



NOW 32 MORE PAGES! **25¢**
MAR.

NEW DETECTIVE ZINE



**DEATH
LIVES
HERE!**

A TALE OF
DARK MYSTERY
by WALLACE
UMPHREY

NO BODY BUT YOU

by G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

JOHN D. MACDONALD • WILLIAM ROUGH • PETER PAIGE *MANY OTHERS*

Send Only \$1

WE WILL SEND ANY ITEM YOU CHOOSE FOR APPROVAL UNDER OUR MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

Simply indicate your selection on the coupon below and forward it with \$1 and a brief note giving your age, occupation, and a few other facts about yourself. We will open an account for you and send your selection to you subject to your examination. If completely satisfied, pay the Expressman the required Down Payment and the balance in easy payments of \$5 a month. Otherwise, return your selection and your \$1 will be refunded.



A408/C331 \$125
7 Diamond Engagement Ring, matching 8 Diamond Wedding Band. 14K yellow Gold. Send \$1, pay 11.50 after examination, 12.50 a month.



A301/C112 87.50
3 Diamond Engagement Ring, matching 3 Diamond Wedding Band. 14K yellow Gold. Send \$1, pay 7.75 after examination, 8.75 a month.



A202/C97 \$55
5 Diamond Engagement Ring, matching 5 Diamond Wedding Band. 14K yellow Gold. Send \$1, pay 4.50 after examination, \$5 a month.



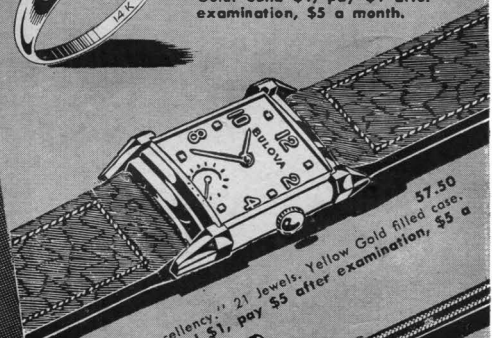
D404 69.50
Man's Diamond Ring with 2 Diamonds, pear-shaped simulated Ruby. 14K yellow Gold. Send \$1, pay 5.95 after examination, \$7 a month.

SEND FOR FREE CATALOG

Prices Include Federal Tax



Genuine 1 Carat Zircon F190 15.95
Gleaming 1 Carat Zircon with 2 side white Zircons. In 14K yellow Gold. Send \$1, pay \$1 after examination, \$5 a month.



M413
Bulova "His Excellency." 21 Jewels. Yellow Gold filled case. Leather strap. Send \$1, pay \$5 after examination, \$5 a month.



R459 49.50
Bulova "Her Excellency." 21 Jewels. Yellow or white Gold filled case. Cord band. Send \$1, pay \$4 after examination, \$5 a month.

Prices Include Federal Tax

SEND \$1 WITH COUPON — PAY BALANCE OF DOWN PAYMENT AFTER EXAMINATION.

L. W. Sweet, 25 West 14th St. (Dept. P9)
New York 11, N. Y.

Enclosed find \$1 deposit. Send me No. _____
Price \$ _____. After examination, I agree to pay \$ _____ and required balance monthly thereafter until full price is paid, otherwise I'll return selection and you will refund my dollar.

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE _____

L.W.Sweet

MAIL ORDER DIVISION FINLAY STRAUS, INC.
25 W. 14th St., NEW YORK 11, N. Y. Dept. P9

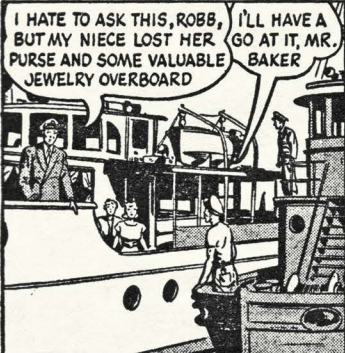
BILL FOUND MORE THAN TREASURE WHEN...



RADIO FROM THE "OLD MAN" HIMSELF. HE WANTS THIS CREW SENT TO HIS YACHT PRONTO!

WONDER WHAT'S UP?

CHIEF DIVER BILL ROBB, EX-NAVY SALVAGE OFFICER, IS RESTING BETWEEN DIVES TO A SUNKEN SHIP IN HOLLISTER BAY WHEN...

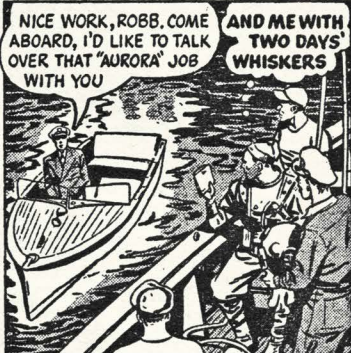


I HATE TO ASK THIS, ROBB, BUT MY NIECE LOST HER PURSE AND SOME VALUABLE JEWELRY OVERBOARD

I'LL HAVE A GO AT IT, MR. BAKER



WHAT LUCK! I'VE FOUND IT



NICE WORK, ROBB. COME ABOARD, I'D LIKE TO TALK OVER THAT "AURORA" JOB WITH YOU

AND ME WITH TWO DAYS' WHISKERS



I'LL DELAY INTRODUCTIONS UNTIL WE GET ROBB OUT OF HIS WORKING CLOTHES

WHAT A GIRL!



HERE'S SHAVING TACKLE AND SOME CLEAN WHITES

THANK YOU, SIR



WHAT A SLICK-SHAVING BLADE! SOMETHING SPECIAL, SIR?

WELL, YOU COULD SAY SO... THIN GILLETTES ARE EXTRA KEEN AND LONG-LASTING



I HANDLED A SIMILAR SALVAGE JOB IN NAPLES AND IT WORKED PERFECTLY

H-M-M, THINK YOU COULD HANDLE THIS ONE?

HE'S THE BEST-LOOKING MAN I EVER SAW



IF YOU WANT QUICKER, EASIER AND BETTER-LOOKING SHAVES AT A SAVING, THIN GILLETTES ARE JUST YOUR DISH. NO OTHER ECONOMY BLADE EVEN COMES CLOSE TO THIN GILLETTES FOR KEENNESS AND LONG LIFE. THEY FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR EXACTLY, TOO, THUS PROTECTING YOUR FACE FROM THE SCRAPE AND IRRITATION OF MISFIT BLADES. ALWAYS ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES





ALL STORIES NEW—
NO REPRINTS 25¢

NEW DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Vol. 11

Contents for March, 1948

No. 2

TWO COMPLETE NOVELS

OBJECTIVE—DEATH.....**Curt Hamlin** 8

Seven years in jail can be sanctuary . . . if when you get out murder stalks you for a crime you didn't commit!

NO BODY BUT YOU.....**G. T. Fleming-Roberts** 58

When poison isn't lethal, but candy kills . . . when a suicide isn't dead, but a live girl is . . . when killers go free and cops go nuts—shamus, take this case—if you dare!

NOVELETTE

DEATH LIVES HERE!.....**Wallace Umphrey** 102

They live too easy and die too hard; they'll trade your dough for a number in a morgue . . . you're in this town to stay, brother—because Death Lives Here!

CRIME FICTION

ONE VOTE FOR MURDER.....**John D. MacDonald** 38

The dead don't talk—but their friends do—and horror creeps in City Hall corridors with a mayor who could reform everything—but his trigger finger!

DIE, LITTLE LADY.....**Peter Paige** 54

Shock treatment can be fatal to a weak heart—but don't make any mistakes about your victim!

BURY ME DEEP.....**William Rough** 84

Out of the night they came, the snarling little henchmen of homicide, to track down a victim who sought his final sanctuary from their doom—in the Death House itself!

SPECIAL FEATURES

THE THIRD DEGREE.....**Hallack McCord** 6

STRANGE TRAILS TO MURDER.....**Lee** 82

SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS.....**M. E. Ohaver** 99

CIPHER SOLVERS' CLUB..... 57

THE BEST IN CRIME FICTION

Published bi-monthly by Fictioneers, Inc., a subsidiary of Popular Publications, Inc., at 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, 16, Illinois. Editorial and Executive Offices, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, 17, N. Y. Henry Steeger, President and Secretary, Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice-President and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter May 23, 1946, at the Post Office, at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1948, by Fictioneers, Inc. This issue is published simultaneously in the Dominion of Canada. Copyright under international Copyright Convention and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction, in whole or in part, in any form. Single copy, 25c. Annual subscription for U.S.A., its possessions and Canada, \$1.50; other countries 38c additional. Send subscriptions to 205 East 42nd Street, New York, 17, N. Y. For advertising rates, address Sam J. Perry, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, 17, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts, enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope for their return, if found unavailable. The publishers will exercise care in the handling of unsolicited manuscripts, but assume no responsibility for their return. Any resemblance between any character, appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional. Printed in the U.S.A.

"LOOK, DAD! They're wearing 'em, too!"



Lee-the 6 to 1 favorite



Lee Matched Shirts and Pants



Lee felt Denim Overalls

YOU'LL learn why Lee Matched Shirts and Pants and Lee Overalls lead the next brand by "6 to 1,"* once you wear them.

Lee "Tailored Sizes" give you perfect fit whether you're tall, short, slim or stout... they provide you with more comfort and better appearance.

Lee fabrics (used only in Lee Work Clothes) wash better and give you longer wear.

HERE'S THE GUARANTEE YOU GET WITH EACH LEE GARMENT... your Lee garment must look better, fit better and wear longer than any other you have ever worn, or you can have a new pair free or your money back.

THERE'S A LEE FOR EVERY JOB!

BUY LEE WORK CLOTHING AT LEADING STORES COAST-TO-COAST

**In a nation-wide survey conducted by a prominent publishing company.*

THE H. D. LEE COMPANY, INC.

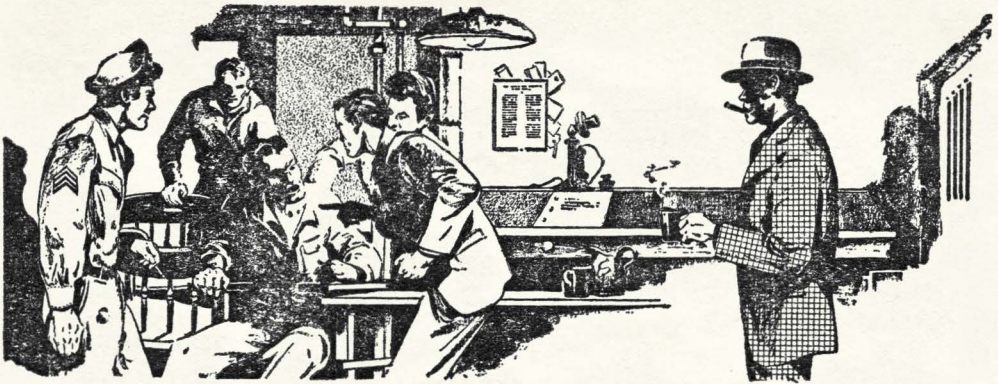
Kansas City, Mo. • Minneapolis, Minn. • Trenton, N. J.
San Francisco, Calif. • South Bend, Ind. • Salina, Kansas

Jeit Denim Overalls • Union-Alls
• Matched Shirts and Pants •
Dungarees • Cowboy Pants



COPYRIGHT 1948
THE H. D. LEE CO., INC.

WORLD'S LARGEST MANUFACTURER OF UNION-MADE WORK CLOTHES



THE THIRD DEGREE

By Hallack McCord

SO YOU THINK you'd make a pretty good detective, eh? Well, here's your chance to test yourself and find out. Below are listed nineteen questions dealing with crime investigation and criminals. If you can answer fifteen or more of them correctly, chances are you'd be a first-rate sleuth. Good luck!

1. In the slang terminology of the convict, what are "active citizens"?

2. Generally speaking, does a witness tend to exaggerate or understate?

3. If a crook who operates a dice game told you he was looking for his "ax," what would you think he wanted?

4. "Buttons" is an expression used in reference to: Gambling joints? Policemen?

5. When a detective has an excellent memory for faces, it is said that he has a c-----e--.

6. Could the age of a murder victim be determined by his skeleton?

7. If the police chief sent you out to bring in a "Feero," you would return with a: firebug? pickpocket?

8. What is the difference between a "flatfoot" and a "flathead"?

9. True or false? "Iso" means "isolation cell."

10. Ballistically speaking, what is the meaning of the term "barrel time"?

11. If a detective friend of yours told you he had just picked up a "knuck," which would you believe he had just

brought into headquarters: An arsonist? A pickpocket? A jewelry thief?

12. Normally, a crook would go to a "pigeon joint" in order to: Buy burglar tools? Buy food? Buy stolen diamonds?

13. If a shady character acquaintance of yours told you he had "just received his sheepskin," you would know that he had just: Escaped from prison? Been graduated from college. Been given a pardon from prison?

14. If a man were found dead with his throat cut and his shirt collar buttoned would you suspect murder or suicide?

15. Why might a jewel thief "skin" a pearl?

16. True or false? Wounds on the abdomen are found in suicide cases.

17. "Tears" is the criminal slang term for: Pearls? Diamonds? Emeralds?

18. True or false? In the slang of the "low-class underworld," "face lace" means whiskers.

19. In normal suicide cases, the entrance wound of the bullet will be smaller than the exit wound. Yes or no?

(Answers on page 37)

*they can't stop
you in the
Armored Cavalry!*



HISTORY's greatest heroes ride with you in spirit in the U. S. Army's glory-covered Armored Cavalry. It's the fastest moving, hardest hitting combat team in the world.

You ride in the great tradition of Jeb Stuart and Phil Sheridan. But you move twice as fast and hit ten times as hard. You inherit the mantle of Patton's incomparables who swept across Africa, broke the line at St. Lo and hurled shattering thunderbolts at the heart of Nazidom.

The Armored Cavalry offers big jobs for big men. Not big in size alone. But big in courage and brains. Men who can take it, who crave the excitement,

high adventure and fast-moving life of this proud fighting outfit.

You're more than a soldier in the Armored Cavalry. You're Artilleryman, Infantryman, Tanker and Cavalryman—with the hardest hitting qualities of all four.

If you have a talent for motors and guns, if you like action, if you want to learn leadership, this is the job for you: High pay. Good food and quarters: Travel opportunities. A chance to further your education.

Visit your U. S. Army and U. S. Air Force Recruiting Station:

CAREERS WITH A FUTURE

**U. S. Army and
U. S. Air Force**

**U. S. ARMY
AND U. S. AIR FORCE
RECRUITING SERVICE**





OBJECTIVE- DEATH

By
Curt Hamlin

Seven years in jail can be sanctuary . . . if when you get out murder stalks you for a crime you didn't commit!

CHAPTER ONE

Meeting at Night

IT WAS FUNNY about the cigarettes. The taste of them. Every time I tried to smoke one I'd get this sourness in my mouth.

The other thing was, I could smell my-

He must have gone nuts, because he kept jerking the trigger over and over. . . .

self. I was wearing the kind of clothes they give you. A flannel cap and a cheap suit with high-water pants. The stuff was clean but it stunk of the chemicals they used to disinfect it.

And I felt itchy.

The train was a local. It left at noon and got in at one thirty-five. I went through the gates keeping in the middle of the crowd, with the cap pulled down and one hand kind of shielding my face. I wasn't worried about cops, but I was about Axness. Axness scared me.

The depot is at the end of Sixth Street. The first block is nothing but a lot of parking places and there's an old USO building with some lawn around it. After that you run into a flock of cheap hotels and drug stores and drinking joints. I wasn't walking too fast, but I made good time, and then I got to the corner of Glisan and this news-kid was yelling and holding up a late edition of the *Journal* so I could see the headline. Black, thick letters stretching clear across the top of the front page.

MIKE MARSH FREED

I gave him a nickle and took a copy quick and went on, not wanting to stand around. This thing hit me like a fist in the gut.

Between Couch and Davis there was a bath-and-barber place run by a couple of little Jap women. It looked as good as any so I went in and ordered a tub. They gave me soap and a towel and one of the Jap dames asked, "You want me scrub back?"

I said, "Hell, no." I was embarrassed and the two of them must have thought that was funny because they started to laugh, showing me all their teeth. Maybe they were kidding, but anyway I bolted the door. I stripped, letting the water run hot and deep, and when I was soaking I reached for the paper and read it.

The pictures were in the center. A big

one of me and smaller ones of Phillips and Edith Lee and Evans, and even of Breem. None of Sam Axness. The story filled the whole first column. At the top it said—

JEWEL ROBBER RELEASED TODAY

Ex-Private Investigator
Serves Only Seven Years

Get that. Only seven years. Only seven, stinking, lousy years. And for a job I didn't even pull.

This reporter must have dug around plenty in the old files. He told everything. How Evans was a commission diamond broker and Axness had hired him to sell nineteen big stones worth about half a million dollars. How Axness had decided Evans should be guarded so he arranged with the Marsh and Phillips Detective Agency to keep him under surveillance. We took the job, and I tailed Evans, only the broker didn't know anything about it. That was Axness' idea. Anyway, the fifth night after I started, the cops got an anonymous tip so they went out and found Evans shot in the back, with my gun beside him and the diamonds gone. Then they found me half a block away, lying in an alley with a knot on my skull.

About there, the guy who did the writing really warmed up. He told how ballistics proved it was my gun did the shooting. I claimed I was sapped, and the gun lifted, and at first the cops almost believed me. Only after investigation it turned out that Phillips, Axness, and I were the only ones who knew Evans was carrying those stones, or that I was tailing him. Axness wouldn't cop his own stuff, because it wasn't even insured. And Phillips had an alibi.

The reporter must have sweat blood trying to explain that alibi. First he told about Edith Lee. How she was the agency steno and a very beautiful blonde, only what he called kind of impetuous. Edith's story was that Phillips had been with her

the night Evans was shot. The whole night, from six o'clock until about eight the next morning. It wasn't a reason you could give for skipping church but it satisfied the cops. They decided I had shot Evans, and then stashed the stones, and gone back and knocked myself out to make it look good.

So did the jury.

It was continued on page two and mostly it covered the trial. How Evans had been wheeled into court on a hospital stretcher. He didn't testify because the slug had damaged his spine and he couldn't move or even speak. All he did was lie there, glaring at me. By now he could talk again, but he was still paralyzed and always would be. Right at the end there was a paragraph saying that the diamonds had never been recovered. Breem was only mentioned once in the whole thing. He was a kid we hired part-time when we needed an extra op. The week all this happened he wasn't working and I don't know yet why they pulled in his name.

The tub was cooling off. I ran more hot water. This pounding came at the door and one of the Jap dames started yelling. I finally made out she was telling me, "More water—more money."

I told her to keep her skirt on.

Going back to the news story, it almost made me laugh the way they handled Sam Axness. Called him a prominent businessman and diamond fancier. Diamond fancier, hell. The only reason he put his surplus into stones was because they're easier to hide, and the income tax boys can't trace them like they can cash in the First National. He practically runs this town. Games, dames, or dream powder—buy or sell—see Sam. He owns a big shanty on Westover Terrace, and every Sunday he drops five in the collection plate at church. Nothing hangs under his arm. But just the same . . .

A week after I was sent up, he came to see me. Like everybody else, he thought I

had his damned stones. He wanted them. He told me some of the things he would do to get them. Do to me. He told me if you shove a redhot iron into a man's armpit, or tear his nails off, one by one, he remembers things he didn't know he knew before. He meant what he said and he had a way of saying it. Times after that I'd dream, and wake up with this yell coming out of my throat and the rest of the stiff's shouting, and pounding their bed springs, and telling me to shut up. Even soaking in that hot water I was scared cold. The kind of mad scared that makes you want to hit somebody or break something. I took it out on the newspaper. I tore it in strips and wadded it into a ball and threw it as hard as I could at the floor. When I was dressing I thought it wouldn't be a good idea to leave it like that so I stuffed the mess into my pocket.

I let one of the Japs shave me, heavy on the bay rum. Then I walked uptown to a store and bought a complete new outfit. Shoes, suit, hat, and all. Even a couple of handkerchiefs. I had to wait two hours for the fitter to finish with the suit, but it was worth it. I felt better and I smelt better, and I didn't look so much like that picture in the paper.

THE NEXT THING I wanted was a drink.

It was just five o'clock when I got to this place on Washington. I ordered a double rye. I stood with my back to the bar, facing the street. The rye came and I put it down quick and told the man to bring me another.

There was nothing special about the place. Small and dark, the way most of them are. Tall, chrome-and-leather stools, and a few booths, and a skinny bartender wearing a white apron and a blank expression. I was the only customer until the girl came in. The first I saw she was in the doorway, kind of hesitating. The light was behind her, and if she was wear-

ing a slip it didn't show, and I could see about all there was to see. When she crossed and stood next to me I caught the odor of bruised rose petals, strong enough to chew. I got to thinking about how long seven years was, the way you will, and my hands balled into fists with the nails driving into the palms.

She ordered a Manhattan.

It didn't seem to bother her if I looked, so I looked plenty. She was something. Dark complexioned, like an Italian or a Mex, and with those big, satiny eyes. She was wearing a tight, white silk dress and the things under it were all any women ever needed. Her legs were slender and tanned and she wasn't wearing stockings, so you could see the smooth texture of the skin. Black hair and big, full lips that made you want to reach over and nibble. When the Manhattan came, she licked at it. Honest to God, that's what she did. Ran her tongue out the way a cat would over cream and let it slide along the rim of the glass. And all the time watching me sideways through lashes that were about an inch long.

I got to tingling.

After awhile she said, not like it was important or anything, "You're staring."

"Am I?"

"Is something wrong?"

"No." I went back to my rye. "No."

"You're sure?"

"I told you, didn't I?"

"But you look so funny. Like . . ."

"Like what?"

"Well—sick, sort of."

"Maybe I am."

"Sick?"

"Maybe." I made myself smile. It hurt. Like I was shaping it with wire cutters. I said, "This routine isn't getting anywhere. Let's start over. Let's start with me buying you a drink."

She could have said no, but she didn't. She gave me this funny look, and then she said, "I've got a drink."

"You want another one, don't you? A man can't stand on one leg."

"You really want to buy me one?"

"I'll twist your arm to make you take it. See if I won't."

She said, real slow and kind of putting her head back, "I'll bet you would. You really would."

That's when I knew she wanted to play.

She picked up her glass but not to drink. Instead she turned her head and glanced casually back over my shoulders. So we went back. In the last booth, where it was darkest, knee-to-knee under the table. My pulse sang and it was all I could do to keep from shouting.

She finished the Manhattan. "You can twist my arm now, if you want."

I wanted, all right, but I didn't. The bartender brought more rye and another Manhattan. She said, "To us."

"To us." We drank. We grinned at one another. I asked what her name was.

"Sara. Sara Mitchell."

"I'm Mike Marsh."

"Oh." That's just the way she said it. "Oh." The name didn't seem to mean a thing to her. She reached out and squeezed my hand. "Glad to meet you, Mike."

"Likewise."

"I mean it."

"You think I don't?"

We went on that way. Small talk. We had more drinks. "To us."

"Yeah. To us."

"Did you ever play football, Mike?"

"Once or twice."

"I thought you did. You've got shoulders like you did."

"I did. A long time ago, though."

"Uh-huh." She was fiddling with the stem of her glass. "What do you do now, Mike?"

Carefully I said, as though it didn't matter, "This and that. Mostly that."

"What?"

"Maybe you don't want to know."

"But I do."

"You think you do, but maybe you don't."

"Why, for Heaven's sake?"

"Skip it."

That stopped her for awhile. She wasn't looking at me. She was studying her hands, rubbing the fingers together. Pretty soon she said, "Mike."

"Yeah?"

"You remember when I said you looked like—well—like you were sick?"

"I remember."

"It was because you're so pale. Like you've been inside a long time."

"Inside what?"

"Just—inside."

That did it. My cheek started twitching. Every couple of seconds I could feel it. I kept staring at her and wanting her, and there was all this other stuff bubbling inside my skull. I blew up. I said, "Look." Maybe I was shouting. I said, "You want to know? Okay. Sure I been inside. For seven long, lousy years I been inside. Today I'm out. Just today. Get me?"

"Y-yes, Mike."

"So now you know. Like it?" I was trying to get up. I was through and I was leaving. I couldn't. She had her hands dug into the front of my coat, holding on. I told her to let go.

"Please, Mike."

"Let go."

"Please."

I was twisting her wrists and I did it hard enough to feel the flesh give. It must have hurt plenty but she wouldn't let go. Fat tears squeezed from under her lids and just the same she hung on the way a kid hangs on when he thinks he's going to get a beating. She was whimpering and I couldn't get the words at first, but finally I did.

"Mike. You poor damned fool, Mike. You think any of that makes a difference to me."

She looked as though she meant it.

I stopped twisting her wrists. She pulled me back down.

She didn't say anything for awhile after that. She was crying and I guess I was a little, too. Then I started to tell her the story only I talked so fast she didn't even get half of it. She reached up and put her hand across my mouth. I bit it. Not hard. Just sort of nuzzling. There was this little hard place, like a callous, at the base of her middle finger. I bit that. She got to laughing, and so did I, with her fingers still burning on my lips. It took a long time to stop. The bartender must have thought we were crazy. He was leaning over the counter, his eyes stuck out and his jaw slipped all the way to his belt.

When we did get quieted down she told me to begin at the beginning. I did.

You can bet the first thing I told her was that I was framed. Maybe she believed me, or maybe she didn't. I couldn't tell. Then I told her about Evans and Axness and the diamonds. The whole story. Like how Evans used to carry the stones in envelope affairs put away into special pockets cut in his coat. She asked why he didn't put them in a vault.

"He didn't have a vault," I told her. "He kept office in his hat. He was a curb broker, just went around pushing a few stones at a time. Probably he thought he was safe enough. He didn't look like a guy with the mint in his pants. He didn't look like much of anything at all."

"But half a million dollars."

"Yeah. That wasn't all, either. He didn't use good sense. He was the kind of a character who lives in a rut. Walked down every morning, and home at night, and always went the same way. Some of the streets he went on I didn't like, but I couldn't tell him because Axness didn't want him to know he was being tailed. This night it happened he ate dinner in town, and after that had a few beers around, the way he always did. It was stormy. We were going through this ware-

house district when it happened. The block had an alley down the middle and I'd just passed it when I got slugged."

She was sort of frowning at me. "This Edith. The stenographer. Did she know about the stones?"

"Uh-uh. Anyway, I didn't tell her. And probably it would have been me if it was anybody. We were—friends."

"But the night it happened, she was with Phillips."

I said, "Yeah."

Sara was watching me, a worried look on her face. "Mike."

"What?"

"That man you were talking about. You don't really think he'd do things like that to you?"

"Axness? Don't kid yourself."

She nodded and looked down at her hands, and after that she took down the little bit that was left of her Manhattan. Something was bothering her and pretty soon she got around to it, the way a woman will. She said, "This Edith Lee. Did you know her pretty well?"

"Pretty well."

"But how well?"

I said, "Well, enough to . . ." and then cut it off.

There was a pause. Sara smiled, finally. Not too happy, but she smiled. "I'm glad you didn't finish that, Mike."

"So am I."

I was, too.

CHAPTER TWO

A Tool—to Murder!

WE WENT to some other places after that. We had more drinks and talked, and we smoked. Anyway, Sara smoked. I'd light cigarettes but after the first two puffs I'd have to stub them out. She watched and when I'd done it about twenty times she said, "You shouldn't do that, Mike."

"Do what?"

"Waste them like that."

"They taste."

"If you don't like them you shouldn't try to smoke them at all."

"I like them all right, only they taste. They have ever since I went up. Or maybe since just after it happened. I don't remember."

"Why?"

"You got me. I even asked the doc up at the pen about it. The psycho. He said it was all in my mind." Her face got so serious I had to laugh. I said, "He didn't say I was nuts. He said it had something to do with the spot I was in. Like I was mad and took it out on cigarettes."

"That's funny."

"Yeah."

"Probably you'll get over it."

"Probably."

"Mike."

"Huh?"

"About those diamonds. I wish you were lying about them. I wish you really did have them."

"I'm not lying."

"I wish you were. A whole half a million dollars. You know what we could do, Mike? We could go someplace, like Florida or Mexico. We could have . . ."

I broke in. It kind of made me mad. I said, "Cut it. I don't have them."

"Haven't you?"

Her eyes were smoldering and she looked different. Mean, almost. I asked her what was wrong with her.

"Maybe it's you, Mike. Us."

"We'll get along all right."

She said, "If you had half a million dollars . . ." and left it. And then she gave me a lazy smile, stretching, pulling her shoulders back. She said, "Seven years is a long time, isn't it, Mike?"

I could have killed her. I damned her to Hell. She took the smile away. She was tense, now. Her tone was sharp. She said, "You haven't been lying to me, Mike?"

“Shut up.”

“That’s no answer.”

“It’s enough.”

She said, quietly, “All right, Mike. All right.” She dropped it. It lay between us. We talked around it. She was all sweetness again. Just the same, it made me wonder.

About nine o’clock we went to this Chinese restaurant. Upstairs, on the corner of 2nd and Oak. We sat in a booth. We ordered chop suey and cold roast pork and bean cake. After the waiter left Sara got up and jerked shut the curtain and slid in on my side of the table.

“Mike.”

“Take it easy.”

“Don’t you like me?”

“Too much. Too much for here.”

“You think I’m bad?”

“Not bad. Good. Damned good.”

“Kiss me.”

We did it again. We came out gasping like a pair of pearl divers. She said, shakily, “We must be drunk, Mike.”

“Yeah. We must be.”

The waiter came back. The stuff was all right but I couldn’t eat much of it. The hunger inside me wasn’t food hunger.

I kissed her once more there in the booth, and once on the stairs as we were leaving, and twice when we got to the sidewalk. We walked maybe a block. All of a sudden she pushed me into a dark doorway and followed, standing up close, making little spitting noises. Her eyes were humid, the whites glistening. She raised her arm like she was going to put it around my neck, but instead her hand clawed, and slashed down, ripping her nails along my cheek. I was too surprised to yell. Standing on tip-toe, talking right into my face in a low, vibrant whisper that was enough to give me hot flashes, she hissed. “That’s my mark, Mike. My copyright. You’re signed, sealed, and delivered. You’re my man. Now. Understand? Now.”

I nodded. Only I wasn’t thinking about now. I was thinking about later.

We hit more bars and two or three night clubs, and by eleven thirty I was beginning to get the idea that she was drunk. She walked all right but she was talking too much, and her laughter was high, and shrill, and kind of artificial. I didn’t care because the drunker she got the better she liked me.

Where she scratched me, it bled. Not much, but just kind of oozing out. I had to keep wiping at it. I guess you could tell from the marks that they were fingernail scratches. People would catch sight of them and first they looked surprised, and then they’d begin grinning and nudge one another.

We went to the Meranida Club and Sandoz’ and about two she decided we should make the next stop at Ricco’s.

Ricco’s is the kind of a place where they don’t have a bar. You sit at tables. We arrived in time for the end of the floor show. A girl in a tight blue dress was singing *Star Dust*. She quit after awhile and this guy came out. He was wearing a dinner jacket that didn’t quite fit, and he was thin with all kinds of boils on his face, but he had a good voice. The lights dimmed and he sang *Dark Eyes*. We held hands through that one.

There was some other stuff, but I didn’t notice. Pretty soon the lights came up and the guy with the boils yelled, “Everybody dance.” A few people shuffled out on the floor. The orchestra began to beat the schmaltz out of a swing number. I asked Sara if she wanted to dance.

She didn’t look at me. She was looking at something behind me, over my shoulder. Her mouth was twisted into a tight, nasty knot.

I snapped my fingers at her. “Stop dreaming.”

She said. “There’s a punk staring at me.” She said it loud. Drunk loud.

“Hey. Take it easy.”

She shook my hand away. Even louder, she said, “I don’t want that little punk

staring at me. You hear? I don't like little punks."

I kept hoping nobody else could hear. They could, though. All over the room, heads were swivelling. Most of the dancers had quit and the orchestra was winding down like a record on a broken phonograph.

I tried to shush her. She wouldn't. She said, "You go over there, Mike. You mash the dirty little punk, Mike."

"Now, cut it."

"Mash him, Mike. Go on, mash him."

I had to look. I figured I'd nod and wink and give him the business to show she was drunk. I was grinning when I turned my head. And suddenly I wasn't grinning. My heart lay down in my belly and died.

SURE. It was Axness.

His table was probably twenty feet from ours. He sat facing us. He wasn't too young and he looked older than he was because he was bald, with only a little fringe of white hair hanging around the curve of his skull. His head was big at the top, tapering down, and it made you think it was squeezed out of his body the way toothpaste squeezes out of a tube. He had milky, goiterous eyes, and thin lips, and the lips were smiling.

He wasn't alone. The other two could have been twins, except one had pale, yellowish hair and the other was a redhead. They were both big, with small ears, and their eyebrows grew together at the center. They had as much expression as two bowls of dough and they would look that way if they were shooting craps, or loving a woman, or killing a man.

I was scared moveless.

Back of me, Sara was still talking. She was talking loud and the words weren't nice. Axness only rearranged his face a little, lengthening the split of his lips. I told Sara to shut up and she swore at me

and I grabbed her. "Be quiet. For God's sake, be quiet."

"Smash the dirty little . . ."

I said, desperately. "Listen. That's Axness. Sam Axness. The guy I was telling you about. He's nobody to fool with."

She sneered at me. "What's the matter? You yellow?"

"Take it easy. Will you for God's sake take it easy? The guy's after me. I told you. He's after me."

"Yellow." She threw off my arm. She got up. I didn't know what it was she intended to do but even if I had I probably couldn't have stopped her. She went between the tables, taking short, stiff steps and jerking her hips so the flesh jiggled under the tightness of her dress. She got to Axness and stood right in front of him, but he didn't look at her. He was still watching me. She said something I couldn't hear. After that she called him a name. Her hand swung up and down like a flail and she slapped him with all her strength full across the mouth. In the stark silence the sound cracked like a pistol shot.

Nobody spoke. Nobody moved. I guess everybody was as stunned as I was. And then a woman began to giggle hysterically.

I came out of my chair and just about ran across the room. There was plenty of noise by now. I caught her elbows from behind and lifted so only her toes touched the floor, and I carried her that way into the foyer. She clawed like a cat and swore, but I didn't put her down until we were where nobody else could see. Then I shook her till her neck snapped like rubber. "You damned idiot," I snarled, "you trying to get me killed?"

The shaking seemed to take the fight out of her. She hung to my shoulders, maudlin and half-crying. "Did—did I do something, Mike?"

I said, "That guy back there was Axness. I tried to tell you, but you were so stewed up you wouldn't listen. He's after me. He thinks I've got his diamonds and

what he'll leave of me you could sell over a butcher's counter."

"You give him his old stones, Mike. You give them to him and it'll be all right. That's all you do. Give them to him."

I said, "I don't have them. How many times do I have to tell you. All I got is a pain in the neck and the urge to get out of here."

I had a grip on her arm, trying to push her along. Her knees sagged and she puckered her mouth. "I—I feel sick, Mike."

"You can be sick someplace else."

"I'm going to be sick right here." She jerked loose from me and staggered up the hall to the ladies' room, holding her mouth. I could hear her gagging.

It took her a hell of a long time to be sick. Or maybe it didn't. Maybe it was only five minutes. Anyway, I didn't want to stand around in the open like a duck sitting. I found some curtains and slipped through, holding the part so I could peek through the slit. Nobody showed. I kept looking along the hall where Sara was. At the end was it was a red-lighted exit sign. A fire escape, I figured. Just one of those things you notice.

After what seemed like a couple of centuries she came back. Her face was smoothed out and she walked as straight as a die, a faint smile tipping the corners of her mouth. When she didn't see me waiting she stopped and frowned, tapping nervous fingers against the side of her hand bag. I came out of the curtains and grabbed her, steering for the way out.

"You took long enough."

"I had to powder my nose."

"God! You put me on a murder spot and then you got to powder your nose!"

"You aren't scared, are you, Mike?"

"You're damned right I'm scared."

She said, kind of tauntingly, "I don't think I could like a man who gets scared."

I said, "Okay, so you hate me. Come on."

Ricco's is a second floor joint. There are stairs. We went down them, fast. Sara had a grip on my right arm like she was afraid she'd trip. In the lower corridor I tried to shake her off, but she wouldn't shake, so we went that way, glued together, through swinging doors to the street.

They were waiting for us.

They stood in a line with Sam Axness in the middle. The redhead was on one side and the blond on the other, and the two of them had overcoats draped over their right arms, carefully, so that their hands were covered. And what was in their hands.

Axness spoke first. In that whispery, brittle voice like the sound of a lizard worming through dry leaves. "Mike Marsh. Yeah. Or do you go by your number?"

My throat was full of sand.

He said, "Eddie, this is Mike Marsh. The diamond king. This is Eddie." Eddie was the redhead. "And Jug." Eddie and Jug were dead-pan, but you could tell they thought it was funny. Eddie said in a phony falsetto, "Pleased, I'm sure."

Axness said, "The big diamond king. Got his own private mine. He's going to tell us about it. All about it. Isn't he, Eddie?"

Eddie made a noise like slate dragged on a grater.

All this time I was trying to ease my arm loose only I couldn't because Sara was pasted all over it. I couldn't say anything to her with them watching and by that time I figured it probably wouldn't do any good anyway. I was frozen inside and pretty soon I was panicky enough to try fighting myself free, heaving my shoulder. Axness made some crack about wrestling a lady in public, and Sara giggled, and I hit her.

I hit her hard. I drove my left into her smooth, flat belly. She grunted, and let go of me, and started to fold. I threw her straight at Sam Axness.

I don't know all that happened because I was moving too fast to watch. Sam yelled. His arms flew up and he disappeared over backwards. I was already through the doors and along the lower hall and pounding back up the stairs that led to Ricco's, making for that door with the fire exit sign. Halfway up a fat man wearing a dinner jacket, and a thin woman who was arguing with him, were working their way slowly down. I shouted at them to get out of the way. They didn't or they couldn't. I dove between them. The woman let out a scream and I heard the fat man's feet scrabbling. Then a thump and more screams and something heavy bouncing down the steps. I didn't look back. I made the turn in the foyer and raced toward the red sign.

The door opened out. I was on a fire escape platform. There was an iron ladder with round rungs. I swarmed up it. The rungs were rusty and the rust bit into my hands. Once I was on the cornice I scrambled along on hands and knees, not wasting time to get to my feet. The place was as black as a coffin. Before I knew it my left arm was pawing air and I had to pull back quickly to keep from taking a header into nothing.

I rested, straining my eyes to get them used to the dark.

It seemed like an age, but I guess it wasn't more than a minute or so. Finally I could see that what was in front of me was a vacant space ten feet wide and stretching the whole length of the building. There was no way across and the roof opposite was eight inches higher than the one I was on. I was still trying to decide what to do when I heard feet shuffling on the platform of the fire escape. I didn't wait. I went far enough back to get a running start, and just as I reached the edge of the vent I jumped, giving it all I had.

The far wall hit me in the belly, and my knees cracked into the bricks so hard

I thought the caps were smashed. But I was over.

The rest of it wasn't bad. I managed to haul myself up to a sort of little shack that stood in the center of the roof. The door was locked but the wood was so rotten it gave the first time I banged it with my shoulder. There was a wooden ladder leading down, and I eased along it, spitting cobwebs. A hall, and stairs, and I got to the street. I had the luck to flag a prowling cab before I'd gone a block. I went east of the river.

I spent the night, or what was left of it, in a crummy rooming house on East 3rd. I didn't lie down. The door wouldn't lock but I pushed the rickety dresser against it, and then I sat in a chair, with the lights out, looking through the window. I thought. Mostly I thought about Sara, and some of the things I thought about her weren't nice, but just the same . . .

Dawn was pushing a grey fish belly against the pane when I finally fell asleep.

CHAPTER THREE

Stitch in Time

THE NEXT DAY, Tuesday, I didn't do much. My neck was stiff and my knees were scraped and bruised, and so sore it was all I could do to walk. About four thirty I went up to Union Avenue and hired a tailor to sponge some of the stuff off my suit and give it a pressing. I ate a hamburger steak with the flavor of fried damp sawdust, and washed it down with two bottles of beer, and dug back into my hole.

I guess right from the first, seven years ago, I had it figured that Phillips was about the only one who could have framed me. And that Edith's alibi was a lie they cooked up between them. Just the same, I had a hard time bringing myself to believe it. You know how it is. A guy's got his pride and when he's been playing with a

woman he doesn't like to have to swallow the idea that she's sold him up the river.

The thing was, there was Axness. I couldn't camp on my fanny and let things ride. I had to find those diamonds before Axness found me. Just thinking about it wouldn't do any good. I'd been thinking about it every day for seven years, and I guess every hour, without getting even part of it straight. The only thing left was to get out and work.

I made up my mind to see all of them. Phillips and Edith and Evans, and even Breem. Starting with Edith.

I slept on that. A little.

I was up by six the next morning. I got the address out of the phone book, and had a cup of coffee in a greasy spoon joint, and climbed on a street car.

Where Edith lived, seven years ago, was a walk-up flat on lower Clay. Fifteen a month for two rooms, with a hot-plate and toilet facilities. In the same block was a Chinese grocery, and a junk shop, and some store space that was being used by a family of gypsies. She wasn't in that kind of a neighborhood now. The apartment house was swank. Three stories of yellow brick and big, shining windows. There was a broad entrance walk, and set in the center was a rock pool, with a little fountain playing.

I got there at twenty minutes to eight. The first thing I did was spot the number of Edith's apartment. I hung around in the entrance until I heard somebody coming and then began to feel in my pockets like I was hunting a key. This woman came out. She had greying hair and she was wearing a raincoat over crumpled silk pajamas, and there was an empty milk bottle under her arm. I nodded and she smiled and said, "Good morning," sleepily, and held the door for me.

It almost always works. I went inside.

Edith was on the third floor. I used the stairs, climbing them two at a time. The stair-well was quiet, but when I got to the

hall I could hear sounds. Water splashing, and somebody's radio mumbling the morning news, and knives and forks scraping plates.



I pushed the door open, with her backing away. . . .

I found the number I wanted and knocked. After about a minute, the door came open.

She must've still been in bed when I knocked. She was wearing a white negligee of some thin material you could see through. Her blonde hair was tousled and she had no make-up on, but just the same she was so beautiful it hurt. Only when she saw who it was she wasn't beautiful any more. Her mouth went slack and she kind of melted down, all flabby and fat. Not saying anything and staring the way she might have at the devil himself. Or death.

I said, "Glad to see me, Edith?"

This strangling sound came from her throat and she tried to slam the door, but I caught it with the heel of my hand. I clucked my tongue as though I was ashamed of her manners, and pushed the door wider, with her backing away. When

I got inside I shoved the door shut, using my heel so I could keep watching her.

"I guess you don't remember me, baby. I guess that's it. You don't remember me."

"Mike, I . . ."

"Hey. You do remember me." I gave her this big smile, like I was real pleased. All the time I was coming further into the room. There was a davenport. I didn't hurry getting to it, and I lowered myself easy onto the cushions. They were soft and comfortable. And expensive. So was everything else. A thick rug and nice drapes and new-looking, shiny furniture.

Edith was standing as far from me as she could get and still be in the room, both hands clamped to the front of the negligee.

I said, "All this and you, too. Money buys a man everything, huh?"

She pulled her shoulders up the way a woman does when she wants to make out she's insulted. I said, "It's a good buy, baby."

"You mind your dirty tongue."

"Yeah. I'll do that. I'll do that little thing."

"I don't have to take anything from you."

"You couldn't, sister. Not any more you couldn't."

She was mad and scared both, but now she was trying not to act scared. She walked away from me to a table and took a cigarette from a silver box.

"What do you want, Mike?"

"Talk, maybe. Yeah. I guess that's all I want. Talk."

"I don't want to talk to you."

"I bet you don't. I bet half a million you don't. Not even about old times. Not even about a certain night seven years back when a guy named Evans was getting shot, and a guy named Marsh was getting framed, and a guy named Phillips was supposed to be playing 'Clap Hands, Here Comes Charley' with a certain blonde two-timer named Edith Lee. Only

he wasn't. He was out picking himself a handful of pretty white marbles."

"You're crazy."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. You get that way. Stir nuts."

I lifted my lip, sort of snarling. It worried her plenty. She said, "Listen, Mike. . ."

"You listen. Except for me and Axness, Phillips was the only one who knew Evans had those stones and that I was tailing him. Seven years ago you were living in a slum dump and now you're set up like little Miss Gotrocks. You can draw pictures with that pencil. Five hundred thousand pictures of G. Washington on nice green paper, and a frame to put them in."

Her head was shaking, partly I guess to convince me I had it figured wrong, partly from nervousness. "Gene Phillips was with me that night, Mike. Honest he was."

"Honest," I sneered. "A tramp like you doesn't know what the word means. You forgetting you were sitting on my lap in the old days? And now you try to tell me you sold out to that greasy tub of unrendered lard because he parts his hair in the middle? Sure. You sold, all right. An alibi. And I bet you made him pay plenty."

She got this funny look on her, and then the corners of her mouth started jumping like she was trying to hold back a laugh. "That's it, isn't it, Mike?"

"What's it?"

"The thing that gripes you. The reason you won't believe Gene was with me. It's because you won't admit that some other guy could beat your time. Oh, no. Not you. Not the great Marsh." The laugh got away from her, high and shrill, and as sharp in the ears as a hundred needles.

"Shut up."

"The great Marsh. The great god Marsh."

"I said to shut up."

"All right." The laugh went away. Her voice was harsh and icy. She jerked a thumb toward the door. "Get out. Beat it. Take a powder. You've said your piece. And you've got your answers. That's all, brother. I don't want the neighbors to think I know jail birds."

"I've got an answer for that, too."

"Go on. You heard me."

"Yeah." I came off the davenport. I stood close to her. "Okay. Only listen. I'll be back. I know you're lying in your teeth and I'm going to get the truth out of you. I'll get it out if I have to beat it out."

"You wouldn't dare."

"Wouldn't I? Just wouldn't I! And you know how I'd begin? I'd give you a good stiff poke right in the eye."

"You wouldn't."

I did, though. And I put my shoulder behind it.

Her back slammed into the wall, and she sat down hard and flat on the floor. She'd lost her grip on the front of the negligee, but I don't think she cared because she was too busy holding the left side of her face.

I said, "See what I mean, Edith?"

She didn't answer.

I said, "Next time I guess you'll know I mean business. Next time you won't fool around. Think about it."

I left. I went outside. My stomach felt sort of queasy, as though I'd been handling something that wasn't too clean.

I PICKED BREEM for the next customer. No reason, except that I wanted to save Phillips for the last. I found a beer tavern that wasn't crowded, and where they had a public phone, and called the agency.

A woman answered, using the chrome-polished tones of the professional receptionist. I asked to speak to Breem.

He came on. First I warned him to be careful and keep his face straight, because I wasn't advertising. Then I told him who

I was, and where I was, and asked him to meet me. He said he'd be along in fifteen minutes. He even sounded pleased.

I spent the time watching a woman playing the digger machine. She was wearing one of these new, long skirts. She'd lost three rolls of nickels and was halfway through the fourth when a voice at my ear asked, hesitantly and a little apologetically, if I wasn't Mister Marsh.

I said, "Hello, Breem."

He'd changed. The last time I'd seen him he was only twenty-one or -two. About Edith's age, I guess, but he'd seemed younger because she was a woman in all the meanings of the word and he was still a kid. Big, and not bad-looking in a fresh-faced sort of way, and awkward. Kind of bashful. He was still bashful. He shook hands very formally, and he still called me Mister Marsh. Just the same, the country had gone out of him. He'd got as tall as I was, and a whole lot broader. His suit fit and his shoes were shined and he looked swell. I told him so.

He blushed and grinned embarrassedly. "You're looking good, too, Mister Marsh."

I passed that. I asked him and he said he'd take beer, so we ordered a pair and carried them to a table. We drank some, and swabbed away the suds, and I asked how the world was treating him.

"Pretty fair, Mister Marsh."

"You working full time for Phillips, now?"

"Yes, sir."

"How's Edith?"

He said, "Gee, Mister Marsh, I wouldn't know. I don't hardly ever see her. You'd have to ask Mister Phillips."

"Like that, huh?" I must have sounded mean because Breem's face went blank and then turned a bright scarlet.

"I didn't mean anything, Mister Marsh."

"Skip it."

"No. Really I didn't. It's just that Edith doesn't work for us anymore."

That's why I don't see her. She quit about a year ago, just after I came back."

"Came back from where?"

"From the Army. I got out about a year ago and just after that, Edith quit. We got this other girl. I don't see her hardly at all, except maybe on the street. Edith, I mean."

"But Phillips does, huh?"

"Well, gee, Mister Marsh . . ."

I said, "Okay, kid. Forget it."

He nodded, and ducked around behind his glass of beer, and came out again, still blushing. I didn't say anything. He gave me a cigarette, but after three drags I had to put it down.

Pretty soon I said, "Look, Breem."

"Yes, sir?"

I said, "Probably you got it figured I didn't get you down here to get a line on my old girl friends. I guess you know what I want. I spent seven years inside because some dirty louse fitted a frame to me. That's bad enough, but there's worse. Sam Axness still thinks I've got his damned diamonds and he's after me. If he catches me I'll look like so much minced clam. I'm in a spot, and I need help. I thought maybe you could give me a hand."

Breem said, "Well, sure, Mister Marsh. Only . . ."

"Only what?"

Breem said, feeling carefully for the words, "It's just that I guess I don't know very much. I wasn't working the week it happened, you remember, and about all I know is what Mister Phillips says."

"What does Phillips say?"

"Well, I guess . . ." Breem was getting redder and redder. He wouldn't look at me. Kept staring down into his beer, and making wet circles on the table with the bottom of the glass. "I guess he thinks you really did it. And then now that you're out you'll get the diamonds and go some place. I—I guess that's about what he thinks."

"What he says he thinks." Breem

blinked blankly. I said, "Look. If Phillips was the one who pulled the job, and Edith put up a phony alibi, you can bet he'd say that I was guilty."

"Gosh, Mister Marsh." Breem's voice was a shocked tremolo. "You don't think Edith'd do a thing like that to you?"

"I don't think she'd do anything to me that I wouldn't do to her." Breem didn't get it, and I didn't explain. I said, "Anyway, you can see this. If I didn't plug Evans and clamp onto those stones, the only one who could've is Phillips."

Breem nodded uncomfortably.

I said, "Okay. Now you've got it. I figure that Edith sold Phillips a cover-up and now she's set herself up as a rich-ritz with the proceeds."

Breem was still monekying with his beer glass. After a little he shook his head. "That doesn't fit, Mister Marsh."

"Why not?"

Breem said, "Like I told you, it wasn't till a year ago that Edith quit. It was just before that that she moved into her swell apartment. If she'd been blackmailing Mister Phillips she wouldn't've waited six years to start spending the money. Not Edith."

"Yeah."

"See what I mean?"

"Yeah."

"Gosh, Mister Marsh." He peered anxiously at me. "I didn't mean to spoil your nice theory."

"You got a better one, maybe?"

"Well, no. Only . . ." He squirmed, then leaned forward, his face all shiny with earnestness. "I don't see why it has to be Edith and Mister Phillips. If Mister Axness hired you to watch Mister Evans it must've been because he was afraid somebody would try to steal the stones. If somebody did, the first thing they'd do would be to make sure Mister Evans wasn't guarded. And they'd spot you, and think of the frame, and then they'd . . ." He ran out of breath.

I said, "So it could have been anybody."
 "Not anybody, Mister Marsh. Just somebody who knew about the stones. Like one of Mister Axness' men, maybe."

"Yeah."

"You don't think so?"

"No."

"But why?"

"No reason. I just don't." I drained the last of my beer. I said, "Thanks, anyway, Breem. You've been a big help."

"But what are you going to do, Mister Marsh?"

I humped my shoulders. "How should I know? See people, I guess. Evans, maybe."

"Evans?"

"Surc. What's wrong with that? I hear he can talk, now. Maybe he can tell me something."

Breems said, in a nervous squeak. "I—I don't think so. Look, Mister Marsh. Evans was shot in the back. He didn't see anything or even hear anything."

"What's the other reason I shouldn't see him?"

"The other?" He tried to look as if he didn't understand, and gave it up, grinning. "I didn't want to worry you. You see, Mister Evans isn't right. He's sort of crazy. Being paralyzed affected his brain."

"Too bad. Yeah. Too bad."

I stood up. He followed me out the door. "Listen, Mister Marsh. Couldn't I

trail along so if something happens I could help. Like if one of Axness' men bothers you I could get rid of him."

I thought of Breem standing off Eddie or Jug. Trying to keep the grin from my face I said, "No, thanks."

"I could do it, Mister Marsh. In the army I got medals for marksmanship. You'd be surprised."

I said I would. I said very probably I would. When I looked back, he waved.

I ate something. Not because I was hungry, but because it was getting around that time. Afterwards, I sat over my coffee, thinking about what I'd learned from Breem. And what I hadn't learned.

I decided to see Evans.

He wasn't listed in the phone book. I checked a city directory in a drug store. Evans, Geo., (wife, Mary) lived at 245 N. W. Couch.

I walked.

NORTHWEST COUCH was run-down. Twin rows of brown-front buildings, drab as elderly slatterns. 245 was like the rest. I climbed the steps and went through the double front door with its ornate frosted glass panels. The lower hall smelled the way those places smell. A key board hung on the smoky wall. Evans lived in apartment D. Upstairs. I went upstairs.

When I knocked a woman's voice said, "Just a minute," and steps shuffled across

JOE NYE*

has switched to Calvert
 because Calvert is mellow.

*of N. 5309 Whitehouse, Spokane, Wash.

CALVERT RESERVE Blended Whiskey—86.8 Proof—65% Grain
 Neutral Spirits. Calvert Distillers Corp., New York City



the floor toward me. They were tired steps and when the woman opened the door she was a tired woman. Everything about her seemed to sag. She only opened the door a little at first, leaning her shoulder against it. "What is it?"

"I want to see Mister Evans."

"You can't. He's sick. Very sick." She started to close the door, but she couldn't because my foot was in the way. "He's sick," she repeated. There was fright in her voice.

I said, "It isn't about money. He doesn't owe me anything."

The door gave way slowly. I went inside. She shut it and stood against it. "Well?"

She couldn't have been so very old, but there was no way to tell. She was shapeless, thin in places and unhealthily puffy in others. Her face was lined and her hands were red. She was terribly afraid but you wouldn't know from her eyes. They were shiny and dead, like something looking up from a fish market counter.

I told her to take it easy.

"What do you want?"

"Evans." I looked around the room. It was small, square, airless. A hot plate stood in one corner, under a boiling pot. There was a cracked, filthy sink. A cot. A rickety table. A chair. "Where is he?"

She nodded toward a door that led to an inner room. I went through it and closed it behind me. A man lay on a narrow bed, his eyes closed. Opposite the bed, hanging on the wall, was a square of paper painted like a target. The paper had been slashed to ribbons.

I said, "Evans." He opened his eyes.

He didn't recognize me right away. When the recognition came, it came slowly, and it wasn't nice to see. First his mouth began to twist in something that wasn't a smile, only a gruesome splitting of lips. At one corner a thin stream of spittle drooled out and rolled down his stubbled chin. He tried twice to speak but

nothing came except a rasping that was worse than a curse. Finally he managed to say, huskily, "You came."

"Yeah. I came."

"I knew you'd come. I knew." For some reason his eyes went to the target paper, flickered as a snake's tongue flickers, and came back to my face. "I've been waiting for you."

I said, "Yeah. Probably." He gave me the creeps. There was sand under my shirt. I said, "Look, Evans, there's one thing you've got to get straight. It wasn't me who shot you. Understand? It wasn't me. It was somebody else. I don't know yet who."

I was wasting my breath. He wasn't even listening. It didn't make any difference to him, anyway. He believed what he believed. Maybe he couldn't believe anything else. The smile, if you could call it a smile, was still on his face. He said, "Did you know I can move my arms. Did you know that? Move my arms?" He moved them. He brought them out from under the covers and hung them in front of me. Thin, pale, hairless arms with great white hands and clawing fingers. He said, again, "Move my arms." He waved them. "Move them. That's how I've been waiting for you. Practicing. Moving my arms." He made a noise like peas rattling in a box. The arms dropped back on the bed. His breathing was heavy.

I said, "Look. I want to talk to you. Understand? Talk. I want to ask questions."

"Waiting."

"Sure. Waiting. Only I'm here, now. So we can talk, see? Now we can talk about it."

He said, almost sharply, "Not talk." One of those big hands shoved under the blankets and came out clutching something. At first I couldn't make out what it was because the light in the room was bad. When I did, cold things climbed on damp feet up and down my spine.

He held it so I could see. "You know what it is?"

I said I did. A knife.

He seemed to think that was funny because he set up that rattling giggle again. The spasms contorted his body in a jerky, mechanical way that made sickness rise in my belly. Finally he said, "Knife. Yes. Knife. Throwing knife." He made his eyes find the paper target. "Practicing. Waiting. Knife."

"Look, Evans."

His hands were setting the knife. To me he said, "Move a little."

"Now, listen . . ."

"Move. Move a little." He tried to shift his body but he couldn't. Strain made cords stand like taut hawsers in his neck. "Move."

"Now, wait. I told you . . ."

He said, "Move." He spit it at me. And then I guess he couldn't hold in any longer because he threw the knife. It spun past me, about a foot off, and dug into the wall, quivering.

It took him a long time to realize he'd missed. First he waited for me to fall, and I didn't fall, and he got a hurt expression on his face like you see on a sulky child. He began to cry, slowly, without tears. Sound bubbled out of his throat, a rhythmic, droning, puling whimper. I said, "The angle was different." He didn't answer. His eyes shut and he turned his head to the wall. I left the room. The woman was waiting, sitting on the chair, her hands folded against her sagging chest. She said, "He missed you." Flatly. Sadly.

"Yeah."

She looked into my eyes.

"I didn't want him to miss you."

I said, "Maybe I'll give him another chance. Yeah. Maybe I will. But not if I can help it."

I opened the door, and shut it, and went out into the nice fresh sunlight of the street.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ungentle Questioner

I WANDERED. After a while I was in the park blocks and sat down on one of the wooden benches. There were two old men feeding a flock of strutting pigeons. They were sitting about fifty feet apart, with the pigeons between, and it looked like they were having some kind of fight over which one of them would get the most birds on his side. Finally the old man who was furthest from me ran out of bread crumbs. He tried to keep the pigeons by snapping his fingers and rustling his empty paper sack, but he couldn't fool them. Pretty soon he stood up, looking stern and angry, and limped away, pushing himself along with a cane. The other old man let out a wheeze of hoarse laughter that sent the pigeons up in a swirl of startled wings.

It got to be three o'clock, and then five. I sat. I felt like you do when you have a bad hangover. The back of my head ached, and my eyes, and my stomach was a cave of winds. I had thoughts, but they weren't important or even connected. I'd think about Sara, and then about Edith. Some good-looking woman would pass, and I'd think about her. Next it would be Axness, or Phillips, or the diamonds. I guess I thought about all of it except Evans. I didn't want to think about him.

The sun slid down until the rim of it was below the hills. Offices were letting out and a whole stream of people were moving up the wide walk through the center of the park. A few men, and a lot of women and girls, all of them hurrying and all of them looking tired and relieved.

I made up my mind to see Phillips.

Using a public phone, I called his home. No answer. I tried the agency office. The bell tone rang twice, then there was the click of a lifted receiver. "Phillips speaking."

"You alone?"

Not knowing who I was, it took him a long time to answer. Finally he asked, "Why?"

"Never mind. Are you?"

"Yes."

"Stay that way. I'm coming up to see you."

I hung up, cutting off a question I wouldn't have answered anyway. Let him wonder.

Back seven years ago Phillips and I had offices in the Sparta Building on 2nd and Oak. The Greeley Block is on Broadway, six blocks and fifty dollars a room away. Suite 736, seventh floor. It was at the far end of the hall, a door of sand-blasted glass with PHILLIPS INVESTIGATION SERVICE painted in black letters a foot high. I let myself in.

The reception room was Hollywood. A black linoleum floor and furniture made of chrome tubes and yellow leather. Two desks. One with a typewriter and another I supposed was used by Breem. At the back of the room a door marked PRIVATE was standing a little open. A light showed behind it. I pushed my way through. I said, "Hello, Gene."

It hit him hard, believe me. He was poised, knees pulled under, ready to get out of his swivel chair in case I was a paying customer. He was wearing a kind of half-smile. When he saw who it was the corners of the smile dropped to his chin, and he said, "Mike!", pushing it between set teeth.

"Yeah. Mike."

He was working hard. Trying to pull the muscles up so that his face would smooth out. Trying to swallow whatever it was blocking his throat. He'd suck his Adam's apple in and it would pop out again. Finally he managed to ask me, "How are you, Mike?"

"Changed."

The way I said it didn't make him feel any steadier. His hands fluttered. He'd

raised this gigolo mustache, thin as a pencil line, and one corner of it kept jerking as though somebody was sticking it with the point of a needle. He'd put on flesh, and there was a fat pouch at his throat, and he still looked greasy and soft. He was soft. He started to say something and changed his mind. He said, "Glad to see you again, Mike."

"I'll bet."

"Really."

"Cut it. Cut the brother act. I'm not buying any."

He was all soap and lathered to a sweat. "After all, Mike . . ."

I said, "Look, lard-head. You know why I'm here and you know what I want. Forget the comedy."

Round, oily droplets of sweat clustered at the edges of his mouth. "What do you want?"

"Information."

"About what?"

"A lot of things. For instance, who owns Ricco's?"

"Ricco's?" It wasn't what he'd expected and he was so relieved his voice broke. "Sam Axness, I guess. Why?"

"It explains some things. Two things. A single and a double. A single dame and a double cross."

"Sometimes they go together." It wasn't until after he'd said it that he realized he'd made a mistake. He tried to grin. It didn't come off. He looked sick.

I said, "You'd know that, wouldn't you?"

"For God's sake, Mike."

"How's Edith?"

"What about Edith?"

"I'm asking you. How is she?"

His face was so much putty, hardening. He said, "Damn you, I want you to leave Edith out of this."

"I guess you do. I guess if you could have one wish you'd wish I'd leave Edith out. That's too bad."

"What's too bad?"

"That you aren't going to get your wish."

The tapping of the pencil quickened.

I said, "I guess a guy always wants to look out for his woman."

"She's not my woman."

I said, "That's fine. That's real good for you. I guess then you won't care what happens to her. Because just as sure as you're sitting there, something's going to. If she doesn't talk."

"You stay away from her."

"Sure."

"I mean it."

I said, "I bet you do. And you're scaring me, Phillips. You're just about scaring me to death." I leaned down. I gave him a horse laugh right in his plump, greasy face.

The point of the pencil broke with a snap.

I knew what he was going to do. There was a rim of white showing all around the pupil of each eye and his shoulder worked. I had it figured that he wasn't carrying anything under his arm because he wouldn't want to spoil the smooth cut of his suit. I was right. He grabbed at the center drawer of the desk. I moved fast, getting around on his side, and brought my knee up hard against the drawer. It slammed in, catching his wrist between sharp edges. He let out a yell and I slapped the back of my hand across his mouth. "Shut up."

He was scared, now, bleating like a frightened sheep. "Now, Mike, now, Mike, now, Mike . . ."

"Shut up."

I pushed him away from the desk. I took the gun out and emptied the slugs. It was a .38 auto. Phillips was crouched down in his swivel chair, backed against the wall, watching me. I said, "It doesn't have to be Edith. It could be you. I don't think I'd mind that. Not even a little."

"In God's name, Mike . . ."

I gave him some of the gun butt.

I must have slugged him twenty or thirty times. Not hard. Just enough to rip the flesh and raise a good bruise. He kept bending down, trying to cover his head with his arms. I'd have to grab his hair and drag him up so I could get a swing at him. It was work. Finally I quit for a minute and stood off. "You going to talk, Phillips?"

He mumbled at me.

I said, "Okay. That night. The one when Evans was shot. Where were you?"

He had a time answering. His mouth was so much raw meat and he twisted it around to make words come out. "Honest, Mike. With Edith. All night. With Edith."

I hit him some more.

I got tired, finally. Besides, it wasn't doing any good. His eyes were glazed and he was blubbing and too far gone to know what was happening. I clipped him one last time and threw the gun in a corner of the room. There was a little booth arrangement against one wall, with a wash basin in it. I washed my hands and used a towel to clean blood from my suit. Phillips had fallen out of the swivel chair flat on his face. I filled a glass with water and poured it over him. I did that two or three times, until he began to move some and mutter, and then I said, "So long, sucker."

I went out into the reception room, shutting the door. I opened the outer door and slammed it, real loud, but without going through it. Then I tiptoed back and listened. I heard him stagger across the room and sick up into the wash basin. He ran water and probably sponged off his face. The swivel chair squeaked. It sounded like he was turning pages of a book, and then I heard him dialing on the telephone. I jumped to the typing desk and eased up the receiver

of the extension. I came in on the middle of a ring. There was another, and then Edith answered. "Hello?"

"Edith?"

"Yes."

"Edith, this is Gene Phillips." He was talking around a mouth full of marbles. "Look, Edith. Did you know Mike Marsh was in town?"

I had to grin. It was that simple. I hung up. I knew what I had to know. I couldn't prove it, but I knew.

He was still talking when I opened the outer door for the second time. Quietly. This time I really left.

IT WAS a few minutes before seven. Clouds had come from some place, bringing a drizzling rain. I found a doorway and stood in the shelter of it.

There was a lot I still didn't know, but I could guess, it began with Edith. Get to Edith and beat the truth out of her. Not right then, because since Phillips had tipped her she'd lock herself in and not open the door to anybody. I could wait. All I had to do was keep under cover and make sure Axness didn't spot me.

I stayed in the doorway. I didn't have an overcoat and besides I was feeling so good I didn't mind just standing around and thinking about it. Probably I had a grin on my face. Once I thought I saw Breem across the street and I wondered if he was following me the way he said he might. The crowd moved and when the space cleared I couldn't spot him. I forgot it.

I was there I guess ten minutes. I was so wrapped up in myself that I didn't hear anything or see anything. Or feel anything. Not until this hand slipped in behind my left elbow.

"Thinking about me, darling?"

It was Sara.

She was in a black raincoat with a cape affair over her head and it made her

look like a sweet little girl. Smiling, and not just with her mouth, either. Lips parted, and those moist-warm eyes, and all the same holding a little gun firm as a rock to my ribs.

I called her a name. A filthy, dirty, obscene name.

She said, "Why, Mike, dear," making her eyebrows lift. I must have moved because the gun jabbed harder and her voice went as sharp as a shard of glass. "Don't, Mike. I would. I'd probably cry afterward, but I would."

"What do you want?"

She was back to the little-girl act again. "Why, Mike, angel, don't you know?"

A big black sedan had drifted along and was double-parked on the street in front of the doorway. Sara said, "For us, Mike." She pushed me across the sidewalk. I got into the front seat. She got in back. Eddie, the red-headed torpedo, was driving. He gave me the look you give a chicken before you twist its head off. Then he put the sedan in gear and pulled out into the traffic.

We went down to Alder Street, and waited for the light to change, and turned west. I had needles sticking in the back of my neck. I was that scared.

The whole way, nobody said a word.

The place was on 13th between Everett and Flanders. A big, two-story building. It wasn't new and it was of red brick, with **WHEELOCK MACHINE WKS.** written in white letters along one side of it. The windows had been painted over with black paint and there was a *For Rent* sign tacked on the front door. There weren't any street lights on the corners and the block was dark and deserted. The rain didn't help. Eddie nudged the car against the curb and we got out. First Eddie, then me, then Sara. My tongue was a wad of cotton, dry and swollen.

Even before we reached it, the door

opened. We went inside. It was Jug, the other gungsel, who had opened the door. The first thing he did was frisk me. When he found I was clean he sort of grinned. He said, "We're going to have fun with you, pal."

I wanted to spit in his face.

The four of us, with me in front, crossed a big barny room that smelled of rancid grease. I couldn't see much. There was no light except a flash that Jug was using. I kept stumbling. The place must have had a metal roof because the hammering of the rain built echoes; and the tap-tap of Sara's heels, and a pound, pound, pound that was my heart. What seemed like a long way off I could see a thin yellow line. Only it couldn't have been a long way because even before I wanted to, we got there. A door. The yellow line was light seeping through the crack at the bottom.

The latch rattled under Eddie's hand.

When the place was used, the room could have been an office. It was small, with dirty plaster walls. A naked bulb hung from a wire in the center. Under it was a table with something on it that looked like a small anvil, and four chairs. Sam Axness was sitting in one of the chairs, waiting.

I guess it was about that time I realized where I was and what was going on. I would have yelled or tried to run, only I never had a chance. Eddie had me by one arm, and Jug took the other, and they rushed me over to the table and jammed a chair at the back of my knees. I sat down. I was right in front of the anvil thing with Axness across from me. I couldn't see him very well. His head would swell and shrink like a balloon does when some kid is having trouble blowing it up.

He said, "You're going to talk, Marsh."

I licked my lips. They were dry, before. After, they were still dry.

He said, "And you know what? You won't lie. We're fixing it up for you so you won't lie."

My breathing was loud. It roared, almost. "What you going to do to me?"

Axness' milky, toad's eyes didn't leave my face. He said, "Get the hammer, Eddie."

Somebody went some place. I didn't look. I couldn't. I was paralyzed. I couldn't turn my head or even swallow. I knew Sara was there because the perfume was strong. And Axness. And that damned, horrible anvil. All of a sudden, like he'd come from the floor, I saw Eddie. He was swinging a ball-peen hammer with a head as big as his fist.

"What are you going to do to me?"

Somebody laughed. Sara, probably. Axness said, "Can it." And then he said, "Begin with his left hand. The nails."

I don't remember much. The hammer. God, the hammer. I yelled and fought but it wasn't any use, and pretty soon there was no fight left in me. They weren't in any hurry and they did it slow, spacing it so I could feel every time the hammer came down. One thing, though I can't get rid of in my mind. Sara. Sara leaning so close I could feel the heat of her. And all the time, smiling. All the time they were doing that to me, smiling her damned, lovely, vicious smile right in my face . . .

YOU KNOW how it is when you wake up. You aren't where you are, and you've gone some place else, and you wake up. With me I had been swimming. Swimming in all this cold, cold water and now floating and it was turning to ice. Probably I was delirious because I don't really remember coming to at all. Just sitting and saying, "Gonna be sick, gonna be sick, gonna be sick . . ."

I was.

I was scared of the dark. You get that

way. A big, black dark and it scared me. I lay there, blubbering like a lost kid, with my head on one arm and shaking all over. My mind worked like it was split. One part kept saying to get up and the other wanted to stay there. I'd think: *Stand up.* I'd kind of kick my legs and maybe raise my head. And drop it down again.

Stand up. Damn you, stand up.

Up!

It took time but I did it.

There was a steady rapping. Rain on the roof. And grease smell. I thought: *The big room. The big, outside room. Door someplace. I know. Smart Mike. Yeah. Smart Mike. Smart as a . . . Look out!*

I screamed. I was hugging my hand to my chest and I slipped and fell flat down on it and I screamed.

Sick. Oh . . . God . . . Sick . . .

Up . . . Up . . . Up . . .

Three steps and stop, three steps and stop, like I was waltzing. I thought: *Waltzing Mike. Waltzing Mike the Mouse. Dizzy as a dancing mouse.*

Cut that. Got to find door. What's this? Door. And unlocked!

Hey, unlocked!

Quiet!

I was in the street.

It was cold. A wind had joined the rain, and it beat at me, and my teeth set up a chattering. I started off at a stumbling run and the jogs sent big, fiery bursts of pain up my arm. I had my right hand clamped around my left wrist, tight, but the throbs would get through and flash in blinding arcs across my brain. Once I stopped under a street light to look at my hand. It wasn't a hand. It was a piece of red pulp. All bloody smashed.

Sometime in here I came out of it.

It was like being awfully drunk and suddenly coming sober. I knew where I was and what I had to do, and every-

thing. Standing on the corner of 16th and Burnside and I had to see Edith and she lived on 25th and Alder. Ten blocks. I kept on going. I went on bent, strained knees, flat-footed, with sobs so deep they made me gag. The flesh of my face hurt. And all the time the pain kept coming and coming and coming.

That part of Burnside Street is old district. I'd stagger past four or five of the gaunt frame buildings and then squat down on some steps, chewing my lips and my tongue, and finally start on again. I don't know how I happened to see this sign. It was in a corner of one of the bays, the name blocked off by the edge of a curtain so that I made out only the letters M.D. I got to crying again, climbing those stairs, only this time it was with relief. There was a bell and I leaned against it, listening to the clamour of it inside the house, and now I was laughing but there were still tears.

The door opened.

"Doctor?"

"What do you want?"

"Hand." I held it up. "See? My hand."

He came closer to look. He was old and his nose was long and he needed a shave. He smelled unclean and of sleep. His breath was rank. He was wearing a bathrobe and his skinny feet were pushed into untied shoes.

I said, "It hurts. It hurts something awful."

"All right. Come in."

He led the way, his shoelaces snickering as he walked. A long, shadowy hall and a room. He flicked on the light. I saw cracked linoleum, and a glass cabinet with smeared windows, and an examination table. A stool of enamelled metal. He jerked a thumb toward the stool. "Sit there."

I sat there.

With a knife he slit my coat and the sleeve of my shirt up to my elbow, all

the time staring at the hand. "How'd you do that?"

"Accident, Doctor. Yeah. In a car accident."

He shook his head. "I can't dress it. I'll give you something for the pain. We have to get you to a hospital."

"You fix it. No hospital."

"Don't be a fool, man. Those bones are smashed. You need surgery."

"No hospital."

His head came up and he looked into my face, and pretty soon he shrugged. "It's your hand." He didn't like it, though. His eyes were narrow and flat and suspicious.

He went to one of the cabinets and got out a little pill from a box, using a pair of tweezers, and dropped it into the barrel of a hypodermic syringe. He said, "Morphine," without my asking anything. He fitted a needle to the barrel and began to draw distilled water from a kind of baby bottle. I watched. I licked my lips. I even grinned. I could already feel the barrel cool against my arm, and the needle sliding in, and the pain draining away.

"Hurry. For God's sake, hurry."

He was holding the syringe up to the light, pushing the first drop from the end of the needle. "Fifty dollars."

"Fifty dollars?"

"Now."

"Oh. Sure. Fifty dollars." With my

good hand, I reached for my billfold.

It was gone.

I went nuts. I fumbled through every one of my pockets and all I found was part of a package of cigarettes, and some matches, and a dirty handkerchief. I began to moan and babble and plead with him. "I'll pay you. Sure. I'll pay you."

"Now."

"I'll come back and pay you. A hundred dollars. Five hundred. Just fix the pain and I'll pay you five hundred. Tomorrow. The first thing tomorrow."

Very deliberately he dropped the syringe into a drawer of one of the cabinets. His face was pulled tight and hard.

"All right. Get out."

"I'll pay. I'll . . ."

"Get out. Now. Before I call the cops."

I came off the stool. My heart was pounding so hard it bruised my ribs. "You got to fix the pain. You got to. You got to."

"Now. Get out now."

"You dirty butcher," I screamed. "I'll get you, you dirty butcher."

I went for him.

He got away from me. He scuttled around me like the rat he was and out the door and pounded down the hall. The front door came open and I heard him yelling, "Help. Police. Help," at the top of his lungs. There had to be a

Listen here!

Shopping for mystery and adventure tales on your radio? If so, here are clues to good listening. You'll find that each program is a full half hour's worth of real entertainment for one and all.

NICK CARTER

Sundays, 6:30 p.m., EST.

Lon Clark as radio's Nick Carter

THE FALCON

Mondays, 8:00 p.m., EST.

Romance mixed with murder

HIGH ADVENTURE

Mondays, 9:30 p.m., EST.

Dramatic action and adventure

MYSTERIOUS TRAVELLER

Tuesdays, 8:00 p.m., EST.

Eerie and supernatural tales

THE ZANE GREY SHOW

Tuesdays, 9:30 p.m., EST.

Stories of western adventure

RACKET SMASHERS

Wednesdays, 8:00 p.m., EST.

Experts counteract crime

QUIET PLEASE

Wednesdays, 8:30 p.m., EST.

By W. Cooper, writer of "Lights Out"

SCARLET QUEEN

Thursdays, 8:30 p.m., EST.

Action aboard the "Scarlet Queen"

MUTUAL BROADCASTING SYSTEM, INC.

back way, and there was, and I found it. I'm not sure how. I had to climb a fence and run up an alley, slipping and sliding, and once I fell. I must have run four blocks before I stopped. I was sobbing again, and cursing him, but it didn't do any good. The pain was still with me.

After that, I carried it.

I MADE IT to Edith's apartment. I remember that part. I got down on my knees and drank out of the rock pool in the center of the walk, lapping like a thirsty dog. The water had old cigarettes and papers and things in it, but it was sweet in my mouth. Then I put my hand, my left hand, in my suit pocket. The material was sharp as ragged glass, but I got it in.

I sat down on the front steps to wait, closing my eyes and kind of weaving like I was drunk.

It could have been a minute or an hour before these people came along. A man and a woman. Talking as they came up the path. The woman said something and the man said, "He looks it." A hand jiggled my shoulder. "You all right, sport?"

I partly opened my eyes. I said, making my tongue thick, "Key. Losht key."

"Key?" He shook me again. "Here. Wake up. What'd you say the matter was?"

"Losht key."

The woman said, "He must live here. I saw him this morning."

I opened my eyes wider, looking at her. It was the milk bottle woman. I gave her a feeble grin. "Sure. Third floor. Only losht key."

They let me in. They even helped me. I had a time getting rid of them. The man wanted to give me a lift upstairs. I told him no. "All fine, no help."

Finally they went away.

I went up the stairs. I went up them on my knees. Halfway up my left hand

got to hurting so bad I had to drag it from the pocket. In the hall, I walked. I got right up on my hind legs and walked. I knocked on Edith's door. Not too loud, but I wasn't timid about it.

She must have been expecting someone because the door opened right away. I didn't give her a chance to see who it was. I rammed my shoulder against the panel, and I heard Edith squeak, and I was inside.

I closed the door and locked it. I said, "Back again, Edith."

She was wearing the same white negligee. Dead white. So was her face, except for her left eye. Her left eye was a gorgeous, puffy purple.

I said, "Know what I want, Edith? Talk. At lot of talk."

"But I thought . . ."

I said, "I know what you thought. Only you were wrong. A lot wrong. This is it, Edith."

She was hard, all right. Her face changed. She spit at me. She told me where to go—with bells on.

"How's the eye, Edith?"

"Tough guy. Tough Mike Marsh. The big woman fighter. Go ahead. Hit me."

"I'll do that. More than once I'll do that. I'll beat you into hamburger patties."

"Sure. You're big enough. You're . . ." It cut off, cold. She looked sick all over. She shrank away from me. "Mike. Wh-what's that, Mike?"

She was staring at what was left of my hand.

I said, "Like it, Edith?"

"Don't, Mike. Don't!"

"Like it? Like to look at it?"

"Mike!"

"Talk, baby."

"No, Mike, I . . ."

She was trapped in a corner. I pushed the hand at her. That twisted thing that hung from her left wrist. "Talk."

"I'll talk, Mike."

"Sure you will. You'll talk."

"I will. Honest I will. Only keep it away. For the love of God keep it away from me."

"Sure. You'll talk."

She screamed. "Mike!"

"Yeah." I put my hand down. I said, "Only you don't have to talk to me, Edith. I know. Some people don't. Like Sam Axness, for instance. You talk to him. All nice and pretty. Huh, baby?"

She didn't even hear me. She was on the davenport, bent over, making sick sounds at the rug. I thought it was funny. She wasn't afraid of a licking but she couldn't stand the sight of blood. I got to giggling. I picked up a brass ash tray and stood over her. I said, "Just to make sure you'll keep. Keep good and cool." I was still giggling when I brought the ash tray down on top of her head.

She went out like a light.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Dead Don't Talk

IT TOOK me some time. Finally I found her purse, with her keys in it.

I took the keys. I went back to the street. She was still out cold on the davenport.

It was just after two o'clock by my watch. Finding Axness wasn't going to be easy. I decided the best bet was to go to the machine shop place. They'd go back there some time. I walked about a block when nausea started to build up in me, washing over in big, bolting waves.

I managed to make it to Burnside and turn down. My hand was so swollen it wouldn't go in my pocket, so I carried it pushed under the front of my coat. It hurt like fury and the skin above the wrist was tight and turning color.

I didn't make good time. I'd go fifty feet, or a hundred, and then I'd have to lean against something. A few cars passed, and a street car, but nobody seemed to see me or pay much attention. On the corner of Twenty-first Street I was hanging on this telephone post, with my eyes shut and trying to keep from being dizzy, when I heard the clatter of heels like a woman running. Before I could do anything, or even open my eyes, somebody lit like a cat on my back, swinging me around. It was Sara. She was still wearing the rain cape thing, but she didn't have any little-girl look. She was mad and she meant business. Her .25 poked into my middle. "All right, Mike. The game's over. You talk, now. We aren't playing any more. This time we mean it."

I tried to say something. Anything. I couldn't.

She was pushing me along. "The diamonds, Mike. Remember? We want the diamonds."

I shook my head. "I don't know where they are. I know . . ."

"Come on. Sam's waiting. And Eddie. You know what that means?"

"Look. . . ."

"Shut up."

I said, "For God's sake will you listen? Will you just for a minute take it easy and listen?"

I kind of tore loose from her. She smiled. Anyway, she showed her teeth. She didn't look nice. Like some animal that's tasted blood and wouldn't mind tasting it again.

I was scared and I had cold sweat all over under my shirt. She was inching closer, and I tried to hold her off, and I said, spilling it all out in a hurry, "I don't know where the diamonds are but I know who does. I know. That's what I'm trying to tell you."

I didn't give her a chance to say anything. I just kept talking. I told her I'd

seen Edith and Edith would talk and Edith was at the bottom of everything. I said, "She's waiting. She'll talk. You get Sam and she'll talk. She won't go any place, either. She's all laid out cold, waiting."

"Is this the truth, Mike?"

"Sure. Sure it's the truth."

She believed me, finally. There was this all-night drug store in the next block. We made it in easy stages. Sara asked me the address of Edith's apartment and then went inside to use the phone. When she came out I asked her if she'd gotten hold of Axness.

"I got Jug. He's going to get Sam and Eddie and they'll meet us at the apartment."

"They weren't so smart as they thought, I guess. Letting me get away from them."

"We lost you at that doctor's office."

I didn't say anything but I must've looked surprised because she had to laugh at me. She said, "You don't think you really got away, do you? They just let you. They figured the first thing you'd do would be head for the diamonds. We all followed you. Only you went into this doctor's place and then he came out yelling like he was being murdered. That's where we lost you."

"I went out the back way."

"What happened in there, anyway?"

I told her. She put her arm around my waist and gave me a squeeze. "Poor, poor Mike. Does your hand hurt pretty bad?"

I pushed her away. I told her what she could do.

"Please . . ."

"Let go my arm."

"Please, Mike."

"I said to let go."

She let go. She began to cry. Damned if she didn't. We went that way, with her sniffing and sobbing and pecking at her eyes with a handkerchief. It made me sick to listen to her. When we got to Edith's

apartment she made me stop so she could fix up. I unlocked the outside door and Sara told me to leave the key under the mat so Sam could use it.

"Why do that?" He can ring the buzzer.

"I told him you would, Mike."

I sneered at her. I said, "You like me. Sure. You like me. You even trust me. You wouldn't think I was pulling a fastie on you. Oh, no."

Just the same, I left the key.

THE BUILDING was as quiet as a morgue and when we went along the hall the only thing we could hear was our own steps. At that, we didn't make a lot of noise. Sara took the key from me, and unlocked the lock, and left the key sticking in on the outside. She had the little .25 out again. She said, "You first, Mike."

I went inside. She was right behind me, the gun pressed against my spine. I heard the door close, but I didn't look around. Something had gone wrong. Edith was still there, but she wasn't on the davenport like I left her, and she wasn't unconscious. She was lying on the floor, and her whole face was purple and there were marks on her throat. I could tell without going closer that she was dead.

Seeing her like that I could remember kissing her. The memory was old and dry, like a dead leaf, and not very important.

Sara sucked breath sharply and her gun came away from my back.

The next thing I heard was this man's voice saying, "All right, Mister Marsh. Against the wall. You too, lady."

I went to the wall. I went easy, backwards, careful not to make any funny moves. Once I tripped over something on the floor and almost fell. When I got past it I saw it was a suitcase. My shoulders stopped against the wall. Sara was beside me, rigid. And there was Breem. He had Sara's little .25 in his left hand, and a bigger automatic, a .38 in his right. He

was holding them both very steady.

I shook my head at him. "Don't kid yourself. I had you pegged a long time ago."

He didn't like that. It hurt his ego. He sneered at me and said things like, "I'll bet," and "Sure, a wise guy," but just the same it got him. That was what I wanted. He was so sure he was good that he wouldn't do anything until I'd told him where he'd made his mistakes. And the longer I talked the more chance there was of Axness getting there. I said, "You gave part of it away yourself, Junior. You said Edith wouldn't wait any six years to start spending the money from the stones if she had it. Only she didn't have it. It wasn't safe for you to start passing the stuff right away, and before you could you got drafted. You didn't trust Edith so you stashed the diamonds someplace and told her she'd have to wait until you got out before she got her cut. And just after you got out she moved up to this place. It all fits like fingers."

Breem tried to laugh, but it came out brittle. He dropped Sara's little .25 into one pocket so he'd have a hand free, and fumbled for a cigarette. "You don't build anything with those bricks."

"I didn't have to. I guess you know I went to see Phillips tonight, but what you don't know is the rest of it. I gave Phillips a workout. I let him think I left, but I didn't. I stayed out in the reception room. When he got so he could, he called Edith. But first he had to look her number up in the phone book. And then when he talked to her he asked if she knew I was in town. That cinched it. If Phillips had been tied up with Edith he would have known her phone number. And if she'd been playing with him, the first thing after I punched her face she'd have let him know about it. Three strikes on Phillips. That meant you were up, Junior."

He was smoking and watching me.

I said, "There's more. Seven years ago

I thought Edith was my woman. She wasn't. She was doubling me with Phillips, and she was doubling Phillips with you. It was Phillips who told her about the stones. Probably he got drunk. Anyway, she tipped you. You weren't working that week so you had a chance to fit me for a frame. You picked a night and Edith took Phillips out of the play just in case. That left you in a nice spot. I'd think Edith and Phillips had framed me, and everybody else would think I'd pulled the job. Either way, you were in the clear, unless Edith talked. And you knew what to do about that." I was looking at Edith's body. I said, "You did it."

Breem was getting restless. His hand was tense around the automatic and he was sort of swaying back and forth on his heels. Just the same I knew he'd listen as long as I could keep talking. I said, "You want to hear the rest, Mastermind? You made a lot more mistakes. This morning after I left, Edith let you know about me. That worried you. You didn't know how much I suspected. Then I called and wanted to talk and you thought you'd fallen into luck. You tried to lead me down the garden path and when that didn't work you wanted to follow me. I gave you the brush, but you didn't change your plans. I bet you trailed me all over town. I even saw you once, after I left Phillips. By that time you'd figured the best thing to do was to tip Axness and let him take me out of circulation."

From beside me, Sara said, "That's right, Mike. We got a call you were waiting in that doorway."

"Sure. I bet after that Breem called Edith and told her everything was satin and to wait for him here. Only he got to worrying again. He had to make sure. We went down to that machine shop place and he tagged along and hung around outside. When he saw me get out he probably would have killed me only you and Axness and those two goons were on my tail and

he didn't dare. He lost me at the doctor's office like the rest of you. He was sure dumb because he spent a lot of time hunting until it dawned on him I'd make for Edith's. Probably he got here while I was inside. Maybe he even listened through the door. Did you listen, Junior?"

He only nodded.

I said, "Yeah. And you figured you could wait until I was gone and then pin her murder on me. The way you framed me once before. That's where you made a mistake. You hung around too long."

Breem said, "I had some things to pick up."

I knew he meant the suitcase. I said, "Yeah. Things that would tie you to Edith. Like your toothbrush, maybe."

"Maybe."

"Yeah."

Breem said, "Only I like it this way. It'll work out just as good, but I like it better. You know what the cops are going to find? They're going to find you and this lady. Only you'll be dead. And they're going to think you killed Edith and then shot the lady and killed yourself."

"With your gun?"

Breem shook his head. He was grinning. He was feeling cocky again. "With the lady's gun. This nice little one." He put the .38 away and came out with Sara's .25. "Not so much noise, but you'll be just as dead, I think."

"You think. That's your last mistake, Junior. You waited too long. Before we came, we told Axness and his boys where we'd be. We even left the key downstairs for them. They're coming now. You listen. You just listen."

He listened. I did a little, too. And damned if I wasn't right. We could hear voices and a lot of feet moving down the outside corridor.

Whatever it was Breem intended to do he never had a chance to do it. Sara left that wall like she'd been blown away from it, charging him. The little gun cracked

and I knew she was hit, but she didn't stop. She didn't stop until she was hanging on Breem's arm, all doubled over, holding his gun hand tight against her own middle. He must have gone nuts because he kept jerking the trigger over and over and every time he did her body would jump with the impact of a bullet. When she finally slid off him, and went to the floor, the gun was empty and Sara was dead.

The door came open and Eddie and Jug went past me, and Axness. I heard Breem shriek and saw him throw the automatic as hard as he could. It hit Eddie on the chest, and it must have hurt, but he kept right on going. Breem managed to duck away and get into another room, with the rest of them following. The door shut, but I could hear Breem yelling through it.

I didn't pay much attention.

BREEM finally stopped shrieking. Sam Axness came out of the room, wiping his hands with a handkerchief. I asked him if Breem had talked. He said, "Yes." He looked a little sad, the way you do if you've lost a favorite dog or cat. He stood for awhile, staring down at Sara, and once he sort of touched her shoulder with the tip of his shoe. He said, "My wife."

"Tough."

He nodded and put away the handkerchief. He said, "I guess we don't owe you anything, Marsh."

I said, no, they didn't owe me anything. There was no reason for me to stay, so I left. The hall was filling up with a lot of frightened people wearing nightclothes but none of them tried to stop me. When I got outside I stood on a corner and used my good hand to light a cigarette. It was bent and loose, and I had to keep spitting out bits of tobacco as I walked along.

Just the same, for the first time in seven years the taste of the smoke was clean and sweet.



Answers to THE THIRD DEGREE

(Questions on page 6)

1. According to convict slang, "active citizens" are common lice.

2. Generally speaking, the person on the witness stand tends to exaggerate rather than understate. The psychological detective, prosecuting attorney, etc., should take this factor into consideration when making investigations or when questioning.

3. If a crook friend said he wanted his "ax," you should know he was looking for his razor.

4. "Buttons" is an underworld expression used to indicate policemen.

5. When a detective has an excellent memory for faces, it is said he has a *camera eye*.

6. The age of a murder victim can often to some degree be determined by the skeleton. However, generally speaking, the older the person the more difficult it becomes to determine the age with near exactness.

7. If the police chief sent you out to bring in a "feero," you should return with a firebug.

8. In criminal slang, there is no difference in the meaning of "flatfoot" and "flathead." They both mean "policeman."

9. True. "Iso" means "isolation cell."

10. "Barrel time" concerns the flight of the projectile, and measures the time

from the fall of the hammer to the muzzle of the gun.

11. If your detective friend told you he had just picked up a "knuck," you should know that he had just taken a pickpocket into custody.

12. Normally, a crook would go to a "pigeon joint" in order to buy burglar tools.

13. If your shady character acquaintance told you he had just "received his sheepskin," you should know that he had just been released from prison.

14. If a man were found dead with throat cut and shirt collar buttoned high around his neck, you would suspect murder. First of all, a man with his throat cut would be unlikely to button his collar around the wound. Second, suicide victims almost always bare the part of the body they intend to destroy.

15. Jewel thieves sometimes "skin" or peel stolen pearls in order to make them more difficult to identify.

16. False. Wounds on the abdomen are seldom found in suicide cases.

17. "Tears" is the underworld slang term for "pearls."

18. True. "Face lace" means whiskers.

19. Yes. In normal suicide cases, the wound of entrance of a bullet is smaller than the wound of exit.

*The dead don't talk—but
their friends do—and hor-
ror creeps in City Hall cor-
ridors with a mayor who
could reform everything—
but his trigger finger!*

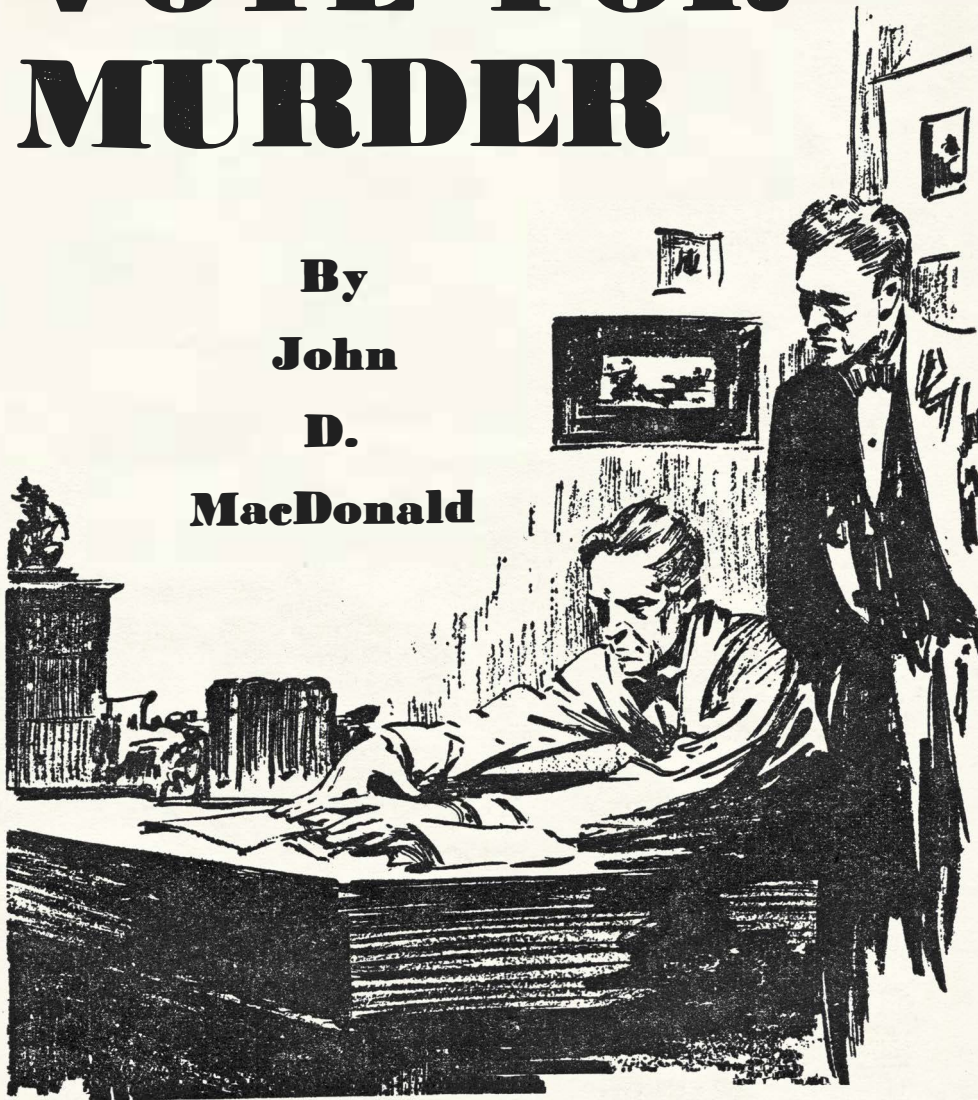
ONE

*"Who else knows about these
fairy tales of yours?"
Houghton asked. . . .*



VOTE FOR MURDER

By
John
D.
MacDonald



I WALKED behind her down the narrow aisle with the booths on each side and thought how funny it was that for nearly eight years I carried an empty space around with me—a space just her shape and size—and here she was again and she fitted right into that empty space with a definite click.

We sat across from each other and she

gave me the tight careful smile that beauty gives strangers and said that she thought she'd keep her coat on.

"This is all pretty mysterious, Mr. . . ." she said.

I hadn't given her a name. I smiled and said, "It sure is. I didn't know how good a ticket the name Peter Lanse was going to be. He talked about you a lot,

Miss Corry. Shouldn't I call you Jen?"

The careful smile. "Please do." Her hair was still the silver of a new coin, her eyes the mist grey of early morning, the face modeled with a trim delicacy of bone that would have been sterile but for the promised warmth of the mouth. It was all the same. But not quite. Nearly eight years. Fine lines at the corners of her eyes. Delicate lines in her throat. A wiseness in the grey eyes that hadn't been there before.

The waiter coughed impatiently. "Two bourbons and plain water . . . no ice," I said.

She looked at me curiously. "Peter told you that, too?"

"He told me a lot of things, Jen."

"Did he tell you why he didn't write. . . why he didn't come back?"

"To what, Jen? You were all sewed up with Stanley Hall. He had nothing here but you, you know."

"He could have said that before he left."

"He was a shy kid nearly eight years ago. He was twenty-three then, Jen. He believed in the goodness of people. Damp behind the ears, they call it."

As she lifted her drink her eyes met mine. I looked into the grey eyes and saw them widen, saw her lips turn pale. She tried to set the glass down but it tipped over and I measured the extent of her shock by the fact that she didn't move as the drink ran across the table, spilled over onto her legs.

"Peter!" she said. It was like the whisper of leaves driven by the wind. There was hysteria in it. I reached across and took her wrist, felt my fingers sink into her smooth cold skin.

"Hold tight, Jen. Hold tight," I said softly.

"What happened to you? What happened?" The hysteria was still there.

"Hunk of shell casing. They kept me in the hospital for twenty-two months. Everything was gone below the eyes so they built me a new face. Did a good job.

I even have to shave. Like it?" I tried to smile.

The old face had had a bland look, sort of like a well-scrubbed baby. The new one was lean and taut and somehow slightly out of focus. I knew what she was trying to get used to. I had lived with it for a year and I still wasn't used to it. Every morning a stranger looked out of my mirror at me. He smiled when I did.

The shock faded out of her eyes and she began to look concerned. I let go of her wrist. I handed her my handkerchief and she mopped the drink out of her lap.

"Peter, you can't stay here. They're looking for you," she said hurriedly. "They want to serve papers on you . . . make you testify."

"That's why I came back."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Last week I was in New York. I went to the stand on Times Square and bought a Beach City paper. John C. Houghton, the Reform candidate for Mayor had made a statement about Stanley Hall's suicide. He mentioned my name. Mine and Wally Doberty and Jim Steph."

She glanced at my suit and shirt and tie and topcoat and was suddenly cool. "If they catch you, you might have to pay back the money," she said.

"Jen, honey, this is all old stuff to you and I am disappointed you are believing everything you read in the papers. Take a look back at Nineteen-Forty. Wallace Doberty was, and still is, City Engineer. He had two fresh kids in his office—Stan Hall and myself. You were right down the hall working as secretary to the Commissioner of Assessment. You still there?" She nodded. "We had been filling in the bay west of the city with ashes and dirt for a long, long time. The appropriation came through to permit us to let bids on the road to be built over the fill. One mile and a half of four lane highway and a retaining wall where there used to be water. It was a big job. Stan and I in-

spected it every inch of the way. It was a good job and it was finished two months before I went into the army. I figure the road should have lasted fifteen years and the reinforced retaining wall should have lasted forty.

"I got out of the hospital and I got a job in Jersey. Engineering work. You have to have a license to do engineering work. It's the only kind of work. I buy a paper and I find out that somebody named John C. Houghton whom I never heard of is running for Mayor on the basis that the Beach Drive was a \$2,400,000 swindle and that the wall is collapsing and has to be condemned and the people in on the conspiracy were the Mager Brothers Construction Company, Jim Steph who was Mayor at that time, Wally Doberty, City Engineer, and the two kids who were in his office at the time, Stan Hall and myself. I know they are looking for me and it won't be long before they locate me and, if they throw too big a cloud over me, I lose my license. What I want from you is help and information, Jen, not suspicion."

She was very still for long seconds and her eyes seemed to be searching my face. "I'm sorry, Peter," she said softly.

"I'm registered in at the Beach City Hotel as William Riley. Call me Bill for practice. Go ahead."

"Okay, Bill," she said, suddenly flashing the gamin grin of the old days. Nose wrinkled and eyes like a jack-o-lantern. She turned serious. "Do you mean that there was nothing in it at all, Pete . . . Bill? No graft?"

"Not a nickel. That road and wall were built according to specifications. They're good for years. I spent a thousand hours on that job."

Her smile was crooked. "What were you doing? The road is roped off and it sags toward the bay in three places."

I stared at her in disbelief. "Is that right?"

"Absolutely."

"What do the Mager boys say?"

"They say that they have the certified statements of inspection and approval from the office of the City Engineer. They say their books are open to inspection at any time. They disclaim any connection with it."

"What does Wally Doberty say?"

"Nothing. He hasn't made a statement."

"Who the hell is this John C. Houghton?"

"He came here four years ago as Executive Vice President of Bennton Shipbuilding. He's from the coast. Very impressive."

"Tell me about Stan. He was a good boy."

"As you know, he couldn't get in the service. He got married to Madge Kale three years ago and . . ."

I stared at her. "But I thought . . ."

"You thought wrong, Peter. It was never that way."

I felt embarrassed. I tried to smile. "Could it be that . . ."

"If you say what I think you're going to say, you'll be flattering yourself. I'm twenty-nine years old, friend. I'm a civil service employee. I keep very busy. After thirty years of service, I'll get a pension and I'll still keep busy. I like it this way."

I finished my drink and made aimless circles on the hard black table top with the wet bottom of the glass. I frowned at the circles.

"What do you expect to do?" she asked.

"I don't know. That wall shouldn't have collapsed. I don't know of any swindle. I've got a new face to hide behind. I covered my tracks coming here. Maybe I can find out how it works from this angle. Who is doing what to whom and who is getting paid."

"You'll need some sort of an 'in'," she said.

"Got any ideas?"

"Maybe you could be a free-lance writer gathering the facts on the swindle for a

magazine article. One of those better government things."

"Let's have a drink to Bill Riley, demon journalist."

We lifted our fresh drinks, the glasses making a thin clink as we touched them together. She still lived in the same apartment. I took her back and there was no invitation to continue the talk upstairs. I walked her in to the self-service elevator, smiled politely, said, "Take care," and left.

JOHAN C. HOUGHTON had a male secretary, a young man who sat glowing in a shaft of morning sun and listened amiably to my story. The offices had been decorated to look like the study and library in an early American home. You half-expected to see someone writing with a quill pen and sprinkling sand on the manuscript.

I had typed the letter myself. An informal note. "Dear Bill: We could use 12,000 words on the highway swindle in Beach City. Phone me if you can cover. I'll send Carstairs down later for photo coverage. Usual rates." To it I had signed the name of an imaginary associate editor on a far from imaginary top-flight magazine.

Pretty boy looked up from my letter and the faint coldness in his manner was completely gone. "I'm certain that Mr. Houghton will be glad to see you, Mr. Riley, if you'll wait one moment."

When I walked in, John C. Houghton stood up, came around the corner of his desk and shook my hand warmly. I had expected the shaggy sheepdog type with a profile off a Roman coin. John C. turned out to be a slim man of average height with sandy reddish hair, a slumpy, lined, ugly face, sharp blue eyes, and an air of great sincerity.

He handed my letter back to me after we had shaken hands and said, "It'll be a pleasure to help you, Mr. Riley. This is a

nasty situation we have down here."

I sat down. "First tell me about yourself, Mr. Houghton."

"I was born and raised in Southern California. I went to Stanford Graduate School of Business, worked as an investment counsellor in Los Angeles, then later as the comptroller of a small manufacturing firm. I got into the shipbuilding business and I was approached to come down here to Beach City and run this yard during the war. I'm unmarried and I have no political ambitions. I want to be mayor of this city long enough to clean up the filthy mess we have here, and then get out. I'm a businessman and I'm mad at these people. The money they wasted was tax dollars from Bennton Shipbuilding and from our employees."

"Who's in back of you in this campaign?" I asked.

He looked puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"Are you all by yourself? How about your organization?"

"Oh, I see what you mean, Mr. Riley. The men working with me on this program are men from the firm. The executives here."

"What do the stockholders think of that?"

He smiled. "I'm afraid you don't understand. I'm given a certain amount of leeway in my job. I feel that by going into city government I can effect a substantial reduction in the property taxes. So, even though the company is paying for the time of the men helping me, the end result is for the good of the stockholders in the company."

"Do they see it your way?"

He lost his smile. "I'm not growing any fonder of your attitude, Riley."

"Sorry. I'm just after the facts. A good article ought to do you some good in this campaign."

He smiled again. "I have a feeling we won't need much help. My statisticians

have conducted polls which tell me I will be in by a landslide vote. People of Beach City are very, very tired of politicians and graft, Mr. Riley."

"Could one of your men show me around?" I asked.

He clicked the switch on a box on his desk. "Send Robert in, Paul," he said.

Robert turned out to be Robert Wilt, a tall, shambling, balding man with a long sallow face, tired eyes, a beaked nose, an inverted U for a mouth and grease spots on his grey vest. He was Houghton's campaign manager, and Public Relations Director for Bennton Shipbuilding.

As we walked out of the office building he said, "Beer first, boy."

He propped a lean foot on the brass rail, gulped half his glass, belched and looked at me coldly. "What you want to know, Riley?"

"First about Stanley Hall. What's the pitch?"

"Smart kid. Too smart. But no guts. Made a mint on the Beach Drive swindle and when the pressure went on he stuck a .45 between his teeth and lifted the back of his head off. Cops still looking around to see where he stashed his end of the take."

"Maybe he spent it?"

"No chance. Lived inside his salary."

"Where did he do it?"

"At night in the office of the City Engineer. Sitting at his desk. No witnesses.

Watchman didn't hear the shot. Found him in the morning. His wife had called the cops when he didn't come home."

"You figure he did it because he was guilty?"

"What else is there to figure? The medical examiner said there was nothing apparently wrong with him physically. Happy home life. Two small kids. It had to be that way."

"How about this man Steph who was mayor at the time?"

"Dead. Over a year ago. Heart. Maybe he had the heart attack thinking about what would happen when that retaining wall collapsed."

"And it has collapsed?"

"In three spots, Riley. Sags like a postwar girdle."

"Has anybody tried to find out the reason?"

"Houghton had a guy look at it. The guy said the concrete was all sand."

"Who looked at it?"

"Guy named Shafter. Bud Shafter. His report was in the paper. I'll give you the clips when we go back."

"Where is this Shafter?"

"An office downtown. Want to go and talk to him?"

"Not right now. What has Doberty got to say?"

"Nothing. What can he say? 'I've been a bad boy?' All he can do is keep his mouth shut. Wally has been around a long

Aaron Robinson*

has switched to Calvert
because Calvert is smoother.

*of 8701 Shore Road, Brooklyn, N.Y.

CALVERT RESERVE Blended Whiskey—86.8 Proof—65% Grain
Neutral Spirits. Calvert Distillers Corp., New York City.



time. Maybe he'll go on a trip. South America."

"Four governors of this state have started as mayors of Beach City."

"Houghton says he's going to quit after one term."

"What do you say?"

"I say that politics is like taking shots in the leg. It's hard to stop. But don't hint that in your article, boy. Don't hint any part of it."

I grinned at him. "I sort of figured it that way myself. Of those four governors, one came awful close to being president. He didn't have the background and personality that Houghton's got."

Robert Wilt grinned back at me. "You're okay, Riley. The shipbuilding business is awful slow lately."

"What are the odds on Houghton getting in?"

"Sure thing. No bets. Brayton and Lessnat are the other two candidates. Brayton was given his start by James Steph. That smears him. Lessnat has been a close friend of Wallace Doberty. That smears him. A walk-away."

A kid came in the door of the bar with a stack of papers. Wilt bought one, showed me a box on page one. It said that I had been located in Jersey but that I had disappeared. Fortunately there was no picture. I was glad that I had been shy about having any picture taken since they had given me a new face.

Wilt slapped the box with the back of his hand. "See that? Makes the whole thing cut and dried. This Peter Lanse gets the wind up and scoots. Proof positive, they call it. And it makes a thousand more votes for Houghton."

They had a longer article and my picture on the inside, page three. But it was a picture from long ago and far away. There was no mention of anyone having checked back and found out about my new face.

Beach Drive was closed off. Wilt and I

walked down it. The air off the bay was damp and chilly. A train roared by on the tracks near the road. The black top seemed to be in good shape. Normal wear. Two hundred yards from where it was roped off, it tilted crazily toward the ocean. A twisted ribbon. The lanes on the ocean side were dropped six feet in a space maybe thirty feet long. The strain had cracked the black top. I looked over the edge. Hunks of concrete and twisted steel bars. The waves hacked at the jumbled mess and threw spray; I couldn't feel it when it hit the numb parts of my face. I wiped it off.

Wilt was bored. The next spot was the same. We walked to the car. A company car. He sat behind the wheel and stuck a cigarette in the corner of his sour mouth.

"How do you like it, Riley?"

"It's a mess. I don't wonder that the people are sore."

He looked at me and there was a little glint in his sleepy eyes. "I'm sore myself, Riley. My house is within the city limits. My taxes'll have to go to ripping out that mile and a half of wall and putting something right in there."

"How long have you been on this job with Houghton?" I asked.

"Two months. I was on the paper before that. He's okay."

I went alone to Bud Shafter's office. It was as well appointed as a phone booth and just slightly larger. I handed him a note from Wilt and watched while he read it. He was a puffy man with pads of moist flesh under his eyes and dimples on his white knuckles. He gave me my note back, yanked open a desk drawer and handed me a piece of concrete, a small piece. I rubbed it hard with my thumb and it crumbled away like a little girl's mud pie.

"This came off the wall?" I asked.

"It ain't off the Taj Mahal, friend."

"Can I keep it? I'd like it for background for my article."

"Bob Wilt says in the note to cooperate. I got some more pieces here."

"Could I have a copy of your report to go with it?"

"For that you'll need a specific okay from Wilt or Houghton."

"Maybe I don't need it. Maybe you could just give me a note that says this piece came off the retaining wall."

He rubbed his chin with thick white fingers. "I could do that." He scribbled a note and handed it to me. "Maybe you can work my name into that article. Good advertising."

"Maybe I can do that. You're got a professional license?"

"Sure. Right there on the wall." I stepped over and took a look. As I turned around he said, "Anything I can do for you, Mr. Riley, you just come on over or call me up. Any time."

I thanked him and left.

It was forty minutes by train to the University. I waited three hours until all the tests were made, and then I paid nominal fee, stuffed the lab reports in my pocket, thanked them and went back to Beach City.

The girl on the phone said that Mr. Doberty had left for his home. I took a cab out to his place and knocked on the door. He opened it. He had aged since I had seen him last. He was a thick-bodied man with a slow walk and hands that still curled from the hard labor of his youth. His eyes were a mild brown and they looked at me without a shred of recognition. I explained myself and he said, "I've got nothing to say, Mr. Riley. Nothing at all."

"Maybe I've got something to say to you."

He smiled ruefully. "Everybody has that, son. Come on in."

It was the same quiet, shabby house. His wife had died just before I went into the army. Doberty was in his shirt sleeves. We went into the living room and I sat

opposite him as he wedged tobacco down into his pipe.

"You know, Mr. Doberty, you're going to have to say something sooner or later."

"I know that, son. I know what I'll say when the time comes."

"What will you do? Confess?"

I saw his hand tighten on the stem of the pipe. After long seconds he said, "You make it hard for me to remember that you're a guest in my house, Riley. I haven't done anything that I'm ashamed of. Yet."

I caught the inference. "But you expect to do something not . . . quite right."

"There's many ways of looking at a thing, Riley."

"When this statement that you're going to make comes out, what do you think it might say, Mr. Doberty? Understand, I'm not asking you what you will say. Just what you might say."

He held another match to his pipe. "Well, I might say that I suspected the activities of the young men in my office, but I had no proof. I might say that I was in error in not checking the job myself instead of sending the two of them out."

"A statement like that might be worth some money to Houghton."

He knocked his pipe out. "Riley, think this over for a minute. I'm sixty-four. I retire next year, if I don't get booted out sooner. When I retire, I'm expected to live on a hundred and twelve dollars a month for the rest of my life. This house has still got a three thousand dollars mortgage on it. I gave my whole life to this city. If I make that statement and if it wasn't the truth, who would I hurt? Jim Steph? He's dead. Stan Hall? He's dead. Lense? Today's paper says he's skipped. Besides, the bloody wall has fallen down. What would you have a man do?"

"How much will he pay you?"

"How much will who pay me?"

"Houghton."

"I've never met Houghton. I got a phone call one night from a man who said that he had a proposition for me. Could have been anybody. Understand, Riley, I talk to you like this because I'm an old man and this thing has taken the heart out of me. Right now I don't give a damn. An old man talks too much."

"Or not enough."

"Haven't I met you before, Riley?"

"Not that I know of."

"Never mind. Something about the way you carry yourself, and the way you use your hands. . ."

AFTER I left, I picked up the clips from Wilt and spent a few hours in the hotel room going over them.

That night I phoned Jen and she told me I could come up. She wore a blue wool dress that made her eyes shine. The apartment wasn't as I remembered it. Things moved around. New things. Different wallpaper. But she was the same, though frightened.

She put the chain across the door and came over to where I was sitting. She knelt beside the chair and took my hand in her cold grasp.

"Peter," she said, half whispering, "I was afraid to call you. Something has happened. Something odd. A man named Brown from the District Attorney's office came to see me today. He asked me where I got the two thousand dollars that was deposited to my account the day before Stan shot himself. He said they got a telephone tip on it and they had checked the bank.

"I told him he was crazy and we went to the bank together and the cashier said that they had been expecting me in to sign the signature card. He told me that I had two thousand dollars in a checking account.

"I told Brown that I didn't know where it came from and he said he would see me later and not to leave town."

"The day before he shot himself," I said softly. "You were running around with Stan at the time the contract was let back in Nineteen-Forty, weren't you?"

"With you too, Peter."

"Never mind that. These people are smart, honey. I'll bet the two thousand will have a typed deposit slip. I'll bet it was mailed in. I also imagine that the typing will match a machine in the City Engineer's office. The story is that Stan, having decided to kill himself, gives you some of the cash for old times's sake. Or for services rendered. It makes the suicide angle stronger and also the swindle case stronger because Stan's wife won't know where the two thousand dollars came from."

"But why?" she said. "Why? Haven't they got enough already? Why do they have to bring me in on it? I don't like it, Peter."

I stood up, pulled my hand away and paced back and forth in the small living room. I turned to her. "It only makes sense if you assume that Stan was killed. It isn't necessary as far as the election is concerned. It has to be a safety play. Maybe somebody wanted the safety angle. Let's go see Madge."

"Together?"

"Why not. I'm just a new friend. Get your hat."

Madge Hall, whom I had known as Madge Kale, let us in. She smiled politely when Jen introduced me as Bill Riley. I looked at Madge curiously. She seemed so very placid. I couldn't figure it until I saw the blank look in her dark eyes. She was still moving around in a state of shock. A tall fine girl with rich black hair.

The furniture was thick with dust, the rug littered with the children's toys. Madge waved a vague hand at the mess. "You'll have to forgive the way the place looks. I haven't felt like cleaning up."

Jen said quickly, "Madge, darling, Bill and I have some new leads on Stan's

death. Would it hurt you too much to talk about it?"

"It wouldn't hurt me at all, I don't believe," Madge said vaguely.

"Tell me about how Stan acted the day he . . . he died," I said.

"Why, I guess he was upset. He'd been upset for three days. Ever since Mr. Houghton came out in the paper with all that talk about Beach Drive. He wasn't eating right and he couldn't sleep. He came home for dinner and he snapped at the children and said he had work to do and went back to the office. He . . . he never came home again."

"Did he talk to you about Beach Drive?"

"He said it was all a put-up job and that if it collapsed it wasn't his fault. He wondered if Peter Lanse had been the one who made money from it. He said that because Lanse didn't come back here to Beach City after the war, it looked as if he might be the one. He said they weren't going to pin anything on him and get away with it. He was very bitter about some man named Schaeffer or something like that."

"Shafter?"

"That's the name."

"Do you think he shot himself, Mrs. Hall?"

"We were happy . . ." she said.

Jen went quickly to her. Madge stared at me and then her face slowly crumpled

as Jen's arms went around her. She turned and Jen went back to a bedroom with her. The door shut and I heard the thin desperate cries of grief released.

After three cigarettes, Jen came out and said, "We'll let ourselves out. The door'll lock behind us. She's asleep now."

We climbed into Jen's battered convertible and I lit a cigarette for her. "Find out anything?" I asked.

"Just one thing. I don't know what good it is to you. They wouldn't let her look at him after he was dead. Said it would make her feel worse."

I frowned. "That doesn't make a hell of a lot of sense, Jen. The gun was stuck in his mouth. It shouldn't have marked him up much in the face. Who was the undertaker?"

"Cafferty, I think. Hudson Street near Palmer."

"Let's roll it."

We got there in a few minutes. Jen sat out in the car. The establishment was in the back of an old frame house. The front end of the house belonged to a florist. A hearse was parked in front of the triple garage in the back and there was a light on.

I pounded at the door for two full minutes before a swarthy young kid with pimples yanked it open and said, "Yeah?"

"My name is Riley and I'm working on the Beach Drive scandal for John Houghton. I've got a note here from Robert

HEADACHE

**UPSET
STOMACH**

**JUMPY
NERVES**



RELIEF!

THANKS TO FAMOUS
BROMO-SELTZER

Millions turn to Bromo-Seltzer to relieve ordinary headache *three* ways. It's famous for giving fast help. Caution: Use only as directed. Get Bromo-Seltzer at your drugstore fountain or counter today. A product of Emerson Drug Company since 1887.



Wilt. I want to talk to whoever worked on the Hall body."

"Come on in," the kid said. "My name is Arnelli. I'm just learning the business. Joe Cafferty started the Hall job and I finished it off. Nothing much to it. Routine embalming. No cosmetic treatment even because the coffin was screwed down for the funeral. What you want to know?"

"The police didn't have to dig for the slug?"

"No. It went on right out the back of his head. We plugged the hole with burlap so that the head would sit right on the pillow."

Arnelli took one of my cigarettes, leaned against the wall and inhaled deeply. He said, "I like that kind. Automobile accident stuff is the worst."

"Was he marked up pretty bad?"

"Not too bad, Mister. The slug smashed his front teeth all to hell and the back flash burned his lips some. That was all. Couldn't you have got this stuff from the cops?"

I smiled. "Guess I could. But I like to get everybody's angle. You know how it is."

I thanked him and left. Out in the car I said to Jen, "Murder, honey! He went back to the office to wait for somebody. They sapped him on the back of the head, shoved a .45 in his hand, put the muzzle between his lips and pushed his finger down on the trigger. The slug messed up the place where he was slugged."

She gasped. "How can you be so sure?"

"Use your head, Jen. The slug smashed his teeth. If you put the muzzle of a gun in your mouth in order to knock yourself off, you get it past your teeth first."

She thought it over and then nodded slowly, her eyes wide with wonder and what could have been fear.

"What's the police situation now?" I asked.

"Chief Burdick has been sick for a long time. Morgan White is Deputy Chief. He

has been handling the case himself."

"How bright is he? I don't know him."

"I think he's smart. He's a professional cop. Courses with the F. B. I. and at Northwestern."

"That's bad," I said.

"What do you mean?"

"The way the case looks, whoever handled it had to be either dumb or crooked. Is this Morgan White ambitious?"

"I think he thinks he looks like he is. He walks with his shoulders very straight and sings baritone in his church choir. He's got a lot of pictures of himself in his office. Pictures taken with various bigshots around the country. He was a private detective in New York for a time, they say."

I drove the car for three blocks, glanced at my watch. Five of ten. I left Jen in the car, and phoned Wally Doherty from a drugstore phone booth.

As soon as he was on the line I said, "Wally, listen and don't interrupt. This is Pete Lanse." I heard him gasp. "Wally, Stan was murdered and Bud Shafter's report was a frame. I still don't know why the wall collapsed. You're a smarter engineer than I am. Suppose you get down there at dawn and look those spots over and see if you can find out why it collapsed. I'll call you tomorrow morning." I hung up on him.

I phoned the police headquarters and asked for Morgan White. He wasn't in and they wouldn't give me his address, but they gave me his phone number. I called the operator and found out it was an unlisted number. I called the number and a polite voice told me that Deputy Chief White was at a party at the residence of John C. Houghton.

Jen knew where Houghton's house was. She drove and we parked a block beyond it. A light rain was coming in from the ocean, whipping against us. Houghton's house was behind a spiked fence. It was a

side hill house and looked like a cubist diagram of a flying wing. Indirect lighting shone through the glass brick and we heard music.

I said to Jen, "Better go on back to the car. I'm going in there and see how much hell I can raise."

I felt her arm tighten under my hand. "I'm going along, Peter."

"What good will that do?"

"There'll be two of us. I make a good witness, Peter."

I thought over the angles. John C. Houghton would be too careful to try anything rough. It looked okay. "In we go," I said.

The big gates were open. Jen's heels made sharp sounds on the flagstone walk. I pushed a thumb on the recessed button beside the big front door. A very pretty blonde woman of about thirty-five opened it. Her cheeks were flushed and she held a drink in one hand.

"I don't believe I . . ." she started.

"I'm Bill Riley," I said jovially. "I'm working on an article for John and he asked me to stop by. This is Miss Corry."

"How do you do," the blonde said gravely. "Won't you come in? I'm Mrs. Houghton."

The inside of the house was all white birch paneling and aqua ceilings and wall to wall rugs, indirect lighting. She took us into a main room with one wall completely of plate glass framing the dark horizon of the ocean. A man in a white jacket stood behind a corner bar and a redheaded girl with a big mouth was playing the piano and singing dirty lyrics in a hoarse monotone. The guests were clustered around the big piano.

I recognized John Houghton, Bob Wilt, Shafter, the pretty-boy secretary, a man who looked like Jen's description of Morgan White, and some assorted beefy looking executives and their wives.

I saw the quick flash of annoyance cross Houghton's face, fading quickly as he

came toward us with hands outstretched. "So glad you could stop by, Riley. Order anything you'd like to drink."

I introduced Jen and he bowed in a courtly manner. "I wonder if I could make a request?" I asked, smiling.

"Anything you wish, Mr. Riley. Anything at all."

"I'd like a little conference. Seven of us. You and Wilt and your secretary and Shafter and Morgan White and the two of us. Have you got a room where we could closet ourselves for a little while?"

"Why yes, but I think we'd better wait until the party starts to break up, don't you?"

I smiled as cheerfully as he did. "Murder won't wait, they tell me."

His smile was still there, but the sharp blue eyes above the smile were like deep holes in a cake of ice.

"Right now, then," he said, "And with your permission I'll have my Mr. Bozzert attend also. He's my right hand, you know."

"I didn't know. But the more the merrier."

HE COLLECTED the others and herded us back down a long hall and into a large study in the rear of the house. Since it was a side hill house, the study windows were very small and close to the ceiling. As he shut the door behind us, I could hear the distant tinkle of the piano and the murmur of the red-head's insinuating voice suddenly cut off, soundproofed.

John C. Houghton quickly turned it into a board meeting. He went behind the big desk in the middle of the room and got us all grouped in chairs in a semi-circle in front of the desk. With one exception. His "right hand," Mr. Bozzert, stood by the door; in fact, he leaned on it. His chest and shoulders strained a tweed jacket to the tearing point and his face had all the sensitive dignity of piece of wet

rock. The lids of his small eyes were inflamed and he blinked them rapidly.

John C. Houghton said, with a winning smile, "I really don't know what this is all about. Mr. Riley here asked me to call this little . . . group together. I believe he has something to say. Mr. Riley." He sat down.

I glanced quickly at Jen's pale face, at the way she had shut her teeth down over her underlip. I stood up and walked slowly over to the side wall, to a place where I could watch Houghton and the others.

I said softly, "I came here to write a story on Beach City, a story on graft and corruption and how an honest man was taking over. I guess that I have been a little too energetic in my research. I've talked to too many people.

"I called you together to ask your advice on how to write this story. I have some facts that are awkward to fit into the story. These are the facts that I want your opinion on. First—Stanley Hall was murdered. Second—an attempt has been made to frame Miss Corry by paying money into a new bank account for her. Third—Mr. Shafter's report on the retaining wall was faked. Fourth—Mr. Doherty is going to be paid for issuing a statement damaging to the two young men who were in his office at the time the contract for the Drive and the wall was let.

"Of the supposed grafters, two are dead, one is missing and the last is being paid to fasten all the blame on the other three. The construction company disclaims any responsibility in the matter. If I print all the facts, my story is going to look as though Mr. Houghton's organization has framed up a fake frame-up. If you follow me."

John C. Houghton drew his sandy eyebrows together in a puzzled frown. Wilt took out a pack of cigarettes and poked one into a corner of his tight mouth. Morgan White looked very stuffy. Pretty-boy

examined his fingernails. Shafter began to twitch. Bozzert, by the door, yawned and covered his mouth with a freckled hand.

Houghton cleared his throat. "This is all very startling, Riley. Pretty fantastic for my money. What do you think, Morgan?"

Morgan White grinned at me tightly. "Maybe the psycho boys should throw a net over him, John. He talks about facts and says that it is a fact that Hall was murdered. I handled that case. Hall committed suicide."

I faced White. "How would you like to have that body dug up, friend? How would you like to have somebody look at it who knows his business? Maybe the Federal boys. Maybe I could get them interested on an income tax basis. If the swindle was made, how about taxes on the take?"

Morgan White was good. He had a very boyish laugh. He used it. "If you want to dig up Hall, Riley, I'll loan you a department shovel."

Shafter still fidgeted. I turned on him. "How about that license of yours, Bud? The one that hangs on your wall. I took that piece of cement and your informal affidavit and I went over to the University and took your piece of cement and one that I took from the broken wall. If I showed the two reports I got to the State Board, how long do you think you'd retain that license? The piece you gave me is less than a year old and the mixture is entirely different from the piece of the original wall."

"The wall is falling down," Shafter said sullenly.

"What about digging up that body? What do you mean?" Wilt asked.

"Stay out of this, Bob," Houghton ordered.

"Stan's teeth were smashed by the slug, Wilt," I said quickly. "The muzzle was between his lips but his teeth were clenched. What does that mean to you?"

Wilt turned and looked oddly at Morgan White. White said smoothly, "The recoil slammed the barrel into his teeth, Bob."

Wilt sucked on his cigarette and his lean face was expressionless. He said to me, "What's this about the girl there?"

Jen said, "Somebody put two thousand dollars into the bank for me. The District Attorney's Office got a telephone tip that Hall had put it there the day before he . . . was killed."

I decided to fake a little. "Also, Mr. Mrs. Hall remembered who Stan went down to meet at his office."

"But I didn't keep the appointment!" Shafter yelled.

"Shut up," Houghton said.

He turned smoothly to me. "Mr. Riley. You seem to have dug up some things that confuse the issue here. Until we can get these details cleaned up, I think that it would be better if you took another assignment. I have one for you."

"Like what?" I asked.

"A biography of myself. I could pay . . . oh, say, ten thousand for a good job."

Wilt said suddenly, "Mr. Houghton, I'd like to give you my informal resignation as of this moment. I don't like the smell of this thing. I don't like Shafter having an appointment with Hall the night Hall got it. I don't want any part of this deal all of a sudden." He stood up.

"We have a contract," Houghton said softly.

"So what?"

"So I think you'd be foolish to try to leave at this point. I could make a little trouble for you."

Wilt sat down slowly, his eyes puzzled. I reached for a long shot. I said, "Houghton, I can't take your offer because I can't write. I'm an engineer, not a writer."

"Then why . . ." For the first time Houghton looked shocked.

"Because I'm Peter Lanse. Don't let the face baffle you. I lost the old one in

the war." I turned to Wilt. "This is a rough outfit, Bob. I don't think you belong in it."

Wilt jumped up suddenly and made for the door. He had that look in his eye that you see on old newspaper men when they smell a really fat story. Bozzert slid easily to one side, braced himself and hooked Wilt in the mouth. Robert Wilt spun back into the room and dropped onto his face. He didn't move.

Houghton was the first to snap out of it. He shrieked at Bozzert, "That was a damn fool thing to do!"

Bozzert looked sullenly at Houghton, glanced down at his knuckles and then leaned against the door again. Shafter sat like a damp white buddha, a stunned look on his face. He jumped when Houghton snapped, "Shafter! Go join the party and keep your mouth shut about what's going on in here. Hurry!"

Bozzert held the door open and closed it softly after Shafter went out.

PRETTY-BOY huffed on his nails and polished them on his tweed thigh. "Now what?" he asked softly. He licked his red lips with the tip of his tongue.

"Shut up! Let me think," Houghton said and glared at me. Jen sat very quietly, her eyes on Houghton.

Morgan White's hard shoulder hit me above the left kidney and drove me back against the wall. As I went down, he hit me under the ear and the room spun crazily. When it came back into focus, he was handing some papers to Houghton. "This was all he had, John. These seem to be the lab reports from the University."

Houghton glanced through them, ripped them twice across and dropped them into the wastebasket beside the desk. "What do you think?" he asked Morgan.

"It's your baby. Who has he spilled this to? That's the big question."

"Let's find out."

Morgan White moved in one me from one side and Bozzert from the other. The lights went out. When they came on again, I was in a chair, my hands behind me, tied together and tied to the chair.

"Who else knows about these fairy tales of yours?" Houghton asked.

"At least ten people, Houghton," I said with a weary smile. My head hurt.

Pretty-boy, on instructions from Houghton pulled Jen up out of the chair, spun her around and held her tightly just above the elbows, facing away from him. Houghton said, "Now, Mr. Lanse, unless you want to sit and watch the lady roughed up, you'd better tell us who knows these things beside you."

He turned to her, slowly drew the hard fist back. Jen shut her eyes. I said, "Okay. Hold it! The only person I've talked to is Doberty."

Bozzert laughed and swung on her, opening his fist at the last possible moment, his hard palm cracking against her cheek, knocking her out of Pretty-boy's hands. She fell into the side of the desk and landed on her hands and knees.

Robert Wilt, still as green as split-pea soup, flew at Bozzert. He looked like a creaking, animated windmill and his fists were like weights on the end of long ropes. Strangely, there were tears running down his cheeks as he drove in, pushing Bozzert off balance with the odd fury of his attack.

I saw Pretty-boy dip a hand into his coat. It came out holding a flat, evil automatic. I yelled a warning to Wilt whose back was turned to the gun.

Jen grabbed Pretty-boy's arm just as Houghton came around the corner of the desk. The little gun made a noise like somebody had slapped a flat stick against the sidewalk. Just as the shot sounded, Bozzert hit Wilt high on the cheek, driving him back toward the gun. Wilt turned, saw the gun and jumped at the blonde boy. He managed to snatch the gun. He tore it out of the blonde boy's hands and turned

it on Houghton. Morgan White grabbed him from behind and the gun went spinning across the rug. Wilt spun out of White's arms, ran to the door and yanked it open. It slammed behind him.

Morgan White reached for the gun. "Don't touch it!" Houghton said sharply. "It's got Wilt's prints on it right now."

I glanced over toward the door. Bozzert was on his face on the rug. For the first time Houghton called Pretty-boy by his name. "Roger, see if he's dead."

Roger knelt briefly beside Bozzert, put his ear flat against the man's back below the left shoulderblade. He stood up. "He's dead. I didn't do it. The girl did it. She grabbed my arm."

Morgan White squared his shoulders. He said, "If I may use your phone, Mr. Houghton, I'd like to call Headquarters. You're all under arrest."

Houghton's eyes blazed. "Don't get official, White. There's a way out."

"If there is, I don't see it, John. I've got to cover myself. This has gone too far right now. You handed me some beautiful dreams, but you're at the end of the road. It was okay when all you had done was to hire Shafter to blast cracks in the retaining wall at dawn when the trains were going by. That was fine. That gave you an in. But you had Bozzert go to Hall's office when Hall suspected what Shafter had done and wanted to talk to Shafter. You had Bozzert kill Hall. You went out of line right there, John. I'm off your bandwagon and now you're under arrest."

"Don't be a damn fool!" Houghton said, in a half whisper. "Wilt's prints are all over that gun. All we have to do is kill Lanse and the girl without spoiling those prints. Then you phone in and say Wilt went crazy at a party here and killed these people. He won't have a leg to stand on."

Morgan White looked down at the gun on the floor. He glanced at me, at Jen,

at the corpse of Bozzert, at Roger and then back at Houghton. He scratched his chin with his thumb. "What do you mean, *we* kill them? Who does it? It better be you, Houghton."

Houghton walked around the desk, took out a handkerchief and picked the little gun up by the barrel. He stood and looked blindly down at it and I saw that his hands were shaking. He switched the gun carefully, his finger pressing the cloth against the trigger. He stepped closer to me and aimed it at my face.

Jen screamed.

The desk phone rang suddenly. Morgan stepped to the desk and picked it up. Houghton stood, his head half-turned, watching Morgan White. "This is White. Yes. Yes. . . . Okay." He hung up.

"That was Wilt. He says that you should listen to WLBC for a special broadcast in the next few seconds."

White walked over to the radio in the corner, turned it on, and as the set warmed up, an excited male voice was saying ". . . to bring you a special broadcast. Tonight, according to Robert Wilt who stands here beside me, as police cars race toward the modern home of John C. Houghton, a civil engineer named Shafter is closeted with the District Attorney giving him the details of how, at Houghton's order, he blasted holes in the retaining wall on Beach Drive so as to give Houghton a ready-made platform with which he expected to become mayor of this city. I am quoting Robert Wilt when I say that Stanley Hall, who stood in Houghton's way, was recently murdered and that the murder was covered up by our local police forec. This is a scandal that . . ."

Morgan White clicked off the set and, with a smooth motion, yanked a .38 belly gun out of his hip pocket. He centered it on Houghton and his face wasn't pretty.

"Okay, John. Drop it!"

The little automatic thumped on the rug, still wrapped in the handkerchief.

Morgan White came over behind me and fumbled with the knot at my wrists, his eyes still on Houghton and Roger.

My wrists were free. I rubbed my numb hands together, stood up dizzily. In the distance was the sound of sirens. Jen gasped and slid down the side of the desk, folded slowly onto the rug and lay still.

ROBERT WILT belched and set the empty beer glass down on the bar top. He said, "You know, Pete, I think that damn Morgan White would have got off free and clear if Houghton hadn't gotten the yen to drag everybody down with him. It was Houghton's statement that fixed Morgan White's clock."

"What'll he get?" I asked.

"Maybe twenty. Maybe ten. I figure Houghton for life. He never should have given Bozzert his orders to knock off Hall with that Roger kid within earshot. You know, Pete, you're kind of a local hero. Understand you're going in as assistant to old Doberty."

I smiled. "That's what they tell me. But I'm no hero. You're the guy. I still don't understand how you made that broadcast so quick. Ten seconds later on that phone call and my number would have been up."

Wilt ordered another set of beers. "Hal Daybra, the program director down there, is a guy I owe ten bucks to. It always amazes me how nice people are to you when you owe them money. And that Shafter guy didn't need any urging to come along. He was afraid that if things went wrong, Houghton'd throw him to the wolves."

I glanced at my watch. Time to meet Jen. I said so long to Wilt and left him hunched over the bar like a myopic stork.

I slid into the booth and looked across at her.

I looked into her eyes and suddenly the eight years we had been apart were eight minutes. Or eight beats of her heart.

Shock treatment can be fatal to a weak heart—but don't make any mistakes about your victim!

|| DIE,

YOU EMERGED from the bedroom after examining Valerie and told me: "Ran across a feature article about you in the paper the other day, Johnny. They called you Manhattan's hermit."

"Did they spell my name right?" I smiled.

"Seriously, Johnny, is it true you've never—"

"Been out of Manhattan? Almost, Doc. I spent one summer on a farm as a kid. One summer of mosquitoes in my ears, manure on my shoes, sun blisters on my neck and work blisters on my hands. A horse kicked me. A cow stepped on my foot. I was only eight, but I made up my mind then that my future would be confined to the asphalt and air conditioning of Manhattan. What lies between Coney Island and Grant's Tomb, the Statue of Liberty and the Bronx Zoo is world enough for me. Why?"

"Does Valerie feel the same way about it?"

"She never complains."

"Of course not," you murmured. "But—"

You let it hang as we gazed down from the apartment at the nylons twinkling up and down Fifty-seventh Street—until I prompted: "But what, Doc?"

"A few more weeks of Manhattan would kill her," you said.

I gripped your shoulder and spun you to face me. After all, Doc, it *was* sudden. Just a routine family check-up. For a moment I didn't believe you.

"This is on the level, Doc?"

You nodded solemnly. "A sudden loud noise might do it. Worry. In fact, almost

any emotional disturbance. Even . . ." You went on to describe the type of thing that could stand between a heartbeat and eternity. You put it in technical language, then brought it down to my level. Valerie's heart. It needed rest and quiet. "What it takes, Johnny, is a peaceful cottage somewhere in the country. But . . ."

"No buts!" I snapped. "She goes to the country."

"She can't go alone."

I thought about that and you watched me think about it—until I nodded. "Okay, Doc. *We* go to the country. Pick a spot."

"How about 'Forever Tomorrow,' Johnny?"

"Let Bernstein find another ham. Any spot you pick, Doc. But make it quick!"

That grin you'd been hiding behind your teeth leaked through and you pumped my hand as if you wanted my vote.

"I already have the spot, Johnny."

"I've been jobbed!" I grinned back at you.

Grin? I could have howled! But you couldn't know about that. You couldn't hear my heart beat a triumphant tattoo against my ribs.

After you left I entered the bedroom and told Valerie: "We're gonna make like rubes, hon."

She said: "I know, Johnny." She said it through a mouthful of nougat—but I'm telling you? Wasn't that your last sight of her? Valerie with the silvery curlers among the broom straws she wears for hair, the pasty lard sagging on her arms, the smear of cold cream on her face running into lipstick and chocolate smears around that perpetually moving mouth; not to mention the extra chins quivering

By Peter Paige

LITTLE LADY

*"Johnny, what's wrong?"
she whispered. . . .*



and her cheeks bulging as she chain-ate nougats from the open box at her elbow? She didn't even glance up from her comic book to answer me, this delectable wife of mine. She murmured through nougat: "I know, Johnny. We'll need money. Bring me my checkbook."

I brought her checkbook.

Did I thank you for helping me out of my contract? Bernstein was going to have me before Equity—until you spoke to him and he practically crawled into my dressing room before my last performance.

Doc, I'll have to spring Sheila on you cold. You've seen her, Doc; the B girl in "Forever Tomorrow." You probably dwelt on the profile under her chin along with the rest of the animals. Next time look into her eyes and listen to her voice and think of Valerie—and try to keep from retching.

I looked into her eyes over a table in Grippo's after that last performance and heard her voice murmur: "You're what I want, Johnny, but you're a long time picking up the option."

"Don't commercialize us, Sheila," I pleaded. "You know Valerie and you

know what kind of evidence rates a divorce in this state."

"All I know is I want you to stop crowding me into a back street, Johnny."

I reached across the table for her hand.

"A little more patience, Sheila, then I promise you—the big contract!"

Her hand avoided mine. She rose from the table. "That's a broken record. Let's pick this up again when it's clean, shall we, Johnny?"

What could I tell her, Doc—that nothing short of murder could wipe this slate clean? I sat there alone at the table and thought of your words and thought of Valerie and Sheila—and thought now no detective in the whole wide world could lift a fingerprint from a voice . . .

VALERIE'S EYES squinted up into the sudden light. "Johnny?" I watched her knuckle her eyes, blink toward the shadowy corners of the room, then turn back toward me. I saw the eyes widen at the expression on my face, then fill with shock as she finally saw the carving knife gripped in my right hand. "Johnny, what's wrong?" she whispered. I stood there and watched her come up on one elbow, her eyes flicking uncertainly between the blade and my face.

She tried to sit up. Her face got into the palm of my free hand. I forced her back down to the pillow. I sat at her side and poised the tip of the blade a hairbreadth from her throat.

"They say it doesn't hurt," I told her quietly. "They say you don't even feel the blade sliding in. Just a faint prickle—then peace. You need peace, Valerie—to give me peace—so I could bring peace to Sheila. But you don't even know about Sheila, do you, Valerie?"

Her eyes screamed at me.

I told her about Sheila. I told her about herself. I told her about her checkbook. I told her in painstaking detail and allowed fury to mount in my voice and hate to

etch itself on my face and spasms to twitch my fingers on the haft of the knife—and I watched the fear crescendoing in her eyes until the terror that trembled the fat on her face was a wild and ugly thing.

I sprang to my feet with the knife poised high.

She scampered off the bed and waddled backwards until the wall held her firm and my blade was a darting shimmer under her eyes.

Words bubbled through her lips.

"Johnny—I've got to tell you—"

The expression in her eyes clicked off, leaving them blank.

She crumpled to the floor.

I raised her wrist. Limp. I thumbed back an eyelid. Glassy. I put my ear to her breast—but heard nothing but the awful pounding of my own heart.

That was when you heard my voice on the phone, Doc. "It's Valerie," I said. "Get over here quickly. I think she's—dead."

I broke the connection before you could reply because elation would have forced a roar of triumph through my lips. Hadn't I just committed the perfect murder? Could they raise a fingerprint from my voice? Could they drag my words, expressions and gestures before a jury and say: "With these weapons he murdered his wife!"?

I broke the connection and turned from the phone and from the bedroom doorway Valerie said: "What I've been trying to tell you, Johnny . . ."

That was when my chest exploded and the whole world blurred—until your face swam into focus, Doc.

Sure it hurts. It hurts like crazy. But you knew that, didn't you? You knew I'd never leave Manhattan for myself, so you and Valerie cooked up that lie about *her* heart being weak, didn't you?

It doesn't matter. Nothing matters anymore—except can I have a cigarette? A dying man is entitled to a cigarette.



Cipher Solvers' Club



We're sorry that due to space limitations we haven't been able to keep up with the Cipher Solvers' Club—the following listings will bring us up to date.

November, 1946—Continued.

*E. H. Werner, 1358; †Arthur Whitfield, 314; †Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 314; *James H. Williams, 781; *Reg Williams, 1090; *Wilray, 1387; *Doctor X, 3880; *Xad, 1675; *Yarbic, 905; †Zizi, 427.

Ten Answers—†John Aitken, 111; Alchemurg, 10; *P. W. B., 1237; †Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 268; †Marguerite Gleason, 469; Mrs. James Gregg, 60; O-Jaycee, 82; †Jayemem, 170; *Jesse C. Leach, 1124; *Lucille E. Little, 2023; Van Magonigle, 80; †H. Pool, 160; †M. C. Seward, 140; L. Silverman, 60; *Nick Spar, 3182; *Ubez, 1502; *N. Dak. Ump, 644.

Nine Answers—Ray Boyd, 18; Honey Dew, 9; *Greg-owsy, 1782; †Mij, 475; *Betty S. P., 691; †C. Retherford, 101; †Tot, 279.

Eight Answers—*Clarence P. Greene, 1265; †An, 226; †J. E. L., 289; A. Walrus, 30; *P. Wee, 1859.

Seven Answers—*D. H. Holcomb, 1245; *Pearl Knowler, 2396; †A. G. Tate, 143; Virsat, 62.

Four Answers—Rosemary Larsen, 2.

Three Answers—Suit Yourself, 3.

Corrections—*Cryptox, 11 for Sept., 1946, *Gregory, 9 for Sept., 1946, †Tot, 7 for Sept., 1946, not previously credited.

Cipher Solvers' Club for January, 1947

Eleven Answers—*Case Ace, 1169; *Agatha, 1770; *Age, 2809; †John Aitken, 122; *Ajax, 2413; †Alphamega, 367; †Amoroi, 377; †The Ponder Bare, 102; *P. W. B., 1248; *Bert, 1989; *S. H. Berwald, 961; *Alpha Bet, 1732; †Harry Blank, 245; †Florence B. Boulton, 374; *Gold Bug, 1592; *Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 3853; *Carso, 1882; *Codela, 1413; †Codet, 381; *Floyd E. Coss, 1602; *Darn Cross, 1024; †May C., 128; *Cryptox, 1916; †M. E. Cutcomb, 405; †Jump o'er Dam, 466; *Debutant, 801; *Kay Dee, 588; *Honey Dew, 20; *Gunga Din, 734; *Drol, 2643; *M. E., 3698; *Eve Eden, 1240; *Eldes, 1340; *Arty Ess, 3854; *Jay-En-Ess, 2097; *Estece, 1807; †Ewie, 307; †Ewlee, 371; Ex-Moosejaw, 25; *Femo, 687; †Fern, 141; †Allah Gator, 257; *LeRoy A. Guidr, 811; †Gus, 198; †G. Rene, 265; *Henry J. Haewecker, 1860; Hamlet II (Washington, D. C.), 24; *Hayrake, 1318; *T. Hegarty, 3415; *Jack-Hi, 1937; *Javel, 3973; *Kate, 2811; †Betty Kelly, 464; *Keystonian, 1620; †S. A. L., 366; †J. E. L., 400; †Martoy, 253; *Theo. W. Midlam, 3215; 3215; *Lee A. Miller, 1764; *Mossback, 2420; †Pablo, 16; *W. F. P., 2997; †H. Pool, 171; *B. E. R., 1129; *Rekroyen, 1496; *Don Ricardo, 1247; *Wm. G. Ringer, 1348; †Rush, 245; *Mrs. H. A. Seals, 2949; *R. B. Shrewsbury, 1520; *Logan Simard, 1140; *Sam Spiegel, 2629; *M. G. S., 1767; *Jack-Stay, 3674; †Dad S., 409; *P. H. T., 1602; *Tyro V, 2484; *Ubez, 1513; *Valkyrie, 1073; *Chi Valor, 1006; *Volund, 1825; *Mrs. James Wallen, 3000; *P. Wee, 1870; †Ruth E. Weiss, 243; *E. H. Werner, 1369; †Arthur Whitfield, 325; †Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 325; *James H. Williams, 792; *Reg Williams, 1101; *Wilray, 1398; *Doctor X, 3391; *Yarbic, 916; †Zizi, 438.

Ten Answers—†Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 278; Ray Boyd, 28; *Engineer III, 1730; †Sally Fischer, 143; †Marguerite Gleason, 479; *Clarence P. Greene, 1275; Mrs. James Gregg, 70; *Gregory, 1792; †K. R. Hess, 165; †Frank F. Hobson, 110; *D. H. Holcomb, 1355; *Pearl Knowler, 2406; Rosemary Larsen, 22; *Jesse C. Leach, 1134; *Lucille E. Little, 2023; *C. Retherford, 111; *Alvin Robb, 1488; *Ty Roe, 1501; L. Silverman, 79; *Nick Spar, 3192; †A. G. Tate, 153; †Miss Tick, 206; *N. Dak. Ump, 654; Virsat, 72; A. Walrus, 40.

Seven Answers—†Kenneth H. Riggs, 257; Stanle Wunderlich, 7.

Correction—*See Bee Bee, 11 Answers for Nov., 1946, not previously credited.

Cipher Solvers' Club for March, 1947

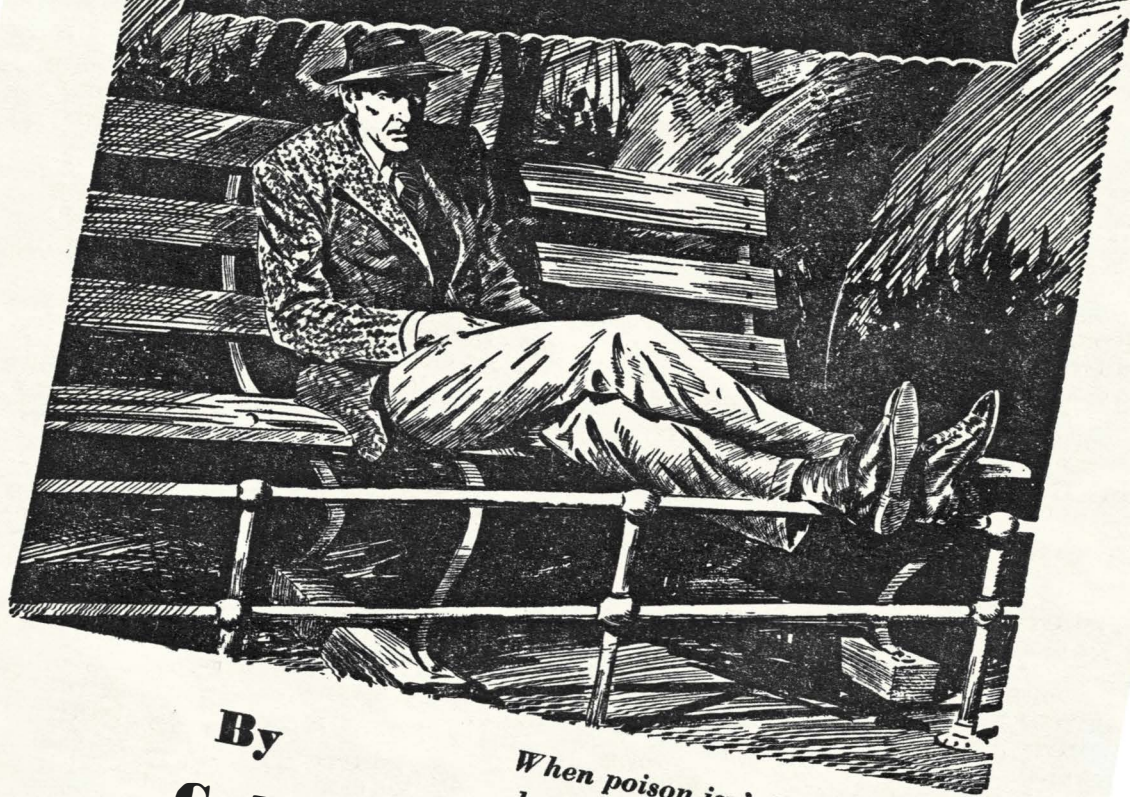
Current Grand Total: 889,528 Answers

Eleven Answers—*Aachen, 3273; *Agatha, 1781; *Age, 2821; †John Aitken, 133; *Ajax, 2424; †Alphamega, 379; †Amoroi, 389; †Anidem, 335; †The Ponder Bare, 113; *P. W. B., 1259; *Bert, 2000; *S. H. Berwald, 972; *Alpha Bet, 1743; †Harry Blank, 257; †Florence B. Boulton, 386; *Gold Bug, 1603; *Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 3864; *Carso, 1873; *Bessie Casey, 559; *Ciphermit, 3505; *R. C. C., 596; *Codela, 1424; †Codet, 393; *Floyd E. Coss, 1614; *Darn Cross, 1035; †May C., 149; *Cryptox, 1927; †M. E. Cutcomb, 417; Dagwood, 11; †Jump o'er Dam, 477; *Debutant, 812; *Kay Dee, 600; Honey Dew, 31; *Gunga Din, 745; *Drol, 2655; *M. E., 3709; *Eve Eden, 1251; *Elbetee, 558; *Engineer III, 1742; *Arty Ess, 3865; *Jay-En-Ess, 2108; *Estece, 1818; †Ewie, 318; †Ewlee, 283; Ex-Moosejaw, 47; *Femo, 688; †Sally Fischer, 154; †Allah Gator, 368; †Fern G., 153; *Clarence P. Greene, 1286; *LeRoy A. Guidr, 822; †Gus, 209; †Gyrene, 277; *Henr. J. Haewecker, 1871; Hamlet II, 36; Hayrake, 1330; *T. Hegarty, 3427; *Jack-Hi, 1048; O. O. Hilton, 79; †Invictus, 424; *Javel, 3924; *Kate, 2822; †Betty Kelly, 475; *Keystonian, 1638; †S. A. L., 377; †Martoy, 264; *Theo. W. Midlam, 3226; *W. F. P., 3005; Quipogram, 24; *B. E. R., 1141; *Don Ricardo, 1259; *Ray F. Richer, 1456; *Wm. G. Ringer, 1360; *Alvin Robb, 1510; *Alice Routh, 3788; †Rush, 256; *Mrs. H. A. Seals, 2969; *R. B. Shrewsbury, 1531; L. Silverman, 90; *Logan Simard, 1161; *Sam Spiegel, 2640; *M. G. S., 1778; *Jack-Stay, 3686; *Clement E. Taylor, 308; *P. H. T., 1613; *Tisen, 1219; *Tyro V, 2495; *Valkyrie, 1085; *Virsat, 83; Volund, 1837; *Mrs. James Wallen, 3011; *P. Wee, 1831; †Ruth E. Weiss, 254; *E. H. Werner, 1380; †Arthur Whitfield, 336; †Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 336; *Reg Williams, 1112; *Wilray, 1409; *Yarbic, 927; *Doctor X, 3903; †Zizi, 449.

Ten Answers—†Mrs. H. H. Bailey, 227; †Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 288; Ray Boyd, 38; †Marguerite Gleason, 489; Mrs. James Gregg, 80; †K. R. Hess, 175; †J. E. L., 310; *Jesse C. Leach, 1144; †H. Pool, 181; †C. Retherford, 121; *Nick Spar, 3202; †Dad S., 419; †A. G. Tate, 163; †Miss Tick, 216; A. Walrus, 50.

(Continued on page 81)

NO BODY BUT YOU



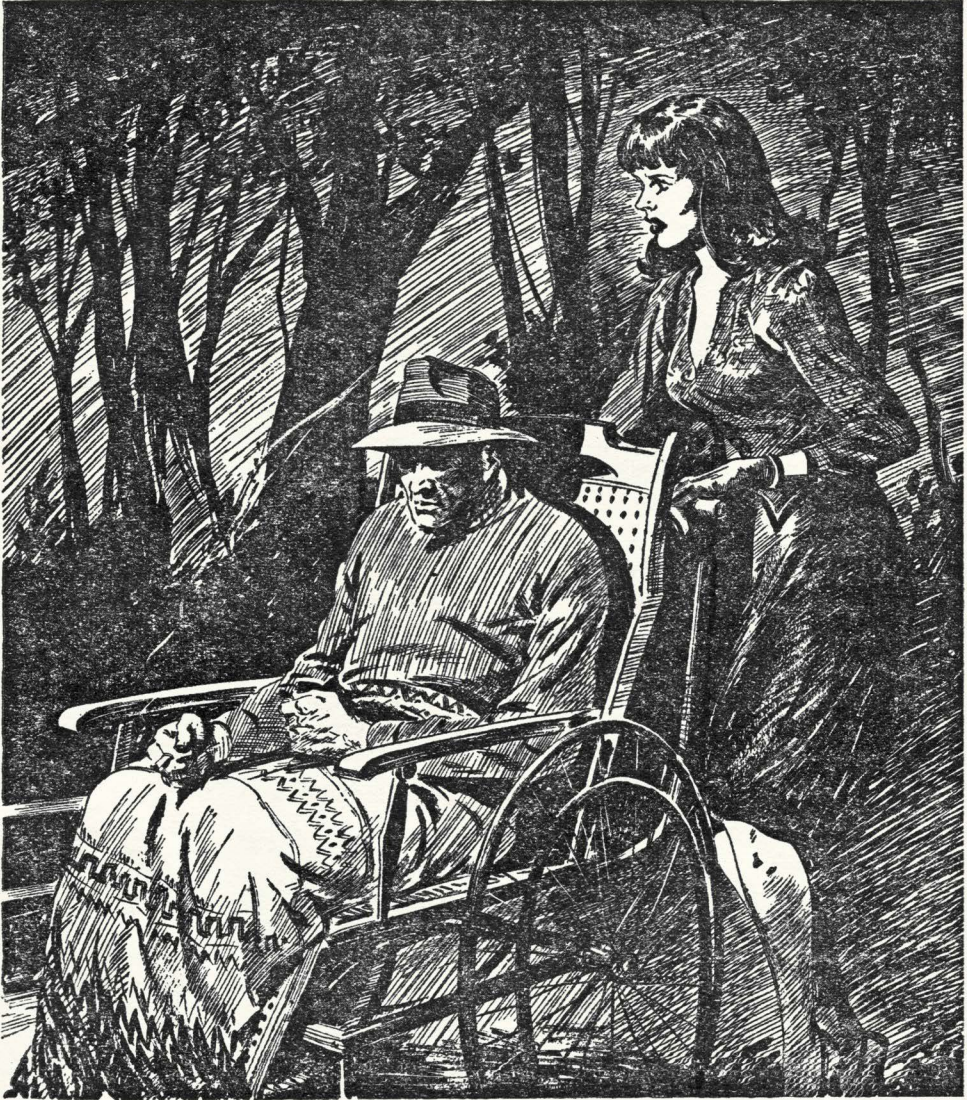
By

G. T.

Fleming-Roberts

When poison isn't lethal, but candy kills . . . when a suicide isn't dead, but a live girl is . . . when killers go free and cops go nuts—shamus, take this case—if you dare!

*Just keep on walking, her
mind hammered. There
isn't any reason you can't
get away with it. . . .*



CHAPTER ONE

Funeral at Midnight

HE SAT in the wheelchair near the door of the shabby basement apartment that fronted on the alley, swathed tightly from waist to ankles

in a part-wool blanket of brave Indian pattern. His hands were in his lap, cupped slightly, not doing anything. In spite of the unseasonable warmth of the September night, he wore a heavy, gray wool sweater with a high turtle neck that pillowed his peaked chin. The rest of his face was lost

in the shadows of a black felt hat pulled well down over his eyes.

Marva's pale grey eyes studied him. "You look sort of . . . dead," she said softly.

He didn't say anything. There was no sound within the room except the shrill dry chirp of a cricket and the loud tick of a cheap clock.

It was five minutes until midnight.

Marva got up from the brown leatherette couch, a tall girl, not too thin, with coarse glossy black hair worn in a Dutch bob that framed her face squarely. She was a little pale beyond her rouge, and her hands were not quite steady as she opened her shoulder-slung purse to get out cigarettes. She broke three paper matches before she had a light.

She said, "You look too damned dead," and blew smoke from full lips toward the man in the wheelchair.

With the suddenness of impulse, or inspiration, she turned, crossed the room to a scarred oak table, opened a drawer from which she took a metal spool of cellulose tape. She tore off a curl of the tape, went to the wheelchair, took the cigarette from her lips, and inserted it between the first and second fingers of the man's right hand.

"You've always got to consider the guy you didn't think would be there, Red says," she murmured as she fastened the cigarette to the fingers with the piece of tape.

Then she turned out the one lamp, opened the door, and pushed the wheelchair out into the night.

In the apartment she had felt reasonably certain she could do what she had to do, but in Burling Street fear caught up with her in a swift cold rush like the wind. Sweat came out on the palms of her hands, and hard as she gripped the back rail of the wheelchair her hold still seemed uncertain. Burling Street inclined steeply to the north, and if the chair got away from her it wouldn't stop until it crashed

into the steps of some tenement building or toppled from the curb, and in either case the man would spill out, and his hat would fall off to reveal his face.

His dead white face. His white, dead face . . .

She shivered. She hung back against the incline, against the impulse to run downhill. Because you never hurried at a funeral. You never laughed either, but there was wild hysterical laughter bubbling up within her.

She fought back the laughter, and she didn't run.

Near the north-west corner of the playground the city fathers had hacked from the slums at the foot of Burling Street, Marva stopped. She stood, incapable of motion, clutching the back of the chair, her heart in her throat.

Twenty feet ahead of her a man sat on the bench at the corner of the playground, lounging, sort of, as though on the point of a pin, his heels cocked up on the low iron pipe fence. A thin man, long-legged, faceless in the dark. A bum, she thought. A nobody, but at that particular moment about the most important somebody in Marva's world. He was the guy Red had warned her about—the guy you didn't think would be there. He was the reason she packed a gun in her purse. He was the reason why she had, on her own initiative, planted the lighted cigarette in the dead man's fingers. He was the Unexpected Witness.

Just keep on walking, her mind hampered. Don't hurry. There isn't any reason why you can't get away with it. There isn't any reason why you shouldn't wheel an invalid down the street. At midnight? Why not? Suppose he had insomnia. That's it—he couldn't sleep . . . That's good! That's very, very good, when you couldn't wake him up with an atomic bomb!

Well, *do* something. He's watching you—the guy on the bench—and you stopped,

and now you've got to pull something.

Marva dragged her gaze from the motionless silhouette of the man on the bench. She peeled one hand away from the back of the chair with an effort, transferred it to the large right wheel to check any downhill motion. She took a sliding step that brought her to the front of the chair. She stooped over the corpse, her back toward the Unexpected Witness. She had to do something—something to account for her sudden stop. Her shaking right hand reached down to tuck ineffectually at the Indian blanket, and it was then that she noticed the cigarette.

Marva's heart skipped a beat. The cigarette had burned faster than she had anticipated. The red glow from its tip faintly illuminated the waxy flesh at the base of the second fingernail. By the time she reached the bench it would actually be burning the lifeless fingers, and the silence of the man in the wheelchair would shriek the truth.

She pinched the butt away, tearing off a portion of the cellulose tape. She flipped the cigarette into the street with a motion that involved only her wrist and would be invisible to the man on the bench. Then she stood for a moment, bent over, not breathing.

No sound from the man on the bench. Marva got to the rear of the wheelchair again by a cautious hand-over-hand process, then walked slowly on. The man on

the bench might have been asleep except that she knew instinctively that he wasn't. She could feel his eyes follow her as she passed.

My legs, Marva assured herself. She had always been a little vain about her legs. They had a knack of getting looked at.


But it was not her legs, nor the man in the wheelchair. It was the Indian pattern blanket . . .

PAT OBERON took his heels off the iron pipe fence and sat up a little straighter. He wished he had a blanket. He turned up the skimpy collar of his suitcoat, shoved his thin crooked fingers down into his pockets, and tried to recall what he'd seen in the evening paper about the unprecedented Autumnal heatwave. Maybe the city was sweltering, but he wasn't. There was a draft up his spine.

My anemia, he thought. My low blood pressure.

This was the damndest park bench he'd ever tried to sleep on. There was no part of its seat that conformed with any part of his.

When the girl and the man in the wheelchair were out of sight, Pat drew thin legs up onto the bench and extended himself full length. He turned onto his right side to pillow his one good ear against his palm, thus shutting out the nocturnal grumble of the city. This was all right



Arthur Pollard*
has switched to Calvert
because Calvert is milder.

*of 178 Columbia Road, Dorchester, Mass.

CALVERT RESERVE Blended Whiskey— 86.8 Proof— 65% Grain
Neutral Spirits. Calvert Distillers Corp., New York City

except that the designer of the bench had allowed no room for Pat's nose, which was flattened against a slat in the back. He flopped over, good ear up, and closed his eyes.

To hell with all landladies, he thought, his in particular. Somebody had tipped her off that the OPA Rent Control was a very shaky bureau, and she had met Pat that night at the door of his room, muscular arms akimbo and an argument on her lips. Something about twenty-seven dollars. He hadn't paid a whole lot of attention, because as of right now he had about thirty-eight cents.

He would probably catch pneumonia. If he did, he would stagger back to die on his landlady's front steps.

A mosquito, unaware that it was late September, started to sing above Pat's ear.

"You'll be sorry," he mumbled. "Blood you want. Like water you'll get."

The mosquito stopped singing, and Pat swatted. The mosquito went off somewhere, to return with the second stanza of the same song. Pat took a few more swats and then decided he was not sufficiently sleepy to make like Miss Beauty Rest on the playground bench. What he wanted was a hit-the-hay smoke.

He sat up, searched his pockets for cigarette makings. He had a folder of papers, but the tobacco sack was empty. He recalled the butt the man in the wheelchair had tossed away and wondered if he'd got so low he'd pick up a butt from the gutter. He concluded that he hadn't. Anyway, maybe the guy in the wheelchair had something catching.

He put his feet up on the fence railing again and debated whether or not he wanted a smoke bad enough to walk a mile to the nearest all-night drugstore. He could walk two blocks east and take a trolley for eight cents. He might do that. On the other hand, if he walked to the trolley line he might have to wait an hour or so

for the next owl car. He wondered what time it was, then listened intently to the sounds of the night—the high whine of generators in some public utility plant to the west, the sleepy chug of a yard engine. Near at hand was his friend the mosquito, and then footsteps on concrete. He looked toward the north from where the footsteps came, watched as the girl and the man in the wheelchair emerged from the murk.

The lucky stiff, Pat thought, to have a blanket.

They came on slowly, the girl and the man on wheels, and when they were directly opposite Pat, they stopped.

"Good evening," said the man in the chair. A deep voice, resonant.

"That's one man's opinion," Pat said.

The man took a hand from beneath the blanket and coughed behind it. "Do you have insomnia too?"

"No," Pat said, "but there's a mosquito in my boudoir that does."

The man in the wheelchair laughed quietly. "Well, I feel as though I could get a good night's sleep now." And the girl went on pushing him up Burling Street.

Pat's eyes followed them until they were out of sight. He thought, Now what the hell was that for? Then he stood up, stepped over the low iron pipe fence, sauntered up the sidewalk a little way in the direction the wheelchair had taken, stepped off the high curb into the street. He moved in small circles after that, head down, searching the black asphalt surface of the pavement. Then he stopped, knelt, struck a paper match. He picked up about an inch of cigarette butt, the end of it stained with lipstick, a curling bit of cellulose tape adhering to the paper. He picked the butt up carefully as the match went out.

Pat straightened. He took an old envelope from the inner pocket of his coat, dropped the cigarette into it. He straightened, looked off into the dark, his thin

shoulders shivering. He wished things like this didn't continually pop up in his life.

Things like murder.

AROUND the Hillary Building, where a rose by any other name would smell, she was known as the Lady Murderer, and she came into the airless cubicle that housed the Oberron Detective Agency the following morning carrying a purse, a box of cherry cordials, and a furred newspaper. She had on an old brown felt hat that looked a good deal like a hat and a brown velveteen suit, the skirt of which sagged like a hammock. She closed the door and approached the roll-back couch that occupied a good third of the available floor-space.

Pat Oberron, in the lopsided swivel chair behind the desk, watched her through eyes that were cold and green and tilted somewhat at their extremities like those of a cat. The woman sat down stiffly on the edge of the couch. She was about fifty, tall and angular with a long horsey face and the sincerest pair of brown eyes Pat had ever seen.

"How are you, Mr. Oberron?" she asked gently.

"Fine," he said sourly. "Last night a mosquito chased my corpuscle and it's still running around like crazy."

Anna Molloy—that was her real name—looked as though she didn't know whether that was good or bad; her smile was polite but uncertain. She put the newspaper and her purse beside her, took the lid off the box of cherry cordials.

"Will you have a chocolate?" she invited.

Pat tipped forward in the chair and frowned at the seven pieces of candy remaining on the top layer of the box. When anybody in the Hillary Building offered you something for free it was apt to blow up in your face. "What's the matter with them—are they poisoned?"

The Lady Murderer drew her mouth down and looked offended. Pat said hastily, "That's right, you didn't poison your husband, did you?"

"No," she said without a trace of emotion. "I hit him on the head with a flatiron, and he deserved it."

On this point the grand jury had been in accord with Mrs. Molloy. Mr. Molloy, they agreed, had deserved everything that had come his way, including the flatiron. Mrs. Molloy had come home from a movie the night of the killing to find her husband drunk and attempting to embrace the sweet young thing across the hall. Mrs. Molloy had come to the defense of the girl, hitting Mr Molloy with the handiest object available, and the result proved that Mr. Molloy had a pretty thin skull and two thousand dollars in life insurance.

The newspaper publicity had been welcomed by at least one member of Mrs. Molloy's family, her cousin, a character known as Cy Wakeman who hung around the Hillary Building. Cy Wakeman immediately organized something he called the Society For The Perpetuation Of Life Through Temperance, and made the Lady Murderer the nominal president. Cy would rent a vacant store building, cover the windows with gruesome posters that featured such eye-arresting objects as hardened livers and bloody flatirons, and advertise a free lecture on the curse of strong drink.

"Everything is on a high moral tone," the Lady Murderer always felt called upon to explain, her brown eyes beaming sincerity. Cy, wearing a white tunic as spotless as that of any dime store corn remedy salesman, would deliver the lecture, after which Anna would tell her tragic story. Then Cy would pass the hat "so that the great work may go on and on." There were few people who had the cheek to view a genuine murderess without contributing a dime or a quarter for the privilege.

There was something about the Lady

Murderer that got under Pat Oberron's thick skin, possibly the notion that she didn't realize how she was being exploited by Cy Wakeman. For that reason, Pat got up, reached across to the proffered candy box, picked a chocolate from its plaited paper cup, and thought, I'll eat it if it kills me. But then he didn't. He couldn't. He had lifted the candy halfway to his mouth when he noticed a small neat blob of chocolate in the center of the ordinarily smooth bottom. Something in his stomach—he had no idea what it could be—turned completely over. He twisted around under the pretext of pushing his chair back against the radiator, and when he faced the Lady Murderer again his jaws were occupied in the mastication of nothing.

"Very good," he said and dumped his lank body into the swivel chair. He sent a sidelong glance at the angular figure on the couch and thought, Pat, you're seeking ghosts under the bed. She wouldn't, even if she had a motive. Unless she's nuts. Nevertheless, the cherry cordial went into the drawer of his desk when he reached for cigarette makings.

"Look here," he said as he rolled paper smoothly around flake tobacco, "you didn't come in here just to offer me sweets for the sweet, Anna."

The Lady Murderer shook her head. "No, Mr. Oberron, I didn't. Are you employed, at present?"

Pat made a sound like laughter. "Compared with me, all the Displaced Persons in Europe are as busy as beavers."

"Good." She showed her dentures. "I want to hire you to find a young man for me. It won't be easy. The police have already given up."

"Since when?"

"Since last night. He disappeared last night—"

"Now wait a minute," Pat broke in, smelling fish. "He disappeared last night, and the police have already given up." He shook his head. "Not the cops I know.

Not boys like Tom Gherry. They may not all be geniuses like I am, but they stick like burrs."

"This," said the Lady Murderer with some emphatic eyebrow wagging, "is different. The police won't take the matter seriously. Neither will the newspapers." She picked up the newspaper, unrolled it, spread it on the corner of Pat's desk. She pointed to an item headed:

TEMPERANCE WOMAN DATES INVISIBLE MAN

"Don't read any more," she said and hastily withdrew the paper. "That will give you an idea of the attitude the police take. I'd rather tell you the story exactly as it happened."

Pat thought the newspaper account would have proved more entertaining, but he tilted back in his chair, lighted his homemade cigarette, and told her to shoot.

"About eight o'clock last night, I was accosted by a young man on the street who asked for a quarter . . ." she began.

Pat nodded sagely. "That's inflation for you. They used to ask for dimes."

"I noticed a distinct odor of liquor on his breath." The Lady Murderer paused to register disapproval, which she accomplished very effectively with a lowering of eyelids and a pursing of lips. "I saw in him a poor wayward young soul, misguided, on the road to hell . . ."

Via the flatiron route, Pat inserted mentally.

". . . and decided I would do what I could to rehabilitate him. It was my Christian duty. I talked with him a moment, and it appeared he was a person of good education, fundamentally a fine young character, and I told him that if he would accompany me to the Moritz Restaurant I would buy him a full meal."

"The hell," Pat said. "I must let you rehabilitate me next time I'm broke." His thin mouth tipped up on one side. "What do I mean—next time? What's wrong

with right now? Can't you just smell my breath and use your imagination, Anna?"

More disapproval. "Please, Mr. Oberon. This is a serious matter." She waited until an appropriately serious expression had returned to Pat's lean face and then continued.

"The young man was delighted, of course. We went to the restaurant, entered—there was quite a large crowd—and in the foyer my young friend disappeared."

"With how much cash?" Pat asked.

Anna Molloy shook her long head. "No-no, nothing like that. He simply disappeared from the Moritz foyer. I hadn't even given him the quarter he had requested. He vanished."

Pat said, "Well, I'll be damned. Like that, huh? What did you do?"

"Well, I summoned the head waiter, asked if he had any idea where my young man could be, and I shall never forget the totally blank expression that came over the waiter's face. 'But madame,' he said, 'you came in alone.'"

Pat lifted his head and blew a thin column of smoke at the ceiling. He didn't say anything.

"I told the waiter he was very much mistaken," the Lady Murderer said, "and he called the doorman, who also insisted I had come into the Moritz alone. By that time I was in a state of panic—not for myself, but for the poor wayward lad.

The manager called the police who made a half-hearted search to satisfy me he wasn't on the premises."

"But you're still not satisfied, huhn?" Pat put in.

"I am not." And then the Lady Murderer got to the most interesting part of her story, from Pat's point of view. She opened her purse.

"Say a hundred bucks," he ventured in a strangled voice. Then when there was no indication that Anna Molloy would drop dead from shock, he added, "for current expenses."

The Lady Murderer took a tight wad of bills from her purse and dropped it loftily into Pat's shaking hand. "There's fifty dollars there," she said. "I'll have to give you a check for the balance."

PAT wasn't too enthusiastic about the check, for while every heel in the Hillary Building carried a check-book it was doubtful if more than two per cent of them had bank accounts.

He took the check, folded it, and would have escorted the Lady Murderer to the office except that she asked a pertinent and embarrassing question.

"Won't you need a description of the young man?"

Pat coughed. "Well . . . yes. That might help a little." He went back to the desk and sat down. "What's his name?"

"Melvin King," she said. "He's tall,

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1913, as amended by the acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946, of New Detective Magazine, published bi-monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1947. State of New York, county of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Harold S. Goldsmith, who having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of New Detective Magazine, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1913, as amended by the acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946 (section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations), printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Fictioneers, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Editor, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Managing Editor, none; Business Manager, Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. 2. That the owner is: Fictioneers, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Shirley M. Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: none. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing a grant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner, and this grant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. Harold S. Goldsmith, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of October, 1947. Eva M. Walker, Notary Public, New York County Clerk's No. 40, Register's No. 363-W-8, (My commission expires March 30, 1948.) [Seal]—Form 352b—Rev. 7-46.

about six feet, I should say, blond and clean shaven. A fine looking boy. He *has* character . . ." She broke off, possibly because Pat didn't seem to be paying much attention. He had one knee propped up on the edge of the desk and was smoothing all that lovely green money out on his thigh, an ecstatic expression on his thin face.

"And the smell of liquor, though that may have worn off by now," Pat contributed to prove he was listening. "You realize this may take a little time, don't you, Anna? It could run up into money."

She tossed her head back and sighted him along her nose, her nostrils flaring. "I don't care. I don't like to be laughed at. There *was* a young man with me last night, and I'm *sure* he met with foul play . . . But here, have another piece of candy, Mr. Oberron, before I go."

Pat said, "I don't care if I do." He took another cherry cordial in its paper nest and parked it on the corner of his desk. He pushed his lips into a watery smile. "I thought maybe you'd leave the rest of the box here as a sort of bonus."

"I couldn't do that," she said without hesitation. "What would Cy think of me?"

"You mean Cy Wakeman gave that candy to you?"

She nodded. "He won it on a punch-board downstairs at the cigar counter. He'd think me ungrateful if I gave it away."

"He might at that," Pat said as he showed the Lady Murderer to the door. Maybe there was nothing wrong with the candy. Maybe he just had the shudders. Maybe this was a new phase of the miss-meal cramps. Suspicion, he'd heard, sharpened on an empty stomach.

When Mrs. Molloy had gone off down the third floor corridor, Pat returned to the desk, picked up the second piece of candy to discover the same sort of tampering—a tiny blob that centered the smooth

flat coating on the bottom. He put the chocolate down, picked up the phone, and dialed Police Headquarters with nervous jabs of his thin crooked finger. He asked for Homicide and when Lieutenant Tom Gherrity's familiar bluff voice came out of the receiver, Pat said:

"You know this thing cooperation you're always yapping about?"

Gherrity knew. "But it's a one-way street, you understand, Oberron," he added cautiously.

"Sure," Pat said. "I tell you all I know and most of it runs out of your ears . . ."

"All right!" Gherrity broke in. "Cut the horsing around and get to the point."

"Well, I've got evidence," Pat told him worriedly. "Evidence I wish I didn't have."

"What kind?" Gherrity demanded.

"Just evidence. I'm damned if I know. But it sort of creeps up on you like red flannel underwear."

CHAPTER TWO

The Man on Wheels

NECKTIE SAM put his pale peaked face through a narrow opening in the door of the Oberron Detective Agency. "Patrick, you ain't asleep so soon this morning already?" he asked.

Pat, with three hamburgers soothing his hunger-pangs, was tilted back in his chair, eyes closed, a complacent pussy-cat grin on his lips. He said, "Yes, and go away," without opening his eyes.

Necktie Sam tiptoed into the room. He was carrying a suitcase in each hand, one the familiar fiber case from which he peddled a gaudy array of cheap neckwear which he represented as stolen goods, the other a more substantial piece of luggage with nickle-plated metal corners. He put the two suitcases down with as much noise as possible, and with a malicious gleam in his sharp black eyes he went into a loose-

jointed dance, slapping his hands in rhythm and singing:

“Go and tell your mammy
It’s Saxophone Sammy
Meanest horn in town.”

Pat opened first one eye and then the other to survey the short slight figure in the cheap, too-blue suit with no enthusiasm whatever. He noticed the case with the metal corners.

“What have you got in there—a dismembered midget?”

Necktie Sam stopped dancing. “You’re referring no doubt to my jazzy saxophone.”

“Your which?”

Necktie Sam stooped over the case, snapped up the clasps, threw back the lid. From the plush-lined interior he took an alto saxophone. He fitted neck and mouthpiece into place, looped the leather strap over his neck.

Pat held up a hand in protest. “Not here, Sammy. There’s a nice quiet spot in Death Valley . . .”

But Sam had already inflated his meager chest, and with the black rubber mouthpiece to his lips he blew. Aside from a rush of air there was no audible result. Sam lowered the instrument, smiled widely, and rolled his eyes.

“Admit, Patrick, that’s the loveliest saxophone music you heard this side of heaven.”

Pat’s frown was dubious. “I didn’t hear a damned thing.”

Sam chuckled. “My point, positively. My saxophone is minus its sliver. Every night with Manny Peegar’s orchestra I’m getting three dollars for not playing third saxophone. Like when the AAA was paying farmers they shouldn’t grow corn, I’m getting. Tonight could be I’m promoted to not playing first saxophone, who knows?”

In spite of his better judgment, Pat allowed his interest to sharpen. “I don’t get it,” he said.

Necktie Sam shrugged eloquently. “To a heel like you it should be lucid. Manny Peegar is charging for an eight piece orchestra at regular union rates. On me he is collecting ten dollars. I couldn’t play a note. Three dollars he is paying me to look like a saxophone player. Seven he is pocketing clear profit, who should know the difference?”

Sam sat down on the saxophone case and gave his head an appreciative half shake. “That Manny Peegar! Musicians, Patrick, mostly they are just bums, always from hunger. But Manny Peegar, sometimes I think he is almost as smart as you.”

“Thanks,” Pat said dryly. “Now that I’m smothered in orchids, what do you want?”

Necktie Sam fixed sharp birdlike attention on Pat’s face. “If you ain’t from financial embarrassment, the temptation to hock it won’t bother you, can I stash my saxophone in your closet it shouldn’t encumber me while I’m selling my ties?”

Pat jerked a thumb toward the closet door. “Go ahead. I won’t hock it until . . .” He broke off, transferred his attention to the office door. The knob was turning slowly and with a minimum of sound. The door opened only a crack at first and then widely to reveal a tall girl with pale gray eyes, her heavy black hair worn in a Dutch bob.

Necktie Sam whistled in appreciation. The girl’s full red lips curved into a languid smile.

“Have you got anything for me today?” she asked anybody.

Pat gave her a slow going over with his cold green eyes. “Only a yen, baby. Were you expecting something more negotiable?”

“Isn’t this . . .” The girl, a baffled expression on her rather square face, took a close-up of the black lettering on the frosted glass light of the door. “Isn’t this a theatrical agency?”

"D-E-T-E-C-T-I-V-E, Theatrical," Pat said. "Spells it every time, doesn't it?"

The girl tossed her dark head. "Well, shame on me!" She backed out and slammed the door.

"Patrick!" Necktie Sam spoke in an excited whisper. "Pinch me I could be dreaming, but ain't that dame Marva Fox?"

Pat shrugged. "It could be." He banged forward in his chair to reach the wastebasket from which he took the brown paper sack that had packaged his three hamburgers. He put the two pieces of candy which the Lady Murderer had given him into the bag, stuffed the bag into a pocket.

"Who's Marva Fox?"

"Marva Fox?" Necktie Sam stared incredulously. "In the newspapers you seen her last year, that self-same girl just went out. That's the girl Mr. Molloy was caught getting fresh with, to put it delicately, the night the Lady Murderer conked him with a flatiron."

Pat got up suddenly and legged to the door. He got it open, fingered the button of the night latch, turned to Necktie Sam. "Are you comin, or do you want to become a permanent fixture?"

"But my saxophone—"

"To hell with it. I'll lock the door."

Necktie Sam, lugging his necktie suitcase, came out into the hall. Pat slammed the door, started for the elevator shaft. A car was just on the way down, and Pat yelled at the operator without result. He turned, headed for the stairway in the "L" at the end of the hall, went clattering down three flights and into the small lobby that was crowded with unemployed musicians, unemployed entertainers, and the get-rich-quick schemers and bookmakers who operated from the public telephone booths.

There was no sign of the tall girl with the pale gray eyes.

PAT WENT on past the cigar-stand soda fountain, out the front door, looked up and down South Illinois Street, then across the pavement. The girl was standing in the entryway of a third-rate hotel, her back toward Pat, apparently in earnest conversation with a broad-shouldered, red-haired man who sat in a wheelchair, his legs swathed in a bright Indian pattern blanket.

Pat shivered. He turned, re-entered the Hillary Building, and approached the cigar counter. He took out a two-bit piece and rapped on the glass to draw the attention of Gertie, the short-change artist who ran the concession. Gertie left the coke fountain, came over to where Pat stood, and placidly chewed gum in his face. Pat spun the quarter in her direction.

"Ready-mades," he ordered.

Gertie picked up the quarter, examined it on both sides. Except that she had heard of the germ theory of disease she would have bitten it to make sure the coin wasn't lead. Satisfied, almost, she reached for a pack of cigarettes.

"In the chips, huh, Pat?"

He said, "Not exactly. Somebody paid off an old debt and I nearly dropped dead." He stripped cellophane from the package. "Tell me, Gertie, did Cy Wake-man win a box of candy off your punch-board this morning?"

Gertie thoughtfully shook her head. "Yesterday, wasn't it? Maybe the day before. You want to try your luck, Pat? You got a chance to win a dandy portable radio."

Pat snorted. "Like a chance to make Miss America, I got!" He took a light from the gas flame and went on out into the street.

The girl with the pale gray eyes had gone, but the man on wheels was still parked in front of the hotel. He had a tincup in his lap and a bundle of lead pencils in his right hand. Pat turned south, walking quickly along the crowded side-

walk. He came to the corner, waited for the green light. When he had reached the opposite side of Washington Street, he glanced back over his shoulder. The man in the wheelchair, a benign smile on his broad rugged red face, was in the middle of the street being propelled toward the curb by a charitable traffic cop.

Pat knew he had a tail on wheels.

Half way down the next block a painted cambric sign floated over the sidewalk in front of a store building. Big red letters loudly proclaimed:

ALCOHOL IS A KILLER
FREE LECTURE

There were two windows, one covered with a highly colored portrait of some alcoholic's digestive tract, the other with a crude painting that represented the Lady Murderer with a bloody flatiron in her hand standing over a corpse. A few curiosity seekers were already hanging around outside, though a placard on the door announced that the next free lecture would not begin until 11:30 AM.

Pat knocked loudly at the door and waited. There were footsteps, then the sign was swung a little to one side to permit a bleary blue eye to peer out through the glass. A key twisted in the lock, and the door was opened just far enough to admit Pat's skinny form into the gloomy interior.

Pat said, "Hi, Cy."

The short paunchy man in the white tunic ducked his bald head. Cy Wakeman's nose was large and red; presumably, before lectures on temperance, he powdered it. The collar of the tunic was open at the rear, and what became of his third chin when he buttoned the collar was far more intriguing to Pat than the plaster model of a hardened liver which Cy Wakeman had in his left hand.

Cy looked anxiously at Pat and said, "I'm busy."

Pat smiled pleasantly. "That's the way

to be. There's nothing like honest work. I must try it sometime." He moved back along the aisle between chairs that had, appropriately, been borrowed from an undertaker, came to a small crude stage cheerfully draped in black crepe.

"What do you want, Pat?" Cy Wakeman worried as he shuffled along behind Pat.

Pat stared at a white hygienic looking table that centered the stage. On it was an assortment of bottles impressively labeled with skull and crossbones—"Strychnine Solution," "Arsenic Solution," "Prussic Acid," "Bichloride of Mercury Solution," "Carbolic Acid." There was also a flatiron tipped up to show a dull brown stain that was possibly rust.

"All genuine, huh, Cy?"

Cy nodded his bald head. "Maybe you'd like a drink, just to make sure."

"I'll take your word for it." Pat flicked cigarette ash onto the stage. "What's the pitch? You show them all this stuff, give out statistics you've dreamed up to prove that alcohol kills more people than poison?"

"Than *other* poisons—yes."

Pat took the brown paper sack from his pocket, opened it, looked inside. "I'll be damned. One for you and one for me." He proffered the bag to Cy Wakeman.

Cy's eyes flickered down at the two chocolates, then came up to meet Pat's squarely. "I never eat candy."

"That's why you tossed away all that money on Gertie's punchboard—to get some candy you don't eat?"

Cy said, "I was after the radio, and I spent thirty cents."

Pat snorted. "Sucker! That radio has outlasted ten of Gertie's punch-boards."

Cy flushed. He didn't say anything.

Pat dropped his cigarette and heeled it out on the floor. "What do you think of that kind of publicity the Lady Murderer got in the paper this morning? You read the yarn, I suppose."

"I did," Cy said, "and it only bears out what I've been suspecting for some time. My poor old cousin is crazy. Like many another zealot, she's let her desire for reform go to her head. I think she wandered into the Moritz with an imaginary man. When she recovered from her delusion, the memory of it was so strong she thought something had happened to her invisible companion."

Pat thought that over a moment, eyes narrow. "You don't believe in Melvin King, then?"

Cy frowned. "Who is this Melvin King?"

"The young man Mrs. Molloy insists accompanied her into the Moritz."

Cy was still puzzled. "There was no mention of any name in the newspaper account. The paper even quoted my cousin as not knowing the young man's name. I've never heard of a Melvin King."

THAT WAS QUEER, Pat thought. A reporter's first job was to get names. If the Lady Murderer hadn't known the young man's name on the night before, how did it happen she knew it this morning?

Pat said, "Anyway, she paid me a nice little retainer to find Melvin King."

For the first time something like alarm showed in Cy Wakeman's watery blue eyes. "How much?"

Pat gave him a cool little smile. "Now that's between Mrs. Molloy and me and the Department of Internal Revenue. I'll tell you this. It wasn't all cash. She gave me a check for the balance."

Cy Wakeman caught the fullness of Pat's coat, of which there was quite a bit. "How big a check?"

"Oh . . . big," Pat evaded.

"Then I'll stop payment on it at once, do you hear? The idea, taking advantage of a demented old woman!"

Pat brushed off Cy Wakeman's puffy fingers. "You'll stop payment?"

"I most assuredly will! She's mentally incompetent. I have instituted proceedings. She is incapable of handling her own affairs, and I have taken the proper steps to have her so designated by the courts."

Pat looked at the plump and pompous little man and uttered a short laugh. "So that's the gag, is it? Do you want to bet I can take steps to the bank faster than you can take steps through the courts?" He turned on his heel and started back along the aisle toward the street entrance.

Cy Wakeman came after him, caught him by the coat tail. "Wait, Pat." He was close to pleading. "Wait just a second."

Pat stopped, watched Wakeman from the ends of green eyes. Cy's face was contorted, trying to put thoughts into words.

"I . . . I . . . Look here, Pat. We can do business. Suppose I buy you off. You simply tell Mrs. Molloy you can't find this—this Melvin King, and I'll double your fee."

Pat said, "After the courts declare Mrs. Molloy mentally incompetent and you get yourself appointed as administrator of her affairs, then you'll double my fee, huh? No thanks. I'll take a bird in the hand any day."

Cy shook his head. "No, Pat. I'll pay you right now. In cash. We've been doing mighty well here. Mighty well indeed."

Pat hesitated.

"Look," Cy wheeled. "Mrs. Molloy is screwy. On top of that, she's a dope. It'll be for her own good if I take over her affairs. What do you say?"

Pat looked at the ceiling. "What day is this?"

"Friday. What's that got to do with it?"

"Friday." Pat regarded the other solemnly. "You're out of luck. Try me tomorrow. Friday is my day to be virtuous. I practically never double-cross anybody on Friday." He left Cy Wakeman stand-

ing between the row of undertaker's chairs, walked to the front door, and went out.

Not ten feet away, the red-headed man in the wheelchair hastily concluded the sale of a pencil to a sympathetic woman and swiveled around to follow Pat.

On Washington Street, the man in the wheelchair was still behind Pat, scudding along without apparent effort, dodging pedestrians skillfully. Pat went batting through the revolving doors of the First National Bank, paused, saw his shadow pull up just outside. Pat went to a desk, indorsed the check the Lady Murderer had given him, then presented it at the paying teller's window, where it was honored without question. He returned to the revolving door from where he could just see the blanketed legs of the red-haired man to the left of the entrance.

Pat took a deep breath, went through the revolving door fast, skirted the end of the wheelchair. He walked perhaps ten paces before he did a complete about-face just as the cripple shoved away from the bank building. Stuffed and hung over the fireplace, Red's head would have made a nice thing with which to scare grandchildren. His features were coarse and large, his skin deeply pitted. A pendulous lower lip showed yellow crooked teeth. The habitually squinted eyes might have indicated anything from near-sightedness to extreme cunning.

Pat walked directly toward the man as though he intended to speak, swerved suddenly to the right of some people who were streaming around the side of Red's chair, cut over, and approached Red from the rear. Pat's hands dropped on the rail at the back of the chair, and Red jerked his head around to glare at Pat.

Pat said, "Now you've got an outboard motor," and started to push the chair along the sidewalk.

For a quarter of a block, Red didn't seem to be able to compose himself. He

kept looking back to see how Pat was doing, and Pat was doing all right. Only Red didn't seem to think it was all right. He didn't say anything, but his look certainly wouldn't have sold any lead pencils. Finally, however, he subsided in the chair, head slumped forward, big hands lightly folded in his lap.

"You see what I mean, Red?" Pat said conversationally. "After being tailed a while, you get a crick in your neck, don't you? That's why I thought I'd follow you for a while, only this way, I already know where you're going."

Red didn't say anything. The way he didn't say anything was downright disconcerting.

Pat jounced the chair off a curb and turned it into the mouth of an alley. "There's a place up here where they sell beer to practically anybody, Red. You and I are going there and discuss your insomnia. I may chime in once in a while about my low blood pressure, but mostly we're going to talk about your insomnia."

Red might have been dead. He wasn't, but he might have been for all the indications of life he showed.

"Huhn," Pat mused, "a talkative kind of a guy, aren't you? Look, Red, you didn't pass out from sheer fright, did you? I said we were going to talk about your insomnia. We won't mention that body that you and the girl ditched last night, because, you see, the only body I give a damn about is the one I walk around in."

Red suddenly dropped a hand to the right wheel of the chair. That is, he gripped the circular wood handrail used for propelling the wheel, checked its rotation so that the chair pivoted crazily to the right and crashed into the brick wall at the back of a building. At almost the same time, Red rolled to the left, kicked off the Indian blanket, and came onto his feet. He was fully as tall as Pat and twice as wide, and he stood on thick legs that were reinforced by steel braces jointed at

the knee. Huge hands caught Pat's skinny shoulders. He raised his right foot with a clanking of metal, and if he had worn pole-climber's irons he couldn't have done a better job of gashing Pat's left ankle as he stamped down.

Pat uttered a short agonized sound and collapsed. He thought for a moment that the building had collapsed on top of him, but that was only Red and Red's iron-work landing neatly on top of Pat's three hamburgers. Pat's head bounced against the alley pavement, and while he was never completely out, neither was he sufficiently conscious to realize that Red was frisking him until Red's hurried and indelicate fingers ripped some portion of the inner pocket of Pat's suitcoat. Pat thought then of all that nice green folding money he was carrying—or possibly by now he wasn't carrying it—and lashed out desperately with his left.

It was a backhand blow that couldn't have been very effective, yet suddenly Pat's starved lungs were gasping for, and getting, air. His vision cleared, and he found himself lying at Red's feet.

Red was sayin hoarsely, "Get up, dammit. Get up!"

Pat got up. Not to accommodate, not to indulge in any good-to-the-last-drop heroics did he get up, but to run like hell if that proved possible.

It wasn't possible. It didn't even seem practical. Red was about a yard in front of him, and Red's right hand was reaching toward Red's hip pocket—a gesture suggesting that Red would presently produce a gun.

Pat and Liberty Pawn Shop owned a gun, sort of joint title, but there didn't seem to be any point in Pat's waving a hock ticket to prove it. Instead, he lunged, clawed at Red's right hand, caught something and hung on. Red let go with a left to Pat's chin. Pat went reeling back to the wall where he stood with knees caving, and a lot of pretty Christmas tree orna-

ments exploded in just front of his face. "Help! Police! He's robbing me!"

Pat thought dimly, Hey, that's my line! But it was Red who was doing the shouting. Red had regained his chair. In it he darted to where Pat wavered against the wall. The footrest gouged into Pat's lacerated ankle, and the pain was sickening.

People were streaming into the alley. Where people had been when they had been badly needed, Pat didn't know. But now there were people, and among those present, one uniformed cop. Pat noticed that his own right hand was clutching a wallet—Red's presumably—and he flung it into the middle of the alley just as the burly cop laid hands on him.

Pat looked up onto the map of Ireland. His grin was faint and stoical. "I was just going down to Headquarters anyway, officer," he said.

CHAPTER THREE

Plenty of Poison

AT ELEVEN A.M., the door of Pat's cell in the police lockup was opened by Lieutenant Tom Gherrity who regarded Pat distastefully and remarked that this was against his better judgment, but Pat could come out.

Pat came out limping. The police surgeon had done a good job dressing Pat's leg, but the gash was plenty sore and the leg was going to be plenty stiff.

"What I want to know," Pat demanded, "did that so-called helpless cripple have the guts to prefer charges against me?"

Gherrity said, "He did. That's what he's doing righth now. We're prolonging the process to hang onto him a while, because I want to hear you speak your piece." He led Pat along a narrow corridor and to a narrow stair. On the way up the steps, Pat's leg gave him hell. Gherrity opened the door that carried the legend HOMICIDE BUREAU, urged

Pat into the room and indicated a chair at the side of Gherrity's desk. Gherrity sat behind the desk, helped himself from a pack of cigarettes, and then, somewhat grudgingly, offered the pack to Pat.

Pat said, "Gee, that's sweet of you, Lieutenant."

"Go ahead, have one," Gherrity said. "They're yours. I was looking over the stuff they took out of your pocket, and remembered I was fresh out of butts."

Pat's green eyes glared. "I suppose you were fresh out of money, too. Or did I have any?"

"You have an even hundred dollars," Gherrity said coldly, "which will be returned to you eventually. Also a handkerchief, a paper book of matches, and a brown paper sack that had some mess in it."

"Nothing else. Not an old envelope with a lipstick stained cigarette butt in it with a piece of Scotch tape attached?"

Gherrity shook his head.

"Red got that then," Pat said. "That's what he was after. Because that piece of Scotch tape recorded a portion of the fingerprints of a dead man."

Gherrity frowned. "How's that?"

"Evidence, I said I had, didn't I?" And then Pat told him what he had witnessed on the night before. "The thing that struck me as pretty queer," he said in conclusion, "was that on the return trip, the babe who was pushing the wheelchair stopped *before* Red spoke to me. As though they'd planned it that way as a move to prove the guy in the wheelchair was alive. Then after they'd gone, I went out into the street, had a look at this cigarette. I figure the girl was the one who had lighted the cigarette, and she'd stuck it to a pair of very dead fingers."

Behind the desk, Tom Gherrity maintained a thoughtful silence. Then, "You think on the way out the girl was wheeling a corpse, while Red Pastor rode back on the return trip."

"You catch on quick," Pat said acidly. "Red can walk. Maybe he can't walk very well, but what he did was go somewhere, prepare a place to stash the corpse. The girl pushed the corpse to that spot, they ditched it, and Red rode back."

Gherrity shook his head, massaging his heavy jaw as he did so. "Where the hell along Burling Street could you hide a corpse that wouldn't show up within an hour afterward?"

Pat's mouth twisted into a grin. "I've been thinking about that. It's got to be a grave that doesn't look like a grave even if you walked over it ten minutes after the burial. And there could be one in every playground."

Gherrity stared at him a moment. Then he got up, came over to Pat. He held his cigarette daintily with thumb and pinky and tapped Pat's hollow chest with three stiffened fingers.

"Don't start horsing around now, Oberon. One word from me, and you'll go into court. Public opinion favoring the guy in the wheelchair, as it will, you'll be out of circulation for a couple of years."

Pat registered phony admiration. "Gee, but you're a great big powerful man, Lieutenant!"

Gherrity's big face reddened. Possibly he counted ten and then asked meekly, "Where's the corpse, Oberron? In playgrounds they've got swings and slides and giant strides."

Pat said, "That's mighty pretty poetry, but you try hiding a corpse in a swing sometime. The body is under the sandpile, Tom. Where the hell else could it be? And five minutes after the burial, you could take your little sand bucket and shovel and go build castles and you wouldn't know you were sitting on top of a grave."

Before the dazed expression had left Gherrity's face, the door of the office was opened by a plainclothesman who looked first at Pat and then at Gherrity.

"Can I speak to you a moment outside, Lieutenant?" the detective asked.

Gherrity got up, went out with the man, and closed the door. Pat leaned back in his chair, stared at the fuzzy silhouettes on the frosted glass of the door for a moment. Then he picked up the pack of cigarettes—his cigarettes—from Gherrity's desk, lighted one from the glowing butt of the one he'd been smoking. Gherrity came in alone, and the expression on his face was both puzzled and strangely embarrassed. He resumed his seat at the desk.

"Er, Oberon, what was that god-awful mess in the brown paper sack you had in your pocket? Candy it looked like, or maybe some half-digested fruit salad."

Pat said, "A couple of cherry cordials that probably got smashed. Why?"

Gherrity coughed. "Well, you see we keep a cat in the building to discourage mice and—"

Pat got onto his feet. "Damn it, Tom, isn't anything sacred around here? How the hell do I know some rabbit hasn't mistaken my dough for lettuce? Why don't you—"

"Shut up!" Gherrity broke in. "Shut up and sit down. The cat licked some of that mess and keeled over. Doc says it looks like morphine to him. Now you'd better be nice before I toss you to the wolves in the Narcotics office. Where did you get those chocolates?"

Pat subsided in the chair. "I was coming to that. You remember Anna Molloy who conked her husband with a flatiron? She gave them to me. I'm supposed to be working for her, trying to locate that guy she misplaced at the Moritz Restaurant last night. She had a whole box of cherry cordials which she got from Cy Wakeman, and Wakeman got them from the Hillary Building cigar stand, and I suppose you can go all the way back into ancient history and find out where they originated if you want to, but it looks a hell of a lot like somebody was trying to

poison somebody, and it might as well be me."

Gherrity looked all over the desk for Pat's cigarettes, and when he didn't see them, he broke down and lighted one of his own. He asked, "How does that hook in with this wheelchair funeral you attended last night?"

Pat shrugged. "It doesn't. Except that the gal who pushed the wheelchair last night is Marva Fox, and Marva, you may remember, was the babe who testified before the grand jury that Mrs. Molloy acted in Marva's defense when Mr. Molloy got his skull mashed . . . Incidentally, what was Mr. Molloy's business?"

Gherrity shook his head. "He didn't have any. He was a professional beggar. He used to walk the streets and squeeze hymns out of a concertina. Which," he added as he reached for the phone, "gives the late Mr. Molloy something in common with this wheelchair lead pencil salesman you assaulted and robbed."

Gherrity caught an inside line and issued an order to somebody. "Put a vag charge on Red Pastor, Mike, and send Williams and Siodmak out to the Burling Street playground. They're to dig up the sandpile. . . . Yeah, that's what I said. Dig deep. They're looking for a stiff."

He hung up and turned to Pat. "Now, Oberon, just where do you fit in? I know you're not mixed up in this just because you love law and order. Where's the money in it?"

Pat said, "I told you. Aside from the fact that I don't like the idea of being poisoned and being mauled by a supposedly helpless cripple, I've got a client, Anna Molloy, and she wants me to locate a guy she thinks she took into the Moritz Restaurant last night."

"She's nuts," Gherrity said with feeling. "Just plain nuts."

"A view you share with Cy Wakeman," Pat said. "He says he's going to take legal steps to have Mrs. Molloy declared

mentally incompetent so he can handle her money. I don't know how much nor where she got it, but Mrs. Molloy has money. And if Wakeman thought he could have her declared insane and get his hooks on her dough that way, then he wouldn't take the risk of trying to poison her with morphine flavored chocolates. Yet when I offered Cy Wakeman one of those chocolates, he said he didn't eat candy, as though maybe he knew they contained something besides cherries."

Gherry's phone rang. Gherry put down his cigarette, took off the receiver, and said, "Yeah?" For a long time he listened. Then he hung up, looked uneasily at Pat, took out a handkerchief and honked his big nose. Pat watched him coldly.

"What's the matter, Tom—bad news?"

Gherry shook his head. "For somebody, maybe. Not for me. Every time some Hillary Building gyp-artist kicks off it makes less work for the department."

"Who is it?"

"Cy Wakeman. Suicide. He took a big slug of carbolic acid over at that free lecture pitch he set up on Illinois Street. Maybe he did try to poison Mrs. Molloy with that candy. Suicide is as good as a confession of guilt."

Pat sneered openly. "Before anything in the way of suspicion was poked in his direction? Don't be funny, Tom. You'd better take a second glance at this thing. Maybe a couple of second glances."

Gherry stirred in his comfortable chair. He looked at the ceiling, then he looked at Pat. Finally, he looked at the rack where his hat was hung.

"Okay," he sighed. "Let's go, Oberon. Let's go take a second glance."

The eleven o'clock free lecture on Alcohol Is A Killer had been delayed, and some news hawker, who had become intrigued by the posters in the window, had gone around to the back door of the store building to see how come. It must have

been quite a shock. Even Pat Oberron, surrounded by a sizable representation of the police force, could not view the corpse of Cy Wakeman without a shudder. Because of what carbolic acid had done to the lips and the swollen mouth.

The bottle, plainly labeled as carbolic, stood open on the white table that centered the crude stage. On the floor, where Wakeman had dropped it, were the shattered fragments of a small glass. There was no suicide note. At the same time nobody seemed to want to suggest murder for the simple reason that, even at gun-point, it would be practically impossible to induce anybody to drink carbolic.

Pat got hold of Gherry's coat sleeve and pointed at the white table. "Where's the rest of the stuff—all the other assorted poisons and poisonous solutions he used in his act?"

Other official eyes besides Gherry's turned on Pat. Somebody asked, "What's the matter, shamus, isn't carbolic enough for you?"

"No," Pat said stubbornly. "I like plenty of poison, and there was plenty of it around when I was in here earlier. Solutions mostly, like arsenic and bichloride."

"Kiger," Gherry growled, "you'd better look into that." He took a step toward the white table, stopped, picked up some minute object from the floor of the stage. It was perhaps an eighth of an inch square. Gherry raised it in his big palm and sniffed at it. "Violets," he said. He looked up and around at his men. "Any of you boys use breath perfume?"

The "boys" exchanged glances. Nobody cared to confess.

Pat said, "The corpse did, Tom. You want to bet he was prettying up his breath so he wouldn't offend the coroner?"

Somebody snickered, but it wasn't Tom Gherry. Gherry turned on Pat, and Gherry's eyes were narrow and menacing. "You get the hell out of here, Ober-

ron. I've stood about all the horsing around I'm going to take from you. Go on. Get out."

Pat shrugged and headed for the door.

NECKTIE SAM was in Burks Place across from the Hillary Building trying to sell a mauve tie to a truck driver who had too many beers when Pat Oberron intervened. He took the little pitchman over to one of the booths and gently, wordlessly pushed Sam down onto a seat. Then he sat on the opposite side of the table.

"Limping, ain't you, Patrick?" Sam asked, concerned. "Don't tell me you got beat up again. I couldn't bear it."

"A beer would help," Pat said, "if you feel like spending."

"Sure, Patrick. Only you got to reciprocate. I'll buy you one, and you'll buy me one, eh? Reciprocation, that's what makes the world go round."

"I thought it was love," Pat said as he beckoned to the waitress.

When their beer had come, Pat leaned across the table and addressed Sam in a low voice. "I noticed a sign in front of the Moritz Restaurant to the effect that Manny Peegar's band is playing there. Is Manny's the orchestra you're dumpony-ing with?"

Sam nodded. "With Manny I'm not playing third saxophone."

Pat drew a flat-handed gesture. "Let's get along without that not-playing business. The point is, you were there last night when the Lady Murderer mislaid her young man."

"Yeah, only—" Sam crinkled his nose, "like a bedbug, she's crazy! Don't let her tell you she ain't because she's prejudiced. I was there. We practically went in with each other, Anna and me. It was just after eight when the orchestra comes in to be ready to play at eight-thirty. Anna Molloy walked in the front door, and she was all by her lonesome. Ask anybody,

Patrick. Ask Melvin King—he walked in right behind her."

Pat raised a hand and gently touched his aching forehead. He stared at Necktie Sain. "Ask *who*?"

"Melvin King, the first saxophonist. What's the matter, Patrick, it was something in your beer? Suddenly you don't look so well. I'm mentioning Melvin King, you're getting sick. Tell me, are you allergic to saxophonists?"

"I think so," Pat said slowly. "Especially Melvin King. You say he entered the place right behind Anna Molloy?"

"He did," Sam said emphatically. "He's coming in behind her. With me and the hide beater Melvin King is going back into the dressing room where we change to monkey suits we should look like gypsies. Melvin is transferring a big wad of money from his street clothes to his costume, and suddenly he is stopping and saying to me, 'Why should I work?' Profanely, Patrick, he's asking me why he should work, and with that big wad of money in his hand, I'm asking him right back, why should he? Melvin is taking from his pocket a piece of candy, chocolate, and he is chewing it-like this, Patrick." Necktie Sam stared off into space and worked his jaws slowly. "Meditatively, he is chewing. Then he don't put on the monkey suit, he don't get out his saxophone. He's quitting, walking out the back door . . ."

"And from there," Pat cut in, "he went to Red's place. And from Red's to the sandpile." He smiled almost fondly across the table at Necktie Sam. "Sammy, you're wonderful."

"I'm confused." Sam took a quick swallow of beer. "This sandpile stuff—what's that, Patrick?"

Pat didn't attempt to answer. "Tell me about this money Melvin had. You said it was a wad. You mean a roll, or a thick sheaf, or just what?"

"A wad." Sam gesticulated. "All wad-

ded up, I mean. Like leaves from a cabbage."

Pat nodded. "You mean female money. From a woman's purse."

Sam chuckled. "Ain't it remarkable? Female money and male money, they should get together and have lots of leetle pennies, nickles, dimes."

Pat choked on his beer. He said, "I don't think that necessarily follows. Money isn't sure to multiply. Murder is, though. You can count on murder and rabbits." He stood up, slid out of the booth.

"Hey—" Necktie Sam gulped the last of his beer, "hey, Patrick, you ain't reciprocated."

"Haven't I? Then I must have broke the handle off my reciprocator." And Pat walked on out to the sidewalk where he stood in the sun and lighted a cigarette. Necktie Sam, clutching his suitcase, joined him a moment later. Sam's eyes were wistful.

"You know, Patrick, I wish I was as accomplished a heel as you are. Your beer you don't even pay for."

Pat didn't say anything. His cold green-eyed stare reached across the street. The Lady Murderer in her drab brown dress and hat was just going into the shabby entrance of the Hillary Building, lugging a heavy-looking brown shopping bag.

Pat stuck his cigarette onto his lower lip and jay-walked. Necktie Sam came pattering along behind him.

The Lady Murderer was waiting for an elevator in the Hillary Building lobby. The smile she gave Pat as he and Sam approached was a trifle absent.

"Doing a little shopping, I see." Pat pointed to the bag.

Anna tittered. "Oh, a few small items. Everything is so high now . . ."

The clatter of the safety-gate cut her off, and she stepped into the elevator. Pat and Sam followed.

"Third," Pat and the Lady Murderer said, almost in unison. They exchanged nice polite smiles over the coincidence. The elevator crawled upward uncertainly, came to a bouncing stop. The trio got out, and the Lady Murderer would have turned off to the right if Pat hadn't checked her.

"Remember me, Anna?" he said. "I'm working for you. I've got a report to make on Melvin King."

The sincere brown eyes closed slowly, opened. Mrs. Molloy swallowed, then smiled. "Oh, yes. So soon, Mr. Oberon?" And she allowed Pat to lead her to his office.

Sam trailed them.

"My saxophone, Patrick," Sam said, crowding close, his eyes shiny with curiosity as Pat unlocked the door. "I've got to pick up my saxophone."

Pat said, "All right." He opened the door, went in, offered the Lady Murderer a seat on the couch. Pat went behind the desk, put his aching self down gingerly in the chair. Sam seemed to be having a good deal of trouble locating his saxophone, but he was quiet about it, merely tiptoeing in and out of the closet, his ears sharpened to pick up anything that was said.

"I'm out of money, Anna," Pat said. "I'm making progress, but I've got to have more expense money."

THE LADY MURDERER drew thoughtfully on her lower lip. "Not that I don't trust you, Mr. Oberon, but before I make any further outlay, I would like to have some indication of this—this progress."

Pat leaned back in his chair and cradled a knee in his hands. "Well, let's see. I can tell you just how Melvin King disappeared. He followed you into the Moritz and stepped into the dressing room used by the boys who play in the orchestra. The reason the doorman and head waiter

insist that you entered alone is that Melvin King was a member of the orchestra, whereas you represented him as your companion. You did so because at the time you didn't know he played in the Moritz orchestra. You didn't even know his name was Melvin King. If you had asked the waiter where Melvin King was, he'd have told you."

The Lady Murderer carefully shifted her shopping bag so that it rested against her bony legs. In motion, the bag gave out a liquid *glunk* of sound. Pat looked into the steady brown eyes and his lips curled into an easy, friendly smile.

"How about that, Anna? How come you could tell me the young man's name this morning?"

"It simply slipped my mind last night," she said without hesitation.

Pat made no comment. "Now, Anna, I think that with another day's work I'll be able to take you directly to Melvin King. But it'll cost you a little more. Say, another hundred."

Necktie Sam ducked out of the closet and blinked his dark eyes rapidly. The Lady Murderer frowned.

She said, "It is, of course, a mere whim on my part. I don't really feel compelled to speak to . . . to—the name almost slipped my mind again—to Melvin King. I was chiefly interested in proving to the public that I did not enter the Moritz alone. So . . ." she tittered again, "we really may as well drop the matter. Suppose, Mr. Oberron, I give you say . . ." She opened her purse and took out a crumpled wad of bills.

Necktie Sam whispered, "Female money," and drew a cold glance from Pat.

". . . say, fifty dollars, Mr. Oberron?"

It was agreeable to Mr. Oberron. He took the money, smoothed it out, and put it carefully away in his wallet along side the still untouched hundred he had received that morning. The Lady Murderer stood up.

Pat said, "Did you polish off all those cherry cordials you had this morning, Anna?"

Mrs. Molloy put three fingers up to her scrawny throat and coughed. "I've such a miserable little cold, I haven't touched a single piece. I do think sweets aggravate a cold, don't you?"

She went out of the office and closed the door.

"Patrick . . ." Sam began excitedly, but Pat had a finger on his lips in a hushing gesture. He whispered, "Follow her, Sam. Right now. Make like a shadow. Find out what she's going to do with those bottles."

"Bottles?" Sam looked from Pat to the door and then back. "Bottles, you said, I didn't misunderstand you."

"Yes. Cy Wakeman's poison bottles he used in his free lecture. Get going, Sammy."

Sam left both his necktie case and the saxophone behind, and slipped quietly out the door of the office. Pat creaked forward in the chair, pulled the phone across the desk, dialed Police Headquarters. Before he had an answer, the door of the office was opened and Necktie Sam stuck his pale pinched face into the room.

"Patrick, I can't possibly. It ain't decent I should follow her," Sam sputtered. "Get Getrie, or Flora Gould, or some lady heel, on account of the Lady Murderer has gone into Ladies."

Pat came from behind the desk and to the door. He limped out into the deserted hall, turned to the left. As he and Sam came into the end of the hall, the door marked LADIES opened slowly. A tall girl with heavy black hair in a Dutch bob backed out. Her right hand was up to her mouth as though to stifle a scream. She whirled then to face Pat and Sam, and her pale gray eyes were wide.

Sam gasped, "Marva Fox!"

"Quick! A doctor! She's taken poison. She's—" And then the pale gray eyes

seemed to see Pat more clearly; they had a fire-alarm look in them.

"Oh no, Marva," Pat said quietly. He caught the girl's arms, shoved her back to the half-open door, and into the ladies room. Over his shoulder, he said to Sam. "Come in and close the door."

The Lady Murderer stood beside the wash basin, her long horsy face expressionless. In her hand was a bottle the label of which said "Prussic Acid". At her feet were other bottles, all bearing the red skull and crossbones, all empty.

The Lady Murderer let the prussic acid bottle slide from her fingers. It shattered on the tile floor. Then, like something in a slow-motion movie, she crumpled down to lie motionless.

Marva Fox uttered a little wail and twisted around to Pat. "Lemme out of here!"

Pat said, "You stay where you are, Marva. Right now a couple of cops are in the Burling Street playground, digging in the sandpile for Melvin. When they get through there, they are going to have a lot of things to ask you and Red Pastor."

"But . . . but I didn't . . . We didn't kill him," she stammered.

"I'm listening."

Sam said, "Patrick, we got to get a doctor." He was wringing his pale hands and staring down at the Lady Murderer's still form.

Pat said, "I don't think a doctor would do any good. Get talking, Marva."

"I . . . I don't know where to begin. Melvin and I were married once . . ."

Pat shook his head. "The wrong beginning and a rotten alibi. Anna was married to Mr. Malloy once, too—remember?"

Marva nodded. "And she killed him. She meant to kill him, because she'd found out he'd been holding out money on her. He had a lot of money stashed around the house, and she'd found some of it. I didn't know that then. I didn't

know about the money until I met Red Pastor and he told me that Mr. Molloy used to make ten thousand a year just begging. He'd wear dark glasses and fumble around the streets playing an accordion. But anyway, Anna Malloy intended to kill him."

"And then she got you to testify before the grand jury that she acted in your defense," Pat said. "Is that it?"

MARVA NODDED. "For a lousy grand, she bought me," she said bitterly. "She said if I'd give the grand jury that story we'd split the life insurance, so I did."

"Then along came Melvin King, and you told him about the Molloy money."

"And Melvin started writing Anna Molloy threatening letters. He didn't sign them. Last night she was to meet him downtown and give him some money."

"She did," Pat said. "Also, she induced him to have some candy which she'd loaded with morphine."

"She always had it," Marva said. "She's got needle punctures all over her body."

Pat remembered what Cy Wakeman had said about Anna being a dope. Dope fiend, Wakeman had meant. He said, "Anyway, Melvin and Anna went into the Moritz together—Melvin, because he played in the band, and Anna because she wanted to make sure he'd taken enough candy to knock himself out permanently. When Melvin disappeared, she got panicky, because if the morphine wasn't fatal Anna would be worse off than before. She started asking questions, insisting the young man had disappeared. Then when the manager called the police that must have given her a very bad time. Actually, Melvin had gone out the back door. From the Moritz he went to Red's place."

Marva was nodding. "He told us about getting some money off Anna, and then he went to sleep."

"And didn't wake up."

"We couldn't wake him," Marva said, "and Red could tell by Melvin's eyes he'd died of dope."

"So you thought if you concealed the body," Pat went on, "you'd have a new lever with which to pry money from Anna. The fly in the ointment was the cigarette you'd stuck to Melvin's dead fingers. I got hold of the butt, and that worried you. You tackled Anna about it this morning—that was when she found out Melvin's name—and Anna thought she'd better get rid of me. She came to my office for no other reason than to feed me poison chocolates, but to explain her coming in at all she said she wanted to employ me to find Melvin."

"Patrick, you ate them poisoned chocolates?" Sam asked, aghast.

"Oh, sure!" To Marva, he said, "Then you thought you'd slip into my office and grab the cigarette butt, and when you found I wasn't even unconscious, let alone dead, you went to Red. Red tried the more direct method, thinking that once he had the incriminating cigarette butt nobody would ever latch on to where you'd hidden the body."

"Which," he concluded, nodding at Anna Molloy's still figure, "winds up about everything, since suicide is accepted as a confession of guilt."

Anna Molloy suddenly moved. There were gasps from Necktie Sam and Marva, but Pat didn't seem at all surprised. Anna sat bolt upright, hands flat on the floor, arms bracing her, her bony legs straight out. She blinked brown eyes at Pat. "The hell it's a confession," she said harshly. "I'm not confessing anything, and you can't prove a word of this—not a word!"

Pat's smile was slow and malicious. "Now that really ties it, Anna. I never saw a killer who has the rotten luck you have. You ought to have tried using an ax. You came in here to sluice the contents of Cy Wakeman's 'poison' bottles

down the drain, and you thought you were alone. You had all of them emptied except the one that said 'prussic acid' on it. You'd just left my office, and you had an idea I was getting dangerously near the truth, so you thought you'd just take a bracer before you emptied the last bottle. Marva saw you take the nip and yelled. You thought if you played dead Marva would go for a doctor, and then you'd disappear. Because as soon as anybody realized Cy's bottle contained liquor—not poison—then Cy's 'suicide' became murder.

"What you did was simply substitute real carbolic for the liquor Cy kept in the carbolic bottle. Cy, an habitual drunk if I ever saw one, tossed off a shot of carbolic. What put me wise as to the real contents of the poison bottles was the fact that the several of the labels read 'solution' of this or that—poisons you'd ordinarily obtain in the dry form. That enabled Cy to keep a pretty large supply of liquor on hand. He'd want to limit his trips to the package stores, because he risked seeing his temperance racket go up in smoke."

The Lady Murderer said, "He was a stinker, Cy was. A dirty stinker." She said it dazedly, staring at the floor.

Pat said, "You had to kill Cy because he had instituted proceedings to have you declared mentally unbalanced on the grounds of the scene you made at the Moritz last night. You couldn't very well defend your sanity without uncovering the body of Melvin King."

Necktie Sam took his head in his hands and rocked it slowly back and forth. "Poison, it ain't poison. Candy, it's turning out poison. Suicide, it's murder. Suicide, she ain't dead. Temperance leaders, they're turning out drunks. Around here nothing is on the up-and-up. Even in the ladies room, they got men."

Pat stared at Anna Molloy. "Well anyway, there's the Lady Murderer. She's legitimate."

(Continued from page 57)

Eight Answers—*Gregory, 1800; *Betty S. P., 600; *Ubes, 1521.

Seven Answers—*Pearl Knowler, 2413.

Five Answers—*D. H. Holcomb, 1800; Rosemary Larsen, 27.

Corrections—*CIPHERMIT, *Alice Routh, and tClement E. Taylor, 11 answers each for January, 1947; Alchemurg, 10 answers for January, 1947, not previously credited.

Cipher Solvers' Club for May, 1947

Current Grand Total: 890,777 Answers

Eleven Answers—*Agatha, 1792; *Age, 2832; tJohn Aitken, 144; *Ajax, 2435; tAmoroj, 401; tAnidem, 346 tThe Ponder Bare, 124; *See Bee Bee, 2694; *P. W. B., 1270; *S. H. Berwald, 983; *Alpha Bet, 1754; tFlorence B. Boulton, 397; *Gold Bug, 1614; *Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 3875; *Carso, 1884; *CIPHERMIT, 3518; *R. C. C., 606; *Codela, 1435; tCodet, 405; *Floyd E. Coas, 1628; *Darn Cross, 1046; *Cryptox, 1938; tM. E. Cutcomb, 429; *Kay Dee, 612; Honey Dew, 42; *Gunga Din, 756; *Drol, 2066; *M. E., 3720; *Eve Eden, 1262; *Efdce, 1351; tJay-em-en, 181; *Engineer III, 1753; *Arty Ess, 3876; *Jay-En-Ess, 2119; *Estece, 1829; tEvie, 329; tEwlee, 395; Ex-Moosejaw, 58; *Femo, 679; tSally Fischer, 165; tFern G., 165; *Clarence P. Greene, 1297; tGus, 220; tGyrene, 288; *Henry J. Haewcker, 1882; *Hayrake, 1342; *T. Hegarty, 3438; *Jack-Hi, 1059; *H. H., 2107; tInvictus, 456; *Jayel, 3995; tJune, 450; *Kate, 2833; tBetty Kelly, 480; *Keystonian, 1649; tS. A. L., 358; tMartoy, 275; *Theo. W. Midlam, 3237; *Lee A. Miller, 1736; *Mossback, 2442; tClarence Neilsen, 314; tPablo, 138; C. Edward Parker, 24; Ira Pent, 43; *W. F. P., 3019; *Kee Pon, 1101; *B. E. R., 1153; *Don Ricardo, 1271; *Ray F. Richer, 1467; *Wm. G. Ringer, 1372; *W. A. Robb, 1522; *Alice Routh, 3799; tRush, 287; *Mrs. H. A. Seals, 2971; *R. B. Shrewsbury, 1542; tL. Silverman, 101; *Sam Spiegel, 2651; *M. G. S., 1799; *Jack-Stay, 3698; tMiss Tick, 227; *Tisen, 1231; *Tyro V, 2506; *Valkyrie, 1097; *Volund, 1849; *Mrs. James Wallen, 3022; tRuth E. Weiss, 265; tBret Harte Whitman, Jr., 347; *Reg Williams, 1123; *Wiray, 1420; *Doctor X, 3914; *Yarbic, 938; tZiryab, 169; tZizi, 460.

Ten Answers—tHarry Blanck, 267; tMrs. Hugh Boyd, 298; tMarguerite Gleason, 499; Mrs. James Gregg, 90; tJ. E. L., 320; *Jesse C. Leach, 1154; *Lucille E. Little, 2043; Rebbina, 65; tC. Retherford, 131; *Nick Spar, 3212; *N. Dak. Ump, 674; Virsat, 93; A. Walrus, 60; *E. H. Werner, 1390.

Nine Answers—Ray Boyd, 47; *Gregory, 1800; *D. H. Holcomb, 1369; tH. Pool, 190; *Ike N. Wynne, 2437.

Eight Answers—*Ubes, 1529.

Correction—*N. Dak. Ump, 10 answers for March, 1947, not previously credited.

Cipher Solvers' Club for July, 1947

Current Grand Total: 891,969 Answers

Eleven Answers—*Aachen, 3284; *Age, 2843; tJohn Aitken, 155; *Ajax, 2446; tAmoroj, 412; *P. W. B., 1281; *S. H. Berwald, 994; *Alpha Bet, 1765; tFlorence B. Boulton, 408; *Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 3886; *Carso, 1895; *Bessie Casey, 570; *CIPHERMIT, 3529; *R. C. C., 617; *Codela, 1446; *Floyd E. Coas, 1637; *Darn Cross, 1057; *Cryptox, 4919; tM. E. Cutcomb, 440; tJump o'er Dam, 488; Damac, 11; *Kay Dee, 623; *Gunga Din, 767; *Drol, 2077; *M. E., 3731; *Efdce, 1362; *Engineer III, 1764; *Arty Ess, 3887; *Jay-En-Ess, 2130; tEvie, 340; tEwlee, 406; Ex-Moosejaw, 69; *Femo, 690; tFern G., 176; *LeRoy A. Guidry, 844; tGyrene, 299; *Henry J. Haewcker, 1893; Hamlet II, 47; *Hayrake, 1353; *T. Hegarty, 3449; tInvictus, 447; *Jayel, 4006; tJune, 461; *Kate, 2844; tBetty Kelly, 497; Mrs. Captain Kidd, 71; tS. A. L., 399; *Theo. W. Midlam, 3248; *Lee A. Miller, 1797; tReady Money, 211; *Mossback, 2453; tClarence Neilsen, 325; *Nerts, 1120; Novice III, 11; *Sue de Nymme, 2743; tPablo, 149; C. Edward Parker, 34; tCat's Paw, 489; *W. F. P., 3030; *Kee Pon, 1112; *B. E. B., 1164;

*Don Ricardo, 1282; *Ray F. Richer, 1478; *Wm. G. Ringer, 1383; *W. A. Robb, 1533; *Alice Routh, 3810; tRush, 278; *Mrs. H. A. Seals, 2982; tW. E. S., 211; *R. B. Shrewsbury, 1553; tL. Silverman, 112; *Sam Spiegel, 2662; *Jack-Stay, 3709; *P. H. T., 1624; tMiss Tick, 238; *Tisen, 1242; *Tyro V, 2517; *Valkyrie, 1108; *Volund, 1860; *Mrs. James Wallen, 3033; Ruth E. Weiss, 276; *E. H. Werner, 1401; tBret Harte Whitman, Jr., 358; *Wiray, 1431; *Ike N. Wynne, 2448; *Doctor X, 3925; *Yarbic, 949; tZiryab, 180; tZizi, 471.

Ten Answers—tThe Ponder Bare, 134; tMrs. Hugh Boyd, 308; *Gold Bug, 1624; *Ceebee, 830; Honey Dew, 52; *Marguerite Gleason, 509; tMrs. James Gregg, 100; tJay-em-en, 191; tJ. E. L., 330; *Jesse C. Leach, 1164; *Lucille E. Little, 2053; tC. Retherford, 141; *Nick Spar, 3222.

Nine Answers—*Gregory, 1818; tIan, 225; tH. Pool, 190; tVirsat, 102.

Seven Answers—Ray Boyd, 54.

Six Answers—*D. H. Holcomb, 1375

Corrections—tAlphamega, *LeRoy A. Guidry, and tClement E. Taylor, 11 answers each for May, 1947, not previously credited.

Cipher Solvers' Club for September, 1947

Current Grand Total: 893,149 Answers

Eleven Answers—*Age, 2854; tJohn Aitken, 166; *Ajax, 2457; tAlphamega, 413; tAmoroj, 424; tAnidem, 357; *Attempt, 729; *See Bee Bee, 2706; *P. W. B., 1292; *S. H. Berwald, 1005; *Alpha Bet, 1776; tFlorence B. Boulton, 419; *Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 3897; *Carso, 1906; *Bessie Casey, 581; *CIPHERMIT, 3540; *R. C. C., 623; *Codela, 1457; *Floyd E. Coas, 1649; *Darn Cross, 1068; *Cryptox, 1960; tM. E. Cutcomb, 452; tJump o'er Dam, 499; *Gunga Din, 778; *Drol, 2088; *M. E., 3742; *Efdce, 1373; *Engineer III, 1775; *Arty Ess, 3898; *Jay-En-Ess, 2141; tEvie, 351; tEwlee, 418; Ex-Moosejaw, 81; *Femo, 701; tSally Fischer, 187; tFern G., 188; *LeRoy A. Guidry, 855; tGyrene, 310; *Henry J. Haewcker, 1904; Hamlet II (C. A. A.), 59; *Hayrake, 1365; *T. Hegarty, 3461; *Jack-Hi, 1061; *Jayel, 4017; tJune, 472; *Kate, 2855; tBetty Kelly, 506; tS. A. L., 410; tF. Mack, 260; tMartoy, 286; *Theo. W. Midlam, 3259; *Lee A. Miller, 1808; tReady Money, 222; *Mossback, 2464; tClarence Miller, 336; Ella Nohr, 22; C. Edward Parker, 45; *Cat's Paw, 500; Ira Pent, 54; *W. F. P., 3041; *Don Ricardo, 1294; *Wm. G. Ringer, 1395; *W. A. Robb, 1544; *Alice Routh, 3821; tRush, 289; *Mrs. H. A. Seals, 2993; *R. B. Shrewsbury, 1564; tL. Silverman, 123; *Slevy, 975; *Sam Spiegel, 2673; *M. G. S., 1811; *Jack-Stay, 3720; tMiss Tick, 249; *Tisen, 1253; *Valkyrie, 1119; tArlene F. Vaughn, 190; *Volund, 1871; *Mrs. James Wallen, 2044; tRuth E. Weiss, 287; *Arthur Whitfield, 347; tBret Harte Whitman, Jr., 369; *Wiray, 1442; *Doctor X, 2936; *Yarbic, 960; tZizi, 482.

Ten Answers—Ray Boyd, 64; *Ceebee, 840; tMrs. James Gregg, 110; tJay-em-en, 201; *Jesse C. Leach, 1174; *Lucille Little, 2063; *Nick Spar, 3232; *E. H. Werner, 1411.

Nine Answers—*Ike N. Wynne, 2457; tVirsat, 111; *Ubes, 1538; tC. Retherford, 150.

Eight Answers—*Gold Bug, 1632; Honey Dew, 60; *Marguerite Gleason, 517; *D. H. Holcomb, 1383.

Seven Answers—tJ. E. L., 337.

Five Answers—Dare Davel, 5.

Corrections—tAlphamega, tSally Fisher, *Jack-Hi, *M. G. S., and tClement E. Taylor, 11 answers each for July, 1947, not previously credited. tA. G. Tate, 9 answers for July, and 10 for May, 1947, not previously credited.

STRANGE TRAILS

Mr. Schwartz's almost Perfect Crime

CHARLES HENRY SCHWARTZ--YOUNG, HANDSOME & APPARENTLY WEALTHY--ARRIVED IN BERKELEY, CAL., ON THE HEELS OF WORLD WAR I.

HE TALKED ENTERTAININGLY, IF VAGUELY, OF HIS EXPLOITS AS A FLYER, BEGAN DEVELOPING & PROMOTING A SECRET PROCESS FOR MANUFACTURING ARTIFICIAL SILK IN AN EXPERIMENTAL LABORATORY ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN, AND IN A FEW YEARS

ACQUIRED A WIFE, 3 CHILDREN AND AN EXCELLENT REPUTATION.

ON A JULY EVENING IN 1925, SHORTLY AFTER THE WATCHMAN EXCHANGED A FEW WORDS WITH SCHWARTZ AND LEFT, A TERRIFIC EXPLOSION AND FIRE DESTROYED THE LABORATORY. MRS. SCHWARTZ IDENTIFIED THE CHARRED, DISFIGURED BODY RAKED FROM THE RUINS AS HER HUSBAND

SUSPECTING FOUL PLAY BECAUSE OF THE PRESENCE OF CRUDE TORCHES, DR. EDWARD O. HEINRICH, THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA'S CHEMICAL-LEGAL WIZARD, INVESTIGATED.

MINUTE LABORATORY EXAMINATION OF THE CORPSE SHOWED 2 NEWLY EXTRACTED TEETH, BOTH EYEBALLS STRANGELY PUNCTURED, ACID BURNS ON THE HANDS AND THAT DEATH RESULTED FROM A FRACTURED SKULL--ALL INCURRED BEFORE THE FIRE STARTED.

... to MURDER ^{by} LEE

SIFTING OF THE RUINS DISCLOSED BURNED BITS OF A BIBLE BEARING THE NAME OF G. W. BARBE, AN ITINERANT EVANGELIST MISSING FROM HIS USUAL HAUNTS, AND THE FACT THAT THE HOUSE WAS NOT A LABORATORY AT ALL.

WHEN INVESTIGATION INTO SCHWARTZ'S PAST REVEALED A RECORD AS A SWINDLER AND A \$200,000 INSURANCE POLICY ON HIS LIFE TURNED UP, DR. HEINRICH REASONED SCHWARTZ HAD MURDERED BARBE, PULLED 2 TEETH AND OTHERWISE FIXED THE BODY TO RESEMBLE HIS OWN BY DESTROYING FINGERPRINTS AND COLOR OF THE EYES, RIGGED THE BLAST, AND VANISHED.

IN AUGUST AN OAKLAND ROOMING-HOUSE PROPRIETOR REPORTED TO POLICE A NERVOUS LODGER ANSWERING SCHWARTZ'S DESCRIPTION.



A SHOT GREETED DETECTIVES AS THEY BROKE IN THE SUSPECT'S DOOR.

ON THE BED LAY THE REAL SCHWARTZ, A BULLET IN HIS HEAD, BESIDE HIM A CONFESSION OF THE WEIRD CRIME JUST AS DR. HEINRICH HAD DEDUCED IT.

24-120

Out of the night they came, the snarling little henchmen of homicide, to track down a victim who sought his final sanctuary from their doom—in the Death House itself!

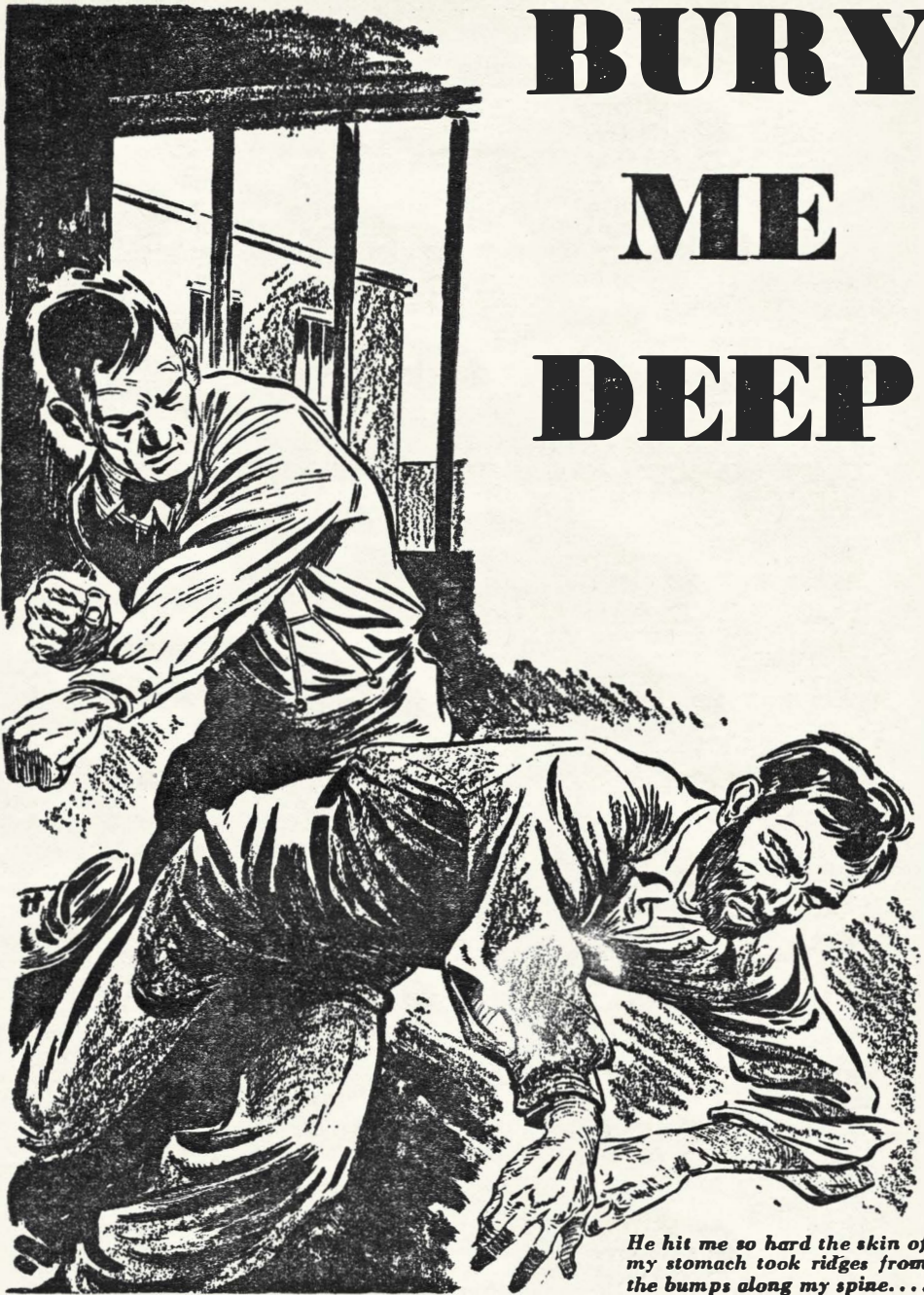


WE SHOULD HAVE played it smarter but we thought we were dealing with punks. We knew that they were tough enough, of course, and that they were experienced and organized; but we didn't figure that we'd turn their jail upside down and that they'd kill.

Johnny Keems and I got off a train in Gibbsville, Centre County Seat, population ninety thousand, one sweaty July night about ten o'clock and picked out a

medium-good hotel, the Mansion House. I slid into the lobby first, hid a grin at the beefy, red-faced, blue-serge-suited man who was chewing a cigar by the bulletin

BURY ME DEEP



He hit me so hard the skin of my stomach took ridges from the bumps along my spine...

board. He had a sheaf of readers in a hand the size and color of a boiled lobster, and he was studying them and glowering at the lobby lizards. A sandwich board

By
William Rough

spelling HOUSE DICK on his bay window couldn't have labeled him more plainly.

I learned later that his name was Barney Nola, and that he wasn't to be counted out of the running on account of his burlesque getup; but at the time I chuckled inwardly, wondering if he'd pull an old, frontier-style Colt if suddenly he found one of the guests answering a description on the readers.

I looked them over myself. Salesmen, a wolf or two, a bum or two, newspaper scavengers—and one customer worth a second look. He was a medium-sized, slender man in a wilted blue-and-white-striped seersucker suit and a chewed-up Panama hat. His small-featured narrow face was grayly expressionless, eyes glacial, lips so thin and bloodless that they were hard to find.

Johnny Keems came in, then, and registered. He held his key so that I could spot the number, and after while I went up to his room, shucked off my tan tropical worsteds and got into the hand-me-downs I'd picked up in a hock shop before leaving Capitol City.

I gave the nice pigskin wallet which Betty Blane had donated for my twenty-eighth birthday to Johnny to hold and put a couple of bucks into a greasy billfold along with a tattered identification card that said David Wilson. I heaved back the hotel carpet and found dirt to work under my fingernails.

Johnny hefted a bottle of scotch. "Want this, Abe?"

"You don't find good scotch on stumplebums," I told him. "I'll pick up some rotgut somewhere."

Johnny is small-boned, middle-aged, running to paunch; but he hasn't slowed up much because of it, nor have the years brightened his outlook on for whom the bell tolls. He claimed that no cloud that ever came his way had been lined with anything but fog. His dark eyes checked me over worriedly.

"Sox," he moaned. "You still got on good sox."

I grimaced. Then, "Lend me a pair of yours, Johnny," I chuckled. "You never spent more than thirty cents for a pair of socks in your life."

"Zat so?" Johnny was hurt. He flipped me a pair of mended socks. "Don't overdo it, Abe," he pleaded. "You have to get hauled in, but you don't have to sock a cop to do it. Bust a store window, or something, and go quietly."

"Sock a cop?" I clucked. "You shouldn't give me ideas. Don't forget extra film when you bring me the camera."

I closed the door on his groan. He knew he hadn't given me any ideas since I'll sock or rib a cop or a lawyer or a politician every chance I get. Most of them, anyhow. You meet a square one once in a while—about every ten years. And I certainly didn't figure on meeting any square ones in Gibbville. In fact, the reason we were on hand was because the county jail was so crummy.

Governor Anderson had ridden into office on a reform ticket two years back; so of course he was doing some reforming. I'd been his chief investigator when he was Attorney General and had moved along with him into the Governor's mansion. Thus far in his term, we'd cracked some gambling syndicates, a marihuana ring, a plumbing and heating racket and some other odds and ends. Our last deal had been cleaning out the minor judiciary in third-class cities, and it had led on into the sheriff's office and the county jail. We'd had some rough reports about conditions, and I was now doing the groundwork of an exposé.

I was supposed to get pinched, learn what I could on the inside, take some pix of the filthy jail conditions, and like that. Maybe we wouldn't be able to put Sheriff Olin Mainwaring behind his own bars on a felony, but at least we'd blast his tank in the papers and wreck his chances

of being reelected—we earnestly hoped.

I didn't much like the idea of a night in a jail, particularly in this jail, but it was the only way to catch Mainwaring cold. If any hint that we were interested in him got out, he'd have time to spruce the place up and pressure the inmates not to talk.

I SHOULD HAVE left the Mansion House by a back way, because the second I stepped out of the front elevator the lobby bloodhound's cigar stub came to attention and he lumbered toward me: he'd spotted me going up and the change to shabby clothing had alerted him. I *said* we should have played it smarter.

His two-forty wasn't hard to outdistance. I scooted out a side door, got just a glimpse of the slender, frozen-faced guy in the seersucker suit gliding out of his chair.

In a package store I got a pint of cheap booze, poured most of it in an alley, a little on my coat and shirt, and sampled it just once—which was enough. I stuck the bottle in my hip pocket and headed for the county jail.

It was a three-story building of red brick. Wide stone steps led up to double doors that were open to catch a little of the mucky breeze. No cops were handy, so I walked past it, turned and came back, hoping.

I got my hope in no less than a neat, middle-aged man with a snowy white mustache: Sheriff Mainwaring himself! As he trotted down the steps, I lurched into him, snarled and gave him a push and a drunken-sounding curse. My only regret was that he was too old to hit with much satisfaction, but I cocked a fist under his nose menacingly.

He yelped, "Raymond, quick!" in a falsetto howl. Heavy footsteps came to the rescue. I glanced up, set myself: the stand-in for a mountain charging out of the jail wasn't too old to hit. He was two

inches taller than my six-one and carried twenty pounds more beef, clad in the blue-gray of a jail guard. Not a bad looking guy, in a square-jawed toothy way; his pale eyes tightened cruelly as he came to me.

I stood clear of Mainwaring, and for just a second my gaze swept the other side of the street. I saw a slender, cold-eyed man in a blue-and-white-striped seersucker suit—and took one look too many. There was a swish and a splat. The swish was a sap dancing out on Raymond's big paw. The splat was when it connected with my jaw.

I had wanted to get pulled in: brothers, I *got* pulled in!

I don't know how many times Raymond whacked me. Enough, but not enough to knock me out. Probably he was too lazy to carry me, and that's all that held him back. I felt his knee where I sit and sprawled forward on the stone steps. Then he was booting me on up and Mainwaring was snarling, "Drunk and disorderly, assault and battery, resisting arrest, vagrancy! Six months, Raymond!"

Talk about your curbstone hearings!

Raymond frisked me as we moved, then his keys jangled. A cell door grated and I was caught by hands which passed me around like a basketball till my knees hit an iron cot and I flopped. Prying fingers dressed me down. Somebody grunted disgustedly, "He's clean. Raymond rolled him, as usual."

I threw a bleary glance around. I was in a cell designed to hold six men: there were a dozen present. The cots were jammed so tight together that there was only enough floor space for two men to stand up decently. The place stank of sweat and muck. The cot springs were busted, the ticking was lousy and the blankets were black with creasote and human excretions. If the sap hadn't given me a good start, I probably couldn't have slept in such filth; but it had and I did.

I woke once during the night. I thought a mouse was scurrying over my face and tried to swipe it away. The yellow wash from a corridor bulb showed a twitching nose hovering over me, glittering little eyes. They could have substituted for a mouse at that, but they were human. I cursed as they melted back. It would be just my luck to be recognized by some stir bird I'd met in my travels who would tip off Sheriff Mainwaring. . . .

Tincups banging on concrete snapped me awake the second time: my cellmates were bawling for breakfast. I glanced around for a twitching nose and glittering eyes. I saw them, or maybe they were just jittery eyes, now: eyes that needed something to steady them down—something like a packet of white powder cut with sugar of milk.

The breakfast cart would be along soon; I had to find out where I stood. I wiggled through drunks, stumblebums and grifters who'd needed baths and shaves for days, and flopped on my pal's bunk. "Long time no see," I said without moving my lips. He could take a crack like that any way he liked. He took it in a way that *I* didn't like.

"Get away from me till after chow, Gressive," he hissed. "If that guard, Alber, sees us chummy, he'll sweat me about you."

I winced. He knew my name. I put on my best leer. "You know what happens to stools, pal?"

"Get away from me," he croaked. "I ain't stoolin'—not on you, anyways. I'll make a deal with you—only later."

I kept my fingers crossed and moved away from him. When the slum cart rattled to a halt outside the cell, I picked up the tin cup and pie plate beside my cot. They'd been wiped out but not washed and were greasy and rusted. I itched to get my hands on the camera Johnny Keems was supposed to smuggle in to me. Too bad I couldn't photograph the break-

fast they handed out. It was awful.

Watery coffee, mush with strap molasses, and a stale biscuit. It must have cost the sheriff at least four or five cents a head to put it out. At that rate, the total he'd be feeding a prisoner would be twenty cents' worth a day.

But our state is still on the fee system: the sheriff is allotted a certain amount for every prisoner on the books. I knew the subsistence allowance was seventy cents per diem.

FIGURE IT OUT: old Mainwaring was getting seventy cents a man every day and spending twenty. His profit was a half a buck a day on every inmate. This was the county jail, with prisoners funneling into it from three good-sized cities. The population of the jail averaged two hundred or better all the time. Mainwaring was pocketing a hundred bucks a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year: over thirty-six grand!

And this didn't include his salary of \$10,000, or his free living quarters, or his power to appoint forty-odd deputies, guards, bailiffs and other stooges at the jail. Talk about political pork barrels: the sheriff's office was the juiciest plum in the county.

I saw some of the cons hanging back, not even trying to get their handouts. A second later the answer trundled into sight: another food cart. But this one was steaming with honest grub, not swill. Money passed through the bars, and the inmates who could afford it sat back to eat decent oatmeal, toast and ham and eggs. Another source of revenue for Sheriff Mainwaring!

Raymond had scobbed my wallet, of course, so I was just a spectator at breakfast. I merely tasted my pan of mush and slung it to the waiting roaches. I took a mouthful of coffee, spewed it into the

stinky commode, prayed that Johnny wouldn't oversleep.

By this time I'd heard a couple of the cons talk to my friend of the twitchy nose and glittering eyes. They called him Mike Fetsko, but I still couldn't place him. As the slum cart started on to the next cell, he yelped, "Wait for me!" and slid close to the bars with his cup and pan.

The stringy, tobacco-chewing beanpole who was ladling out the swill didn't snarl back at Fetsko at all; in fact he wasn't even sore.

I tensed. This would be it. This would be where Fetsko hissed in the guard's ear—and my name would be mud.

Damn if I wasn't wrong. They certainly came together, but no words passed between them. Something else did—a tiny white packet. Then Fetsko was scrabbling back to his cot, making believe he was wolfing his mush. He wasn't. That boy was sniffing cocaine.

I watched his shoulders straighten, his lips tighten. My own tightened. Was the beanpole guard peddling dope on his own, or was Sheriff Mainwaring in on it? A narcotics rap wouldn't be the worst thing in the world to hang on my pigeon. I watched till Fetsko's jazzed-up gaze fastened on me. The slum cart rattled on and he nodded. I skinned over to his cot quick.

"Talk it up, buster," I told him. "What's this deal you're going to make with me? What's your end and what's mine?"

"Don't play dumb," he sneered. The junk had given him his guts back. "You're Abe Gressive, the governor's boy. You crashed in here to find out about Joe Simms, right?"

I blinked. "Good old Joe. How's he doing?"

"Ask the worms," Fetsko cackled.

I stiffened. A crawling sensation along my spine told me that I knew right well

what he was driving at, but I continued to play dumb. "What worms?" I asked him.

Fetsko jerked a thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the rear of the jail. "The graveyard worms, pal. They didn't get at Simms yet, because he's only been planted about a week. But it won't be long now."

I wet my lips. I sensed what was coming. "How did he die, junior?"

"How do you think?" Fetsko countered. "They threw him in the hole and got a little too frisky trying to make him sing."

Does it ever fail? You start out on a nice, clean, dirty little job and ram into something else.

"What were they trying to make him talk about?" I pressed. "Who are they? Who was he?"

Fetsko's shiny eyes narrowed. He rubbed his forefinger under his nose unnecessarily, since it wasn't twitching just now, and grunted, "Hey, you don't know so much, at that." He studied me craftily. "A pardon buys me, Gressive. You're close to the Governor. Get me clear and I'll go on the stand against . . ."

"Against who? Mainwaring?"

Fetsko's lips curved at the corners in a sly grin, but otherwise they were tight together. They stayed that way, too. He knew he had something I wanted, but he was taking no chance on being crossed. He wanted out and *then* he'd talk. He was playing smart.

I didn't blame him, but it didn't do my blood pressure any good. It looked as if I had latched onto sixteen times as much as I'd expected: corrupt jail conditions were small potatoes compared to murder. After the first jolt, I wasn't surprised, though. That is, I wasn't surprised at murder having *been* done in a trap like that; what got me a little later was murder being done—right under my nose, three feet away in the same cell!

A LONG about nine o'clock Johnny Keems pushed his paunch up against the bars and clucked, "David Wilson, won't you ever reform?" I hung my head dutifully and Johnny sighed to the long, thin guard, Alber, "I guess I'm stuck for his fine again."

Alber showed tobacco-stained teeth in a mirthless grin, spewed a brown stream carelessly between the bars and opened up. He gangled down the corridor ahead of us, and I felt Johnny's hand transferring weight to my jacket pocket: the Leica. I hissed to him, "Joe Simms, Mike Fetsko and a frozen-faced guy in the hotel lobby: check them up, but don't give yourself away." He grunted.

Sheriff Mainwaring's snowy mustache was at a high, desk-sergeant-type desk in a big court-style room when we entered. Raymond's big teeth showed themselves to me sneeringly. "Softened up today, huh?"

Mainwaring started intoning the various charges against me and I looked around the room at various sleepy-eyed guards and constables. I winced. Barney Nola, the bulging Mansion House dick, was on hand. He *would* be! I bet morning court was his main form of entertainment. I was sure he recognized me, but he didn't sound off right then.

Mainwaring announced, "Six months or a dollar a day fine, Wilson."

Johnny Keems howled, "Cripes, I ain't holding that kind of dough, Your Honor!"

Raymond chuckled, "Pay or stay."

Mainwaring frowned him into silence. He was really a dignified looking old buck, with his white mustache, neat features and a well-cut salt-and-pepper business suit. "Perhaps we can reach an adjustment," he told Johnny. "How much can you afford?"

"Twenty bucks," Johnny said promptly.

Raymond sniffed and Mainwaring shook his head sadly. Johnny argued some more to make it look good, then said

he needed time to raise the money. Back I went to the cell block. It was all according to plan, because now I had the camera. I'd shoot my pix and be ready to head for the hotel and a bath the next time Johnny showed up. A lot I knew!

Just as Alber was re-opening my cell, somebody yelled from the courtroom, "Sheriff says put him in the West block this time."

Alber looked surprised, shifted his cud, and we tramped into the West cell block. I opened my eyes—and cursed at the same time. Because I wasn't going to get any pix of filth here. These were rows of small cells, fairly neat and clean. The inmates were sleek and well-fed, clean and shaved. They lounged back with books, magazines and newspapers. I saw empty beer bottles in a couple of cells, and at least three radios. I wouldn't have been surprised to see a babe or two, and the answer was that these were inmates who could afford to grease the sheriff and the guards plenty.

Alber put me in an empty cell and gangled off. One thing gave me a lift—the washbowl. I used it, but good, and was drying myself when keys jangled in the door again and Alber prodded Fetsko into the cell. Well!

Fetsko flopped on the cot across from me. He opened his mouth.

"Stool!" I hissed.

"So what?" he shrugged. "I gotta keep making believe I'm still on their side. I'm supposed to con you. They found out you're not kosher, somehow."

"That damned house dick told 'em," I burst.

"Barney Nola?" Fetsko took me up. "He's the dope who put me in here."

"Yeah?" I said.

"I was running a crap game in the Mansion House and he grabbed me."

"Then what?" I pressed.

"Once I was in, I had to have junk. I made a deal with Alber. Later on, when

they brought Joe Simms in, I got put in with him to pump him. If I found out what they wanted to know off him, I'd get sprung."

I leaned forward. "But either you *didn't* find out—or you found out too much. Right?"

Fetsko's shiny eyes were malevolent. "Yeah, I found out the pitch. Now, they're scared to spring me, especially with Simms dead, and his pal, Jake Yoder, hanging around."

"Jake Yoder, a frozen-faced guy?" I pounced.

Fetsko nodded. "And now with you on hand, too, they'll be getting scary. If I don't get out quick, I'll end up in the grave with Simms. It's lucky I was tending bar in Capitol City last year and seen you around, huh? You're gonna get me clear, pal."

He was right. I wasn't going to be cute. When you get a stool like Fetsko lined up, there's nothing to be cute about. You pay his price, record his song and clean up the loose ends.

I didn't worry about Johnny for a few hours, but by late afternoon, when he didn't come, I knew something was haywire. I started pacing the cage. Had frozen-face Jake Yoder moved? Had I sent Johnny into a hornet's nest in telling him to check up on Fetsko and Joe Simms?

I probably would have had as good a case of jitters as Fetsko when his junk wore off if I'd had to put in the whole night biting my nails. But at supper time, Alber brought in some half decent chow. I wolfed mine and drank the coffee—and that was it! Fifteen minutes later I couldn't keep my eyes open. I remember sprawling on my cot and staring blearily at Fetsko. His face was going round and round. I can't say for sure if it was just before I passed out, or just as I came to again, that I heard myself croak, "They slipped me a Mickey!"

AT ANY RATE, it seemed like one minute I was going to sleep and the next I was coming out of it. Twelve hours had passed, but I didn't know it yet. All I knew was that I was back in the cell and Fetsko's face was no longer going round. It was still approximately where it had been, on his bunk, but now it was very still, very white, and the wide-open eyes held no glitter whatever. There was no moisture on his yawning lips, either.

Somebody in the cell started cursing a blue streak. I wiped the back of my hand over my mouth and the cursing stopped—it had been me.

The knife was in Fetsko's stomach, just about where a Jap would use a Samurai sword on himself. But it wasn't a Samurai sword, just an ordinary switchblade, a bone-handled jack knife.

I felt my sweating skin crawl. I heard the labored sound of my breathing and put the nails of my hands hard into my palms. "Whistle your way out of this one!" my brain hammered.

I whirled toward the bars, grabbed one in each hand, and started to shake. I caught myself, and socked my palm against my forehead a couple of times. I wouldn't give them a chance to use a strait jacket on me.

It was about seven in the morning; the slum carts would be rolling quick. I turned back to Fetsko. The cutting edge of the jack knife was jutting toward his chin. It meant that the killer had used a professional underhand sweep, not a downward chop, to put it home. And it meant that Fetsko had been on his feet when it happened, facing the killer. I gauged the distance from the bars to where the junkie sprawled on his cot. Four or five feet at the most. I saw how it *could* have been done, easily enough.

I prowled the cell instinctively. If they had known Fetsko was going to rat on them, there was plenty of reason to kill

him. But *how* had they known? We hadn't talked loud enough for anyone to overhear.

The answer was on the underside of the flush tank, a microphone button with two beautifully camouflaged wires sprouting out of it and into the wall.

I washed my hand through my sticky hair, down the back of my neck, squeezing the bulging chords to relax them. They'd known Fetsko had told me enough to make me push it further. They couldn't kill me without risking a federal investigation, because I was Governor Anderson's man and he'd go to bat for me if I died. But they could kill Fetsko, frame me for his murder and in that way discredit anything I might say.

"Where in hell is Johnny Keems?" I gritted. But that was just praying. The fact that Johnny hadn't showed up proved that something had happened to him. Most guys caught in a murder frame can at least try something for a few hours. I was stymied from the start—I'd been in jail for murder before the damned thing even *happened!*

All I could do was wait for he next move from the killer, or killers. I didn't have long to wait. Alber's shoestring figure gangled along with the breakfast cart. He peered into my cell—and had a fit! He bellowed for Raymond. Raymond came lumbering—and he had a fit, too! Were they acting? I couldn't tell. It's pretty hard to go pale unless you mean it, and those hucksters were white.

"Open it!" Raymond ordered Alber. "Don't let anybody else in on it. This means two stiffs to get rid of." His pale eyes gleamed sadistically at me. "Maybe three."

The lanky guard's key stuttered in the lock. Raymond's bulky shoulders crowded in. He took a step toward Fetsko as if to examine him. I bit. I took my eyes off him.

He hit me so hard that the skin of my

stomach took ridges from the bumps along my spine. I hadn't had breakfast, so there was nothing but a strangled sound that came out of me—plus my strength.

Raymond hit me again. I reeled, swung wildly. Alber kneed me. There was more. I didn't feel much of it. I didn't stay conscious long enough. . . .

There'd never been such blackness in the world: or above or below it. I kept thinking, "I can't be conscious; it's too black."

But I was conscious, just the same. I was an inert lump, still too numb for pain to register, but conscious. I felt my eyelids going down, but it made no difference—it was just as black with them open as closed. I flung out my arms, tried to straighten. No dice.

My head and feet jarred against something. My outflung arms scraped against concrete. Numbly, I orientated myself. I was in a box or a packing case—but they don't make packing cases out of concrete.

Suddenly it clicked. I was in the hole, the solitary confinement cell. A whipped sound broke out of me—and I hit myself in the mouth. None of that, now!

Time passed. I wiped my face, massaged my muscles. Panic was further behind me. Sooner or later that door would open and I'd hit out—foul! I'd make sure that somebody would suffer.

Where was Johnny Keems? Was he all in one piece? Could he do anything on his own? How long would it take him to contact Governor Anderson?

I tried not to think of it: there was no hope in that direction. Before Johnny or the governor could move, Raymond and Alber would make up their minds.

I began to do what every man does, I guess, when chucked into solitary. I began exploring every square inch of the five-by-three cell. With my fingers, of course. Eyes were no good. I discovered that the concrete walls were old and crumbling, full of ridges and furrows and

little holes. One of these holes was larger and smoother than the rest.

It didn't mean anything the first couple times my fingers skittered over it, but I came back to it time and again. There was something about it. . . .

I didn't have a flash of vision or intuition, or anything like that. I simply realized that crumbling concrete seldom leaves smooth-edged holes. A man had worked on this one!

Some poor devil had poked and rubbed and turned a finger in the nick in the concrete until it had enlarged a little. He'd been killing time—before he got killed himself!

My fingernail scraped something in the hole. I stiffened, dug harder. In a second I had it out: a piece of thin paper rolled to spit ball size. I opened it. It was a cigarette paper.

Oh, for a light now! A cigarette paper rolled up and stuffed in a hole in another place wouldn't mean anything. In a solitary confinement cell, it practically *had* to be a message from the last poor devil who'd been here. Joe Simms? He'd been worked on in here. He'd felt himself getting weaker. Maybe he'd. . . .

I froze. Something had scraped furtively outside the iron cell door. I balled up the cigarette paper again, slid it inside my shoe, listened.

AND THEN I saw light! Beautiful wonderful light! It was only the sickly yellow gleam of a corridor bulb, but it was brighter than any sun to me. The voice was even better. "Abe?"

"Johnny!" I cried. "Love you, boy! Get me clear!"

"Can do."

The door swung wide. I reeled out and hugged Johnny's paunchy little figure. "What time is it? What happened?" I squinted at Johnny. His face had got a treatment somewhere besides a barber shop. "Who worked you over?"

"Your pal of the frozen face and seer-sucker suit," Johnny grunted. "It's about noon. Let's get out of here."

"Frozen Face is Jake Yoder," I said. "He was a pal of one Joe Simms who was beat to death in here."

"Why?" Johnny demanded.

"I'm not sure," I confessed. "Simms knew something, or had something, that somebody else wanted. Yoder wants it, too, and . . ." I knelt and plucked the spit ball out of my shoe, spread it open and peered at the miserable scrawl. There had been no attempt to punctuate or write decently. No wonder: try writing a note on a cigarette paper in pitch blackness sometime, after you've been beaten and tortured for days.

The pitiful chicken marks said, "tell jake yoder mansion house sixth floor closet get nola joe simms."

"What does it mean?" Johnny scowled.

"It means I'm figuring right so far," I told him. "Whatever they're after is in a closet in the Mansion House. Jake Yoder is supposed to get Nola, the dick, to let him in the closet. *We'll* get Nola instead. Did you come across him?"

Johnny nodded. "After I put on the act and passed you the camera yesterday, I went back to my room and walked into knuckles. It was Yoder. When I came to, the room and my pockets had been searched."

"So it means he saw our identifications and knows we're undercover men," I said grimly. "Then what? Why didn't you come back and spring me last night according to schedule?"

"I tried to, Abe," Johnny assured me. "I came back here about supper time. Raymond said the sheriff had gone for the day and he wouldn't sign you out on his own. It sounded legitimate enough, and I figured another night in the cooler wouldn't hurt you."

"Yeah, but it was malarkey Raymond gave you." I snapped. "Because at sup-

per time last night, he'd already listened in to Fetsko and me talking in our cell. He wasn't holding me just because Mainwaring wasn't on hand to sign me out. Did you try to bail me out today?"

"Sure thing," Johnny vowed. "They gave me the same story a couple hours ago—sheriff wasn't around. But this time I got thinking. I asked Nola if he knew Yoder, but he didn't. Today, I went back to the hotel and asked Nola if he had a line into the jail here and could find out what they were doing with you."

"Did he?"

"Why do you think I came to the recue?" Johnny countered. "Nola made some phone calls, then told me a murder had come off and a David Wilson was being held for it. I knew you were jammed and asked Nola who could be bought around here. He said everybody has his hand out in this tank, but a guard named Frank Alber was greedier than most. I contacted Alber, and for five yards he said he'd get me the key to the solitary confinement cell and leave an alley door unlocked. That's the works, Abe, and we better hit that alley fast."

My scalp crawled. I dug my fingers into Johnny's arm. "Did you bring my gun?"

He jerked, passed over my .38. "Cripes, we're not going to need artillery. I tell you I bought an open door . . ."

"That's what you think!" I grated. "This thing is wired. Alber is in on killing Joe Simms and Fetsko. The only reason he'd go along with you is to shoot us down as we break."

Johnny winced. "I might've known he bribed too easy! Now what?"

"Got a car waiting?"

"Nah. I figured we'd do better just walking natural-like out of the alley."

"We wouldn't have to walk, boy," I assured him. "We'd be carried. Raymond is at one end, I'm betting, and Alber at the other. We'd be in the middle."

Johnny's paunch vibrated and his forehead glistened with sweat. "How else do we crash out?"

I licked my lips. "Bluff or shoot it out the front way. We'll run into other guards, but they won't be set. Come on."

Johnny went first, peering around the ells in the corridors to see that the coast was clear, and then highballing me on. I straightened out my clothing as best I could, kept the .38 out of sight in the waistband of my pants.

The hole was in the basement, of course. We made it up to the street floor and even to the end of the corridor that was a one-way path to the doors. It was just after lunch had been handed out, hot and mucky. Most of the inmates were snoring in their cells. The ones who noticed us merely yawned. All to the good.

IN a sloppily-run place like that the guards, too, loafed every chance they got. We saw only one until we were on the last mile, and he was going the other way. A couple of civilians moseyed in from the street and turned into the courtroom as Johnny and I waited our chance at the end of the corridor. There was a lull in the traffic.

"No stops," I ordered. "Anybody horns in, chop him down."

We held our breath, moved out—and Lord if that corridor didn't suddenly fill up like a picnic tablecloth when the ants charge it!

For a second I thought they'd been laying for us. Then I saw that there were more civilians than guards—and nobody was paying us any attention at all. It had been just one of those natural fluxes of corridor traffic in a big building. And so long as it was only that, it was in our favor.

Johnny and I got down that hall lickety-split. We got through the doors, down the steps. The sunlight was dazzling. The air was sweet. The sound of honking

horns and squealing tires was music. I spotted a cab pulling into the curb and headed for it. But, brother, do I pick 'em! Sheriff Olin Mainwaring's mustache practically bumped my chest as he tried to get out of the cab and I tried to get in!

There was only one way to handle it. I rammed him back in again, piled after him and waggled the front sight of my .38 under his nose. The whiskey color drained out of his unlined face and he couldn't talk—lucky for him!

"Mainwaring!" Johnny panted crowding in. "What in hell do we do with him?" He prodded the hacker to roll.

"That's up to him," I said, baring my teeth at the sheriff. "If he talks, we'll handle him legally. If he doesn't . . ." I caressed the white mustache with my gun sight.

I'd known that he was soft the second I'd accosted him on the jail steps and he'd bawled for Raymond. He didn't change his spots, now. His lips moved fast enough for a tobacco auctioneer, but all he could manage was: "T-t-talk? W-what about? Mr. W-Wilson, you're losing your head over a p-p-petty misdemeanor."

I scowled. If he still thought my name was Wilson, he couldn't know who I really was.

He sputtered, "Obviously, you've p-paid your fine, but if you think it was inequitable, I'm sure we can adjust it." His hand trembled toward his armpit. I tensed, but he was only reaching for his wallet. "I'll reimburse you myself, m'boy."

How do you like that? The old grafter didn't know the score. He thought I'd paid my fine and got out. But that meant that he didn't know about Fetsko being killed, either.

"Where've you been today?" I demanded.

"At the courthouse, every minute, m'boy. If Raymond mistreated you, I'll reprimand him severely."

I watched him fumbling bills out of his

wallet and tender them to me nervously. I grimaced. Was this a man with the guts to shiv somebody?

"Listen," Johnny Keems burst, "this town is too hot for us, Abe. Let's get to the railroad station."

"No. The post office," I told him.

"Post office? What for?"

"I want to look at pictures," I said. "I want Sheriff Mainwaring to look at pictures, too."

Johnny groaned, "You're cracking up."

"Wising up," I corrected. I ordered the driver to the post office, watching Mainwaring squirm and Johnny bite his lips. "Watch him," I said when we pulled up to a marble-columned building. I nipped up the steps, went inside to a bulletin board and started leafing through the sheafs of readers posted there. When I found the one I'd hoped would be there, I ripped it off, went back to the cab.

I folded the reader so that the front and profile pictures of the men on it were visible, but not the print giving their names and offenses, showed it to Mainwaring.

"Which one of these men is Joe Simms?" I asked.

He looked at me as if I'd gone nuts. "I d-don't know. I never heard of Joe Simms."

"You didn't book him and throw him in jail? You didn't bury him in the prison graveyard?"

"P-preposterous! No records on anyone by that name ever went over my desk!"

I bought it. "Out!" I said and helped him with my knee. "Mansion House," I told the cabby, and checked over my .38.

Johnny Keems swallowed. "Whose pix on the reader, Abe?"

I showed him. The first man was Jake Yoder, our frozen-faced friend. The second photograph was of a stocky dark-haired man with a cast in his left eye. Joe Simms. The reader said that Simms

and Yoder had held up a jewelry store in Boston a month ago.

“GET THE PICTURES, kid?” I asked Johnny. “Simms and Yoder split up after the heist, planned to meet here to cut the cake. Maybe one of ’em has relatives or a fence contact here. But somehow Simms got chucked in the can and Raymond and Alber tried to make him sing about where he’d stashed the heist-take. First Fetsko was put in with him to try to pump him. When that didn’t work, Simms was thrown in the hole and beat. He knew Yoder would come to meet him and left a note, figuring the average con would deliver it.”

Johnny whistled softly. “I can guess what you expect to find in the hotel closet, then.”

“Natch,” I said. “But can you guess what I’ll find in the lobby?”

“Huh?”

“Watch,” I advised, and when we hit the Mansion House I strode in and went straight to the bulletin board. I saw Barney Nola’s blue-serged bulk on guard, as usual, but paid attention to leafing through the readers thoroughly. I found none of Joe Simms and Jake Yoder.

Johnny, watching me, grunted. “Hell, Yoder was here in the hotel, wasn’t he? If he intended to hang around, the first thing he’d do would be to look for a reader describing him and tear it up.”

“Uh-huh. Here comes Nola.”

The heavy dick frowned. “Are you David Wilson?”

“Just a pen name,” I told him. “Pun intended. Come on upstairs. I’ll show you something.”

On the sixth floor, I gave it to him straight. “A grifter named Joe Simms stayed in this hotel and stashed something in a closet on this floor.”

“Says you.” Nola’s cigar butt bristled. “I didn’t spot nobody named Simms.”

“He’d have been using an alias,” I cut in. “Stocky, dark-haired man with a cast in his left eye.”

Nola winced. “Yeah, I make him. He didn’t look hot to me. There’s only two closets on the floor. Mop closet is too public. Linen closet, huh?” His lobster-red hand delved for keys. He plodded down the corridor, his shiny serge beam no wider than a rowboat, and opened a closet. Shelves of sheets, towels and pillow cases lined the interior, lit by an overhead pull-string bulb.

The jewels weren’t hard to find; practically nothing is, once you know where to look, and I’d found that out the hard way. When the shelves were swept bare, the wall behind them showed yellow, aged plaster, just over the third shelf, at a convenient place for a stocky man to work, was a spot of plaster whiter than the rest. I used Johnny’s pocket knife and a whole chunk came out, showing a hole big enough to hold a fair-sized apple.

There was no apple there, of course, but it could have been called a juicy plumb—a greasy chamois draw-string bag with hard little nuggets inside. I opened it, clucked at glittering diamonds, rubies and emeralds. After the heist, Simms and Yoder had removed the stones from their settings and put them all together in the bag. I yanked the drawstring shut again with one hand and my teeth, got my other hand on the butt of my .38.

“No, you don’t!” Nola’s voice rumbled, and my gun arm screamed with pain, then went numb. He’d brought the barrel of his gun down on my collarbone. It wasn’t a frontier style Colt, either—it was the most modern looking and efficient thing about him, a Police Positive.

Johnny Keems yelped. His voice choked off as Nola’s gun struck and the floor trembled as he hit it. One of Nola’s huge paws snatched the chamois bag from me, then held me against the shelves while he caught my .38.

"Be quiet and you live longer," he warned me. I could feel his paunch vibrating in the small of my back. "Remember I can plug you anytime: you're a con on the lam. Down the freight elevator."

Nola was on his home grounds; he herded me down the corridor, after locking Johnny in the closet. He knew the hotel like a book. We ended up in the basement in a janitor's office, me on the floor in a sitting position, well away from anything I could snatch and heave. Nola telephoned and told Raymond and Alber to jump over. When he hung up, he put a fresh cigar in his jowls and studied me through heavy-lidded eyes.

"You're a guy that don't make much fuss, Gressive," he told me approvingly. "The second I saw you leave the lobby looking like a bum, I knew you were a ringer. Dam' if I see how the governor got wind of Simms, though."

"He didn't, Fat-Boy," I sniffed. "I came here to dig into Mainwaring's graft. If you had leveled with your stooge, Fetsko, and sprung him after he pumped Simms, he wouldn't have been on hand to tip me off. As it was, he was afraid you'd never let him go alive and told me just enough to start things rolling. You had the cell wired and heard him, but even so it wasn't smart to shiv him."

"Is that a fact?" Nola clucked. "He had to go, once he started cracking. Even if we could've stopped an official investigation, Yoder was around and he was dynamite. Fetsko would have got word to him sooner or later and Yoder would have gunned all of us."

"That, I believe," I agreed. "Simms' note said to get Nola. I thought he meant get you to open the closet, but he meant get revenge. But you pulled a boner when you told Johnny Keems that you didn't know Yoder." Nola's brows lifted and I went on, "Hell, Yoder was sitting right in front of you in the lobby the first time

Johnny and I came in. You were studying readers. Yoder and Simms may not have been on the batch you were going through at the time, but they'd been on others earlier because they're also posted in the post office."

"Spotted Simms for a grifter right off," Nola admitted. "He registered as Sam Wall, but when the reader came in on Yoder, I made him."

"And figured he'd be holding the take from the jewel heist," I nodded. "But if you'd had the eye on him, he'd have smelled it. He did and stashed the jewels. Once he was in the can, you tried to pump him through Fetsko. No dice. So you got Raymond and Alber to work on him. They killed him."

"The hell we did!" Raymond was in the door, big teeth bare. Alber's lank figure was behind him.

"Nola done it all himself," he said.

"YOU'RE damned right he did," Raymond echoed. "Simms died the night we let Nola into the hole to work on him. Nola said since there were no records of Simms anywhere and nobody but Fetsko knew the score, all we had to do was bury the body. But Yoder and Simms had been planning to meet in town. When Simms wasn't on hand, Yoder started poking around. Then you showed up and . . ."

"And Fetsko talked," I cut in. "That jammed you but good."

Raymond snarled. "We still could have got rid of Simms' body and it would have been a junkie's word against ours that we'd buried anybody in the first place. We got it outside now. Only Nola had to get cute."

Alber croaked, "I wondered why he was hanging around me at supper last night. He was doping your coffee. Later on, he slipped into the cell block . . ."

"Coaxed Fetsko to the bars and knifed him that way," I filled in. "If one of you

guys had done it, you would have come right into the cell. You had keys. The guy who did it didn't have."

Nola's bulk faced us all. There was nothing hickish about him, now. "Is everybody happy?" he grunted. "You still have to string along with me. Wait till I get his sidekick."

He shambled out. I whirled on Raymond and Alber. I made myself a salesman. I talked sixty miles an hour, telling them that they could ease out of most of it in court. *They* hadn't killed anybody, I argued. If they turned State's evidence . . .

But those babies had seen cops put on the same act with other crooks. They'd done it themselves, no doubt. They weren't having any.

Nola came back, with poor Johnny Keem's weaving like a drunk. Johnny would be more a handicap than a help if I got an opening.

If I got an opening? That's the drowning man type of reasoning. "Governor Anderson will call in the Feds if Johnny and I don't show up," I warned.

"It'll take time," Nola said, setting us in motion down the dank basement. "And this time we'll make sure what we plant can't be identified in case it's dug up. We dig Simms' grave a little deeper, put you in first, then a layer of lime, then your partner and another layer of lime. Fetsko will be next and Simms on top. We'll rig records on him, too, just in case the grave would ever be opened. Chances are that if he looks legit, nobody would figure there'd be three under him, huh?"

Nola was hard behind me, gun in my back, but holding me with his free hand so that I couldn't spin. He prodded me through the alley door, over to the back of a half-ton paneled truck.

Was I going to die like a trapped rat? I yanked the truck door open, dived in a little, hands outspread to brace myself on the floor, according to plan—but

from there on I wasn't running things.

A cannon was! A cannon that let go right over my head!

Curses sounded behind me, the gurgle of a man who tastes lead in the middle, the grunt of another who takes it in the chest.

Still face down, half of me inside the truck, I stretched my arms full length, swooped them together, clutching. My fingers grasped a box, Joe Simms' coffin, then I felt cloth in my hand, thin, summery cloth—seersucker!

I yanked, backing out of the truck like a crab. I saw frozen face Jake Yoder's pants legs wave in the air. He was in a sitting position after my yank. I proceeded to help him wear out the seat of his pants by dragging him on out. When he cleared the end of the truck, his head made a thumped watermelon sound, then he was no more trouble.

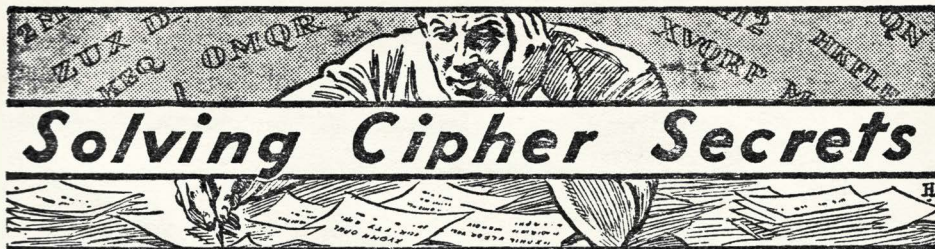
I looked around. Jake Yoder had been prowling around looking for his buddy, Simms. He'd seen Raymond and Alber drive up with the truck and had peeked in. He'd found his buddy, all right, in a coffin. He'd gotten his revenge.

Three bodies were sprawled at scarecrow angles around the truck. With Yoder opening up on them the instant I opened the truck door, they hadn't had a chance. Barney Nola was on his back, his paunch motionless as a grave marker.

Raymond was doubled over, both arms wound around his mid-section.

Alber's scrawny length was the worst heaped-up of them all—but suddenly it stirred. I uncoiled him, saw that he'd taken only a single slug high in the chest. No blood drooled from his lips, so he was going to live. This boy was going to do the singing about Mainwaring's crooked jail. I breathed relief. I like to finish any job I start.

As for the assorted corpses—Simms, Fetsko, Nola and Raymond—they wouldn't be four deep as Nola had planned, but they'd end up in the graveyard, all right.



Founded in 1924

Article No. 836

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.

CRYPTOGRAMS

No. 5151—Message Material. By °Valkyrie. After solving this, note word-length in No. 5160! ABC and YHABENA, with endings -HTZ and -AHET, will unlock KENU-OCAACU.

ABC DEFA GHKKHLNOA FHDROC FNSFAHANAHET LHRBCUF
 VUC DVGC NR CTAHUCOX EK KENU-OCAACU YEUGF,
 YHABENA ENAFVGTGHTZ RVAACUTF, FNLB VF GENSOCF.

No. 5152—Done without "Ease"! By °Theo. W. Midlam. Start with phrases FS FT and FT OBS, noting SAFT and ending -TFBOT. Next, pattern-word EOGBUUBO, with GNO.

ABC DEFGHKL GNO LBE PFOR BES CANS FT EOGBUUBO
 NVBES SAFT XNYNZYNXA! FS KBBHT BYRFONYL, FT OBS
 BESKNORFTA OBY PNOTSFG. VES BYSABZYNXAFGNKKL
 FS FT GEYFBET. CANS BGGNTFBOT SAFT BRRFSL?

No. 5153—Liberty or Death. By Scorpio. Short words RL, XS, and SLR provide all letters in ending -RXLS. Follow up with ANRNSRXLS and YNSRNSHNA.

HPXTXSZUY FNP N SLR YNSRNSHNA RL KPXYLS RNPTY XS
 ZSHXNSR *PLTN. VZXUY FNP N LSUB GLP ANRNSRXLS
 LG ZHHEYNA KNPYLSY ESRXU RPXZU LP NDNHERXLS.

No. 5154—A Powerful Pair. By Vulcan. Enter through endings -'H, -QHEH, and -EQHEH. Continue with QLEU and HEULT. And thus to ZLFQTL, HFQTLQHEH, etc.

ZLFQTL ZNFSTVQHEH ATZNUOHN H UOJSE VBESQFZN
 RSQNUHURSTP'H HEULT, XUONK EPZLHVOET YZHT VTEZN
 QLEU JUNK. VUKTPL HFQTLQHEH TWSQYQE ZEUVQF
 YUVY, IOQFDNB EPZLHCUPV TMTPBESQLJ QLEU GOLD.

No. 5155—Breath-Taking Device. By °Marcia and °Jaybee. Identify, suffixes -PEO and -HPSE, then complete QPHB. DNHBLD will follow by pattern and substitution.

UVDFBVGPK LKPY GNLKHPEO QPHB FSHLUUPVR KXLEPYN
ASGRU BXYGSKXLEPK OLU, DNHBLD ALKHSG LKHPTLHPEO
GNKNEHDX YNTNDSFNY KGPRPELD NCNKVHPSE KBLRZNG.

No. 5156—Hitler Out-Hitlered. By °Dr. A. Attack phrase BUKL AKLIT by comparison of affixes ZAW-, -UWD, and -KUAW. Substitute in ZAWYSUTI, and fill in.

SWINJAZAZZU, SOKLADIWUZ COZKITUO ZAWYSUTI
BUKL AKLIT EAOKLYAJI NWUZIEENEOT ZTIOKNTIY,
OKKIJSKUWD NWUHITYOE LNJOW FIYKTNZKUAW.
SNTSAYI, JOQUWD ZAYJAY YOGI GAT JUZTAATDOWUYJY.

No. 5157—Fiery Finish. By °Volund. Note affixes TU- and -TUZ. Use letters thus found in Ary for IWSTILLZF, duly noting endings -ZF and -EZZF.

CRANE CEAND NOXANSTUZ FEEOYBEOS HANKS YFCEOND:
BNOLFNTXFEBN, TYBKTXFEAN, STXEFEAN, NOBVSTFEAN,
FUUTRTKFEAN, FSPVSTXFEBN, TUXTUONFEAN. LFKO!

No. 5158—Haste Makes Waste. By †Sara. Note ending -YHOOYV in connection with YBOHO. Short words UFPB, PBELAK, KBEF, etc., will readily follow.

FLUSH ANFELV ANOTHO PBELAK ZUXLAAH AHFKHXSBN0;
KAUSHO FHE ANFLZBNP AHGMYHOOYV, GLAHHFO KBEF
ANFELV, XUDXLDO UFPB OPHHR AUKDH. YBOHO PUCH.
AHFHDHO RYLF. AHPNAFO TBCH. KLPH NFMHRP!

No. 5159—Expressing Aversion. By †Acahti. Here's an intriguing catalogic or "list" cipher! Try for IWSTILLZF, duly noting endings -ZF and -EZZF.

MOXI "DERIMAZ" *IVBZOLD NUTJL, IRFPUZUBOKEZZF
*DIZZIVOK, IWSTILLZF OPSZF EVROSERDF RUNETJ JUBL,
NUPIV, LRTEVBITL, PETTOEBI, ETBAPIVR: POLUKFVF,
POLUBFVF. POLUWIVF, POLUBEPF, POLUZUBF.

No. 5160—Rural Adventure. By °Chemystic. Find your own clues, fans, in this last cipher, an isologic message, all words being of the same length; Note reference in No. 5151.

ABCD EFDG HIFJ KLMD BDNF OFDP ELFQ NALQ LABQ CLIJ
HLCB DPIQ HFKB RCLH DLOQ. RICH PIQJ KBQD ELKD,
SFCK HIJB PFET SKIJ OFDP TFMM, CLJB UIET PLHB.

DECIMATION, or "counting out," is familiar to everyone. The practice was resorted to even in ancient times, in the selection of every tenth person from a group, for punishment or death. And the device may of course be extended to include the use of any desired number besides ten. In World War II, Nazis used the plan in conducting mass murder in prison camps and elsewhere. Victims were "counted out," and summarily clubbed into trenches, often while still alive, for hasty burial. At the other extreme, simple rhymes are used to determine who is "it," in children's games, this being only an innocent application of the same general mathematical idea. And in cryptography, which concerns us most, use of the principle introduces some extremely interesting cipher systems. For instance, just try *Hopulikit's No. X-5162, where a secret number provides the decimation key. An illustrative example of a similar cipher is also subjoined.

No. X-5162. Decimation Cipher. By *Hópulikit.

| | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| THMLC | RSEER | EPIOU | HSGAS |
| LPLYN | NDULH | DIANT | SAEEO |
| SIITE | REEOD | HRNIT | NATTE |
| VSOUG | THADF | ATIEE | TTCCB |
| VEBHE | VCNYO | IEYOO | NESRH |

A decimation cipher is of the transposition class, plain-text letters retaining their natural alphabetical values in the cipher-text, being altered only in their message order. To illustrate, let us encipher the plain-text SOLVE THIS CIPHER in a simple system of this kind, using the digit four (4) as numerical key. First, prepare a diagram of fifteen spaces for the fifteen letters of the text. Next, count four spaces from the start, as indicated by the key 4, and write the first plain-text letter, S, in the 4th space of the diagram. Then count forward four more spaces, and place the second letter, O, in the 8th space; similarly, place the third letter, L, in the 12th space. Continuing, four counts forward from L returns you to the start, so that the fourth letter, V, thus occupies the first space.

Spaces already filled in this way are omitted in subsequent counts through the diagram. Thus, fifth letter, E, will occupy the 6th space instead of the 5th. And so to the completed cryptogram: VHPSI EHOIC TLRES. Translation with the key is a reversal of this process. Letters of the cryptogram are crossed out in the order indicated by the key, such letters then being omitted in subsequent counts, thus quickly retrieving the plain-text. A decimation key is not restricted to a single digit or a single number. But *Hopulikit has intentionally avoided undue difficulty in this respect. Conventional five-letter groups have been observed in the cryptogram. A full explanation of No. X-5162 will appear in the next issue.

How did you make out with the "Broken Pole" puzzle, No. X-5150 by Johnny B. in the last issue? The 36-foot telegraph pole broke ten feet above the ground, and the upper 26-foot section fell over the fence, so that the end touched the ground just twelve feet from the fence. Keep your solutions and contributions coming, fans! Answers to current puzzles will be published in the next issue!

No. 5161—Cryptic Division. By *Betty Kelly. Subtraction of R minus R limits S to 0 or 9, and LS minus LN eliminates one of these. The key runs: 0123 456789.

E P S E) L S I E B I S (R I U
L N P I R

U L I R I
U B S R T

I S T S
I S T I

E

ANSWERS FOR LAST ISSUE

5139—A good-looking lass can have a lot of fun with a good looking-glass. Plenty of "good looking," lasses, in good looking-glasses! Good-looking lasses also look good in good-looking glasses!

5140—February Second could very well be called Sausage Day, since it is well known by all that sausage is merely "ground hog"!

5141—When my four-year-old son was recently asked how he liked his new baby brother, he remarked, rather disgustedly: "Oh, all right. But imagine, he still drinks from a bottle!"

5142—The greatest measured speed that has ever been attained over the ground by an unassisted human body is ninety-one miles per hour—on skis!

5143—Arctic blizzard becomes mere zephyr beside absolute zero pervading cold space, supposedly produced upon halting existing atomic motion!

5144—Winning World War II consumed approximately seven-eighths of the entire wealth of the nation, costing twice as many lives as the first World War and nearly twenty times as much in wealth.

5145—Crime calendar: slander, perjury, bigamy, forgery, larceny, robbery, burglary, arson, assault, kidnapping, manslaughter, murder.

5146—Bespooled beauty bewails brush-off. Belabors benighted beau, bruises back, batters bridgework, belittles brain. Beaten brute begs beseechingly. Beloved bestows balm, becomes blushing bride.

5147—Some localities still enforce celebrated Green River Ordinance, named after Wyoming town, fining solicitors, peddlers, hawkers, transient vendors; protecting townsfolk, local merchants.

5148—Children brought birthday gift, garish necktie; spouse bestowed sumptuous tobacco pouch. Proud father! Next quarter came accounts due. Charged!

5149—Key:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
H O U S E P A I N T

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.

Death Lives

CHAPTER ONE

Assignment In Kill-Town

THE FIRST GUY I saw when I entered the corporate limits of Milltown was lying dead at the edge of the road. His clothes were dirty and ragged and he needed a shave. A



Here!

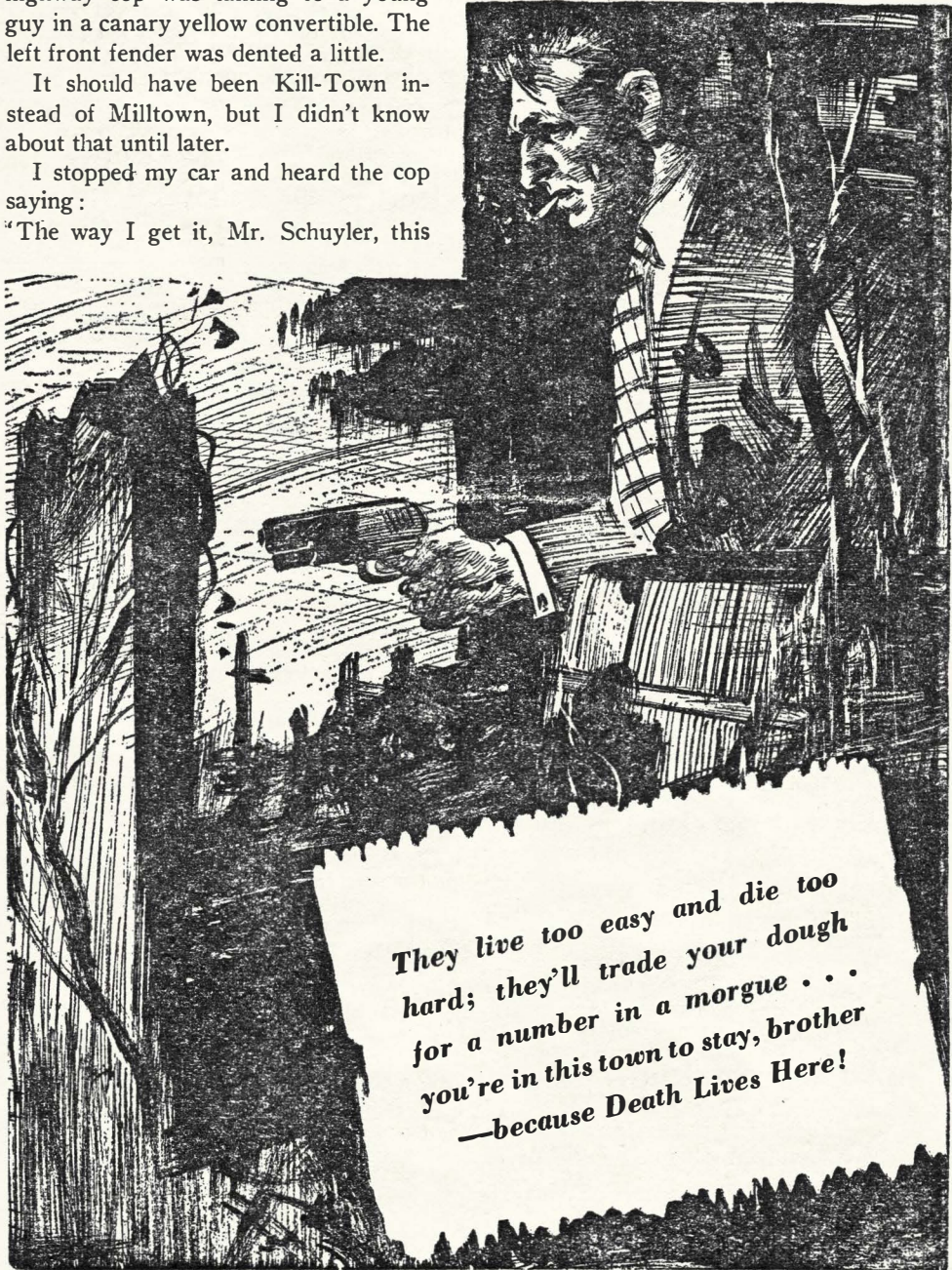
By
Wallace Umphrey

She didn't look at the gun in my hand. "Imagine seeing you here," she said. . . .

highway cop was talking to a young guy in a canary yellow convertible. The left front fender was dented a little.

It should have been Kill-Town instead of Milltown, but I didn't know about that until later.

I stopped my car and heard the cop saying:
"The way I get it, Mr. Schuyler, this



bum just stepped out in front of your car and you couldn't help hitting him."

The young guy nodded and lit a cigarette from the butt of another. His face was wet. He had blond hair, a thin mustache, a tanned face, a weak chin. He was wearing one of the loudest sport coats I'd ever seen.

Sitting in the convertible with him was a girl with red hair and a neat stream-lined figure. She wore a playsuit of white sharkskin, and her face, arms and legs were delicately tanned to a shade that contrasted very nicely with her hair. It was a neat trick and she had done it.

The cop saw me. He glared and jerked a thumb down the road. "On your way, Nosey!" He was a young guy with a beefy face and a lank jaw.

"Hey, you! Just a minute," the girl called out.

"Who—me?" I asked.

"You." She snapped open the door of the yellow convertible and piled out. "How about a lift into town?"

I gave her my best come-on smile and held open the door.

"Hey!" yelled the blond guy in the yellow convertible.

"Sut up, Vance," the girl called out. "I've had enough for now."

The blond guy ridged his jaw. His chin still looked weak. His blue eyes hated me.

The highway cop said: "Well, I guess it's all right, Ethel May. I'll take down the rest of Mr. Schuyler's statement. You can sign it later."

She climbed in beside me. Maybe she just floated in, or maybe the breeze was blowing just right. She was that kind of a chick. There was a faint purple-and-green bruise high on her right cheek. I clicked the door shut. I'm a sucker for red-heads—also blondes, brunettes, and all in-between shades.

"I guess I'm going to like this town," I said.

She wrinkled her nose. "All I asked for was a lift."

"Just call me Pete."

Some of her smile slipped away. "I doubt if I ever get to know you that well." She sighed. "Sometimes I wish I were just an old hag. Men never make passes at. . . ."

"End quote," I said.

The next guy I saw might as well have been dead. Both his arms were off at the elbows. He didn't tell me but I knew. A Schuyler had done that too. Not literally, of course. It would have been the work of a big saw in the Schuyler Lumber Company mill. Or maybe a high-lead cable snapped and took off both arms back in the woods logged by the Schuyler Logging Company. Milltown had a population of about two thousand. The Schuylers owned it too.

"Your boy friend may run into some trouble," I said.

"Vance?" She shook her head. "It wasn't his fault! That bum stepped out of some bushes directly in front of the car. Vance couldn't avoid hitting him."

She didn't correct my use of the term *boy friend*. It might not mean very much.

I stopped at the curb in front of the two-story brick Schuyler Building.

"Thanks for the lift," she said. She looked squarely at me. Her eyes were long and opaque and a bit slanted and very green.

"My business will take only a minute," I told her. "Why not stick around?"

"What will we do?"

"Should I tell you?"

She settled back in the seat. "Well, maybe you'd better not."

"You know," I said, "you remind me of a nymph."

"How was that again?" she asked.

"I'm speaking as a poet," I told her. "I'm not dealing cards out of the deck of Freud."

She smiled and settled back again.

I FOUND old man Schuyler in his office on the second floor. His spinsterish secretary let me in.

Old man Schuyler looked like a bald-headed eagle. He had a snowy crest of white hair, a thin beaklike nose and a narrow predatory jaw. He was seventy-five years old and looked it. He was dressed in rusty black with a string tie, and he looked like an old-line congressman. Which he'd been at one time.

His hat would *have* to be an old-fashioned soft felt with a floppy brim. I saw it hanging on an ancient clothes tree in the corner. It was.

He stared at me in stony silence. His eyes were like agates set in deep pits with lights behind them.

"I'm Peter Grady," I said. He stared at me in silence. "You sent my boss at Great Western a wire," I told him. "You want a private investigator. Ackerly sent me down here." I showed him my credentials. "Remember?"

He agreed finally. His voice was so deep it seemed to come from somewhere beneath the soles of his feet.

"My grandnephew in being held on suspicion of murder," he said. "His name is Sidney Tate. He is accused of killing a man named Henry Walter." He stared at me again. "Sidney is being held in jail and I want him released."

"Is he guilty?"

Old man Schuyler's voice came as thin and tight as a guy wire. "I don't care whether he is or not."

I lit a cigarette.

"Please don't smoke in my office," he said. "I don't like it."

I stood up, slapped my hat on my head and walked to the door.

"Come back and put out your cigarette," he snapped. "Don't get impertinent with me."

I looked at him. I dropped my cigarette on the rug and stepped on it. I didn't take my eyes off him.

We were getting off to a fine start.

His grin was frosty but it was a grin. "You're a rugged individualist. The Lord knows it doesn't mean anything these days but I like it. Let's start all over."

"Okay," I said.

"I don't think Sidney did it. Sidney isn't a killer. It's supposed to have been over a girl—a girl named Ethel May Walter. Henry Walter objected to Sidney's attention to his wife."

I thought about the girl who was sitting in my car. "It's funny, but once in awhile husbands object to that sort of thing."

He waved a hand. "Ethel May and Henry weren't living together. I think she's been getting a divorce." He looked at me from under his bushy white eyebrows. "Henry Walter was found floating in Sampson's Slough, a bullet in his head. Ed Walter—that's Henry's father—was my first mill superintendent. He's been dead half a dozen years. He was my friend for fifty."

"Does this have any bearing?"

He shook his head. "I'm just telling you about Ed."

"What else?"

"Don't rush me, son." His grin was still frosty. "Sidney was at Rosie's Place, with Ethel May. A roadhouse up in the hills. Sidney was very drunk. Henry Walter showed up and picked a fight. They rough-housed some; then Henry Walter picked up a rock and knocked Sidney unconscious. He drove away before Sidney came to."

"Henry and Ethel May Walter were separated," I said. "Why did Henry pick the fight?"

"Henry was jealous. Besides, he always hated the Schuyler clan."

"What about the shooting?"

"They say Henry left and that Sidney chased after him after he awoke. Sidney cornered him and shot him dead awhile later down at Sampson's Slough."

"How did Sidney happen to corner him there?"

He shrugged. "I don't know." His eyes were masked.

"What does Sidney say?" I asked.

"He doesn't say anything."

"Why not?"

He shrugged again.

"Let's not kid each other," I said. "You own this town. Why don't you just pull the right strings?"

He walked to the window and looked out. The back of his wrinkled neck was red.

"Sampson's Slough happens to be over in Jefferson County," he said angrily. "Milltown is in Barr County. They are holding Sidney in the county jail down at Clarkson, the Jefferson County seat. If it were in this county, I wouldn't have had to call you in." He paused a second. "Come here, son."

I went over to stand beside him. I could see the Schuyler Mill, the smoke from the burning sawdust pile, the steam from the boilers. I could see the mill pond and the giant fir logs floating in it. At this distance the logs looked as big as match sticks.

Beyond the mill were the ramshackle houses of the employees, rows and rows of uninviting dilapidated frame structures. All were cut from the same uniform shabby patterns. They were just houses, not homes. You could see the weedy yards and the sagging clothes lines behind. This wasn't the answer to the current housing problem.

Below the window was Mill Street, the main drag. It was clean and wide. It didn't compensate for the houses.

"I built all this," said old man Schuyler with a fierce pride. "Without me there wouldn't be a town. I built my first mill out at Sampson's Slough in 'ninety-five, then moved it here and built the town." His voice got harsh. "Nobody can take it away from me."

"Is somebody trying?"

He said simply: "Yes."

I went back and sat down.

"Your job is simple," he said. "Get Sidney out of jail."

"Don't push me," I said.

He sneered. "Good-bye, son."

I kept on sitting there. "Your grandson—I gather it was your grandson—ran down a man on the highway awhile ago. A yellow convertible. I thought you might like to know."

He shook his head. "That's Vance, all right." The back of his neck got red again. "I made my own way from the time I was twelve. I guess I just don't understand kids nowadays." He turned, and his eyes were suddenly tired and old. "Will there be any trouble?"

"Probably not," I said.

He smiled thinly. "Get Sidney out of jail."

"I'll report later," I said.

When I reached the street my car was empty. Ethel May was gone. The glove compartment was open, and lying in plain sight was old man Schuyler's telegram to the Great Western Agency. Maybe she didn't like a private eye. I still liked her, though.

I GOT OUT my luggage and crossed Mill Street to a hotel named the *Kincaid House*. A roly-poly man in a light suit handed me a card to sign. He looked about seventy and he stuttered pretty badly.

A tall, thin youth carried my Gladstone upstairs. He had black curly hair, a big nose, a thin sensitive face.

He opened a door and said: "Here's your kip, Jack. The pad is mellow. The chinchies ain't a fraughty issue. Old man Kincaid keeps a clean dommy."

"That's groovy, Gate," I told him. "I've got a lot of friends who are musicians."

His eyes brightened. "You like jazz?"

"Yeah."

"Clarinet," he said. "Yours?"

"I'm not a musician."

He shook his head. "That's a bring-down, Jack."

I flipped him a silver dollar. "Have an ace for yourself."

He pocketed it, then said slyly: "Want to tighten your wig, Jack? I can get you some of the real muta. It's the real golden leaf, the real mezz."

"I don't use reefers," I told him.

He shrugged and went to the door. "If you want anything, Jack, let me know." He went out.

The room was small and neat. There was a bed, a chest of drawers, a small table, a couple of chairs. I washed up and then went out to Mill Street and began to prowl.

A round of the taverns was a good start. You can find out a lot in such places. There are always characters.

What I learned added up to this:

All that remained of the Schuyler clan were the old man, Vance Schuyler and Sidney Tate. Vance Schuyler's dad—the old man's son—had been killed in the first world war. His mother had died later. Sidney Tate's father had committed suicide during the stock market crash in the late 'twenties; his mother had remarried and was now living in Florida and Sidney Tate had been living with the old man ever since his father killed himself.

Controlling interest in the Schuyler enterprise was in the hands of the three. All the enterprises were lumped into the Schuyler Company, with the old man as president. It was a closed corporation; there were only nine stockholders. The minority stockholders were either original partners or heirs of the original founders. A representative of an eastern holding company wanted to buy out the Schuyler Company.

Consensus was that Sidney Tate had killed Henry Walter in a drunken frenzy.

I was told to look up Ethel May and maybe I'd understand why. This was all I learned that added up, except that Milltown had a constable and a couple of deputies. The name of the constable was Alderson Drake.

At a little after ten I decided I might as well go back to my hotel. I'd made the rounds of all the taverns. I started to slide off the stool. The door slammed open with a jar that shook the building.

The big guy came in as if he had something on his mind. He wasn't just big—he was huge. He was wearing a plaid shirt, faded blue jeans and caked logger's boots. A dirty felt hat sat on the back of his massive head.

Somebody said: "Hello, Wayne."

He blinked his eyes without answering. His eyes were a muddy brown, as was his hair. He came over and stood beside me. I didn't like what was in his eyes.

There were only two other customers in the place. I guess they didn't like what was in his eyes either. They gulped their beer and went away.

"Gimme a beer," he said to the bartender.

I slid carefully off the stool. I even tried smiling at him. His expression didn't change.

He examined a place on the wall a foot above my head. His huge jaws moved up and down. He spoke suddenly, in a strangely soft voice. "You was ridin' Ethel May around in your car earlier today. You got business here in town?"

He didn't expect an answer and he didn't get one. His question had been polite, and meaningless. Absently he reached out for his glass of beer. His hand was big enough to hold the whole keg.

He shifted the quid of tobacco in his mouth to the side and drained the glass. With the sleeve of his plaid jacket he wiped his lips. His lips looked like chunks of beef liver. His eyes still examined the

spot on the dirty wall above my head.

His eyes were better than mine. I couldn't see anything.

I started to reach inside my coat. His eyes dropped. His hand came out and clamped around my arm. His grip was no stronger than the jaws of a hippopotamus.

"That's my right arm," I said. "I'd kind of like to have it back. Maybe I'll need it again some day."

"What for?"

"Damned if I know right now."

"Not to neck Ethel May with," he said softly. "Pal, this town just ain't for you."

He let go of my arm. His eyes were still a muddy brown, without emotion. He stepped back a pace and examined me curiously. I didn't think my arm was broken. It just felt a little dead.

His fist didn't travel more than six inches. I guess that was far enough because the roof fell down on top of me and the floor reached up and spun me around.

I rolled up in a ball to protect my face. I didn't know whether he would give me the boot or not. Once I saw a guy who had taken a calked boot in the face. It wasn't pretty.

Only a couple of hours limped past. I couldn't see him now but I couldn't feel him either. I gave him plenty of time to go away. Finally I crawled to my feet. I had to lift the ceiling back into place to do it. I was surprised to find that only three minutes had elapsed.

The place was deserted, just me and the bartender in his white jacket. He was drinking a beer and watching me. The floor was still trying to grab me.

"I should have worn my brass knuckles," I said. "Only I didn't expect to meet the Piltown man. What did you say his name was?"

The bartender scowled. One eye pointed two feet to one side of me. Nobody was there. The other eye looked at me. "I didn't say," he said.

I'd had enough. I let him have a free look down the barrel of my gun, a .38 on a .45 frame. It's a nice gun but it didn't seem to bother him much. He leaned on his elbows on the bar.

He stared at me balefully. One eye did, anyway.

"I guess I didn't catch the name," I said.

"It don't matter," he said. "We don't like smart strangers here in town. His name don't matter."

"It may matter to him," I sneered.

My voice sounded about as dangerous as that of a puppy baying at the moon.

CHAPTER TWO

Elusive Lady

ABOUT EIGHT the next morning I managed to pry myself and my headache out of bed. It would have been nice to leave my jaw sleeping on the pillow. I ate and then carried my bruises down to the office of the local constabulary, which was located in a small one-story frame building between a hardware store and a lunch counter.

The constable was sitting in a small semi-private office in one corner of the barnlike room.

I circled the wooden counter and went through a knee-high swinging gate. A tall thin man leaning on the counter watched me with indifference. He wore a deputy's badge pinned to his blue shirt.

The constable was a solid, short, fat, gray-haired man with greenish eyes. His face was pink and white and his feet were propped up on the edge of his desk. They stayed that way all the time I talked to him.

He wasn't interested until I told him I was a reporter on the Puget City Free Press sent down to cover the trial. Then he opened up.

"Trial?" he asked blankly. "What

trial? Tate ain't even been arraigned yet."

I explained that I'd been sent down early for background material, and that seemed to hold him.

The case against Sidney Tate seemed open and shut. He'd had the fight with Henry Walter about nine at night. Henry Walter had swung on Ethel May, then

found. Sidney Tate had apparently ditched it. The fact that it hadn't been located was one reason why he hadn't been arraigned. That and the fact that the Schuyler clan were handled with kid gloves in this part of the country.

It was generally agreed that Sidney Tate was too drunk to know what he was doing—but that didn't excuse murder.



His fist didn't travel more than six inches, but that was far enough. . . .

attacked Sidney Tate. That was the beginning of the murder chain.

Next came the shooting down at Sampson's Slough. It wasn't much more than half an hour later. It was nine-fifty to be exact when the shot was fired.

Because there was a witness. A man named Abel Springer was down there fishing. He saw two men come out of the woods that bordered the pond. They stood there arguing for a minute, then there was a shot. Abel Springer recognized both men.

Henry Walter fell into the water and Sidney Tate staggered back to the road.

The gun was a .22, but it hadn't been

Abel Springer crept up to the place where the shooting had taken place. He shone the light down into the water, saw the body floating there and drove like crazy back to Milltown to report the slaying.

But Sampson's Slough was in Jefferson County, so the office of the sheriff down at Clarkson had taken charge. That made Alderson Drake sore.

"Sheriff McClintock is a dumbhead," he told me, watching me out of his greenish eyes. "He ain't got the brains of a gnat. But the case against Sidney Tate is foolproof. He can't miss."

I hoped he was wrong. "Who is this

Abel Springer?" I asked. "I'm all mixed up."

"A lawyer."

"Does that mean his integrity is spotless?"

"You know better," Drake said. "But why should he lie?"

"So he was down there fishing without a light."

Constable Drake scowled. "It's illegal. But what the hell? Nobody ain't gonna arrest the main witness in a murder case just for illegal fishing."

"Will there be any charge against Vance Schuyler?"

"You mean about the bum he killed yesterday?" He shook his gray head. "It was unavoidable."

"Did Ethel May Walter back up his story?"

"Yeah," he said, and nodded. "She signed a statement absolving Vance Schuyler."

"Tell me about her," I said.

He looked up quickly. "Huh?"

"Human interest stuff," I said. "The public eats it up."

He nodded and swallowed audibly. "She's too damned good looking."

I said: "No chick can be too good looking."

"I dunno." He shrugged. "You been over to see Sidney Tate yet?"

I stood up. "Not yet. Maybe it's lucky for justice that the killing happened in Jefferson County."

His face got red, then white. "I've lived in Milltown all my life. I've been constable for ten years." He was snarling at me now. "It's a soft job and I like it. I can be constable for another ten if I keep my nose clean. It's an elective job, but people in this town vote the way they're told." He began to whine. "I take my orders whether I like 'em or not. Old man Schuyler owns the town."

"What happens when he dies?"

"Huh?"

"He's getting pretty old. The town will have a new boss before long. Maybe you're laying in the spade work."

He began snarling at me again. "To hell with you. Now scram."

I LOOKED up Abel Springer. The lawyer had an office in a run-down brick rat trap. I climbed worn wooden steps, went down a narrow hallway to a door that said: *Abel Springer, Attorney-at-Law, Entrance.*

I entered.

A tall man wearing thick glasses was sitting at a cluttered desk tying a trout fly. He didn't look up, but his head nodded slightly. I sat down to wait. There were a couple of chairs, a green metal filing case, a worn oak desk. At length he was finished, and he admiringly held up his handiwork.

"Gray hackle?" I asked.

"It's a dandy. Boy, I'll bet they'll go for it."

His eyes were bright. He was wearing a brand-new pin stripe suit that I envied. It didn't fit his dingy surroundings.

"Sorry to keep you waiting?" His voice went up at the end, making a question out of it.

"I'm investigating the Henry Walter killing," I said.

"Ah," he said. He looked a little worried. Then he began looking a little impressed. I showed him my credentials. He raised an eyebrow and asked, "For old man Schuyler?"

"Yeah."

"He's pitching curves, calling in outside help." He dragged out a drawer of his desk, lifted out a bottle of bourbon and two glasses. We had a drink to crime. "How can I help you?" he asked.

"You're sure of the time?"

He nodded. "It was nine-fifty. That night I went directly from Doctor Loughgren's office to Sampson's Slough. I got there just about nine. When I heard the

shot I happened to glance at my watch."

"Convenient," I said.

"A lawyer is a trained observer, you know."

I didn't know, but I kept it to myself. We talked awhile longer. His story was exactly the one I'd already heard.

"Do you do legal work for the Schuylers?" I asked.

"A little for both Sidney and Vance. Vance mostly."

"What about Henry Walter and his wife?"

His eyes got a little distant. "Some."

"Vance probably needed your help yesterday."

He shook his head and said, "He was cleared of all blame. They've got the body of the bum down at Hellstrom's now, trying to locate any relatives. Ethel May was with Vance when it happened."

"I thought she was Sidney Tate's girl."

Abel Springer shrugged. A spot of color came into his pale thin cheeks. He said, "She plays the field."

He began tilting the bottle again.

"Let's keep on talking about her," I said. "She's worth talking about. I understand she and her husband were separated."

He looked up and said, "Yeah."

"Did the decree go through?"

"No. She's a widow now." He watched me a second. "She wanted the divorce. Henry was going to contest it."

"He couldn't stop it," I said. "In this state incompatibility would be enough."

He nodded. "That's right. But he could have made things pretty messy."

After another drink—this time to redheads—I stood up to go. He went out with me. He hung a sign on the outside knob of the door that said: **BACK TOMORROW**. He was carrying a fishing rod and a creel. "Boy," he said. "I can't wait to get this fly on the water."

"Sampson's Slough again?" I asked.

He looked unhappy. "Hell, I don't want to go near that place ever again. Think I'll try Willow Creek."

"By the way," I said. "Was there a moon the night Henry Walter was killed?"

He pressed his lips together. "Of course there was. How else could I see who was there?"

Doctor Loughgren wasn't hard to find. He had an office down the block from the KINCAID HOUSE.

A block away I saw Ethel May Walter come out of a beauty salon and mount a bicycle. She rode past, but she neither smiled nor waved. This time she was wearing chartreuse slacks and a thin blouse to match. It was a man's bicycle and one pant leg was rolled up, on the side where the chain was. She really had nice legs.

A moment later a canary yellow convertible rolled by. It slowed down to the speed of the bicycle and Vance Schuyler leaned out, calling something to her. Ah, romance.

Doctor Loughgren turned out to be an oculist. He verified the time more or less. Abel Springer had been checked for new glasses on the day Henry Walter had been killed. There had been a couple of emergency cases from the Schuyler Lumber Company Mill, and the lawyer had had to wait until almost eight before the doctor could get around to him. It was about eight-thirty when Springer had left the office.

The doctor was a short squat man with bushy hair. He said, "First Drake, then Ethel May, now you."

"Ethel May checked?"

He nodded.

"Why?"

"I can't tell you that. She didn't confide in me." He grinned. "I'm a married man but she can confide in me any time she wants."

"I just saw her zoom past on a bike."

"She'll be riding it for the next four months," he told me, still grinning. "Two months ago she got a six-month suspension of her driving license. Reckless driving. The State Patrol did it, so it can't be fixed."

I walked toward the KINCAID HOUSE where I'd left my coupe. It seemed like it might be a good idea to have a talk with Ethel May.

About half way out there I passed Vance Schuyler in his yellow convertible. He didn't see me.

Ethel May lived in a small neat cottage at the edge of town. The lawn was like green velvet, almost too clipped and neat. I walked up a flagstone path to the front door.

At one side of the house was a garage, the doors closed. The bicycle wasn't in sight. I didn't think she was home.

She wasn't.

I knocked and a dog began yapping excitedly inside. It sounded like a very small dog. He kept on yapping and scurrying around and sniffing under the crack of the door. The sniffing made a sound like a vacuum cleaner.

I looked through the window of the garage and saw a red coupe standing there. Even the window of the garage was clean, which is something you seldom see. The house was as neat as Ethel May, but far less pretentious.

Back in my car again, I pointed its nose in the direction of Sampson's Slough.

It was just beyond the county line, on the road to Clarkson. I left the coupe at the edge of the road and tramped down a weedy lane to the pond. The lane was overgrown with brake, salmon berry, salal, and Oregon grape. Underfoot the ground was soft and springy.

SAMPSON'S SLOUGH was a festering pond bordered by tules and cattails. Green algal scum coated the surface. I didn't like it. The air was

evil, miasmatic, even though some sunshine slanted through the trees. At one edge of the pond was a small tumble-down lumber mill with a part of the roof caved in. A wide door sagged on rusty hinges. An ancient donkey engine leaned beside it.

For a moment I stared at the fetid water. Small insects hummed over the surface. Here was where Henry Walter had been slain. I hoped I'd get the chance to pick a better place.

I stepped inside the abandoned mill. It was dark and brooding, even though part of the roof was gone. The floor sagged—what was left of it. One whole end was caved in, and there was the musty smell of rotting wood. Sunlight slanted through the old roof and dappled everything with strange shadows.

The silence did things to me. At heart I'm just a city boy.

Under the part of the roof that was still intact I found evidence of human habitation. Somebody had been camping here quite recently. A small circular wall of stone supported a rusty steel plate. Dead embers lay inside the improvised stove. Empty tin cans had been strewn carelessly about. An upended wooden crate held a gutted candle. Dried grass on the floor would have made a tolerably comfortable sleeping pallet.

Beside the upended crate were several crumpled sheets of cheap note paper. They all began: "Dear Sir . . ." That was all. The writing was cramped, childish. Someone had had trouble trying to compose a letter.

Everything was just too quiet. It hurt my ears.

I leaned against the wall and rubbed my nose.

I stared at the place where part of the floor was gone. Then I stared down at the part of the floor that was still intact, where I was standing. There was a space about four feet high between the ground

and the remaining floor. Plenty of room.

My nose began to itch. I got out my .38. "All right under there," I said. "Come on out."

There was just a large hunk of silence. I was being silly as hell. But if I were wrong, there would be no one to know it. I don't mind being silly if no one else knows about it.

I pointed the gun into the air and pulled the trigger. The sound of the shot was satisfactorily loud. A piece of wood fell down from the roof a couple of feet away.

"Next time I'll shoot straight down," I snarled. My voice was a pretty good imitation of Humphrey Bogart.

From somewhere under my feet came a muffled gasp.

"Shake out the lead," I said.

Crawling sounds, another gasp, a muffled curse—all these came from under my feet. Then Ethel May appeared. She was still wearing the chartreuse slacks.

Soil clung to her hands and knees. There was a smudge of dirt on her nose. She had scratched a leg trying to get out, which accounted for her swearing.

"Well, hello, there," she said brightly. She climbed to my level. She tried a smile, then changed her mind. She didn't look at the gun in my hand. "Imagine seeing you here."

"Imagine," I said. "Did you lose something down there?"

She pursed her lips and blew out her breath. A lock of her hair jiggled. She pulled up a leg of her slacks and examined the scratch. She was front-line chorus.

I said, "Okay. Maybe you just live down there."

"You're not funny." She let the leg of her slacks slide back down. "Do you have to keep that silly gun pointed at me?"

"I'm protecting myself."

"You're a private detective."

"A shameless hussy. Reading my mail. Why didn't you wait for me?"

"Put your gun away or I'll leave."

I put the gun away in the holster at my shoulder.

"So old man Schuyler sent for you," she said quietly.

"Let's be serious," I said. "What are you looking for?"

She took a step toward me. She was still three feet away but my blood pressure rose a notch. She did things with those long green eyes of hers. "Do private detectives really make much money?"

I shook my head. "We have fun, though."

"Then you're not for me," she said. "Would you really have taken a shot at me?"

I grinned. "Probably not."

"You wouldn't shoot me?"

I shook my head, still grinning insanely.

She said: "That's all I wanted to know." And with a doelike speed she began running.

I caught her at the door and we fell through it into a pile of rotting wood and sawdust. Her body was soft and warm and firm.

She snatched up a piece of wood and smacked me over the head with it. The wood was still partly rotten, but still sound enough. She scrambled to her feet and fled swiftly through the tangled undergrowth.

This was her country, not mine. I'm city born and bred. I don't like violent exercise.

I didn't even chase her.

I returned to my car. She wasn't anywhere in sight. I tooled the car in the direction of Clarkson, a good twenty miles away.

Last night I'd been slapped down by the Piltown man. Today by a girl. Tomorrow a three-year old baby would probably take my gun away from me.

I felt a little sorry for myself.

CHAPTER THREE

A Killer Strikes

CLARKSON, the county seat of Jefferson County, was a town about the size of Milltown. The county courthouse was a big, frame, boxlike building with a square cupola on top. It was old, but freshly painted.

I went down a long corridor to the sheriff's office. Brown linoleum covered the floor. Thin cigarette burns almost concealed the original surface.

Sheriff McClintock was a young, intelligent-looking fellow dressed in whipcord breeches and shirt. I told him what I wanted and he waved me into his office.

"We still haven't arraigned Tate yet," he told me. He was chewing gum with a fast, nervous, rolling motion of his teeth. His teeth were very white.

"Why not?" I asked.

He looked up at me. "You nosed around Milltown yet?"

I nodded. "Okay. I get it. Old man Schuyler throws a lot of weight."

He shrugged. "I don't like it but there it is. We haven't found the gun. Tate won't talk. We're giving him a chance to change his mind."

"May I see him?"

McClintock waved down a deputy. "Bring Tate in here."

Sidney Tate came in, walking with a lithe, sleepy grace, like a big cat. His eyes were brown and sleepy looking. He had sandy hair, a rugged face made up of angles. He looked like a big, good natured, overgrown kid.

"Old man Schuyler hired me to get you out of here," I said.

He sat down and yawned. The deputy went away. McClintock didn't even watch Sidney Tate carefully. They didn't seem to feel he'd try to escape.

I asked: "Don't you want to get out of here?"

He was wearing slacks and a clean white shirt. He yawned lazily. "I dunno." He shrugged. "I kind of like it here. We have a poker game every night, me and a couple of other prisoners and the deputies. I'm sixty bucks up on the game."

McClintock flushed.

"It's an easy life," Sidney Tate said. "The food's good. I guess I like it pretty well."

"They burn you in the chair for murder in this State," I told him.

His lips thinned down but he didn't speak.

McClintock said almost petulantly, "All I get in Milltown is the raspberry. That Drake is a knothed. Milltown ought to secede from the Union."

I turned to Sidney Tate. "If you've got some romantic notion about protecting Ethel May, skip it." He looked up at me with his sleepy eyes. "Besides, Abel Springer says he saw you do it."

His lower lip crawled up over his teeth.

"How about talking now?" McClintock asked him.

There was a faint doubt in his eyes but he shook his head. McClintock waved down the deputy again and Sidney Tate was taken away. McClintock shook his head.

"I don't think he'd ever kill," he said. "But I can't hold him like this forever. A jury couldn't help but convict him after Abel Springer's testimony."

I stood up. I asked him to call me at the KINCAID HOUSE if Sidney Tate decided to talk. He agreed. McClintock was the kind of a cop I like to deal with.

After a quick lunch I drove back to Milltown. It was a little past the middle of the afternoon.

By repeating my performance of the previous evening I managed to add a little more to the tally. I kept away from the place where I'd met the Piltdown man, just on general principles.

Old man Schuyler kept both his grandson and grandnephew under his ancient thumb. Neither took a great deal of interest in the business. Vance was listed as treasurer, Sidney as secretary. Both spent most of their time playing around. This really suited the old man, though he complained bitterly about it. He wanted to run the business his own way, without any interference. Just so Vance and Sidney voted "right" at the stockholder meetings, he was satisfied.

There were only one hundred shares of stock in the Schuyler Company, and Vance and Sidney each owned ten shares apiece. The old man held thirty-five himself, which gave the three of them controlling interest. Since the old man spoke for all of them the stockholder meetings, which were held only rarely, were cut and dried.

The last stockholder meeting had been a dilly. A man who represented an eastern holding company proposed to buy out the Schuyler Company. Things got stormy. The minority stockholders voted as a block to sell, but the Schuyler clan held control, so the old man got the proposition vetoed. Just about the then the other stockholders began hating his guts.

I found out that Ed Walter, old man Schuyler's first mill superintendent, had been a stockholder. At his death his stock had reverted to his son.

It was a little after seven when I gave up. I had a lot of more or less miscellaneous information now, most of which didn't mean a thing. I ate dinner, then sent a telegram to the Great Western office in Puget City. I wanted to know if there was any information in local financial circles about the proposed stock deal. A girl in the office named Helen Argus had a brother Willie who was a runner for a bond house.

I looked up Ethel May in the phone book. It was listed under Henry Walter's name. I figured she'd moved back into

the house after her husband had been killed.

She said, "Hello?"

"It's me," I said.

She mulled that over for a second. "Oh, yes! Hi there, Pete. I'm sorry about this afternoon."

"How sorry?"

"Well—I'd like to see you."

"How about going out to Rosie's with me tonight?"

She sounded really sad about it, but she just couldn't make it. She'd already promised Vance a date.

I said, "Break the date."

"I can't do that. But I'll get him to take me to Rosie's. Maybe I can see you there." She paused a second. "Is this business or pleasure?"

"A little of both."

"How can I tell which?"

"When it's business I mean business. And when it's pleasure I mean business too."

She giggled.

"What time?" I asked.

"Vance is coming past about nine-thirty."

I told her it might be pretty late before I got there, and hung up. Her voice had sounded about the way she looked. Very disturbing. I began hoping it took a long time to solve the murder of Henry Walter.

I had another cup of coffee and began talking to my brains. The interview didn't amount to much.

It was dark now, just about nine. I walked up the street and there was a light in Abel Springer's office. He was one guy I wanted to talk to again. I turned into the building and mounted the stairs.

The place was such a trap that there wasn't a light in the hallway at night.

That's what I thought. The shot sounded pretty loud.

I ran down the corridor, bumping into the walls on either side. You'd think a man could run a straight line in the dark,

but it isn't so. A cat can do it, or a dog—but not a man. My .38 was in my hand. I ran into Abel Springer's office, saw him and no one else, and I ran out to the hall again.

THERE WAS a window at the end leading out to a fire escape. The window was open. I leaned out and saw a figure leap off the last landing and sprint around toward the front of the building. I didn't shoot. I'm good with a gun, but not that good.

Abel Springer was kneeling on the floor in an attitude of prayer. He was on his knees with his head touching the floor. He had been shot in the chest at close range. The bullet hole wasn't leaking ink. In a corner of the office was a wicker creel with two nice cut-throat trout in it. His new trout fly had been a success.

When I turned back to look at him, his body fell slowly over on one side. The hair on the top of my head lifted a little. There was no breeze.

No footsteps sounded on the stairs. Evidently the shot hadn't been heard outside the building.

I searched quickly through a green metal filing cabinet and found nothing. I pulled open the bottom drawer of his desk. Like most lawyers he just chucked copies of wills into a drawer without bothering to file them. I found what I was looking for—a copy of Henry Walter's will. He left everything to Ethel May. She'd still been his wife when he was killed and she would inherit.

Neither Vance Schuyler nor Sidney Tate seemed to have made a will.

I called the constable's office, reported the killing to a deputy, withheld my name but told him where he could find the body. He told me to stick around and I agreed. Then I got out of there before he arrived.

I drove out to Ethel May's house on a hunch and parked half a block away. The

lights were still on inside. It was quarter to ten by my watch. At ten o'clock Vance Schuyler's yellow convertible slid past and stopped at the curb. The horn cut loose. A moment later the lights inside the house winked out and the car drove away.

Vance Schuyler had been half an hour late for his date.

There was a note for me when I got back to my hotel. The note said: "I thought I hired a detective. Why don't you report?" It was signed: "Alexander Schuyler."

The tall, thin bellhop was hanging around. Behind the desk was the roly-poly man who had been there earlier. The telephone bell rang.

I slipped the bellhop a sawbuck and gestured toward my room. His eyes brightened and he sauntered away.

The phone call was for me, and McClintock was on the end of the wire. He wanted to know if there had been any progress. I told him no. "Who did it?" he asked.

Again I told him I didn't know.

"How about Ethel May?"

"Why?"

"Sidney Tate wants to know."

"Maybe," I said. "And maybe Vance Schuyler or the old man or Sidney Tate or you. Or maybe it was me."

The noises that came over the wire didn't sound very enthusiastic.

"Here's a break for Tate, maybe," I said. "Abel Springer was scragged tonight. No witness now—no case."

McClintock started sounding excited at this point. I told him that was all and hung up on him.

The roly-poly man was sitting on a high stool behind the desk. His eyes were half-closed but he'd been listening to what I'd said to McClintock.

"I understand you own five shares of stock in the Schuyler Company," I said. "You were one of the original partners."

He nodded, blinking.

"Tell me about the last stockholder meeting."

He told me. I had to translate the stuttering. He told me just about what I'd heard already. The price offered by the eastern syndicate seemed very fair. The income from his stock had dropped alarmingly the last few years. And it would continue. The timber was about gone. He and the rest of the minority stockholders had wanted to sell, but old man Schuyler had managed to block them. They were all sore about it. Vance Schuyler and Sidney Tate had been sore about it too, but there had been nothing they could do about it. They had been afraid to buck the old man.

I mounted the stairs to my room. A couple of minutes later the bellhop came in. He said: "Jack, we'll have a ball!" He pulled some fat brown-paper cigarettes out of his pocket.

I shook my head and told him the ten spot had been for information, not reefers.

"What's up, Jack?" he said. "These are the real mezz. Vance Schuyler goes for them in a big way."

"I'm not a viper," I told him. "You scuffle good?"

"Fair. All I can handle. Vance bought tonight." He sat down and regarded me moodily. "You're unhip, Jack." He took one of the fat brown-paper cigarettes and held it in his fingers.

I told him to go ahead. He lighted the muggle and smoked it slowly, holding the end away from his lips so that he sucked as much air as smoke. He sucked the air and smoke deeply into his lungs, held it there for a long time, then let his lung muscles push it slowly out. After a few drags he looked a lot happier.

He said suddenly: "Your water's on, Jack."

"Trouble?"

"Drake was getting nose-y."

"Thanks, Gate," I told him. "Tell me. Is there anything about Sidney Tate or

Vance Schuyler that I ought to know?"

He was feeling plenty good now, plenty glad to talk. Most of the stuff I already knew. Then he came up with something new.

The day before Henry Walter had been killed, he and Vance Schuyler had happened to meet here in the KINCAID HOUSE. They had never got along, and as usual they got into an agreement. Vance Schuyler had a big idea. He was through being dominated by his grandfather. He was going to throw in with the minority stockholders and vote to sell his block of stock. That would give the minority stockholders a voting majority. The old man would be wild but there would be nothing he could do about it. Vance Schuyler's stock was in his own name.

That should have hit Henry Walter just right, but it didn't. He had always hated the Schuyler clan. Henry Walter said, if that happened, he would vote his own block of stock along with old man Schuyler and the whole deal would be stalemated as before.

I also learned that Ethel May, upon separating from her husband, had taken a room here at the KINCAID HOUSE. But after Henry Walter had been killed she had moved back to the house again. I didn't inquire into the personal life of Ethel May while she had been living here.

"Off your daniel," I said to the bellhop. "I've got work to do."

He walked out to the hall in front of me. There was a sort of vacuous grin on his face. I went out to my car and drove out to see old man Schuyler.

HIS HOME was atop a bluff overlooking the town and the Schuyler Lumber Company. It would have to be that way. Big windows marched along the entire front. I could picture him sitting there in front of them, the curtains twitched aside, peering out—lord and master of all he surveyed.

There was a big half-moon in the sky. The house looked fifty years old, the architectural nightmare of a bygone era. I'll take spinach.

I climbed wide stone steps to the porch. I'd learned that the old man kept only one servant, a house-keeper about his own age who was stone deaf. He opened the door himself.

"By George," he said. "I expect a report once in awhile. You aren't on an annuity."

I told him I'd been busy.

He shook his crest of gray hair. His frosty eyes were distant. He led me into the parlor and we sat down.

I was right about the windows. He took a chair close to them, angrily twitched aside the curtain, stared out. Crouched there like some old vulture, he was watchdogging the town.

"I've just come from Abel Springer's office," I said.

"A shyster." He turned to face me, still holding the curtain pulled aside. His faded blue eyes had fire in back of them. "His statement will convict Sidney."

"It won't now," I said.

He let go of the curtain. "Why not?" "He's dead."

He stared at me a second. Then he began smiling a soft, secret smile.

"And that ain't all." I showed him my strong, beautiful, white teeth. "This Abel Springer was lying through his bonnet. He's been perjuring himself all along."

The old man was concentrating now. He said, "Huh?" The fire back of his eyes was brighter now.

"Look at his new clothes," I said. "How can he afford to close up shop in the middle of the day to go fishing?" I shook my head. "No, don't look at that—it's not important. To hell with it. What is important is this: The evening he swore he saw Sidney shoot Henry Walter, he had just had his eyes tested for new glasses. Do you know what the means?

I defy anyone who has had his eyes dilated to see much of anything less than two hours later!"

The old man watched me shrewdly, and a bit doubtfully.

I asked pleasantly: "Did you shoot him?"

He frowned. "It would have been a good idea. Only I didn't think of it. Do you think I did it?"

"I guess not."

"Who did?"

"I don't know."

He nodded. "Somebody tried to frame Sidney for murder." That simple statement seemed to surprise him. "Somebody got Springer to perjure himself. Somebody murdered him to undo the frame. It has to be a different person, doesn't it?"

I grunted noncommittally. A brace of old silver mounted dueling pistols were lying on the mantel above the fireplace. I picked one up. The old barrel had been removed—it was now barreled for a .22 cartridge. It was unloaded. I couldn't tell if it had been fired recently. The other pistol was the same.

The old man brushed a wrinkled hand across his predatory face and the fire leaped behind his agate eyes. "Why would Sidney be framed?"

"How does this sound?" I cleared my throat importantly. "Let's go back to the offer made to buy you out. You and Vance and Sidney control the Schuyler Company. The minority stockholders voted to sell. If anyone of you three should throw in with them, they'd be the majority. Then your empire would collapse."

"Absurd!" He was snarling now. "I can always hold Vance and Sidney in line."

"Can you?"

He nodded. "Both of 'em would probably like to dispose of their blocks of stock. I think they'd like to have a ready bunch of cash so they could move away

from Milltown. The town is dying—timber is thinning out. Someday it'll be gone. And Milltown will go with it. But I'll be gone too, so it won't matter."

"Was the offer made by the eastern syndicate fair?"

He snarled at me. "There isn't enough money in the world to buy me out!"

"Okay," I said. "It's absurd." I looked at him. "You're getting old. Do you still think you've got the town in your hip pocket?"

Fire leaped behind his agate eyes. He nodded.

"What about Drake?" I asked.

"Alderson Drake? He'll do what I say. I put him into office single handed. I remember when he was born. I remember when Ethel May was born, too. I can remember. . . ."

I said, "Let's go back. What about Ethel May?"

"Drake's her father."

That was something I hadn't picked up before. It didn't seem to change much of anything.

"Look," I said. "Suppose Sidney should die for a crime which we're still not sure he *didn't* commit. What happens to his stock?" I stabbed him with a finger. "Maybe he's made a will, left his stock to somebody. His stock could be voted with the minority. You'd be forced out."

I could see his mind working fast. "Who?"

"He was in love with Ethel May."

He shook his head. "No!"

"Okay," I said. "I don't think he ever made such a will. But what I'm trying to show you is this: the killing of Henry Walter may be more complicated than you suspect."

He was still thinking it over. "Good God!" he said.

"There have been three deaths by violence in Milltown in the last couple of days. You ought to have named it Kill-Town."

"Three?"

"Henry Walter, a bum out on the highway, and now Abel Springer."

"What's the bum got to do with it?" He shook his gray head and spoke in a voice that lacked conviction. "Son, you're off your trolley."

"Where's Vance?" I asked.

"Out someplace." He leaned forward, his eyes frosty once again. "Maybe neither Vance nor Sidney are worth a hell of a lot. I can't evaluate men any more. But, son, I've got my pride. And they have my blood. They'll do as I say—just like this town—but they've got my blood. You leave Vance alone!"

"Don't you want Sidney out of the pokey?"

He didn't answer. His eyes were unfocused now, unseeing, folded back somewhere to a dim and secret past. I said good-bye to him but he didn't even seem to hear me. I let myself out of the door and went down the long stone steps to my car.

I had the door open and one foot inside when the moonlight glinted on something bright not more than twenty feet away. I dropped flat and tried to roll under the car. A shotgun let go in the darkness. There was a fiery muzzle flash and a sound like the slap of a giant hand came from the body of my coupe.

My own gun was out now. I cut loose with three shots, aiming just below the muzzle flash. I shot three times as fast as I could. It sounded like one continuous rolling blast.

For a moment there was silence. Then there was a liquid groan. Something thumped to the sidewalk.

A door banged open and old man Schuyler called out, "What in hell was that?"

"Call Drake," I said.

I sat down on the curb for awhile. My legs had run away. I had to wait until they came back.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dressed to Kill

ALDERSON DRAKE stood up and said: "That was nice shooting, Grady. Three in the chest. A silver dollar would cover 'em."

A couple of deputies began loading the body into their car. Drake examined my gun. I showed him my license. He handed the gun and license back reluctantly.

"You say he shot first," he said. "Maybe it was the other way around."

Old man Schuyler said, "Don't be an idiot! I can tell a shotgun blast when I hear it. The shotgun came first."

"Who was the guy?" I asked.

"A guy named Tomlin," Drake said. "He ain't no loss to the town. I shoulda run him out a long time ago."

I said, "He was hired for this caper."

Constable Drake turned to me. "You ain't no newspaper reporter. I think you called about Springer's body. I ought to have run you outa town too."

"Shut up, Drake," old man Schuyler snapped. "This man is working for me. I sent for him to get Sidney out of jail."

Drake began to whine. "Why in hell didn't you come to me with a straight story, Grady?" he asked me. "I'm always glad to cooperate with you agency boys."

"Kyaw-kyaw," I said.

I could see Drake open his mouth, then snap it shut again. He was really boiling. He went over to see what his men were doing. Old man Schuyler wanted to know if I wanted a drink. I told him no and got into my car.

The car door was sieved. All the holes were concentrated in a circle about a foot in diameter. If I'd been standing the blast would have caught me in the guts. And it was pretty lucky the shotgun had been fired at close range. Otherwise the shot would have spread and I wouldn't have escaped without a scratch.

Back at the KINCAID HOUSE there was a telegram for me.

VANCE SCHUYLER TRIED TO PEDDLE HIS BLOCK OF SCHUYLER COMPANY STOCK THROUGH A DUMMY NAME. NOBODY WOULD TOUCH IT. THE NEXT DAY HE WITHDREW THE OFFER. DON'T FORGET TO CHANGE YOUR SOX AND WE ALL LOVE YOU.

It was signed: "Ackerly."

I crammed the telegram into my pocket and went out to the street again. In the distance I could see the red glow in the sky from the burning sawdust pile at the Schuyler mill. The street was quiet. A sidewalk clock in front of Jorgensen's Jewelry Store diagonally across the street told me it was almost eleven-thirty. Moonlight dappled the street and sidewalk with quiet silver.

Two blocks down Mill Street and I came to Hellstrom's funeral parlor. It was a frame house with a green lawn in front, a small square annex at the back. There was subdued light in the front parlor and harsh light streaming from a window in the work room at the back.

Muted chimes pealed at my touch on the bell. I waited. After awhile measured footsteps approached and the door swung open.

"What will it be, brother?" The voice had the measured tone of the chimes.

"Hellstrom?"

He nodded. He was a tall, gaunt figure with long hairless skull that gleamed whitely in the subdued light. There was a fine sheen of sweat along the white skin. He was in his shirtsleeves, and he smelled of alcohol. His eyes had a dusty, blank look and he was standing very rigidly in the doorway.

"A man was run down on the highway yesterday," I said.

He inclined his hairless skull. "Pardon my appearance, brother. I am working late."

"Has he been identified?"

"Not yet, brother. Would you like to see him?"

I nodded and he stepped carefully aside. "Enter, brother." His voice was still muted.

We went through the small front parlor, which smelled of faded flowers, down a dim corridor to the work room. Hellstrom walked very carefully, like a man walking in the dark. It took me a second to get it. He was drunk, almost out on his feet.

The work room was brightly lighted. It smelled of alcohol. Cans of embalming fluid were stacked against one wall. Two wooden trestles supported by wooden horses stood in the middle of the room. One trestle was empty. The other held the body of the bum.

He'd have a couple of more guests shortly, but I didn't tell him so.

The bum had his clothes pressed, his face recently shaved. In the bright light his beard made his face look just a little dirty. In repose his face was thin, middle-aged, with a sort of beaten, defeated look.

Hellstrom's eyes were as blank as the painted eyes of a picture. He said sonorously, "He was a difficult case. His body was badly smashed. Do you know him?" His voice was sounding a little like distant thunder now.

I shook my head. "Any sort of identification?"

"No, brother. Only a few jimcracks in his pockets. And a knapsack."

The contents were spread out on a wooden bench. There was a jack-knife, a couple of mauled cigarettes, a stubby pencil, a book of matches. The knapsack had contained a worn blanket, a kettle and a frying pan, a change of sox and underwear.

And a cheap note tablet, the pulp paper kind with thin ruled blue lines to help you write a straight line.

I carried the tablet under the bright overhead light. The paper was the same as that I'd found crumpled in the abandoned mill.

"Brother, would you like a drink?" he grinned.

"Probably."

The final draft of the letter would undoubtedly have been the last sheet torn off. And the faint impression made by the stubby pencil was still visible on the blank top sheet.

Liquid began sloshing into two glasses. I turned. The undertaker was pouring embalming fluid from a can.

I made some strangling sounds in my throat.

"It won't hurt you, brother." He didn't look up. "I've drunk it for thirty years. We've had some nice parties back here, let me tell you."

I asked him if he'd invited all his ghoul friends, but he didn't think I was very funny.

He was hurt when I wouldn't drink with him. He finished one glass, then walked stiffly over to the bench, poked around with a rigid finger, and finally located one of the dead bum's cigarettes. He lit it and ambled back and began nibbling on the second glass of embalming fluid.

I tore off the three top sheets from the note tablet, folded them and slid them away in my coat pocket. The tablet I returned to the bench.

He finished the drink, smacked his lips as if it tasted wonderful. Then all his bones and muscles turned to jelly. He leaned against the wall, slid slowly down it to the floor, dropped his chin on his chest and began to snore.

I walked back to my car and kicked it to life. Two blocks later I decided I was being tailed. That would be Alderson Drake's idea. And it was old stuff to me.

I lost the tail with ease and headed for *Rosie's Place*.

THE ROAD went past Sampson's Slough and then wound upward to the high ridge above. It unwound between high walls of fir and hemlock so that even the moon was fenced out.

Occasionally I passed a small hill farm, just a few cleared acres at the side of the road with chicken runs behind.

Ahead the road widened into a small clearing. There was a squat low wooden building with a blue neon sign in front that said in Gothic Script: *Rosie's Place*. It had all the architectural appeal of an army barrack. I drove into the parking lot.

It had been twenty minutes from Sampson's Slough.

The building was divided roughly in the middle. One half contained a long low bar. The other half was a dance floor with booths around the edges, a battered piano and a few chairs for the band, when there was a band. A juke box stood aloof but ready in case there was no other music.

Tonight there was a band. Both the dance floor and the bar were crowded. I found an empty stool at the bar and ordered a beer from a girl in a blue apron.

Standing behind the bar was a bald, pot-bellied man. He was thoughtfully chewing the end of a wooden match. That seemed to be all he had to do.

The hillbilly band was good—piano, fiddle, guitar and banjo. They were knocking out *The Girl I Left Behind Me* with a great deal of zest. A tall, young, red-headed youth was calling the dance.

Both Ethel May and Vance were in the crowd. Ethel May was dancing with the Piltdown man who had floored me last night. Vance danced with a cute little girl in a starched gingham dress. He wasn't looking too happy.

The Piltdown man was dressed fancy tonight. His hair was slicked down and his face had a very clean, scrubbed, shiny look. He looked like a pretty nice youngster who packed too much heft for his age.

I looked around for somebody resembling the owner of the place. A waitress swished past and I ordered another beer and asked for the manager. She drew the beer for me, then spoke to the pot-bellied man. He drifted over.

"Is the owner around?" I asked.

"I'm Rosie," he said. His voice was high-pitched.

I pointed at the Piltdown man. "And that?"

"Him? He's Wayne Colvos."

"What does he do beside try to dance?"

"Timber beast for the Schuyler Logging Company. He's the best fighter in the woods."

"The dame," I said.

His eyes got a little distant. "Take my advice, pal. Just forget about her."

"How was that?" I asked.

He leaned over the counter, resting on his elbows, his wrists crossed. "Who did you say you were?"

I showed him my buzzer. There was no point in keeping it a secret. His eyes stayed a long way away. He chewed on the match stick for awhile. I asked him about the fight the other night between Sidney Tate and Henry Walter. He didn't answer right away. He took the match stick out of his mouth, examined it carefully and then threw it on the floor.

"I guess it don't matter," he said, and told me the story I already knew.

The band finished the number and the crowd began milling around. Everybody looked fresh and enthused. They'd be going all night long. It was that kind of a place.

"I'd like a roll of half dollars," I said.

"All we got are nickel slot machines."

"How about a roll of . . ."

"Yeah, but . . ."

We weren't getting anywhere. I slapped a double sawbuck on the bar. He looked at it, at me, back at it again. Then he picked up the two tens. The back of his neck was red.

He handed me the roll of fifty cent pieces. They were wrapped tightly in brown paper. I slipped the roll into my pocket. It felt comfortably heavy.

Vance Schuyler sat down beside me and ordered a cup of black coffee. He still didn't look happy. There was a faint odor of marihuana on his breath.

"Is Sidney still in jail?" he asked vaguely.

I nodded and said: "Abel Springer was shot tonight."

He was surprised. "Springer? Shot? That means the case against Sidney falls apart."

"Maybe. Want to answer a few questions?"

He shrugged. "Why not?"

"I've found out you tried to peddle your block of Schuyler Company stock. That didn't work. So you decided to throw in with the minority stockholders. Henry Walter queered the deal."

"Damn him." He glanced toward Ethel May and Wayne Colvos. They were watching us. Wayne Colvos was glaring, but Ethel May smiled. I didn't know whether it meant anything or not. "She came with me," Vance said, "but she's danced with that ape most of the evening." He looked around quickly. "Do you think I killed Henry Walter?"

I smiled winsomely.

He slid off his stool and said, "Watch my coffee. I'll be back." He disappeared in the direction of the wash room.

When he came back he was smiling. He mounted the stool as if it were a purebred gelding. The odor of marihuana was stronger now.

"Okay," he said. "I'm trying to unload my block of stock. Milltown is a rat hole. Is that a crime? I'm old enough to vote."

"That isn't what your grandfather thinks."

"Well, to hell with him." Vance Schuyler was really riding high.

"Why did Ethel May get her driver's license suspended?"

"She loves to drive but she drives too fast."

"What about Sidney getting out of jail?" I asked.

He swung around. "Huh?"

"Maybe they'll release him because of lack of evidence. So maybe he'll beat your time with Ethel May."

He began to sneer. "She's going to marry me. Just as soon as it's proper."

I thought that she'd be more than he could handle, but I didn't tell him so. "Do you know a guy named Tomlin?" I asked.

He frowned. "Tomlin? Oh, yeah."

"He got killed tonight."

"How?"

"I shot him."

He chewed that over for awhile. I thought he was going to ask me more about it but he didn't. We talked a bit longer, but I couldn't pry anything worth while out of him. He finished his coffee and then went over to talk to Ethel May and Wayne Colvos.

I WATCHED them, sipping my beer. Ethel May lifted her eyes, stared steadily at me a moment, then shrugged briefly toward the door. I got the idea. A couple of minutes later I ambled outside toward my car. The band started playing "Bile Them Cabbage Down." Ethel May joined me and we climbed inside.

She sat relaxed, her head back against the seat. Her throat was gracefully arched and there was a tiny pulse. She spoke lazily.

"What have you found out?"

"Not very much."

"Do you think Sidney killed Henry?"

I gave her the old refrain—I didn't know. She asked for a cigarette and for awhile she smoked in silence. It seemed very peaceful out here. The music from

inside, and the noise of the crowd, seemed a long way off.

"You don't seem bowed down with grief," I said.

"I disliked Henry. Everybody knew it."

"Why'd you run away this afternoon?"

"I was frightened."

"What were you doing there?"

Her head stirred lazily. "It's restful down there. When I heard someone coming, I was frightened. I remembered what had happened to Henry. So I hid."

I let that go. "Maybe I ought to congratulate you."

She sat up. "What?"

"On your engagement."

"Oh. Vance told you." She put out her cigarette. "Why do men have brains, brawn, or money—but never all three at once?" She squeezed my arm. "You've got brains and brawn."

"But no money."

"That's the hell of it." She cuddled down against my shoulder. "I like you. Why aren't you rich?"

"What's money?" I asked.

She pulled away again. I could hear her breathing in the darkness. I felt her body tremble.

"Vance told me about Abel Springer and that other man—that Tomlin." Even in the darkness I could see her greenish eyes, large and luminous like a cat's. "I'm bad—*bad!* Men like me and I make them suffer. I hate myself but I can't help it. It's been that way ever since I was fourteen." She began to sob.

"That's a good act," I said.

Her body was rigid now. She held her hands in front of her face. "It's not an act," she said. "I mean it."

And I believed her. I patted her shoulder and her arms started going around my neck. It was going to be nice.

It would have been even nicer if somebody hadn't jerked open the door of the car just then. I almost fell out on the

ground. But Wayne Colvos grabbed the back of my coat and hoisted me to my feet. The tips of my toes just touched the ground. I'm a pretty big guy, but he treated me like a doll. A small doll.

"Let me down," I told him. "I'm a big boy now."

"So you're out here smooching with Ethel May," he said. He put me down.

His face was ugly. People were streaming out of the place. This was going to be good. There's nothing like a good scrap to pep things up. I put my hand into my pocket.

This time he was going to do things right. He hauled his fist clear back to Christmas and then let it come. It looked as big as a watermelon, but it was coming slow. I could have cut out a paper doll while I waited. I slid in close, under his arm.

I jerked my hand out of my pocket. The roll of silver half dollars was tucked neatly in my fist. I tagged him on the jaw.

He fell straight over backward.

A sort of sigh whispered through the crowd. Have you ever heard an idol smashing? That's the sound Wayne Colvos made when he hit the ground.

I dropped the roll of money back into my pocket before anyone happened to see it. My hand was hurting, but I pretended it didn't.

Somebody bent over the Piltown man. Then stood up again, shaking his head in deep surprise.

Pot-bellied Rosie came up rapidly. He was slapping a shot-filled sap against the palm of his hand. He looked tough and capable now.

"Okay, you took him." His voice was still high-pitched. "I don't want no trouble. Any more trouble up here, and McClintock down at Clarkson will close me up. Maybe you better blow."

I looked at the faces of the crowd. They were starting to come alive. I was a stranger, and Wayne Colvos was one of

them. The faces started getting ugly. I got into the car. Ethel May was over standing beside Vance now. I kicked the engine to life and drove away. The short hairs at the back of my neck were prickling.

It took me half an hour to get back to the *Kincaid House*. The street was deserted at this hour except for a car parked across the street. Somebody ran toward me from the right. Somebody ran toward me from the left. I didn't have a chance. They had me neatly boxed.

One of them grabbed at me and I used my elbow on him. A pair of arms got me from behind. There were three of them now.

"We've been waiting," Constable Drake said. "Get into your car and drive."

He was holding a gun in my back. I didn't argue. Drake and one of his constables slid in beside me. The second deputy crossed the street and climbed into the parked machine. My luggage was back of the seat.

They'd checked me out of the hotel.

"Drive toward Jefferson County," Drake said.

Just before we reach the white marker at the county line he told me to stop. The other car drew up behind and the deputy hopped out. Drake pushed me out on the road.

The two deputies grabbed me. Drake put away his gun and pulled out a leather-covered blackjack.

I said professionally: "You'll get yourself into real trouble some day holding a sap like that. A guy fast on his feet could grab it and tie you up—"

He hit me twice, very hard and very fast across the bridge of my nose. My eyes began to smart. There was blood in my mouth. Tears were in my eyes now and things were a little hazy.

"We don't like private cops in Milltown," he said coldly.

Again he swung the sap. I went down on my knees. Somebody put a foot in the middle of my back and I flopped on my face in the road. I grabbed a rock. Somebody stepped hard on my wrist, kicked the rock out of my hand. I didn't think my wrist was broken.

Then Drake really laid it on me. I guess I went limp. A hand fumbled inside my coat and my gun went away. Somebody kicked me in the ribs.

From a long way off I heard Drake say: "Don't come back. Just keep on driving."

I lay there. Jumbled sounds told me they were getting into their car. After awhile they were gone.

I stood up. My face hurt and my ribs hurt and my wrist hurt. My nose hurt worst of all. I staggered to my coupe and fell into the seat. Finally my nose stopped bleeding.

I drove into Clarkson. It took me a long time to get there.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Face of Murder

A DEPUTY SHERIFF phoned McClintock and then tried doctoring me a bit before the sheriff arrived. There wasn't much for him to do. Drake was pretty efficient with a sap. Except for my badly swollen nose all I had to show for it was a fine collection of painful bruises.

McClintock looked me over. I figured I looked worse than I really was. That didn't help my wounded vanity.

"This didn't happen in my county," he said. "Nobody saw it. Down at the Barr County seat you might get some kind of a warrant against Drake. I doubt it. Schuyler has the whole county sewed up."

"That's not what I want," I said.

He raised an eyebrow.

"You have a murder case on your hands, don't you?"

He nodded, grinning a little. "Seems to me I heard something about it."

"Let's go down to Milltown and solve it," I said.

"You've got something?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said.

His eyes were shrewd. "Is it enough?"

"I don't know."

He scratched his jaw, then nodded. "Okay. I'll string along with you. Your agency has a good name."

I told him what I wanted.

He nodded again. "We'll take Sidney Tate along. Old man Schuyler will already be there. We can pick up Vance and Ethel May at *Rosie's Place*. I guess we'll need Drake too."

He was still staring at me. His lower lip climbed his teeth. Then he turned to a deputy and told him to fetch Sidney Tate and then round up Vance and Ethel May.

On the way back to Milltown I began feeling a whole lot less sure of myself. But I didn't tell McClintock that.

The old man was up and dressed, even to the black string tie. He went to the window and angrily twitched aside the curtain. It was still dark and at 5 a. m. the town was asleep.

"All I wanted was Sidney out of jail," he snapped, his eyes frosty. "But by God! I didn't order all these dramatics." He jerked a thin shoulder. "This is an ungodly hour. I've got to have some coffee."

Some men are rulers and others are ruled. He was the former. We all trooped into the kitchen after him. I didn't like it. Here he was taking the play away from me.

Ethel May wandered away first, followed shortly by Sidney Tate. It didn't matter. McClintock had the doors guarded outside. Finally we had all straggled back to the living room.

"Here it is," I said. "I'm going to try to turn up a killer. Or maybe killers. My little talk is entitled 'A Little Journey To The Pleasant Land Of Murder.'"

"Get on with it," barked old man Schuyler. There was fire behind his agate eyes.

I bowed to him. "Let's start somewhere near the beginning. Sidney and Henry Walter had an argument at *Rosie's Place*. Henry socked Ethel May. Then Sidney socked Henry Walter. Stop me if I'm wrong." Nobody stopped me. I turned to Sidney Tate. "About fifty minutes later Henry Walter was shot to death. Did you do it?"

He shrugged blandly.

"Ethel May and Vance are engaged," I said. "Cozy, isn't it?"

There was a slow change in his eyes. Suddenly he didn't look sleepy any more.

"I didn't kill him."

McClintock said: "That's the first word you've said. Can you prove it?"

He shook his head. "I just drove around. Nobody saw me. I was trying to cool off. I was drunk, but not too drunk to know what I was doing."

"Why did Henry Walter happen to go down there?" McClintock asked me.

"Let's let that go for awhile," I told him. "Let's talk about a lawyer named Abel Springer. He was hired to swear that he saw Sidney shoot Henry Walter. It was logical to pick him—he was always fishing. That night he probably wasn't even near Sampson's Slough. His testimony was perjured. I can prove that."

Schuyler said: "Skip it and go on."

"Then Abel Springer was killed. He was killed for one of two reasons. Either because of his testimony against Sidney Tate, or because he was getting scared of perjury. Either way, he was killed to keep him quiet."

"Which is it?" McClintock asked.

"Let's look at it another way," I suggested. "If both Walter and Springer were killed by the same person, then it was the latter. But if we have two killers . . ."

Death Lives Here!

Old man Schuyler flushed angrily. I paused and lit a cigarette. The old man snapped: "Please don't smoke around me." I tossed the cigarette into the fireplace.

"Henry Walter was killed for a couple of reasons," I said. "The most important has to do with the last stockholder meeting of the Schuyler Company. All of you are familiar with what happened. The move to sell out the company was vetoed."

"I don't get it," Drake said.

"Vance got his back up over the deal. He wanted to sell, really, but grandpa held the party line. So Vance approached Henry Walter. His idea was to throw in with the minority stockholders at the next meeting and override the veto. But Henry told him to go climb a tree." I spoke directly to the old man. "Do you get the idea? Vance would vote against you, but Henry Walter would side with you. Nothing would be changed."

THE HARD PLANES of the old man's face began falling apart. He suddenly looked very old.

"Are you accusing Vance?" asked McClintock.

I shook my head. "Not yet. I think Abel Springer was killed for the reason I gave. It ties in with the various attacks on me. Abel Springer was killed because he was dangerous to the killer. I was almost shot once and beaten up twice because the killer decided I was dangerous too." I turned to old man Schuyler. "Did you give Drake the word to make me a present of these lumps?"

The old man shook his head. His face was haggard.

I turned to Vance. "Who was driving when you hit that bum on the highway?"

He looked surprised. "Why—I was."

"The hell you were. Ethel May was at the wheel."

Can You Equal This Home for 2475

**Shipped
Direct
from Our
Mill**



*Save 30% to 40%
on Your New Home..*

Act Now!

Don't pay several hundred dollars more than necessary when you build a home! Buy it direct from our mill at our low factory price. We ship you the materials—lumber cut-to-fit, ready to erect. Paint, glass, hardware, nails, etc., all included in the price—no extra charges. Plans furnished—also complete building instructions. No wonder our customers write us that we saved them 30% to 40%. Prices subject to change without notice.

BIG BOOK
of
House Plans
in Colors
25¢

Handsome Big CATALOGUE

Pictures wonderful homes in colors at money-saving prices. Designs to suit everyone. Send 25¢ for catalogue today.

LEWIS MANUFACTURING CO.
2383 Lafayette Ave., Bay City, Mich.

If an INVENTOR

BELIEVES HE HAS AN INVENTION

a search of the most pertinent prior U. S. Patents should be made and a report obtained relative to its patentability. Write for further particulars, as to patent protection and procedure and "Invention Record" form at once. No obligation.

McMORROW, BERMAN & DAVIDSON

Registered Patent Attorneys
150-L Victor Building Washington I. D. C.

LAW

STUDY AT HOME FOR PERSONAL SUCCESS and LARGER EARNINGS. 39 years expert instruction—over 108,000 students enrolled. LL. B. Degree awarded. All texts furnished. Easy payments. G. I. Approved. Send for FREE BOOK—"Law and Executive Guidance"—NOW!
AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 87-B, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.



DON'T GIVE IN TO GRAY HAIR

Try this famous Gray Hair Coloring Preparation. Give your hair the handsome, youthful color you desire...so gradually even close friends and business associates won't guess your secret. **So easy to use!** Comb this clear liquid through your gray or faded hair. Watch it give your hair the youthful-looking shade you want. Will not harm hair texture. 50-year favorite of thousands. Now give yourself attractive **looking hair**—in the privacy of your home.

Buy a bottle today at your drug or department store. **Money-back guarantee. FREE TRIAL:** Send coupon now for free test kit! See how amazing Mary T. Goldman's works.

MARY T. GOLDMAN'S
AB1 Goldman Bldg., St. Paul 2, Minn.

Send free sample. (Check color of hair)

Black Dark Brown Light Brown
 Medium Brown Blonde Auburn

Name.....
Address.....
City..... State.....

● MECHANICS • HOME STUDY

Step up your own skill with facts & figures of your trade. Audels Mechanics Guides contain Practical Inside Trade Information in handy form. Fully illustrated. Easy to Understand. Highly Endorsed. Check book you want for 7 days' Free Examination. Send no Money. Nothing to pay Postman. □ Carpentry \$6 • □ Auto \$4 • □ Oil Burners \$1 □ Sheet Metal \$1 • □ Welding \$1 • □ Refrigeration \$4 □ Plumbing \$6 • □ Masonry \$6 • □ Painting \$2 • □ Radio \$4 □ Electricity \$4 • □ Mathematics \$2 • □ Steam Engineers \$4 □ Machinist \$4 • □ Blueprint \$2 • □ Diesel \$2 • □ Drawing \$2. If satisfied you pay only \$1 a month until price is paid. AUDEL, Publishers, 49 W. 23 St., New York 10, N. Y.

LAW...

STUDY AT HOME Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before.

More Ability: More Prestige: More Money We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL.B. We furnish all text material, including 16 volumes' Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 48-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send NOW LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY, 417 South Dearborn Street A Correspondence Institution, Dept. 332-L, Chicago, Ill.

GET THIS FINE SUIT NO MONEY TO PAY!

BIG CASH EARNINGS, TOO!

Big news! This fine tailored suit yours without paying one cent—and big cash earnings, too! It's easy! Just take a few orders. Earn up to \$10 in a day and get your own suit as extra bonus. Dozens of rich new fabrics, superbly tailored in latest styles, at low prices produce orders on sight. Money-back guarantee.

FREE SAMPLES! Write today giving name, address, age, etc. for five complete outfits of actual samples and details of amazing new BONUS SUIT and money-making plan—All Sent Free! No experience. **SEND NO MONEY!** W. K. GIBSON, Inc. 5005 Throop, Dept. C-498, CHICAGO 7, Ill.



SALESPeople WORLD'S LARGEST DIRECT SELLING ADVERTISING BOOK MATCH FACTORY

Offers money-making proposition to men or women, full or part time. Liberal cash commissions. No experience needed to start. No investment—now or ever. Year-round selling. Low prices for high quality. Factory service. Repeat orders. Impressive samples printed in FOUR and FIVE colors of ink. Sales kit and instructions furnished. Write today.

MATCH CORPORATION OF AMERICA
3433-43 WEST 48th PLACE, Dept. PG-3, CHICAGO 32, ILL.

"How to Make Money with Simple Cartoons"

A book everyone who likes to draw should have. It is free; no obligation. Simply address **FREE BOOK**

ARTOONISTS' EXCHANGE
Dept. 483 Pleasant Hill, Ohio

INVENTORS

Learn how to protect your invention. Specially prepared "Patent Guide" containing detailed information concerning patent protection and procedure with "Record of Invention" form will be forwarded to you upon request—without obligation.

CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN & HARVEY JACOBSON
Registered Patent Attorneys
826-A District National Bldg. Washington 5, D. C.

High School Course at Home Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H. S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.
American School, Dept. H348, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37

STAMMER?

This new 128-page book, "Stammering, Its Cause and Correction," describes the Bogue Unit Method for scientific correction of stammering and stuttering—successful for 47 years.

Benj. N. Bogue, Dept. 4825, Circle Tower, Indianapolis 4, Ind.

GET THIS FREE BOOK!

New Detective Magazine

"No," he said stubbornly.

"Be careful, Vance. It's important."

He said doggedly: "I was driving."

"It was no accident," I said, "and whoever hit the bum is our killer."

I had their interest now. "The bum is our key. If you ran him down, then you killed Henry Walter and Abel Springer. Not to mention throwing Colvos, Tomlin and Drake at me."

That was a little more trouble than Vance wanted to take on. I could see it in his eyes. It had him worried. His eyes darted toward Ethel May.

She was standing by the fireplace. She asked: "Are you accusing me of all that? Goodness!"

"This is it," I told her. "You asked Henry to meet you there. He was still in love with you—a divorce was *your* idea. That's how he happened to go there. You shot him and made a deal with Abel Springer. He was willing to perjure himself. For money? Probably. But you—well, you're too damned beautiful. Men want you. When Abel Springer began getting jittery about his perjured testimony you had to shoot him."

Sidney Tate gulped. "But why frame me?"

"You like Milltown, don't you?"

"Well—yeah."

"There's the answer. With you out of the way, Ethel May could work on Vance. It wasn't hard. Vance *wanted* to get away from Milltown. If both of them voted their block of stock to sell, the Schuyler Company could be sold.

"But that meant Henry Walter had to be out of the way. Only as his widow could Ethel May inherit the stock." I was watching her now. "There's even more. Henry was going to contest the divorce. It would have been messy. It might have been so messy that both Sidney and Vance would figure you weren't worth it. And then where would you be?"

Death Lives Here!

She said: "Of course you can't prove any of this."

"This next part is kind of funny," I said. "You got Abel Springer to perjure himself. The funny thing is, there really was a witness. An old bum who happened to be shacking up in the old sawmill."

I paused a second. "This next part is guesswork, but it's logical. Sidney was arrested and the bum decided to aid and abet justice. Then he got a brainstorm. He decided to blackmail you instead. You arranged to meet him out on the highway. Then you got Vance to let you drive his car. You killed the bum so that it seemed like an accident. Vance agreed to take the blame, since your own driver's license was suspended."

With a flourish I pulled the sheets of notepaper I'd got at Hellstrom's from my pocket.

"The old bum started a lot of letters and then threw them away. He couldn't get things started right. Then he decided on blackmail. So the next letter was addressed to you. That's why you were down there when I ran into you—trying to find anything incriminating around."

I swallowed a couple of times. The back of my neck was wet. I began: "Dear Madam, I seen you shoot your husband . . ."

Ethel May said tightly: "That isn't what the letter says."

"So he did write you?" I said. Suddenly I began to feel pretty good.

McClintock said to her: "Where's the letter?"

Drake said to her: "Damn you! You called me from Rosie's about this gumshoe making passes at you. Where's the gun that killed Henry?"

She just seemed to fall apart in that moment. It was all of us picking on her like that, more than anything else.

"Hee, hee, hee," she said. It wasn't laughter.

How To Relieve Bronchitis

Creomulsion relieves promptly because it goes right to the seat of the trouble to help loosen and expel germ laden phlegm, and aid nature to soothe and heal raw, tender inflamed bronchial mucous membranes. Tell your druggist to sell you a bottle of Creomulsion with the understanding you must like the way it quickly allays the cough or you are to have your money back.

CREOMULSION
for Coughs, Chest Colds, Bronchitis

ACCOUNTANT

BECOME AN EXPERT

Executive Accountants and C. P. A.'s earn \$2,000 to \$10,000 a year. Thousands of firms need them. We train you thoroly at home in spare time for C. P. A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous experience unnecessary. Personal training under supervision of staff of C. P. A.'s. Placement counsel and help. Write for free book, "Accountancy, the Profession That Pays."

LASALLE Extension University, 417 So. Dearborn St.
A Correspondence Institution Dept. 3334-H Chicago 5, Ill.

WATERPROOF YOUR SHOES!

DEWATEX keeps shoes dry! Keeps Feet Dry! Leather shoes treated with DEWATEX wear longer, give greater protection. Help guard children's health—use DEWATEX regularly. A colorless, non-injurious cream, easily applied. It's not sticky or greasy. Treated shoes take beautiful shine. Exactly same formula sold to U. S. Armed Forces. DEWATEX permits leather to breathe. Comes in 4 oz. tubes with brush for applying. Buy at leading stores or send \$1.00 direct for tube postpaid.

DEWATEX, INC., 242 West 38th St., New York 18, N. Y.

SPECIAL SUBSCRIPTION OFFER!

ARGOSY

FOR MEN

14 BIG ISSUES FOR ONLY \$2.50

Here's a magazine offer you'll want to act on! Fourteen big issues of that action-packed Man's Magazine, ARGOSY, for only \$2.50. Mail in the coupon today so you don't miss a single issue of good reading.

A TIP TO WIVES AND SWEETHEARTS

ARGOSY makes a swell gift for any man. Take advantage of this offer, give us your name and we'll tell him whom it's from.

ARGOSY, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

Here's my \$2.50. I accept your special subscription offer of 14 issues.

Name

Address

City..... Zone... State.....



SEND FOR THIS FREE!

HOW to BREAK and TRAIN HORSES

Make money with horses. Every farmer, every lover of horseflesh should have a copy of this booklet. If you want to know how to break, train and make money with horses, write today for full information FREE, together with my special offer of a course in Animal Breeding. If you are interested in Gaiting and Riding the saddle horse check here. Do it today—now. You'll never regret it.

BEERY SCHOOL OF HORSEMANSHIP
Dept. 843 Pleasant Hill, Ohio

CONFIDENTIAL LOAN SERVICE

Borrow \$50 to \$300!

Need money? No matter where you live you can borrow **BY MAIL** \$50.00 to \$300.00 this easy quick confidential way.

BY MAIL

IT IS EASY TO BORROW BY MAIL! Completely confidential and private **CONVENIENT MONTHLY PAYMENTS**

NO ENDORSERS NEEDED EMPLOYED MEN and women of good character can solve their money problems quickly and in privacy with loans **MADE BY MAIL.** No endorsers or co-signers. We do not contact employers, friends or relatives. Convenient monthly payments. Send us your name and address and we will mail application blank and complete details **FREE** in plain envelope. There is no obligation.

STATE FINANCE COMPANY
511 Walker Bank Bldg., Dept. 8-74, Salt Lake City 9, Utah

Get into Good Paying AUTO BODY and FENDER WORK

BIG DEMAND in Auto Body and Fender work. Start training now in your spare time at home for good pay work. Practical shop experience included. U. E. I. Training covers metal work, welding, painting, etc. Placement service—or we will show you how to start your own shop. Behind U. E. I. TRAINING is a large national organization founded 1927. Write today for FREE FACTS—No obligation.

Approved for Training under G.I. Bill

AUTO-CRAFTS DIVISION • UTILITIES ENGINEERING INSTITUTE
2523 SHEFFIELD AVE., DEPT. X-9AG, CHICAGO 14, ILLINOIS

New Detective Magazine

She reached toward the mantel and came up with the two silver-mounted dueling pistols, one in either hand.

She began to circle us. Maybe she could make a break and maybe she couldn't.

"Don't move," Drake said to me. "Your gun ain't loaded. I took the slugs out after we worked you over."

"Hee, hee, hee." She was nearing the door.

Alderson Drake sighed. "It's kind of up to me. She's my daughter."

"I'll shoot to kill," she said.

He didn't seem to hear her. He walked slowly toward her. There was no excitement in him. "Gimme those guns, Ethel May." His voice was flat, without emotion.

He was within three feet of her when she fired. He fell toward her. He took a wavering step and then fell against her and they both went down.

I leaped for the other gun. The slug whanged past my ear. Then I had the gun. It didn't matter anyway. She'd shot the works.

She sat and screamed crazily. The crazy laughter filled the room. Her face became a queer shade of purple and the cords of her neck stood out, and still she kept on laughing. Then all at once it was over. She collapsed there on the floor, across the body of her father.

The deputies ran in from outside. One of them said that Alderson Drake was still alive. Somebody called an ambulance.

"Let's see that damned note," McClintock said.

"It won't mean a thing," I said. "After writing Ethel May the bum wrote another letter. Here's about all you can make out. 'Dear Sis, I am still alive and happy and maybe I'm going to be wealthy too . . .'"

Old man Schuyler's eyes looked dead. I lit a cigarette. He didn't even yell at me to put it out.

"Seductive as Scarlett—ambitious as Amber"

... and a match for the devil himself!

*PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

This Fascinating New Tale of Flaming Love and Terror

Yours for a **3 cent stamp!**

with FREE membership in THE DOLLAR BOOK CLUB

THE WEB OF DAYS

HESTER SNOW came to Seven Chimneys to be governess to the only son of an old Georgia plantation family. Put in this huge and eerie mansion, set in the midst of a decaying island estate, Hester found that passion, greed and cruelty held sway. St. Clair Le Grand, arrogant, perverted, whip-wielding master of the thousand acres, calmly watched his wife drink herself into forgetfulness while he coveted Hester. Roi Le Grand, barred from the house, stole embraces from Hester that stirred her to her depths but left her troubled and suspicious. Tawn, the velvety-eyed wench who occupied the

overseer's house threatened Hester with "conjur."

Why did Hester stay? What determined Hester to be mistress of Seven Chimneys—even if it meant bearing St. Clair a son? Why did she remain ever a challenge and a taunt to Roi, even though she gave herself to another man?

Read Edna Lee's sensational new novel, "The Web of Days," a historical romance so unusual, with a heroine so new and captivating, that you'll thrill to every page! We'll mail you a copy right away for just a 3c stamp if you accept this offer of FREE membership in the Dollar Book Club.

Dollar Book Club Membership Is Free!

NO OTHER book club brings you popular current books by outstanding authors for only \$1.00 each. Every selection is a handsome, full-sized library edition printed exclusively for members. You do not have to accept a book every month; only the purchase of

six books a year is necessary.

Best-sellers by favorite authors are received by members at \$1.00 each while the public is paying from \$2.50 to \$3.00 for the publisher's edition, at retail. 600,000 discriminating families buy their books this money-saving way!

Choose Your First Selection from These Best Sellers

Upon receipt of the attached coupon with a 8c stamp you will send a copy of "The Web of Days." You will also receive as your first selection for \$1.00 your choice of any of these four best sellers:

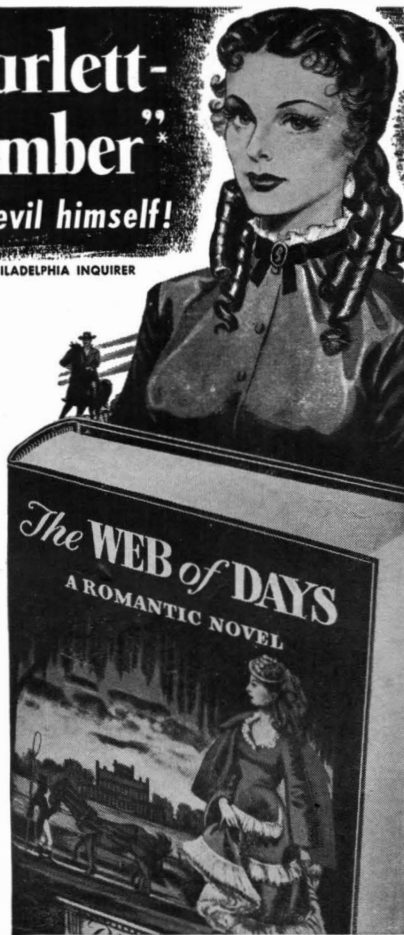
● **Woman of Property** by Mabel Seeley. What wouldn't a woman do for money! Ask the many husbands Frieda sold herself to.

● **Yankee Pasha** by Edison Marshall. From Salem to Tartary, this fighting Yankee was irresistible to women!

● **Unconquered** by Neil H. Swanson. The thrilling new tale of love and adventure on which the movie is based.

● **Gentleman's Agreement** by Laura Z. Hobson. The sensational best-seller about an amazing masquerade.

For convenience members prefer to have shipped and pay for books every other month. The descriptive folder called "The Bulletin," sent to members, describes the forthcoming two months' selections and reviews other titles (in the original publishers' editions selling at retail for \$2.50 or more) available to members at only \$1 each. If you do not wish either of the two new selections for \$1 each, you may notify the Club, so that the books will not be sent you. In any case, you may purchase any of the other titles offered for \$1 each. Mail the coupon to **DOUBLEDAY ONE DOLLAR BOOK CLUB, Garden City, N. Y.**



MAIL THIS COUPON DOUBLEDAY ONE DOLLAR BOOK CLUB

Dept. 3 P.O.P., Garden City, New York

Please enroll me free as a Dollar Book Club subscriber and send me at once "The Web of Days" for the enclosed 3c stamp. Also send me as my first selection for the \$1.00 the book I have checked below:

- Gentleman's Agreement** **Woman of Property**
 Yankee Pasha **Unconquered**

With these books will come my first issue of the free descriptive folder called "The Bulletin" telling about the two new forthcoming one-dollar bargain book selections and several additional bargains which are offered for \$1.00* each to members only. I am to have the privilege of notifying you in advance if I do not wish either of the following months' selections and whether or not I wish to purchase any of the other bargains at the Special Club Price of \$1.00 each. The purchase of books is entirely voluntary on my part. I do not have to accept a book every month—only six during the year to fulfill my membership requirement. I pay nothing except \$1.00 for each selection received plus a few cents shipping cost.

Mr. _____
Mrs. _____
Miss _____
(Please PRINT)

St. and No. _____
Zone No. _____

City _____ (if any) _____

State _____

Occupation _____ If under 21, Age please.
*Same Price in Canada: 105 Bond St., Toronto 2.



for every writer's every written word!

SENTINEL DeLuxe THREESOME

The only complete writing ensemble—everything you'll ever need for whatever, wherever, however you write!

Sheaffer's celebrated "TRIUMPH" pen for character writing—for putting you on paper! The dependable ball-tipped STRATOWRITER for quick notes and casual writing—for making carbons, for signing stencils, for addressing packages, for permanent red or blue writing on almost any surface.

And Sheaffer's famous FINELINE pencil for all erasable writing—for figuring, sketching, jotting memoranda.

Three separate and distinct writing instruments—but only one quality, top quality, Sheaffer's quality!

SENTINEL DE LUXE THREESOME—"TRIUMPH" PEN with 14-K gold point, \$15; STRATOWRITER, \$10; Pencil, \$5; complete set, \$30. No Federal Tax.

SHEAFFER'S

Copyright 1947, W. A. Sheaffer Pen Co.

Listen Sunday to SHEAFFER'S PARADE with Eddy Howard—NBC Network: 3 P.M.E.S.T., 2 P.M.C.T., 1 P.M.M.T., 12 Noon P.T.