into fun and games you'll have something very wonderful indeed.*

I closed my mouth to keep from drooling and trotted along after her. She must have felt the beady eye on her because, as she reached for the stair railing, she turned and gave me one glance. It was as though somebody had broken an icicle over the bridge of my nose. I guess with the interesting blue shadows under my right eye, I didn't look like what the lady expected.

She seemed mildly pleased with the room. Anna, the housekeeper, was fussing about, putting out fresh linens. George Janocki was puttering around out in the shrubbery and I got him to help me haul the steamer trunk upto her room. She got the suitcase herself. No stopping her.

I introduced her to George and, when Hiram went down the hall, I introduced him also. She was very grave and very pleasant with the introductions. Both George and Hiram had funny looks in their eyes, trying to bridge the gap between Helen and his new version.

"Mike will be up and around by lunch time," I said. "When you get settled, come on down to the library and I'll explain your duties."

As I turned to leave she said, "Why do you and Mr. Janocki and Mr. Kelly act so peculiarly? As though I shouldn't be here."

That was plain enough. It was oddly difficult to lie with those grey-green eyes boring into mine. I noticed absently that the top of her head came to the bridge of my nose. A very pleasant differential in height.

I gave her the Grade A smile. "I might as well be honest with you, Jane. Maybe blunt is a better word. Mike Muriak generally selects the assistant secretaries from his own social level."

One eyebrow went up in a most intriguing manner. "Oh, I see. I met Mr. Muriak during the evening. I wasn't dressed this way."

"How were you dressed?"

One corner of her mouth twitched. On anybody else it would have been a broad grin. "A rather extreme evening gown. Silver. And when I'm out in the evening, I don't wear these." She took off the glasses.

I mentally slipped her into an evening creation. "Hmmm!" I said.

She popped the glasses back on, said, "I'll be down in a few minutes," and closed the door in my face. I shook my head as though shaking off the effects of one of Mike's friendly left hooks. I floated downstairs and sat behind the kidney shaped desk. The typist's desk was off on my left. Suddenly I remembered that nobody had cleaned out the typist's desk.

I SNAPPED my fingers and hurried over to it. The top drawer was okay. Bond and second sheets and carbon. I slammed it shut and opened the second drawer. A massive silver bracelet, half a lipstick, a comb missing some teeth, Helen's heavy sapphire ring and her silver cigarette case.

I was reaching for them when Jane's voice, ten inches from my ear said, "She must have left in a rush."

I whirled. "Few little things she forgot, I guess," I said. I shoved them in my side pocket. "I'll see that she gets them."

She had annoyed me, creeping up on me like that. The rug is thick and maybe she didn't do it on purpose. There was

one quick way to get even. I said, "As soon as you find a notebook and a pencil, I want you to take a letter." I walked over and sat behind my desk. She rattled through the drawers, found a notebook, swung her chair around and propped the book against her crossed legs.

I leaned back, stuffed my thumbs under my belt and gave her a long letter to Rush Morson. As I rattled it off, I was pleased to see her lips tighten, see her bend over the pad, a lock of the dusty blonde hair falling across her forehead. I was determined that I'd make her ask me to slow down. She didn't. That was okay with me. I'd catch the errors in the letter.

"For signature by Michael Muriak," I said, "Two carbons, triple space between paragraph, each paragraph indented ten spaces." I picked some papers off my desk and started to read them. But I was watching her with little quick glances.

She ran a sheet of scrap paper into the old machine, rattled off one sentence, tore out the paper and found the brush and cleaned the type. She located a ribbon, changed the old one, went upstairs and washed the ink off her hands, trotted back down and made the old machine sound like one of those gimmicks they use to bust up pavements. She clipped the envelope to the two page letter, put the whole works on my desk.

It was the freshest, cleanest letter that ever came out of the place. And every comma was right where I wanted it. And one rather clumsy sentence had been polished up so that it read right.

"I surrender, dear," I said. "You've worked before."

For the first time she really smiled. "Long enough to know that only a darn fool turns down an offer of one hundred a week, Al. I was making sixty-five."

"You may want to go back to the sixty-five, Jane."

She frowned. "How so?"

"The last gal would have made that letter last all morning. It looks like you'll handle the day's work in an hour. Boredom is a pretty rough thing."

"I can stand a lot of it for this money, Al."

I didn't tell her the real reason why I thought she'd leave.

"Well, I better tell you the setup, Jane. Mike is a very good friend of this Rushmore Morson. Mike has no financial interest in Acme Devices, Morson's company. He doesn't even own a share of stock. Rush takes Mike's advice on business matters. Rush lets Mike give advice to a Mr. Kline, head of Morson's sales department, and also to a Mr. Andresa, who is, you might say, a comptroller."

"What does Acme Devices manufacture?"

"Amusement devices. Games."

"I see. Does Mr. Muriak have any other business interests?"

"None whatsoever, Jane."

"Where does he get the money to run a place like this?"

"Income from investments. Enough comes in to keep up the house, the cars, our salaries and a bit over."

She frowned. "Why does he need you?"

"I take care of his correspondence, box with him in the basement, get him home when he's drunk, handle the household accounts and payroll, make out his income tax, pay all the bills and keep him as happy as I can."

There were a few little items I didn't tell her, such as making the cash pickups, helping the Moke when the clients wouldn't cooperate, acting as a bodyguard and so forth.

She frowned. "Well, I could take over the household accounts, if you want me to, and pay the bills."

That seemed to solve the problem of keeping her busy for a time. I handed her the big ledger and journal and triple-

tiered checkbook. She was just getting into it when Mike came lumbering down the stairs, groaning as each step jolted his head.

He walked into the library, looked at Jane, blinked, rubbed his eyes and looked at her again. "Hello," he said uncertainly.

"Good morning, Mr. Muriak," she said primly, sitting at attention.

I could guess what was going on in Mike's head and I wanted to laugh, but I knew it wouldn't be sound. Mike was trying to mentally take off her glasses and put her back in the silver gown. It was quite a strain.

During lunch he kept giving her funny looks. The four of us ate together while Hiram served. For once the conversation was polite and almost formal. Chunky, black-haired George Janocki didn't tuck his napkin in his neck and made a point of chewing with his mouth closed. Mike acted pained.

After lunch Mike and I went down into the cellar. He was shaking his big head sadly. "Al," he said, "I wasn't even drunk. Believe me, Al, she looked good. Maybe this her sister, hey?"

Somehow it made me feel good. I had a hunch that if Mike had started looking at her in the old familiar way, I wouldn't have had any appetite for lunch. She reminded me a little of the gal I had been dating at the time I was nudged out of college. I couldn't even remember her name. But she had had the same crisp, clean look as Jane Ferris.

We stripped down, put on the ring togs and climbed through the ropes. Mike seemed absent-minded. I tagged him a few times, but not so hard as to attract his special attention. By keeping him off balance with left jabs, I kept him from getting set and booming me in the middle with those jolting hooks of his.

We worked up a good sweat, and then, in the cellar showers, he called to me above the roar of the water. "Al, I think I find another girl. I get rid of this one."

It was a weight off my shoulders, but I knew if I agreed too quickly, he might change his mind. I said, "What's the matter with this one?"

He roared with laughter. "Good typer and bookkeeper, that's the matter. One week and she goes. Maybe give her a month pay, hey?"

BUT at dinner she fixed it for herself, but good. At five she folded the typewriter, went up to her room and came back down with the glasses gone, the hair upswept, an aqua dress on that did exactly the right things for her figure. She and I had martinis while Mike sipped old-fashioneds and looked at her with deep approval. She became flushed and gay and surprisingly vivid. Once when I filled her glass and handed it to her, her fingers touched mine and it was as though I had poked my hand down in where you put in a light bulb. I look at Mike's face and knew that Jane would be staying longer than a week.

But I could also see that she baffled him and that he would take it slow and easy, not wishing to risk an untimely departure.

Up in bed that night I smoked in the darkness and tried to tell myself that it was none of my business, but somehow it was and I couldn't help it. There was something all wrong about Mike's brute strength and the slim purity of Jane Ferris.

The next day was a busy day. The Moke arrived at the station at nine in the morning. The Moke looks like a small, withered associate professor of ancient languages in a tiny college who has despaired of ever working himself up to be a full professor. His glasses have antique steel rims, and his clothes are all oxford grey.

Once some eager operators in K.C. threw the net over me and tied me to a chair and were unlacing my shoes to get

at the soles of my feet when the Moke came in. He caught a .45 slug in the left shoulder and it slammed him against the wall so hard that the plaster fell off the lathes. Sprawled on the floor, the .38 Police Positive somehow jumped into his hand and he made three neat holes in three heads. He struggled to his feet, cut me loose and explained just how he wanted the bandage fastened against the hole in his shoulder. I felt okay until the Moke felt a little faint. He glanced around, then with a small sigh of weakness, sat gratefully on the middle of the back of one of the deceased. That is the sort of citizen he is. All the compassion of a lizard. It was a spot well out in the country, and the local police were too happy about the demise of the three citizens to look for the doctor that treated the Moke with more than a half-hearted interest.

He came trotting through the station, small and fussy and nervous looking. He didn't look at all like a character carrying one hundred and twelve thousand bucks fresh from Louisiana. But he was. He had the dough in a brown paper bag and it looked like his lunch. We had coffee side by side and I walked off with his lunch.

Per agreement, I shook off any tail that could have been curious, then returned to the station and checked the lunch in a dime locker. I stuck the key in a hunk of cardboard and mailed it to a John Doe box we rent in the Newton Center Post Office. Mike had indicated his desire to pick it up later himself, in spite of my objections. I rejoined the Moke in the car and George drove us out to the house, which, in my heart of hearts, I call Crude Manor.

George dropped us off under the arch at the side door that opens into the study on the opposite side of the hall from the library. Jane Ferris was standing in the front hall, her glasses in her hand, her eyes bright and angry. But they weren't any angrier than the eyes of the tall young man in the grey suit who was yammering at her.

"I say that you're going to leave this place!" he said.

"And I say that I do as I please," she said.

They turned and stared at Moke and me. At that point, grey suit grabbed Jane's arm just above the elbow and tugged her toward the front door. She braced her feet and slid.

"Hold it up!" I snapped.

"You stay out of this," he said.

"Who is he?" I asked Jane.

"An ex," she said icily.

That was enough. I chopped his biceps with the heel of my hand and he let go of Jane's arm. When he hauled the hand back to swing on me, I grabbed his wrist and spun with it, ending up with it anchored against his back between his shoulder blades. I reached around him, pressed my thumb down on the brass latch and pulled the front door open. I walked him out onto the porch, hooked a toe around his ankles and gave a hearty shove. When he stopped rolling and scrambled up, his face was white and both knees were out of the grey trousers.

He came charging back at me like a brave little boy. I stepped aside and tripped him again and he fell on his hands and knees on the porch. I got the back of his collar and the slack of his pants in my two hands and tossed him back out onto the bricks.

"I'm coming back with the police," he said. His voice was shaking as though he was close to tears.

"You do that," I said. "Bring them right back. We'll file a complaint. Trespass and assault."

With as much dignity as he could manage, he stalked out to his battered little coupe and drove off. I went back into the house. The Moke had shut himself in the study with Mike. Jane was dabbing up

tears that ran out of her grey-green eyes.

"You two seemed to have a difference of opinion," I said.

"He thinks I shouldn't be working here and staying here," she said. The tears were there, but there was no reflection of them in her voice.

Before I thought I said softly, "He might be right."

She looked startled for a moment. But she didn't ask any questions. She turned on her heel and went into the library. When I looked in she was adding up the figures on the bank statement.

MIKE opened the study door and called me in. He had a tumbler half full of brandy beside his chair. The Moke was drinking ginger ale, straight. I shut the door behind me. Mike said, "The Moke worries too much."

"What about this time?" I asked.

The Moke said, "I come here too often with too much money. I was careless yesterday. I could have been picked up. I wasn't. Why?"

"I give up, why?" Mike asked.

I felt a little twinge of alarm. If Moke was right, there was a cause for worry. Shipments had been picked up before. But they had no way to trace the connection to Mike. Mike just took the loss, got the Moke out of trouble and went his merry way.

I said slowly, "If you're right, it means that they've got some reason to think they can trace the connection."

"Is the dough safe?" Mike asked.

"Of course it's safe," I snapped. "I'm wondering why somebody is getting optimistic about you to the extent of letting a shipment ride through. When is the next one coming?"

"Two weeks," Moke said. "Big one. Two hundred. West coast dough."

"Better not bring it here," I said. "I can meet you some place and we'll drop it on ice in a new safety deposit box."

Mike groaned. "Now I got two of you worrying. Why? What's different? They get a chance to grab the dough and they don't. So what?"

"There must be a hole in the routine some place," I said. "I don't like it."

I slapped my side pocket to find my cigarettes, felt instead the outlines of the heavy silver bracelet, the lipstick I had taken out of the drawer of the typist's desk. Something started to chew at the back of my mind. Little sharp teeth nibbling.

Mike saw the look on my face. "What's matter, Al?"

"Hey, the cigarette case! Helen's cigarette case! It's gone!"

"Al, honest, you drive me nuts. Smarten up, Al."

"I tell you, Mike, I had it in my pocket and it's gone." I smacked my forehead with my hand. "The door on that damn locker!"

Mike looked bewildered. "Prints, Mike!" I said. "Prints!"

He came out of his stupor fast. "Who can take the case, Al? Think."

"Let me see. I put it in the pocket of this jacket yesterday morning. I changed clothes when we went out after dinner last night. I put the jacket on again this morning. I didn't remember noticing it this morning. I tossed it on my bed while I took a shower. That's the only time it wasn't locked up in the room. Oh, and when we were showering in the cellar."

Moke said what was in our minds. "Who's that girl you got now, Mike?"

While we were thinking it over, I heard the distant ring of the phone in the library. I walked to the door and opened it. Jane was walking rapidly toward the front door. On a hunch I grabbed her. "Where are you going?" I whispered.

"Down to the corner for some cigarettes," she said, pulling her hand away.

"The house is loaded with them, lady.

Come here." I began pulling her along.

She hung back at first, but when she saw that it wasn't any good, she came along willingly. I shoved her into my room, locked the door and pocketed the key. I went back into the study and said loudly, "I guess we're all getting nervous. The gal's okay."

I didn't have to look hard or long. There was a neatly wrapped package on the table by the window. I tiptoed over to it and Mike looked at me as though I were crazy as I laid my ear against it. I heard a small humming noise.

I started a running account to the Moke of the way Michael had pasted me down in the ring, while I found a scrap of paper on Mike's desk and scribbled, "Room wired for sound. Keep talking."

Mike's eyebrows went up into his hair, but he kept talking. I told them I had some work to do and went out and slammed the door.

There is a cedar hedge between us and the house next door. Actually the two houses are within fifty feet of each other, both having been built on the edges of large lots, but the hedge gives the impression of more privacy than there actually is. I had a pretty good idea of what we were up against.

The guy I had thrown off the porch was lounging in a small room in the nearest corner of the house. He had a standard radio set turned on, had a sound recorder set with the mike right up against it. I was right so far, even to his hearing our conversation and warning Jane by phone. The room had french doors. I edged close to the frame, flattened against the side of the house. I could hear Mike's voice.

The spring made a small click as I pulled the automatic free. I slammed the doors open with my foot and went in on him. He was too good and too smart to show how startled he was. I gave him no chance for a quick try at me. I got him turned around, his palms against the wall, leaning against it. The silver case was in his inside pocket, wrapped in tissue. I took it. I also took the little plastic records that had been filled out by the recorder. I could hear Mike's conversation coming out of the radio.

Some of my anger at Jane went into the blow when I laid the barrel of the automatic behind his ear. He slumped against the floor, curled up like a sleeping child. I went back out, across the lawn and shoved through the hedge.

BACK in the room I tossed the records into Mike's lap, ripped open the cardboard carton and held up the little electronic mike. I bounced it off the rug and knew that the conversation coming out of the radio next door had suddenly stopped. A nice gimmick. No wires. Self contained battery and tube transmitter, good for any receiving set within a radius of sixty feet.

Mike took the records in his big hands and crumpled them.

"What did you do with her?" he asked.

"Locked in my room."

"Let's go," he said. "Moke, you stay right here and we don't want company. How much time we got, Al?"

"The guy across the way ought to be out for ten minutes. But maybe he's got friends in the house. I was quiet as I could be."

He scratched his big chin. "Al, you tell George to bring the car around. We go for a ride. Give me key."

I don't think he noticed my hesitation. By the time I ran back to the front of the house, tires were crunching on the gravel as George brought the car around. Mike hadn't been exactly dainty. He came down the front stairs with his big paw on her wrist.

We left Hiram to take care of the house. Moke and George rode in the front seat. Mike and I were in back with Jane between us.

Everybody but Jane relaxed when we finally got out into the traffic.

Mike said, "Now, you tell us a little, huh? Who you work for?"

"The government," she said coldly.

"That nice. Very funny."

I said curiously, "Why didn't you take it a little easier? Why the speed?"

"Why not?" she asked coldly.

"Mike," I said, "the guy working with her brought the little electronic mike in the package while I was out. He gave it to her in the front hall and she slipped him the cigarette case she had filched out of my pocket. They put the box in the study, because she knew that was your place for business conversations. When Moke and I walked in, they turned it into an act. The guy did well, too."

"It won't do you any good to run," she said.

Mike laughed. "Who runs? Al, he paid a visit to your guy next door. I busted the records. Al got the case back."

She could snarl and she did. "That doesn't matter. I know enough and Mr. Forrest knows enough so that between us we can break up this long tea party you've been having, Mr. Muriak. You can plan to spend several years sitting in the federal penitentiary thinking about income tax evasion, along with your dear friend, Al."

"Have you got records?" I asked mildly. "Photostatic copies of our books? Don't talk rot, Miss Ferris, if that is your name."

She smiled sweetly at me. "Al, darling, you're so much brighter than Mr. Muriak. You know, you should be in charge. We knew that Mr. Andresa came at intervals. Mr. Muriak has a tiny black notebook that he keeps in his wallet. On one sheet is a row of figures. Last night he wrote down the date and opposite it he wrote eleven point two. Compared with previous figures we know that Mr. Andresa brought in one hundred and twelve thousand dollars today." She paused, watching them.

I looked at Mike with deep disgust. "Mike, do you do a damn fool thing like that? I thought you were smart."

He smiled sheepishly and took out his wallet. "Is harmless, Al. I show you." He stuffed a blunt finger in the compartment and then his mouth opened slowly. "Is gone!"

Jane laughed. "Of course it's gone. Along with some samples of your handwriting. You're all through, Mr. Muriak. That is, unless you get out of the country fast enough, and I somehow don't think you will."

Mike looked at me dolefully. "What now?"

I was thinking out loud. "A key part of their case is Jane's evidence as to how she lifted it off you. They've got to prove that you wrote the figures down to record income. Are they in pen?"

"No. Pencil."

"Good. They can tell the age of ink. Now suppose I were to make up a quiz where the figures you wrote down would be the right answers to the quiz. If Jane here couldn't—"

I was about to say testify. I didn't need to say it. I had already condemned her to death. She was sitting beside me. Mike filled up so much of the back seat that her knees pressed against mine. I could feel the warmth of her through the fabric of her skirt and my trousers. She was warm, and yet, in a very definite way, she was already dead. We had a corpse between us, and good old Al had done it.

Mike chuckled. "Maybe she like to swim like Johnny Lerone."

I remembered Johnny. He had tried to expand into our line of business. Some of his boys had broken up some of our equipment. He fell for Mike's offer to merge. He accepted Mike's offer to come up to the camp at Lake Loraina in New Hampshire.

He had been wined, dined, kidded along

and carefully drowned. Mike spent three hundred bucks on flowers for Johnny's funeral.

Mike had done it himself and had enjoyed every minute of it. Mike is a fine swimmer. He can hold his breath for a full two minutes under water.

"George," Mike said. "We go to Lake Loraina. Miss Ferris, she needs swimming suit. Stop by a store. And we got to buy some food. Nice steaks, Al. You pick."

I guessed her at a size fourteen. George pulled into one of those market spots where you can buy everything. I bought a suitcase, two dresses, swim suit, sandals, toilet articles.

When I got back to the car after the second trip for groceries, Mike had opened the bag and he said, "What you buy all this stuff for, Al. Why?"

"Don't be a dope, Mike. If all she had left in the camp was the dress she's wearing, the coroner might get ideas."

I felt the quick start that Jane made, and then the slow shudder. I looked at her. Her eyes were shut and her lips were bloodless. I think it was the first time she realized that this was the end of the line for her.

We took turns eating at a pig stand so someone could watch Jane. When I came back from my turn, along with George, I brought her a sandwich. She looked at it as though it made her gag. A mile or so further on, I dropped it out the window.

The November day was warm and pleasant. The sky was an intense blue. The big car ran with silent power. Beside me the corpse of a pretty girl sat. She breathed and her body was warm and her heart was beating. But she was dead. And now she knew it too.

We rode in silence and I watched the successive stages march through her mind. Fear, disbelief, terror, doubt, horror, disbelief.

Once she said in a high voice, shrill and somehow child-like, "You're trying to scare me!"

Mike patted her knee heavily and she cringed away from his touch. "Not scare you, girl. Don't be scared. Over quick." He laughed.

The Moke turned around and looked at us. I could see that he didn't care for any part of the idea.

We made the camp at four in the afternoon. The only way I can describe what happened to Jane Ferris during that trip is to say that she unraveled at the edges.

Fear of death ate at her. And yet she didn't crack wide open as so many would have.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Something Wrong

THE camp is in Rush Morson's name. The lake is small and secluded. There is only one other camp on the lake and that is invisible from ours. The camp itself is a rambling log structure. Lots of bedrooms. Log steps that wind down to the beach and to the diving platform.

"Moon tonight. Drink now. Nice moonlight swim after. You don't drink, Al. You got to watch her."

There is something about death for a woman, a young woman, that is horrible. You see shadows of it in the eyes of the witnesses when a woman is about to be electrocuted. It awakens both latent sadism and self disgust.

George, Moke and the boss broke out some bottles and sat around the kitchen table. I could see that they were going to get drunk quickly. It would be easier that way. I kept telling myself that I wouldn't have anything to do with it. I'd turn my back when it happened. I'd rub the memory of it out of my mind. After all, in spite of her being a woman, she was from the Other Side. What had the Other Side

ever done for me? Not a damn thing . . . ever.

I took her upstairs. She was submissive. I pushed her into one of the bedrooms, followed her in and pulled the door shut. She stood by the bed, dull and apathetic.

I put the suitcase on the bed and flipped it open, pulled out the swimsuit and one of the dresses.

"Climb into these," I said. "Put the dress on over the swim suit."

I walked toward the door, turned, leaned against it and lit a cigarette. She looked at me. "Can't you—"

"No, I can't. Mike would take it very unkindly if you managed to hang yourself to the shower rail with one of your nylons. Do as I tell you." I made my voice cold.

She looked at me for a second, and then her lip curled in disgust. She pulled the dress up over her head, stepped out of her shoes, sat on the bed and peeled off her stockings. I studied the glowing end of my cigarette. When I looked at her again she was dressed in the swim suit. It was one of those tubular jersey jobs. Her shoulders were all that shoulders can be. The rest of her matched nicely.

She put the dress on. Then the sandals.

I held her wrist firmly as we went back down the stairs. I took her out into the kitchen and, at Mike's order, had her sit in one of the straight chairs in a corner. I sat with the others at the kitchen table, between her and the door. I took one light drink. She refused a drink. Mike waddled over to her with the bottle, held her chin cupped in his hand and tried to pour straight rye down her throat. It dribbled on the dress I had bought her. Something in her calm eyes seemed to shame him, and he laughed half-heartedly and sat down again at the table.

The calmness surprised me. It was as though she had made her pact with death and from here on in, it didn't matter in the slightest.

Finally George got drunk enough to say what was on his mind. He looked at the girl and then at Mike. "I don't like this one damn bit," he said.

"You don't like what, Georgie?" Mike cooed at him.

"I don't like killing no girl. I never got mixed up in anything like this before and

I don't like it now. I think it's a sucker play. Hell, they'll burn all of us for it."

Mike's big fist made a small arc. There was a wet sound as it thudded into George's mouth. George went over backwards in his chair and skidded on the linoleum toward the stove.

As he got up shakily, Mike said, "Good place for you, Georgie. Time you cook steaks. Getting dark soon."

He turned toward Moke and said, "Georgie didn't like the idea, Moke. What you think?"

"I don't like it either, but don't put your dirty hand on me."

Mike looked stupidly down at his hand. "Not dirty, Moke."

"Just don't take any pokes at me," the Moke said. His voice was almost a whisper.

Mike hooked a big foot around the rung of the Moke's chair and yanked. The Moke went over backwards. He came up with the Positive in his hand. I tore it out of his fingers and dropped it into my side pocket. George was banging pots and pans. Finally the Moke stopped trembling and sat down. I handed him back his revolver. He tucked it away.

Jane looked at all of us with her calm eyes.

Though George prepared a plate for her, she wouldn't eat. Mike ate like a great pig, grunting and rooting at his food. I tried to eat, but didn't make much of a job of it. In my mind I had a screwy picture. Symbolism maybe. It was as though I was on a runaway freight car going down a steep hill with a switch at the bottom. I could go one way or the other. Both of them were right angle turns. Both choices would wreck me. And there weren't any other choices.

Night crept toward us, shadowing the lake. The last glow died in the west. George went back to the bottle as soon as he ate. In a half hour he put his head down on the table and began to snore. Mike cursed him and shoved at him. He fell off the chair, moaned once and then began to snore again. Mike laughed.

The Moke sat and looked at Mike with hard eyes in which there was no flicker of expression.

Finally Mike stood up, lumbered to the window and looked out at the lake. "Nice moon, hey?" He turned toward Jane. "Swim now?" He laughed. But I could see that it had gotten him a little too. There was a rusty edge in his laugh.

He pushed her toward me. "You take care, Al. I find swim pants."

My own personal little freight car was roaring down onto the switch, toward the right angle turn I couldn't make.

Idly, without taking the cigarette out of my mouth, I clubbed her on the side of the head above the ear, knocking her down. It wouldn't leave a mark. I yanked her back up and said, "Why don't you let me take care of all of it, Mike? No reason why you should have all the fun. I want to see if this pigeon can breathe under water."

Glancing at Mike's eyes, I knew I had won. There was relief there, and yet a shade of suspicion. Jane's eyes were dead. The seconds seemed interminable as he stared at me.

Finally he said, "Okay, Al. I watch you do it."

THE logs of the curving steps were still warm from the sun under my bare feet. She was beside me. She shivered in the night air.

The three of us walked out onto the broad wooden dock. Mike took her shoulders. "Swim out little ways, Al. I push her off when you ready."

I dived in. The water felt warm compared with the air. I came up, turned and waited. He pushed her. She sprawled clumsily, barely managing to turn it into a dive as she hit the water.

I got her as she came up. She clawed

at my face, tried to bite. She seemed at home in the water. I prolonged the struggle unnecessarily, moving farther out.

Mike yelled, "What's matter, Al? Can't handle her?"

"Sure," I said.

When we were far enough I whispered, "Keep fighting, Jane. I'm faking this."

She paused for a fraction of a second, then tried to twist away. I got her around the neck and pushed her head under. I let her come up and said, "Can you swim under water about a dozen feet?"

She nodded.

"Keep fighting. Scream as I shove you under. I'll pretend to have you under the water near me. Swim under water to the far side of the float."

"What you whispering about?" Mike yelled.

"I'm panting, if that's what you mean," I yelled back.

She screamed and I pushed her under. I pushed her way under, angling her off toward the black shadow of the float. I felt her slip away from me, but I continued to thrash around as though I were holding her under.

Finally I relaxed, turned and swam with a slow crawl back to the dock, heaved myself up, panting and dripping to sit beside Mike's feet. We both looked out at the quiet expanse of dark water.

"You mark her up?" Mike asked.

"No."

He laughed. "I think for a minute you try something funny, Al."

"Funny? How?"

"Never mind, Al. Forget."

Back in the camp I toweled myself, dressed slowly. Mike was on the phone. He had gotten hold of the proper authorities in the village and they were relaying a call to the county coroner and sending some men out to help drag the area near our dock. They'd be there in a half hour, Mr. Muriak. Yes sir, Mr. Muriak. Tough luck.

An hour later Mike and I sat up on the broad front porch watching the two boats going slowly back and forth in the harsh glare of the portable floodlights dragging the area between the float and the dock.

Mike yawned. "You think we have trouble, Al?"

"Sure we'll have trouble."

"But not so much as the other way. Nobody proves anything this way, Al."

He stiffened suddenly. "What the hell!" he said.

There was a drone and something passed the bright face of the moon. It circled and went down to the end of the lake. The drone seemed to make the dark woods pulsate.

"Seaplane," I said.

"Al, I don't like this," he said.

The floats were tossing up spray when it passed across the moonglade. It turned, running lights glowing, and taxied toward the float. The boats got out of the way and, with short bursts of power, it came all the way in, swinging to rest at last with the wing overlapping the low dock. The floodlights shone on it.

The first man to step out had an official look. Mike muttered, "We get out of here, Al. Something wrong."

George was asleep. I got behind the wheel while Moke and the boss piled into the back. I looked back and said, "If we run, Mike, it makes the girl's death murder."

Mike was rattled. He said, "Got hunch, Al. We run like hell. Get moving."

There was a shout behind us. I roared up the overgrown road. A car blocked the exit. I didn't get to the headlight switch quick enough. I saw her and I knew that Mike saw her. Jane Ferris wearing a man's overcoat over her swim suit. She had some beefy citizens with her.

In the dark, with the car still rolling, I pushed the button that opened the door and rolled out. I smacked hard against a tree.

The Cad rolled on into the car that blocked the way. There was a crisp roar of shots. I staggered to my feet and ran back down toward the camp. Footsteps pounded behind me. More shots sounded from up the trail.

I broke out into the moonlight and turned to see Mike bearing down on me. The gun glittered in his hand. I fell sideways as he shot, rolling onto my shoulders and kicking up at him. He fell, but got up as quickly as I did. I kicked the gun out of his hand and tried to move away, but he caught me under the ear with a right that turned the night to hot, red day. I fell back, powerless to move. He loomed over me with the gun.

Something cracked sharply and he fell over me. He shifted once and then lay still. I blinked in the glare of the flashlights held on us. The flashlights showed me the new economy-size hole in Mike's temple.

YOU can't take a right angle turn at the speed I was going without getting wrecked. Mike was dead. Andresa lived two days before he died. Jane's phone call to the right place had brought the plane up. She had come in the car with some locals.

I gave all the evidence I could. I sewed up Morson and Kline for nice long terms. I didn't feel as though I was ratting. It was all part of the right angle curve I had taken from the moment I doubled up my fist and hit Jane Ferris.

But in spite of the evidence, they tempered mercy with a jolt of justice. I drew five. With the way I'm behaving in this pen, it'll be cut to three years and something over. I'll be around thirty-three when I get out.

I'll feel a lot younger.

I'm on good behavior not only to cut the time in stir, but also to keep them from snatching my visitor's privileges. Every so often I get to look through the wire mesh at a pair of grey-green eyes that have a lot of things to say. I even like them with the glasses.

And, as Janey says, it'll be handy for a stir-bug to have a crack stenographer as a wife. A little income until I get into some nice clean man-sized work, like digging ditches.

## STAMP OF DEATH

HOW MUCH is a stamp worth? Three cents, generally; a penny in Great Britain. But one Englishman, secretly, had amassed a fortune in stamps, in a small collection. It was less than one hundred pieces, but worth over $10,000. Only his best friend knew of this collection and its worth. And his best friend killed him to acquire it.

The killer broke up the collection, and offered individual stamps to buyers on the continent. He never offered more than one stamp to a collector, and each time he introduced himself by a different name, altering his appearance slightly.

In Italy he offered a famous stamp collector an unusual stamp. The collector bought it, and bid his visitor good-by. Then he ordered his servant to trail the man. Meanwhile the collector called the police.

"I have just been offered a rare English stamp. This particular one belonged to me at one time and still has my secret mark on it. The man I sold it to four years ago was recently killed in England—a mutual friend wrote me about it. I know the dead man did not sell the stamp because only two months ago I offered him half as much again as he had paid me, and he refused."

In less than a week the killer was on his way to England under Scotland Yard escort.

*—Ray P. Shotwell*

# TRIAL BY FURY

## By Scott O'Hara

*She felt the inevitable lift of the rear wheels, the rolling, rocking crash. . . .*

***Some men are born to die —some women are born to kill. And some nights are made for their rendezvous —nights without a dawn!***

HELEN WILKINS, wearing nothing but the cork-soled beach shoes stood back in the room where she could not be observed and, by standing on tiptoe, managed to see over the concrete railing around the small private sundeck, down onto the Florida beach where minute shoulders and backs and trim thighs were deep brown against the glaring white of the sand.

She did a small dance step, stumbled and blushed as she caught sight of herself in the full length mirror. She stood in front of the mirror and took inventory. The third careful inventory in so many days. Her throat was good, she knew. None of the horizontal creases that so many women of thirty-five acquire. The throat swelled into a firm body that looked tight and young.

She frowned. It was the face that was wrong. A thirty-five-year-old face on a

twenty-two-year-old body. That was Harry's fault. Harry with his constant whining and fussing had put those deep lines from the nostrils down around the corners of the full lips. He had made the flesh sag along the jawbone.

But Harry was gone. Massage would do a lot. Maybe a face lifting. She put her fingertips to her temples and pulled the skin tight. There! A face lifting might give her eyes an intriguing slant.

Harry would have said, *"Nonsense, Helen. Act your age, for goodness' sake! You're not a kid any longer."*

But Harry wasn't around to object. She was free. Free! She spun away from the mirror, danced across the room and stretched out luxuriantly on the soft bed.

Harry wasn't around.

She looked up at the pastel ceiling of the expensive hotel room and watched the scenes form and dissolve against it. The square brick house in Brayton, Pennsylvania, where she had spent those deadly years with Harry. What a fool to marry at nineteen. Sixteen years with Harry and his eternal complaining. She was glad that there had been no children. Otherwise she would be tied down. But it wasn't too late. A woman of thirty-five is young. Young! The world was full of a number of things. It was full of Greg Catlett, with his slow wry grin and the hungry look in his eyes.

She saw the brick house, saw the cars parked outside, the people coming up the walk with that stupid expression reserved for calls on the newly bereaved. She had met each one at the door, dressed completely in black, wearing not a shred of makeup. Oh, she had acted the part perfectly. The stricken eyes, the small wisp of handkerchief touched gently to the reddened nostrils. She remembered how she had rubbed her nose violently to make it red. The Widow Wilkins!

Outside the sun flamed down on the beach and, as she felt the other scene slowly floating into her mind, she wanted to get up, dress hurriedly and go out into the sun where there would be no memories, only the flaming present.

The red brick house had been sold and the car was gone and there was nothing left of Harry except this image of his death that constantly floated into her mind like a cloud obscuring the sun. As always, she felt the prickle of her skin, the tight dryness of her mouth and she hugged herself with arms that were suddenly cold.

It was so simple, the way it had happened. Harry always insisted that she drive. He hated to drive a car. And she hated to drive with him sitting beside her. He constantly fussed. He kept pipes and tobacco and matches in the glove compartment. For as long as she could remember, he had smoked a pipe and had never been able to keep one lighted.

The continuing clack of the glove compartment door had worn her nerves ragged. Harry's little symphony of sound. Clack of the glove compartment, scrape of the match, slam shut the glove compartment, puff, puff, cough, roll down the window, spit, roll up the window, clear the throat, puff, puff, clack of the glove compartment—on and on and on until she wanted to scream.

*"Stop fidgeting, Harry!"*

*"What's the matter, Helen. Bad nerves? Better get a tonic or something."*

What was the use? Harry was a stingy, fussy little man.

Maybe if she hadn't seen that accident eight years ago when the McCoys ran into the back of that truck and the timbers that extended over the tail gate. . . .

She shuddered.

IT HAD been a dark and rainy night. She had gone over to Brayton Center to bring Harry back from one of his interminable meetings. On the Valley Road she had caught up with the truck. One long pipe with a red flag on the end

extended fifteen feet out over the tailgate. She almost didn't see it, her mind registering the fact that it was probably against the law not to have a lantern or something hung on it. If she ran into it, the hood of the car would go under the pipe and the pipe would come through the windshield. . . .

Harry sat beside her, puffing and clacking and spitting, shifting constantly in the seat. She was edging out to pass the truck when, far ahead she saw the alternating blinking red eyes at the rail crossing. She turned back in, slowing down.

Her anger at Harry had become a roar in her ears. She thought of Greg, of the lingering hands on her shoulders when he helped her on with her coat. Harry, with all his money, who made her live like the wife of a ribbon clerk.

It was oddly like threading a needle. The pipe was the thread. Harry's head was the eye of the needle. Steer just so, a little more to the left. . . .

Shatter of glass, Harry's scream that turned into a horrid, wet, bubbling sound as the flagdraped end of the pipe caught him full in the mouth.

The Florida sun seemed to have lost its warmth. She shuddered. The investigation had been so simple. The light mist. The skid marks on the street. They didn't know she had jammed on the brakes after the end of the pipe had struck Harry.

The coffin had been closed, of course. There was nothing they could do to fix him up.

The scene slowly faded out of her mind and she began to feel warm again. She knew it would come back—an incredible number of times. But she was strong enough to face it. It was a small price to pay for freedom. Freedom from the small town, from Harry. Freedom—for Greg.

She smiled fondly. He would have received her discreet letter by now, he would have had it for three days. Long enough to read it many times, read the meaning between the lines. Nothing had ever been said between them. But the meaning in his eyes had been unmistakable. She thought of his lean brown hands and she wanted to purr like a great cat.

With the blackness behind her, with the terror forgotten, she got up, made ready for the beach. Sun lotion, pale yellow sunsuit, blanket folded neatly and draped over her arm, harlequin sunglasses with little stones set around the lenses. Harry would have snickered at anything like that. The stupid hotel insisted on guests wearing a robe when walking through the lobby. She put the brilliant cotton robe on, but didn't belt it. Before leaving the room she paused by the mirror and touched deep red nails to the puffiness along the line of her jaw. Exercise might get rid of it. Maybe by the time Greg came down some of it would be gone. Anyway, by then she would be a golden tan. Greg would like that. She had a good start on it.

A good thing Greg was a widower. Otherwise there might be more difficulty.

The elevator boy kept his eyes so fixed on her with such intensity that she pulled the robe around her.

At the desk, the sleek little man gave her his professional smile and took her key. He handed her a letter with a flourish. She thanked him and her breath stopped for one delicious moment when she saw the return address. Gregory Catlett, Attorney at Law—Rider Building, Brayton, Pennsylvania.

No need to show her excitement in front of the dapper desk clerk. She went through the lobby, out the wide doors, down the concrete steps and onto the hotel's private beach. She frowned as she saw a squat hairy man with bowed legs trying to knock a giggling girl down by throwing a beach ball at her with all his strength. If she had known that the hotel would have this class of clientele. . . .

But annoyance was forgotten as the sun flared on the crisp white letter in her hand. Greg's hands had touched it.

Save the iceing till last. She found a garish umbrella, spread her blanket near its dark shadow, stretched out carefully and smeared her long slim legs with the suntan lotion. Backs and fronts. The shoulders and midriff were easy, but it was difficult to cover her back. In a few days Greg would be down and she would have him cover her back with the lotion. The idea of his strong hands on her gave her a delicious thrill. She wondered if he would be shy. He probably would. That would add to it, somehow.

She stretched out on her stomach, propped herself up on her elbows and looked down at the letter. The sun was a weight that flamed against her. The crash of the white surf was soothing.

Squinting, she held the letter up, tore off one end of the envelope. After making herself wait so long, her hands were shaking. She unfolded it, frowned. It was typed!

Dear Mrs. Wilkins:
Thank you for your generous and somewhat bewildering invitation to visit you in Florida. I am forced to decline due to press of business. Do phone me the next time you are in Brayton so that I may thank you more adequately.
Very truly yours,
Gregory Catlett

When Helen was next able to think coherently, she realized that she had ripped the letter to bits with such frenzy that she had made a long dig across the back of her finger. She looked stupidly down at the fragments of the letter. Dictated! And to that Francy Arnold in his office. They would both be laughing at her. Laughing at the love-hungry Widow Wilkins. Why had he done it? Surely she hadn't misread the messages in his eyes! Probably frightened of her now that she was free. Probably trying to impress the Arnold girl with how devoted he was to her. She frowned.

The weight of the sun made her head spin dizzily. Impossible to spend the day on the beach—alone—thinking of Greg and of Harry.

Oddly she wanted Harry. That was stupid. Harry, whenever she cried, would put his thin arm around her shoulders and make that silly clucking noise and say, "There, there, Helen. It isn't that bad. It really isn't."

Stupid Harry with his clucking sounds. She dug her fingers into the hot sand, tightening her fist around it, catching a bit of the inside skin of her lower lip in her teeth and biting it hard, biting off a small damp fragment.

Deliberately she calmed herself. There was no Harry to cluck at her and somehow make things right again. There was no Greg. But there were others. Hundreds of others. If not here, then in Rio, or the South of France or Southern California. Bronzed young men. She was a young widow with an income of just over seven thousand a year. More, if she wanted to touch principal. Seven thousand a year from this moment until death. No one to spend it on but herself.

The thought cheered her a little. Maybe it would be nice to take a cruise. It would give her a chance to show off the pretty clothes she had bought for Greg. Harry would have called them silly clothes and would have clucked at her for going about *"—half-naked at your age, Helen."*

Suddenly she wanted to show Harry her new clothes, just to watch his gasp of dismay. Everything she did mattered a great deal to Harry. Now it seemed that nobody gave a single damn what she did. Not even Greg.

THE SQUAT man with hair had knocked the silly girl down and had her by the ankles and was dragging her toward the surf. The girl was screaming shrilly. Helen frowned, stood up,

slipped into her robe, folded the blanket, picked up the lotion and walked back up to the hotel.

She wanted some kind of activity, something to make her forget. She walked into the lobby, approached the man behind the desk and said, "I want to rent a car."

"Ah, we can supply a beautiful car, madame, with liveried chauffeur and—"

"I want to drive it myself."

His lip curled a little. "Oh. Madame has a driver's license?"

"Of course."

She waited in one of the modernistic, uncomfortable chairs and, in ten minutes, a man came into the lobby and murmured to the man behind the desk. He pointed and the man came over and said, "The car's out in front, Mrs. Wilkins. If you'll show me your license and give me a twenty-five dollar deposit—"

The red tape over, she climbed behind the wheel, dropped the car into gear and spun away from the curb. The touch of the wheel gave her a feeling of comfort. She had always been such a good driver. As good as a man, they said. Her reaction time was good.

She elbowed her way gracelessly through the traffic, finding at last the main route south out of town, pressing the thick cork sole down on the gas pedal, feeling and hearing the rising whine of the motor.

Running away, Helen. Running away from what? Regret about Harry? But you're free, Helen! Don't you understand that? Free! Everything that the word implies. You can go where you please, do what you please, buy what you please, love whom you please.

And yet Harry would care. Harry would look at her and cluck and give her a lot of conflicting advice and end up by patting her jerkily on the back and calling her, "My girl." That had always infuriated her.

The road passed the lush groves of fruit, and then began to lift a bit, climbing above the surface of a swamp where the Spanish moss hung from the gnarled grey trees toward the still black water.

Her lips flattened back in a grin that was not a grin at all and she edged the speed of the car up higher. The silence in the car oppressed her. She wanted to wipe it out with the roar of the motor. Why should she dread the silence? Of course! Harry would have been beside her, clacking the glove compartment door, puffing on his pipe, coughing and pointing out to her things she had no interest in.

*"Look at the size of that tree, Helen! Mighty big, hey?"*

*"I suppose so, Harry. If you say so."*

It never discouraged him.

*"Fine straight road, Helen."* She could imagine him beside her, imagine what he would be saying. Banalities. Self evident comments.

*(Continued on page 130)*

# PARDON MY MURDER

*"Elias—Elias—you're not going to kill me. . . ."*

***You only lived twice, was Elias Manton's motto—but if his second life was easier than the first, the second time he died came harder!***

**By D. L. Champion**

ELIAS MANTON moved slowly about the room, assembling the articles needed for his journey. He was an elderly man, nearer to sixty than fifty. He walked stiffly on arthritic joints.

The room was small, shabbily furnished and permeated with an unpleasant, unclean odor. Brown cracks streaked the plaster of the wall. Vermin marched persistently along the scuffed baseboard.

The bed was narrow and its center sagged despairingly. Its coarse sheets

and cotton blanket were covered with a dreary grey counterpane. It was on this counterpane that Elias Manton carefully placed the items which were to accompany him on his visit to his brother.

It was an odd collection.

There was a battered makeup box, relic of that distant day when Elias Manton owned a medicine show and indulged in protean impersonations to attract his gullible clientele. The box contained greasepaint, an eyebrow pencil, crepe hair and spirit gum.

Against the box leaned a glass bottle plainly labeled CHLOROFORM. And next to it was another bottle with a death's head on it. On the far side of the box were three freshly laundered handkerchiefs, a flashlight and a key. It was an old key, older even than Elias Manton. It was of iron, heavy, and had been fashioned to fit a mortised lock. It was worn and shiny as if it had been carried in a pocket for half a century.

Elias Manton bent down with some effort and withdrew a cardboard suitcase from the closet. He set it on the bed and proceeded to pack the items on the counterpane into the cheap suitcase. Then he shut it.

He left his clothes in the drawers of the tilting bureau, his toothbrush over the wash basin. Then, the suitcase clutched firmly in his gnarled hand, he quit the room and walked to the bus station.

To the traffic cop on the corner who saw him pass, to any casual eye on the crowded street, Elias Manton was obviously a respectable old man on some quiet errand of his own. None guessed his true mission—which was fratricide.

THE house was old, but the rocks on which it stood were a million years older. It was a granite house, and square. It stood, forbidding, above the sea which dashed itself thunderously against the desolate coast. For two hundred years the Mantons had lived and died there; until now there were but a pair of them left.

Elias stood before the grim house. A moonless night fell about him like a blanket of sin. The crashing of the waves boomed in his ears as he took the ancient key in his hand and felt his way to the massive front door.

It swung open silently. Elias Manton passed through and stood in a hallway that he had not entered for four decades. His heart beat swiftly. His pulses hammered. Silently, he found the staircase. Silently, he mounted.

Touch and memory guided him along the upper corridor. His flashlight was in his hand but he dared not flick it to life until in his brother's room. The nurse, he knew, slept elsewhere in the house. She must not be aware of his presence until he was prepared.

His hand groped for and found a worn doorknob. He turned it, entered a room and closed the door behind him. Then his thumb pressed against the torch button. With its aid he found a switch. He clicked it and a dim floor lamp lighted. Elias Manton moved to the foot of an immense bed.

A man lay in the bed, his eyes closed. His pain-racked face was grey, like smeared ash upon the pillow. Elias stared at him, suddenly aware of an eerie sensation that he was looking in a mirror.

True, Abner Manton, his twin brother, possessed a trifle more hair on his temples, slightly bushier eyebrows, but the crepe hair and spirit gum in the suitcase would easily remedy that difference.

Abner's face was greyer, more wrinkled than that of Elias but the grease paint in the makeup box could make those faces exactly alike. And there were other differences, too, which were even simpler to equalize.

For almost seven years the muscles of Abner's limbs had not moved of their own

volition. His arms and legs were hopelessly paralyzed and he was stone deaf. His vision, though not gone, was dimmed. His mind was childlike and unanchored. He retained his voice but when he spoke the sound was a harsh, dispirited wheeze.

Elias Manton sighed. His resolve was firm, yet before him lay a physical task which would summon all the strength of his old and dissipated frame. He took a handkerchief from his suitcase, doused it liberally with chloroform. He walked around the bed to its head.

As he reached the pillow, the eyes of Abner Manton opened suddenly. He stared into the face above him—that face so like his own—and swift horror shone in his pupils.

"Elias," he said, and his voice was a raven's croak. "Elias, you're—you're not going to kill me?"

Elias chuckled without mirth. He said, "Not yet, Abner," and held the saturated handkerchief hard against his brother's face. He kept it there until certain Abner had lost consciousness.

The muscular effort of lifting Abner from the bed, bearing him silently down the stairs into the night was tremendous. Elias stumbled through the blackness toward the sea. Panting and spent he arrived at the battered boathouse in which no boat had been kept for forty years.

There he lay Abner in a corner and placed a handkerchief in his mouth for a gag. There was no need to bind one whose arms and legs were useless. He left him there and returned to the house.

Twenty minutes later, he lay in Abner's bed. He had donned Abner's pajamas and recourse to his makeup box made him resemble Abner even more than he had when first entering the rooms.

He glanced toward the window and estimated that dawn was, perhaps, three hours away. He lay still against the pillow and reviewed his plan.

There was an element of danger in it but a pauper who gambles for a million must expect some risk. It was only a matter of a few hours. By noon, certainly, he would know whether he had won or lost.

All his life he had been poor and unloved. Even his father had hated him. He had demonstrated that clearly enough when the family fortune had been left entirely to Abner. But Elias had been young then. He had gone out into the world to make his own way. That way had been bitter, penurious and evil.

Abner had hated him, too. Abner had always refused him financial aid and had cut him off. The accumulated fortune was, at present, consigned to some remote and distant niece in West Virginia. But that will would be changed in the morning—as soon as he could see Charters, the lawyer.

Elias had plotted what he was about to do for six months. The first part of his plan had been accomplished. Abner lay in the boathouse helpless—not dead yet, but all in good time.

In the morning, Elias would request the nurse to send for Charters. Then, Elias, masquerading as Abner, would dictate a new will. Since Abner could not move his fingers, no forgery was necessary. Simple dictation was enough.

With that done it was only a matter of waiting for the night to fall again. Then Elias would put Abner back in his bed. But not before he had utilized the second bottle he had brought with him. Abner would be dead when they found him, which would startle no one since Abner had been expected to die for the past five years.

There were but three things he must do. He must completely fool the nurse and the lawyer. He must remember that he was now suffering from all Abner's ailments. He must move no muscle. He must give no indication of hearing what was said. He must speak in Abner's croaking voice.

And if he could do these things he

would make up in the remaining years of his life for all the grim poverty he had undergone, all the shabbiness of his existence.

THE morning was grey as the sea which hammered on the shore. Elias looked at the misty window and knew the lack of bright light was in his favor.

The bedroom door opened and the nurse entered the room. She was a woman of about thirty-five. Her dyed hair was the color of brass. Her eyes were bright with wisdom and her face was hard, smeared with ample, hastily applied makeup.

Elias Manton uttered a croaking greeting and blinked his eyes at her. She gave him a startled look. A peculiar smile came over her red lips. She hurried to the bedside.

Elias Manton's pulse pumped savagely as she bent over him. The woman seemed to behave queerly. Was it possible that she had already penetrated his disguise? Her face was now a scant foot above his and it seemed as if hatred was burning in her eyes.

He felt her warm fingers on his pulse. As she counted the beat and checked it with the tiny watch on her wrist, an expression of bewilderment crept over her face. Elias Manton realized he had forgotten one thing—the beat of his excited pulse was far higher than the torpid, reluctant rhythm in Abner's wrist.

The nurse dropped his nerveless arm back on the sheet. She said aloud, "Wonder what's happened to the old goat?"

The words angered Elias. He almost replied indignantly. In time he remembered and the words died in his throat. Doubtless, this one spoke her mind freely before the unhearing Abner.

He moved his lips. He said, wheezingly, "I want to see my lawyer. Phone Charters. Tell him to come out here as soon as he can."

Eulalie Joynson, the nurse, glanced at him sharply. She smiled and nodded.

He was puzzled. Yet he emitted a sigh of satisfaction. He had passed the first and most dangerous test. If the nurse who ministered daily to Abner had not recognized him, Charters certainly would not. It was doubtful if the lawyer saw Abner twice a year.

He saw the woman at the telephone, saw her finger dial a number. A moment later, she said, "Hello, Joe? This is Eulalie. Something's wrong. The old goat's got a pulse like a tomtom. Yeah, I know. It should have. You'd better come out right away."

Elias Manton blinked. Who was Joe? It wasn't Charters. His first name was Richard.

He worried about it until she turned and faced him. She still wore an expression of anxious surprise. He moved his head slightly and said, "Charters? Did you call Charters?"

She forced a horrible smile which might have meant anything at all. Then she turned on her high heels and left the room.

She came back a few minutes later and fed him orange juice and hot milk through a glass tube. As she lifted the tray from the bed, she regarded him wonderingly. She shook her head and remarked, "Fifteen years in this racket and I've never seen anything like it."

She left Elias Manton alone once more. He shifted uneasily in the bed. The woman's attitude unnerved him. Perhaps, Abner had been sicker than Elias knew. Perhaps, the fact of his high pulse was in the nature of a medical miracle. At least she had not known he wasn't Abner, though. He was certain of that.

He heard the jangling of the outside door bell. Perhaps, it was Charters. Maybe she had called the lawyer from the downstairs extension. Maybe she was friendly with Charters and for some intimate reason called him Joe.

He heard footfalls mounting the stairs. A wide, baldheaded man came into the room, followed by the nurse. The man was not Richard Charters.

He stood at the foot of the bed and stared at Elias with cold blue eyes. Elias, staring back, saw something rubber and metallic hanging from the pocket of a sack suit. It was a binaural stethescope. This, then, was the doctor.

He caught Elias' eye and grinned. He nodded his head in dumb greeting. Elias muttered a good morning and added that he felt much better.

The nurse said, "How do you figure it, Joe?"

The doctor shrugged. He came to the side of the bed and touched Elias' pulse with professional fingers. He said, in a puzzled tone, "I'm utterly damned if I know. I guess I'd better give him another shot."

The doctor went into the next room, leaving the door ajar behind him. Elias could see him open a small black bag and remove a hypodermic needle. He heard the faint clatter of glass and a moment later the doctor stood over him, needle in hand.

ELIAS was suddenly, inexplicably frightened. As the sharp needle point neared the flesh of his arm, sheer reflex action almost caused him to jerk away. He held himself in check. Any movement would betray him.

There was a prick in the skin. The contents of the hypodermic pumped itself gradually into his bloodstream.

Whatever this was, Elias told himself, it couldn't harm him. After all, it was only medicine intended for an ill man. He glanced up at the doctor who was regarding him strangely. Again fear swept him. Fear and a curious lassitude, probably a result of the injection.

There was a buzzing in his ears, a weak swimming sensation in his head. A disturbing thought oozed into his brain. Perhaps they were trying to kill him.

No, that was impossible. He had never seen either of them before. There was no conceivable motive. No, that was wrong, of course. Somehow, he was having difficulty thinking. They didn't know he was Elias. They thought he was Abner. Perhaps, they were trying to kill Abner.

But that was equally absurd. Neither doctor nor nurse could have any motive for killing Abner either. There was more motive for letting him live. If he lived the doctor would still collect his fees, the nurse draw her salary.

He was dimly aware that the doctor had moved away from the bed, that he now stood at the window. The doctor turned his head sharply. He said quickly, "Eulalie, that's Charters driving up outside. You didn't actually telephone him, did you?"

Eulalie Joynson said, "Do you take me for an utter fool?"

The doctor swore. "All right. Go downstairs and let him in." He looked swiftly at Elias. "His nibs, here, is almost out anyway. I'll see Charters in the next room. I'll tell him that the old fool is too ill to see him. It's lucky I'm here."

There was a spinning in the head of Elias Manton. His pulse was not high now. The blood crawled through his veins like a lethargic snake. He heard a distant drum of footsteps. Through the half open door he heard voices dimly as if from behind a screen.

"I'm sorry." It was the doctor's voice. "He's pretty low. I'd rather you didn't see him."

Charters tone was quiet. He said, "That's all right. I didn't really come to see Manton. I wanted to speak with Miss Joynson, here."

The nurse said harshly, "Me?"

"I've been meaning to come out for the past two weeks," said Charters. "But something always happened to keep me at

the office. I've wanted to talk to you ever since Abner dictated those changes in his will. It's only fair that you should know the truth."

He paused for a moment. Elias' brain had difficulty following the sense of the eavesdropped words. His mind was functioning slowly, heavily, like the movement of a glacier.

"You see," went on Charters, "Abner Manton is incompetent."

There was a long silence. The woman said, "What do you mean by that?"

"Simply," said Charters, "that on that day two weeks ago when Abner sent for me and dictated the changes in his will which left you all his money, it didn't mean anything."

Now the sentences came more slowly into Elias Manton's consciousness. He was sleepier than he had ever been. An enervating weakness had come over him.

"Four years ago," said Charters, "when Abner's mind began to go, the state courts declared him incompetent to handle his own affairs. My firm has been doing it for him. His only legal will is the last one he made before the court declaration. Therefore, I'm afraid, Miss Joynson, that you don't get a cent of the Manton money."

Elias Manton's brain was close to paralysis. It took a good thirty seconds for understanding to seep in. Then, slowly but startlingly, it came to him.

Abner had left the fortune to his nurse. She was obviously working hand in hand with the doctor. If Abner died they would divide the Manton money. Motive? They had the most powerful motive in the world for killing Abner. Exactly the same motive possessed by Elias, himself.

Then, the final and most shocking conclusion pushed itself into his fading brain. *They think I'm Abner!*

"I'm sorry," Charters was saying. "But Abner Manton's cash still goes to his niece."

Elias Manton knew he was dying. He knew that whatever the doctor had shot into his bloodstream was killing him as surely as a noose. There was but a fragment of strength left in his body. With a tremendous effort, he sat up in bed.

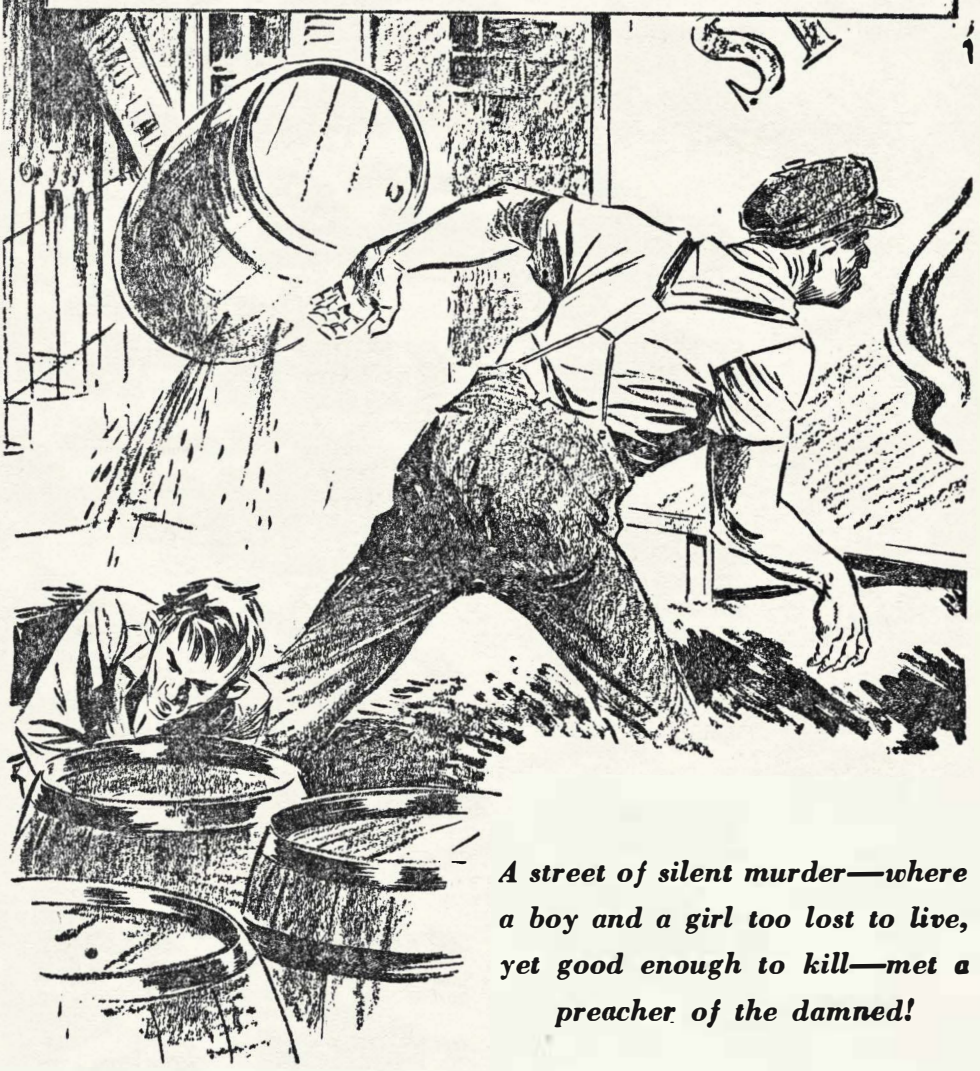
The terror within him sent a spurt of adrenalin into his heart. It picked up a beat. Elias thrust himself from the bed and stood, trembling on the rug. He staggered across the room like a drunken cripple.

He reached the doorway and pointed a clawing, tremulous finger at the astonished Charters.

"They've killed me!" he shrieked. "Abner's in the boathouse. They thought I was Abner. Post-mortem will prove it. Murderer! Murderer!"

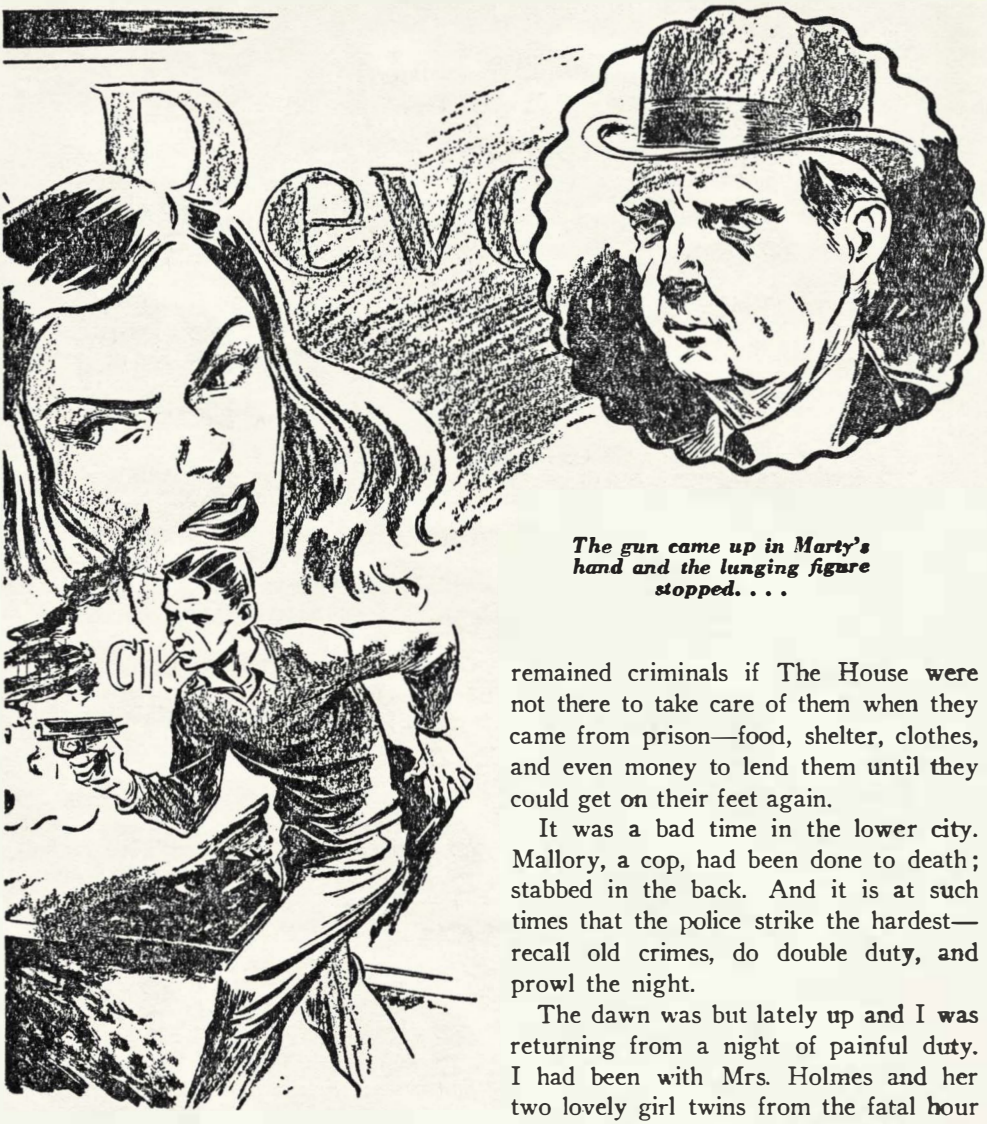
Perhaps the final word was denunciation—perhaps, self-accusation. Anyway, it was the last thing he ever said.

# THE LAW OF THE NIGHT



*A street of silent murder—where a boy and a girl too lost to live, yet good enough to kill—met a preacher of the damned!*

**By Carroll John Daly**



*The gun came up in Marty's hand and the lunging figure stopped. . . .*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Murder Street

THOSE who like me call me Doc Fay or just Doc, and those who hate and fear me—well, what they call me now doesn't matter. It is The House that counts, starting as a small, shabby dwelling and now taking up the best part of a city block. Built mostly by men who were criminals and might have remained criminals if The House were not there to take care of them when they came from prison—food, shelter, clothes, and even money to lend them until they could get on their feet again.

It was a bad time in the lower city. Mallory, a cop, had been done to death; stabbed in the back. And it is at such times that the police strike the hardest—recall old crimes, do double duty, and prowl the night.

The dawn was but lately up and I was returning from a night of painful duty. I had been with Mrs. Holmes and her two lovely girl twins from the fatal hour until dawn and heard her cry out in defense of her husband who beat her and the children unmercifully. Yet try as I might I could find no good in the man.

Yes, they gave Gerald Holmes the chair that night up at the Big House.

I spotted a brewery wagon before Dirty Dave's Dive. The driver was a big fellow, more muscular than most of them. His face was a new one, but it was the boys I was watching—Marty Mann and a younger boy called Harry. Marty Mann

must have been seventeen but he looked about fourteen. He was a handsome boy in a rough and rugged way. His face was always washed and his hands were always clean. His clothes, though the worse for wear, were almost spotless.

The driver had lifted a barrel upon his shoulder as Marty approached him to get in conversation. It was an old trick. Harry was ready with a brace and bit and a pail to cut through the bung of another barrel and siphon off a few gallons of beer.

This time it didn't work. The driver, though new to the district, must have suffered from the same trick before. He swung suddenly, almost hitting Marty with the barrel, and kicked out at Harry. It was a low, mean kick, and Harry rolled over in the gutter, crying out with pain.

The man raised his foot to kick the boy again, still balancing the barrel on his shoulders. Marty had stepped back several paces with his back against the billboard. I raised my stick, started forward, but the shout died on my lips.

There was the blast of a bullet. Heavy caliber—a thirty-eight, maybe a forty-five —I wasn't sure.

The truck driver's foot paused in mid-air. Beer was pouring from the barrel, down his neck, but he still held it. He cast a bewildered look toward Marty and the billboard.

Flattened in the shadow of the tenement, I saw little Marty Mann. He was leaning easily against the billboard, his legs crossed. There was a cigarette hanging from his lips, his eyes were small and narrow, and his face was no longer boyish. He held a forty-five in his hand.

"Take your time, Harry," he said through closed lips. "If you can't walk, crawl—and if you can't crawl, I'll dump this heap of beef down alongside of you."

Harry began to crawl. The bewildered and stunned driver turned his eyes back to Harry. The gun barked again. Beer began to pour out from another part of the barrel.

And then I saw it coming. The driver dropped the barrel, threw both his hands in the air, and lunged toward little Marty Mann.

THE gun came up in Marty's hand, his lips moved, and the lunging figure stopped suddenly. I first thought a slug from the gun had caught him in the chest, but there had been no report of a gun. The truck driver said nothing. He looked around as I looked too. The street was beginning to fill with people. The driver jumped aboard his truck, jammed the car into gear, and drove away.

I stepped out of the tenement shadows as Marty Mann almost ran into me. It was remarkable how quick he was on his feet. The cigarette disappeared from his lips almost at once. His hand ran quickly through his hair.

He said easily, "Hello, Doc. Sorry. Be seein' you."

For all his speed, my cane shot out and the handle gripped his arm, jerking him back.

"I was wondering, Marty," I said easily, "if you'd have killed him."

"You saw it?" He looked up at me with those bright, honest eyes.

"I saw it," I told him.

"How much of it?"

"All of it."

"Then you saw him kick Harry. This is on The House, isn't it, Doc?"

I nodded. "It is on The House, Marty. It'll go no further."

"Well, then, Doc—I don't know. There was Harry in the gutter. It isn't hard to kill a man, Doc. Not too hard."

"When—where did you learn that?"

"Learn it?" He seemed very far away. "Just now, in the few seconds, it came on me like that. I was figuring how Harry and I could get away, or if I must give

the driver the works. But he stopped, Doc. He stopped dead like he was hanging in air."

"What did you say to him?"

"I don't know, Doc. I guess—I sort of whispered through my lips, 'This is it!' Can I walk along with you, Doc? I got things to say to you—man to man."

"Sure, Marty, sure. I'll be glad to walk along with you."

"You think maybe it's for an alibi, Doc?"

"No, Marty," I said, as we walked down the alley to the street beyond. "You're too independent for that. What would you do with the beer? Sell it?"

"Is that your business, Doc?"

"That is very much my business, Marty. You see, I've shut down pretty well on the places that sell liquor to kids. I never bother you young people; I simply see that others do not afford you drink and dope and solicit your aid in crime." I stopped and looked down at Marty. "As a matter of fact, Marty, you're smarter than most—criminals."

The smile that had started to come across his face faded. He said simply, "I thought you were going to say smarter than most men, Doc. I would have liked that. I'm not a criminal."

"You could be pretty dumb, Marty, yet smarter than a criminal. But juvenile or not, according to the laws of man, you are not going to peddle liquor or dope or beer. There—don't tell me. You sell the beer to other kids, and later it will be hard liquor, then dope. And if I won't have it from hardened men I certainly won't have it from strong kids playing on the weak."

"Yeah—" Marty cocked his head as he looked up at me—"you can pass the word along the Avenue and frighten the pants off pretty tough criminals. You finger them, and the word gets out. They know they have to beat it. Now you couldn't finger a kid—could you?"

"Marty," I told him straight, "you sell so much as a glass of beer to any child and I'll lay the finger on you so fast, you won't be able to grab a cap to beat it out of these parts."

"Like that." Wise, bright blue eyes looked up at me. "Okay, Doc. I'll lay off and I'll tell the others." And he added a little bitterly, "I'll tell them as far as you are concerned they can load themselves up until they lie in the gutter, as long as they don't tempt others."

"Good boy." I knocked the mockery out of his voice and the words back down his throat. "You understand, Marty, don't you?"

"Yeah." We walked along together. "I understand but maybe I don't like it. It's how you think and how you'll act—I think I know where I stand. Now I got something on my mind."

"Yes?" I waited.

"Sally Gordon," he told me. "She's marrying Pete Fiester. She's a swell kid, and he's the dirtiest load of swine in any language. Why don't you finger him? Why don't you kill that marriage?"

"I don't like Pete Fiester," I told him. "Most of my boys at The House think he's a louse. I know Sally is a grand girl, one of the best and I know her mother, too. I'm willing to help you, Marty, smooth out the tough spots, even push guys like Pete Fiester out of the way, but I don't direct lives. Fiester beat you up once, didn't he, Marty?"

"Yeah." Marty nodded. "I didn't walk for three months afterwards. I never squealed. I figured Pete Fiester wasn't so old, and I'd be growing up. I'll feel pretty bad I guess when the time comes to let go of my hate. I think Fiester knows it. I feel it that way. And do you know, Doc—I think he's beginning to be afraid."

I switched the subject. I asked him about his clean hands and face, and his neat clothes. I had often wondered, but Marty hadn't been confidential before. He

laughed. The hate died out of his eyes.

"It made me tough, Doc. I had to fight every kid in school and most of them on the street to give me the right to be clean. I don't figure to snarl and twist up my mouth and be a common hood like Lefty and Jake the Dip—and Dagger Dan. They go around and scare each other, but even the kids laugh at them. I want to be smooth, cool, and soft spoken, and not try to make half wits afraid of my big mouth. I'm going to be someone—one way or another."

"Your schooling—you've given that up?"

"No." He perked up at that. "I'll graduate from high this year. I'll be about eighteen then. Oh—" He paused. "My father was no dirty bum. I never saw him, but my mother lived until I was pretty old, almost seven. You don't have to be a sissy to be clean. You have to be pretty tough. What about Sally Gordon?"

"What about her? What are you doing about her?"

"Me—" he said. "I'm going to marry her." And he laughed, instead of being mad as most boys his age would be at my surprise. "She's not nineteen yet. I make some pretty good dough now and go to school. In a couple of years I'll be doing all right. Then night school and Sally. I'm disappointed, Doc, but I guess you can't do anything about it. Thanks for listening to my beef."

He was gone. Disappeared suddenly into some tenement.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Cop Killer

SALLY GORDON did not come to me. She worried me, of course, but true to my plan when I came out from behind those prison walls for the last time, I did not seek her out. To be sure, I suspected pressure from her stepfather who had been seen too much with Pete Fiester, and whose record was not good.

I was sorely tempted to go and see Sally. More tempted perhaps to send for Pete Fiester but that would be a drastic move and I could find no reason to justify it. As far as I knew Pete Fiester harmed only himself—his rotten self.

I smoked my pipe and waited, but Sally Gordon never came, nor did I see Marty Mann again—that is, until the wedding.

Pete Fiester and Sally Gordon were to be married by a justice of the peace. It was whispered around that none of the clergy would touch it. It was to take place over at the Chapel at Adams Funeral Parlor.

The little chapel was not overcrowded when I swung in the doors, tucked my cane under my arm and sat down right behind Sally Gordon and her mother who was crying softly. Sally looked stolid and her fine face was set rather hard. Though they both saw me, it was only her mother who reached back and gripped my hand. Sally let on she didn't see me.

There was no one to give her away—no one decent maybe who'd do it. But they played the wedding march just the same. A tall man in a frock coat and black tie who was just a little drunk, got out of the front seat and beckoned to Sally. Then slammed out in a loud voice, "Quiet, there. Quiet, do you hear me!" This to the crowd standing in the back, not expecting things to move that fast. He was the justice of the peace.

He took Sally by the hand, beckoned to Pete Fiester, made them clasp hands. Then opening a book he read mighty fast. I guess he didn't like it either, and I was sure he was paid in advance. Anyway, you couldn't get a word of what he said until he came to the following, and he fairly bellowed it out.

"If any man knows why these two should not be joined in holy wedlock, let him speak now or forever hold his peace."

He paused, "Okay, kid, that's the line."

The last was very low and the justice of the peace looked half over Sally's shoulder. She was crying now and had been almost from the beginning of the ceremony.

It all happened at once. I turned my head to where the justice had looked and saw Marty, clean and immaculate. His face got red as he shouted the words so everyone in the chapel must have heard.

"I know why," he cried out. "It's Pete Fiester. He's the rottenest scum on this earth, and he's forced Sally there to marry him for some reason which I'll find out. He's a dirty crook and—"

The justice looked at Marty through an alcoholic fog and said with no feeling in his voice, "You'll have to do better than that, kid."

And Marty did. They tried to grab him, but he broke away, hopped over the back of the bench, and pointed his finger at Pete Fiester as he fairly screamed the words.

"He killed Mallory. He stuck a knife in his back. It's the truth—I seen him. I saw Blanchard open the little gate and Pete drag Mallory's body through. Look at him. Cop killer."

That tied it. A great rumble broke loose. A cop in the back blew a whistle and came forward. Pete Fiester's hand shot under his coat, and came out with a gun. He leveled it slowly on Marty Mann.

"Okay, rat—" Pete said, and his hand didn't shake. "You got blood in your head. Now take this in your belly."

My hand went up with the heavy cane. I guess Pete fired as my cane struck his wrist. The gun went flying through the air and bedlam broke loose.

Pete Fiester got away all right and so did Marty—Pete out the side door I think, and Marty just vanished from view.

The justice of the peace reached the rear door when I took his arm.

"What did you mean 'Okay, kid?' " I asked him, as I gripped his arm tight and half raised my stick. I watched his face.

"Yes." He stared at me through soft barroom eyes. "Yes," he said again. "You're Doc Fay, sure enough. And when you want to know, you want to know. Okay, Doc. The kid came to see me, slipped me a pint and a genuine ten-dollar bill. All he wanted was the tip-off when I came to that line, so I gave him the okay. I had no idea, of course—"

"Yes?" I held him tighter now.

"It's been done before you know, Doc—or don't you? It was a queer hitch, and I got double the fee in cold cash before I put a foot in the chapel. I'm no fool. Good day to you, sir."

THE news spread through the grapevine of the underworld and the boys at The House had already heard it when I got back. It wasn't spoken aloud upon the streets, but everyone knew it and there was a diversity of opinion about Marty Mann. Did he go contrary to the law of the night and rat out on Pete Fiester? Or could it be accepted as a kid fighting for his girl or striking back for a beating long forgotten by others but not by Marty Mann.

I decided to find out what the others thought and called the Cassidy Club.

"Cassidy can't talk to no one now. Cassidy can't—" The hard voice changed when I gave my name. "I'll find him for you, Doc. Hold the line. He'd cut me throat from my ear to the back of me neck if I didn't fetch him for you."

Five minutes later Cassidy's smooth voice came over the wire. He was a smart man. He did the talking right from the beginning.

"Good to hear from you, Doc," he said. "We've got a guy, remember Piggy Landers? Well, he's a big-time customer's man now, and his dough is honest dough. He's putting up for a couple more alleys down your way. Oh, Doc, do me a favor, will you?"

"Yes, I— What is it?"

"Marty Mann. Nice kid. Some of the boys got wrong ideas about his bluffing the pants off Pete Fiester up at the wedding which never come off. Of course he knows nothing and he'll say he made Pete turn yellow. Any kid might have done it. Pass the word around in my name—Cassidy's name—see, Doc? I wouldn't like for anyone to lay a bit of pipe over the kid's head. No, I wouldn't like it, Doc. Remember Kelly Ryan?" Then a pleasant laugh. "I'll call you up again, Doc, about them bowling alleys. Good-by."

That was Cassidy—big-time racketeer, big-time gambler—and I remembered Ryan. It was many years ago. They'd shot it out not a block up from The House, when Ryan was after my hide. Yes, they buried Ryan. Poor misguided Cassidy. He would always be a crook, and he'd always be a friend. He knew and accepted the responsibility for Marty Mann.

The police came to see me that night. It was Captain Rearden from my own district. We were sort of friendly enemies. He appreciated my work with youth, but he deplored my silence and my "congregation," as he called it, with known criminals.

"Didn't expect me?" He followed me into my little office behind the desk. "Well, they're getting smart downtown, Doc. They know they can't get a judge to sign a warrant without being in trouble with him when he reads the papers next morning. It's like this, Doc," he went on. "The boys know that they can't search your place without a warrant—that is, without knocking you out cold. And they know they can't knock you out cold without having a man or two laid out by that stick of yours, or tossed through a window by those heavy hands of yours."

"Tch, they wouldn't care about a couple of men, would they?"

"Not Inspector Riley," he admitted. "But he would care about the papers in the morning, and the riots that might start along the Avenue. You are a great guy, Doc. Now, don't you think a lad who killed a cop should be punished?"

"I sit in judgment on no man," I told him.

"Well," Captain Rearden stroked his chin, "we know you are out for the kids, Doc, like Marty Mann for instance. He spoke a piece up where they tried to tie some unfortunate girl to Pete Fiester." He spat on the floor when he used the name. "We want the kid to tell us all about it."

I raised my eyes and looked at the letters to my left: SILENCE.

"It's like this Doc," he too looked at the word but shook his head. "We could swear out a warrant for his arrest, material witness or accessory after the fact of murder. But I would rather talk to the boy. He should come in himself, and no warrant. He'll be hunted, Doc, by the police who want him for questioning and by Fiester who will want him for ratting out, and who'll want to silence Marty forever."

He didn't wait for me to speak then. As he reached the door he said, "You figure it out, Doc, what is best for the boy. He can hide out for a while with a price on his head, then be thrown in the can or in the morgue. Either one won't help him to grow up right."

"And Pete Fiester?"

"We'll get him—never worry about that." Rearden's words were cold, hard.

Rearden wasn't gone over ten minutes when the buzzer sounded from the little room behind the door which is never locked day or night. No, it was no surprise. Somehow I knew it would be Marty Mann.

There was a hunted look in his eyes and, worse still, he swaggered a bit when he walked across the floor and entered my larger room. I locked the door behind him.

"It's man to man, Doc," he told me, as

he took off his cap and stood there shivering though the room was warm. He looked toward the word: SILENCE. "I don't know if that goes for cops too, Doc, but it doesn't matter. I saw Captain Rearden come out a few minutes ago. Doc, have I done anything that I could get a ride for? I mean legally wrong?"

I hesitated a long time. Then said, "Not that I know of. Not anything a good lawyer couldn't get you out of."

"Like that, eh?" He nodded. "Can you hide me out, Doc?"

"No," I told him. "You're a wanted man, Marty. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Doc. I've been sort of looking into the law. You think I should turn myself in like any big shot and say, 'I hear you've been looking for me.' Should I?" And seeing my face, "Well, Doc, what would you do in my place?"

"I'd give myself up. And I'd say I was sent—"

"That you sent me?" Marty laughed. The twitching was going away from around his mouth. "Okay, Doc, I'll buzz Rearden from outside and have him meet me in some dark spot—like in a book, eh? Oh, Doc—" He drew a manila envelope from his pocket, tightly sealed. "Would you put this in that big safe, and let me have it when I want it? It's my last will and other things."

I took the envelope from him, made out a little card and put it away in the safe.

THEY let Marty out after a bit. They had to let him go. I got it straight from Captain Rearden.

"The trouble is, Doc, he's a smart kid. We can't tell if he's lying or not. He said he made it all up about Pete in hopes of breaking up the marriage. When we asked him how he expected to scare Pete Fiester if it wasn't true, he said he didn't think of scaring Pete. He hoped maybe Sally and her mother would scare out of the marriage. And when we asked him what he thought of Pete taking a run-out like that, he shrugged and said, 'Maybe it was Pete after all.' Then he came up with a story that might be the truth—"

"You— They didn't lay a hand on him?"

"Nix, Doc. We talked no more than you might talk of his future and how we wanted to see him make good in life because he's a friend of yours. We hammered it hard, Doc, but no real threat."

"And the story he came up with?"

"Well, he had heard it around, he said. He was out most of the night; it didn't seem worthwhile to go home, so he curled up behind the Anson Box Factory. He heard a voice say, 'I held open the gate for you, didn't I?' And he remembered that Mallory's body was dragged through the gate, and that it was Blanchard talking and—he just tossed it out at the wedding. He didn't care what happened."

"You couldn't pick up Blanchard?"

"Blanchard was what made him tell us so much. You see, Blanchard was seen about the time Mallory was done in by the skunk. We told Marty that and we told him it couldn't be any coincidence about Blanchard. Then he gave us that story. I'm inclined to believe it."

I wasn't, but I nodded my head gravely and filled my pipe. I said, "You've been looking for Blanchard, but haven't found him?"

Rearden set his teeth. "We found him this morning. We picked him out of the river. He'd been in it close to three weeks. He was cut up pretty bad—just after Marty heard him talking—and Pete Fiester likes a knife. So the story jibed." He spread his hands apart, looked at the word: SILENCE. "All off the record, Doc. Pete didn't have many friends, but if he had—well, the kid's first story is the best for the Avenue. He just made it up to scare the pants off Pete Fiester."

"Which he did," I said.

I didn't see Marty Mann for a few

weeks after that. I knew he was all right though, for I heard that around. He was sticking to school too, but seemed to fade into the night, not sleeping at home.

Then early one evening the little buzzer sounded in my back door. I was out in the main room at the time, watching a chess game between two of the boys.

Lareky, a not too bright ex who had been working for me some years, gave me the signal and I passed behind the desk into my main office. I grabbed up my heavy cane and flinging open the door of the office, stepped into my little sanctuary.

I stopped dead. I was facing a gun—and the man behind it was Pete Fiester.

HE WASN'T the cocksure sneering criminal and murderer he used to be. The few weeks had changed him; he was hard and desperate. His voice was thick and his tongue licked at dry lips but his words were steady—and his gun-hand steadier.

"Are you mad?" I asked simply.

"Maybe so, Doc." The gun never wavered. "But don't move a step nearer. I know your quickness with that stick and the strength of those hands. I'm a hunted man and don't threaten me or call for help. I'd kill you like that. What would it matter?"

I never took my eyes off his muddy brown ones. I said to him, "Pete, what do you want of me?"

"That's better." He pulled in a breath. "I want the envelope Marty Mann left with you and I'm taking it now. I know it's in the safe beyond this room." And when I still stood in front of the door, "I'm desperate, Doc, that paper means my life. What more can you take from me?"

"Pete Fiester," I told him, "you can shoot me, yes. You might even kill me but would that get what you want from my safe? I am not afraid of death, but your shots would be heard. There are one hundred and eleven men here in The House, all used to violence and crime. Do you think you could reach that safe and open it? Do you think you could escape over my dead body before they tore you to pieces? Pete, you must have known you never could get away with this."

Fear, hate and emotion had told Pete he could, but now he knew better. He stood there looking at me.

"Doc," he said, "I got a sealed note I want you to give to someone tomorrow. I'll want your word and—"

"Pete," I stopped him. "Throw that gun of yours upon the desk. No man can stand there and threaten me in my own house. That door through which you entered has not been closed against the most loathesome thing of the night. It is not even closed to you. Toss that gun upon the desk and, since you stand upon two feet, try and talk to me as the man that you pretend to be."

He hesitated a moment, then threw his gun on the desk.

I said to him, "What is it you want of me?"

He took a long, thin envelope from his pocket which was sealed and taped across the flap.

"You'll not look into that, Doc. And you'll give it to Marty Mann before noon tomorrow. It is not—" For the first time his lips curled—"not a matter of life and death, but a matter of death. I'll take my gun and be going."

I let him take his gun and watched him leave.

I sent for Marty at the lunch hour the next day. He took the note and read it. His cheeks paled and he sucked in his lips. Then he read it through again. He stared at it a while and I knew he wasn't thinking of the note. He was bracing himself to talk naturally and choosing the words he would say to me. Finally he came up with it almost naturally.

"I'll answer this note, and send it along

from outside, Doc," he told me casually.

He stopped and when I said nothing he continued.

"If you put up with that skunk Pete Fiester once for me, Doc, I guess you'd do it again, though I doubt if he'd bring the answer to what I'll write him here himself."

This time when he didn't speak I knew that he was going to wait me out. So I said, "Nothing you want to tell me, Marty?" That was a long way for me to go, and Marty knew it. He looked up surprised; glanced over at the word: SILENCE. Then he smiled, and shook my hand.

"Doc," he said very solemnly. "You wouldn't toss away all that word stands for, not for a fool kid like me. And if you would, the man in me wouldn't let you. No, Doc. It's him or me."

## CHAPTER THREE

### With Whose Belly Full of Lead?

AFTER three days of troubled dreams, troubled sleep—all because I thought of Marty Mann—the letter came for Marty. Pete Fiester didn't deliver it; Pone Johnson brought it—a harmless enough little snowbird who had been going to take the cure. He stood in the doorway, letting it slip slowly closed behind him.

"Look, Doc," he said, holding out the soiled white envelope to me. "If it wasn't me there would have been someone else, and a lad I don't know told me to bring it here. I got paid for it."

"With narcotics, I suppose," I said, as I took the envelope.

"Dope! Snow!" Pone straightened in great indignation. "Why—" And then with that sly grin and a sharp lifeless look in the pinpoint pupils of his eyes, "It doesn't matter though, Doc. I'm taking the cure tomorrow, no half ways for me."

Marty Mann came in two nights later. He sent word first that he was coming and then somehow slipped in the front door. I found him there by the open fireplace. It was after twelve.

The night was dark, cold and foggy, but Marty was dressed for it—a windbreaker, a snug fitting cap, even heavy leather gloves. He took the note I brought him and read it.

"I'll be wanting that other envelope, Doc. I've another one to take its place." He handed me a thicker envelope this time. "Maybe I'll be coming for it myself. But if you are convinced, sure-like, that I won't come, then open it and take care of things for me, will you, Doc? It's about Aunt Mamie. She's my legal guardian." And with a wry little twist to his mouth, "But otherwise I'm hers. She's okay, Doc, though I know you don't lean much toward hard drink. But sober she's tops."

I took the manila envelope, went right back and put it in the safe. When I returned to Marty the long envelope I had given him was jammed deep into an outside pocket. The note was still held in his hand.

"I don't speak out of turn, Marty," I told him. "But I can always listen, and I've been around a long, long time."

"Thanks, Doc." The kid half stuck the note in his pocket. I don't think he was even conscious of his action. He came to his feet then, said, "I think, Doc, you've gone further for me than you would for any other man." He held out his hand and shook mine. "Good-by, Doc. Take care of yourself."

He was out the front door, closed it behind him. A draft of air shot toward the open fire, and with it a bit of paper from Marty's pocket. It fell so I couldn't help but see the black letters printed in pencil upon it: It read:

> Wednesday: 2 A.M. Well out on the bridge. Bring Blanchard's confession you forced out of him. I'll give you all I got on Sally's stepfather and never bother her again. No harm meant you. Unarmed. Burn this.

I crumpled up the paper and threw it in the fire. There were no plans in my head. I quickly picked up my coat and hat, swung my stick under my arm, and was down the broad worn stone steps after Marty. By now he was a small speck far ahead in the fog. I moved faster, closing up the space between us.

MARTY didn't expect to be followed, or if he did he didn't care. He didn't hang close to the buildings as I did, nor did he look back.

Marty turned toward the river and the bridge. Now and then a shadow moved through the mist, a peculiar light seemed to be in the fog. It was the moon trying to slip through.

Things quieted down as we broke into the broadness of the entrance to the bridge. Then we were on it, going up and out into more of a mist that gave no light. Not even the lamps on the bridge were more than a dim marker in the murky night.

I don't know when it was or exactly where it was, but high up above the hidden waters they met—two figures, a small one and a larger one—and something flashed between them. Sirens screamed in the night and a moment of quiet.

I knew, of course—Pete Fiester and Marty Mann. I was nearer and things were clearer. A gun had flashed and roared twice. The figures fell apart, the taller one turning as if to run back toward the opposite side of the bridge. The smaller one crumpled slowly, sinking slowly, falling to the ground, turning so that he lay upon his back.

I knew where the sirens were then. They were ahead of me and behind me. Flashes of lights on cars, searchlights creeping along the bridge, and the moon suddenly popped out and shone directly on the little body of Marty Mann as he lay there on his back.

Searchlights covered the bridge, and I saw Pete Fiester. He seemed bewildered by the lights. He dashed back and forth, then climbed up on the rail of the bridge and hid himself against the steel. As I ran forward, he fired his gun.

I could see Pete Fiester plainly for the moon had found him now. I heard the crack of Pete Fiester's gun again and I think Marty jarred. He didn't jar too much, for I saw him lying on his stomach, his elbows braced beneath him and the huge gun in his right hand.

Marty's gun barked once. Yellow blue flame showed up, but only where I could see it. A single moment of dead quiet; then a scream of fear or horror pierced the silence. A police spotlight was full upon Pete's face, the gun in his hand, as he whirled once, clutched at the empty air

and plunged out into the deeper darkness.

While all eyes were on him I saw Marty half stagger to his feet and toss out his arm. I saw no object, but I knew that a gun had followed Pete Fiester into the water, and that the gun would never be seen again. Marty fell backwards and lay still—terribly still.

I reached him first and he knew me.

"I tossed the envelope with the gun," he whispered to me. "Fiester had written evidence against Sally's stepfather. I evened that up for her. Am I going to kick the bucket, Doc?"

"I don't know, Marty," I told him honestly enough. "The police are here and an ambulance and—it was self defense, remember that."

"I didn't kill him," Marty said slowly. "I didn't kill him." And when I looked down at his white bloodless face, "You know, Doc, I figured we'd meet at the bridge and he'd find out if I had what he wanted, then he'd shoot me dead. And do you know Doc, it struck me sort of funny, because I intended to empty my gun right straight into his stomach as soon as we met."

"And you knew that would be wrong?"

"No—no, Doc. I didn't see much wrong with it then. It was just—I thought maybe you wouldn't like it."

Marty stuck to his statement that he didn't kill Fiester. He grinned through his pain when they questioned him before the operation.

"What did I shoot him with?" he said. "A kid like me. And suppose I did. He was a cop killer, wasn't he? You guys would take honors for bumping him off, but you let him plug at me without ever firing a shot."

An old-time inspector said, "Let the boy alone. Can't you see? Fiester fell off the bridge and got himself drowned."

I saw the doctor before he took Marty Mann up to be operated on. He said, "The boy's got a chance. He wants to know, Doc. What story will I tell him?"

"Tell him the truth," I said simply.

The surgeon said:

"It's like this, Marty. There are odds and odds. Do you shoot craps now?"

"Not since I was a kid." Marty looked up at him seriously. "I haven't had the money to fool around with lately. But I know the odds."

"They're not good." The doctor looked at him. "Say—five to one that you'll live."

Marty Mann laughed before they wheeled him out of the room.

"Five to one. That's a better chance than I've had in a long time. Be seeing you, Doc. And I didn't kill him."

"No, Marty," I said. But I had seen his face screw up with pain, and seen him aim so carefully, so surely before he pressed the trigger.

Marty whispered with his old grin. "He fell off the bridge like the cops said, and got himself drowned."

MARTY came through the operation with flying colors and was given better than an even chance to recover.

Captain Rearden said, "We'll drag the body out of the river sometime today, Doc. It would have been better if the boy—well we'll never know. I was talking to the juvenile authorities, and no matter how worthy the purpose or the results, a boy with a gun in his hand—well, you know how they are."

"No one saw a gun," I told him. "A few cops are guessing, but they won't swear to it."

"You would know," said the captain with a shrug. "Well, we'll know in a few hours after we fish the body out of the river."

But they didn't fish the body out of the river the next day, nor for many days to come. The gun they never found.

Marty Mann got a break along the Avenue. There wasn't a single one who

didn't believe that he shot Pete Fiester off that bridge, and all of them admired him for it.

"Tough Pete Fiester," they said, "to go out like that. Shot to death by a kid. A kid with a belly full of lead in him at that."

Marty only grinned and answered, "I didn't kill him. He fell off the bridge and drowned."

Another kid would have cashed in on such a reputation and have been a gang leader in a year or two, but not Marty. He played his part modestly. And when Cassidy started the fund for him, Marty said, "You know, Doc, it's just that the people don't do anything about it. I'm going to be a lawyer, Doc, and I'm going to see that the people who deserve a chance get it—and most of them are people that others don't think deserve it. You tie that money up tight, Doc."

Then I asked him about Sally although I guessed.

"Well—" He grinned. "I never proposed to her, you know. But she and her old lady were awful good to me when I was a kid. I guess we're just about even now."

It was the night he graduated from high school that they fished Pete Fiester's body out of the river. Peculiar too. Almost back at the very place it went in.

The cops were surprised and so was I when the medical examiner got through with the body.

Captain Rearden said, "I guess we were all wrong, Doc. But it looks as though—well, Pete Fiester must have been scared silly, thinking of the cops when he heard the sirens."

I found Marty in Bert's Drug Store drinking a soda with a girl about sixteen. He saw me at once, saw my face and came to the door.

"They found Pete Fiester's body, Marty," I told him. "There was no lead in him." And when he grinned, I put a hand on his shoulder. "You didn't—kill him then?"

Marty Mann looked dreamily across the street where the rain was beginning to drop.

"No, Doc, I didn't," he told me softly. "Something told me 'No' as I had a bead right between his eyes—with lights on his face. I—I aimed then to miss him by at least three feet. I wasn't born that way, Doc. I'm not a killer."

"Fine—fine." A sudden surge of pleasure came over me now and then I screwed up my face. "What will you tell the boys now, Marty?"

He threw back his head and laughed out loud.

"Just what I have always told them. Pete just fell off the bridge and got drowned."

## CITY OF CRIME

IN SEVERAL parts of Asia, notably on the frontier between Persia and Afghanistan, there are entire communities devoted to crime. In these parts the most successful criminal is regarded by his fellow townsmen as a daring hero who has enriched himself at the expense of the less courageous and less clever. He is revered as a great man and people make way for him on the streets. Men offer him their loveliest daughters as brides, and youngsters strive to enlist in his troop. As a man of affairs his opinion is solicited on village problems and frequently he is the unofficial ruler of the community.

*—Simpson M. Ritter*

# LAST LESSON

## By William R. Cox

*He comes across the table. I have my finger on the trigger just then. . . .*

IT WAS warm in the room and my eyeglasses steamed up. I took them off and then I couldn't see Captain Casey. I wiped them carefully. There was a harness bull and several detectives in the room.

One of the detectives said in a quiet, educated voice, "Is this George Kell? Why, I saw you fight Kayo Magee, George."

"The hell with you," I told him.

"I'm Morgan," he said. "Maybe I don't blame you. Maybe I understand why you feel the way you do. I was born on Dewey Street, too."

I put my glasses on. I said, "Yeah. You're Duke Morgan. You went to college and played football. What are you doing on the damn cops?"

"What is this, old home week?" asked Casey. "Let's get down to it."

"Yes, sir," said Morgan. It was rank and he couldn't go against rank, but he still had it in him, I could see. The old Dewey Street angle—stick together or you'll get stuck separately.

It's plenty tough on Dewey Street or on any of the side streets. If you are raised down there you got to live a certain way; if you don't, you're in trouble

***One knew how to shoot, the other how to die. And I, who wanted neither, must soon choose between their two roads to hell!***

and you either move away or get very bad hurt—maybe dead.

Morgan said, "If I could handle this, sir. You see, I know all these parties."

"These punks won't talk," said Casey. "George never talked yet and he's been here several times."

Morgan looked at me. "There's only one thing. The running away."

I could see them all right now. The cops, sitting around, leaning against the wall—big, fat, red-necked guys, hating me. I took a good look at each of them and said, "Yeah. I know. And if it wasn't for Mary, you know what you could do. But I'll talk, just to prove Casey's a dope."

The captain's face got red and that made me feel better. But I hated it, talking to cops. I had to think hard about Mary. . . .

I WAS standing on the corner of Dewey and Prince, where it was dark. The corner street light was out. I was standing there, thinking about going to school on the G.I. Bill Of Rights. I couldn't box any more because of my eyes, which were getting bad from taking a few before the war and which got worse during the war. I didn't want to get like Buggsy Ray and wander onto Queer Street.

All my life I had been coming pretty close. I was almost a good enough athlete to get a college scholarship and then almost a good enough fighter to get top billing in the big clubs. I was almost promoted to lieutenant on the field at Tarawa. Bad vision—it licked me.

I don't know why I was different from other Dewey Street guys, except maybe I can't take things from people. I can't take a shoving around from a cop, or a boss. And I was smart enough to learn early that if you keep your nose clean and do your job you don't have to take it. The other kids down Dewey Street wanted to fight about it. I did my fighting in the ring. I never took one for the mob and I never backed down. All right, I stole some bananas when I was a kid, I was mixed up in a whiskey racket once with Joe Lantoni. I also sold a few lottery tickets for which I was pinched. Then I was drafted.

By that time I was getting smart, and switched to the Marines as a clerk, through our Congressman. Sure, we do things through Maloney. He gets his vote in our neighborhood, don't he? Well, once you are in the Marines, you get to fighting. That's the way it is. Never mind what happened, that's on my record and you know it.

I came back and there it was. Nothing for me to do. And Mary—well, there was Mary. I wind up standing on a street corner on a dark night. Buggsy Ray comes along and from the other direction comes Joe Lantino. They don't see me.

No, I tell you, they never saw me, didn't know me. All right, you coppers, the hell with you. . . .

Morgan said, "Sir, I suggest we let him talk. It's all being taken down. It can be checked. Certain things can never be proven, and—"

"Okay, Morgan, okay," Casey yapped.

I went on. . . .

You coppers know about Fatso. He was a louse. He was a fence and a Fagin and he fingered every job Lantino and Buggsy pulled. But Fatso Butcher never did time. He was a stoolie—Captain Casey's stoolie, and that's why you got so hot on the thing.

Fatso got worse than lousy. He wasn't able to turn up enough stuff for you coppers, so he deliberately set up a job for Lantino and Buggsy and then tipped Casey it was coming off. You needn't glare at me, Casey. That's what happened and you can sleep over it. That's what put Lantino and Buggsy on the

prod. That's the system and what happens sometimes. That's why I say the hell with you.

Well, there I am on the corner and Fatso is sliding along, that way he had, like a giant spider. He always went past that corner at exactly the same hour, going home. My glasses were wet—it was raining, remember—and I took them off and wiped them, like I did just now. Fatso got into the dark spot and we—Buggsy and Joe had run a little, because of the way it went they had to run to get there—we were on the other side of the street.

Lantino was never in the service. He was in jail, because of that job Fatso had fingered. But he knew how to shoot. He let go with his roscoe and Fatso folded like a big balloon that has just run into a cigar butt. When I got my glasses on he was lying there, collapsed, and there was a gun in my hand. Someone had shoved it into my mitt and, of course, like a dope I grabbed it and there I stood. There was a dead man across the street, a man everybody hated, including me, a fact you coppers knew very well. Joe Lantino and Buggsy were gone and there I stood. My prints were on the gun and Fatso was good and dead.

So I ran. If you are raised down our way and you are in a spot like that you only know one thing. Run.

I got down to the docks and pitched the gat into the river and walked back slowly to where Fatso lay. The prowl car was there and about ninety other people. And then some joker says, "There he is. That's the guy who was hangin' around."

So I ran again, with Clancy and Poley after me.

Then I was on the lam, wasn't I? Then I had the whole department after me, and Mary was going nuts. I didn't have a pal in the world, because when you get hot around Dewey Street nobody dares hide you out. Nobody can stand a shakedown very good. People are poor down there and they have to get money any way they can.

I know my way around the town better than any copper. I've driven a milk wagon, I've delivered telegrams, I've done a lot of things you wouldn't know or care about, trying to make a living. I know how to hide and keep moving and double back and hide again. Some of you coppers walked so close to me I could have touched you. I never did smoke nor drink so I could keep pretty quiet. It's the nervous boys who give themselves away. I'm small and I get into small places. I never was more than a featherweight, you know. Sure, I fought lighties. For money—anything for money, remember?

Well, I am doing a lot of thinking while I am running. Like I told you, I never could stand being pushed around. It was double bad, running away when I hadn't done anything. I couldn't see Mary, because naturally you would have her all staked out. I couldn't get clean clothing, I didn't have any dough on me. I got pretty hungry and I had to work a delicatessen finally, after midnight. Then you got closer, because I left prints.

There is a feeling about running away and being chased. It does something to you. Inside you get sullen, you know. Angry and hurt and you get mixed up, too. If I'd kept that gat I might have shot one of you. Yeah, I think I'd have shot Casey, because Fatso was his stoolie and when Fatso framed Lantino he started the whole thing. . . . All right, Casey, bug your eyes out. I'm telling you. You wanted me to talk and I'm talking. So I'll tell the whole thing and I'll tell it my way or I'll shut up. . . .

THERE was one thing I knew. Lantino and Buggsy had a place lined up. They had to have one, if they had planned to kill Fatso. And be-

cause that corner light was out, I figured they had planned it, all right. They knew Fatso's habits, they got there at the right time, they found a patsy when they saw me and now they were walking around free as the air, with alibis they had bought and paid for. Buggsy and Lantino were never pals of mine, you see. They just grew up where I did, on Dewey Street. We used to play ball on the street together, among the trucks, but they ran with a different mob after we got older.

So there I was, no dough, no place to go, the cops hot after me and time passing. You coppers always got that on your side—time. You can wait and wait, and a guy on the lam has got to hurry to keep ahead of you while every second his time is running out. You should try running once, just to see what it is like. It's what the guy calls a liberal education.

Then I got a flash. Never mind where I got it. The message was to meet Mary. I don't mind telling you where we met. It was where we used to meet, when we were both going to high school. I was a senior and she was in the second year, but Mary always was smarter than others. You get born kind of old down Dewey Street, and in high school it is like college among the kids whose parents have got the rocks.

There was coppers all around, of course, but Mary goes uptown, into a movie, out the back door, into a cafeteria, out the side door, into a subway, off at Eighteenth, goes uptown again, then back down to the Ell Street station near the school. She walks over to the school and I am stached up in the areaway behind the ashcans.

Mary told me all about it, how everyone thought I had knocked off Fatso for his roll. I couldn't see her and I wanted to light a match. She was always the prettiest girl in town.

"But nobody rolled Fatso," I told her. "They shot him and ran."

She said, "He was cleaned, George. Not a dime on him. You know how he hated banks, how he always carried a lot of money on him."

I said, "Mary, I don't get this. Lantino is sore at Fatso. All right, Fatso sent him to the pokey on a framed rap. Lantino gets poor Buggsy, who was only on probation because he is punchy, and sells him a bill of goods, and they knock off Fatso. Why Lantino had to have Fatso I do not know, unless it was to keep up his nerve. Lantino is a killer, but he is not any world beater when it comes to moxie."

Mary said, "Maybe somebody else took Fatso's money." She was nervy, and you coppers don't know what it takes to hold your nerve behind a pile of ashcans with every rookie on the force trigger-happy about you. All right, I know it is bad to let anybody get away with killing stoolies because then nobody would be a pigeon and how would you coppers ever solve a crime?

I said, "Nobody had a chance. There were people all over the spot in no time. The prowl car was right there."

She said, "Fatso was robbed, George."

I said, "Then the coppers got his dough. . . ."

It's no use, Casey. I'm going to tell it my way or not at all. You think coppers don't frisk a corpse when they get a chance? All right, leave it out of the record. That's what I thought when Mary told me Fatso was rolled. Okay, I'll tell it—my way. . . .

I sat there behind the ashcans. Mary had brought me some sandwiches and some dough. I ate and soon began to feel more like a man and less like a hunted rabbit with hounds all around.

Mary said, "You could take the money and get out of town, George. Maybe that's what you should do." She was holding my hand.

I said, "You don't want me to do that.

I won't be pushed around, Mary. You know I'd rather go to the chair than be pushed around."

"You shouldn't have run," she said. "But I know you had to. Flight is the first instinct of man. They taught us that in psychology, remember? And on Dewey Street I guess it is the second and third instinct. What can we do, George?"

I told her what to do. It wasn't an easy thing, neither for Mary nor for me. But it came to me while I was sitting there and she agreed. That was Mary—no hesitation. She said she'd meet me again the next night—that was Thursday. Then she went off, back down into the subway, so she could be picked up by that dumb tail you had on her and he would think she had returned from uptown. I bet you that was never in his report, was it?

THE DETECTIVE nearest the door cursed me. Morgan handed me a glass of water. I needed it. Morgan was playing it cute, sort of helping me, but getting the story and figuring in his mind. I could see what was going on in his skull because he was from Dewey Street. He was playing the angles. He had been in on the finish and since promotion was slow on the force, this was important to him. He was from the neighborhood, he was smart and he was a copper. Casey was howling at the detective who had lost Mary and had not reported it.

Morgan said, "Easy, kid. I know this was tough on you."

I said, "Never mind me, Morgan. Look out for yourself."

Casey yelled, "No wonder we don't get nowhere in this precinct. I'm gonna see the commissioner and shake up that precinct . . . . Go on, George."

I had Casey partly on my side now, and it made me laugh inside. I went on talking. It was easier all the time to tell it. . . . It was even getting enjoyable.

That night, Wednesday, I kept moving, but I narrowed it down to the neighborhood. I went to the back door of the delicatessen and saw Veroni and gave him the dough for the food I stole. He gave me some food and said he did not know it was me, or he wouldn't have rapped to the cops. I asked him a few questions and he said, "Sure, Lantino's got dough. I am fairly positive he took my till that time and he is always taking someone. Lantino is a bad one, George."

I said, "Okay. I want to see him."

"The Social Club," said Veroni. "Him and those others—they got that Social Club. I would hate to have them mugs get social with me."

Well, you coppers had been all over the Social Club. But you didn't know about the back yard. There is that store where they have painted the windows green and put in the pool table and the bar, but in the back yard is that shed. You kicked the door open, threw a flash in there and left it. You were surprised about that shed. It has got a cellar under it, huh?

You didn't know that. They dug it themselves and carted away the dirt out the alley between the store and the tenement. It is the only labor the mugs ever did. But they did it right and they ran a wire down there and they had lights and tables and chairs and a cabinet full of stuff.

No, I never knew that. But when I prowled the Social Club I was on the lam, remember? You were after me. I was hotter than the chair up the river you were trying to fit me into. So I looked closer than you did.

The shed was nothing. But the trap door wasn't hard to find, if you looked. I slept down there Wednesday night.

I did a lot of thinking in there, too. When you are running away, your mind works all the time. It is hard to get any

rest. Always your mind is working and when you wake up in your sleep, that is the time you can get frantic. If you do, then you are a goner. But if you hang on and let your mind work and don't strain too hard, then maybe you will be all right. Lots of guys blow their top and come in, or they shoot themselves, or else they run like a blind horse until they run into a copper or the river.

There was a chance for me to knock myself off. What was there for me if I lived? Figure it out for yourself. If it wasn't for Mary. . . .

Well, I did not sleep on the table of that cellar. There was no guarantee some of the boys might not come down there any hour of the night. The boys using that place did not keep regular hours. They had this cabinet and it was never locked because why lock it? If anyone got down in there they would tear out that wooden cabinet first thing. Besides, they would each have had to carry a key and that would be dumb, what with the cops fanning everyone and finding a bunch of identical keys on certain guys.

Like I say, I'm small, so I could fit into the cabinet all right. There were some gunny sacks and I carried the light in there and took a look. The funniest thing was the service revolvers. It seems the boys took pleasure in stealing guns from coppers. There were at least a half dozen police revolvers.

I settled down among the guns, the brass knucks and the knickknacks the boys could not hock but which they could not return to the rightful owners either. It was about midnight when I got in there and fell asleep. I woke up about noon the next day. I was pretty sleepy, I guess, and then I had half-waked several times during the night. I might as well tell you I had a gat in my hand all night. The serial number was 096789, Smith & Wesson Police Positive. . . . Okay, Casey, check it. I notice the stenog ain't taking that item down either. . . .

IT WAS about two o'clock when Lantino and Buggsy came in. I had been awake a couple hours and needed coffee. They had a hot plate down there and that is just what they were brewing—coffee. That was the hardest time of all, smelling that good aroma.

I lay there, listening. Joe Lantino is a big guy, as you know, and Buggsy was a heavy until he got his brains scrambled. They shook the cellar when they moved.

Buggsy says, "We got no dough, Joe."

"It's that broad," said Joe. "She knows."

"We got no dough." When Buggsy gets hold of one thing, he hangs onto it.

"She don't say nothin', but I see her. She puts the eye on me," said Lantino. "All the time, she puts the eye on me."

"But Joe, we got no dough."

"It's one of two things. We got to take a powder or we got to nail the broad. I don't like nailin' no broads," said Joe. "But if we got to nail her, we got to do it quick. If she goes to the coppers they will get snoopy and with our record we are cooked. Then I will have to kill some coppers. Not that I would not like to kill a copper, especially Casey."

Buggsy said, "We got no dough, Joe." He must have liked the rhyme.

Joe said, "George is sure layin' low. You got to give George credit. We put it in his hands and he sure is making a great lammister. But that broad of his. I bet she is seeing him."

"No dough, Joe," said Buggsy.

"The neighborhood is full of cops. One pigeon dead and the cops feel like they are sunk," said Joe. "I wish we had time to snatch his roll. Yeah, yeah, Buggsy, I know we got no dough. I wasn't thinking of dough. I was thinking of stir and the time I did."

They were pouring the coffee. I was cramped in the cabinet, so I started work-

ing to get the blood flowing again. Sure, I had a rod, but this was a blind cellar, and if I come out smoking, what happens? They maybe don't get me before I get them, two big guys in a small cellar. And if I get them, what? Two dead guys who killed another guy and the coppers still believe I knocked off Fatso. Sure you would. That's the way you bulls figure. You'd never believe me. I knew you dredged the river and found the gun. Never mind who told me. You know who told me, but you'll never get that from me. Not for the record you won't.

And I knew my prints were on it, because when I wiped them I was running and scared, and that was before I started thinking. It is only later, when your heart stops pounding that you can think.

I smelled the coffee and waited. I had an idea. It was screwy, sure, but I am not a copper. My ideas are my own; they do not come out of regulations and police schools and routine experience.

I waited for them to come for the rods they were going to need to knock off Mary. That was nice, waiting for that. You ever have any experiences like that, you coppers, with the law behind you and the whole city on your side? Lying there, waiting for them to make plans to kill the only person in the world who believes in you, the only person who cares for you? No, you don't know about that.

All right, I got my arms and legs uncramped and waited. Joe Lantino kept talking.

"She's a nice twist, too. I never had nothing against her, nor George neither. George went uptown when he was a fighter and I hear he done good in that war I sat out up the river. I never knew George. I never figured to put him on no spot. But he was there and a patsy is better than them alibis we cooked up. The patsy keeps the bulls from gettin' nosey about the alibis, see?"

"No dough, Joe," said Buggsy, slurping coffee.

"The broad will be bringing George some dough," said Lantino.

They drank coffee, and I knew Lantino was thinking it out. He would be slow, but he knew how to plan a stick-up, all right, and a killing. The cops might lose Mary, but Lantino wouldn't, because he would wait for her to come back to the neighborhood and then tail her. Before she could get to me, he would get to her.

Buggsy understood part of it. He said happily, "Dough, huh, Joe?"

"I'll tell Morgan. He's okay. I'll tell Morgan we got a job out west. We won't run. We'll play straight and take a rattler. Morgan will go for that. He's one of them new-fangled cops."

I heard a cup rattle against a saucer and I knew it was coming. He was coming straight for the cabinet for a rod. I got to my knees and held the revolver in my right hand.

He opened the door. I came out. You know I was pretty fast. But now I am wearing these glasses and without them I can see nothing. Well, not much. The light is burning—just a bulb hung from a wire over a hook—and I see Joe Lantino all right. He is quite surprised.

Buggsy is very slow, and I had counted on that. I hit Joe with the barrel of the gun. I hit him very hard. I laid him wide open and I hit him again, on account of Mary. I had nothing against the guy, except that thing about Mary. He had to have a patsy and that was an accident, leaving me with the gat that killed Fatso, but going after Mary was bad. So I hit him hard.

BUGGSY was up then. You remember Buggsy? Six feet two, over two hundred in shape. Two-forty he would weigh now. He was too slow for the ring—they used him when he was too slow which is why he is slap-happy.

This is a small room, and I do not want to kill Buggsy, who is a poor dumb slob. I may have killed Lantino, but if I did and I kill Buggsy, where am I? I might just as well have shot them both.

So I have got a handful of Buggsy and he is between me and that ladder going up to the trap door. I talk to him. I say, "Buggsy, this gat is loaded. I will shoot hell out of you if you do not go up that ladder and get the hell out of here. I want to talk to Joe."

"You hit him. You hit Joe," said Buggsy. He was shoving the table out of his way. "You should not of hit Joe."

I say, "Buggsy, you know me. George Kell. I was a boxer, too. I do not want to kill you, Buggsy."

"You should not of hit him, George," said Buggsy. He has a one-track mind, like I told you. Maybe it is not a mind, but it is what he uses for one. "That was bad, George. Hittin' Joe."

"Hell, you're a heavy, he's a heavy. I'm a feather," I says.

I am moving, now, because he is moving, slow, like an elephant, but there is no room in that cellar to get away. He shoves out a big left at me and that is easy to get away from, but I can't counter him, because if he gets me in a clinch then I am finished. Fighting a punchy ex-boxer is tough because they will automatically do the right thing. That's all they have left, that automatic reaction.

There was nothing to do. I keep moving, he keeps coming in. The chair gets busted when he falls over it. I go in to try and clip him. He makes a grab for my leg and I have to take it away. I go around and around, trying to think of two ways out.

Sure I know one way. But I am not a copper. Buggsy is just a big hunk of guy with no brain. I got a heart. It is not easy for me to do these things. Besides, how do I know who is upstairs in the Social Club?

Well, he comes across the table. I have my finger on the trigger just then. I am really scared. I am no guy to be going out in a burst of heat. Suppose there are coppers upstairs and they hear the shot?

I side-step the table. He throws it at me. I go down. I got tight against the wall and the table is on me. But it is at an angle, see? I am scrooched down, and the angle of the table is over me like a tent.

I get a flash then and I lay still. Buggsy mumbles, "You should not of hit him, George."

I could reach out and touch Lantino. He was like dead.

Buggsy comes for me. He picks up the table. I get up off the floor faster than that, even. I slam him once, twice, three times with my gat. Then he has got me.

You remember Buggsy? He could take it. Bravest of the brave, the papers used to call him. You ever hear of Buggsy getting kayoed? No, you didn't. T.K.O's they had against him. They cut him and the ref stopped it plenty times, toward the end. But nobody ever laid him for the full count.

He had hold of me. His hands locked behind my shoulders. I used the boxer tricks, but it was no dice. He was bringing me in, blood running down his face.

My feet were going off the ground when I got my arm free. I had the gat. I butted him under the chin. He had to throw back his head. My glasses were gone. I couldn't see him. I reached up and slugged at his Adam's apple.

Buggsy's arms loosened. I slugged him again. He went down. I fell on the floor and lay there, scrabbling for my glasses. I kept listening, but there was no sound upstairs. I had to think, but I was blind as a mole and my blood was pounding through my heart like water through a sewer after a heavy shower.

I got hold of myself, finally. I picked up the eyeglasses. I straightened my clothes, even though they were filthy. I

had slept in them for five days and this was Thursday.

I left the gat. I didn't even try to wipe off prints. I had a reason for that. I went up the ladder. There was no one in the Social Club because the heat was on and the boys were laying low. And the cops had looked it over, so they didn't do more than leave a uniformed flattie at the front door and, of course, this is in the yard. So I hopped a fence or two and then I was on the lam again.

But now I knew something. I could take a chance. I could go uptown because now I could tell something. I didn't need evidence because I am not a copper and neither is Congressman Jerry Maloney one.

You coppers think a guy like me is nothing. Because I have not got a job and do not know just where to start looking for one, you think I am a punk. But to Maloney I am a constituent. I vote regular and I vote right. Maloney put me in the Marines and Maloney knew me. He would throw me to the cop's quick if he thought I was wrong, but he knew me. I would not have gone to him cold, but with what I had figured he would want to listen.

Sure I knew he was in town. Mary told me that. I called her and she had already talked to him, but it was no dice then. So I told Mary to call you coppers and send you down for Lantino and Buggsy. That was hard to do, even after what had happened. But I did it, because of Mary and me. And you went down and found those gats and everything and hid the ones with the police numbers, but not the one I used, because it had my prints. You figured you could cover that one by saying it was lost. You couldn't cover six of them, but you could cover one. You brought in Lantino and Buggsy and you kept looking for me, because you thought you had killed three birds with one stone on that anonymous phone call. I was with Maloney when you picked them up, Lantino and Buggsy, still out like lights. . . .

CASEY said, "All right, Jake, you got that all down? I'll want to read it and maybe make some changes. Then George can sign it."

The uniformed cop was all ready to take me away. I said, "You change as much as a comma besides the stuff I said you could leave out and I'll see you fry in hell before I'll sign it."

I waited.

Morgan came forward. He said, "It'll be all right, George. We'll see that you are taken care of."

"Sure, good old coppers," I said. "Did you birds ever hear of the Feds? How they can do things it would take you months to do? In banks?"

Morgan said, "Come on, George. Re-

member, just like you, I'm from Dewey Street."

"Remember, it means the chair to me," I said.

Morgan said, "No, it doesn't. You got life right now. No matter what the D.A. says, you've talked and you'll never go to the chair. Right, captain?"

"I didn't promise him no immunity," said Casey.

"He talked," said Morgan. "The boy told it his way. But he talked."

"It's no confession," said Casey. He was puzzled. He smelled a rat. One thing about an old, experienced cop, he don't take much for granted down inside him. For the records, yes, but not really down deep.

The door opened. Maloney shoved in, a big man, red-faced like Casey, but sharper.

There were two medium-sized, quiet guys with him.

I said, "Feds. They get into safety deposit boxes like they were sardine cans."

Then I got off the chair. I got off very fast, like in the cellar back of the Social Club. I spun Morgan. I did not hurt him. I just used an old ring trick. I felt sorry for him.

Those Feds are efficient. They had his gun and had cuffs on him before he could take a deep breath.

I said to him, "If it wasn't for my bad eyesight, I'd have seen you. But I had just put my glasses back on and wasn't focussing good and then Lantino slipped me that gat and I was running. But it had to be you, because you bought that new car. Mary found that out fast. You got that broad in the chorus at Lacey's Club and new cars are hard to get and she wanted to swell around.

"Morgan, you went to college and learned a lot of things. But you forgot some of the things any kid on Dewey Street knows. You should have put that money in a safety deposit box, like you did. But you should have left it there for years and then dribbled it out. Mary had been looking for someone who had dough to spend. Lantino did not even have lammister money, so he did not get Fatso's roll. He couldn't have, anyway.

"I never saw you, Morgan, because of the way it happened. But it was you, all right. You were right there, first crack, and you kept on me all the time. You wanted me. You could even get promoted if you put it on me. That wasn't nice, Morgan, when you knew Lantino and Buggsy did it. But Lantino and Buggsy and the mob had stolen your gun and maybe you were in on it with them. I don't know. I am no copper and I don't even want to find out."

Morgan said, "This is ridiculous. This hoodlum's word against mine is all the evidence you got."

It didn't go over.

Maloney sat on Casey's desk, swinging a leg. He lit a cigar and said, "You put that money in there the day after the murder. Some of it is money with just a little blood on it. The Feds are typing the blood. When you bought that car for cash, Morgan, you should have spent the bloody money. Although the Feds would have got it anyway, as they are checking black market lots and who buys those cars. And I had them in on it, because George Kell happens to be one of my boys."

Then he said to Casey, "You don't want George for anything any more, do you?"

"Why—er—I guess his story will stand up. You want him, Congressman?"

Maloney said, "Take it easy, Casey. See you later."

He took me out of there. We just left them with it. The sun was shining outside. Mary was waiting. She looked—well, she looked like Mary. It was the only way to put it.

Maloney was starting downtown, toward Dewey Street. He said, "I came from there, too."

"Sure, I know, Maloney," I said. I felt friendly.

"We never get all the way clear. If Lantino had shoved that gun in my hand, I would have run a ways, too."

"That's why you believed us," I said. Mary looked weary and worn, but she was still beautiful.

Maloney said, "I am going to be the next governor, George. We made a deal this morning. I'll need a man, a sort of confidential agent."

I told him, "I'll do my best for you, Maloney."

He has a wonderful grin. He said, "You don't call me 'mister'. I like that. You'll have to, when people are around, but I like it the way it is. And you'll want to get married now . . . I like that, too."

I said, "I'm broke, Maloney. But I'm ready."

He handed me two hundred. Just like that. He fixed it up about the license. He stood up with us. Mary packed and we were on the train that night going upstate. But instead of the big house, it was to the capital, to start the ball rolling for Maloney. It was worth having a future governor on your honeymoon to get a break like that.

I still wonder about Morgan, if he was in on the whole deal, or just happened to come along and get to Fatso first. Poor Morgan—he was one of those who try to fight it out instead of thinking it out and waiting for the breaks to get you away from Dewey Street.

As far away as you can get from Dewey Street, that is. . . .

## Rubber-Gloved Murder

SOME years ago a young Jamaica, West Indies, business man planned to kill his elderly partner who had named him in his will to receive the larger share of the oldster's estate. There was still a third partner, a quarrelsome middle-aged man who got along with none of the white or native help and with neither of his two partners. The would-be killer set about planting suspicion in everyone's mind that the querulous one might some day do something rash as he had spoken very harshly to the older partner on several occasions.

The young man waited patiently for an appropriate time to commit the murder. He had even planned the death instrument—a cane sometimes carried by the middle-aged partner. In his back pocket the killer carried a pair of rubber surgical gloves that would hide his fingerprints and could be easily disposed of by burning.

At last the day came. A bitter quarrel took place between the old man and the middle-aged partner. Several clerks in adjoining buildings heard the two angry voices and veiled threats of the middle-aged man.

Three hours later the young partner discovered the elder one dead in his room, his head crushed by repeated blows of a heavy stick. The middle-aged man was arrested, and his cane taken in evidence; there were blood clots and hairs on it. The middle-aged partner vehemently denied that he had killed his senior.

Finding no fingerprints, the police inspector, using a microscope, discovered the presence of rubber and powder. And the stain that showed up suggested a hand somewhat larger than that of the accused man.

A check of the island's stores uncovered the purchaser of the rubber gloves, and the young man was condemned to death three weeks later.

*—David Crewe*

# TUNE IN ON STATION HOMICIDE

THE swimming pool, under the moon, was like black ink in a white stone tray. Beyond the fringe of trees, blatant and gaudy, were the lights of Los Angeles, that painted lady of the Pacific.

Up on the night hill, by the pool, it was a time of silence, of quiet voices and blessed peace. Jimmy Hake, that round and comical man of radio, that owl-faced, elfin, blundering character, in whom every man saw his own image, reclined on the wheeled redwood couch and watched the way the faint light from the windows of the house made mysterious the face of his beloved.

Jimmy Hake needed all of his talent to keep his voice and manner relaxed. Murder makes the breath short, the palms sweat, the voice tremble, the neck rigid.

Murder is something that is two years a-growing. Murder is the answer to a question that couldn't otherwise be answered.

It was Sunday night. Tomorrow rehearsal, then the program itself at eight. Jimmy Hake, proudly presented by the makers of Shaynaline products, the cosmetics that bring out your natural beauty. Go to your nearest drugstore. . . .

Three people by the pool that belonged to Jimmy Hake.

Jimmy, Bob Morrit, his best writer—and Anna, wife of Bob. In the early part of the evening they had gone over the script for the last time. In the morning Bob would get the right number of copies made and then, at rehearsal, last minute changes would be made in all copies.

Bob Morrit was saying: " . . . and now we've got the thing pinned down strong enough so we can stay right in the same groove. Character established. Type of incident. Just switch the cast around from time to time."

Jimmy knew that Bob had been largely responsible for the program pattern that had made him a success. Sure, Bob was clever, but what did he know about how to make a million bucks the hard way? That start, thirty years ago, eighteen years old and already a baggy pants specialist in the burlesque circuit. Coffee money for years and years. Small clubs. Rough. Rough all the way.

Then one day you hit the top and what have you got? Weariness that feels like you have putty instead of marrow in your bones. High blood pressure. Shortness of breath. Dyspnea, to be exact. Technically you are forty-eight, but you feel seventy-eight.

Oh, that jolly, jolly Jimmy Hake! That comic fellow!

You have everything except the one thing in the world that you want. Anna.

**By Peter Reed**

***Jimmy Hake was tops as a radio comedian—and this last night, though it never showed on his Hooper rating, his show was the most killing of all!***


*"You fat little fake! What about Anna. . . ."*

Funny, sort of. There were always lots of women. Eager to help you spend the bankroll. Laughing women. Tender women. Bitter women.

Not one like Anna.

He watched her. He had watched her for three years. A deep, strong, calm, incredibly beautiful woman. Safe harbor for the rest of his years. Straight and true. And loyal to Bob Morrit. Married to Bob Morrit. All bound up in Bob Morrit. And time for Jimmy Hake only as a friend. A good friend.

When Jimmy Hake remembered the times he had tried to tell her how he felt about her, he flushed. She had handled him so easily. "Please, Jimmy."

Just that. A tone of voice. The tone of voice said two things. It said, *"If you persist, I will go away."* It also said, *"You*

*are nice."* But Jimmy didn't feel nice.

Silver blond hair and sea-grey eyes and a face that would be beautiful when she became sixty. That sort of a face. You could tell by the line of temple and jaw, the set of the eyes.

You get to the top and have everything you have ever wanted. Except Anna. And the need for her makes everything else worthless, tasteless.

There is no way out. No answer. There can be no deviation in her loyalty—except if there is no longer anyone to whom she could be loyal.

And like the simplest equation written on a school blackboard, the answer becomes . . . . Murder.

IN AMUSEMENT parks there are small, silvery, streamlined boxes in which one sits and is strapped in. They hang at the end of a long bar. The silver cockpit goes around and around in a vertical circle. Jimmy Hake felt as though he had a very tiny such apparatus in his heart. It went around endlessly. Strapped in the seat, holding the crossbar in brittle fingers, sat a miniature skeleton. The shape of the skull was oddly like that of lean, serious Bob Morrit.

During the two years that he had thought of murder, he had thought of many ways. Many methods. To murder and go free. Conviction would make the murder pointless.

At night Jimmy Hake would awaken, cold sweat oily on his body, his fists tightly clenched. Then, in the silence of the night he would think of Bob Morrit.

Not of Anna. Of Bob and of death.

Ten months before, without the faintest idea of how he would use it, he had acquired, in Rio, a small amount of curare. Vegetable base poison. Instant paralysis of the heart and lungs. A few words whispered to a ragged guide. A large bill. A small tin aspirin box pressed into his hand. Inside, a greyish sticky substance.

He knew that there was no way it could be traced.

He realized that Bob had just asked him something.

"What was that?"

Bob laughed. "It is getting late. I was asking you if you didn't think this no-good wife of mine could be of more help in the programs."

"How?"

"He's got the idea," Anna said wryly, "that I ought to listen to the programs. Isn't listening to you two chew up the script enough?"

"You're a good girl," Bob said, "and we both love you, but you're no darn help to us. You don't even laugh any more at the script."

"I used to laugh to make you feel good."

"If you listened," Jimmy Hake said, "you could tell us what sounded flat to you. You are our most unforgiving public."

She sighed. "I always forget until after the program is over. Life is so full of a number of things. Besides, I hate the commercials and I hate the opening patter before you get into the meat of the script."

"Then tune in late," Bob said.

She yawned. "All right, you humorous people. Tomorrow at eight ten I will be your ardent listener. I will sit home and laugh like mad."

She stood up, clean and straight in the faint light. She said, "Bob, darling, you are such a collector of gadgets. Why don't you find a gadget that will get me home and into bed at night without any effort on my part."

"I'll look for one like that," he said.

As Jimmy Hake stood up, she said, "Jimmy, what a life I lead! In the car, lighted cigarettes pop out at you. In the apartment, the windows open and shut at regular hours. Things go off and on. Civilization, they call it."

"It makes life easier," Bob said firmly.

Jimmy Hake was suddenly anxious for

them to go. He was afraid of the conversation. He was afraid of the turn it might take. Because murder had already been consummated, at least as far as he was concerned.

Bob Morrit was standing there by the pool, talking, his arm around Anna's waist. And yet he was dead. It was queer. His life was over. Finished.

Anna would be broken up over it, of course. She would weep. But there would be the handy and familiar shoulder of Jimmy Hake on which to weep. Then, it would be only fitting that the two people who were the closest to poor Bob should themselves be married. He would make her happy. Far happier than Bob had made her. Of that he was sure. And that was, in part, his rationalization.

He stood in the drive, and the headlights of Bob's car swept across him. He waved, shouted good night and watched the tail-lights diminish and suddenly disappear as they rounded the curve.

Suddenly sweating, he hurried back to the bath house near the pool. He clicked on the inside lights, and stood for a moment, conscious of the fact that these next few minutes might mean life or death.

It was the men's side of the bath house. The two shower stalls were on the left, the lockers on the right.

Bob Morrit had been in the shower when he had done it. He had been prepared. He had timed Bob in the shower a dozen times, and found that four minutes was the minimum time he would have. While Bob had splashed and sung tonelessly, he had pulled open Bob's locker. Bob's favorite gadget, the trick Swiss alarm watch, was on the shelf. It was a clever thing, actually. It was a wrist watch. Once the alarm was set, a blunt brass plunger jabbed out of a small hole on the wrist surface of the watch at the proper time.

When it was new, Jimmy Hake had borrowed it once. It was remarkably effective. The pressure of the little plunger was sudden, strong and startling.

With fumbling fingers he had set the alarm for the moment while Bob was in the shower. The little plunger clicked out. With a triangular file, he carefully and quickly sharpened the little plunger. Then he smeared the tip with the grey, sticky curare, forced it back into the recess and turned the alarm off.

Closing the locker door quietly, he had placed the file and the aspirin tin in the bottom of his own locker. When Bob came out of the shower a minute or so later, Jimmy Hake was out by the pool, talking with the fair Anna.

All evidence had to be removed. Three items. The little tin box, the file and the minute brass filings. He had filed the brass while holding the watch inside his own locker. In the harsh light he saw the tiny yellow glints of brass.

Locating the tin box, he opened it and carefully brushed the filings into it, snapped it shut. He was sweating as he undressed, pulled on his swimming trunks. The servants would see nothing odd in a midnight swim.

The file and box clutched in his hand, he pulled himself under the water by means of the metal ladder at the corner of the pool. His groping fingers found the drain, unscrewed the mesh cover. He dropped the file and box down, replaced the cover.

With slow strokes he made two lengths of the pool, climbed out, and, incredibly weary, walked back to the bath house.

Bob Morrit walked about with death on his wrist. It was as though he wore a coral snake coiled there. Sooner or later, Bob would set the alarm to remind himself of an appointment. When the alarm went off, the blood would carry the poison to his heart and Bob would be dead. Instantly.

And there would be no basis on which to try the famous Jimmy Hake. Opportunity, yes. Motive, no. Would a come-

dian kill his best writer? Of course not. And, of course, there was a good possibility that the death wouldn't be properly diagnosed.

As he went up to his bedroom, he fully expected not to be able to sleep. He put water and sleeping tablets on his bedside table. But moments after his head touched the pillow, he dropped off into a sleep that was like death.

LAST minute script changes were made by Jimmy Hake. Because such changes were usually to fit the show into the schedule, there was no need for Bob to attend. He seldom did. When Jimmy Hake got to the studio just before rehearsal, he picked up the dozen copies that Bob had arranged for.

The rehearsal was like a program in a dream. Jimmy Hake could hear his own words without understanding what he was saying. It was hard to keep from looking at the doorway through which they would come to tell him Bob was dead. In his heart the little carnival toy went around and around, the body of Bob Morrit strapped to the infinitesimal seat.

The band music seemed much too loud, the voices of the supporting characters much too shrill. He wanted to hold his plump hands over his ears and run from the studio. But somehow he got through it. Some mechanical part of his mind ordered the script changes, made the pencil corrections on his copy. The program finished exactly thirty-five seconds before the allotted half hour. Thirty seconds for the closing commercial, and five more seconds for Jimmy Hake to sign off in his unforgettable manner.

Close of rehearsal allowed the cast a half hour to get coffee before returning to the studio to get set for the actual broadcast. Jimmy Hake had coffee downstairs with the guest star. He knew that he was making the right comments, smiling in the right places. But he didn't know how he was managing to do it so unconsciously.

At any moment he expected to get word that Bob Morrit was dead.

The elevator took them back up to the proper floor and he walked with the guest star to the stage. He looked up and saw Bob Morrit standing, talking with the band leader. Somehow Jimmy Hake kept smiling, kept walking. Not dead yet. Not dead yet, but soon.

He forced himself to go over, grin at Bob and say, "Not many changes in the script, boy."

"Good. About ready to roll?"

"Just about." He glanced up at the big clock. The studio audience was hurrying in, struggling for seats. Jimmy Hake turned and gave them his famous smile, a wave of his hand.

He looked back just in time to see Bob Morrit pull up his cuff, glance at a bare wrist and then grin. "Habit, thy name is Morrit."

Jimmy Hake's voice sounded hoarse. "Where—what happened to your watch?"

"That fine absent-minded wife of mine. I set the alarm for ten after and strapped it on her so she wouldn't miss the show this time. Hey, you better get on the ball and start warming up the studio audience, Jimmy."

Jimmy Hake walked with leaden steps toward the front of the stage. A routine done so many times. Automatic. He did not know what he was saying. But he could hear their laughter, see their open mouths. The smile muscles of his cheeks were tight.

Everything was lost. *Anna instead of Bob. Anna instead of Bob. Anna will die.*

He looked back over his shoulder. Three minutes to eight. Thirteen minutes for Anna to live.

They gave him a signal. One minute to eight. Eleven minutes before Anna died. What could he do about it? Leave the studio? He couldn't get to Bob's apartment in fifteen minutes. How could he

explain, even if he could get there in time?

". . . that man with no future, a sad past and no presence—Jimmy Hake!"

He shook his head. The lines of the script wavered so he could hardly read them. On the air. The mike a few inches from his mouth.

He licked dry lips. *Ad lib it, Jimmy. You can't read what it says here and you can't remember.*

"I'm trying to get up the courage to read the jokes my writers have just handed me." They laughed. That was a good sign. He realized he was throwing the timing off. But still he couldn't read the words. He glanced over to the side. Bob's face was white. He was biting his lips. The rest of the cast had odd expressions.

Suddenly it was unbearable that Anna should die. She had eight minutes to live. No. Seven minutes.

The script fluttered to the floor. The mike shaft was cool in his sweating hand. His voice was thin and tight. "A matter of life and death. To anyone in the Foster Apartments on Wiltshire. Go to apartment six-B right away and take a gold watch from the wrist of Mrs. Robert Morrit. A matter of life and death—"

His throat tightened up and no more words would come.

It had been the only answer. The only way to save Anna from death. They would have nothing on him. He could quit. Go away. Retire. Nobody would prosecute.

The studio seemed to swing around him as though he were standing in the center of a garish phonograph record.

Suddenly he was in a corridor. Bob Morrit had him by the lapels and was shaking him. Bob's lips were drawn back from his teeth and his eyes were wild.

"What were you trying to say, Hake? What is this all about? Answer me, you rubber-nose comic! You fat little fake! What about Anna?"

Jimmy Hake fought for self control. He was alone with Bob for a moment. "I had to do it. I—fixed the watch so it would kill you. I wanted Anna. I'm—I'm quitting the business."

Bob slowly dropped his hands to his sides and his eyes went dead.

His voice was as dead as his eyes. "So you fixed everything up."

"Yes, Bob," Jimmy Hake said eagerly. "I must have been crazy. I—I couldn't let her die."

"Do you know what time it is?"

"No. Why?"

"It's twelve after eight, Jimmy. Twelve after."

Bob walked heavily away from him, turned and said, "You better start running, Jimmy. You acted funny. As soon as you said Foster Apartments, the control booth took you off the air."

Jimmy Hake stood alone in the corridor.

His wide lips were still spread in the automatic, lovable smile that had made him famous.

Wearing that same smile he walked toward the window at the end of the corridor.

He walked with the comic, jerky little shuffle he had learned thirty years before.

## CONFESSION

IN VIRTUALLY every state of the Union a person can not be convicted on the sole basis of his confession of murder. The law automatically assumes that the confessor is either shielding someone, or else boasting, as psychotics will often do, and demands corroborative evidence.

*—Lance Kerrait*

# STRANGE TRAILS

## The CASE of the IDENTICAL LADIES

A FARMER, REAPING NEAR GRANITE CITY, ILL., ON JUNE 16, 1921, CAME UPON A RECENT GRAVE WHICH YIELDED THE BODY OF A PRETTY YOUNG WOMAN. DEATH, AN AUTOPSY REVEALED, HAD RESULTED FROM STRANGULATION SOME 10 DAYS PREVIOUSLY

CHIEF LEROY CLARK OF THE GRANITE CITY POLICE, FINE-COMBED THE AREA, TURNING UP A BROKEN-HANDLED SHOVEL AND A REPORT OF A COUPLE SPOONING ON THE NEARBY LEVEE. TWO DAYS LATER AN ELDERLY WOMAN FROM EAST ST. LOUIS, ILL., IDENTIFIED THE BODY POSITIVELY AS HER GRANDDAUGHTER'S. A POLICE SERGEANT AND A DENTIST CONFIRMED THE IDENTIFICATION.

THE GRANDDAUGHTER'S HUSBAND, PICKED UP IN INDIANA, DENIED THE KILLING, STATING HE HAD NOT SEEN HIS WIFE IN MONTHS.

AS CHIEF CLARK PREPARED TO GO BEFORE THE GRAND JURY, THE GRANDDAUGHTER WAS LOCATED IN CINCINNATI THROUGH AN ANONYMOUS LETTER.

CLARK TURNED TO THE ONE REMAINING CLUE -- THE BROKEN-HANDLED SHOVEL. AFTER A 7-DAY HOUSE-TO-HOUSE CANVASS A DEPUTY DISCOVERED AN ODD-JOBBS MAN AT A ROOMING HOUSE ON D STREET WHO IDENTIFIED IT AS ONE STOLEN FROM THE CELLAR.

# ...to MURDER

by LEE

THE PROPRIETOR REVEALED THAT A MR. AND MRS. ARTHUR DORMAN HAD LIVED THERE UNTIL JUNE 8TH. THE NEXT DAY MR. DORMAN DEPARTED WITH A TRUNK AND A TOOL CHEST, SAYING HIS WIFE HAD LEFT HIM FOR ANOTHER MAN. THE RESTAURANT OWNER WHO EMPLOYED MRS. DORMAN SAID SHE WORKED AS USUAL JUNE 8TH BUT HAD NOT BEEN SEEN SINCE.

← MRS. DORMAN

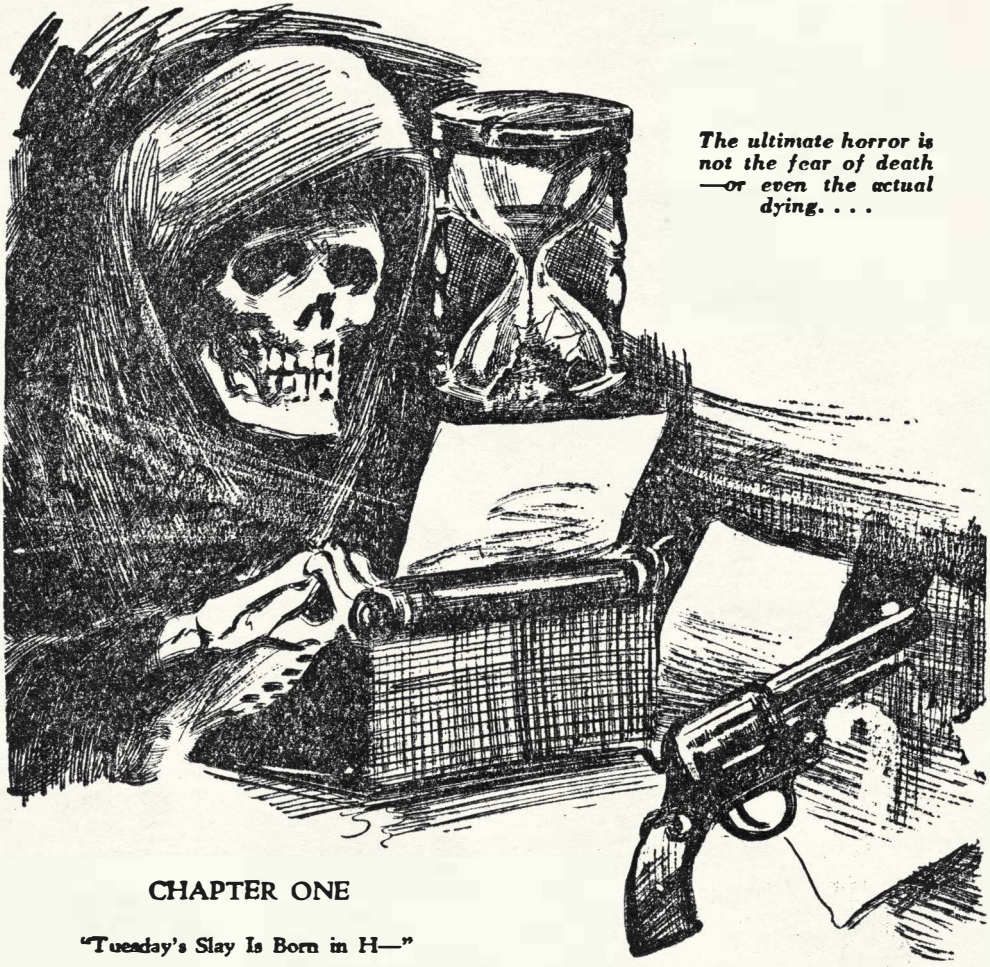
THE RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN MRS. DORMAN AND THE GRANDDAUGHTER WAS STARTLING, EXTENDING TO SIMILAR DENTAL WORK AND SCARS OVER THE SAME EYE.

FROM THE LOCAL EXPRESS OFFICE CLARK LEARNED THE TRUNK AND TOOL CHEST HAD BEEN SENT TO MURPHYSBORO, WERE THEY WERE LOCATED IN A PAWNSHOP. DORMAN WAS ARRESTED ON AUGUST 22ND AT JUNCTION, ILL., THROUGH A TIP.

HE CONFESSED, EXPLAINING HE'D DISCOVERED HIS WIFE WITH A MAN ON THE LEVEE, CHOKED HER TO DEATH, STOLEN THE SHOVEL AND BURIED HER. PLEADING GUILTY, HE RECEIVED AN INDETERMINATE SENTENCE, WAS PAROLED IN 1930 AS A MODEL PRISONER, AND IN 1931 WAS SENTENCED TO 20 YEARS FOR AN ARIZONA HOLDUP.

# I Thought I'd

## By Bruno Fischer



*The ultimate horror is not the fear of death —or even the actual dying. . . .*

### CHAPTER ONE

**"Tuesday's Slay Is Born in H—"**

WHY would anybody want to kill me?

I have no mortal enemy. I am not rich enough for anybody to gain wealth from my death. I am happily married and have never played around with another man's wife.

Hate, gain, jealousy—all are out as possible motives. Revenge? As far as I know, I have never done anybody a great injury. Fear? I am not the kind of man who inspires fear for whatever reason.

Perhaps it wasn't deliberate.

I have been over it again and again in my mind. All right, go over it once more. I can think best when I place my thoughts on paper.

Last Friday Grace Tildsley, the fiction editor of *Modern Woman,* asked me to do a five thousand word love story. The rate she offered was enticing. I had promised

# Die —

***Two minds with but a single thought—two hearts that killed as one. But there was one thing Alice didn't know: If I died—it was her funeral!***

to have the story on her desk within a week, yet this morning I found myself still without a plot. I roamed my Washington Heights apartment like a caged lion.

At lunch I said to Alice, "I always have trouble working in New York. I'm going up to the country place."

She gave me a half-mocking smile born of seven years' experience as a writer's wife. "To write or to fish, Chet?"

"You come, and stand over me with a whip and keep me glued to the typewriter."

"No, thanks," Alice said. "I won't enjoy freezing up there. You go alone, darling."

I preferred that. I can do my best work when nobody, not even my wife, is around. I packed a small bag; I kissed Alice and told her that I would be back in a couple of days; I fetched my car from the garage.

Within two hours I was in the upstate town of Trevan, in the Catskills. I stopped off at the super-market for groceries and

drove three more miles to the cottage.

This is a charming four-room clapboard house, painted ivory with blue trim. It is rather isolated, nestling against a hillside and some four hundred feet in from a dirt road. Alice and I spend the greater part of our summers here.

It was a brisk October day. There is no central heating in the cottage. I made a roaring fire in the fireplace. I set up my portable typewriter on the coffee table in front of the fire, placed a pile of yellow paper beside the typewriter, opened a fresh pack of cigarettes. I was set to produce fiction. All I needed was a plot.

None came.

After an hour of beating my brains out, I decided that fishing would be an aid to the function of my mind. There is something contemplative about fishing; a man's thoughts become clear and sharp. Two hours of daylight were left.

I got my fishing gear out of the storage closet, changed into appropriate clothes, set out. Jordan Lake, which the state stocks with bass, is two miles away. One could drive to it, but I preferred the walk through woods and fields.

I HAD almost reached the lake when somebody shot at me.

I was crossing an open field which ended at the shore. Adjoining the field were thick woods running all the way into the water. It was among the trees on my left that a rifle slammed. In the instant that I heard the shot I felt a tug at my left arm.

As I stood listening to the echo of the shot roll away over the lake, it didn't occur to me that the bullet had come anywhere near me. It wasn't until complete silence had returned that I remembered that slight tug at my arm and looked at my left sleeve.

A couple of inches above the elbow there was a small, clean tear in my woolen shirt, as if a razor blade had been drawn across the fabric. I knew that the bullet had done that.

A careless hunter, I thought. "Watch where you're shooting!" I yelled at the trees.

The gun roared again. This time the bullet kicked up dirt at my feet.

"Hey, what's the idea!" I yelled.

Looking back now, I realize how absurd I was to stand there scolding him and continuing to offer myself as a target. It should have been obvious at once that a hunter in the woods couldn't have mistaken me for an animal. In that naked field, I couldn't have been more clearly revealed as a human being.

Then I saw movement in the woods. It was no more than a gliding shadow in the dimness there, but it was enough. Perhaps he had decided to shift his position; perhaps he was only stirring while reloading a single-shot rifle. Whatever the reason, there was deadly menace in that shadow.

Not many months ago I had seen a man killed on a New York street by no more than a shadow that came silently and insubstantial as a ghost and vanished within the blinking of an eye. Shadows, I had learned, can kill.

I turned and ran.

A third shot followed me. I have no idea how close the bullet came; the important thing is that it did not come too close. I did not slow down until I reached the protection of woods a quarter of a mile from the lake.

Panting, sweating as much with fear as with exertion, I looked back across the meadow. I saw nothing.

I was still alive because he was a rotten shot with a rifle. At no more than two hundred feet even I could have hit a target my size.

That did not mean that he would miss a fourth time. I continued back to the cottage.

When I reached the crest of the hill which overlooked the cottage, I hesitated.

He could have beaten me back here easily in a car. Perhaps he and his rifle were waiting for me—waiting just outside the house or even inside, so close that this time not even he would miss.

Heavy undergrowth ran to within fifty feet of the rear of the cottage. I moved through it at a crouch. Most of it was sumac, but there were briers which ripped my clothing, my hands and face.

Somehow I felt ridiculous, as if I were a grown man playing a childish game. Because now that I had had a chance to collect my thoughts, it seemed utterly fantastic that somebody would want to kill me. If that unseen rifleman had deliberately shot at me, it was only because he had mistaken me for somebody else. In that case, he would certainly not follow me here.

Evidently he hadn't. I slipped into the cottage through the back door. Cautiously I looked through every room. I stared out through every window.

The countryside was tranquil.

AS MY nerves untied themselves, I started to laugh. Doubtless there was a touch of hysteria in that laughter. But really, I told myself, there was nothing to fear. Either I had been mistaken for somebody else, or a hunter with a gruesome sense of humor had decided to frighten me. The second theory was probably the right one. It explained why three times he had missed me at comparatively close range. Likely he had been expert enough to put bullets very close to me without hitting me.

*These damn yokels,* I thought. *They hate city vacationists anyway. It must have amused him to make me run like a scared rabbit.*

The fire was smoldering ashes. I pulled aside the screen to throw on more logs, and as I did so my eyes fell on my left sleeve. I froze, standing with my left arm outstretched, staring.

If that rifleman had been only trying to frighten me, would he have sent a bullet close enough to rip the cloth?

Perhaps that had been a mistake; the bullet had gone nearer to the target than intended.

I replaced the fire screen without putting more wood on the fire. I was, I decided, getting the hell out of there. Cold reason insisted that I had nothing to fear, but the fact remained that staying here would be useless. I would be too nervous, too jittery to produce fiction. I would be better off returning to the New York apartment.

I repacked my bag, put the portable typewriter back into its case, gathered up my briefcase, went out to my car. And the car refused to start.

The starter turned over, but nothing happened to the motor. My frenzy mounted as I sat hunched over the wheel, my foot on the starter, listening to that impotent whirr go on and on. Presently I got out and raised the hood and stared at the motor. Merely a gesture, that. I know little about a car except how to drive it.

I shivered. In my topcoat I should have been warm enough, but I shivered. He did something to my car, I told myself, to prevent me from leaving.

I felt naked, defenseless out there in the open. I ran back to the cottage. My fingers shook as I fumbled to insert the key in the lock. I got the door open, slammed it behind me, locked it.

Then that laughter, with a touch of hysteria in it, came again. Fool, I told myself. Things happen to cars. Only last week I hadn't been able to get it started in the garage; a mechanic had had to fix it. Something to do with the fuel pump.

I couldn't phone a garage because the phone had been disconnected for the winter. Very well, I'd walk to the service station only a mile down the road and bring a mechanic back with me.

I opened the door and then closed it without going through it. Another thought had struck me. Perhaps he had disabled the car to induce me to walk toward town, and on the way he would be waiting to shoot me down as I passed.

But why? If he were determined to kill me, why hadn't he while I had been standing outside the house?

The answer: he wanted to make it appear that I had been shot accidentally by a hunter. For that he had to get me out into the open, and away from my house.

Nonsense. Perhaps.

At any rate, there was no sense taking a chance, even if but one chance in a hundred. I could wait for darkness. Under the protection of the night, I could slip away unseen.

I threw a couple of logs on the fire and waited. In an hour twilight trickled in through the windows. In two hours night was complete. I stepped outside and stopped.

A great orange full moon was rising, bathing the night in mellow radiance. I would be as clearly revealed as by daylight.

I closed the door, locked it, put more wood on the fire.

That was thirty minutes ago. I sit typing this in front of the fire. I am safe enough while I remain in the cottage. If he intended to kill me here, he would have done so before this.

I have read over what I have written. What does it all amount to?

I was shot at. A mistake or a particularly fiendish practical joke.

My car refuses to start. This is a peculiarity of all cars.

Apparently somebody wants me dead. Nobody has reason to want me dead.

In short, I have been frightening myself with ghosts which I myself have conjured up. In the morning I will laugh at myself. Indeed, I am laughing at myself now.

I will read for a couple of hours and then go to bed. Tomorrow, refreshed, I will buckle down to writing that love story.

## CHAPTER TWO

### "Wednesday's Corpse May Not Get Well"

THERE is no longer any doubt.

I awoke gagging, coughing. Although it was still night, the living room was brilliantly illuminated by madly dancing flames.

I was still in the armchair in front of the fireplace. I had fallen asleep while reading. For a dazed moment I had a notion that the flames were licking out at me through the fire screen. But the fire in the fireplace was dead; ironically that was almost the only part of the room where there were no flames.

The walls were burning.

I flung myself out of the chair. Smoke whirled about me like a fog, and through the fog, flames reached for me. Most of them came from the burning partition which separated the two bedrooms from the living room.

I swung toward the front door, but that way was blocked. The door itself burned. Smoke seared my lungs. I reeled. *Keep your head,* I told myself. *There must be a way out. . . .*

There was. The kitchen was in a wing by itself on the side of the house opposite the bedrooms. No flames were in there; the only hazard was smoke pouring in from the living room. It was five steps across to the back door. I turned the lock and stumbled out to the wonderfully clean air.

I fell and lay on the ground. The fire crackled merrily in the quiet night. I felt heat on my back. I started to rise when a man shouted: "Hey, pa, here's somebody!"

Hands grabbed me, lifted me to my feet. Almost in anger, I shook the hands off.

"I'm all right," I said.

"Anybody else in there?" The light of the fire revealed the speaker as Ed Manders who lived a thousand feet down the road. The husky young man with him was his son.

"I was alone," I said.

"Thanks for that," Manders said. "There'd be no chance getting anybody out."

We started to the front of the cottage, widely skirting what had become a huge bonfire. The outer walls of the bedroom were already more than half gone. I could see through them, and in the room beyond were fires within fires—a dresser, a chair, a bed burning.

If I hadn't fallen asleep in the living room, I would have been in that bed.

I looked at my wrist watch. It was seven minutes after two.

A siren wailed. That was the fire engine from Treven. Half a dozen cars containing volunteer firemen were bunched behind it, and at brief intervals more volunteers arrived. There was little they could do except to keep the fire from spreading in the brush.

Sergeant Powell, the town policeman, came over to me. "Any idea how it started, Mr. Duncan?"

"It was incendiary," I said.

He blinked rather foolishly. "You mean somebody started the fire on purpose?"

"Yes," I said. "To murder me."

People standing nearby heard me. There was abrupt movement toward us; faces closed about me, gawking, waiting for me to continue.

Sergeant Powell scowled at the faces, took my arm, led me down the driveway. When we were off by ourselves, he said, "Okay, Mr. Duncan, let's have it."

I told him about the three shots fired at me and about my car not starting. "And now this," I said, waving a hand toward the fire.

We stood beyond the light spread by the blaze, but the full moon, white now and high in the sky, revealed every detail of Sergeant Powell's face. It was heavy jowled, stolid, a typical policeman's face, and it was plainly skeptical.

"You had a fire in the fireplace," he said. "Maybe a spark—"

"That fire had gone out hours before," I told him. "Besides, it started in the bedrooms. What happened is obvious. He disabled my car to prevent me from leaving. He waited until I was sure to be asleep. Then he drenched the outer bedroom walls with gasoline and set a match to them. That's why the fire blazed up so rapidly."

"He'd take the trouble to look in the window. He'd see you sitting in the chair."

I said, "I remember that after reading for a while I turned the floor lamp off and sat looking into the fire. I fell asleep like that. Eventually the fire in the fireplace burned out and the entire interior of the house was in darkness. He couldn't come in to make sure that I was asleep in bed because I'd locked the doors and windows." My voice thinned. "If I had gone to bed, I wouldn't have had a chance."

Sergeant Powell scratched his jowls. "The way I'd murder a man would be to knock at his door and shoot him down when he opened it."

"And start a manhunt for the murderer?" I said irritably. "He was out to play safe. The hunting season has just opened, and every fall people are accidentally shot by hunters. I would have been just another one of them. When that failed this afternoon, he determined to make me the apparent victim of a very prevalent type of accident—that of being trapped in a burning house."

The sergeant glanced around. "Which is your car, Mr. Duncan? I'll have Steve Whittle look at it."

I pointed out my car to him and gave him the keys and then stood watching my

house burning down to the ground. Suddenly I realized that I was so tired that I could hardly stand. I sat down on the bare ground.

Ed Manders came over. "You need a place to rest. Come to my house."

THE MANDERS were all very good to me. Mrs. Manders fed me hot coffee and then led me upstairs to a bed and gave me a pair of her son's pajamas.

I awoke at noon. When I went downstairs, only Mrs. Manders was in the house. She was a sweet-faced woman, who, it turned out, was an admirer of mine. Of my stories, that is. She told me how much she liked them while she served me lunch. I thought she was wonderful.

Sergeant Powell had been there twice during the morning to see me. Shortly after I finished lunch, he arrived again. We talked on the front porch.

"Steve Whittle will send your car here." The sergeant's big hands were wound around a rolled up magazine. "It's okay now."

"What was wrong with it?" I asked quietly.

"Nothing much. The gas line came loose."

"You mean was pulled off."

He shrugged. "Could've been. Or could've worked loose over bumpy roads. It happens all the time."

"No," I said. "A killer did it."

"Speaking of killers—" He unrolled the magazine and spread it out flat on his knees. "My wife subscribes to this. I saw it on the table this morning and your name jumped up at me."

It was the current issue of *National Weekly*. I had a story in it; my name was on the cover. *Portrait of A Killer,* by Chester Duncan.

"I see you're a detective story writer, Mr. Duncan." There was something insinuating in the way the sergeant spoke.

"Primarily I write love stories," I told him. "If you've read that particular story, Sergeant, you know that it's not a detective story. It's a psychological study of a murderer."

"That so?" he muttered. He sounded as if he either didn't know what I was talking about or wasn't interested. "You writers never object to publicity, do you? Helps your business."

I stared at him. "Is it your notion that my story about somebody trying to murder me is a publicity stunt?"

"Well, it won't hurt you any. The papers will play it up big."

"I suppose," I said dryly, "I burned down my house as a publicity stunt?"

"Well, no," he conceded. "But fires start by accident. Then you saw your chance to use it for publicity. After all, Mr. Duncan, a hunter with a rifle wouldn't miss you three times at two hundred feet." He sat back grinning. "You actors and writers."

He felt pretty proud of himself. He wasn't going to let an outsider come up here and take him in.

The hell with him. I stood up. "It doesn't matter. I'd hardly expect an investigation to turn up anything anyway."

"I'll investigate all right, if it comes to that."

"Thanks," I said and went into the house.

Within a few minutes my car arrived from the service station. I expressed my gratitude to Mrs. Manders and resolved to buy her a handsome gift. I drove past my cottage. All that was left of it was the cinderbrick foundation. My stomach turned over. I continued on the way to New York.

Alice was not at home when I let myself into my apartment.

A hot bath had a therapeutic effect on me. It calmed me, relaxed me, and suddenly murder became as unreal as a story based on an insignificant experience and

elaborated to form a well-rounded plot. Perhaps, I thought as I shaved, that was what I had done with three disconnected events—a practical joker shooting at me, a fuel line worked loose in my car, a fire started by a spark from the chimney.

Yet even so they didn't tie together in a plot, for the heart of the story was missing—the motive. And without motive there could be no attempt to murder me.

I put on fresh clothing and sat down to wait for Alice.

It is now, as I write this, a few minutes before midnight. Alice has not yet come home.

Of course it's nothing. She did not expect me back for a day or two yet, and so she went out by herself, to a party, to a show, on a visit.

Perhaps whoever tried to kill me wants her dead also.

Cut it out! Stop frightening yourself even more than you are already frightened!

## CHAPTER THREE

**"Thursday Still Has One to Go. . . ."**

ALICE returned home at two o'clock in the morning. That was twenty-four hours to the minute after I had awakened to find myself in my blazing cottage.

Why did I write that last sentence? What symbol is it meant to contain?

Am I kidding myself? Haven't I discovered the ultimate horror?

I was in bed, but not asleep, when I heard more than one person enter the apartment. I heard gay voices, soft laughter. In robe and slippers I went out to the living room.

Max Thayer was with Alice. She wore that blue evening gown which displayed the splendid lines of her figure to perfection. Max had just helped her off with her fur jacket and his hand was on her bare shoulder. Perhaps by accident, but why should it have lingered there?

Max saw me first. "Hello, Chet," he said.

Alice swung around. "Why, darling! I had no idea you were home. Did you finish your story so quickly?"

She did not come over to kiss me. While affectionate enough, she is not demonstrative in public. Still, the presence of our best friend should not have interfered with a welcome home kiss.

"The cottage burned down," I said.

"What?" Alice said, her brown eyes becoming very large and round.

I had made up my mind to tell her nothing that would worry or frighten her. "A spark from the fireplace must have started it. I managed to get out in time. There's nothing left of the place."

Alice flew into my arms then. She held me tight. "Oh, darling, you might have been killed!"

"Well, you can see he wasn't," Max said cheerfully.

Over her head I looked at him and, as so often before, I was aware of the contrast between us. He is tall, athletic, handsome; I am average in height and appearance. He has charm, wit; I am afraid that I am somewhat on the dull side. I have never been quite able to understand why Alice chose me instead of him, for we had both met her at the same time and had both promptly fallen in love with her. For all I knew, he still loved her. At any rate, he had never married.

"I suppose the place was insured," Max was saying.

"Yes," I muttered, my mind on something else—on the fact that at two o'clock in the morning Alice had brought up to the apartment a man who probably loved her, when she believed that I would not be home. And that she had preferred to stay at home alone for a number of days instead of accompanying me to Tsevan.

My arms fell away from her.

Alice frowned up at me. She must have seen something in my face, for an explanation came quickly. "Max took me to a show tonight and then to a night club. He felt sorry for a woman left all alone by her husband."

"It was a pleasure," Max said gallantly. He glanced at his watch. "Alice asked me in for a nightcap, but it's getting late, and I'm sure you kids want to be alone."

Alice accompanied him to the door. I heard the mutter of their voices in the foyer, and suddenly a terrible thought struck me.

It would not be the first time a woman and her lover planned to murder a husband.

Nonsense! Again I was letting my talent for evolving plots out of ordinary details spill over into reality. If Alice no longer loved me and wanted a divorce, she knew that she had only to ask for it and I would grant it.

So there was nothing to it. Nothing at all.

But as we were preparing for bed, an involuntary question tumbled from my lips.

"Alice, what did you do yesterday afternoon?"

Alice turned from the closet where she was hanging up her gown. "I went shopping."

"Alone?"

"Quite alone. I didn't buy a thing."

"And in the evening?"

"I stayed home, listening to the radio and reading." She frowned at me. "Chet, you sound as if you're checking up on me. You're not jealous of Max?"

I made myself laugh lightly. "What an absurd notion!"

She moved to her dresser. She looked very lovely. I sat on the edge of the bed looking at her and hating myself for what was in my thoughts.

All night I knew wild dreams. But not wilder than being shot at or almost trapped in a burning, crackling house.

WHEN I arose in the morning, I was determined to concentrate wholly on the job at hand, which was to turn out a love story by tomorrow. I sat at my typewriter. The vague outline of a plot came to me. A girl suspects that the man she is to marry in a week intends to murder her because. . . .

Damn it! Couldn't I get anything on my mind but murder?

Mrs. Johnson, who comes in during the day to clean and cook, brought the morning mail into my study. Nothing important—circulars and bills. But one of those bills brought a return of terror in a sickening rush.

It was only a reminder that my annual life insurance premium would be due next week, but my hand holding it trembled.

I carry twenty thousand dollars in life insurance. Double indemnity if I died as the result of an accident.

Absurd! The sole beneficiary is my wife.

Well, couldn't that be the missing motive? Look at it coldly, objectively. Say she loves Max Thayer. He is only a moderately successful lawyer. Divorcing me brings no money, but if I die, especially in what appears to be an accident, she is free to marry him and gets forty thousand dollars in insurance, plus some fifteen to twenty thousand dollars I possess in various assets.

Sixty thousand dollars and the man she loves. Wives have murdered their husbands for less.

*You've nothing,* I told myself savagely. *Damn it, nothing at all!*

I left the study. Alice, dressed in a silk housecoat, was speaking on the phone to one of her woman friends. I stood looking down at her.

It was not a face of murder. But it was a face that controlled emotions, that held them locked inside her. I wondered if,

after seven years of marriage, I really knew her.

"Do you want something, Chet?" she asked.

"Yes."

She said good-by into the phone and hung up. "Aren't you feeling well, darling? You look pale."

"Alice, who beside you knew that I was going up to the cottage?"

"Who knew?" she echoed as if she didn't understand the question.

"You told Max?"

"He phoned yesterday only a few minutes after you left and wanted to speak to you, so naturally I told him where you had gone."

So two people knew—Alice and Max. Either of them or both together could have followed me there.

"I don't understand," she was saying. "Why is it important that you know?"

"I expected a message."

That was lame; it didn't answer her question. She kept frowning at me, more than a little bewildered.

"Now try to remember, Alice," I said. "Did you tell anybody else where I'd gone?"

"I don't—" She paused. "Oh, yes, there was a phone call for you from *National Weekly* a few minutes after Max called. An editor named Dale Krutch."

"Krutch?" I said. "I don't know anybody by that name."

"He spelled it out for me over the wire. K-r-u-t-c-h. He said it was important that *National Weekly* get in touch with you. Something about that story of yours in the current issue."

"And you told him that I went up to the cottage?"

"Of course. I said they couldn't phone you there because the phone had been disconnected for the winter, but if it was so important they could send a messenger."

"In short," I said, "you gave him directions on how to get there."

Her brown eyes studied me curiously. "Shouldn't I have told him?"

I didn't reply. I picked up the phone and dialed. The switchboard operator at *National Weekly* told me that there was nobody by the name of Dale Krutch connected with the magazine. I asked to speak to the fiction editor. He had never heard of anybody by that name either; there was, he said, no reason why anybody at the magazine should have been anxious to get in touch with me yesterday.

Alice had lit a cigarette and was watching me through a cloud of smoke as I hung up.

"That's odd," she said. "I'm positive he told me that he was an editor of *National Weekly*."

It added up. Yesterday he had watched this building, shadowing me, waiting for an opportunity to kill me. He saw me come out with a bag, which indicated that I was going on a trip. He trailed me to the garage, saw me drive away in my car. At the moment my name was on two million covers of the current *National Weekly;* a phone call from one of the editors would sound legitimate. Using a phony name, he learned from my wife where I was going. He secured a rifle, drove up to Trevan, and made two attempts on my life.

"But why would this Dale Krutch lie?" Alice was asking.

She sat curled up girlishly on the chair, looking unutterably sweet, a portrait of innocence. A great load lifted from my chest. She couldn't possibly be the killer if the killer were a man who'd had to make a phone call to find out where I'd headed yesterday.

The fact that somebody wanted to kill me had become less important than the fact that now I had proof that she was not the one.

"Maybe Krutch is from another magazine," I said, trying to sound indifferent.

"If he wants me badly enough, he'll call again."

I returned to my study. As I closed the door, another answer to that phone call struck me.

How could I be certain that anybody at all had phoned yesterday? I had only Alice's word. Perhaps this Dale Krutch had no identity outside of her imagination?

*She is aware that I suspect her. She made up the story of the phone call to put me off the track.*

*No!*

Why not? Who but she or Max Thayer or more likely both working together have motive?

*No!*

This is the way to madness. I know nothing, I am certain of nothing, but my mind is a riot of dark doubts and fears which will not be dismissed.

The ultimate horror is not the fear of death or even the actual dying, but the unrelenting suspicion that the woman you love wants to murder you.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### "Friday's Frame Is Full of Woe. . . ."

IT IS not easy to murder a man in a large city, particularly if the killer desires to make the death appear accidental. Perhaps for two solid days he had been waiting for me to pass beneath him. More likely, he had had everything set in advance and had rushed up there when he had observed me leave the building.

He—or she—is not exactly clever. Only desperate.

Halfway up the street on which I live, several charming brownstone houses were being torn down to make way for an apartment building. The sidewalk had been ripped up and covered with wooden planks which made a walk so narrow that two people could scarcely pass each other. That, along with the noise and dirt of the construction work, was an annoyance imposed upon us innocent residents of the street.

After lunch I went out for cigarettes and an afternoon paper. I had covered about two-thirds of that plank walk when there was a great thump behind me. The planks shook violently.

A woman screamed.

I spun and saw the woman standing across the street, her mouth still open, though no further sound came from it. And I saw a man run toward me.

I completed the turn, and there at my feet was a large cement building block. I could not have passed it without having had to step over it, so it could not have been there a moment before. A coldness that was a little like death possessed me.

My eyes lifted to the skeleton form of the building. A scaffold jutted out some ten or fifteen feet overhead. A cement block pushed off that scaffold would land just about where this one had.

People were around me, four or five, including the man I had seen running and the woman who had screamed. It was a quiet residential street—nobody else was nearby.

"Brother, that block missed your head by inches!" the man I had seen running said. "I thought you were a sure goner."

For the first time I was aware of the silence in that unfinished building.

"Isn't anybody working there?" I asked.

"Not since last week," another man replied. "I heard the company went broke." He shook his head. "What's the matter with those dopes, leaving a block like that on the scaffold? I bet you can sue them, mister."

I tried not to tremble. I tried to keep my voice steady. "Did any of you see a person on the scaffold? I mean, as the block was falling, or just before or after?"

There was a brief silence. People looked at the block, at me, up at the scaffold.

The man I had seen running spoke. "All I saw was the block falling. You got an idea somebody knocked it off the scaffold by accident? That's pretty heavy to knock off by accident. Anyway, nobody's in the building."

"I suppose," I said, "it was left too near the edge and toppled over."

There was nothing to be done. By this time the killer had slipped out through the rear of the building. It was certain that he had planned his escape beforehand. I moved off the plank walk.

"I'd sue if I was you," a man's voice came after me.

"It's not worth the trouble," I muttered.

At the corner I had to pause to lean against a wall. My knees had little strength.

Last night or the night before the killer had pushed that block out on the scaffold. Then he had waited for me to leave my building, knowing that I almost always walked in that direction for cigarettes or to the subway or to my garage. He had stretched out flat on the scaffold, invisible from the street below, and at the precise moment I passed beneath he pushed the block.

Yet it was a method of desperation. The chances were that the block would miss me entirely, as it had, or only maim me. He. . . .

Why not she?

I returned to the apartment, crossing the street when I neared the building under construction, though there was no possibility that he would again be on the scaffold with another block. As I opened the door, the phone was ringing.

On the wire was Grace Tildsley, fiction editor of *Modern Woman*. Where was the story I had promised her for today? I could not tell her that I was unable to plot love when somebody was plotting my death. I asked for more time, and she gave me until Tuesday.

When I hung up, I stood listening to the stillness of the apartment. Alice had left an hour ago for a luncheon date downtown and Mrs. Johnson had the afternoon off. It struck me how much time my wife spent away from home—a fact to which I had given little or no thought before.

On impulse, I left the apartment. I took a taxi to the midtown hotel in which Max Thayer lived.

MAX was at home. He held a magazine in his hand as he opened the door. I stood looking straight at him.

"Anything wrong with me, Chet?" he asked. "Why stare at me like that?"

Past him, I could see most of that room. Alice wasn't in it. She couldn't have known that I was coming; she wouldn't have hidden just because somebody knocked on the door.

"You're not at your office today," I said.

"I felt a cold coming on, so I'm taking it easy." He waved the magazine. "I've just read your story, *Portrait of a Killer*. Fascinating."

I stepped into the room. The bedroom and bathroom doors were both open, and so was the closet door. Alice wouldn't be hiding under the bed. She wasn't the type.

I settled myself in the armchair, lit a cigarette. I wasn't sure of what I wanted to say.

"That story was really your idea," I reminded him.

"Was it?" Max chuckled. "Oh, I remember now. It's rather amusing that you, a writer, witnessed a murder on the street, yet it required me, a lawyer, to point out to you that there was a story in it."

"I seldom write crime stories. I didn't become interested in that one until a few

days later when you had dinner with Alice and me and we discussed the case and you gave me a lawyer's viewpoint."

"Well, it took a talented writer to produce a story like this from so little," Max said. "After all, you only saw a man struck down. You went on from there to give a complete portrait of a killer, though you say you never even saw his face."

"He was only a shape in the darkness," I said. "The rest of him is imagination." Oddly, I had the feeling of groping for some exclusive fact—something hidden in our words.

"You were certainly convincing." Max tapped the magazine with a forefinger. "You draw a portrait of a meek, mild, almost mousy man, an accountant, who had only one important possession, his wife. When he discovered that another man was stealing her from him, his basic emotion was panic. All his life he had been a coward, and you showed how it was his cowardice that caused him to murder his wife's lover."

"All murderers are cowards," I said. "That's why they're murderers."

"You make that clear enough in your yarn." He tossed the magazine aside. "How about a drink?"

"Too early." I hadn't come here to discuss fiction. I leaned forward, holding my cigarette between my knees. "A coward is trying to murder me."

"What's that?" He gawked at me. "You're kidding, Chet."

"No."

I told him about it. All of it but the suspicions which tormented me. And as I spoke, I watched him intently. He listened without comment, with only interest in his handsome face.

When I finished, he said, "I'd call him worse than a coward. A particularly inept killer."

"Yes," I agreed. "Somebody who's not much good with a rifle, but who tried that, and then got so nervous that he shot before I got close enough to make him sure not to miss. Burning down my cottage with me in it had more chance of success, but he was unlucky there. Pushing down that building block on me was uncertain and dangerous, but it's not easy in a big city to murder a man and make it appear an accident."

"Another measure of his cowardice," Max said. "Afraid to let murder look like murder." He frowned. "There has to be a reason. Anybody you suspect?"

"Nobody especially," I lied.

He fetched a bottle of Scotch and poured two short ones. Though a few minutes before I had refused a drink, I accepted one now, wondering if Max needed it even more than I did. His face was merely grave. He studied me for long moments.

"I get it, Chet," he said. "You came here to my hotel, though you had no reason to expect me not to be in my office. I wouldn't want to leave myself open to having my secretary say that I wasn't in at the time the block fell on you. But nobody could prove that I hadn't been in my room all along, so I scooted back here after I shoved the block off the scaffold. Is that the way your mind is working, Chet?"

I didn't say anything.

"Because of Alice, I suppose," Max went on. "Because I'm supposed to be still in love with her." His eyes widened. "Holy cats, you suspect Alice too!"

"No," I mumbled.

He disregarded the feeble denial. "Alice or me—or both of us in it together. But why, Chet? Alice could go to Reno and divorce you, if it came to that. Your money? Insurance, with a double indemnity clause probably. Hell, Chet, that's too trivial a price for murder."

I said, "You could convince me that anything is too trivial a price for murder, but somebody is trying to kill me."

"Or maybe me alone," he said reflectively, "because I have an idea Alice will turn to me with you dead. Chet, you know me better than that," he finished, frowning.

"Does anybody know what goes on inside anybody else?"

Max downed his drink and refilled his glass, though he wasn't a heavy drinker. "I'd offer to help, but in your state of mind you'd be afraid of my help."

"All right, I'm afraid," I burst out. "I'm afraid of ghosts, of shadows, of everything and everybody. I don't want to die."

I stood up to go.

Max followed me to the door. He put a hand lightly on my shoulder. "Chet, why don't you go to the police? You can't go around like this."

"And then what? I went to one cop, up in Trevan. He thought it was a publicity gag. And if the New York police do believe me, what can they do? Assign a man to live with me, sit with me while I work, sleep in my bedroom? No, thanks. And when he leaves after a week or a month, what then? The killer will be ready to strike again."

"I know, it's a hell of a note," he said sympathetically.

I pulled away from his hand on my shoulder. "I don't want your pity," I flung at him and stepped out quickly into the hall.

I was panting with the fury of my outburst. It had got me nowhere; nothing had been changed by his visit. Things were exactly the same.

When I reached the elevators, I glanced back. Max was standing in the hall, looking after me. It seemed to me that there was a thin smile on his lips, but it may have been only the effect of a shadow.

I couldn't be sure. I could be sure of nothing except that death was waiting for me.

## CHAPTER SIX

**"The Body Found on A Week-End Beat. . . ."**

I DON'T want to die.

I have not left the apartment today. I have spent most of my waking hours here in the study, not working, not even reading, not doing much of anything except being afraid.

I can hear gay voices in the living room. Alice is entertaining two of her women friends. That I have shut myself up in the study, even when there is company, is not unusual for one who works at home. And if Alice is aware of my strangely aloof attitude toward her in recent days, she no doubt puts it down to preoccupation with a story I'm writing.

I don't want to die.

Once I saw a man murdered. The memory of that scene is part of my terror. I had observed murder strike swiftly and silently, and I had seen how a murdered face looks staring up at me from the sidewalk.

On that night several months ago I had been walking home from the subway. It was two o'clock in the morning and I had the quiet residential street to myself. Or almost to myself, for a hundred feet ahead, but on the opposite side of the street, a man walked in the same direction.

I paused to light a cigarette. A breeze was blowing; it whipped out my match. I stepped into a doorway to shelter a second match. When I turned back to the street, I noticed that there were now two men on the opposite sidewalk.

They were both in deep shadow, between two street lamps. Although they were only a very few feet apart, the first man, the one I had seen before, seemed unaware of the other at his back. Momentarily the two shapes merged into a single monstrous bulk.

It happened within the blinking of an eye. There was no outcry, no sound of

any kind. There was only a parting of the two shapes, and then the first shape fell. It pitched to the sidewalk and lay still. The second shape bent over.

I shouted. My voice tore from my throat without conscious will.

The crouching shape turned what must have been its head, and I felt it stare back and across the street at me. Then it jerked erect, seemed to leap into deeper darkness, and was gone. I knew that it had ducked into the doorway of a house.

I ran diagonally across the street. When I reached the shape on the sidewalk, it took definite form. The street lamps spread light far enough to reveal the man's body, the face. He lay crumpled on the side, but his face was turned to the sky. I can recall no detail of those static features, only the eyes staring widely up at me, and the mouth partly open. I would have known that he was dead even if I had not seen that his skull was caved in.

Hundreds of people slept in the houses, but I was alone with death. The killer had expected no witness; a moment before he struck he had not noticed me on the street because I had stepped into a doorway to light my cigarette. Fear touched me then, and my eyes darted apprehensively. But none of the shadows surrounding me stirred.

A cruising taxi rolled up the street. I shouted and the driver stopped. Two minutes later he returned with a policeman.

The dead man's name was George Egan. He was thirty-two years old, unmarried, a credit manager for an installment house. He lived in a furnished room a block from my home. And somebody had smashed his skull in with a blunt instrument.

"No motive we can find so far," a detective named Carrigan told me next day. "Egan seemed like a quiet, respectable lad. No gambling, no debts, no bad company. We're rounding up everybody we can find who had much to do with him. Think it's any use for you to take a look at 'em, Mr. Duncan?"

"You mean on the chance that I can identify one of them as the murderer?" I said. "I told you that all I saw was a shape, a solidification of darkness that only vaguely resembled a human form."

"Could you say if it was a man or a woman?"

I thought that over. "I think it was a man, though that's more of a feeling than anything else. It could have been a woman wearing slacks."

"Well, that's what we're up against." Carrigan shook my hand. "Thanks for your cooperation, Mr. Duncan. I don't think we'll have to trouble you any more."

That was all there was to it. Another unsolved murder, forgotten by the newspapers after the first day and probably by the police after a week or two.

My own murder would be like that. My body found in a street, in an alley, my sightless, staring eyes turned to the sky, my mouth partly open. The police would come and mill around and get nowhere. Probably there would not even be a real investigation, because my death would be so arranged that it would appear to have been merely an accident. Perhaps I would rate a photo on the obituary page of the *New York Times*. Then, like George Egan, I would be forgotten.

Something did come out of Egan's death—a story I wrote and called *Portrait of a Killer*. It's a pity that I will not be able to write the story of my own murder and call it *Portrait of the Killed*.

A poor joke. But those who are about to die lose their sense of humor.

I believe that I could accept with equanimity death in a sick bed. But I do not want to die like George Egan.

On Sunday Alice said, "Darling, you've been working too hard. Let's get out of the apartment, at least for a few hours."

And the thought crossed my mind:

*Killing me at home can't easily be made to look accidental. That is why she wants to get me out of here.*

"There's a picture I want to see at the Paradise," Alice said. "You've hardly stuck your nose out of the study for days."

Two days. Pretending to work, but actually hiding.

I looked at my wife, at her familiar loveliness, and weariness possessed every bone in me. I could not go on like this. If she desired my death, was it important to live?

"All right, let's go," I said.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when we stepped into the street. The day was crisp and bright, and people had that washed and unhurried Sunday appearance. My wife and I strolled arm in arm to the theater, and while we watched the picture she held my hand. She was particularly affectionate.

*To lull my suspicion,* I thought, and no longer argued with myself.

After the show we had dinner in a restaurant. It was not quite nine o'clock when we neared home. The street, as always, was placid and poorly lighted. When we came opposite our building, we started to cross the street.

There must have been the roar of the car charging down on us in second gear, but I don't remember hearing it. What I heard was Alice's warning shriek, "Watch out!" and I turned my head and saw the hood of a car almost upon us.

Instinctively I leaped backward. An instant before Alice had started a backward leap of her own, and as her hand was through my arm, it may be that the added momentum her tug gave my body saved me. Certainly that car swept by me with not more than an inch to spare.

We stood there in the middle of the street, and Alice was trembling against my side and saying something in a shaken voice. I stared after the car. It was already turning the corner. The tail-light was out, making the license numbers indistinguishable. Then it was gone.

A taxi driver got out of his cab and came over. "Boy, was that close!" he said. "Talk about crazy drivers."

The reaction came. I started to tremble. "Did you see how it happened?"

"Well, I saw this guy start up his car just as you and the lady started to cross the street. Guess he didn't see you. He headed right for you."

"Do you know the kind of car it was?"

"Y'know, I didn't get a look at it," the driver said. "First time I noticed it was when it swung out from the curb and headed toward you and the lady, and then I was too excited to look what make car it was. Sedan. Four-door, I think, but maybe two. Dark color—blue or black or maybe maroon."

That was a help. "Did you see the driver?"

"Somebody wearing a man's hat. That's all I can tell you, mister." He scowled. "They shouldn't let reckless guys like that behind a wheel."

Alice tugged my arm. "Let's not stand here."

We crossed the street. We entered the building.

At any other time, I thought, it could have been merely a careless or drunken driver. But not now; not after three attempts to murder me since Tuesday. And he hadn't tried to apply the brakes; he hadn't swerved to avoid us, though there had been room. His latest murder weapon had been an automobile.

He had watched us leave the building this afternoon. He had been parked there waiting for us to return. Even if he hadn't been able to flee after he had run us over, it would still have been considered an accident. Again an inept way of murder, for a car can injure instead of kill. By now he was frantic enough to try anything, even if it had meant killing or maiming Alice as well as myself.

Suddenly I felt good. Though the fourth attempt had just been made to murder me, I felt better than at any time since Tuesday. Because now I knew beyond doubt that Alice had nothing to do with it.

If she had been in on the scheme, she would have induced me to cross the street ahead of her. Instead, she had warned me of the approaching car. She had saved my life.

We were in our apartment. I turned to her and took her into my arms with an ardor I had not felt for days. Her arms went around me, holding me as I held her.

It was as if I had lost my wife and found her again.

The phone rang. It was Elsa Marble, her closest friend, and Alice settled herself for the usual protracted conversation. I wandered off into my study.

Not Max Thayer either, I thought. Because if he wanted me dead on the chance that she would then marry him, he certainly wouldn't have tried to run me down when there was the possibility that he would also kill Alice.

Who was left? Who was so frantic, in such a hurry to have me dead, yet did not dare use the obvious and more certain weapons, such as a gun or a knife or a club?

I found myself looking down at a copy of *National Weekly* on the table. I had done a portrait of a killer, had shown in that story that a man killed because he was a coward. The fictional killer I had created had been afraid to lose his wife to another man and had taken the weak man's way to solve a problem.

THE MAN who sought to kill me was a coward, terribly frightened. But why on earth would anybody fear me?

Blood drained from my fingertips. A sudden excitement boiled in me. I left the studio and put on my hat and topcoat.

Alice looked up from the phone. "Where are you going, darling?"

"Just out for a few minutes."

I took a taxi to the police station only a few blocks away. I did not dare walk alone in the street at night.

Detective Carrigan was on duty, which spared me the necessity of getting his address and going to his home. He shook my hand heartily.

"Did anything ever turn up on the George Egan murder?" I inquired.

He spread his hands. "A blind alley. The lieutenant thinks it was a mugging. The killer didn't have a chance to pinch Egan's wallet because you yelled out and scared him away."

"You questioned suspects, didn't you?"

"Such as they were. People closest to him. Neighbors, friends, relatives. Got nowhere."

"I'm writing a story about this case," I said. "I'd appreciate it if you'd give me a list of suspects."

Carrigan frowned at me. "One of those true detective stories?"

"Something like that," I lied. "Because I was personally involved, an editor would like me to do it. Of course, I'll give you a big play as the investigating detective. We can use a photo of you."

Carrigan liked the idea. "Don't see why not. It's done all the time."

I wrote down names and addresses and what Carrigan could tell me about each individual. A man at his office with whom Egan had quarreled shortly before his death; his landlady who thought highly of him; a rich aunt and uncle in Westchester; an accountant and his wife with whom he had been friendly; a girl in his rooming house whose advances he had rejected; a lawyer who had once threatened him because Egan hadn't been able to pay a poker debt promptly. And half a dozen others.

The lawyer's name was a shock.

It was—Max Thayer.

My heart was thumping. I saw that at last I had something—or thought I did. I was at last a little nearer to that hidden link that had eluded me during my interview with Max Thayer. A killer, I thought, is a coward primarily because he's stupid.

Now I am back in my study, sitting at my typewriter. Alice is waiting for me to come to bed. I will join her, in another minute.

The notes I made in the police station are spread out on my desk. Over and over I tell myself that it can't be, but there it is.

Should I tell Carrigan? There will be the usual red tape. I doubt if I will be able to convince him. Certainly there is no evidence that will hold up in court.

It's up to me. I can do it. Tomorrow.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### ". . .Is One That Would Not Leave Its Feet"

I MADE sure to be at Max Thayer's hotel before he left for his office. He had his hat and coat on when he opened the door.

"How's your cold?" I asked.

"Cold? Oh, the one I thought I was getting. I managed to avoid it." His mouth twisted. "I see you're still alive, Chet."

"Through no fault of the killer," I said. "Max, you own a pistol. I'd like to borrow it."

He pushed his hat back from his brow and studied me solemnly. "To protect yourself, I suppose?"

"Yes."

Max said, "If you told the police your story, they'd give you a license to carry a gun and you could go out and buy one."

"That would take too long."

Max reflected for a long moment. Then, without another word, he went into the bedroom. A minute later he came out with a compact small-caliber automatic. He was pushing a clip into the magazine.

"Seven bullets in it," he said. "If you kill somebody with any of them, I'll be in a spot."

"I'll try not to point it at anybody," I told him dryly.

He handed me the gun and I dropped it into my topcoat pocket. Together we went out to the hall and down the elevator.

When we were in the street, he said, "Chet, do you know who it is?"

"I'm not sure. Thanks, Max."

I got into my parked car and headed east to the Queensboro Bridge and over it to Jackson Heights.

The address was one of a row of two-family frame houses. There were two bells in the vestibule. One said Thomas Strick, the other John Roberts.

I rang the Strick bell. There was no answer. I was hours early, of course; likely he was at work at ten-thirty on a Monday morning. But Mrs. Strick was not in either.

I rang the Roberts bell. A woman called from the head of the second floor stairs: "Who is it?"

I went up the stairs. Mrs. Roberts was comfortably plump in a pale pink wrapper she held tightly about her. I asked her if the Stricks were at home.

"Mrs. Strick is in Atlantic City with the boy," she told me.

"A grown boy?"

"He's only four. Mr. Strick won't be home from work till around six. You can leave a message for him with me."

I said, "When did Mrs. Strick and the boy leave for Atlantic City?"

"About a week ago." Mrs. Roberts thought about it. "Just a week ago today it was—last Monday. I remember Tom—that's Mr. Strick—came home at lunch time. He's an accountant, you know. He works in Manhattan for a big firm, and

he said he just got a big bonus and wanted his wife and child to leave for Atlantic City right away. May Strick wanted to wait at least another day to get ready, but Tom had already bought the tickets and made hotel reservations. May came up here and said she didn't know what to do, but I told her to go right away by all means. I never knew a man who was so good to his wife."

"He's very fond of her?"

"He adores the ground she walks on." Mrs. Roberts glanced back to her apartment door. "I have the washing machine going. If you want to leave a message—"

"It's about insurance," I said. "I'll be back this evening."

I drove my car a couple of blocks away, parked it and walked back. I tried not to hang around too near the house, tried not to be conspicuous. I might have to wait for many hours, but waiting was not the hardest thing I had to do. The gun was heavy in my pocket.

Actually, I waited less than an hour. From across the street I saw a rather battered blue two-door sedan pull up in front of the house and a man alight. He ascended the porch steps, took keys out of his pocket. He was unlocking the door to the downstairs apartment when I entered the vestibule. He turned.

"Thomas Strick?" I said.

He stared at me like a man seeing a ghost, but a ghost that he had expected. Insignificant is the word to describe him. It was not so much that he was small in stature as that his face portrayed his inner weakness. You knew at once that he was used to being pushed around.

His watery eyes seemed to be on the verge of tears. He ran his tongue over his lower lip, then turned abruptly and pushed the door open. "Come in, Duncan," he croaked.

I followed him into a small, rather shabbily furnished living room. He stood huddled in his coat, hand sunk deep in his pockets, and appeared to be waiting.

"I had an idea you wouldn't be at work today," I said. "Probably you haven't worked in a week. You had to be free to execute your various attempts to murder me."

STRICK made no denial. And that was an admission of his guilt, proof to me that I had been right in coming here.

"What do you want?" he cried. "If you're after blackmail, you can see I don't own much. I had to borrow money to send my wife and son to Atlantic City."

I nodded. "You couldn't have them around; you needed freedom of action. You sent them away last Monday, when you read my story in *National Weekly* and made up your mind that you had to murder me."

"Damn you!" Strick burst out. "You saw my face the night I—I—" His voice cracked.

"The night you murdered George Egan," I completed the sentence for him.

Again there was no denial. Because why deny it when, as he was convinced, I knew him as a killer? That was why I had come here alone; the sight of the police would only have made him insist on his innocence.

"Damn you!" he said. "You must have seen me next day when the police questioned my wife and me because we were Egan's friends. You knew I was the man you'd seen strike Egan, but you didn't open your mouth. You damn writers! You saw a way to make money out of it. You wrote a story in which you described me, told why I had to—to do away with Egan."

I felt a little pity for him, and a great deal of contempt.

"You were nothing but a shape to me the night you killed Egan," I told him. "Until last night I didn't know a man

named Thomas Strick actually existed."

He stood sunk within himself, as if trying to hold himself together. "Why bother to lie, Duncan? Last Monday I read that story of yours called *Portrait of a Killer*. That was a portrait of me. You described how I—I hit Egan over the head."

"I could see that much from across the street, but that was all I saw."

"You called the man in the story Stewart. The same initial as Strick. That was supposed to be subtle."

"A great many names begin with the letter S."

"You wrote that Stewart was an accountant, like myself, and that he lived in Queens."

"That was coincidence," I said, but I was frowning as I said it. Nothing, no part of any of this had been a coincidence. I knew.

He shrugged wearily. "Writers do that, change names, locale. And the rest was there too. You knew how Egan was a friend of mine, how he used to come to the house now and then for dinner, and practically under my eyes he started to steal my wife away from me. It's all in your damn story, how I felt when I realized I was losing her, how I was driven to kill Egan. God knows how you did it, but you looked into my soul."

"I looked into the soul of an imaginary killer," I told him. "It may be that all men who strike other men down from behind at night are similar. I knew that he had to be a coward—perhaps I would have felt the same way in similar circumstances. Men don't vary much in what goes on inside them."

He laughed somewhat crazily. "Here we are arguing as if over nothing. You can't fool me. When I read your story, I knew right off what your scheme was. You'd write a second story to follow that one. You'd name names. My name. You'd solve Egan's death in print. You'd get loads of publicity. That's why you said nothing to the police. You could afford to wait until you were ready to strike with a second story in print and make a fortune of money on it."

I was not sure whether those were actual tears in his eyes or whether they were always so watery. A man who had murdered in terror of losing his wife would continue to live in terror of being found out and losing his life. A frightened man is not rational; it took little to add fuel to the flames of the hell in which he lived.

"THERE is no second story," I said. "All I knew was that somebody was trying to kill me. I knew nothing about you until I learned your name and a few details last night from Detective Carrigan. You seemed to fit closest to the killer I had created for my story, and it struck me that perhaps that was the motive. But I was certain of nothing until I came here."

I was still not telling him the whole truth. He could still make denials to the police. I had to trap him. Something happened to his eyes. They became bright, intense. His shoulders straightened.

"I thought there was no time to lose," he said. "All along my wife half-suspected I killed Egan, but she wasn't sure. I think she's become afraid of me. Then I read your story, and I knew that you knew and for your own reason were playing with me as a cat plays with a mouse. I had to get rid of you before you named names."

I waited.

"I couldn't just kill you," he said angrily. "Maybe you'd already written something naming names, and I'd be at once suspected by the police. But if it looked like you died in an accident, nothing you had written could be used against me. You wouldn't be alive to testify I'd killed Egan." He moistened his lips. "I

tried so hard to make it look like an accident. I took so many chances. But you were so damn lucky."

"Lucky," I agreed, "and you were inept. You should confine your killing to hitting men over the head on dark streets."

Strick did not appear to be listening to me. The corners of his bloodless mouth lifted.

"So you're the only one who knows?" he whispered.

The strained expression in his face made me hesitate over a reply. He looked so insignificant that I had not feared him now that I was facing him openly. My contempt for him had caused me to ignore the gun in my pocket. Now suddenly I moved my hand toward my gun, but I had delayed too long.

His right hand came out of his topcoat pocket. Like myself, he carried a gun there. But his was out and pointing at me, while my hand was still in my pocket.

*I talk too much,* I told myself bitterly.

"Turn around!" Strick croaked.

Probably he was as incompetent with a pistol as with a rifle, but I couldn't take the chance. I said desperately, "You don't dare shoot. This will be a murder you won't be able to get away with. You'll burn in the electric chair."

The gun shook in his hand. "We'll go down to the cellar," he croaked.

The room became airless. Strick could get away with it. He would kill me in the cellar and bury me under the floor, and nobody would ever know what had become of me. Nobody—except one other person, who would not talk. My finger was curled around the trigger of the gun in my pocket. I wondered if I could shoot him through the cloth.

"Damn you, turn around and walk ahead!" There was a tearful quality in his voice, as if in bitter complaint that I was not being fair in my refusal to obey him. An insignificant man who had killed once because he could not fight in any other way and who would kill again if he had the upper hand.

Well, it would make no difference to me whether I died here or in the cellar. And here I still had a chance. I pulled the little automatic out of my pocket.

Though he'd known that I had that gun, my sudden act took him by surprise. His reflexes weren't quick, and so we both pulled triggers at the same time. I'd been right about him being no better with a handgun than with a rifle. You've got to be an expert to hit a man even at close range. The kick of his gun sent his bullet toward the ceiling.

As for my gun, nothing happened when I squeezed it.

But Strick didn't know that. He went completely to pieces because he was a coward. He saw my gun pointing at him and his gun out of position, and he threw an arm in front of his face, as if to protect himself from the anticipated bullet.

"Don't shoot!" he wailed. "For—"

"Drop your gun," I ordered.

It fell from his lax fingers. "Please don't shoot!" he begged. A man who had murdered, but who was utterly pitiful.

Upstairs, Mrs. Roberts, who had heard the shot, of course, was yelling. I shouted to her and in a few seconds she came panting and agitated through the door. After a while I convinced her to phone the police while I kept Thomas Strick covered with a gun that couldn't have harmed a fly.

MAX THAYER sat behind his desk when I entered his office. He frowned at the sight of me and said casually, "Anything come up since this morning?" and waved me to a leather chair.

I remained on my feet. I smiled a little.

"You're pretty good at story plots," I told him. *"Portrait of a Killer.* But I wrote only half the portrait. I omitted you entirely."

His brow continued to be creased in a frown, but his eyes looked uneasy. "What the devil are you talking about, Chet?"

"Your murder plot," I said. "So perfect that I came nowhere near guessing it—not until I spoke to the police and found your name connected with Egan. Then I found another name—Thomas Strick's. There was too much coincidence, Max. I described too accurately a man I'd never seen. I made him an accountant and had him live in Queens, just like Strick. But, of course, I wasn't really sure until I found out that your gun didn't shoot."

"Chet, you sound crazy."

"I'm in the best of health," I said, "mentally and physically. That's not your fault. You love my wife. You saw an opportunity to get rid of me. With me dead, Alice would probably have married you."

He said slowly, "I'm afraid this is over my head."

"It isn't, but I'll explain anyway. The idea came to you when you heard I'd witnessed Egan's being murdered in the street. Egan was a gambling acquaintance—you knew of his attachment to Strick's wife. You put two and two together and came up with Strick as the killer. Perhaps Egan had told you of being threatened. You had dinner with Alice and me and discussed the case and suggested that I write a story about it. I recall now that you practically gave me all the details. It was you who suggested that I make the killer a certain kind of person—a mousy, insignificant man who lived quietly with his wife in Queens. Your outline was so convincing that I followed it closely in writing the story. You sat back and waited for the story to appear in print. If your guess was right and Thomas Strick was the killer, he'd probably be frantic enough to kill again. I'm sure you sent him a copy of the magazine just to make sure he saw it."

His mouth twisted in derision. "It sounds far-fetched."

"Not so very," I said. "Tricking a suspect into a confession is a lawyer's trick. If you could force Egan into an overt crime; it wouldn't hurt your professional standing. If, in the process, you eliminated Alice's husband, you had nothing to lose. If your scheme had worked, bringing my killer to justice would have strengthened your case with Alice. And no one could have touched you."

There was nothing in his face now. He kept it deliberately blank.

"I know that Alice had no part in it," I went on. "If I ever doubted her, I found out how much she loves me when I was almost run down last night in a car driven by Strick."

"And you accuse me on such flimsy evidence?"

"You gave me concrete evidence this morning, Max. I saw you load your gun in your room, but I didn't look closely enough to notice you shove an empty clip into the magazine. I came to you for a gun to protect myself against a murderer. You gave me an empty gun because you wanted me to be murdered."

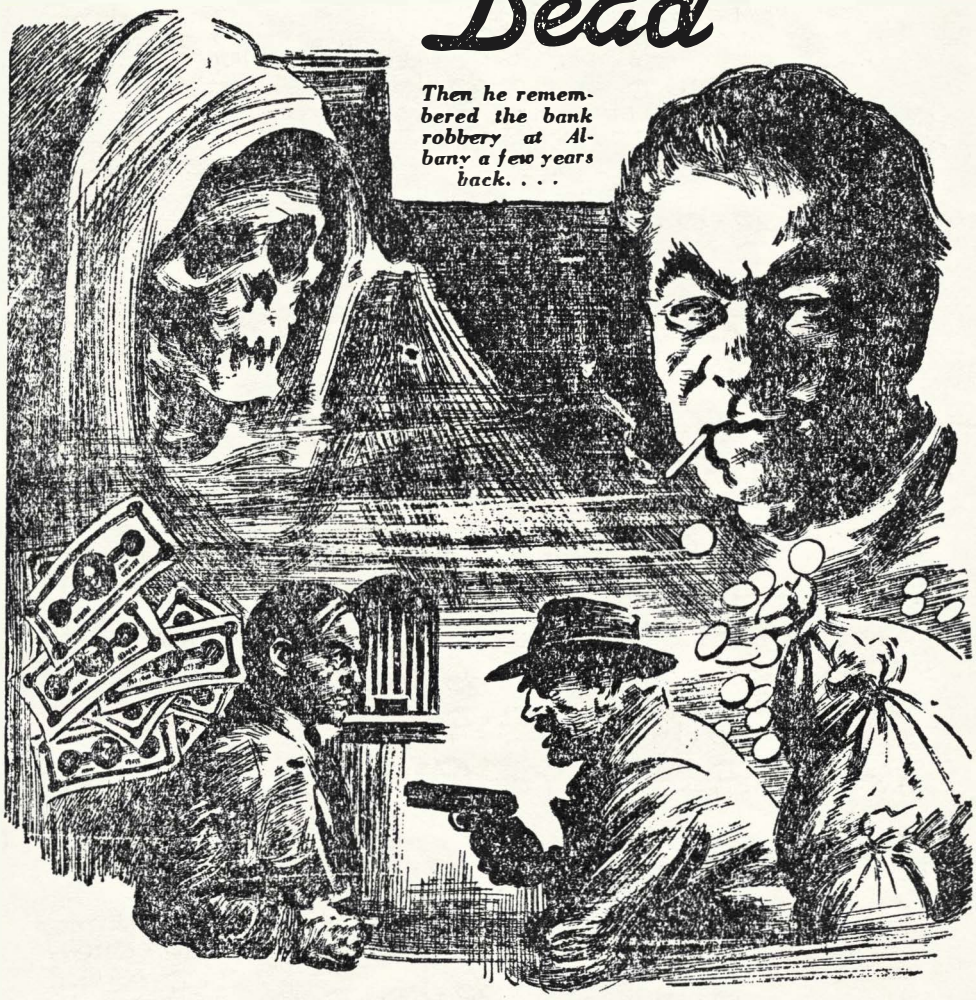
I waited.

Max said nothing. He wasn't looking at me now.

I took the little automatic out of my topcoat pocket. "Thanks for lending it to me. It helped me a lot even though there were no bullets in it. Thomas Strick went to pieces at the sight of it. As we both know, men murder because they're cowards."

I laid the gun on his desk and went out.

# VALLEY OF THE Dead




***Give a murderer enough rope — and he'll find the one which will hang him!***

SPENCE LANSING studied the distance to the safety of the shadows that danced around the campfire. The motion of his eyes and the tenseness of his rangy body gave him away.

"Don't try it," warned the small, thin man with the scarred face. His hand groped under the left side of his conspicu-

**By Duane Featherstonhaugh**

ously new flannel shirt while he talked.

Spence settled back on the pile of pine boughs. He knew the little man was right. He'd be brought down in ten feet if he tried to run for it.

The purr of the night wind, through the towering evergreens, made the crackling of the flames seem puny and ineffectual. A *whooo-whooo* rolled through the mountain peaks.

The little man was on his feet. A heavy automatic gleamed in his hand.

"Screech owl," grunted Spence.

Nat Wilber's eyes searched the shadows for a minute. He sat down like a snake coiling to strike.

"Don't be so jumpy, Nat," another voice cut in. "We got lots to do tomorrow."

The man who spoke was short and squatty. The matching red hunting knickers and shirt, spotless and neatly pressed, bulged, giving him an ape-like look. The red glare of the fire could not wash out the pallor of his face.

"I can't help it, Kaz," Nat said. "This place gives me the jitters."

"Forget it. We'll be back in town in a couple of days, and we'll be sitting pretty."

"How about One-Shot here?" Nat jerked his head toward Spence.

"Maybe he'll want to stay here in the woods—permanently," Kaz said quietly.

Spence gave no sign that he'd been listening. Occasionally he'd give a hitch to his faded khaki jeans, reach a long arm for a log and toss it neatly on the fire.

The two men had watched Spence do this twice. After that they decided to keep a few feet between them.

Kaz Selligg looked at his watch. It was barely eight o'clock. Night had come quickly to the mountain-studded valley.

"Better get some sleep, Nat. I'll keep an eye on Spence 'til one. Then you take over."

"Okay. But watch him. I don't want to wake up and find myself hogtied and waiting for the cops."

"I'll watch him," Kaz said. "After all, we can get along without him from now on."

Spence knew that was true. The two men had reached their objective, and they had carefully marked the trail into the woods.

Kaz stood up, lumbered over to a tree several yards away from the fire, and leaned against it, his eyes on Spence. He was taking no chances that the warmth of the blaze or a sitting position would lull him to sleep.

Spence's hope of making his escape vanished. He spread a few more boughs on the ground, rolled his hunting coat into a pillow and went to sleep.

THE two men had approached Spence at the Adirondack village of Keene Valley early that morning. They had asked if he would guide them to a spot near Mount Dix where a friend had told them there was some good deer hunting. This friend, they told Spence, had mentioned his name as the best guide in the Adirondacks.

Spence spotted the two as tenderfeet—goofers they called them in the mountains—but for a twenty dollar bill Spence would take anyone anywhere. It was more money than he had seen at one time since the last hunting season before the war.

They made plans for a one-night trip, and set out at once. Spence hadn't even told anyone where he was going. That wasn't unusual for Spence, but this time he could see it had been a mistake—very likely a fatal one.

For the first few miles Wilber and Selligg had been pleasant enough. Spence told them about hunting in the north woods. Most new hunters liked hunting stories and they were punctuated by the distant crack of high-powered rifles.

"Deer hunters," Spence said.

Spence had warmed up in his story telling until he came to his yarn of how he had once knocked down a partridge with a slug from a shotgun. Nat had dubbed him One-Shot after that. Spence didn't like it and from then on he shut up.

The pair had pulled out a bottle when they stopped for lunch. After a couple of stiff shots Nat spoke up.

"You might just as well get this straight, Spence. We're going in here to dig up a little something a pal left for us. Do just as we say. Keep your trap shut and you won't get hurt."

Spence had known from that moment on that they planned to kill him, and he cursed himself for not bringing his gun.

Then he had remembered the bank robbery at Albany a few years before. It had been rumored that the robbers had hidden the loot somewhere in the Adirondacks. It had never been found and gradually the case was forgotten.

SPENCE awoke at dawn. Ignoring Nat, who huddled near the dying fire, he poked the embers, dropped on some twigs and then a few large sticks. The mounting flames drove back the chill a few feet. Nat embraced the warmth and his confidence returned with the sun.

"Get some breakfast," he snarled at Spence. He shook Kaz who was sleeping uncomfortably under the lean-to Spence had hastily constructed the evening before.

"Get up. We got plenty to do."

Kaz blinked and sat up. He smelled the clean mountain air, perfumed by the evergreens and the smoke from the campfire.

"Gee," he said. "I'm hungry as hell. Let's eat."

Spence was still poking the fire.

"What you waiting for?" Nat said. "Get some breakfast."

"Need more coals," Spence muttered.

With that a shot echoed through the mountains; then another followed it.

Nat started. "What's that?"

"Deer hunters," Spence said. "Lots of 'em down this way."

"How far away?"

"Mile, maybe two."

Nat relaxed. "So what," he said. "If a party did come through here they'd take us for hunters."

Spence continued feeding the fire. A half-dozen grey squirrels played in the trees overhead. A chipmunk scampered saucily up to the fire, grabbed a crust that had been left over from the evening meal and disappeared behind a tree.

"Fire's ready," Spence said finally.

Nat stepped behind the lean-to. He'd left the food in an open knapsack there.

"Where the hell's our food?" he roared as he threw the empty sack on the ground near the fire. It was littered with bits of torn paper and wrappings.

"Where is it, One-Shot?" Kaz asked. "If you've taken it—"

Spence shrugged his shoulders. "Watched me all night, didn't you?"

Nat and Kaz looked at each other, then Nat stepped toward the woodsman, a heavy stick in his hand. Kaz jerked him back.

"Take it easy, Nat. Hold it."

Kaz turned to Spence. "You look in the knapsack. See if you can tell."

"Don't need to," Spence muttered. He went right on poking the fire. "Porcupines."

Nat exploded, "Why in hell didn't you—" He had his automatic out.

"Cut it out, Nat," said Kaz. "Can't start fighting now." He looked at Spence hard. "Didn't warn us, eh?"

"Didn't ask me to," Spence replied.

Outwardly he was calm. He'd known the porcupines would take the food and had pinned his hopes that Nat and Kaz would drop their guard momentarily when they found it gone. His hand shook a little as he dropped the heavy piece of wood on

the fire. He'd been holding it ever since Nat first stepped in back of the lean-to to get the food.

Nat transferred his anger to a rotten log. Kaz looked hard at Spence again.

"Hell!" he said. "Forget it and find something to eat."

"Like what?" Spence asked pointedly.

The squirrels caught Kaz's eye. He jerked out his automatic. The first shot was wide. It clipped a branch a foot from the squirrel Kaz had scheduled for breakfast. The animal was gone after the second shot. Then it poked its head around the trunk of the pine, a full four feet from where it had been. The automatic roared again. Bark flew from the trunk. The squirrel appeared on the other side of the tree and chattered.

"You're a hell of a hunter," Nat croaked. "Let old One-Shot get 'em."

"You crazy. That's the chance he's been waiting for."

"Okay," said Spence, giving a characteristic shrug, "I can get along without eating. But it's a long time 'til tonight."

Kaz and Nat were used to good living, and plenty of it. They whispered a moment; then Nat picked up one of the rifles and handed it to Spence, but he kept his automatic on the woodsman.

Kaz had his gun out too. He stepped about ten feet away.

Spence fondled the .30-30. He could whirl and get one of them now. Maybe he could line the two up. The high velocity shell would pass through one person. It might disable the second. He moved a step toward the trees.

"Hold it, One-Shot," Nat warned "Stay right where you are."

A squirrel broke loose from the group and skittered along a long bare limb. Spence brought up the rifle, took deliberate aim and fired.

Bark chipped off the limb, a scant inch ahead of the running animal. The squirrel ran on.

Spence aimed again, slowly.

The shot was late. A white streak appeared on the limb right behind the animal.

"One-Shot Spence—shoots partridges with slugs," Nat jeered.

"Maybe he's nervous," Kaz cracked; but he could have sworn he'd seen Spence smile.

Spence aimed again, with the same de-

liberate slowness. The rifle cracked and the squirrel dropped.

"You call that shooting," Nat began. "Why in Brooklyn—"

A shot cut off the remark. The second squirrel kept running. The rifle cracked again. The shot hit just ahead of the grey. It stopped, bewildered. Spence drew careful bead. The shot jerked the squirrel's head back. Tiny claws relaxed and it fell.

Nat jerked the rifle from Spence's hand.

"That's all we'll need. One for each of us. Now cook 'em."

The woodsman said nothing. He picked up the squirrels, deftly skinned and cleaned them and dropped them into a pot.

"Be done in about half an hour," he said. He dropped a couple of hemlock sticks on the fire and sat on his hunting coat.

THE squirrel stew smelled good. Kaz found his mouth watering. Spence kept at the fire until the flames were leaping around the pot.

But Kaz was getting very impatient.

"When'll it be done?" he said. "I'm hungry and we got to get going."

Spence ignored the question and sat with his head cocked slightly to one side.

"Answer me, damn you. When'll it be done?"

"About five minutes." The woodsman starting throwing in little green boughs. "Need a little extra heat to brown it."

The hemlock needles roared and crackled. The sound drowned out the rasp of the bluejay and the cawing of the crows.

Suddenly there were voices and the running trample of heavy boots.

Nat and Kaz whirled instinctively, guns drawn. In that split-second Spence grabbed a stick from the fire and jumped.

He grabbed Nat's gun with one hand and jerked it back. The shot roared through the tree tops. His free hand brought the burning stick crashing on Kaz's head.

Kaz was out cold but Nat scrambled to his feet and broke for the bushes. He tripped over a log and went down. Spence was on top of him, and grabbing Nat by the neck, dragged him back to where Kaz lay.

"What's this all about, Spence?" one of the hunters asked. "Never knew you to call for help before."

"Had to, Wally. These fellows were set to kill me. Think you'll find they're wanted for that bank robbery in Albany. Anyway, they got a map that shows there's some money buried under that stump."

He indicated a flat, broad stump. It was a few feet from a curious, double-trunk tree that was indicated on the map.

Nat was dazed deathly white.

"Call for help? How?" he repeated slowly. No other words would come.

Spence laughed for the first time in two days.

"How? Why anyone who's ever been in the woods knows that three shots spaced even—specially if it's repeated—is a distress signal. I could see you two'd never been hunting before so I was pretty sure you wouldn't know it."

"Distress signal," Nat moaned. "Three shots."

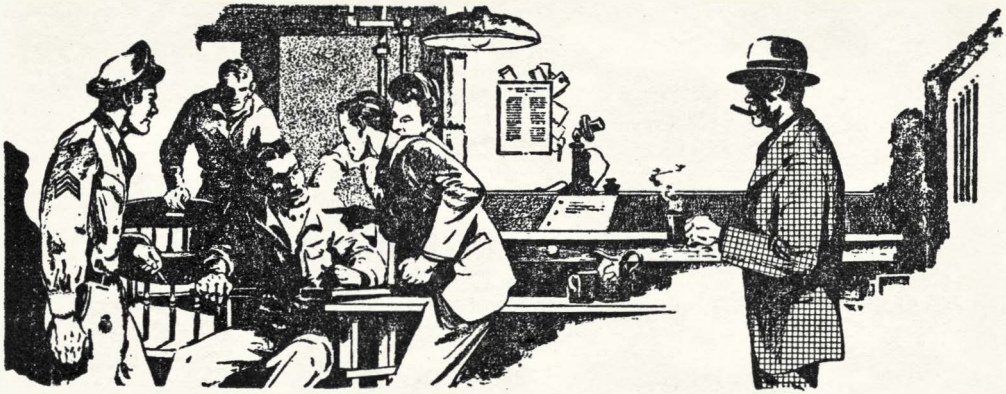
"Yeah. Kaz gave me the idea when he fired those three shots at the squirrels. Remember those shots we heard just before? Well, I figured if we could hear them they could hear us. So I sort of calculated just how long it would take the hunters to reach here and then I threw the green sticks in the fire to cover up the noise of their footsteps, and to help guide 'em here. I knew it'd be some of the local fellows. Not many city hunters get this way."

Nat gulped. "Then those misses—"

Spence picked up a rifle. He held it at arm's length in one hand.

"See that squirrel?" he asked. It was running fast in the tree tops.

The squirrel dropped with a bullet through its eye.



# THE THIRD DEGREE

## By Hallack McCord

*(Answers on page 103)*

SO YOU think you're sleuth material, eh? Then here's your chance to prove it. Below are listed twenty questions dealing with crime and criminal investigation. Answer eighteen or more of them correctly, and chances are you're detective timber. Answer sixteen or seventeen, and you're good. Answer fewer than sixteen, however, and you're slipping into the rookie cop class. Good luck!

1. If an underworld acquaintance of yours told you he was "going to trim a window," what would you think he meant?

2. If, by the underworld grapevine, you heard that a certain criminal character had been "topped," what would you believe had happened to him?

3. Generally speaking, does a guilty crook like to go up against a "rumbeak?"

4. In criminal slanguage, what is the meaning of the term, "rooker?"

5. According to the convict's way of thinking, "piano" is: A workbench? A fat woman? A safe? A slow running horse?

6. What, in the slanguage of the crook, is a "pen?" (Not a penitentiary.)

7. If a crook acquaintance of yours told you he had just "nipped" something, you would know he had: Broken through a jewelry store window? Picked someone's pocket? Opened a locked door?

8. If an underworld character told you he had just stood trial and had "got the music," what would you think had happened to him?

9. In ballistical language, what is the meaning of the term, "impact?"

10. Taxicab robberies are usually performed by: Professional crooks? Amateur crooks?

11. Would it be possible for a spy or other crook to photograph the contents of a letter without opening the envelope?

12. True or false? Strychnine seldom remains in a dead body for more than a few hours.

13. True or false? In the slanguage of the underworld, a "jiggerman" is the lookout who stands guard while the rest of the gang robs.

14. "Jawbone time" is: Time spent by a jailed man before he is brought to trial? Time spent by a convict who has had his parole revoked?

15. True or false? A gleaner, according to the underworld's terminology, is a thief.

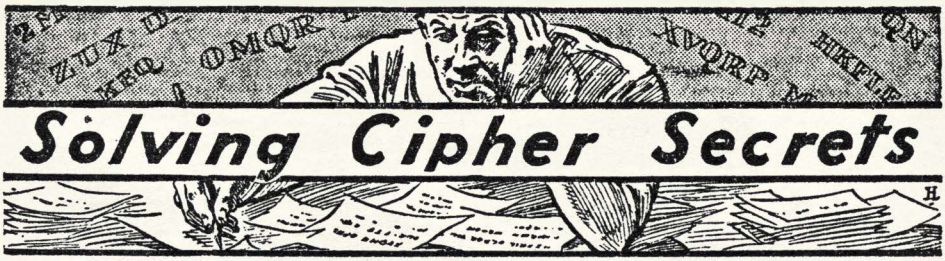
16. If a crook told you he had "just cracked a gingerbread door," should you believe he had recently broken into a bakery shop?

17. In ballistics, what is the meaning of the term, "leed?"

18. True or false? Department store delivery trucks are generally robbed by professional crooks.

19. True or false? "Dropping the leather" is an old confidence game.

20. True or false? Rigor mortis generally first sets in a dead body about thirty hours after death.




**Founded in 1924** **Article No. 839**

**M. E. Ohaver**

**A CIPHER is a secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Helpful hints appear in this department each month. Study them carefully.**

No. 5187—Destructive Element. By Vedette. Try "a" for symbol S; then guess SL (a-) and SLY (a--) as "an" and "and." Next, TL as "in," leading to TLZNLYTSHB (in--ndia--) as "incendiary." Thus to 23rd and 25th words; etc.

KLN XTHN TL NGNHB DNL TE "END" AB S XTHNAFV, SLY KLN KX DUNEN XKFH PKDTGNE FEFSRRB RTNE ANUTLY SL TLZNLYTSHB ARSON: HNGNLVN, QNSRKFEB, VHNNY, ENC.

No. 5188—Solitary Tribute. By Hazel Miller. Identify O and OSX, SLY and YL, LV and VTLG, noting letters in common. Then supply missing letter in YTOPYLT.

"PS KLDPSU THGHGZTOSQH LV GA ZHKLDHX ELS, *NHEEH *B. *NOGHE, GCTXHTHX ZA O YTOPYLT OSX QLBOTX BRLEH SOGH PE SLY BLTYRA YL OFFHOT RHTH."—YOJHS VTLG HFPYOFR, UTODH SHOT *JHOTSHA, *GPEELCTP.

No. 5189—Plain Talk. By Tenderfoot. Start with ZOLAL, ZOL, and AOL, using ZLAZA to check your assumptions. Substitute in ALEZLESLA and fill in the two unknown letters.

ZOLAL ZYD ALEZLESLA VBL TALK RDB ZLGLCODEL ZLAZA NE VBZNSTGVZNDE ULSVTAL DR ZOL QVBNLZX DR ADTEKA ZOLX SDEZVNE: "*MDL ZDDH RVZOLB'A AODL ULESO DTZ," VEK "AOL YVA YVNZNEP VZ FX GVYE."

No. 5190—Solving Lesson. By †Alphamega. Compare YNG, NLD, and YNLD. Substitute these letters in compound YNAGG-FGYYGA, and fill in. Next, DZZR, RZYGD, etc.

HZDY-ODGS YNAGG-FGYYGA *GRXFLDN TZASD: YNG, ERS, KZO, PZA, TED, RZY, VOY, EAG, NLD. VGXLRRGAD

LR WAKUYZXAEUNK DZZR BGGU RZYGD DOWN ED YNLD.

No. 5191—No Rain Again! By H. L. Kruger. Note ZFB joining longer words, and follow with GVLF and GVL. Thus to starred words, *ZGRZFGSJ and *SYRZFB.

*ZYJLFYSEF *SYRZFB, *YECGV *ZGRZFGSJ, EXGZSFY SGY OZGLU YCHHRN PZSFRN WUEP WET-BUSH, OVLULXN PESYGCUL WUEP BUSWGSFT WET EU JRECBY SY JZCTVG XN GULLY ZFB XCYVLY, GVLF YVLB CHEF GVL TUECFB.

No. 5192—That Final Initial! By °A. W. Ending -HCS and four-letter word HCEI provide entry. Next in line, EPRHC and pattern-word APPIP.

PALACE CANDYRYAP HEAK RUIZE PRHOPIRT RLLHTACE LICERHCAT LZPHIZD APPIP: "ABYPADD EPRHC LIOOHTAD NHEG LIN, LZEEHCS GAP OHEAPROOF HCEI LROMAD!"

No. 5193—Meant Both Ways. By °Dr. A. Suffix -APRA, duly observing high frequency of symbol A (used 20 times), etc., provides entering wedge for first word, checking with OPAPY.

OPPUMPRACAPY OPAPY MIFAPY IULOT JMCCUPJ JMIFAIL QIUWAJJUI IARAEKAN, ATEREYAN JQUPYOPAUMJ RIL "*FUN JOKA YGA *DEPF!" WIUC TOIFA *ANEPZMIFG *MPEKAIJEYL JYMNAPY OMNEAPRA.

No. 5194—Sweet Teeth. By †Amoroj. Identify ZG (frequencies 14-6), noting use of G four times as initial letter. Then try for words 4 to 8, inclusive.

PDUZK PHYDFV-XYOZB EYFNZBX GZDBL GZBL ZG XZGF GZBLYBF, XDNCHVX XTZS. KZXF SZDOL NYFTHN KDBRT KDRT BZDAYF FTYB RZBXDKH PZBY GMLH KHYOX.

No. 5195—Sylvan Scene. By †Sara. Symbols K and R, noting high frequency, doubling, and use in last two positions, will unlock pattern words EFRKR and CEKKR.

RNZZKE AUXII: PINK RTAKR, BLACK YIFNUR, JEKKO DGIIKXR, EGAOPFB-YFIFEKU PNCCKEHIAKR, EKU EFRKR, XKIIFB IKGDKR, JFIUKO UGHHFUAIR, PEFBO FGT CEKKR.

No. 5196—Long Line Up. By †Clarence Neilsen. Find your own clues, fans, in this final cryptogram! Asterisks prefixed to cipher words indicate capitalization.

OTXYVFJ ULFG ULGNPJ PLXYRFJ SLGBQF OTYVLNYQR VQY TNP-OTAQFQR OTAQFLPPK, VEQYVJ HFQLKQ-KVLNYQR RXYHLFQQK, VSNFVJ RNFVJ RQYNG KSNFVK, BPXK KNZVJ DPXQ-OTPTFQR, YNOTVNYQ-RNKOTPTFQR DLYRLYYLK.

AIDS for beginners are continued in this issue! We'll get to it. But first let's take No. X-5198 by †Double R. This is a null cipher controlled by a keyword presumably known only to the communicating parties. More fully, each plain-text letter is preceded by a key-letter, both series being taken in regular order, the key repeated as necessary, with the resultant pairs interspersed at will by groups of one or more null letters. Your problem consists in picking up the threads of the plain-text and repeated keyword, casting aside the nonsignificant letters. Full explanation of No. X-5198 will appear in our next issue!

No. X-5198. A Timely Text. By †Double R.

AWPMI TYETR HNIWT FCAAR
PASMA GENRD ZIRHX CUAML
AOOMR ESPRO IFDCW SAASA
RMSET BRHFI EGCRA EWAIQ
MSEGQ RRUIE GXCAN KATSA
NLMED WEERD YIFVT COOAR
NBFAA NHMNE ULYRN IBPCR
AEDAA WMKEA XRBHI LZCEA
CZTAI KYMPP JDEHR ESVIR

Numerical Cipher No. X-5186, by Mrs. Captain Kidd, in last issue, used a 3-digit symbol for each plain-text character, the first two of such digits selecting the letter or spacer in accordance with the accompanying key, and the 3rd digit showing position of the given letter or spacer in its particular word. For example, taking the first word of the message, B is *12*, being located in the *1st* row and *2nd* column of the alphabetic key; and since it is first letter of the word, it is followed by *1*, the full trisymbol thus being 121. Similarly, U *(33)*, 2nd letter of the word, becomes *332*; and so on.

No. X-5186. But just as all the neighbors on the wall have opened up their mouths to shout "Hurray!" a sudden whim o'ertakes me; after all, I think I will not hang myself today.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I |
| 2 | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R |
| 3 | S | T | U | V | W | X | Y | Z | - |

Message: B U T - J
Cipher: 121-332-323-394-211

U S T etc.
-332-313-324 etc.

The "position digit" featured in No. X-5186 provides a clever disguise for repeated letters. To illustrate, the T's were variously represented by trisymbols 323, 324, 321, etc. Plain-text and specimen of encipherment are also given herewith. No. 5187 is partly solved, to help beginners. All letters, as soon as found, must be substituted throughout the cryptogram—this is important! Context also aids solution. Thus, *incendiary* leads to XTHN *(-ire)*, suggesting *fire*; etc. See next issue for answers to current puzzles and the special method for No. 5197.

No. 5197—Cryptic Division. By † Ian. The symbol for *zero* may be found by inspection. The key-phrase is numbered thus: *0123456 789.*

W I N ) L O O K I N ( Y C K
L L Y I
C I I I
I N O U
K K U N
C N Q O
N Q W

## ANSWERS FOR LAST ISSUE

5175—Farm woman, overheard describing kin: "My sister and me ain't no more alike than if we wasn't us. She's as different as I be, only the other way."

5176—"Methinks there never bloomed a rose so red as where some buried Caesar bled, and every hyacinth the garden knows dropped in her lap from some, once lovely, head."—Omar Khayyám.

5177—The club-car steward has to be as smart as the proverbial Philadelphia lawyer. He must know all liquor laws of each state and must observe them strictly as the train passes through.

5178—One may quickly extemporize adequate cipher code by striking typewriter key to right of one wanted, "S" for "A," etc. Handy to know!

5179—Debt can be run into with greatest ease, but escaped from by payment of uttermost farthing, sometimes after great privation and sacrifice.

5180—Pattern words are sometimes the only ready keys to solving cryptograms. Indeed, words like "anyway," "whether," "forever," "someone," and "between" are usually spotted right away.

5181—Buzzing zebubs, zimbs terrorize Zanzibar zimmi, zetetic puzzler. Zealot zigzags across piazza; dizzied, gazes toward zenith, zyzzles, Zounds!

5182—Cornelius, Cornish corn-doctor, concocts corny corn-cure, containing corn, corncobs, cornstalks, acorns, popcorn. Scornful Cornishman corners cornucopian cash. Customers accumulate corns.

5183—Camera fan saw cars crash with great noise, bent fenders, broken headlights, cracked windshields, blown tires, police, spectators. No film!

5184—Seashore warfare: miniature paper sailboats swirling over whirling waves; colorful sea-shell forts surrounding sand castles; faithful starfish soldiers guarding coast-line.

5185—Key:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
D E V I O U S W A Y

All answers to current ciphers will be duly credited in our *Cipher Solvers' Club*. Address: M. E. Ohaver, *New Detective Magazine*, Fictioneers, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.


*It happened too suddenly for any expression to be caught on the dying man's face. . . .*

# Bury Me Not

***Charley Kneap was a bad cop, but as a killer he was simply out of this world—and right into the next!***

HE SAT on the ground, cold and thoroughly miserable. The moon was still up, but the night was rapidly unraveling and, across the grey-white emptiness of the desert, the sky-line was beginning to dilute. Day was just beyond the lightening horizon, a million miles away and yet so close that it could be measured now by minutes. The man on the ground hunched his shoulders and shivered, for the night had been bitterly cold. Still, the coming day was even more to be feared.

Charley Kneap, of the Border Patrol, halted his restless pacing, wheeled irritably, and stared at the man on the ground with hot, hating eyes.

"You're a smart one. Yeah," he sneered, "ain't you the smart one, though!"

The man on the ground said dully, "Lay off, Charley." A gust of wind whipped at him, and he shivered again.

"Smart," Kneap said bitterly. "The smartest operator on the line, that's Tony Ault. Why aren't you using your brains

**By C. William Harrison**

now, instead of sitting there like a whipped dog? Why aren't you, smart guy?"

"I'm cold, Charley."

"Maybe you think I spent the night in front of a fireplace."

"You're big, Charley, and you're young. You're used to being out in all kinds of weather, and I'm not."

"Yeah," Kneap said with hate. "You're cold now, but it'll be plenty hot where you're going if you don't figure a way out of this."

The gusts of wind were ripping at them with steadily increasing strength, the beginning, Charley Kneap knew, of a desert storm. He wondered narrowly if there was any hope for them in the storm. The wind would whip sand up from the dunes and cover their tracks, and that was something.

But it would not be enough. Johnny Ferris was dead, and the Federal boys would not easily forget the murder of another agent. Charley Kneap knew that with unquestioning certainty. The government boys would have all the towns and highways pocketed, and the sheriff's posse would continue, stubbornly and implacably, to comb these dunes. Sheriff Bingham was that kind of a man; he wouldn't be stopped for long by any sand storm.

This was late February, but snow still whitened the high dome of San Jacinto. Snow skidded down from the mountains, raw and cold, and slashed at the skin like needle-sharp particles of driven sand. The horizon was tinging yellow now, an ugly, frowning yellow.

Tony Ault raised his thin miserable face. "You got a cigarette, Charley?"

"The hell with you."

"I've got to think, Charley. I've got to have a smoke so I can think."

Kneap cursed the man with dry venom. He shook a cigarette out of his pack, and snapped it to the ground in front of Ault. The wind caught it, skidding it through the sand, and Tony Ault went crawling after it. Like a dog crawling after a bone, Kneap thought viciously.

He stood there in hating contempt and watched Ault light the cigarette and suck the smoke hungrily into his lungs.

"Thanks, Charley."

"The hell with you."

Ault raised small resentful eyes. "You've got no call to ride me, Charley." His voice was a thin, rasping sound against the wind, like paper rubbing paper. "You're in this as much as me, Charley. We're both in this."

Kneap raised his hand and slowly squeezed it tight. He would have liked nothing better than to smash his knuckles into Ault's face. He wanted to batter the sly cunning out of Ault's small bright eyes, for it was the man's sharp scheming that had brought this trouble down on them.

*"It'll be easy,"* Ault had argued. *"I'll go down into Mexico and get the diamonds. There's plenty of stuff down there if you've got the right contacts. I'll get the diamonds and you'll pass me through the inspections office. We'll split after we sell the stuff."*

Tony Ault moved his thin shoulders and spoke against the wind. "We figured this out together, Charley, so there's no sense of riding me for what happened."

"It was you that killed Johnny Ferris," Kneap said bitterly.

"Someone had to do it." Ault spread his boney hands. "Ferris caught on to the diamonds when you and me met outside of town. You wouldn't kill him, so I had to."

Charley Kneap stood there with his big body braced against the wind, and that was when the thought crept into his mind. It sickened him at first, like cold fingers biting into the pit of his stomach. He stared at Ault's small sharp face, and wondered if he could go through with it. He still remembered Ault's bullet smashing through Johnny Ferris' throat,

the look of shock and horror in Johnny's eyes, and the thin spurt of crimson. . . .

Tony Ault was speaking in his sly voice. "I think there's a way out for us, Charley. We'll hide the diamonds where we can get them later. They'll never find the gun I used on Ferris. The posse will find you and me out here, but they won't be able to pin anything on us, and the worst we can get is maybe a couple years in prison."

"I've got a better idea," Charley Kneap said. He pulled his gun, rammed it against Ault's chest and, because he didn't want to see what he did, he closed his eyes when he pulled the trigger. The roar of the gun was a sullen slap of sound, whipped away and scattered by the brawling gusts of wind.

IT WAS easier than Charley Kneap had expected. It had happened too suddenly and without warning for any expression to be caught in the dead man's face. The eyes were closed, and that helped. There was but little blood.

Kneap bent and went through the dead man's pockets until he found the small sack of uncut diamonds. He gripped Ault's heels and dragged the body away, along the slot of a valley between the sand dunes. He found a steep cutbank of crusted sand, dragged the body in close, dug into the over-hang and caved in the sandy wall.

It was, he thought, as easy as that. A single shot that only he had heard, a slide of sand that had hidden the body, and the murder he had committed would remain forever behind a locked door in his mind.

He returned down the valley, laughing softly to himself. He came to the ancient mine scaffold, only a stunted and half-buried skeleton that remained of some miner's dream of riches. He climbed up the loose sands of the dune, and at the crest the wind tore at him savagely. He bent against the wind, and to the north the mountains were hidden behind an ugly yellow pall of air-borne sand. He turned slowly, swinging his glance, and no more than a mile to the south he saw Bingham's posse methodically searching

*Snow skidded down from the mountains. . . .*

the dunes. Kneap waited a moment, grimly studying the movement of the horsemen. They were working their way north through the sand hills all right, slowly and steadily. Another hour, perhaps, and they would be at the site of the old abandoned mine. It was all Charley Kneap needed to know.

He went down the slope of the dune, with the bitter slugging of the wind instantly wiping out the tracks he made. He took out his handcuffs, unlocked them, and threw away the key. He bent then,

and began scooping the sand away from the remains of the mine scaffold, and an arm's length down he found the heavy iron eye-hook set into the massive timber. He buried the diamonds a foot deeper into the sand, where they could not be discovered when he was freed later by the posse, and he had to lie full length on the ground to lock himself to the eye-hook with his handcuffs. He filled in the hole, and settled back, then, to wait.

He had never realized that wind could give so much movement to sand. The dunes seemed to be crawling toward him, pushed and rolled by the impact of the storm. Sand sifted into his clothes, and it drifted down around his legs until it became increasingly difficult to free them. Still, that was nothing to worry about. There were other more important things to think about, of what he could do with the money when he sold the smuggled diamonds, of what he would tell Bingham's posse when they finally discovered him.

*I heard about Johnny Ferris being murdered, and took the killer's trail alone. I caught him out here, but he got the drop on me. He took my gun and handcuffed me here to this timber and left me to be buried alive in the sand.*

He thought of that, and he thought of the diamonds, and he thought of Tony Ault's dead body. He could never entirely forget the sand constantly drifting around his own. He lifted his head, shook the sand from it, and found that this time it was a definite strain on his buried arm to get his face above the sand.

He looked beyond the mouth of the valley between the dunes, and through the thickening yellow haze of the sand storm saw the shadowy movements of the posse appear a quarter mile away. The gale momentarily obscured the horsemen with driven sand, and when he saw them again they were no longer moving. He waited, and the vague shapes of the riders moved again, but they weren't as definitely outlined as before. He couldn't understand that; the storm haze was no more dense than before. Then he understood.

They were turning back!

The vague shapes of the riders thinned out and vanished, and sand pressed its gritty hand higher on Charley Kneap's face, reaching patiently and implacably to the mouth and nostrils which he could no longer lift any higher.

Once the wind slashed down through the ancient skeleton of the mine scaffold, and made a strange mocking cry through the timbers. It was, Charley Kneap thought, like the sound of Tony Ault laughing at him.

## Cipher Solvers' Club for January, 1948

Current Grand Total: 895,719 Answers

*Eleven Answers*—°Case Ace, 1193; †John Aitken, 188; †Alphamega, 437; †Amoroj, 448; †Anidem, 381; *Attempt, 753; †Mrs. H. H. Bailey, 238; †The Ponder Bare, 158; °See Bee Bee, 2727; °S. H. Berwald, 1027; °Alpha Bet, 1799; †Florence B. Boulton, 442; °Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 3921; °Carso, 1929; *Bessie Casey, 604; °Ciphermit, 3563; °Codela, 1481; °Floyd E. Coss, 1673; °Darn Cross, 1099; †M. E. Cutcomb, 476; *Jump o'er Dam, 521; *Kay Dee, 647; *Gunga Din, 800; °Drol, 2111; °M. E., 3765; °Eve Eden, 1296; °Efdee, 1284; °Engineer III, 1798; °Arty Ess, 3921; °Jay-En-Ess, 2164; †Evie, 373; *Femo, 723; †Fern G., 212; °Clarence P. Greene, 1318; *LeRoy A. Guidry, 878; †Gyrene, 334; °Henry J. Haewecker, 1926; Hamlet II, 83; °Hayrake, 1389; °T. Hegarty, 3485; °Henty, 1029; °Jack-Hi, 1104; °Hopade, 1447; †Invictus, 471; °Jayel, 4039; †June, 495; °Kate, 2877; *Betty Kelly, 532; †S. A. L., 432; Sport La, 24; †Martoy, 308; °Theodore W. Midlam, 3281; °Lee A. Miller, 1832; °Mossback, 2488; °Sue de Nymme, 2755; †Pablo, 172; Ira Pent, 88; °W. F. P., 3064; °Kee Pon, 1123; °B. E. R., 1188; °Wm. G. Ringer, 1419; °Ty Roe, 1536; °Alice Routh, 3845; °Mrs. H. A. Seals, 3015; °R. B. Shrewsbury, 1587; †L. Silverman, 146; °Sam Spiegel, 2697; °M. G. S., 1834; °Jack-Stay, 3744; †Miss Tick, 261; °Tisen, 1277; °Valkyrie, 1143; †Artine F. Vaughn, 213; †Virsat, 135; °Volund, 1895; °Mrs. James Wallen, 3067; †Ruth E. Weiss, 311; °E. H. Werner, 1423; °Arthur Whitfield, 371; †Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 393; °Wilray, 1466; °Ike N. Wynne, 3479; °Doctor X, 3960; *Yarbie, 984; *Zizi, 506.

*Ten Answers*—°P. W. B., 1314; †Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 338; Ray Boyd, 84; °Gold Bug, 1653; Honey Dew, 81; †Mrs. James Gregg, 130; °Jesse C. Leach, 1194; °Lucille E. Little, 2083; L. W. Russell, 10; °Nick Spar, 3252; *James H. Williams, 803.

*Nine Answers*—°Pearl Knowler, 2431; †Ready Money, 244; †C. Retherford, 159.

*Eight Answers*—°D. H. Holcomb, 1391; †J. E. L., 355; *N. Dak. Ump, 711.

*Seven Answers*—†Jay-em-en, 219.

*Two Answers*—*Shadyside, 596.

*Corrections*—Ira Pent, 11 Answers for July, 1947, and †Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 10 Answers for Sept., 1947, not previously credited.

# ANSWERS TO THE THIRD DEGREE

*(Questions on page 95)*

1. If the underworld acquaintance told you he was "going to trim a window," you should know he was planning to smash a display window and rob its contents.

2. If you heard a certain criminal character had been "topped," you should know he had been legally executed.

3. No. In general, a guilty crook does not like to come up against a "rumbeak." A rumbeak is a judge who cannot be bribed.

4. In criminal slanguage, a "rooker" is a swindler, or one whose racket is defrauding.

5. In convict slang, a "piano" is a workbench . . . of the sort found in the prison carpenter shop.

6. In the slanguage of the crook, a "pen" is a forger.

7. If a crook said he had "nipped" something, he would mean he had just opened a locked door.

8. If a crook says he "got the music," then he means he has been acquitted.

9. In ballistics language, "impact" refers to a blow, or the force of a projectile striking an object.

10. Taxicab robberies are generally performed by amateur crooks. The technique here is for the crook to direct the cab driver to an isolated spot. Once there, the crook pulls his gun and performs the robbery.

11. Yes, by means of certain photograph techniques it is sometimes possible for a spy or other criminal to photograph the contents of a letter without opening the envelope.

12. False. Strychnine tends to remain in a body for a comparatively long time. Traces may be found in a body in many cases even after it has been buried for some time.

13. True. A "jiggerman" is one who stands guard outside while the rest of the gang go inside and rob.

14. "Jawbone time" is time spent by an imprisoned man while he is waiting to be brought to trial. In other words, he remains in jail while lawyer and prosecutor, etc., prepare (with much talk) the case.

15. True. In underworld terminology, a "gleaner" is a thief.

16. If a crook told you he had just "cracked a gingerbread door," he would mean he had broken into a safe with an ornate door.

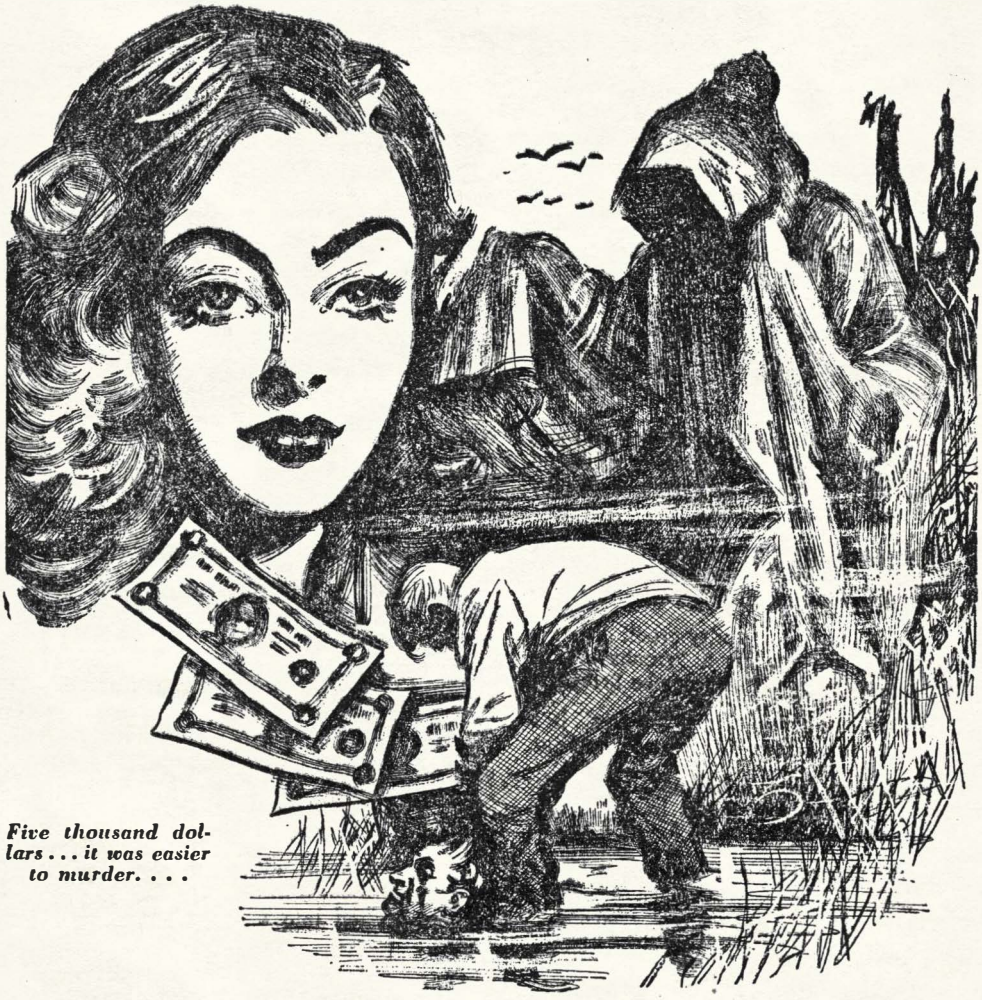
17. In ballistics, the term, "leed," means the rate of twist of the rifling in the barrel of a weapon.

18. True. The scientific detective knows that department store delivery trucks are generally robbed by professional crooks.

19. True. "Dropping the leather" is an old confidence game. There are many variations of this "gag" which hinges around the planting by a crook of a rigged pocketbook . . . to be found by an unwary victim.

20. False. Rigor mortis generally sets in two to six hours after death. This time may vary considerably, however, depending on the cause of death, and various other factors.

# TERROR HAS



*Five thousand dollars . . . it was easier to murder. . . .*

IT WENT off without a hitch. Alvin Lane suspected nothing. Lying in his rowboat, he watched his decoys. He shifted his shotgun a little as the ducks began to settle on the water. He did not hear Leonard Barlow swim toward him through the reeds.

Barlow put a hand on the gunwale. "Al," he called softly.

Lane's head jerked up.

"I'm right here," Barlow said.

Lane looked over the side of the rowboat. Barlow reared up from the water, threw both arms about the other's neck, let himself fall backward. His weight and the surprise of the attack yanked Lane out of the boat. The scream that tore from Lane's throat mingled with the cries of the startled ducks. Then both men were under the water. Barlow was bigger, stronger, and Lane didn't know how to swim.

As silently as he had swum out to the boat, Barlow returned to shore. The crisp

# TWO FACES

***Barlow killed and ran away—but he did it once too often and barely lived — to die another day!***

morning air wrapped itself about his wet naked body. He no longer heard the ducks. They had disappeared from the water, from the sky. The pond was empty, and because of the reeds the boat was invisible from most of the shore, and the cottonwoods amid which he stood formed a screen at his back.

Quickly he put on his clothes and headed away from the lake.

He had not gone more than a couple of hundred feet when he heard somebody cough. He ducked in among a clump of bushes. John Starbuck appeared carrying a .22 rifle on the crook of his arm.

Starbuck walked slowly, his broad shoulders and deep chest filling out his poplin jacket. His heavy face was placid. He was moving toward the pond, toward that part of the shore where Barlow had swum out to the boat and back.

It was all right, Barlow told himself. If Starbuck had seen what had happened, he would be running to the pond, or more likely he'd be running to his car to go for help.

After Starbuck was out of sight, Barlow compelled himself to wait for the space of a hundred heartbeats before he left the bushes. He kept away from the paths, knowing that where Starbuck was, George Heller would not be far away. Last night in a poker game in Starbuck's house he had heard Starbuck and Heller make a date to go hunting this morning.

A minute later he saw George Heller sitting on a huge rock on a bare knoll overlooking the lake. Barlow flattened himself against a tree and stopped breathing.

Slowly he relaxed. Heller was visible to him because he was up there on the bare knoll, but Barlow knew that the trees hid him from Heller. Still, Heller could see most of the lake from up there. Maybe he could see Lane's rowboat.

As Barlow watched, Heller leisurely loaded his corncob pipe and put a match to it. Smoke wreathed across his wizened face. He seemed in no hurry to move.

Then that was all right too, Barlow told himself. Heller wouldn't be sitting there so calmly if he had seen a man murdered ten minutes ago. He had either come up on the knoll after it had happened or the rowboat was out of his range of vision.

Barlow moved on, keeping to the thickest part of the woods. He walked three miles before he reached the place where he had parked his jalopy. The car was at the back of the house on the old Johnson place. Nobody lived there now. A sign tacked on one of the porch columns read: "For Sale, Inquire Leonard Barlow, Realtor."

So if anybody noticed his car there, it wouldn't mean anything. This was three miles from where Alvin Lane had died. Besides, there could be nothing suspicious in a real estate broker going out on a Sunday morning for a look at a house he was trying to sell.

He drove twelve miles back to town.

**By Russell Gray**

Dora wasn't at home. Early this morning she had left in the new car to spend the day with her sister in Trevan. That was a minor break. It was safer that she didn't know that he had been away from the house at the time her lover died.

He changed his clothes and went into the living room to read the Sunday paper. He couldn't relax. He started to sweat and something jumped sickishly in his stomach. Suppose Starbuck or Heller had seen?

Impossible. Wouldn't they have done something about it? Men who have seen murder don't casually ignore it and go about their business. Then why worry? There wasn't a mark on Alvin Lane. It had gone off without a hitch. Lane was dead, and dead men can't steal wives.

DORA returned home late in the evening. She was tired. She sat in the living room for a while, telling him how bright and clever her sister's new baby was, and then she said she was going up to bed.

A few minutes later he followed her upstairs and stood in the doorway of their room, watching her comb out her long brown hair which fell over her shoulders like a cloak. She was wearing that silk housecoat he had bought her for her birthday, and he thought that he had never seen her so lovely.

He crossed the room and put his hands on her shoulders.

She stiffened. "I have a headache," Dora said.

Not even a kiss. A wife with a headache can at least kiss her husband. But that was the way it had been for months now. That was what had made him suspect that there was somebody else. And he had known that if it was anybody else, it was Alvin Lane—so much younger than himself, so much handsomer, so much poorer.

So last week Barlow had gone through the motions of leaving on an overnight business trip. In the evening he had sneaked back. Corny, perhaps, but the only way to make sure. And he had found Alvin Lane with his wife. He had seen and heard more than enough. But he hadn't stormed in on them. If he had, he would surely have lost Dora. He had slipped away, spent the night elsewhere, returned the next day as if he knew nothing. Because he had made up his mind to kill Lane.

Now, with his hands on his wife's shoulders, he looked into the dresser mirror. There was his own face, fleshy, stolid, looking somewhat older and flabbier than this morning. And there was his wife's face, so beautiful, so easy to love desperately. It was a static face now as she waited for him to take his hands off her.

He wanted to dig his fingers into her shoulders, hurt her. But he didn't. He wanted to shout triumphantly what he had done. But he didn't.

He dropped his hands. He turned and left the room, feeling old and tired.

It was in the morning paper. Leonard Barlow bought the paper on the way to his real estate office, but he didn't open it until he was seated behind his desk. Ella Gorson, his secretary, hadn't yet come in.

LAWYER DROWNS
IN TIER POND

It was on the third page, not much of a story because Alvin Lane wasn't anybody important. His body had been found in the pond by two hunters, John Starbuck and George Heller. Evidently Lane had fallen out of his boat while duck hunting and drowned in water which was eight feet deep in that part of the pond. It was known that he could not swim a stroke.

Neatly Barlow folded the newspaper and placed it on the side of his desk. Ella

Gorson came in. She was a gaunt, horse-faced woman. He greeted her with a cheerful good morning and settled down to dictate a couple of leases to her.

Shortly before noon George Heller entered the office.

Barlow stared at him as if at a ghost. Fear gagged him. But Heller said affably, "How are you, Lennie?" dropped into the client's chair next to the desk and pulled out his pipe.

"Good enough," Barlow replied, trying to sound perfectly at ease. He was angry at himself, telling himself that he mustn't succumb to panic, especially when there was no reason for it. A visit from Heller wasn't very unusual.

George Heller took his time filling his pipe. He was small, dried-up, with a pinched, sour-face. When he had the tobacco thumped in, he said: "Did you hear what happened to poor Al Lane yesterday?"

"I read it in the paper. Too bad." Barlow glanced at Ella who was minding her own business typing leases. "The paper says you and Starbuck found him."

"John did. I just happened to be there. Fact is, John saw that rowboat in the morning, but he didn't pay any attention to it. Then in the afternoon we both happened to be walking along the shore together. You know where the cottonwoods are? Lots of reeds there, too."

"I'm not sure," Barlow muttered.

"Well, John looked at that boat and said it was funny anybody leaving it anchored all day in deep water where you couldn't get to it without swimming. I said maybe it wasn't anchored, just drifted out and was caught on something. He said that must be it and we started to go on. Suddenly he stopped and said wasn't that something out there. I looked, but didn't see anything. Then John gave a yell and started to tear off his clothes like he'd gone crazy. He stripped down to his underwear and went into the pond. When he came swimming back, he was pulling a dead body. It was Al Lane."

Heller put another match to his pipe. Barlow sat tied up in a knot, waiting. He looked at Ella's back hunched over her typewriter.

"The reason I'm here," Heller said after a pause, "is that note I spoke to you about at the poker game Saturday night."

The knot untied. Barlow's tone was crisp, business-like. "I told you I can't endorse a note for you."

"It's only for a thousand dollars."

"Only!" Barlow snorted.

"I'm good for it, Lennie. It won't be any money out of your pocket."

Like hell it won't, Barlow thought. But he didn't say it.

"Lennie, I need that money desperately." Heller's wizened face twisted and his watery eyes blinked as if to hold back tears.

"Sorry." The way Barlow said that word was a dismissal.

Heller stood up. Without looking at Barlow, without saying another word, he walked out.

There was silence in the office. Ella had stopped typing and was staring at the door through which Heller had gone.

"I'd go broke in a month if I endorsed notes for every acquaintance I had," Barlow told her angrily.

"I guess that's so." Ella resumed typing.

When Barlow returned home at six o'clock, he found Dora in the living room. She wasn't reading or knitting or listening to the radio. She just sat in semi-darkness. She wasn't weeping now, but she had been.

Looking at her, Barlow hated her as much as he loved her. He wanted to hurt her more than he already had.

"Did you hear about Al Lane?" he asked.

Dully she nodded.

"Too bad," he said.

Dora rose and went into the kitchen. He heard her prepare supper.

During the meal, she cheered up considerably. She chattered endlessly about gossip he had heard before. That, he knew, was to cover up the depth of her grief for Lane. She did not want to give herself away by mourning too obviously for a man who was supposed to be only a family friend.

Give her time, he told himself. A week, a month, and then she would be completely his once more. She had loved him before she had fallen for Lane. With Lane gone, she would again become a devoted and affectionate wife. He could wait. Waiting was the easiest thing he had done to bring her back to him.

THE Tuesday morning paper carried not a word about Lane's death. An accidental drowning was news for only one day.

At eleven o'clock that morning the phone call came.

The voice on the wire was like none he had ever heard before—without tone, without quality, without gender. There were only disembodied words.

"Leonard Barlow?"

"Who's this?" he asked.

"Somebody who knows how Alvin Lane died."

Blood drained from Barlow's fingers holding the handset. For a long moment it was as if he stopped living. Then he regained the power to speak.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"A man swam out to a rowboat Sunday morning," the eerie voice said. "I saw the whole thing, from beginning to end."

Barlow looked at Ella Gorson. She sat in profile as she clipped real estate ads out of the morning paper.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

"I'm sure you don't want me to go into detail over the phone."

Suddenly Barlow realized why the voice sounded like that. The speaker disguised his voice by straining it through a handkerchief held tight over the mouthpiece of a phone.

"The police would be interested in an eye-witness account," the voice went on.

"What do you want?" Barlow asked hoarsely.

"One thousand dollars. In bills no bigger than twenties. Mail them out today to J. B. Julian, general delivery. If I don't receive the money tomorrow, I'll have certain information for the police. I'll repeat: Mail one thousand dollars to J. B. Julian today. Have you got it straight?"

"Yes," Barlow said.

There was a click at the other end of the wire.

For a long minute Barlow sat with the phone in his hand before he thought to drop it on its cradle.

"Is anything wrong, Mr. Barlow?" Ella was turned in her chair, watching him curiously.

"What?" he said.

"You look like you heard bad news."

He roused himself. "It's about—about an investment that turned sour."

He put on his hat and told Ella that he wouldn't be back for a while. He had to be where he could think without Ella watching him. He walked the streets.

Heller or Starbuck—it had to be one of them. They knew him by sight and they had been hunting near Lane's boat. Either of them could have seen the murder.

Not John Starbuck. He was a solid pillar of society, respected by everybody who knew him for his integrity. Besides, the owner of the most prosperous furniture store in town would not stoop to blackmail for a thousand dollars. Only a desperate man went in for blackmail at all.

A man as desperate as George Heller.

He had said so himself yesterday: "I need that money desperately." Heller hadn't even a job at the moment; he'd lost his last one because he wasn't much good at anything. Everything he did was small, even blackmailing.

That sum pointed to him beyond doubt. Keeping quiet about murder was worth a lot more than a thousand dollars, but it was just the amount of the note Heller had asked him to endorse. When that failed, he had decided to use what he had seen on the lake. By not asking for more money, he had compromised with what sense of ethics he had.

As he walked, Barlow's fists clenched in fury. But his fists were no use—only money could save him. The price was cheap enough.

Barlow went to his bank and withdrew a thousand dollars in ten and twenty dollar bills. When he returned to his office, Ella was out to lunch. He addressed a thick manila envelope, sealed the money inside and mailed it immediately.

That evening when he returned home Dora greeted him with an unusually warm smile. She did not shy away from his kiss or complain of a headache when he put his arms about her. There was less ardor in her kiss then he would have liked, but she needed time to completely recover from Lane's death. He could afford to be patient.

THURSDAY morning, the voice strained through a handkerchief phoned him again.

A client interested in buying the Hudson house was sitting beside Barlow's desk. Ella was tacking the new zoning map on the wall. Barlow strove to maintain outward composure.

"Didn't you receive the—the envelope I sent you?" Barlow asked.

"I did," the voice replied. "But you must realize as well as I that the sum was paltry. Five thousand dollars is more like what the deal is actually worth to you."

Barlow had to clear his throat before he could get words out. "You mean four thousand additional?"

"Five thousand. Send it to J. B. Julian, general delivery. I expect to receive it by tomorrow."

"I haven't that kind of money."

"Don't bother lying," the voice said. "I know what you're worth."

It was fantastic, this bargaining with a blackmailer while two other people listened to his end of the conversation.

"I can't possibly raise it today," Barlow said.

"I'll give you one extra day. I expect to pick it up at general delivery Saturday morning."

Barlow hung up. The client raised his head from the plan of the Hudson house.

"A real estate investment I made," Barlow explained. "It seems I have to raise more cash than I thought."

The client nodded sympathetically. "That's the way I feel about this house—too much cash."

"That's different," Barlow said quickly. "Look at—"

He talked mechanically, aware that he wasn't doing his usual selling job. The client left, leaving the sale in the air, and Barlow wasn't sorry to see him go. He went out himself a minute later, to get away from Ella's presence.

Trapped, he kept thinking. It wasn't the money so much. He could raise it without too much inconvenience. But after that—

Heller wouldn't be satisfied with six thousand dollars. He had recognized a good thing when he had gone to the post office yesterday and picked up that thousand dollars. He would demand more and more until everything would go—the real estate Barlow owned, the house he lived in, the new car. Heller wasn't the man to stop until he had squeezed his victim dry, impoverished him. And there was

nothing at all to be done about it. Or—

Barlow returned from his walk without having been near his bank.

On Saturday he was in his office alone. Ella worked only a five day week. He sat behind his desk and waited.

The phone rang, but it was Dora. Some of her friends were going to the movies that afternoon. She said she preferred to go out with him if he intended to come home early.

"I'll be working all day," he told her. "You run along and have fun."

"I'll be home for supper, darling," she said.

A warm glow spread over him. Gradually Dora was becoming the woman she had been before she had met Lane. Damn Heller. If not for him, everything would be working out fine.

He waited a full hour before that weird voice phoned. "There wasn't a package waiting for J. B. Julian at the post office."

"I couldn't get my hands on that much cash until today," Barlow said. "I'll mail it out this afternoon."

"See that you do. Monday is the absolute deadline."

Barlow smiled tightly as he hung up.

He waited until after lunch before he drove out to the Johnson place. He left his car where he had last Sunday and walked the three miles to the woods.

Heller's hobby was hunting. During the season, he spent his Saturdays and Sundays in the neighborhood of Tier Pond. Barlow roamed the woods, ducking for cover whenever anybody came near. If Heller was hunting that afternoon, he didn't find him. At six o'clock he started for home.

Next morning he rose early and told Dora he was driving out to look at some parcels of land he had heard were for sale. He returned to the woods around Tier Pond.

Luck was with him. Just before noon he came across George Heller sitting on a stump in a little clearing. Something must have got into Heller's right shoe because he was just putting it on. His shotgun lay beside him on the ground. Barlow stepped out from behind a tree.

Heller scowled at him wordlessly.

"Don't you even say hello to me?" Barlow said.

"After the way you acted about that note?" Heller finished lacing his shoe.

When he raised his head, he saw Barlow reaching for the shotgun. Their eyes met. Heller licked his lips. Probably he didn't know that Barlow suspected him, but he was nervous just the same.

"Don't touch my gun," he said.

Barlow snatched it up and snapped off the safety catch.

"What the—" In panic Heller jumped off the stump.

Barlow shoved the gun against Heller and squeezed the trigger. The sound of the shot rolled through the woods. Then there was silence except for Barlow's panting breath.

Barlow dropped the gun beside the dead man and ducked in among the trees.

He looked back. One outflung hand of the still form almost touched the shotgun. Nobody was coming. A shot during the hunting season would attract no attention. As for possible fingerprints on the gun, the stock wouldn't hold any, and his own combined with Heller's on the trigger and safety catch would only produce smudges.

Again it had gone off without a hitch, but this time there was nobody who had seen it. He walked back to his car.

When he returned home, Dora was dressing. After lunch, he drove her out to Trevan to visit her sister. The afternoon was not unpleasant. There was the memory of the scrawny man lying in the woods with a hole in his chest, but his chief emotion was relief that Heller could no longer menace his existence. The second time one killed was easier than the first.

IT WAS in the Monday morning paper, even briefer than the story a week ago of Alvin Lane's death. George Heller, of 539 Maple Lane, shot and killed himself by accident Sunday morning while hunting near Tier Pond. The police believed that while walking through the woods he stumbled, and the shotgun went off against his chest. Just one of those things which by tomorrow would be forgotten by the police and the newspapers.

Vigorously Barlow dug into work. He was dictating to Ella Gorson when the phone rang. He scooped it up and said a cherry hello.

"Leonard Barlow?" the voice strained through a handkerchief said.

Barlow sat very still.

"What happened, Mr. Barlow?" Ella said shrilly. "You turned white as a sheet."

He stared without seeing her.

"Is that you, Barlow?" the toneless voice demanded.

"Yes," he managed to say.

"You didn't send the money. The deadline was today."

"Give me—" His throat tightened against words. "Give me till tomorrow."

"All right, but not another day. Remember that." The speaker at the other end of the wire hung up.

"Was it very bad news?" Ella asked.

He said tiredly: "It's that investment I made. It's forcing me against the wall."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

Her horse-face, set in lines of sympathy for him, wavered before his eyes. She was in the way. He sent her on an errand.

When she was gone, he strove to collect his thoughts. Starbuck then, he told himself hollowly. But it couldn't be. Starbuck didn't need blackmail money.

He phoned Bob Anchor, his lawyer.

"I need advice, Bob," he said. "I have a deal on the fire that depends on John Starbuck's financial condition."

Anchor's reply was cautious. "I'm also Starbuck's attorney."

"I know. That's why I'm asking you."

"I guess it won't be violating a confidence," Anchor said. "It'll be all over town in a few days, anyway. The fact is, I don't see how Starbuck can save himself from bankruptcy."

"But I thought his furniture store was doing well."

"The usual thing—he over-extended

himself. He bought the building next door for a warehouse and put a lot of improvements into his place. Sales didn't keep up with the increased overhead. Frankly, Lennie, he's finished."

"How much does he need?"

"Five thousand will see him through the next couple of months, but he really needs at least twenty thousand. And his credit is no longer worth a dime."

"Thanks, Bob," Barlow said and hung up.

So it was Starbuck, the honest, upright citizen—driven to blackmail to save himself from ruin. Starbuck, and not Heller, who had seen the murder, and then brought Heller to the pond so that he could go through the motion of finding the body before a witness.

Or perhaps Starbuck hadn't actually seen the murder, but had observed him leave the pond and then put two and two together after the body was found. His demand for one thousand dollars had been a test, and when he had received the money, that had proved to him that Barlow was the murderer. After he had the five thousand dollars, he would demand more because he had to have more. He wouldn't stop.

Heller's death was a mistake. But mistakes, Barlow told himself grimly, could be rectified.

At seven o'clock that evening, when Starbuck's furniture store closed, Barlow was having coffee and cake in the lunchroom across the street. Through the window he saw the store lights go out, and a moment later Starbuck came out and walked briskly east.

Barlow left the lunchroom, got into his car and drove to Athens Road. There were no houses on this stretch, few street lights. He parked and waited. Starbuck was the health fad type; he liked to boast that summer or winter, rain or shine, he walked the two miles to and from his store. He would come this way.

The headlights picked out that tall, broad-shouldered figure approaching. Barlow leaned sideways to the right door. "John," he called.

The edge of the headlights showed Starbuck's frown as he peered at the car. In the darkness he could not quite distinguish Barlow's features.

He came up to the door. "Oh, it's you," he said.

The heavy wrench was ready in Barlow's hand. Starbuck's head was thrust a little way through the door, and Barlow brought the wrench down on his skull.

Barlow caught him as he sagged. He had a sheet ready and wrapped it around that bloody skull. Then he dragged the unconscious man all the way into the car. Starbuck was quite a load, but Barlow was a big man too. When he had the door closed, he listened to the ragged breathing under the sheet. Barlow hit him again with the wrench, through the sheet, and then he could no longer hear Starbuck breathe.

He drove twenty miles to the swamp around Hawk Lake. The last two miles were over a rutted dirt road. Nobody was in this area at night, and even if somebody happened to notice the car there would be no reason to remember the license number.

When he stopped the car and pulled Starbuck out, he found that he was still alive. It didn't matter. He dragged the unconscious body into the swamp. Muck and brackish water came up to his hips and the body was already out of sight, but still he dragged it. When he was up to his shoulders in the swamp, he released Starbuck's arms. Shivering with cold, he compelled himself to wait there ten minutes, to make sure Starbuck had drowned, and then he returned to his car.

His flashlight revealed that a few drops of blood had spattered on the upholstery. He had a liquid cleaner ready for that and got rid of the spots. He had also prepared a complete change of clothing.

No hitch as far as he could see. It was doubtful that the body would be found for weeks or months—if ever. The police would believe that Starbuck had run away because of his business reverses. And even if the body was found, there would be nothing to connect him with the crime.

That night, after Dora was asleep, he fetched the bundle of muddy clothes from his car and burned them in his fireplace. Except the shoes. Those he simply cleaned.

In the bedroom, he stood looking down at Dora sleeping peacefully. He bent over and kissed her smooth brow.

THE phone call came the following afternoon at his office. "Leonard Barlow?" the voice said. It had no substance, no identity—the way a voice from the dead would sound.

"No!" Barlow shouted. "It's impossible!"

Ella turned from her desk to stare at him.

"It's Tuesday and I haven't received the five thousand dollars," the voice said.

As if his hand acted by itself, it slammed the handset down on the cradle. He sat trembling, and he heard somebody moan.

"Mr. Barlow!" Ella said, rising to her feet.

He realized that the moans were dribbling from his own lips. He clamped his teeth together, and for a minute he did not trust himself to speak. Then he said: "Go home, Ella."

"It's only three o'clock, Mr. Barlow."

"I said go home."

She left that office as if fleeing from him.

Convulsively his hands opened and closed. He should have paid the blackmailer, he told himself frantically. Only five thousand dollars. It was easier to murder. But there was nobody left to murder.

But wait, think it through. The blackmailer had extended the deadline from Saturday to Monday, then from Monday to Tuesday, then phoned today to give him one more chance. The blackmailer would gain nothing by exposing his victim. It went further than that. Having already accepted blackmail money, he would expose himself by exposing his victim. His only evidence was what he had seen, and by withholding murder information from the police for more than a week he was now an accessory to murder besides.

Suddenly Barlow was smiling. Simply ignore the blackmailer—that was the answer. And everything would be all right. And he had Dora back as his affectionate wife.

He locked up his office and drove home.

Dora was trying on a new hat in front of the hall mirror. "You're home early, darling," she said as he came in.

"There wasn't anything doing at the office."

He stood behind her. She was wearing a hairdo which left her ears and neck bare. He kissed the smooth white skin behind her ear.

As he kissed her neck, he looked past her chin into the mirror, and he saw an expression of utter disgust in her face. He yanked his mouth away from her.

Her head turned, and now she was smiling. An artificial smile, he knew. That

other expression he had seen in the mirror was the way she really felt about him, he realized.

"You like the hat, darling?" Dora asked.

He said nothing. He turned away from her and ascended the stairs as wearily and laboriously as an old man. He went all the way up to the attic.

The gun was in a shoebox in a trunk. It was a Luger, a souvenir he had brought home from the war. He loaded the gun and shoved it into a pocket and like a very old man went down the stairs.

Dora was in the living room. She had put on her coat and that new hat and was picking up her handbag from the table.

"I'm going shopping," she told him. "I'll be back in—" She stopped. "What's the matter?"

He was leaning against the wall as if he needed support to hold him upright. He said tonelessly, "All along I thought that voice was a man's, but it could have been a woman's."

"Voice?" she said, not taking her eyes off his face.

"I suppose that Sunday morning you had no intention to go to your sister's," he went on hollowly. "You had a date to meet Lane while he was duck hunting on Tier Pond. And you saw."

She studied him calculatingly, then her red mouth curled disdainfully. "So you know? It doesn't matter. I wasn't at Tier Pond. I saw nothing, but I guessed. I couldn't believe that Alvin fell out of the boat. Suddenly a terrible thought came to me. You had found out and murdered him. I had to be sure."

He found himself nodding. "That first thousand dollars you asked for was a test."

"Yes. When I picked it up at the post office under the name of J. B. Julian, I knew beyond doubt that you murdered Alvin." Her face was no longer beautiful —it had too much hate in it. "I couldn't go to the police. I hadn't any real evidence. But there was another way to make you suffer. I wanted to tear your heart out with fear. I wanted to strip you of everything you owned and then leave you as broken and alone as Alvin's death left me."

"But you were affectionate," he muttered pathetically. "You seemed to care for me."

Her bitter laughter was like a physical blow. "I didn't want you to suspect that I knew. Not yet, not till I was through with you. Every time you touched me, kissed me, it was like dying. But I forced myself to endure it."

He pulled his gun out of his pocket, stared at her.

Contempt glittered in her eyes. "You can't do more to me than you've already done by murdering Alvin. Go on, murder me, too."

He spoke as if to himself: "I thought George Heller was the blackmailer. Sunday morning I killed him."

"Oh, God," she said. "I didn't know."

"Then when you phoned yesterday, I thought it was John Starbuck," he went on emptily. "Last night I killed him."

She whispered, "And now you're going to kill me. You're going to kill and kill and never stop."

"No," he said. "I—"

There were no words left in him, nothing in his brain but unendurable horror. He stood limp and broken against the wall, not looking at his wife or at anything.

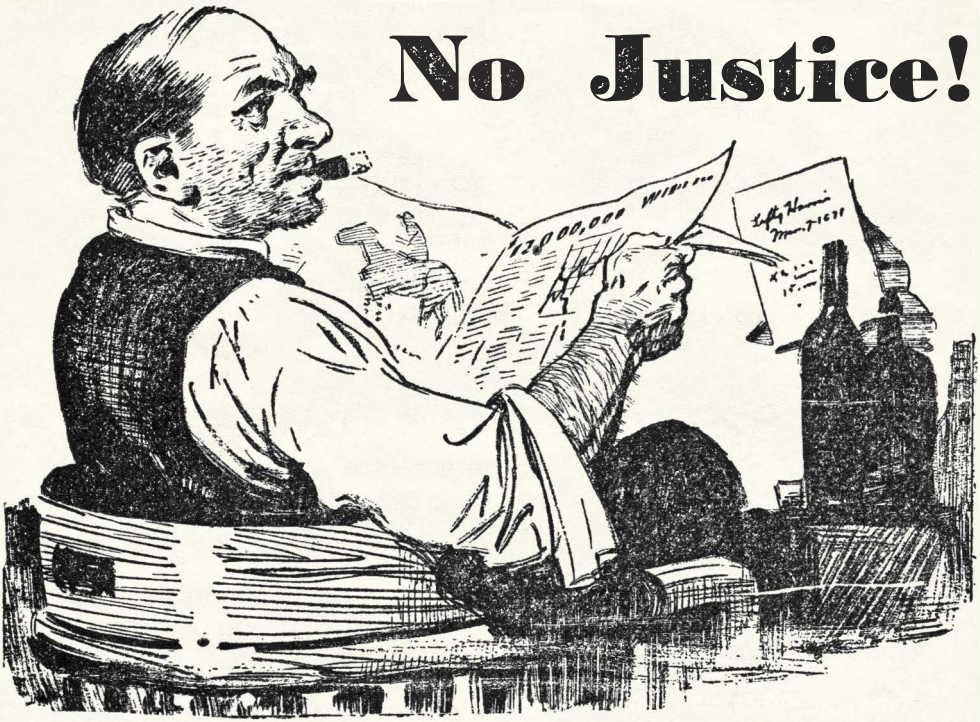
Dora moved then. She walked slowly, quietly, as if not to rouse him. When she reached the hall, she started to run.

Her hand was turning the doorknob when she heard the shot in the living room. Her body stiffened. For a long moment she listened to the silence of the house.

Then she opened the door quickly and went out.

By 15646

# There Ain't No Justice!



***How to have a wonderful crime—at the state's expense!***

I'M DOING a five-year prison stretch, but if that prosecutor had only listened to reason I wouldn't be here. As a matter of fact, it was a mere $1.65 that actually got me those five years . . . and my wife was the one who had started all the trouble.

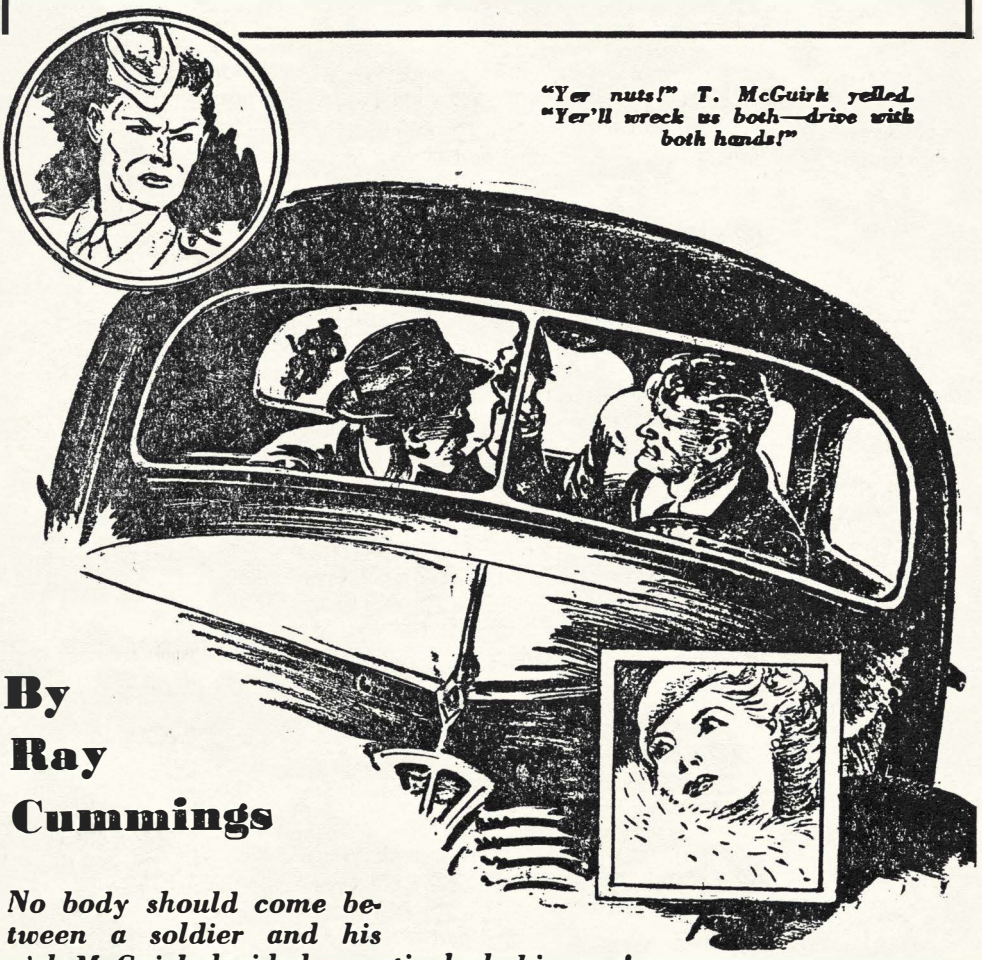
You see, I was living on a budget. My fifteen dollar-a-week salary was hardly enough to keep us, but I had my weekly expenses arranged as economically as any financial genius could budget them.

Here's how my fifteen bucks were spent:

| | |
|---|---|
| Whiskey and beer | $ 8.80 |
| Wife's beer | 1.65 |
| Meat, fish and groceries | (On credit) |
| Rent | (Stalled the landlord) |
| Midweek whiskey | 1.50 |
| Life insurance (on wife) | .50 |
| Cigars and movies | .80 |
| Coal | (borrowed the neighbors') |
| Poker club | .50 |
| Hot tip on horse races | .50 |
| Gambling losses | 2.40 |
| Transportation | (bummed ride) |
| Total | $16.65 |

No need to point out that I was in debt every week—always $1.65 short on my budget. I decided to cut out my wife's beer ($1.65) and then the trouble started. She socked me; I knocked her down. And just for that, the judge gave me five years. There ain't no justice!

# THE BIG STEAL



*"Yer nuts!" T. McGuirk yelled. "Yer'll wreck us both—drive with both hands!"*

**By Ray Cummings**

***No body should come between a soldier and his girl, McGuirk decided—particularly his own!***

T. McGUIRK could see that there was something violently wrong with the soldier. He was sprawled on a wooden bench in a corner of the railroad station smoking room. His cap was on the extreme back of his head, with a shock of tousled brown hair showing in front of it; his khaki blouse was unbuttoned, his tie askew. He was a good-looking, husky young fellow, but now he was a disheveled mess. He wasn't drunk, sleepy, or bored. Obviously he was angry, in fact, the most violently angry person T. McGuirk had ever seen.

You couldn't miss it. His eyes glared into space. His fingers were working as though wanting to strangle somebody. Then he clenched his hands into tight, hard fists, knuckles white.

Fascinated, nevertheless T. McGuirk shuddered. Once the young soldier jumped up. He seemed about to dash off

somewhere, then he slumped back. He had been muttering, apparently cursing to himself; and now, in a chance silence of the smoking room, T. McGuirk heard him mumble. "I'll kill him, that's what I'll do. I'll twist his neck an' kick his teeth in. I'll—"

On the neighboring bench, T. McGuirk's shabby weazened little form shrank within itself. He was about to depart quietly from the vicinity of this fierce violence, when the soldier's next words, uttered in an explosive whisper, arrested him.

"An' him with a diamond ring—maybe a diamond ring worth a thousand dollars—the dirty crook, I'll—"

McGuirk relaxed slowly, thoughtfully. An interested gleam struggled with, and finally replaced, the apprehension in his eyes, which presently began to show sympathy and human understanding. It was becoming perfectly clear to the little man that a strong common bond existed between himself and the soldier—needing only definition.

McGuirk fished into his pocket with a grimy hand and brought out a crumpled cigarette butt. He leaned forward. "Got a match, soldier?"

The soldier glared, sweeping the diminutive T. McGuirk with abstract scorn. Mechanically he handed over a folder of matches.

"Thanks," T. McGuirk smiled. He slumped down on the bench and lighted a butt. "As I often says to me girl, Katie, tobacco is a great solace to them what's in trouble." He seemed about to be ignored. "Ya don't look too happy yerself, soldier. Have a butt? S'all I got, jus' at the moment."

T. McGuirk's thin, unshaven face bore an ingratiating smile. The young soldier was evidently of gentlemanly instincts. He produced a pack of cigarettes.

"Here, take one of these," he growled.

"Why, thanks," T. McGuirk acknowledged. "If ya'll smoke one yerself—"

The soldier did. T. McGuirk graciously lighted it for him. "I been watchin' ya," he offered then. "An' as I often says to me girl, Katie, it's a great comfort to unburden yer troubles onto a sympathetic listener. An' that's me," T. McGuirk put in quickly. The rising storm in the youngster's eyes made him writhe again. "What say we go have a coke? An' if I can help yer—"

The soldier suddenly grinned. "Want a coke? Okay." He stood up. "Come on."

T. McGuirk came nimbly erect. His eyes were level with his husky companion's shoulder. He gazed up reprovingly.

"It's on *me*," he said with dignity. "A coke, *an'* a sandwich. I ain't a wealthy man, but I'm always honored ter have one of Uncle Sam's boys as me guest."

It was a simple, but very sad story that the young soldier finally revealed to T. McGuirk. His name was George Brannigan. Before the war he had been a hardware salesman in the village of Pleasant Valley ten miles away. Working for Uncle, now, would have been all right with him except that it separated him from his girl. She was Gracie Peters, a waitress in Pleasant Valley's only important restaurant. Even the temporary separation would have been okay with George, except for complications.

"But I don't blame her exactly," George was saying earnestly. "We're not married, not engaged—just a sort of an understanding. The reason I stayed in the service is—well, I'm stubborn. I won't go home till Gracie makes up her mind for good. She met this guy during the war and I—"

The other man in the picture was one Bill Jenks, a handsome Army reject, and a garage mechanic in Pleasant Valley. When off duty he apparently dressed and acted like a movie star, with a suave and sophisticated William Powell approach

that girls found irresistible. And Gracie, being only human—

"This," T. McGuirk observed, "is one of the extra hazards of the late, lamentable war, George. Shouldn't oughta be, but it is."

It was a hazard that George had decided must be ended at once. He had just spent all this afternoon with Gracie and things had reached a climax.

"Gracie an' me—we had a fight," George explained. "She said Jenks had phoned her an' he's bought her a thousand-dollar ring—going to give it to her tonight. An' where would Jenks get the money to buy a ring like that I ask you. He's a crook, a slick smooth article an' now I'm goin' back an' kick his teeth in for him. I'll—"

"Take it easy," T. McGuirk murmured soothingly. His slitted eyes gleamed. "Crook or not, a ring like that is pretty powerful medicine. Ya gotta treat it with respect." He glanced alertly about. "Know anything about this Jenks—he a professional, or jest a dishonest no-good?"

"The second. You hear it around a little burg like Pleasant Valley."

"Ya should of pointed it out to Gracie," T. McGuirk observed.

The young soldier snorted. "I did, and what happened? She called me a nasty, small-town gossip. And I couldn't prove anything. That's what started our fight this afternoon. All I can do," George finished gloomily, "is bash his head in. And I'll—"

"You'll wind up in the clink," T. McGuirk stated, "provin' nothin' except yer a sap. Violence is all wrong, George. Nobody gets nowhere usin' it."

McGuirk considered it fortunate that George's plans were nebulous—that at best there was merely an immense amount of illegality mixed up in them. It was now a little after six P.M. George's last train back to camp left the terminal here at Blakesville at 11:10 P.M., but he wasn't going to take it. He had decided now to grab a bus right back to Pleasant Valley and go after the business of squashing Bill Jenks.

"You're gonna go A.W.O.L.?" T. McGuirk was horrified. "A hunted fugitive! George, that's all wrong. How can ya treat Uncle like that—him what's doin' so much to preserve everybody's liberty, an' you get yourself in the guardhouse."

"I'll prove that damn Jenks is a no-good. I'll show him—"

"It's impractical," T. McGuirk insisted. He leaned forward with his hand on George's arm. "Now listen, jus' as a matter o' impersonal interest, tell me more about that diamond ring, an' a few other little questions I wanta ast yer. . . ."

THE Pleasant Valley Garage, at around eight o'clock that same summer evening, was dim and quiet. Bill Jenks, McGuirk found, was simply his employer's gesture of keeping the place open until eight P.M.

The handsome, stalwart Jenks was sitting on a toolbox. Unquestionably he was immensely interested in T. McGuirk, who was sprawled on a cluster of dilapidated tires, talking earnestly.

"I figured you to be just the feller I'm lookin' for, to help me with this job tonight," T. McGuirk said. "Mostly I'm a lone wolf, but the business I got lined up here needs an inside man. An' it pays good enough, so I can afford to split the take."

"Who'd you say suggested me to you?" Jenks wanted to know.

T. McGuirk shot him a knowing, sly look. "There's time for that, after you're in. I don't shoot off my mouth. See what I mean, Jenks?"

"Sure, sure, I get you," Jenks said, a little nervously.

T. McGuirk waved it away. "So now,

leave us get down to business, Jenks. I need a car. You own one, of course?"

"Oh, sure," Jenks agreed. He looked both awed and apprehensive. "This burglary—you're positive it won't be too dangerous?"

"A routine job," T. McGuirk yawned. "I got everything planned; it's all but done. As I says to me girl, Katie, only a fool pulls a job 'less he knows every detail ahead of time. I never miss—but should anything go wrong I need a getaway car. An' somebody to drive it who knows the roads. All ya have to do is wait in the car. I take the risk inside."

"Sure—sure, I get it."

The important matter of Gracie's diamond ring wasn't easy to bring up plausibly, but T. McGuirk managed it finally.

"Say," Jenks said admiringly, "for a little fellow you sure do get around. Yeah, I bought my girl the ring today, over in Blakesville. I 'spose she's already been boastin' about it. Fair enough. She's goin' to the Church Ladies' Aid tonight with her mother. I'm supposed to be at her house at eleven o'clock an' give her the ring. I already phoned her about it."

"Swell," T. McGuirk beamed. "We'll be through by then—an' ya might have a little something else to show her."

It wasn't hard to make the boastful Jenks talk about the ring. Apparently he actually had bought it—on time from a credit jeweler. The down payment he had gotten by half a dozen little jobs that he tried to make sound important to T. McGuirk. The main feature of them was snatching a helpless old woman's purse one dark night in the slums of Blakesville and by luck finding a hundred dollars in it.

*Just a dirty low-down little crook!* Inwardly T. McGuirk was seething, but not enough to destroy his delicate mental processes. Silently he took stock. . . .

George was currently parked in the movie across the street from the Blakesville railroad station where he had promised to sit through the feature at least three times, while T. McGuirk mysteriously was fixing his troubles for him.

"Lemme see the sparkler," T. McGuirk suggested.

Unfortunately Jenks didn't have the ring with him. It was at his home nearby. "Better get it," T. McGuirk said. "We might be delayed and then ya can go right from finishin' up with me, ter yer girl. See?"

They made final arrangements. Jenks was to close the garage, get his ring and car and meet T. McGuirk by the crossroads just outside of Pleasant Valley. Then they'd drive over to Blakesville and pull the job.

"Yer a lucky feller, Jenks," T. McGuirk observed as he stood up, ready to leave. "This night's work'll net yer an even five hun'erd bucks—half a grand. Nice little roll ter flash on yer girl tonight, eh?"

"You said it," Jenks agreed.

"See ya shortly, Jenks," and with a wave of his hand, T. McGuirk shambled from the garage.

IN THE sprawling, dilapidated slums of Blakesville, the sleek black limousine threaded its way smoothly along dim winding streets.

"You sure are a smart worker," Jenks said, "to spot a bankroll in a dump like this."

"It's me business," T. McGuirk agreed. "Turn left. We're almos' there."

Their route led into a shabby section of warehouses, cheap shops and squalid lodging houses with the docks of a greasy river a block or so away. Only a few pedestrians were out and traffic was almost dead. Overhead the summer night sky was leaden, with distant flares of lightning.

"Here we are," T. McGuirk said. "Ya

can pull over there by them shanties."

It was a particularly good spot to park. The nearest street light was quite a distance away so that the car blended in with the shadows of the tumbledown, unoccupied shanties. A few hundred feet away a row of shabby, four-story rooming houses faced them. Only a few of the windows were lit.

"Now listen," T. McGuirk said in a swift, tense whisper. "Ya will stay here in the car and watch. I'm goin' up that fire escape, third floor, second house." He gestured through the car window. "See it?"

A very dim interior light showed up there. "Yes, I see it," Jenks whispered excitedly.

"Ain't nobody home. I verified it. That's their night light."

"What'll I do?" Jenks whispered.

"Yer me outside man in the getaway car jus' in case somethin' should go wrong."

It was very simple. If any shooting started, T. McGuirk would come dashing for the car. Jenks would see him coming, have the motor going, and they'd make their escape.

"An' should it get too hot," T. McGuirk murmured, "ya can beat it without me. But don't—less you have to."

"I won't," Jenks promised.

Then T. McGuirk was out of the car, and disappeared into the darkness.

The third floor window, with a cracked pane of glass and a dirty green shade hanging askew, was partly open from the bottom. T. McGuirk reached for his flashlight and narrowed its beam into the room. Keeping his head well below the sill, he whispered softly, "Don't shoot! It's me—Timothy!"

A startled, mumbled oath answered T. McGuirk. Then, like a cat, he was over the sill and inside. The room was squalid and disheveled with a bed and a small oil lamp that was on the table in the corner.

A big bullet-headed man, sitting in a chair, gasped, "Timothy—what the hell!"

"Shut up, Lefty!" T. McGuirk commanded. "Put that light out! An' keep down from the winder! Duck!"

To T. McGuirk's pal, it sounded like some horrible emergency. The big gunman blew out the light and crouched. Only the wavering little beam from T. McGuirk's flashlight showed in the room and the reflection of it revealed Lefty's big black automatic poised in his hand.

"Put that gat away!" T. McGuirk hissed.

"But Timothy—what's goin' on here—"

T. McGuirk ignored his question and darted his flashlight around in the approved burglar fashion.

"W-what you doin'? What's goin' on here?"

"Shut up! I'm committin' a burglary. Can't a man loot his own joint? Nobody ain't supposed to be here!"

It was certainly too much for Lefty. Obediently he crouched in the darkness, gazing with astonished eyes at his little roommate. T. McGuirk trotted across the room to where a pair of his trousers were hanging on a nail.

"Timothy! What in—"

"Shut up! Can't ya see I'm busy?"

From the trousers T. McGuirk took a big fat roll of bills. Searching around in the pockets he found a grimy piece of paper and a pencil, scribbled a few sentences on the paper. Then he tucked it carefully inside the wad of money and shoved the bankroll into his coat pocket.

"Timothy! Are you nuts? What you doin'?"

"I'm in a rush," T. McGuirk whispered. Then he crouched beside his pal. "Listen, I found a nice young soldier what's gettin' an awful raw deal, Lefty. After him fightin' fer Uncle Sam he's bein' done dirt, so I had ter fix it, see?"

Lefty didn't, and he said so.

"Well, I'm doing just that now," T. McGuirk explained, "an' ya gotta help. Get all yer wits on this, Lefty, an' don't make no errors. Here's what yer gotta do. Go to this address over in Pleasant Valley and—"

"Timothy, are you—"

"Listen ya—it'll take all the brains yer got not ter get this balled up, so yer better keep yer mind on it."

He whispered his instructions and had Lefty repeat them. However, Lefty was still not convinced.

"Yes, but Timothy—"

"Shut up! Don't do no thinkin'—it ain't good fer yer. Give me five minutes ter get outer here, then beat it and telephone like I tol' yer."

A moment later T. McGuirk was out through the window, with the numbed gunman staring blankly after him.

THE excited Jenks had spotted McGuirk running toward the getaway car and quickly opened the door for him. McGuirk slid in and the big limousine glided smoothly away into the darkness.

"You got it?"

"Sure I have," T. McGuirk chuckled. "I never misses."

"Nice work. Say, you're a slick little guy."

"It's an even grand—half for ya. Keep goin' now—let's get away from here in a hurry."

The car picked up speed. "I already divided the swag," T. McGuirk said presently. "Here's yer roll." He handed it over.

"Say, thanks," Jenks acknowledged. "Glad I was able to help you."

"Think nothin' of it," T. McGuirk said graciously. "Now ya better be headin' fer yer girl's house over in Pleasant Valley. Fifty-four Oak Lane, didn't ya say it was? An' ya got her ring?"

Jenks had it all right. With his free hand he gestured toward his jacket pocket.

"Swell," T. McGuirk agreed. "Then ya can drop me mos' anywheres along here." They were well across the business center of Blakesville, and heading toward the northern outskirts. "I gotta get to the Blakesville railroad station. Ain't far, is it?"

"I'll drop you there," Jenks replied. "Hope you're not leavin' town. You an' me—I'd sure like to help you with some other jobs."

"Absolutely," T. McGuirk agreed. "An' I'm gonna speak ter Corky about you. He'll probably look ya up. A swell break fer ya, Jenks—a chanct ter work fer Corky."

"Okay. Glad to help him."

The railroad station was just at the north edge of town and they were almost there. Inwardly T. McGuirk was very pleased. So far all was going well. If only Lefty wouldn't muff his end of it, nothing could go wrong.

"Well, ya can drop me here," T. McGuirk said.

Then suddenly it happened. The wail of a police car sounded behind them; its glaring headlights bearing down on them in a chase!

"Jeez!" Jenks muttered.

McGuirk took a quick look and saw a police car and two motorcycles—a regular screaming cavalcade of the law on the tail of their limousine.

"They been trailin' me—" Jenks murmured. "Why—I never thought—"

"Turn left!" T. McGuirk hissed. "An' step on it!"

They whirled around a corner almost on two wheels and headed out toward the hilly, open country. A moment later, like baying hounds on a scent, the police car

and motorcycles came screaming after them.

Something had gone wrong somewhere. T. McGuirk hadn't anticipated anything like this, and his nimble mind was working overtime to figure a way out.

"Step on it, Jenks!" he rasped. "This the best yer old boat can do?"

They were doing better than seventy and, as the road topped a rise and went down a long sweeping hill, they really picked up speed.

T. McGuirk was puzzled. Why were the police after them? Had Lefty done something wrong? Jenks was white, shattered, clinging to the steering wheel, his foot pressing the accelerator to the floor.

"I never thought—" he was mumbling. "I was sure—"

"What's that mean?" T. McGuirk demanded sharply.

"I—this car isn't mine—I stole it!" Jenks gasped.

"You—" The words stuck in McGuirk's throat. Then at length all he could say was, "We *gotta* shake 'em off. Spare nothing!"

Jenks had certainly picked himself a handsome car, and there wasn't any doubt that it could make speed, but the damnable motorcycles were pulling ahead now. Like little greyhounds, purring and whining with eagerness, they were inching closer and closer. T. McGuirk crouched low on the front seat and flashed a look through the rear window. The headlight eyes seemed only a hundred yards or so behind and the plunging limousine was bathed in their glare.

"Step on it, ya fool!"

"Damn thing won't go any faster!"

The terrified Jenks clung to the wheel. His face was pallid; his beautiful wavy black hair, which undoubtedly was so fascinating to poor George Brannigan's girl, was plastered on his wet forehead.

A yellow-red glare stabbed the night behind them and a shot rang out. Then another. The cops were shooting at their rear tires.

"I'll—I'll—" Jenks muttered thickly. Suddenly T. McGuirk noticed he was holding a nasty little black gun in one hand. "I'll plug 'em—"

"Yer nuts!" T. McGuirk yelled. "Yer'll wreck us! Drive with both yer hands!"

He snatched the gun, dropped it into his pocket. Two shots rang out from behind. One bullet whistled overhead and the other thudded into the rear of the car body. T. McGuirk shuddered. The limousine was approaching a long easy grade and a ray of hope swelled in McGuirk's heart. When the car topped the rise and went down the other side, they would be out of sight of their pursuers for a moment or two.

The limousine went over the rise, with a long down-grade stretching before them. However, two or three hundred yards ahead, a railroad track crossed the highway at right angles. There was a little gatehouse with a big STOP, LOOK AND LISTEN sign. And beside it a loud bell was clanging with a warning, flashing red light. The wooden bars were coming down.

Jenks gasped. Instinctively he jammed on his brakes.

T. McGuirk took one startled look. A speeding passenger train was in the offing to the right; its headlight already bathed the barred crossing with a yellow glare. Then the train whistled—a warning blast that floated through the night mournful as the knell of doom.

McGUIRK had only a second or two to figure it out. Jenks, gasping with horror, seemed to be stepping on both the brake and accelerator at once. But fortunately his instincts made him steer straight.

"Faster!" T. McGuirk suddenly roared.

*(Continued on page 125)*

# THE WITNESS CHAIR

A RECENT fascinating case was that of the St. Louis widow who chose her swindle victims by the stars, recently. This lady of uncertain age, plying the pursuit of astrologer, "saw in the stars" that one of her clients, Walter H. Lutz, smooth-talking realtor and promoter, could make very lucrative investments for her. So she gave him $2,000 to invest in one of his most highly touted enterprises, Zero Hour, Inc. She was so enthusiastic about this venture's prospects that she urged others to get in on it. One of these, a florist, named Halle, put up $300 and signed a 13-week contract to advertise his shop by Zero radio promotion at $10 a week.

Halle became solicitor for various Lutz concerns. It all looked most promising, but Halle at length tired of being paid in nothing but promises. When he learned that other Lutz employes were getting the same in lieu of pay, he informed the Better Business Bureau.

The bureau already had other complaints against Lutz. He seemed to have used his position as head of a private school's fathers' club, as well as the astrologer's boosts, to find victims to swindle in realty and stock deals. It was found that he may have mulcted customers and confidants—mostly widows and elderly men—of nearly $60,000. Lutz's arrest and indictment followed.

Victims described him as a supersalesman and most convincing talker. He had bilked his secretary of a $2,500 equity in her home, and he obtained a like sum in a combined realty and stock swindle from a man whom he got to sign a $3,500 bail bond for him after his arrest. His employes were actually surprised when they learned of his frauds. Lutz pleaded guilty to a charge of obtaining money under false pretenses in one case and drew a sentence of four years' imprisonment.

A CERTAIN man from Iowa must have had a twisted sense of humor, or else he was under a delusion that he was aiding the national defense. He is an interesting crime guinea pig. Whatever his motive, he's now doing three years for impersonating a Federal officer.

As "Sergeant Richard O'Leary," recruiting officer, he prevailed upon officials of the State Reform School of Eldora, Ohio, recently, to free thirty-five boys so

that he might take them to Fort Des Moines to "give them a new chance" in the Army. O'Leary presented proper Army papers at Eldora, but when he got to Ft. Des Moines with a bus load of boys, skeptical army officers checked up.

By the time they discovered the hoax, O'Leary had disappeared. Had he not gone in for another impersonating venture the phoney sergeant might still be at large. But a further essay at recruiting led to his arrest in Kansas.

"O'Leary" was Marion Taylor, 38, of Oelwein, Ia., a 1940 army deserter.

NEW YORK CITY'S law against consorting by known criminals makes it tough for a pickpocket to be seen in a crowd with shady friends. Morris Rosen, professionally known as Yanover, was on the fringe of a sailing crowd at Pier 15 on a sunny morn in late spring with a briefcase in his hand and a raincoat over his arm.

Suspicious detectives, spotting him, charged and collared him, forestalling any lush working he might try. At the police station Yanover was recognized as a dip carded with a record of twelve arrests and several imprisonments dating as far back as 1914. His story of what he was doing at the dock—being with a friend to see another friend sail—didn't impress the magistrate in the Week End Court. And the raincoat on a cloudless day, plus the briefcase with nothing in it, drew some explaining that failed to satisfy the judge.

Yanover protested that he'd gone straight since 1935, working as itinerant barber, that his daughter was to be married, and that his son's due for the army, but all to no avail. He got thirty-five days in the workhouse for meeting crooks and liking a crowd.

DURING their blooming stage out in Los Angeles one spring, sizable bouquets of Bird of Paradise flowers were snipped daily by some elusive thief for about a week. Then one morning detectives on watch caught a young fellow in the act of cutting several blooms.

The culprit turned out to be a dishwasher employed in a nearby one-arm lunch. Admitting he'd been helping himself to the blooms the man said he was prompted by need to relieve inconvenient sneezing caused by his sinuses. Chancing to find that smelling these unique flowers relieved his nasal trouble, he had helped himself to help his sinuses. If he had helped himself get into jail on a petty larceny rap, he just couldn't help it.

GEOGRAPHICAL terms flatter some hard gentlemen, for instance Pittsburgh Phil Strauss of Murder, Inc. On a higher level are names which express personal peculiarities. Diamond Joe was never seen without a sparkling stone as a trade mark. Alec the Milkman always did his prowling early in the morning.

Other nicknames memorialize big moments in an otherwise trifling existence. Lewis the Plunger won $300,000 on the race tracks and tossed it all away in the manner of criminals long before he was sentenced to prison in 1937.

Besides such descriptive terms there are the trade names. Bob Nelson was known as the walking pawn shop of Chicago. Jim the Penman was the first to put forgery on a paying basis. Taxicab Harry would rather go to the workhouse a dozen times over than pay a fare. Funeral Walsh, the pickpocket, was never far behind the undertaker. Good Time Charlie was a parasite in Times Square. Johnny Lead Pipe was a Brooklyn strong man. Pin Cushion Mike used to fascinate Chicago crowds by sticking needles through his cheeks while his brother was busy picking pockets.

There have been many Nanny Goats, diminutive men whom burglars may boost through transoms or hurl across air shafts into open windows. In the quiet nights before the war the chief disturber in London was Flannel Foot the burglar. As his name indicates he was considerate enough to tie strips of flannel about his shoes in order not to alarm the occupants of the houses he raided. Scotland Yard had several hundred pages of complaints regarding his nocturnal activities and London Bobbies were promised a substantial reward and two weeks vacation if they caught him.

## The Big Steal

*(Continued from page 122)*

Like a plunging juggernaut the heavy limousine crashed through the flimsy barrier. It barely touched the tracks as it crossed. For a split second the horrified T. McGuirk thought the huge streamlined locomotive would crash them. Then they were tearing through the wooden barrier-rail at the other side, the train lumbering past behind them.

"Slow up—turn here," T. McGuirk snapped.

A small country road branched sharply to the right, leading off into the woods. They went into it on two wheels.

"The emergency, yer fool!" T. McGuirk gasped. "Slow us up!"

Maybe Jenks got the emergency on and maybe he didn't. In any event, the car slackened speed as the wheels tangled with the heavy underbrush. Suddenly a tree loomed ahead. There was a shuddering, sickening impact, and the tinkling clatter of breaking glass. Then a heavy silence.

A few seconds later McGuirk gingerly moved his arms and legs and was relieved to find that he was all right.

Jenks disentangled himself from the steering wheel. His pallid face was blood-smeared from the broken windshield which had cut his head.

T. McGuirk gripped him. "Come on, get yer wits. We gotta get away from here—they're comin'!"

Diagonally through the woods, the lights of the police car and motorcycles were visible. They were crossing the railroad track now and at any moment they'd spot the wrecked car in the little patch of woods. Its broken headlights were still glaring. T. McGuirk tried to turn them off but they wouldn't work.

"Gimme my gun!" T. McGuirk suddenly became aware that Jenks was clutching him. "It's mine," Jenks insisted.

"Shut up! C'mon—run!"

"I'll shoot it out with them—"

"An' get yerself the chair, ya fool—leggo me!"

Jenks' eyes were blazing; he seemed to have gone insane. With powerful hands he gripped the little man and tried to seize the gun from his pocket.

"Quit it!" T. McGuirk gasped. "Can't kill people—that's all wrong. Ya'll get the chair—"

"Don't you tell me what to do!"

"Leggo me—ya can't have the gun—yer nuts!"

"You been tellin' me what to do long enough!" Jenks panted. He had the frail, weazened little McGuirk twisted back in a corner of the seat. "You got us into this—you damned little runt—and while I'm at it I'll take that other five hundred of the loot."

"Okay, yer the boss," T. McGuirk suddenly mumbled. "Don't hurt me—here's yer gun—"

T. McGuirk whipped the gun out of his pocket and like a flash set the butt of it down hard on Jenks' head. Jenks slumped against the wheel, temporarily dead to the world.

The police were treading through the woods.

T. McGuirk lingered only for an instant; then he was out of the car, moving away stealthily from the scene. He didn't go very far. Instead he crouched in the thickets peering, listening.

The police reached the wrecked car.

"Hey, Sarge, look—"

They had found the roll of bills in Jenks' pocket and a dirty little slip of paper with scrawled, penciled words. It bore the name of William Jenks, Pleasant Valley, followed by 20-FIVES; 10-TENS; 5 TWENTIES; 4-FIFTIES and signed, Corky. It was a list of the bills comprising the bankroll which Jenks was carrying.

"Sarge! If this ain't a wad of queer stuff—counterfeit money— This bird must

have been passing the stuff for some big-shot."

Jenks was evidently coming to now. McGuire didn't wait to find out what he might be trying to tell the cops. The important thing was that it turned out to be a nice haul for the Blakesville police—this young crook with a stolen car, a loaded gun on the seat beside him, and a roll of counterfeit bills in his pocket.

Silently T. McGuirk slid away into the darkness.

"YA CAN breathe easy now," T. McGuirk said. "Yer troubles is all fixed up, George. S'help me, I'm tellin' ya—no more worries.

T. McGuirk had rescued the young soldier from the theater and they were back in the Blakesville railroad station.

"Get yer bags now an' take yer train back," T. McGuirk insisted. "Everything's Jake."

"You're tellin' me that Bill Jenks got arrested tonight?" George said wonderingly. He was pleased.

"S'what I heard," T. McGuirk affirmed. "Seems the cops picked him up in a stolen car which had crashed into a tree while they were chasing him. He's safe in the clink now."

The young soldier surveyed his beaming little friend with amazement. "Say, you certainly do find out things in a hurry. You're not stringin' me?"

"S'elp me," T. McGuirk said with raised hand. "Things get around, yer know. Yer a lucky guy, George. Gracie sure will realize what a narrow escape she had from this here dirty crook. It's better'n jus' a stolen car—"

"What you mean, better?"

"Seems this Jenks is a henchman o' the big-shot, Corky."

"Corky?"

"Ya never heard o' him?" T. McGuirk

said incredulously. "Corky the Counterfeiter? He's what the New York police'd give their eyeteeth ter nab. Seems Jenks had a roll o' this Corky's phony money on him."

"What do you know!"

"A big scandal for Pleasant Valley," T. McGuirk added beamingly. "I wouldn't doubt but Gracie already has heard of it. C'mon, leave us phone her—yer train isn't due fer thirty minutes."

George's husky body filled the little phone booth, but he left the door open. T. McGuirk stood at his elbow, listening with immense interest. And it was certainly an interesting conversation. 54 Oak Lane in Pleasant Valley was at this exact moment in a considerable turmoil. The Pleasant Valley police were there. They had been tipped off by an anonymous telephone call that a notorious young counterfeiter named Jenks would be arriving there about eleven o'clock with a roll of the queer money on him.

"Well—well," T. McGuirk murmured.

That anonymous tip to the police had been Lefty's part in the proceedings, and he hadn't muffed it.

Gracie was thrilled to death by all the excitement and prominence it would bring her in quiet little Pleasant Valley. Fortunately there was no hint that she might be implicated in the affairs of the notorious Jenks. How could there be—a girl of her standing in the Church Ladies' Aid, and she hardly knew Jenks anyway.

T. McGuirk stood by the phone booth, beaming. Obviously all was well between George and Gracie. They seemed to have forgotten Jenks.

"Tell her the Blakesville police picked up Jenks over at the Junction," T. McGuirk put in.

George turned briefly from the phone. "The Pleasant Valley police already know it. They just got a call from Blakesville.'

## The Big Steal

With his worries gone, George sounded quite inspired now.

Twenty minutes later T. McGuirk stood slouching at the train gate watching George as he went down the incline with a crowd. George turned, grinned and waved.

T. McGuirk's grimy hand waved back. Then he shambled away.

"Ya see, Lefty, it was a pathetic situation—that nice young soldier at outs with his girl. An' I was sure glad ter toss that young squirt Jenks in the clink. That's the kind has all the makin's of a killer."

T. McGuirk had returned to his lodging house room and was earnestly explaining his evening's activities.

"So you're a Boy Scout with a good deed a day," Lefty agreed. "An' what you got out of it was exactly nothin'."

"Well, I wouldn't say jus' that," T. McGuirk retorted. "A man deserves reward fer his honest endeavor." A very handsome diamond ring was suddenly in T. McGuirk's grimy palm. "Wasn't no sense in me leavin' this sparkler in Jenks' pocket now was there, Lefty?"

Lefty examined the ring with judicial, appraising eyes. "Good work, Timothy. Ike'll give us maybe three, four hun'erd for it."

"Which is beside the point, Lefty." T. McGuirk chuckled at an idea that just came to him. "Those hick policemen are sure excited over a chanct at nabbin' Corky the Counterfeiter. Seems they never heard o' him, but they're sure after him now."

Lefty looked puzzled. "I was gonna ask you about that. This bird Corky—I ain't never heard of him either."

"Oh well, he was jus' me own invention," T. McGuirk said modestly. "We needed somebody like him." T. McGuirk sighed. "Makes me realize everybody's got *some* dooty, Lefty. An' nobody ought never go A.W.O.L. on it."

*(Continued from page 29)*

*"Not a bad little car. Same make as ours, isn't it?"*

*"Yes, Harry."*

She imagined the fussy little sounds he'd be making, his shifting in the seat, the reek of the pipe.

*"You're going pretty fast, aren't you, Helen?"*

*"Yes I am."* She was shocked to hear the echo of her own words, to hear that she had answered aloud the words spoken in her imagination. Her foot pressed down on the gas pedal.

Seventy. Seventy-five. Eighty. Eighty-five.

How stupid to imagine Harry beside her. Harry was dead. Harry was in the cemetery way up north in Brayton. Stupid, all right.

The glove compartment door clacked open. Her hands tightened on the wheel and in abrupt horror she turned her head, looked at it. Harry had . . . . Of course! The vibration had dropped it open.

It had to be that.

Her eyes flashed back to the road as the wheels on the right hand side dropped off onto the shoulder. She yanked the car back into the road but it slowed, screaming of torn rubber, toward the other side. The left wheels dropped off. She held it for a moment, thinking that she was going to come out of it, but she felt the inevitable lift of the right wheels, the teetering moment, the rolling, rocking crash into the black water.

The sun went out of the world and the smash of water coming in the window drove her back away from the wheel. She clawed toward the window. It was far away, a dozen feet away, a mile away, a million miles away. . . .

Dim bubbling noise. Air escaping somewhere. No! Of course not. Time for Harry to clean out the pipe. Moisture in it, bubbling with each breath.

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