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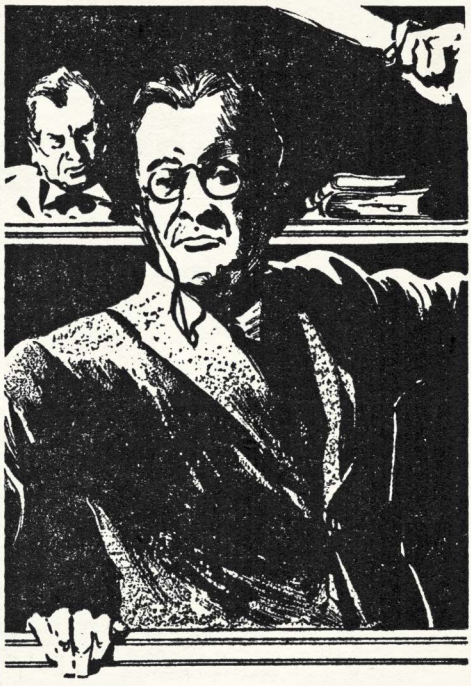

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They had something there. There is much more to crime than meets the eye

(Continued on page 8)

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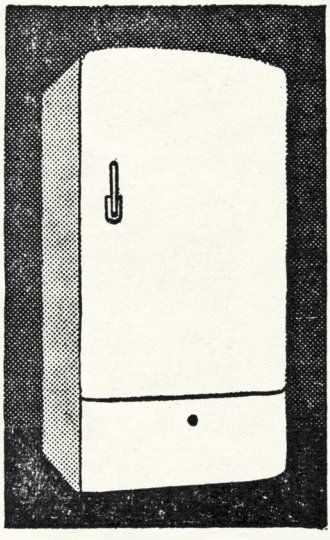

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1850—ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF ICE PROGRESS—1950

New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 6)

And that's why this space is here, so that we can get the little known facts of criminal history together and bring them to meet your eyes. Thus far, with your help, we've succeeded admirably. You've been sending in factual tales at a pace that kills. We're happy to say that our grapple for this issue got plenty.

It was this way, Judge:

Dear Editor:

With the possible exception of a few Oriental kings, no persons in history have received such elaborate funerals as did the gangster chiefs of the prohibition era. Joseph Catania, Guiseppe Masseria, Daniel J. Iamascia and 'Little Augie' Pisano each had funerals costing more than $50.000.

But the grandest exit of all was made by Frankie Yale. Shot on a quiet Sunday afternoon in July, 1927, the Brooklyn mobster died almost instantly. His gang determined to give him a funeral worthy of a racket tycoon. They selected a coffin of fourteen-gauge silver, lined with copper—and paid for it with fifteen $1000 bills.

The floral tributes filled thirty-seven automobiles, and it was estimated that each held at least a thousand dollars' worth of flowers. The widow's tribute was a huge bleeding heart of red roses, with a dagger of violets plunged into its center. Yale's mob sent a floral clock of blue and white violets, with gold hands set at 4:10, the instant of his death. As a companion piece, they sent a pillow of red roses, against the background of which white carnations spelled out the terse promise, "We'll see them, Kid."

Other tributes included such pieces as a twenty-foot cross, a ten-foot lyre, and an eighteen-foot tower of red and white roses. The coffin itself was covered with a blanket of American Beauty roses, and the improvised caisson on which it rested was festooned with orchids. Dressed in an imported tuxedo, the corpse held a gold rosary in one hand and a pair of natty suede gloves in the other. The undertaker later boasted that not a single mourner who viewed the body as it lay in state was able to detect the bulletholes in it.

After a five-mile parade through the streets of Brooklyn, the funeral procession entered Holy Cross Cemetery. A select group of 112 male mourners tossed blossoms on top of the casket, and Frankie Yale rested in peace.

Myra Donner
Brooklyn, New York.

(Continued on page 10)

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(Continued from page 8)

Dear Editor:

Squaring oneself with the law has been known to require strange gestures. In peaceable Sweden, a few years ago, a shortage of manpower caused a ban on all private building, with the single loophole that you still could build a house if you and your family did all the work.

One house-hungry but unskilled citizen defied the law and hired a carpenter. A Government building license bureau, firm but sympathetic, offered the man two alternatives: face prosecution, or legally adopt the carpenter as his son. He adopted the carpenter.

At the other extreme is the case of a rugged individualist bicycle thief, who figured society was in debt to him, and made it pay. The bicycle he stole—back in the days when subway fare was a nickel and meat was five cents a pound—was valued at fifteen dollars. He was sent to jail for thirty days, where he figured that, as his time was worth a dollar a day, the world owed him fifteen dollars. Upon release, he stole exactly fifteen dollars worth of merchandise—no more, no less. Considering that society would be glad to hear it had paid its debt, he announced what he had done—and was promptly returned to jail.

After his second release, he went to the home of the chief of police, and removed everything he could carry. Society had been slow to learn, but this time the lesson sank in. It left the bicycle thief alone.

Leonard Wood
Oak Park, Illinois

And here's the story of a man who turned an unsuccessful career as a jail-breaker into a fortune:

Dear Editor:

Robert McCoy, 33, of Utah, knew he was meant to succeed. Taking a hunch for a sign of success, he went out confidently to rob a bank one day in 1924. It was a bum guess—McCoy's gun went off at a bad time and killed a man.

Prison didn't dim his confidence in himself. He was quick with his hands.

McCoy made his way out. Twice they brought him back.

The middle-aged convict still believed, in the face of all evidence to the contrary, that he'd been born lucky. The quick fingers and the good brain hadn't deteriorated. He set to work perfecting his metal cutter—who'd know more about a metal cutter than a prisoner who'd spent years planning escape? And then the thing happened. His design was good. It was patented. A company to manufacture it was financed at $100,000.

When McCoy was released last December, he'd at last gloriously recouped on the bad guess he made back in '24.

Leonard Garth
Gary, Indiana

Take a tip: horseplayers always die broke:

Dear Editor:

This is the story of a slow horse named Fayenza and a slow crook known as Brains. Although they never met, Brains, otherwise identified as W. W. Young, track character, was informed that Fayenza was the long shot in the Champlains Handicap.

The year was 1926. The town was Chicago. There was plenty of money around, Young knew, for those with the wit to steal it, and he was sure he had the wit. He organized a syndicate, with himself as the mastermind and the Champlains Handicap as the plum. Two men, named Davis and Clark, were sent to the stables on the afternoon of the race, about an hour before post time. Their mission: to feed the favorites just enough strychnine to slow them up. While they were about this precaution, Young was betting the mob's bankroll on Fayenza.

A good thing can be overdone. Davis, sure that Clark was a chump, slipped a few extra poisoned sugar cubes to six out of the seven horses in the race. And when the gun went off, Fayenza had the track to himself. Instead of declaring him the winner, as Davis seems hopefully to have expected, track officials called the whole race off.

Meantime, Young was rushing out of town to meet his bookies. In order, perhaps, to avoid attention, he slipped inconspicuously past a red light, and was stopped by a policeman, the last man he wanted to see. The first explanation that came to his lips was that he was a bank president en route to a conference. This possibility was swiftly discounted when the law discovered that the syndicate chief couldn't even read a stop sign.

The entire mob was ingloriously rounded up within a matter of hours, and would soon have been forgotten, even for the laughs, except for a macabre aftermath. Of the six poisoned horses, two died, and the other four were finished forever with racing.

All the plotters drew prison sentences except Young. Upon payment of a fine, and after reimbursing the owners for their horses, a total of $40,000, he was set free.

John Wheelwright
Coral Gables, Florida

And here's the historical dope on a deadly drug:

Dear Editor:

Dreaded throughout history as the Queen Mother of poisons, variously known as wolf's-bane, leopard's-bane, or Borgia wine, the deadly drug aconite has a long, dishonorable history. In modern times, it has been used in minute quantities for medicinal

(Continued on page 12)

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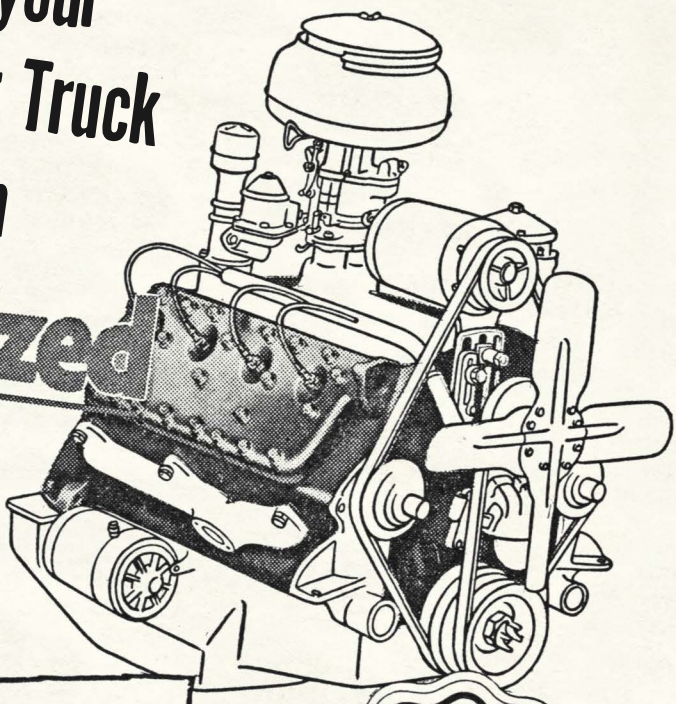

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(Continued from page 10)

purposes; anciently, it was fit for an emperor's revenge or any other pressing state problem that called for murder as a solution. Until 1853 it was so closely guarded that no single case of its use as a poison had been reported in the English-speaking world.

Oddly enough, the killer who broke the record was neither druggist nor scholar, but a barely literate New York State farm boy who had married the prettiest girl in the neighborhood and then gotten tired of her. In fact, so low was John Hendrickson's reputation for learning ability, that when a coroner reported traces of the rare medieval drug in Maria Hendrickson's body, that evidence alone was almost enough to acquit him. However, he was solidly disliked, and every indication pointed to his guilt.

Until the day they hanged him, curious Albany County tried to pry an explanation from John Hendrickson. How had he heard of aconite? How had he come by it?

But he died like an emperor. He wouldn't, or couldn't, tell.

Albert Vail
Syracuse, New York

And then there was the New Jersey lady who turned out to be a latter day Borgia. She'd still be operating—if it weren't for a mere loaf of bread. Here's how:

Dear Editor:

John Schlembach's ambition was to be a detective. While supporting his family as a bakery truck driver, he took the entrance examination for the New York City police force, and passed with honors. However, no vacancy occurred until John had passed the age limit for entrants. He shrugged his capable shoulders, and resigned himself to selling cake and bread for life.

Late in the summer of 1935, he found himself with a long-unpaid account for $18 due from one of his customers, a Mrs. Mary Creighton. As Schlembach had had to make the amount good out of his own pocket, he began to press for collection. Bad-tempered Mrs. Creighton not only refused to pay—she went to Schlembach's employers with a fabricated complaint that almost had him fired.

You can't do that to a detective, even a frustrated one. Schlembach, out for blood and eighteen dollars, started talking to neighbors. The first thing he learned was an almost startling corroboration of his feeling that Mary Creighton was not a nice person. Years before, gossip ran, when Mary was a pretty young bride, she had been suspected of poisoning her adoptive parents (who were also her parents-in-law) and her younger brother, all of whom had died. The State of New Jersey had tried her for murder, but there had been insufficient evidence for conviction.

Also, the people next door to the Creightons in Baldwin, Long Island, hadn't lived there long. Previous tenants had moved rather suddenly.

Why? In his spare time, the bakery salesman traced Mrs. Creighton's former neighbor, a Mrs. Rehm, currently of Long Island City. She had moved, Mrs. Rehm said simply, because she had become frightened of Mrs. Creighton. They had quarreled—Mrs. Creighton had brought suit, and won judgment—and then, rather abruptly, Mrs. Creighton had resumed friendly overtures with housewifely offerings of homemade chili and chocolate pudding. They had made her, Mrs. Rehm said, a little too sick even for careless cooking to explain. Worried, she'd checked rumors, obtained photostatic copies of the New Jersey trial procedure, and, impressed by certain similarities in diet among dead people who'd eaten off Mary Creighton's table, decided to move far away.

Schlembach began to understand why his bread bill hadn't been paid. It was good, wholesome bread—and as such, apparently, not worth Mrs. Creighton's money. She hadn't known that a sleuthing service went with the delivery. He called at her home to inform her of the fact, and found black crepe on the door.

It was just a question of finding out who had died—and then Schlembach went to the police. At first, they laughed at him. But he had built up a strong case in his month of extracurricular collection.

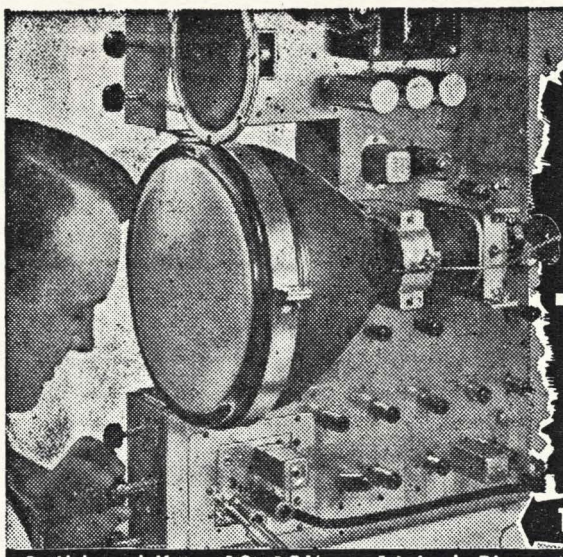
Within ten days, Mrs. Creighton had at last paid all but three dollars of the overdue bill. But it was too late. She was already in custody. The rest is police history. After also confessing to the murders of which she'd been acquitted back in 1923, Mrs. Creighton was electrocuted for the poison killing of her tenant in the Baldwin bungalow, Mrs. Ada Applegate. How many lives were saved by putting this Borgia out of the way, no one ventured to guess.

And John Schlembach, no longer frustrated, went back to his truck—with a new respect for bread.

Daniel Lumbacher
Patchogue, Long Island

That makes up a full cell block, crime fans. We just don't have any more space for the gory and the unusual about the illegal. But keep sending in the stories that you come upon from the world of crime. We'll be happy to use them and to hear from you.

—THE EDITORS



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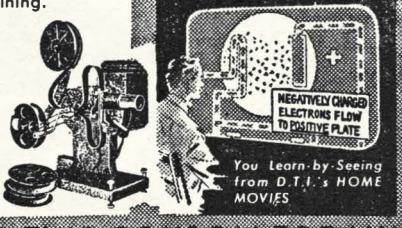

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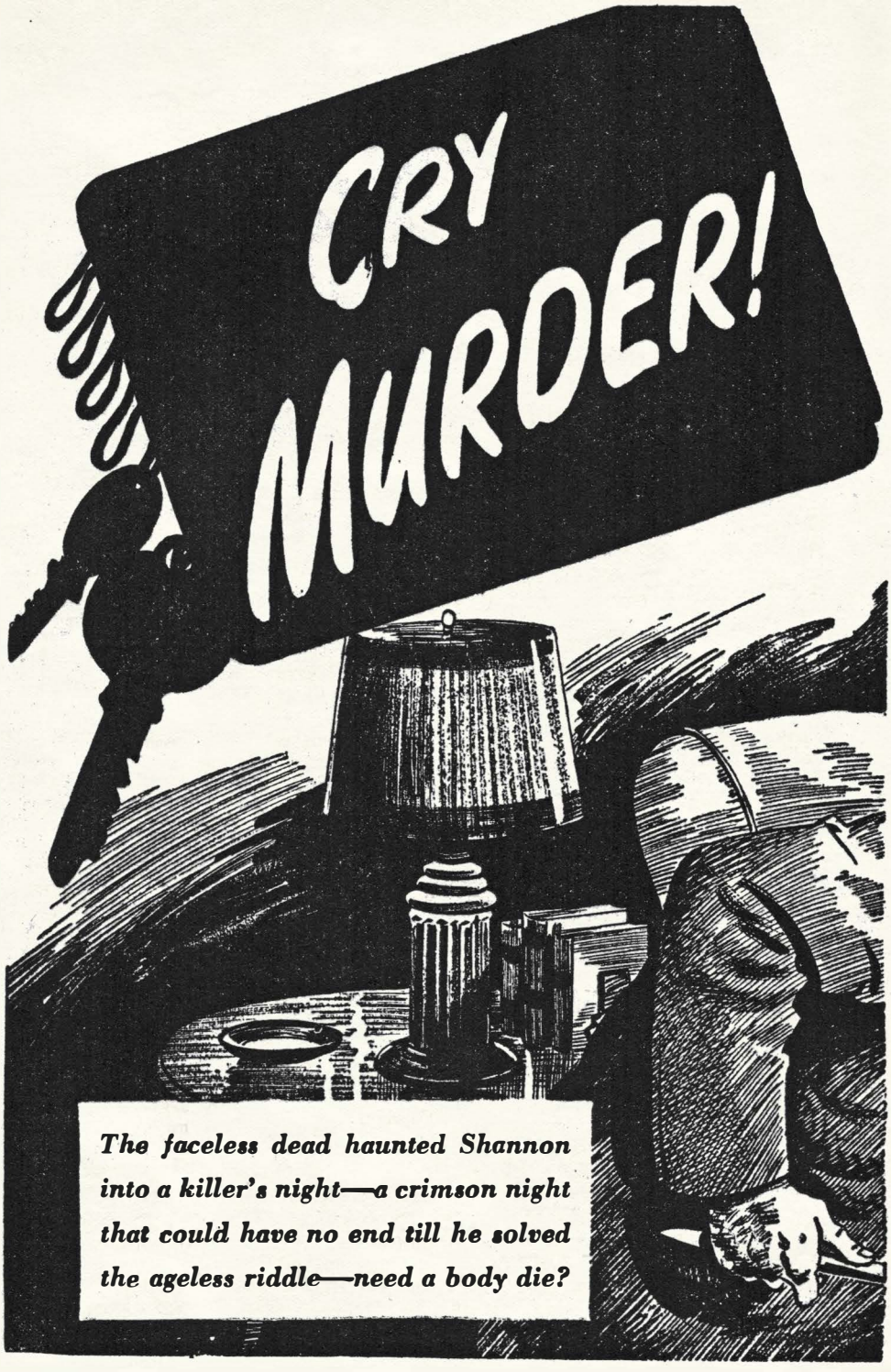

CRY MURDER!
The faceless dead haunted Shannon into a killer's night—a crimson night that could have no end till he solved the ageless riddle—need a body die?

A NOVEL BY **G. T. Fleming-Roberts**

As he moved forward, Shannon let the lug wrench slide out of his sleeve. . . .

CHAPTER ONE

The Big Push

IT DIDN'T look like a murder scene. There was no blood anywhere. No corpse. The living room of the Dayan apartment suggested cocktails and sleek women with strong, not incongruent overtones of violence. An upset lamp. An overturned table. A shattered highball glass.

Shannon had seen the body fall out of the light-spangled dark above North Pennsylvania Street. It had to be Shannon. Of all the people on the near north side of Indianapolis that night who might have witnessed the crime, it had to be Shannon, who wanted no part of it.

He didn't know why he had looked up when he did. Perhaps there had been a faint, despairing cry from the top floor window before that awful downward rush. Whatever it was, Shannon had looked up, and there was the dark shape hurtling down, twisting and whirling as it fell. It had dived head foremost into the sidewalk.

The blood was down there. On the sidewalk. Up here there was nothing. Nothing except the police, the open window, and the chalk-faced kid with the sullen and resentful mouth.

He was not properly a kid, Shannon decided. Twenty-four or five, at least. But when you're thirty-eight, as Shannon was, when you've spent the last twelve years of your life on the police beat, any man under thirty is, by comparison, a kid. This Stanley George—he'd given that as his name along with a St. Louis address—kept his jaw defiantly firm, but that didn't fool anybody. He was sick with fear. MacIlrath, the prowl car cop, had caught him in the elevator, and the kid had pulled a cheap gun.

"Sit down, Mr. George," Lieutenant Sam Kerestes said, being very casual about it.

Stanley George sat uneasily in the armless chair near the open window. The chill draft rumpled his chestnut hair. He didn't seem to have any hat. He had hands, though, and they bothered him until he finally hid them in the pockets of the tan fleece coat he wore over a neat brown suit. His dazed blue eyes searched Kerestes' sallow face, and there was nothing there the kid needed or wanted. He tried Duff's bland features and, perhaps deciding that such mildness in a police detective must be deception, settled on Shannon in the background.

Shannon turned away wondering, *Why me, kid? An old, beat-up newspaperman, out of a job. I just happened along, and I wish to hell I'd gone to a movie.*

"Why'd you do it, Mr. George?" Kerestes asked in that quiet, abrasive voice of his.

Stanley George's lips parted and his bewildered eyes snapped back to the lieutenant's yellowish face. He shook his head.

"Not me," he said. "No."

"Look—" Kerestes held a match and a cigarette— "there was Dayan and you. You had a key. Two ways out of here—the one Dayan took and the automatic elevator. *One* elevator—the other is jammed some way. Not the stairs. The janitor was mopping, and he'd see anybody on the stairs. You in the elevator—just you—and the elevator didn't stop between here and the ground floor. You walk right into MacIlrath on his way up. And you pull a gun, don't forget that. MacIlrath says, 'Hey, you!' or something, and you pull the gun. So—" the match head exploded under Kerestes' thumb and the kid jumped— "so don't sit there and say, 'Not me,' Mr. George."

The kid swallowed past dryness. His lips had a bluish cast.

"I—I didn't," he stammered.

"But you were seen. This gentleman here—" Kerestes turned ripe olive eyes on Shannon, expecting corroboration.

Shannon said, "Somebody, Sam. Like I told you, as Mac and Moracci got out of the prowl car, I looked up again. Somebody's head and shoulders out of the window up here. Anybody's, from that distance at night."

If he was disappointed, Kerestes was too smart to show it. He accepted Shannon's statement with an eager nod and started to work on the kid with it.

"It had to be you, Mr. George. Re-

member, only two ways down from here, and you didn't jump. You were the man who looked out of the window."

Stanley George closed his eyes briefly. "Me," he croaked. "It was me."

"Now we're getting somewhere," Kerestes said. "You looked out the window, saw the crowd. Saw the prowl car. You knew you had to get moving. You'd maybe counted on the crowd, but not on the prowl car."

"Wait." Stanley George held up a hand that trembled coarsely. There were shiny pinpoints of sweat on the palm. "I'm trying to tell you. You say Dayan and I—"

"Well, who else?" Kerestes crowded the kid harshly.

The kid was shaking his head again. Both hands were in the open now, tight pink-and-white fists.

"Nobody else—if you'd just let me tell you. Not even Dayan. Everything just like it is now. The lamp, the table, everything. I didn't touch anything except maybe the windowsill when I looked out."

Kerestes took half a step back. He sneered and his dark eyes glinted dangerously. "Oh, sure. Who let you in, Mr. George?"

The kid reached in under the overcoat, fumbling for a pocket.

"I've got a key. I'll show you. I let myself in. And went to the window, naturally. A window open wide like that in the middle of January?" His smile was sickly. He brought out the key. dropped it, and Duff picked it up. Duff padded toward the door and winked as he passed Shannon.

"This key," Kerestes was saying. "Where'd you get it? You must have been pretty friendly with Dayan. Or—" he smiled nastily, "Mrs. Dayan, huh?"

A flush spread upwards across Stanley George's face. His clenched fists hammered soundlessly on his thighs.

"Stop it! Stop putting in lies, damn you! I didn't even know there was a Mrs. Dayan. I met Dayan twice. Last month—the last time I made Indianapolis. And then this afternoon at the station, when I got off the train. I ran into Dayan at the station. He said there was a private card game going on here tonight. I was to take the key and let myself in. He didn't say that he lived here."

DUFF came back from the door, caught Kerestes' eye, and nodded. The key fitted, but the story about the card game didn't. No cards, no chips, no table, no players. And, Shannon thought, no time. No time for anybody else to have left the apartment via the one elevator between the instant that Dayan's body had slashed down through thin air and the moment that Stanley George's head had appeared at the window.

No, Shannon told himself, it had to be the kid.

"All right," Kerestes said, as though he accepted the idea of the card game. He brought something wrapped in a handkerchief out of his pocket. "We'll say you were coming here to a nice friendly little card game." He unfolded the corners of the handkerchief. Somewhere in the room, a flashbulb went off and struck light from the nickeled surface of the cheap little revolver that Kerestes displayed. Kerestes was slightly startled. The kid wasn't, Shannon noticed. Cold numbness had settled on the kid.

"Why the gun. George?" Kerestes lashed out at the kid.

Why the gun? There had to be a reason, and knowing it, Stanley George reeled slightly in the chair.

Kerestes abruptly lateraled to Duff. Kerestes had softened the kid, now Duff would come in and kill him with kindness. Shannon caught Kerestes' eye as the latter went striding off in disgust.

"Sam—" Shannon said quietly.

Kerestes altered his course and came toward Shannon with a confident smile on his thin lips. Over by the open window, Duff was getting down to the kid's level, one hand on Stanley George's shoulder.

"Stan," Duff was saying. "That what they call you? That what your mother calls you? Let's you and me go on into the bedroom for a smoke, huh, Stan?"

Shannon felt sick.

"If you're through with me, Sam," he said to Kerestes.

The lieutenant looked puzzled. "I thought I was giving you a break, Pete."

Shannon said, "I quit the *Telegram*—didn't you know?"

"No! When?" Kerestes shook his head. He couldn't get over it—the *Telegram* still on the street and Shannon not on the *Telegram*.

"Week, ten days ago."

"What the hell are you doing?"

"Free lance," Shannon said. He worked up a smile. "Always wanted to. Articles."

"Honest?" Kerestes looked pleased. "The big time?"

"Well, not right away," Shannon explained. "Fact crime stories now." He made another start toward the door, Kerestes following him.

"Pete, that's swell. I mean it. And sometime when the well runs dry, I've got a story I think you could use."

So had everybody. Shannon had a story himself, and he wanted to get off alone with it. He went through the door. The cop posted there was Mac MacIlrath, Shannon's brother-in-law, a huge, sometimes fumbling man, perpetually tired. Not like his sister. Not like Sally had been. Shannon worked up a smile for MacIlrath and the reporters. Familiar faces surrounded him. Familiar voices were raised. "Pete always did get the breaks . . . made a few for himself, didn't he? Give the devil his due . . . what about this one, Pete? Who've they got in there?"

"Nobody we know," Shannon told them. "A Stanley George from St. Louis. Travels in dry goods, he said." He became aware of MacIlrath breathing down his neck. He looked around and up at the big cop. "How's everything, Mac?" MacIlrath looked worried. Or it was that aura of embarrassment he had worn since Sally had decided she'd had all of Pete Shannon she could take? Six months, though, was a hell of a long time to wear an aura.

"What do you think?" Mac batted colorless lashes, his eyes fumbling.

"I don't. All you get is a headache." Shannon tried to push on, but Mac nipped at the sleeve of Shannon's shapeless grey coat, jerking his head to indicate the Dayan apartment.

"About that in there, I mean."

"Hell, Mac," Shannon said, smiling. "How would I know? Sam seems to think they've got their boy." He pulled away, got away from them all, walked on past the two elevators to the service stair. The janitor would have noticed anybody who had left the floor that way, Kerestes had said. But suppose the janitor was lying? Suppose somebody, in passing, slipped him a sawbuck to keep his mouth shut? *All right now, Shannon. Cut it out, see? It's probably just as open and shut as Kerestes wants it to be.*

He tried to believe that, Shannon did, as he stood in the pool of yellow light outside the apartment entrance. There were a few people hanging around. Even tomorrow there would still be a few because of the stain on the sidewalk. Shannon passed them, turned north into the night, melding with it, his mood as bleak as the wind that scudded the hard white granules of sleet along the walk. Cars passed with a wintry rush, but Shannon's gait was at least twice as old as he was. Feet moving, that was all. Not going anywhere. Unless a room two flights up off Sixteenth Street was anywhere.

He had thought, as lovely as Sally was, that things about her acquired a loveliness. Even this dump, where they'd lived for nearly two years after their marriage. Then, "I wanted a home. Is it too much to ask, Pete? To be just a housewife instead of a short order cook for a—a—"

"A bum?" he'd suggested from deep in his chair, looking up at the tall, slim girl who had dusty gold in her hair. Looking up, laughing until he noticed how earnest she was about this.

"A sort of bum," Sally had said, gray eyes narrowing. "You are, Pete. And I'm through. I've stalled off the last bill collector. I've vulcanized the last good steak, rewarming it. We're all washed up, understand?"

He didn't blame her. He should have known it wouldn't work. The difference in their ages had been obstacle enough. Then add the place in which he'd asked her to live. Add the hours he kept and the money he couldn't keep. His money always seemed to trickle off somewhere while he was waiting for a story to break, or while waiting to see the right people who were as often as not the wrong people—the racketeers and ward bosses, the touts and the grifters. Grifters like this Charley Dayan they'd just scraped off the sidewalk. A con man. *Queer way for a con man to go,* Shannon thought. Shoved through an eighth story window. A con man usually died like anybody else, in bed.

CHAPTER TWO

Death and the Lady

A CAR stopped out on Sixteenth Street. Its door slammed. Heavy footsteps plodded on the stair. Shannon put his glass down on the extension leaf of his typewriter stand and listened, following the footsteps up to the second flight. When he was reasonably sure of their destination, he put a hand out and turned off the lamp. There was a loud knock on his door.

"Pete, Hey, Pete. Want to talk to you."

Shannon didn't stir from his chair. He thought, *Go away, Mac. Just leave me alone.*

MacIlrath tried the knob. "Want me to break it in, Pete?" He started to try, and a thin panel cracked a little under pressure from a massive shoulder.

Shannon cursed softly as he got up, went to the door and turned over the key. MacIlrath opened the door and looked in.

"Mac, you know what time it is?" Shannon asked.

"Better than you. One-ten in the A.M." MacIlrath blew on the cold fingers of his right hand while his left fumbled along the wall to find the light switch that illuminated the hideous fixture in the center of the ceiling. Loose mouth ajar, the big cop stared at Shannon.

"You got your clothes on."

Shannon laughed shortly. "Is there a new curfew law—you got to have your clothes off after midnight?"

MacIlrath gave his head a worried half shake. As he moved across the room, his eyes were busy. Baffled but busy. He noticed the glass, the bottle. The wastebasket beside the typewriter stand. The magazine stuffed down in the wastebasket.

"This it, Pete—the one with your article in it?"

"It's right where it belongs," Shannon said.

But Mac had already stooped to the wastebasket, had recovered the magazine. He must have noticed Sally's letter, now topmost in the basket—the letter in which she'd asked Shannon if he couldn't file suit for divorce. She'd put it straightforwardly. There was a young man in the office where she worked who wanted to marry her, and at this point, the letter had dropped leadenly and straight into the

basket. He'd put the magazine that carried his first free lance article down on top of the letter.

"You heard anything from Sally lately?" Mac asked as he flipped through the pages of the magazine.

Shannon nodded. "She wants a divorce. She ought to have it."

"You told her so?" Without looking up.

"No. No, Mac. Haven't answered her letter yet."

"When did it come?"

"A week, maybe ten days ago. What day is this?"

Mac raised hollow eyes. "Pete, Pete."

"I'm not tight, Mac. I just don't know."

"Going on Tuesday. One hour, fifteen minutes on Tuesday." MacIlrath moved around the typewriter stand and sat down slowly, his puttees creaking.

"You're on the city's time," Shannon reminded him.

"Moracci is out in the car. He'll give me the horn if anything comes in for us." Mac opened the magazine on his thighs and licked a thumb to turn pages.

"Take it with you," Shannon suggested. "You got a job, Mac."

"Sure. I got a wife and kids. I got a conscience, too." A page turned, scraping the hem of MacIlrath's blue mackinaw. "Pete, that boy Stanley George didn't do it."

Shannon lighted a cigarette. His dark eyes were lusterless. He didn't sit down. He wished MacIlrath would go.

"Stagey, Pete. It was. Things don't happen that way. Monday night, and the janitor always mopped down the stairs. Not Tuesday. Not Saturday. Monday, and always at the same time. So the stairs were blocked. And the other elevator—know what was wrong with it?"

Shannon didn't know. He didn't care.

"A leather key case, Pete, wedged under the door so it wouldn't close. Down in the track, where it wouldn't show. Those elevators won't work if the door won't slide. Man named Harris, who rents the other apartment on that floor, lost his key case this morning. Tonight it turns up jamming the elevator."

"It could happen like that," Shannon said. "Somebody could have kicked the key case along the hall and it slid into that track and jammed the elevator."

"It could have happened, but did it? What do you think, Pete? Only one way down—the way I was taking up—and the boy had to be in that elevator. Stagey, see?"

"You and Moracci were tipped off?" Shannon found himself asking.

Mac looked up, shaking his head. "It didn't have to be us. A guy either jumps or is pushed out of a window on North Pennsylvania around seven in the P. M. How long does it take a crowd to gather after he hits the pavement? Ten seconds, Pete? Thirty. Somebody was bound to go up."

Shannon blew smoke out slowly and watched it coil and spread. "Why bother me with it, Mac?" he asked.

"You were in there when Duff and the others searched the place. What did they find?"

"Nobody home. And everything locked tight except that one window." Shannon stared hard at the big face of the man in the chair. "Why ask me, Mac? You're the cop."

MacIlrath passed a chapped hand across his face. It was grey with tiredness.

"I never got anywheres," he said. "A beat cop. Too damned dumb or too honest to be anything else. They wouldn't listen to me—not Sam Kerestes."

"What is it you want them to listen to?"

"That there had to be somebody else. That there was another way out. In that little hall between the living room and the bedroom part of the Dayan apartment—

wasn't there a skylight up through the roof. It could have been opened—"

Shannon was shaking his head. "Duff looked at it. He tried to open it. It was bolted on the inside, the bolts rusted. Why wasn't it Stanley George, Mac? What was his motive? He had one, didn't he?"

MacIlrath nodded sadly. "Last month, last time he came into Indianapolis, young George got mixed up in a card game. He and a guy named Chase. You know a grifter named Chase, Pete?"

"No."

"Anyway, Dayan took Stanley George for twenty-four hundred dollars. It was money the boy was saving to put down on a home. That's why the gun. He thought he was rooked. He thought he could scare Dayan into giving the money back with that gun."

Shannon made sounds like laughter. "Not too bright, is he?"

"Not too, no. Just a nice boy. And he didn't do it. In fact, I'm sure he didn't."

"Who else, Mac? Where's the alternative? This guy Harris, across the hall—would he purposely jam the elevator with his own keys?"

"No." Mac shook his head. "No, Pete." He closed the magazine and rolled it into a tight cylinder with which he smacked his open palm fiercely. "I wish you'd do something for that boy, Pete."

"Oh, hell." Shannon jammed the stub of his cigarette into an ash trap. "Sam Kerestes is a clean cop. Dale Andrews is a clean prosecutor. The kid'll get what he deserves, whatever that is. What the hell could I do?"

Mac stood up. He looked at Shannon with cold eyes. "And you're just going to let it go at that, huh?"

"Why not, Mac?" Shannon asked softly.

MacIlrath went to the door, striding, no longer tired in his anger. "You do that,

Pete. And I hope you're very happy."

"Thanks, Mac. Thank you very much."

MacILRATH went out the door, closing it so quietly that he might as well have slammed it. Shannon moved the chair and sank into it. The light hurt his eyes, and he covered them with hands that shook a little.

Tuesday, Shannon ate lunch about two o'clock in a little cafe off Sixteenth Street. Not Delange's. A new place where nobody would ask, "Is everything all right, Mr. Shannon?" thus reminding him how much of everything was all wrong. He was having his cigarette over his last cup of coffee when he happened to look up at a girl with nice ankles who had just come in off the street. Nice ankles and a pencil slim skirt, navy blue. Shannon's eyes jumped to her face, and his lips jerked apart in a small smack of sound. His heart quickened, choking him, as Sally's grey eyes, misty behind a wisp of veil of the little black hat he remembered, found his.

Blindly, then, she threaded her way among tables to reach the booth where he was. Shannon stood, his napkin falling unnoticed to the floor. There was a third party, a waitress, blind to the fact that this was a private affair.

"Your check, sir?"

"No," he said tonelessly. "Coffee. Another coffee."

"Yes, sir."

Sally sank down on the opposite side of the table. Her eyes dropped momentarily to the menu placed deftly in front of her. And Shannon sat down.

"My dear," he said. And then, "Sorry, Sally. Just a wee bit knocked out."

"Pete." She gave him a quick, shining look, half alarm. Then there was the waitress again with her pad and pencil.

"Coffee," Sally said.

"With no cream," Shannon put in with a tight laugh.

"Two coffees," the waitress said as she went away.

There was so much that had to be said. He'd got her letter, and of course she was right. He'd been busy, though. Free lancing now—had Mac told her? Ought to have answered her letter, though. But look, they could run up to Scott Marburger's office this afternoon and get the thing started—

"No, Pete," Sally broke in. "That isn't it, Pete. Didn't Mac tell you? Mac wired me last night. About Stan."

The shiny bauble fell off the tree and smashed into dust that blew into his face. His eyes smarted. He looked away, toward the wall. Now he knew. The thing that couldn't happen once in a billion years had happened to him. Sure, he'd known Sally was working in St. Louis. So were a lot of other people, including this Stanley George.

He said, because he had to say something, "St. Louis is a big town."

"Then Mac didn't tell you?"

"Mac's yellow," he said.

"Not Mac. He just doesn't know you."

He looked at her, and she was the most beautiful thing in the world. But young. Just a kid. Twenty-three—just right for Stanley George.

She was saying earnestly, "Stan didn't do it, Pete."

"You could be wrong," he said gently.

"He didn't!" Her hand clenched on the table. "Can't you—*won't* you do something, Pete?"

He said, "I don't know what I can do. I'm not on the paper, I've told you."

"But you know Andrews, the prosecutor. You know all of the right people."

"And a lot of the wrong."

She nodded eagerly. "That could be important. The wrong people. This Dayan—a sort of a crook, wasn't he?"

"Very top drawer sort," he said.

Their coffee came. Shannon pushed his aside.

"But Andrews would listen to you."

"Maybe on some little thing, like petty larceny, Andrews would listen. This is murder, my dear."

Her full lower lip trembled. "You could try, Pete."

"There would have to be proof," he argued as much with himself as with her. "Look at it from this angle—the way Sam Kerestes and Andrews will look at it. It's murder. And here's George with motive and opportunity."

"But—" she faltered, "but Mac says—"

Shannon nodded. He knew how that was. Mac hadn't known, when he'd collared George in the elevator, that this was the boy. It had happened to Mac as it had happened to Shannon. Not until Mac had heard the name Stanley George and the St. Louis address had he known. And Mac refused to believe that any man Sally would consider marrying could be guilty of murder. Mac's hunch was as groundless as that.

Shannon reached across the table, and his hand closed on Sally's. Hers was cool and unresponsive.

"Pete, I can't bargain with you," she reminded him in a whisper.

"I know."

"I can only ask. I can say please." She was saying it now with her eyes. "And, if you want, you can say no."

"Maybe you think I can."

"Then you'll try? You will, Pete?"

"I'll give it my best."

"That's the best there is, Pete."

He said soberly, "Let's put it this way—it's all there is."

CHAPTER THREE

Who Dies There?

LIEUTENANT Sam Kerestes sat on a corner of his desk, right knee cradled in thin, laced fingers. His ripe olive eyes were wary. Yesterday's cordiality toward Shannon showed definite indications of having been somewhat warmed over.

"What do you mean are we sure it's Charlie Dayan who got killed?" Kerestes demanded.

Shannon tilted back in the straight oak chair. His smile was slight and irritating. He wasn't sure what he meant. He'd dropped the suggestion experimentally because there had to be a place to start, a toehold, even if you had to make it yourself. Here you had Stanley George, on one hand, and Charlie Dayan on the other. Apparently you had nobody else. If you were going to kid yourself into believing you could eliminate Stanley George, Dayan was left. So you started with Dayan. Suppose Dayan committed suicide. Well, he hadn't. Torn flesh on Dayan's fingertips, his type of blood on the window coping, indicated that Dayan had hung onto life, tooth and toenail.

That bubble burst, Shannon blew another. Were they sure it was Dayan that they'd carted off to the morgue?

"The face," Shannon elaborated. "The corpse didn't have any. His wife identified the body, but is that good enough?"

Kerestes spread his hands. "Hell, she's his wife."

"But what about teeth? What about fingerprints?"

"Teeth are out," Kerestes said with some show of impatience. "Literally out. Dayan dropped his plates on the floor of the bathroom yesterday morning and broke them. So the body was toothless. As to fingerprints—" Kerestes let his knee slip through his hands and his leg dropped loosely, foot banging the floor. "This off the record, Pete?" he asked warily.

"You know damned well it is."

"Then Dayan's prints aren't on file. They were, once upon a time. But you know how a big con operates. Dayan worked the payoff. He had a horse race

store, remember? That means he had to fix a few boys in this department."

"And somebody slipped his prints out of the file," Shannon concluded, his smile thin. "When was all this, Sam?"

"Years ago. It's all ancient history. All cleaned up now. It hasn't anything to do with Dayan's murder, that's for sure."

Shannon laughed softly. "You're going to have fun in a couple of days when two or three insurance companies send their investigators down here."

Kerestes' eyes were narrow and bright. "I don't give a good damn whether Mrs. Dayan collects a dime of insurance. She knows her husband when she sees him. He was shoved out of his own apartment window, and there was nobody there except Stanley George."

"Mrs. Dayan has an alibi?" Shannon asked after a moment, and drew a curdled look from the lieutenant.

"Two of 'em. First, she was spending the evening with friends—nice people in no way connected with grifting. Alibi number two comes from a funny source: Stanley George says she wasn't in the Dayan apartment. That's good enough for me."

It was good enough for anybody. You couldn't beat it. Shannon thoughtfully broke open a new pack of cigarettes and offered them to Kerestes, who took one.

"What's the angle, Pete? What do you think you're getting at?"

Shannon shook his head slightly. "I don't know. Any kind of an angle. Dayan was loaded with life insurance, and murder would make it double indemnity."

He got up and moved to a window that looked out on a narrow alley. Clean white snowflakes drifted incongruously out of a dirty sky.

"What about Dayan's neighbors? Who are the Harrises in the apartment across the hall?"

"Nice people," Kerestes said. "Mr. Harris is a buyer in the men's wear department of one of the best stores."

"What about the floor below?" Shannon persisted. "A good cop would check."

Kerestes' yellowish face flushed slightly. "A good cop did. Under the Dayans you've got the family of Dr. John Sherman Hilliard, the noted surgeon. 7B, across the hall, is currently vacant, although Dayan had rented it by proxy for a friend of his—a man by the name of Courtland in Columbus, Ohio, who is expected to move in sometime this week."

Shannon was wondering if this was anything you could sink your teeth into. "What about Courtland?"

"He's in advertising," Kerestes explained wearily. "I checked on him with the local branch of the firm that employs him. Nice people again, Pete."

Shannon nodded. "All nice except Dayan. Even Stanley George is nice people. But to get back to Courtland—Dayan latched onto this vacant apartment for Courtland. Is that a new angle for some sort of a con game, you think?"

Kerestes didn't know. There were always new angles. "Maybe Dayan was softening him up for a touch—I don't know."

Shannon toed out his cigarette on the floor, came back to the chair and sat down.

"Just one more thing, Sam, then I'll get out of your hair. Stanley George was rooked by Dayan—that's the motive, you say. I want to know how he was rooked. There was Dayan, I know, and somebody the kid referred to as Mr. Chase."

Kerestes nodded. "I placed him right away. 'Chase' was Johnny Pike, known as Johnny the Artist. He was a roper for Dayan in the days of the old horse race store. I've had Johnny the Artist in here for questioning, and he freely admits he and Dayan played cards with Stanley George coming over on the train from St. Louis. They rooked him with a short con game, a quickie known as the Huge Duke. Ever hear of it?"

"That the one where they start playing some innocent five card game like euchre?"

"Right."

"Then the outside man—that would be Johnny the Artist—says his hand looks more like poker than euchre. They start making small bets on their euchre hands, go around a few times, and let the victim win. Then comes the killing—where Stanley George lost his twenty-four hundred. It would be on Stanley George's own deal, wouldn't it?"

KERESTES nodded and laughed. "But Charlie Dayan cut the cards before Stanley George dealt. And when Dayan cut, he switched in a cold deck. Stanley got four aces, and he didn't see how anybody could beat that in a million years. He stuck with Dayan, and Johnny the Artist dropped out. Johnny took a look at the kid's hand and advised him to plunge. Stanley George saw a chance to double his bank account. Then, on the showdown, Dayan turned up with a royal flush."

"But the kid must have known he was rooked." Shannon objected. "Why didn't he start something right there, if he's the sort to blow up and kill? Why the thirty day slow burn?"

"The Huge Duke," Kerestes said. "Remember? After he's been taken, the mark is then properly cooled out. Remember what Dayan was like—a tall, stooped, affable man with grey hair and a kind of fatherly manner? Before Stanley George could recover from the shock of losing his money, Dayan chuckled and apparently tore up the kid's check. He told Stanley George to let this be a lesson to him—not to play cards with strangers. Stanley George felt immediately relieved, figured he hadn't lost any money, and that Dayan was really a prince of a fellow. What Stanley George didn't know was that Dayan had palmed in a blank check—the one he tore up—retaining the real check which he later put through for payment. Stanley George didn't get the full impact of the thing until days later when he picked up his statement from the bank and found that the check had gone through—the check he was sure had been destroyed."

Shannon nodded, his dark eyes thoughtful. "The slow burn. The delayed action fuse. On his next regular trip to Indianapolis, the kid packs a gun. And the first person he sees when he gets off the train is Charlie Dayan."

Shannon broke off, shaking his head. "It's nutty."

"Only if you assume Stanley George is telling the truth about meeting Dayan at the station is it nutty."

"I'm assuming he is," Shannon argued "for the very simple reason that it gets nuttier if he was lying. Dayan was a smooth operator. As smooth as they come. Would he rook a guy as cleverly as that and then fail to cover his tracks? Uh-uh Sam. The Huge Duke served as a delayed action fuse, and the blowup was scheduled for last night."

"Maybe it backfired." Kerestes moved a piece of paper on his desk a quarter of an inch to the right. "Maybe Dayan was setting up Stanley George for another touch—it's been done in the con game—and this time it backfired."

"Maybe," Shannon admitted.

"What we do know—" a thin smile spread across Kerestes yellowish face, "is that Dayan was there and so was Stanley George. Nobody else. You always come back to that. You want to talk to Stanley George, Pete?"

Shannon stared at the lieutenant a moment. "Hell, no." He crossed to the door, striding.

You had Stanley George and you had Charlie Dayan. The dumb young puppy and the wary fox. And the fox was dead. It didn't make sense.

And you had some names of people who had been conspicuously absent. You had Mrs. Dayan and her double strength alibi. You had Johnny Pike, Johnny the Artist, who'd helped Dayan rook Stanley George in the beginning. You had somebody named Courtland for whom Dayan had rented an apartment.

Shannon stopped his car in front of the Caslon Apartments, stepped out onto a sidewalk lightly powdered with snow. Entering the building, he took one of the automatic elevators to the eighth floor, where he knocked at the door of the Dayan apartment.

A short blonde woman of anywhere from forty to fifty, wearing a brown velveteen dress, was presently peering at Shannon through puffy-lidded eyes. She was inclined toward plumpness and her round face was innocent of makeup.

Shannon took off his hat. "Mrs. Dayan?"

A smile trembled on the small, pink mouth. "Yes."

From the room beyond, Shannon caught the discreet murmur of voices.

"My name is Courtland," he said. "I knew Mr. Dayan, and I wanted to extend my sympathy."

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Dayan put out a small hand that felt boneless in Shannon's brief grasp. "Do come in, Mr. Courtland. It's about the apartment, isn't it? Charlie had so many friends." The pink mouth trembled and Mrs. Dayan hastily turned her head to hide emotion as she stepped back from the threshold.

Shannon moved into the vestibule. "I don't want to bother you at a time like this, but if I might have the key—"

"Oh, no bother. I was just about to get a glass of sherry for—" Mrs. Dayan gestured vaguely—"*Mr.* Dayan's friends."

Did the slight inflection deny any previous acquaintance with the odd pair seated on the sofa near the fatal window? The woman was fat and cheery looking. She was dressed in a soiled grey coat with a mangy looking black fur collar. The man beside her was tall and gaunt and grey, his face deeply lined and curiously empty. His forehead bulged with a professional looking gauze dressing, and he reeked of antiseptics. Chapped, big-boned hands pulled the brown plaid overcoat together in front of a maroon sweater.

Mrs. Dayan said vaguely, "Mrs.—uh—Baker, this is Mr. Courtland. And—" Mrs. Dayan appealed helplessly to the fat woman.

"Mr. Woodward," Mrs. Baker supplied. She nudged the man again. "Gentleman here, Mr. Woodward, wants to shake hands."

A RAW-BONED hand was thrust out gropingly, and Shannon understood the vacant expression on the man's face. Mr. Woodward was blind. Shannon shook the hand. It clutched his. The lined face broke into a toothless smile.

"Mr. Courtland, you say? Since I can't see faces, I got to remember names. You're a friend of Mr. Dayan?"

Shannon said he was. He stepped back.

"Sit down, Mr. Courtland," said Mrs. Dayan.

Shannon said, "No, thanks, I hate to be a nuisance, but do you have the key to 7-B or ought I to see the manager?"

Mrs. Dayan said, "I have the key. But please sit down."

Shannon watched Mrs. Dayan go into the dining end of the big room and thence into the kitchen. He sat down, and the odd pair on the sofa beamed at him.

Shannon asked either of them, "Had you known Mr. Dayan long?"

"Not me," said Mrs. Baker. "Didn't know him at all. He was a customer of Mr. Woodward's, wasn't he, Mr. Woodward?"

"Yes," said Mr. Woodward. "And a good friend." His face sobered. "And to think, it mightn't have happened if I

hadn't fallen down that flight of stairs last night."

Shannon frowned slightly. "What mightn't have happened?"

"The murder," said Mrs. Baker indulging in a shudder. "Though how a blind man could've prevented it is beyond me. He'd have been here, though. I was to bring him here."

"You were?"

"Yep," said Mrs. Baker. "I got an old jalopy."

"For dinner," Mr. Woodward said. "Mr. Dayan asked me to have dinner with him."

"Last night?" Shannon asked.

"That's right. I closed my newsstand early. And when I went home—I got a little apartment in the basement of Mrs. Baker's house—I tripped at the top of the steps and fell the full length."

"Knocked hisself out," said Mrs. Baker, nodding vigorously. "Liked to scare me half to death when I saw him lying down there at the foot of them steps. Doc had to take three stitches." She turned her head as Mrs. Dayan came in from the kitchen with a tray bearing sherry glasses and a decanter. Mrs. Baker looked pleased. She said, "Now you shouldn't've went to the trouble, Mrs. Dayan."

Mrs. Dayan put the tray down on the coffee table. Her puffy eyes slid to Shannon, who stood, his hat in his hand.

"None for me, Mrs. Dayan. But if I could trouble you for the key—"

"Yes," said Mrs. Dayan. "Perhaps if Mrs. Baker will help herself to the sherry and help Mr. Woodward."

"Oh, sure," said Mrs. Baker, heaving herself forward on the sofa.

Mrs. Dayan had started toward the bedroom end of the apartment. In the little hallway where the skylight was, she turned to speak to Shannon.

"You understand about the rent, Mr. Courtland?"

Shannon didn't know anything about the rent. "Why," he ventured, "Mr. Dayan paid it, did he not?"

Mrs. Dayan nodded. "From the first

(Continued on following page)

IN 1848, NINE young Irishmen were convicted of treason and sentenced to die. The presiding judge set the date for the execution and solemnly read their names: Charles Duffy, Terence McManus, Richard O'Gorman, Michael Ireland, Patrick Donahue, Morris Lyene, John Mitchell, Thomas McGee, and Thomas Meagher.

Because several of them were quite youthful, Queen Victoria determined to give them a 'second chance and commuted the sentence to deportation to the penal colonies in Australia.

Twenty-five years afterward, the queen was reminded of the affair and began investigating in order to find whether or not she had been justified in sparing the condemned men.

She discovered Charles Duffy to be serving as prime minister of the province of Victoria. Both McManus and Donahue were generals in the U. S. Army. O'Gorman was a former Governor-General of Newfoundland. Michael Ireland was attorney general of Australia, having succeeded Morris Lyene in the office. John Mitchell was a leading New York politician, and Meagher was governor of Montana. Thomas McGee was president of the Council for the Dominion of Canada.

Convinced that every violator of the law deserves a second chance to become a good citizen, Queen Victoria subsequently refused to permit capital punishment except in the case of premeditated murder.

—Elwood Thomas

(Continued from previous page)

of the month. Two hundred and fifty dollars."

Shannon coughed. "I don't have that much cash with me."

"Oh, that's perfectly all right. A check will do." And Mrs. Dayan disappeared.

Shannon took out pen and checkbook, glanced across at the odd pair on the sofa. Mrs. Baker lowered her glass and winked owlishly at Shannon.

"Better have a nip of this, Mr. Portland," she said. "You look a might peaked."

Shannon suspected that he did. He opened his checkbook and began to fill in the blanks. What in the hell was Courtland's first name? Shannon raised his eyes, found Mrs. Baker watching him interestedly. He then put pen to paper and dashed off "A. B. Courtland" as indecipherably as possible in the lower right hand corner of the check. A soft stir in sound behind him announced the return of Mrs. Dayan.

"You found the key?" Shannon asked.

She nodded. Her puffy eyes studied his face. She raised her left hand to her head and patted soft ringlets of greying blonde hair, waiting for the check.

"I'm afraid you'll find the place rather a mess," she said.

"I was afraid of that," Shannon said. "That's why I wanted to look the apartment over with the idea of having someone in to do the cleaning. Our furniture won't arrive until later on in the week."

"But you can give me your check now," said Mrs. Dayan. "Then you'll have the key and can go and come as you please."

"Oh, I'll want you to keep the key for a while," Shannon insisted. "I have to be back in Columbus tonight, and my wife will come when the movers bring the furniture. She can pick up the key then."

The small pink mouth smiled. "I'll be glad to keep one of the keys until your wife calls for it, Mr. Courtland. But you might just as well take the other." She put her left hand out for the check which Shannon reluctantly handed her. She scarcely glanced at it, to Shannon's relief, and her warm, boneless hand touched his as she passed over the key.

"Thank you," he said. "And again, my sympathies."

"Thank you, Mr. Courtland."

She saw him to the door. Shannon went out, stepped to the elevator shaft, pushed the button. He didn't look back, but he was certain that Mrs. Dayan was watching him.

The tall, light-complexioned man in the dark overcoat who came striding out of the elevator brushed by Shannon without a murmur of apology, stopped abruptly in the center of the hall, and looked back over a square shoulder. Shannon, already in the car, thumbed the button for floor seven. Through the narrowing aperture formed by the automatic door, Shannon got a good look at Johnny the Artist. It was only reasonable to suppose that Johnny the Artist got a good look at him.

CHAPTER FOUR

Trail of Blood

HE HADN'T much time. Coupled with the sense of urgency was the thought that he had paid too high a price for a completely unknown quantity. He was still groping along the blank wall. The best there was still wasn't good enough. The key to apartment 7B telegraphed his nervousness against the key plate. He thrust it home, turned it over, turned the knob, his dry, nervous cough echoed on emptiness. Shannon closed the door, dropped the key into his pocket, and stepped into the long living room. The grey, uncertain light of dusk entered broad windows. The apartment was apparently a replica of the Dayan place on the floor above.

Echoes followed Shannon's steps into a butler's pantry. A carton of empty cans stood in the center of the dirty linoleum floor. There was a stack of old newspapers at one side of the sink in the kitchen, and coffee grounds from the last breakfast were a dry mound in the drain. A maid's room and bath adjoined the kitchen. Shannon jerked open closets. Empty wire coat hangers set in motion by disturbed air currents became ghostly chimes. He returned to the living room, to the opposite end to enter the hall communicating with the bedrooms. Here he opened a closet to the crashing accompaniment of falling bottles. He was virtually knee deep in trash. The empty bottles represented a variety of tastes from beer to champagne. There were magazines equally varied in their appeal. There were nondescript rags, the broken shaft of a golf club, and short lengths of very rusty gas pipe.

Gas pipe? In a house you sometimes found odd length of pipe, usually in the basement. But of what use would pipe be to one of these modern cliff dwellers?

Shannon got out of the closet. He couldn't close the door because of the overflow of trash, but that didn't matter. He moved on into the bedrooms with their connecting bath. More closets, each with its little catch-all corner for accumulated rubbish. A nice place for an arsonist, but there was nothing pertinent to murder.

Shannon returned to the living room, to the vestibule. He had not yet decided what he would do with the key. Perhaps mail it back to Mrs. Dayan. Or maybe be forthright about it, and try to trade it for the check he'd forged. Shannon opened the door and wasn't too surprised to find Johnny the Artist standing across the threshold.

He was a likeable guy, this Johnny Pike with his droll, long-nosed, long-lipped face. Blue eyes glinting, one blond eyebrow at a quizzical cant, his mouth showing as much gleaming porcelain as a plumber's window, Johnny the Artist planted stiff fingers on Shannon's chest and pushed him back into the room.

"Shannon, Shannon," he said soberly.

"Johnny." Shannon backed. Johnny the Artist overshadowed him by six inches. Shannon backed and stood, his mind tight, while Johnny leaned on the door to close it. The half light found pinpoints of brightness beneath the narrow snap brim of Johnny Pike's hat.

"I said to Rose Dayan, 'Wasn't that Peter Shannon of the *Telegram* I saw in the hall?' "

"She said it was Courtland," Shannon surmised. "Somebody named Courtland who came for the keys to 7B."

"Somebody named Courtland. And I thought 'Rose, you innocent child, you've been had by a better brain.' She's a lovely, childlike character."

Shannon said, "That's nice." He didn't like fencing.

"What is it, Shannon?"

"I don't know."

"You don't?"

"Unless Dayan isn't dead," Shannon said.

Johnny the Artist didn't say anything. His teeth flashed in the half light.

"Teeth," Shannon said. "The corpse didn't have any. Fingerprints not a matter of record. And no face. How does anyone know?"

"Strawberry mark."

"Oh, hell!" Shannon wanted a cigarette suddenly. He brought out a pack. "Smoke, Johnny?"

"Thanks."

Shannon sparked his lighter. Johnny the Artist steadied his cigarette into the flame. His long nose was red and swollen, his eyes very blue, very sharp.

Shannon said, "He rooked everybody —why not the insurance companies?"

"Thanks, Shannon." Johnny exhaled smoke, shook his head. "You can rook an individual. You can fix a banker or a local official. But you can't rook or fix an insurance company. Uh-uh, Shannon. I'm scared of insurance companies."

"You are, but was Dayan?"

"Nobody ever rooked an insurance company."

"A good many have tried."

"But nobody does. What gave you the idea?"

"He was loaded with insurance."

"Not much of a hunch, Shannon. But why?"

Shannon didn't know. Groping again, he guessed. He said, "Dayan latched onto this place for a fellow named Courtland. Paid the rent for the guy so he'd have a place to move in. What's the deal?"

"No deal that I know of," Johnny said. "Charlie did things for people."

"He did more people than things for them."

"He was a great brain," Johnny said sadly. "I don't know if it was a deal. I wasn't in on it, if it was."

"What about the kid on the train?" Shannon asked. "You and Charlie took Stanley George to the cleaners."

"Just a short con," Johnny explained. "Just for traveling expenses. We'd been down to St. Louis to look over the town. Charlie thought maybe he'd open a big store."

"Did he?"

"He didn't," Johnny said. "He was working up some new angles. This—" the cigarette moved in a short arc again— "if it was anything, I don't know about it. Charlie was having trouble raising the boodle."

"He was broke?"

"Yes."

"But you've been getting along?"

"Sure," Johnny said, showing his teeth. "I'm not like Charlie. He was always a grifter. You know, Shannon, he started out as a dip?"

SHANNON remembered. Dayan had been a born grifter, unlike Johnny Pike who had once been a skilled machinist employed by a magicians' supply house. It had been a short step for Johnny from legitimate gimmicks to crooked dice and the like.

Johnny said, "Shannon, about this deal with Rose—" There was a crisp rattle of paper. Shannon could barely see the check Johnny was holding up because of the failing light. And Johnny was laughing. "Anything for a story, eh, Shannon? You'd risk a forgery rap, even."

"If I'd gotten the story," Shannon said.

"Look, Shannon. I'm tearing it up."

Shannon dropped his cigarette on the floor and scuffed at the spark. "I know that one, too. The Huge Duke."

"No, Shannon." Johnny the Artist sounded injured. "Not a right guy like you." He took out his lighter and snapped

it into flame. His eyes glinted and his smile was wide. "See, Shannon? It's your check, isn't it?"

Shannon saw the four quarters of the check, saw the scrawled writing. He watched lighter flame lick up one side of the little packet of scraps held daintily between Johnny's thumb and forefinger.

"Ashes to ashes," Johnny said, smiling. "It don't hurt to have a friend on the papers. A man never knows when he might need public opinion behind him, does he?"

"A man never does," Shannon said. "When's the funeral?"

"Tomorrow." Johnny sobered. "He was a great brain, Shannon." Johnny let the burning fragments fall to the floor, and then there was darkness.

Johnny the Artist reached behind him and opened the door. He and Shannon stepped out into the illuminated hall.

"You want the key?" Shannon asked.

"I don't," Johnny said. "But maybe Courtland does." He put his hand out for the key. "I'll give it to Rose Dayan. I'm going up there now. Keep clean, Shannon."

Shannon gave the con man the key, and they moved to the elevators to press the two buttons. Shannon's arrived first. He said good night to Johnny the Artist as he stepped into it, rode down to the ground floor, went out against a swirling wall of snow.

Shannon took his life in his hands and crossed the broad street at mid-block to get to a parking garage where there was a pay phone. There he spent a nickel to call the MacIlrath residence, and while he wanted to talk to Mac he was hoping that Sally would answer. But it was Mrs. MacIlrath who picked up the phone. Mac wasn't at home. He was on the prowl car again tonight.

Shannon said, "Thanks, Ruth. Give my best to the three little Indians, and good night."

He hung up, left the garage, and made it again across Pennsylvania Street to his car. He drove on to Sixteenth, turned east to stop in front of the pile of red brick and crumbling mortar where his room was. He got out, crossed the snow-covered sidewalk, and climbed the four steps to the illuminated doorway at the foot of the stairs. Out in the street, a passing car braked suddenly. Orange-red gunfire splintered through white murk, two crashing shots against soft-blanketed silence. Shannon spilled over the iron pipe railing into a snow-laden spirea bush, got onto his feet almost at once, and came wallowing out.

The car was any car, its lurid tail lights lost in the swirl of snow and exhaust vapor as it raced on along the street and turned a corner.

Shannon got around to the foot of the steps and climbed to the door, his knees shivering. At the same moment heavy footsteps came plunging down the stairway from the lodging above. He saw police puttees and blue breeches.

"Mac!" Shannon gasped. "It's okay, Mac."

MacIlrath caught Shannon's shoulders, gave him a quick searching look. Mac's face was grey.

Shannon said, "Backfire, Mac."

"Oh, sure!" Mac squinted against the snow.

"Forget it. Whoever it was is long gone now. Look, Mac—" Shannon caught MacIlrath's sleeve and pointed above the doorway. In the center of the lintel, soot-darkened limestone had been chipped cleanly away in two places. Four inches apart at fifty feet.

"Leggo, Pete. I got to get on this."

"No, Mac," Shannon pleaded. "Listen to me. You're off duty now, and those are the two prettiest things I've seen in a long time."

"In your head," Mac growled, "how would they look?"

HE GOT MacIlrath upstairs and kept him away from the phone. By standing in front of the phone with an open bottle of bourbon in one hand and a glass in the other, Shannon kept Mac away.

"So help me, I'll let you have it, Mac. All over your uniform. I'll drown you in it, Mac. Then when you go down to pick up the prowl car, you know what they'll say."

"That I had a run-in with a lush, they'll say," Mac argued. "Which'll be the God's truth!"

"Mac, I'm sober. Sit down, will you, because I've got to." And Shannon straddled the chair in front of the telephone stand, yet held the glass of whiskey unsteadily in position for throwing or drinking, whichever was indicated. "Look, Mac, you report this and I'll have company half the night." He shook his head without taking his eyes off Mac's big grey face. "Don't want that. I'm tired. I've been working. All afternoon, I've been working. I've seen Andrews and Kerestes. I've talked to Mrs. Dayan. And a fat woman named Baker. And a blind man named Woodward. And Johnny the Artist. I've forged a check. I've broken and entered, and I'm tired."

MacIlrath fumbled behind himself for a chair. He sat down, puttees creaking.

"You've got something?"

"I don't know." Shannon drank from the glass, strangled slightly on the raw liquor. "Somebody seems annoyed, wouldn't you say? Wouldn't you think getting shot at indicates I'm going somewhere?"

Mac grunted. "To the morgue, maybe. You've got something, now let's have it."

Shannon drained the glass, put it and the bottle down on the floor. He rested his forearms on the back of the chair.

"Mac, I don't know. What I thought, I gave to Kerestes—what I made myself think."

"Maybe you made somebody else think it."

"Not Kerestes. No, Mac."

"Some guy with a gun."

"Some guy got excited, that's all. Look, Mac, there are threads. You can follow them in the direction you want to go—away from Stanley George, bless his heart. And where do they lead? To Dayan himself. Dayan pulled the Huge Duke on the kid—the delayed-action fuse that provided fall guy and motive. Dayan put the key to his own apartment into the kid's hand. If Stanley George is telling the truth. And we've got to assume that he is, don't we?"

MacIlrath nodded.

"And Dayan rented a vacant apartment on the floor below for God only knows what reason. And some other things, Mac. But it's always Dayan."

"But, Pete—Dayan's dead!"

"Are you sure? Kerestes says he's dead. He's satisfied with Mrs. Dayan's identification. Without teeth, without fingerprints. And Johnny the Artist is satisfied. But admit it, Mac, and it looks like we're licked."

"You'll keep working, Pete?"

"Tomorrow I'll work on the other angle. On Stanley George. I'll find out if he was lying about meeting Dayan yesterday at the station. Somebody must have seen one or the other or both—somebody the police may have overlooked. But if the kid's lying—" Shannon showed his teeth without smiling.

"Yeah," Mac said. "They let Sally see him today. They were nice about it."

"Don't tell me, Mac." Shannon gave MacIlrath a black look, then reached around for the phone, which had started to ring. Sam Kerestes' abrasive voice came out of the receiver.

"I thought you'd sleep better, Pete. . . ."

"Yeah?"

". . . knowing it's Charlie Dayan they bury tomorrow. Proof even you would believe. The file card with his fingerprints

turned up late this afternoon. Mrs. Dayan located it among some of his papers and gave it to us."

"All right," Shannon said, his smile sickly.

"There were other things, Pete. Things his doctor knew about him that Dayan didn't know."

"All right, I said." Shannon reached over his shoulder and let the handset fall onto its stand. He looked up at MacIlrath and shook his head. "It was Dayan, for sure. Now we've only got Stanley George."

"And a couple of shots at you, Pete," Mac reminded him.

"Backfires, you mean." Shannon stood, his hands clenched on the back of the chair, his face darkening. "Go on and get out of here. I mean it, Mac. You remind me of the seventh pallbearer—that look, and not a damned thing to do."

Mac was going. He trudged to the door and went out without saying a word.

Shannon took off his hat and coat. He had another drink, then he sat down in the lounge chair and tried not to think, which was hard with Sally watching him, soft-eyed, from the plastic frame on the table beside him. He sat there and smoked, and an hour crept by. The pile of butts in the ashtray grew.

Shannon's eyes burned. He reached out, turned off the lamp. Darkness pressed down upon him, the blank wall. *Like being blind,* he thought. Like Mr. Woodward, Dayan's odd friend, who had no sight and no teeth. Who had never seen Dayan. Who knew Dayan only as a voice and a footstep on the pavement. Whom Dayan had invited to dinner on the night before.

But, Shannon thought as he came forward in his chair, *but who did not come to dinner because he fell down the stairs. Which was convenient for somebody. That's the guy. Woodward. And he never knew. . . .*

CHAPTER FIVE

The Judas Window

SHANNON stood, stumbled around, nearly knocked over the lamp in his excitement, getting it on. He crossed to the phone and dialed "O" for the operator. He asked for the police radio dispatcher, his voice tight with urgency. Then, when the call was complete, Shannon said there was a drunk raising hell in the entryway, and gave his own name and address. That would draw the prowl car assigned to this district. He'd have Mac and Moracci any minute now.

Shannon slapped his hat on his head, picked up his coat, and went out the door. He got the coat on going down two flights of stairs. Then he stood in the entryway, behind the billowing white cloak of the storm, waited for a brief eternity, and watched for the red eye of prowl car.

Mac got out, not tiredly now, not fumbled-footed, with the shorter figure of Moracci behind him. Mac paused at the foot of the steps, looked up, saw Shannon beckoning.

"Where's the lush, Pete?"

Shannon laughed. "Here, Mac."

"I thought so." Mac climbed the steps while Moracci remained in the background.

"Listen, Mac—" Shannon caught a thick sleeve already whitening with snow and drew MacIlrath into the entryway. "It was one way to get you. Listen, one more try. If it doesn't work, then to hell with the kid."

Mac eyed him suspiciously. "What you want?"

"Give me a few minutes start. Say about ten. I'm walking over to the Caslon. And you've got to get Mrs. Dayan out of that apartment. Don't ask me how."

Mac was already asking, with his eyes.

"Maybe she parked her car in front of a fireplug," Shannon suggested. "She'll

argue. You'll insist upon showing her."

"Pete—" Mac said worriedly.

"I know. The job. The wife and the kids."

Mac grunted. "I was thinking of Moracci."

"What's a demerit or two between friends?" Shannon slapped Mac's thick arm with a cupped hand. "How about it?"

Mac said, "All right." That was all. He turned and went back through the snow, his huge figure stooped, worry shambling with him.

"About ten minutes, Mac," Shannon called as he left the entryway to go to the rear of his car. He watched the police cruiser get under way, and then raised the lid of the trunk. He fumbled among the tools until he found a flashlight, used that to locate pliers and a lug wrench the handle of which was forged flat like the blade of a heavy screwdriver. He put the pliers and flashlight in his coat pocket, tucked the cold wrench up his sleeve, lowered the trunk, and turned to walk hurriedly west toward the broad delta of Pennsylvania Street.

Ten minutes and he was in front of the Caslon, waiting for MacIlrath. Twelve minutes. A couple came out of the apartment, the woman in mink, her voice gay and carrying on the damp air.

"The snow, Charles! Don't you love it?"

Charles didn't say. He helped the woman into a Cadillac, then went around to get under the wheel.

Fifteen minutes, and Shannon was shivering, partially with the cold. What was wrong with Mac? Mac wouldn't turn chicken. When Mac said 'All right,' that meant as sure as the sunrise. But perhaps he was having trouble with Moracci. Then Shannon saw the prowl car pull up on the opposite side of the street, near the entrance to the parking garage. Mac got out and entered the building.

Good old Mac, Shannon thought. This wouldn't be easy for Mac, who was inherently honest.

Two minutes ticked off. Then MacIlrath was back, alone, his figure blocking the door.

"What's wrong?" Shannon stepped into the light.

"No answer, Pete. Nobody at home."

Possibly Mrs. Dayan had gone to the undertaker's. Shannon said, "Then everything's fine. You go on. Cruise around in the prowl car."

MacIlrath's eyes hovered worriedly over Shannon. "I got a stinkin' hunch I ought to run you in. As a precaution."

"Stinkin' is the adjective for that kind of a hunch. One side, Mac."

MacIlrath moved reluctantly to one side and then, as Shannon entered the foyer, plodded back to the street.

Shannon rode the elevator to the top floor, wondering what he would do if the Harrises, the Dayan's neighbors, happened to be home. Suppose the two he had seen leaving the building—the woman in mink, the man who didn't like snow—were the Harrises? There was one way to find out, to get the bad news in a jolt. Shannon stepped to the door of 8B and thumbed the button beside it. An electric chime sounded . . . almost at once there were footsteps approaching the vestibule. A short, slight man with a big head, wearing glasses, opened the door. He kept one hand on the knob while the fingers of the other marked his place between pages of the evening newspaper.

"Peter Shannon of the *Telegram,* Mr. Harris." It seemed scarcely a lie. If Mr. Harris wanted to be shown, Shannon still had his card in his wallet to prove it. "May I come in?"

Mr. Harris' eyes brightened as though, up to now, this had been a rather dull evening. "Step right in," he said cordially. He closed the door behind Shannon and then led the way into the living room.

"My wife is out for the evening. Won't you sit down?"

Shannon said, "Thanks, but I'm short on time." He didn't know but what any moment Mrs. Dayan would return to the apartment across the hall. He glanced toward the little hall where there should be a skylight—where there damned well had to be.

"It's about that affair over there, I suppose." Mr. Harris was jerking his big head to indicate the apartment across the hall. "When it happened, my wife and I were just getting ready to go out to my daughter's place in the country to spend the night. Because of it, we didn't arrive at Jane's until nearly ten o'clock, what with that business about my keys."

"I'm afraid I've got to bring up the subject of keys again," Shannon said. "The lost key container of yours that jammed one of the elevators."

"Yes, yes, but sit down, Mr. Shannon."

"No, really," Shannon protested. "You think you dropped your keys in the hall yesterday morning?"

Mr. Harris frowned slightly. "I can only presume so, though I didn't hear them fall."

"You and Mrs. Harris were alone in the elevator?"

"No, no." Again Mr. Harris wagged his head toward the Dayan apartment. "We met in the hall. Mr. Dayan said he was on his way down to the dentist. He'd broken both his dentures or something."

Dayan again, Shannon thought. Dayan, planting evidence for the future in the mind of his neighbor.

"Did you mention to Dayan that you were going to spend that night with your daughter?"

"I believe so," Harris said thoughtfully.

"If you didn't hear the keys drop, there's a good chance that Dayan picked your pocket."

Mr. Harris' mouth fell open. "Picked my pocket?"

Shannon smiled. "He began his career as a dip."

"Heavens! But why my keys?"

"Possibly to jam one of the elevators in a manner that would appear accidental and would implicate him in no way." Shannon moved farther into the room so that he could see the skylight that matched the one in the Dayan apartment.

"Jam the elevator?" repeated Mr. Harris bewilderedly.

Shannon said, "We're not entirely satisfied that the police have arrested the right man for the murder. For that reason the *Telegram* is conducting a little investigation of its own. Are you willing to help?"

Mr. Harris almost wriggled in pleasant anticipation of playing detective. "Of course. Anything at all."

Shannon said, "Fine. I'd like to go up through the skylight to the roof. Have you a ladder or something?"

"Ladder? No. A step-stool from the kitchen might do the trick. But are you sure you can get up that way? That skylight has never been opened since we've lived here, though it leaks once in a while."

Shannon grinned. "If water can get in, I can get out." He'd get out if he had to smash through the glass.

MR. HARRIS dropped his newspaper on the floor, contributing a lived-in look to a room that might otherwise have been an interior decorator's show window. He scurried into the kitchen, returning in a moment lugging a tall stool. Shannon had already gone into the hall, had turned his flashlight up at the skylight. It was bolted in exactly the same way as the one in the Dayan place, two fastenings at either end of the short side . . . the bolts had been thrust home, the locking buttons turned into their slots.

Shannon said, "I'm afraid I'll let some snow in, Mr. Harris."

"Oh, that's perfectly all right." Mr. Harris placed the step-stool under the skylight, moved back, gleefully rubbing his hands. "You're a bit taller than I, perhaps an inch or so."

Shannon stood on the second step of the stool and found he could reach the bolts easily enough with the lug wrench. He hammered the lock buttons out of their slots and then drove the bolts to the open position.

"Oh, fine, fine," Mr. Harris whispered.

"Watch the snow." Shannon had already reversed the lug wrench and was using the flattened tip of it to loosen the edge of the skylight where it was seated in a rubber gasket.

It broke away suddenly, and Shannon got to the top of the stool and heaved upward until the skylight fell back on its hinges. Snow flurried down into his face. He threw the wrench to the roof.

"Think you'll make it?" Mr. Harris asked anxiously. "Look, suppose you step up onto my shoulders."

"I'll probably have to."

"Oh, fine, fine." Mr. Harris chuckled and crowded close to the stool, legs spread, bracing himself. "If Mabel could see this! She's not home, thank the Lord."

Shannon put his left foot on Mr. Harris' slight left shoulder, got his palms on the sides of the frame. "Okay, now. If I step on your ear, let me know." He stepped not quite on Mr. Harris' ear and immediately sprang upward, his arms stiffening. Then he had a knee up, a foot, his right hip. As he scrambled through, considerable drifted snow was knocked back into the apartment, but apparently that was all right. Mr. Harris kept saying, "Fine, fine." Shannon knelt at the edge of the opening, used his flashlight to recover the wrench. Mr. Harris was grinning up at him.

"Now how do *I* get up, Mr. Shannon?"

"Not you," Shannon said. "You're the rear guard, Mr. Harris. Suppose I can't get down from here—what would I do without you?" He lowered the skylight into place, and through the heavy wired glass Mr. Harris' upturned face was a blur of disappointment.

Shannon examined the edge of the skylight. Then he stood up in the high, biting wind that whipped the snow across the flat plain of the roof. His flashlight picked out the skylight of the Dayan apartment and he moved over to it, squatted, and began brushing the snow away with his hand.

He played the beam of his light along the edge of the skylight. The ray caught on the bright head of a new machine screw against the metal storm lip around the edge of the glass. Apparently a hole had been drilled through the lip and then into the steel frame and this tapped to fit the threads of the screw. There had been no such fitting on the Harris skylight.

Shannon's trembling hands finally in-

serted the blade end of the lug wrench into the slot of the screw. He got the screw out, then cautiously pried up the skylight, lifting it a few inches so he could examine the bolts. They were still firmly in place in the locked position, but their ends had been cleanly sawed through and remained in their respective socket holes in the frame. The cut had been made, the exposed ends ground and polished for a flush fit. When the skylight was in place and the perfectly surfaced cut ends of the bolts were together, the point of severance would be difficult to detect without close inspection. Detective Duff had noticed that the bolts were in the locked position—they apparently had been cemented, for even now Shannon was unable to move them with his fingers— And Duff had noticed the rust. He had actually tried to open the skylight, but because of the machine screw fastening on the outside, that had been impossible.

And now, Shannon wondered, now that you had it, what did you do with it? The craftsmanship indicated by the gimmicked bolts pointed not at Charlie Dayan but at Johnny the Artist. Johnny must have been in on the scheme from the beginning, from the moment Dayan had picked Stanley George for the fall guy.

Shannon straightened, lifting the skylight. The wind caught it and slammed it back on its hinges. Snow sifted down into the apartment below. Shannon dropped his lug wrench down through the opening, like throwing your hat in the front door. Nobody came running into the hall to find out what was causing the racket, so the apartment was still empty.

And stay that way—empty, Shannon thought as he lowered himself through the opening and dropped to the floor. With the skylight open like that, a tall man—that included both Johnny and Dayan—could find it easy to jump up and get a good grip on the edge of the frame. Then if that closet door happened to be standing ajar, its doorknob would make a good leg-up. Last man through the skylight could kick the closet door shut on his way up to the roof.

Shannon smiled thinly as the final piece of the puzzle fell into place in his mind. He'd leave the skylight open like that. He'd show Sam Kerestes just how open and shut this thing was. It was all right, just that way, with the snow blowing down into the room from the roof. Everything was all right. They'd have to let Stanley George go.

Shannon stepped out into the Dayan living room, spotted the phone, and started toward it, only to pause, dark eyes reaching into the vestibule and the door just beyond. A key tick-tacked on the lock. Shannon turned back, stooped, and picked up the lug wrench. He pushed it up into the right sleeve of his coat. He stepped back into the living room as the door opened.

CHAPTER SIX

Death and the Duke

"IT'S so cold, Johnny," Mrs. Dayan complained.

They came in—Johnny Pike and Rose Dayan—Rose, a soft little thing in her fur coat, Johnny very natty in a grey homburg and a hard-finished navy blue overcoat. They came out of the vestibule and simultaneously they saw Shannon standing there.

"Shannon, I warned you—" Johnny the Artist drew down his long upper lip as though to bite back the words.

Shannon said, "I know. With a couple of shots about two feet over my head. Thanks for the warning, Johnny. It was sweet and pretty damned dumb of you."

They moved a little farther into the room. Rose's gloved fingers were tight on Johnny's arm, her face pale under makeup, the small red mouth standing

ajar. Johnny's eyes shifted toward the draft from the hall. He saw the snow on the carpet, saw the gaping skylight.

Shannon said, "My helicopter is up on the roof."

Rose looked anxiously up and across Johnny's long face. Johnny patted her hand where it clenched his arm. He smiled broadly.

"Shannon, Shannon, we'll have to talk this over. Rose, run and open a bottle of sherry."

Shannon said, "I'll do the talking. Rose won't run anywhere. And I don't like sherry." He indicated the sofa. "Sit down there where you can hold hands."

Johnny hesitated for a moment, then shrugged and led Rose to the sofa. She sank into it.

Johnny said, "We'll put the cards on the table, Shannon. Let's see what you've got first."

"I've got them all," Shannon said with a stiff little smile. "I've even got some second hand gas pipe down in the apartment Dayan rented for Courtland. Those sections of pipe, if they'd been joined together and extended up from some window at the back of the building, would have made a means of escape from the roof to the vacant apartment on the floor below. And that was a part of the plan that was never put into execution; I can tell that by the corrosion on the threads at the ends of the pipe sections. Was that Dayan's idea, too, Johnny—that gas pipe ladder that could be disassembled when you were through?"

Johnny the Artist smiled around his cigarette. "*Your* cards, Shannon. You know what they are, I don't."

"I'll say it was Dayan's idea then," Shannon said, "since he's not around to deny it. In fact, you let Dayan plan the whole thing. He plotted his own murder without knowing it. He thought he was hatching a scheme to rook three life insurance companies with which he had policies. He thought he was going to take them for enough to keep himself and Mrs. Dayan in luxury for the rest of their lives. Do I have to go back to the beginning, Johnny?"

Johnny patted Rose Dayan's gloved hand. "Your cards, Shannon. You play them any way that you like."

"Then," Shannon decided, "I'll take a crack at the beginning, and this is largely conjecture. But I imagine Dayan got the germ of the idea when he first noticed a decided resemblance between himself and a blind newsdealer named Woodward. Not a facial resemblance—the thing didn't go that far—but a close similarity in figure and posture and hair and coloring. Dayan had no teeth of his own, and poor Woodward had no teeth, period. Woodward had never been in trouble with the police, and therefore his fingerprints weren't on file. And we know what happened to Dayan's fingerprint records a long time ago. If Woodward were dressed in Dayan's clothes, if Woodward's features were obliterated when he was found dead, and if Rose identified Woodward's body as that of her husband, then Dayan could succeed in rooking the insurance companies. He could slip away somewhere to be joined later by his wealthy widow. You'd come in for your cut, Johnny, just as you would in any con game in which you participated."

Johnny Pike said nothing. He leaned back beside Rose Dayan, held her plump, boneless hand, and smoked his cigarette.

"Now for the details," Shannon continued. "They're a little complicated, as most of Dayan's schemes were. Dayan invited Woodward to dinner last night after arranging for Rose to spend the evening with friends. Dayan wanted to spare Rose as much as possible. Woodward, I imagine, was to be drugged or possibly knocked out. He'd be dressed in Dayan's clothes. You and Dayan would then batter Woodward's face to an unrecognizable

pulp and, at the proper time, shove the blind man out of the window.

"But Dayan was playing for double or nothing. That meant it had to be murder—no question of suicide—in order to collect double indemnity. Murder requires a murderer, preferably one with a good motive, with opportunity, and if this murderer could be conveniently caught without too much lost motion on the part of the police, so much the better. So the whole scheme had to be synchronized with the arrival in Indianapolis of a dry goods salesman from St. Louis, name of Stanley George. That was easy. A call to St. Louis took care of that. And young George was primed already."

"Interesting, Shannon," Johnny the Artist commented as Shannon paused to light a cigarette. "Even suspenseful, isn't it, Rose? What comes next?"

Rose didn't say anything.

"Stanley George was to walk into the trap," Shannon continued, "and then find every exit cut off. Fortunately, from your viewpoint—yours and Dayan's—that was the night that the janitor scrubbed the service stairs. That took care of that. By jamming one of the elevators, you could preclude the idea that anybody except Stanley George had left this floor of the building. There would be only one way down for Stanley George, and there was bound to be somebody trying to use that same route to get up to floor eight; for, in the last analysis the thing resolves itself into a matter of seconds. This is the way Dayan had timed events that were supposed to take place:

"Johnny, you and Dayan would watch from the open window for Stanley George's entrance. You'd give him a chance to get into the elevator. Then you'd give Woodward—he was supposed to represent Dayan's corpse, remember—you'd give Woodward the old heave-ho through the window. You and Dayan would take to the skylight. You'd be up on the roof by the time Stanley George let himself in. Then, originally, you and Dayan would slip down the gas pipe ladder to the deserted apartment on floor seven."

JOHNNY the Artist gave Shannon a bad moment by reaching into a pocket. But Johnny pulled out a handkerchief and blew his nose gently. He looked up, smiling.

"Shannon, that's beautiful. You know, that gag might work. It's worthy of Dayan. Is it really his idea, or have you been hiding your light under a typewriter all these years?"

"Wait," Shannon said. "I'm getting to the part where you come in. You and Rose."

Rose gave him a slow, dreamy glance and then turned toward the window. It was as though she were pretending she

was in another room, far away from it all.

Shannon said, "Dayan's doctor knew something about Dayan—some physical defect, perhaps some malignant disease—that would make it impossible for any competent medical examiner to mistake Woodward's body for Dayan's. The doctor hadn't told Dayan, not wanting to distress him about a condition that couldn't be remedied. But the doctor told Rose. And Rose told you, Johnny."

Johnny Pike nodded. "That's true, Shannon. Rose and I knew. We were fond of each other, and Rose intended to get a divorce so that we could be married. But then the news about Charlie's health broke. We learned he had only a little while to live and decided the only decent thing to do was to wait."

Shannon laughed bitterly. "I don't think you'll get Dayan's doctor to substantiate that. I think the doctor will testify that Dayan could have dragged on for years. Anyway, Dayan had done all the spadework for the killing. He'd plotted his own murder without realizing it. The only change you had to make to get them into sure-fire working condition was to see to it that Mr. Woodward didn't keep his dinner engagement here at Dayan's apartment. Then at the scheduled moment of fall guy Stanley George's arrival in the foyer of the building, you shoved Dayan out of the open window, then you got up through the skylight, alone. That Dayan happened to cave in his face when he hit the sidewalk was a matter of pure chance, but that's what set me to thinking.

"It would be a very easy matter to prevent a blind man like Woodward from fulfilling a dinner engagement. You could wait quietly at the head of those stairs that led down into Woodward's basement apartment and, at the proper moment, stick out a foot and trip Woodward. That how you did it, Rose?"

The woman's head jerked to face Shannon. Her lips started to move. Johnny the Artist half turned and struck her across the mouth with the back of his hand. She didn't utter a sound, merely blinked back her tears. She was soft but resilient. Johnny the Artist was the brittle one of the pair.

He said, "Sorry, Rose," as his intense blue eyes returned to Shannon. Johnny smiled again. "Your proof, Shannon. Let's hear it."

"There'll be proof," Shannon said. "You spent a good portion of the night up on the roof in a sleet storm. You caught cold, Johnny."

Johnny laughed openly. "Now they've got a special cold bug you only get up on roofs in sleet storms?"

Shannon colored. "I was thinking of cigarette butts you left up there. Maybe some footprints that'll be well preserved, frozen in sleet under this snow."

Johnny the Artist leaned forward, forearm resting on a knee. His smile was as confident as ever.

"Shannon, Shannon, you got me up on the roof in a sleet storm, and I'm freezing. No gas pipe ladder—you say you can prove that. No way to get down. And the skylight fastened on the *outside,* remember, with a machine screw."

Shannon laughed shortly. "So you *were* up there. You did gimmick the bolts and fasten the skylight on the outside with a machine screw."

Johnny the Artist suddenly stopped smiling. His eyes were shiny with alarm.

"You see, Johnny?" Shannon asked. "You see how it's done? And I'm a rank amateur. It's not so tough to trip a smart guy, is it? You got off the roof the same way that I got up on it—through the skylight in the Harris apartment. The Harrises left to spend the night in the country with their daughter. After the police had left Rose alone, when it was perfectly safe, Rose let herself into the Harris apartment with a duplicate key you had made, and let you down through

the Harris skylight, which was then locked on the inside. You see, I know that Dayan had altered the plan for escape from the roof. Yesterday morning he met Harris in the Hall, and Harris happened to mention that he and his wife were going to the country to spend that night with their daughter. So Dayan swiped Harris' keycase, got you to make a duplicate key and then, later, used the keycase to jam the elevator."

"And that's it?" Johnny asked. "That's the works?"

"The works," Shannon repeated. He watched Johnny the Artist take out a tooled leather wallet, from which he removed a narrow slip of bank paper. The check Shannon had written and signed *A. B. Courtland*. The check Johnny the Artist has presumably burned in the vacant apartment.

Johnny said, "A new angle, Shannon. You make a crude forgery of a crude forgery. You burn the former, keep the latter for an emergency something like this." He extended the check a little way toward Shannon. One blonde eyebrow lifted quizzically. "Do we make a deal, Shannon? Forgery calls for a nasty rap."

Shannon's dark eyes scoffed. "If anybody by the name of A. B. Courtland happens to have an account at that bank, it'll be highly coincidental." He took a step toward the phone.

"We can find out," Johnny was saying. "Rose can put the check through for payment and see just what happens."

"Shannon!"

Shannon heard Rose Dayan's gasp. He turned, found Johnny the Artist standing six feet away, not smiling, a short-barreled revolver in his right hand.

"That's chancey, Johnny," Shannon said quietly.

Johnny's face was as pale and taut as the head of a drum.

Shannon said, "A gun won't always stop a man. And how big is a bullet? How many vital spots are there to put bullets in? And if I reach you, Johnny. . . ."

Johnny tipped the gun a little. Its muzzle eyed Shannon. Johnny intended to gamble a head shot.

"If I reach you, God help you, Johnny." Shannon saw Johnny's trigger finger tighten and sprang into a crouch cat-quick and disconcerting. At the same time he let ten inches of lug wrench slide out of his sleeve and swung his right arm up, the two movements blending into a single movement. The lug wrench caught Johnny's lowering gun arm. The muzzle tipped upward, the shot tugging through the crown of Shannon's hat. Then Shannon was crowding Johnny. They were fighting over who had the gun. They both seemed to have it, up there against the ceiling, where it could do nobody harm, nobody good. It was in-fighting, too close to do much with a lug wrench except rough Johnny's face with it. They rocked forward and back—too far back for Shannon. They went down together with Johnny on top. But Shannon had the gun. And the lug wrench. Shannon had everything. All he had to do was hang on to everything and take all that Johnny could give him in the way of blows on the face. Then he heard Rose Dayan scream from over near the door. He heard MacIlrath's roar. And Shannon supposed that Rose Dayan had tried to leave the apartment, had run into MacIlrath and Moracci on their way in. Mac and Moracci and that excited little Mr. Harris from across the hall—all in the Dayan living room. And soft Mrs. Dayan and Johnny the Artist, who seemed to float up into the air a little way above Shannon before MacIlrath got him.

"Pete, are you hurt?" MacIlrath was lifting Shannon bodily, but not quite as he had lifted Johnny. MacIlrath was saying he'd kill a certain so-and-so who was

(Continued on page 108)

There was twenty grand blood money on the Meredith snatch —but the blood was all going to be mine!

I felt a red hot poker part my hair, then my gun was blasting.

BLOOD on the NIGHT

By Graham Doar

I ASKED, "Could I see the notes, please?" Making it not quite a question.

His strong but fleshy face was strained paper white in the cone of light that flooded the top of his huge desk. His hand trembled slightly as he slid a couple of opened envelopes toward me. Iris Meredith's 'cello-like contralto said, from the dimness by the french windows, "Is all this necessary, Sam?"

Samuel Meredith's cold, pale eyes were on me as he answered her, "Please, Iris. We've been over that. Will you ring for

Simpson? I think we would like some coffee."

I tried to show interest in nothing but the notes as I slid them from their envelopes. The shorter one read:

> FOR 20 GRAND YOU CAN HAVE HIM BACK. IN ONE PIECE.
>
> USED BILLS NO BIGGER THAN $20. GET IT READY AND SIT TIGHT. WE LET YOU KNOW JUST WHERE AND WHEN.

The other one had been received only a few hours ago.

> PUT THE MONEY IN A BOX. DRIVE OVER 14 ST. BRIDGE. TAKE NOYESVILLE ROAD TO CULVERT 10 MILES FROM CIRCLE. PARK CAR AT CULVERT AT 2 A. M. AND LEAVE MONEY ON SEAT. WALK 10 MINUTES TOWARD NOYESVILLE AND BACK. NO TRICKS. TAKE NO CHANCES THE COPS GET IN ON THIS OR THE BOY DON'T GET HOME AGAIN. NOT EVER.

No signatures. The usual melodramatic stuff but, what the hell, it works. Often enough. I laid the notes neatly on the corner of the desk and said, "They seem reasonable."

His eyes were bitter. "Reasonable?"

"Well, twenty thousand's not much. I mean, considering. You're pretty well known to have plenty, and kidnaping is a very stiff rap. I'd have expected a harder bite."

Iris' deep voice spoke again. "What Mr. Mayne intends to say, Sam, is that the punishment for kidnaping is heavy and that he would have expected the kidnappers to ask a greater ransom from a man of your wealth. In English."

And what would she have the knife into me for? I said, "Thanks, Mrs. Meredith."

"Not at all, Mr. Mayne."

Meredith said wearily. "All right, Iris. Will you get a bottle of the brandy from my cabinet? You will, won't you, Mr. Mayne?"

When did Douglas Mayne ever turn down a free drink? I would, indeed.

When she clicked the wall switch beside the liquor cabinet, soft, indirect light filled the enormous room and I got my first real look at the second Mrs. Meredith. The rosy side of thirty, though her husband was fifty if he was a day, she was good to look at. She was wearing a flame-red dinner gown that sort of picked her figure up and threw it in your eyes. When she turned around. I saw that her face was that perfect oval that taffy blondes do have once in a great while, and that eyes unexpectedly dark under dark brows made a piquant sauce for beauty otherwise too bland. Maybe I was staring a little. Her eyes said I was and that she liked it.

I looked toward her husband. "I'd like to speak to the chauffeur—Larrick, is it? If I may."

"Why—certainly. I'll send—"

Putting the squat, golden bottle down on the desk with a thump, Iris again interposed, "But, Sam, I don't see why—"

The butler, Simpson, bent under the weight of the heavy tray with cups and silver coffee service, came into the study. He was all of sixty years old, slight and wrinkled, and he looked sick to me. Meredith said, "Oh, Simpson. Will you ring Larrick's rooms and ask him to come in?"

I said, to anybody, "I understand it was Simpson who found the second note?"

He was pouring and didn't look up. "Yes, sir. It was placed in the mailbox with the regular mail this afternon."

"But no stamp, no postmark?"

"That's right, sir."

Meredith said, "All right, Simpson." He handed me a tiny, stemmed thimble as the old butler shuffled out. The cognac was what you'd expect in a millionaire's home, I guess. This was my first time in one.

I took a second sip, which drained the glass, and settled back. "Okay, Mr. Meredith, this is the way I get it. You're hiring me strictly for the payoff. In other words, once you get the boy, Peter, back, I'm through. Right?"

"Correct, Mr. Mayne. I shall, of course, then make a report to the police and they can—er—take over."

"That's okay. The thing is, I'm not just being nosy with all these questions. I might be able—if I can sort of get the feel of the job, the technique, say, I'll have a better idea what to expect. These boys sometimes play rough." I didn't add that there was an odor of elderly fish about the business which I would like very much to locate.

Iris asked, wide-eyed, "But can't you play rough, too, Mr. Mayne?"

I grinned at her. "Yes, ma'am. As rough as may be necessary. No rougher."

Meredith said, "Of course, Mr. Mayne. Ask what questions you like." He refilled the tiny glass and I waved away the coffee urn.

"Peter, you say, is twelve. An only child?"

"No. No, he has an older sister, Molly. Nineteen. She is in her room. She's—not been well."

"I gather these are the children of the —first Mrs. Meredith?"

"Why, yes. Iris and I have only been married a little over two years." He smiled at her, reassuringly. She smiled back and rose.

"If you don't mind, Sam, and if Mr. Mayne will excuse me, this thing has been rather tiring—"

We both got up. Her smile, fixed impartially at a spot between us, seemed nervous to me. I mumbled, "Good night." Meredith patted one bare shoulder as she swept by.

The tap on the study door almost coincided with her exit. "You was asking for me, sir?"

"Oh. Oh, yes. Come in, Larrick. Mr. Mayne would like to speak to you."

TALL, dark and rugged, with a cold glint in his eye. These rich people never learned. If I were past fifty and had a young wife with hair and eyes and this and that such as Iris Meredith possessed, and, on top of that, had a young daughter about the place, I would have me a chauffeur that combined the qualities of Boris Karloff and Zazu Pitts. This boy was a cross between George Raft and George Sanders.

He stood at attention beside the desk and talked respectfully and seriously and all the time I was burning. Nothing you could take exception to, but his cold eyes were a sneer. His grammar sounded like a Damon Runyon character. Too much like.

"Yes, sir. Day before yesterday, Tuesday, that is, I go like usual to pick up Mr. Peter at this now dancing school. He's not waiting on the corner where he does, so I wait a while, then I go in. They tell me Mr. Peter has left. Well, I don't know, it could be all right, but then I go back to the car and there's this now note lying on the front seat."

"You read the note?"

"Yes, sir. It's not as though—it's not like it is addressed to anybody. Just a blank envelope."

"All right, Larrick. Then?"

"Yes, sir, right then."

"I mean, what did you do then?"

"Well, then I come back here to the house and tell them about it."

I didn't like him, but what the hell, I didn't like lots of perfectly respectable citizens and anyway it was getting toward two o'clock. I nodded to Meredith and he said, "Thank you, Larrick. That'll be all."

The Continental convertible Meredith furnished me for transportation was dull green with cream horsehide upholstery. Sweeping over the Fourteenth Street bridge and around the traffic circle, I

thought that driving this beauty could have been fun if I hadn't had a bad feeling about this job. Everyone I'd met in connection with it gave me the same impression; talking openly and frankly, and always looking at something else when you tried to meet his eye. Well, not Meredith. Maybe not Meredith. He was a stiff, ungiving type but he obviously doted on the boy, on Peter. And, for my money, he was nuts about his young wife. How did she feel about him? Hard to tell. And why did she take such a dislike to me? Was it my face or my job? Sheer snobbery—or something deeper? What did Simpson, the old butler, have on his mind? What was eating on the big guy, the chauffeur?

Why were they all scared to death of me?

Because that's what it was. Plain fright. Each was covering up in his own way, but you can't be mistaken about a thing like that. You can feel it. Hell, I'm no beauty, but I'm no Frankenstein's monster either. You'd think—

There was a sudden soar and drop under me as the convertible wheeled over the slight rise of the culvert. I lifted my foot from the accelerator and began braking down. They'd picked a nice spot for it. There wasn't a house or a light visible in any direction.

I put the Lincoln into reverse and backed her into position beside the culvert. Cutting the ignition and the lights, I patted the shoebox full of double sawbucks on the seat beside me and got out of the car. There wasn't a sound and it was darker than hell's basement.

I'd smoked half a dozen cigarettes and stumbled twice on loose pebbles. I'd walked off the road once and had to feel my way back. Otherwise my twenty-minute stroll was uneventful.

Now, coming suddenly on the dark and silent car, I started and clutched at the forty-five in my shoulder clip. I was laughing at myself for a nervous old woman as I got into the car, but I stopped laughing when my right hand struck against the shoebox. Still there, and still stuffed with that good, green paper. Twenty thousand clams and no sale. What now?

The answer was a shadow, darker than the night, looming beside the car, a flashlight that winked on, swept the convertible and poised on me. A bass voice growled, "Both hands on the wheel. Jack. You took your time showing up."

My eyes, growing accustomed to the light, caught the glint of metal in a massive paw. I put my hands on the wheel. "The money's been right here. Why didn't you get it?" I said.

"All in good time, Jack. We got something for you, first." The light dipped slightly. "Steady with the light, Frenchy!" The basso growl became a bark.

A new voice answered, *"Tais-toi,* Marty! Enough talk. Finish!"

Marty chuckled, coldly, "Take it easy, Frenchy. This's my job. Jack's in no hurry, are you, Jack?"

All right. When they started using names, I knew. This was the business. The real business, not just a kidnap payoff. I managed to keep my voice steady, "Not especially. But what's this one for?"

When you ask a question, a guy always figures you to wait for the answer. Marty started talking, "You got over the line, Jack. Too far over. You—" I pressed my left forearm down on the horn of the car, dived my right hand for my Colt and threw my body sideways and down.

The wild, shouting blee-ee-eeoop! that burst from the Lincoln cut Marty off short and almost drowned the sound of his gun. I felt a red-hot poker part the hair on the back of my head, then the automatic was in my hand and blasting.

He was big and easy to hit. I shot him three times through the body and the second slug from his gun plowed low

through the car door as he went down. I snapped two more shots at the flashlight. It went out.

I listened, flat on the seat of the car, not moving.

Marty's rattling gasps for air were loud in the pre-dawn quiet. No running footsteps on the road. No footsteps, running or otherwise.

Where was Frenchy?

I was conscious of a voice saying, "What the hell. What the hell." Over and over.

I realized the voice was mine.

Marty's breathing stopped with a last choking rattle. I slid out of the car to a crouch on the ground. My hands were trembling, partly with anger, partly with plain fright. Slowly, I crawled toward where Frenchy's light had flashed.

My hand rattled a pebble. A bullet whip-cracked past my ear and I blasted at the flare. Twice.

"*Tirez pas!* Not shoot. I am finish!" The voice was weak, had a bubbling sound in it. Chest-shot, I judged, maybe throat. I threw a pebble. No response.

HE WAS a shapeless huddle in the dim light. I could see he was bleeding hard, inside and out, a dark shine of blood crawling at the corner of his mouth. At least two slugs must have gone into the middle of him, high up.

I said, "Just you and Marty, huh?"

"*Oui.* That Marty!" he choked. "Never yet that *canaille* does something right."

"Yeah? Well, he's made his last mistake."

"*Il est mort?*"

"Mort and growing cold, Frenchy. Where's the boy?"

"Boy? Who—you are not—"

"Where's the boy?"

He struggled to one elbow, staring hard at my face in the dark. He grinned whitely. "So. It was the cross double, eh?" He coughed and there was a bubbling gurgle deep in his chest.

I said, frantically, "Goddammit, where's the boy?"

He was dead already, still leaning on that elbow. Slowly now he twisted and toppled, grinding his face in the gravelly dirt.

I should have called the law right then. All the time I was driving the convertible back toward the Meredith house I was telling myself that. But there was still Peter to think about. Was he dead, or was he alive and safe? Or was he alive and in danger still? I couldn't take the responsibility.

Anyway, I wanted a few words, private words, with Samuel Meredith. Somebody had set me up for a shooting alley duck. If not Meredith, who? I felt as though I had a convention of owls in my brain. *Who? Who? Who?* As I whipped the Lincoln into the Meredith drive and was curving up toward the house, I felt a little like a college heavyweight climbing into the ring with Joe Louis. Millionaires are tough people for private detectives to go up against.

Simpson came to the door. He hadn't undressed, though he had his collar and tie off. He was trembling with fatigue and—there it was again—fear. "Why, sir, Mr. and Mrs. Meredith left about twenty minutes ago. To pick up Master Peter. There was a phone call, sir."

Who? Who? Who?

I said, "Well, Simpson, I'd better wait. The study?"

"If you please, sir. Pardon me, sir, but—" He gestured at the box under my arm.

"There was a little misunderstanding about the arrangements. But I guess it's all right if Peter's safe."

"Yes, sir. Yes, of course, sir. But—"

"It's all right, Simpson. I'll explain to Mr. Meredith." You'd have thought it was breaking his heart to see the money

come back home. I asked, "Did Larrick drive them?"

"Oh no, sir. Mrs. Meredith drove. Larrick left the house shortly before you did, sir."

"Oh?"

"Yes, sir. He had tomor—today off, sir, and wished to get an early start."

"Oh."

He settled me in the study and I asked, "Why don't you go to bed, Simpson? You look tired."

"Why, I couldn't do that, sir." He was shocked. "Not until Mr. Meredith comes in. Would you like coffee, sir?"

"No, thanks. But if I might—" I gestured.

"Certainly, sir." He put the bottle and a glass at my elbow and shuffled out. I put the shoebox on the floor beside my chair and poured. I sipped.

"Mind if I have one?"

"You'll have to get yourself a glass." I didn't turn my head.

She got up from the big wing chair over in the darkest corner of the study and walked to the liquor cabinet. She clicked on the overhead lights, selected a Rhine wine-glass and came toward me.

"You saw me there all the time," she pouted.

I nodded.

"Why didn't you say something?"

I poured a thimbleful of cognac into the bottom of the big glass and handed it back to her. This could only be the nineteen-year-old Molly Meredith.

I said, "That's all you get."

She looked at me with long-lashed green eyes, and I mean green. "Papa lets me have all I want."

I'll bet. "You're a liar."

She giggled. "I like you." She sat down on the arm of my chair.

This kid could have passed for twenty-five or over, easily. She was dressed in black, tailored slacks and one of those fragile linen peasant blouses with lots of needlework.

I said, "I bet your father would spank you if he caught you in here."

She leaned an elbow on my shoulder. "Don't be stuffy. This is my favorite blouse. Isn't it pretty?" She spread out the embroidered collar for me to see.

Also I caught the hot, medicinal odor of her breath and I realized why her eyes looked so green. There was no black in them, the pupils were pinpoints. Nineteen, and coked to the gills. She hadn't been well, Meredith had said. Well, she was well now, just fine. Really scraping clouds.

I leaned on the other arm of the chair.

She said, "You're the detective, aren't you? The one that was to find Peter?"

"Yes."

"I could help you. Help you find him. If you'd do a—a thing for me."

"Oh?"

"Yes." She was running her hand through my hair and I winced as she touched the raw spot in back. She didn't notice. "You don't believe me, do you?"

"Sure. Sure, I believe you." Maybe I did.

"Oh. Well, you know Larrick? The chauffeur?"

"Uh-huh."

"I want you to kill him."

I never thought for one minute that she was kidding. I took a deep breath. "Why?"

"You do kill people, don't you?"

"Sometimes. But why Larrick?"

"You don't have to know why. Do you?" She slid off the arm of the chair onto my lap, dropping her glass on the carpet. "I'll pay you."

"My license is not good for killing people unless I know why."

"Oh. Well, he—"

I said, "Where do you get the candy, kid?"

"What?"

"The hop, kid, the dust. Where do you get it?"

She stiffened. "That's none of your business. I don't know what you're talking about."

"He won't sell you any more, is that it? Or did the price go up?"

"Go to hell!"

"I won't kill him unless you tell me."

"Not even if I pay you?"

I was trying to take it easy. I knew that if she got upset or angry, she was likely to toss a wing-ding that would bring the walls down. And I had more things to do than nursemaid an adolescent hophead.

I stood up, dumping her hot, sick softness with a thud on the floor and, bending, I slapped her face sharply, twice, forehand and back. The green eyes looked blankly at me and the wet mouth writhed.

I said, "What the hell's this with Larrick? Answer me, dammit! Why?"

The green eyes rolled back and a whimpering sound came from deep in her. Her body stiffened, then slumped. I stood a moment, breathing hard, shaking all over. She was out. I picked her up and put her on the sofa and rang for Simpson.

Maybe I would kill him, at that. Maybe I would. If so, there'd be no charge. This one was on me.

THE lock on the door to Larrick's rooms over the garage was a new Yale. I looked at it consideringly.

"Will you have to tell the master about this, sir? About Miss Molly?" So help me, there were tears in Simpson's eyes. "We've been so careful to hide it from him."

I said, "I don't have to tell him anything. But there's plenty I want to ask him. He calls me in on a case that's beginning to look as phoney as a four dollar bill and damn near gets me killed. My fifty buck fee doesn't cover that. That comes higher." I raised one number eleven and planted it where it would do the most good. The door swung open.

Simpson followed me in, hugging the shoebox full of twenties in both arms like a baby. "Killed, sir?"

I was throwing clothes from the dresser drawers onto the bed and just grunted. He didn't repeat his query.

As I moved from the wrecked bedroom back into the living room, I said, "How long's Larrick been here?"

"Just under two years, sir."

"Where was he before?"

"Why, I don't know, sir. Mrs. Meredith engaged him. He had references, of course."

"Don't they all?" I sat down in an armchair and lit a cigarette. Simpson stood in the doorway between the two rooms and studied the floor, the ceiling, the box he held in his arms. I said, "How long has Molly been on the junk?"

"I—I don't know, sir. We found it

out nearly a year ago, but that doesn't—"

"We?"

"Mrs. Meredith discovered it, sir. She—er—enlisted my aid. In watching."

"Why the hell didn't you put her in for a cure?"

For the first time he looked straight at me. "It was a difficult situation, sir."

I could see that. "And how long has Larrick been working the black?"

"The 'black', sir?"

"Blackmail, Simpson, blackmail. How long? And who? Molly?"

"I—I wouldn't know about that, sir."

I let it lie there. He was an old man, tired and half sick, and I didn't really give a damn anyway. "Okay, Simpson, I'm just guessing. But take a look around. Twelve suits in the closet in there—and look at the labels. Silk underwear and pajamas. Fifteen or twenty dollar shirts. Ties by Sulka and Bronzini. Solid gold cigarette case. Maybe three or four hundred dollars worth of camera and equipment. Hell, what does Meredith pay a chauffeur?"

"I—I see what you mean, sir."

I stood up and stabbed out my cigarette. "I'll bet you do, old man. And don't think I couldn't open you up if I felt like it."

He looked at me for the second time. "I've been with Mr. Meredith for twenty years, sir. I held Miss Molly in my arms before she was an hour old." It didn't sound like an answer, but I knew it was.

My voice was gentler. "All right. Let's take a look at this room. The obvious place would be a safety deposit box—but Larrick didn't strike me as an obvious type."

"I've been wondering, sir," Simpson said, "just what went—er—amiss with the ransom delivery."

"Yeah. I've been wondering, too." I was leafing through the books in the well-stocked case and grinned as I came to a volume of Damon Runyon short stories. He must have used it for a grammar text.

These Fancy Dans are always just as cute as hell and they always think they're twice as cute as they are. The stuff was in the bottom of one of those hollow-stemmed smoking stands with a big gaboon for a base. It's usually filled with water; Larrick had sand in his. Sand and a little box filled with paper folds of a fine white powder.

It was the hop, all right, part of what I was looking for. I tipped up the receptacle and spilled the sand in a pile on the carpet. Two more items turned up—a heavy brown envelope and a folded piece of parchment. I shook the sand from the latter and unfolded it, squatting on my heels.

He must have been proud of it, not to have burned it up. It was a diploma from State Medical College, dated eight years before, and it stated that one Lawrence K. Anson had satisfactorily completed the prescribed course, etc. I said, "What's Larrick's first name?"

Simpson was close behind me, reading over my shoulder. "Why—why, it's Anson, sir."

"Uh-huh." I let the diploma flutter to the floor and drew out the contents of the brown envelope. They were letters—photostats and originals, maybe thirty of them. There was a picture in with them.

THE old butler's breath was harsh in my ear and there was a sob in it. "Good Lord, sir, I never dreamed —so it was this! No wonder she—the poor child!"

I stood up, brushing the sand from my hands, and slid the letters back into the envelope. "Yeah. No wonder, too, Larrick was living high. There're eight or ten different —uh—names here. These little items would mean a pretty nice income. Not counting the dope he peddled."

Larrick must have been standing at the door for some minutes. Now he

spoke, "Not so much, Mayne. Some of them didn't have any money."

I turned slowly, careful not to move my hands too suddenly. "Dr. Anson, I presume." I let the envelope fall to the floor.

The revolver in his big hand drifted casually between Simpson and me. The old butler had backed against the wall and he still had the box of money cradled in his arms. Larrick laughed. "Just don't presume too much, Mayne. Did you have fun with Simpson's little playmates?"

Maybe I was a little slow. It had been a tough day. "You mean Simpson sent those cowboys?"

He laughed again. "Can you imagine that doddering old sniveler trying to set a trap for me? It would have worked, too. If I'd gone near that money, I'd have been a gone pigeon."

Simpson found his voice. "How did you know? How did you find out?"

"Don't expect a hophead to keep secrets, old man. I got it out of Molly that she'd talked to you, so I was looking for trouble. I parked off on a side road and came up to the culvert on foot, from the other side. I crawled through the culvert and damned near tripped over them. I thought they were cops at first; then I heard them talking. So I just froze."

I said, "So you were right there?"

"Right there. And that reminds me. You're pretty good with a gun, Mayne. Suppose you unbutton your coat and open it up. Slow! That's right. Now, still slow, get the gun by the muzzle and toss it on the floor—toward me." There was sweat standing on his forehead. On mine, too, for that matter.

Simpson's voice was thick, unsteady. "I still thought it was just the drugs, Larrick. If I'd known—When I saw Miss Molly place that note in the mailbox, I followed her to her room and forced her to tell me. I—I threatened to go to Mr. Meredith."

I said, "Why the hell didn't you?"

"She—she said she'd kill herself. Then I—well, I have for years placed an occasional bet on the races and I know quite a few—sporting people. I got a telephone number from—a chap—and I called it. Twenty thousand dollars will buy almost anything." I'll bet. Those guys would have settled for five hundred. Simpson turned to me. "You see don't you, sir? This way would finish it—for good. It had to be finished. It was all I could think of."

"Finished, eh? I ought to finish it." There was no laugh in Larrick's voice now. "I ought to let you have it."

I didn't like the crazy look in Simpson's eyes or his almost hysterical tone. "If I'd known about those letters, I'd have done the job myself. You—you—" Rage choked him off.

"Look," I put in, "how did this mess get started? Whose fancy idea was the kidnap frame? And where's the boy, Peter?"

Simpson spoke to me, but his eyes were on Larrick. "He wanted twenty thousand dollars from Miss Molly. He'd been blackmailing her for a long time, but not for any such amounts as that. She didn't have it and couldn't get it. Larrick was getting frightened and wanted to get out—but he insisted on having the money first. I guess Molly was the one who thought of faking a kidnapping. She was really desperate."

Larrick growled. "You can't trust a hophead. She was likely to blow her top any time and I'd be in the soup."

I cut in again, before Simpson could answer. "But how about the boy? Is he all right?"

"Sure he's all right." Larrick's voice was easier, more relaxed. "I got a woman to take him to Richmond. She's his 'aunt'; the kid wouldn't know the difference. Other boys have aunts, why shouldn't he? She's kept him full of candy

and pop and taken him to picture shows. A great big holiday. Then tonight she left him in a hotel lobby and called the house here. His father will pick him up—with nothing wrong worse than a bellyache."

I applied the prod. "You know this place is going to be lousy with cops as soon as Meredith's sure the boy is safe?"

"Sure, I know. And I intend to be long gone by then. All right, Simpson, I'll take that box now."

I'd seen it coming, had tried to stall it, but what could I do? The old man's judgment was gone; he'd been made, literally insane, since he'd seen the letters. He mouthed an oath and his washed-out eyes flamed redly as he launched himself at the chauffeur, directly at the big, short-barreled revolver in his hand. I froze, tingling, but the pistol never wavered. Not yet.

The falling shoebox scattered packets of twenty-dollar bills over the carpet, but Larrick's eyes fixed me as he swung a beamlike left arm, knocking Simpson back against the plaster wall, his delicate looking head striking with a harsh crack. The thin form slumped, slid slowly down. He looked like a bag of bones thrown from a third floor window. The chauffeur's face was ugly as he took a swift step and kicked the old man viciously in the head.

I said, "You probably go good with old women, too." I knelt by the old butler and felt for a pulse. It was there, but weak.

"Pick up the money, Mayne."

"Go to hell."

His eyes changed color and I saw his fingers whiten on the trigger. "All right, hero. One more time. Pick it up."

What the hell. I began to pick it up.

But he hadn't used the gun on Simpson. He didn't want to shoot—and if he didn't want to shoot, he was my meat. My foot kicked one of the packets and I made a fast sidestep toward it.

Larrick said, "Watch it!" But he still hadn't made up his mind when, from my crouching position, I sprang.

He finally pulled the trigger, all right, but he'd hesitated too long. My right hand was on his wrist, and by the time the bullet smacked into the wall, I'd started my pivot. He landed head down.

He came up on one knee, shaking his head dazedly. I took two carefully calculated, swinging strides and kicked him squarely in the face. He was raised almost to his feet with the force I got into it, and he didn't even twitch after he toppled. He lay full length, on his belly, and blood from his face began to soak into the carpet. I rolled him over on his back and his head flopped weirdly. His neck was broken.

Before going to the phone I picked up the letters, still in their envelope, and stuck them in my pocket.

I SAID, "That's the way it was, Mr. Meredith. I got back to the car before the kidnapers cleared out—there must have been something wrong with their timing. Anyway, they got frightened and started shooting. I got them both, but one of them admitted, before he died, that Larrick was in on it."

Meredith was pale, worn out, but he looked better than he had the night before. He opened a drawer of his desk and took out a checkbook. "Simpson died on the way to the hospital. I just heard. A fracture," he said wearily.

That made four. The thin morning sunlight fell across his desk, striking a glint from the brandy bottle. I fumbled for a cigarette. "I was afraid he wouldn't make it. He was handled pretty brutally."

"I'll miss him. He'd been with me for twenty years."

I reached for the brandy bottle. What could I say? Meredith finished writing and waved the check in the air to dry. You'd think a millionaire could afford a blotter. He slid the pink oblong across the desk to me.

"All right, Mr. Mayne. You did a good job, I suppose. I could wish some of these people had been left alive. There are still questions in my mind. For instance, what's wrong with Molly?"

I put the check into my pocket without looking at it and reached for my hat. "Didn't you talk to the doctor?"

"Yes, I talked to him. Just nerves, he said. A few weeks rest in the sanitarium. Why can't she rest at home?" He looked away from me, through the window. "Maybe you're right, Mr. Mayne. Maybe I'd rather have the questions than the answers."

I got out. There was a maid in the hallway pretending to dust and she showed me the way. I mounted the stairs and knocked on the door of Iris Meredith's sitting room.

She was dressed in a yellow housecoat with a wide sash of vivid wine red. She too was pale and drawn.

"I'm glad you came in, Mr. Mayne. I did want to thank you."

I dropped the letters in her lap. "I thought you might want these, Mrs. Meredith."

"But what—" Her face went scarlet. "Oh—Molly! The poor, foolish child!"

"Look at all of them, Mrs. Meredith, and the picture."

She raised her hands to her shining crown of loosely piled hair, framing her face with their white slenderness, and I saw again the lush, dark beauty that I'd recognized in the photo. And she had to inscribe it. Beautiful, but foolish.

She said, "But what do— Some of these are not from Molly."

She was pretty good. "I believe you interviewed Larrick when he first came?"

"Why, yes. But I don't see—" She saw, all right. Her eyes were haunted.

"Did you check his references?"

"Why—"

"Where had you known him before?"

"Mr. Mayne!"

Even now, even this late, I could have left it. There had been a picture with one of the letters—an outing of some kind. She was in it. I said slowly, "You've gained a little weight, Mrs. Meredith. It's becoming. And I like you as a blonde. But it's about time to have your hair dyed again. It's a bit dark at the roots."

The 'cello tones of her voice were pure agony. "And I thought it was finished now. How much do *you* want? What will be the end of it?"

"I didn't think Larrick—or Anson—was hanging around here for the nickels he could squeeze from Molly's allowance. Four men dead—that's a stiff price."

She had her face hidden against the striped satin of the love seat where she sat, and her moaning cry was muffled.

"All right. That's all, Iris. But I wanted you to know that I knew. I'm a private detective, a hired hand. I work for money, pretty dirty work and pretty dirty money, sometimes. What I start, I finish. When I finish, I take my money and go. And that's the end of it. People who've known me professionally never want to know me socially. I play too rough. But I wanted you to know that I knew—and that's the end of it."

She didn't answer.

After a while, I picked up my hat from beside my chair and went to the door. I had it open and was partly through before she raised her face. Even crying, even with her makeup mussed, she was still beautiful.

"Thank you—Douglas, is it? I wish I could make you see. I wish I could explain. It was a long time ago and I was very young and foolish. I thought I loved him, I guess. I've forgotten, now, what I felt then. He was so very handsome."

I said, "You should have seen him with his teeth missing." I closed the door and went down the stairs and out. The check was for a thousand dollars, I discovered, which helped a lot.

THE THIRD DEGREE

By Hallack McCord

(Answers on page 117)

TO BE a really top notch sleuth, one needs a great deal of knowledge about crime and criminals. How much do you know about these subjects, or, put differently, what kind of a detective would you make? Test yourself on the twenty questions listed below and find out. Answer eighteen or more of them correctly, and chances are you'd make an excellent sherlock. Answer sixteen or seventeen and you're still good. But answer fewer than fourteen, and you land smack in the amateur class. Good luck!

1. Which of the following poisons is the most common cause of death? Iodine? Nitric acid? Carbolic acid?

2. True or false? To the untrained eye, the symptoms of opium poisoning and apoplexy may often appear quite similar.

3. If a crook friend of yours told you he had recently been "given the kick," which of the following would you think he meant? He'd been given the third degree? He had been sprung from prison?

4. True or false? In crook slang a "kid glove" is a so-called high class crook.

5. According to the underworld's way of thinking, what is a "short conner?"

6. True or false? In criminal slanguage, a "shover" is one who makes his living by cracking safes.

7. True or false? Generally speaking, poisoning by one of the mineral acids tends to bring on observable symptoms rather quickly.

8. Would a person working around vegetable sprays be likely to use arsenic as a poison?

9. True or false? Through microscopic examination it is often possible to tell freshly cut hair from hair which has not been cut for several days.

10. True or false? Hair may sometimes appear to grow after death as a result of the shrinkage of the skin.

11. True or false? It is relatively easy for the scientific detective to identify ski tracks as coming from a specific pair of skis.

12. What is a "homicide kit?"

13. What are two meanings for the underworld slang term "sprung?"

14. If a crook acquaintance of yours told you he was going to "square a rap," what would you think he was going to do?

15. If a well known stool pigeon told you a friend of his was "on the sneeze," what would you think the stool pigeon was talking about?

16. True or false? A person poisoned by mushrooms may display symptoms similar to those of one poisoned by yellow jasmine.

17. In general, what is considered the fatal time for morphine—that is, the length of time it takes to kill?

18. In crook slang, what is a "spill?"

19. What is a "speed ball?"

20. "Sour paper" is underworldese for which of the following items? Forged checks? Illegal passports? Spaghetti?

Take two dead men, address unknown—one dead brain behind the loveliest living face Detective Morgan had even seen — mix well with one gibbering, moonless night and serve with a sprinkling of hot ice for —

MAYHEM AT EIGHT

CHAPTER ONE

A Jewel of a Murder

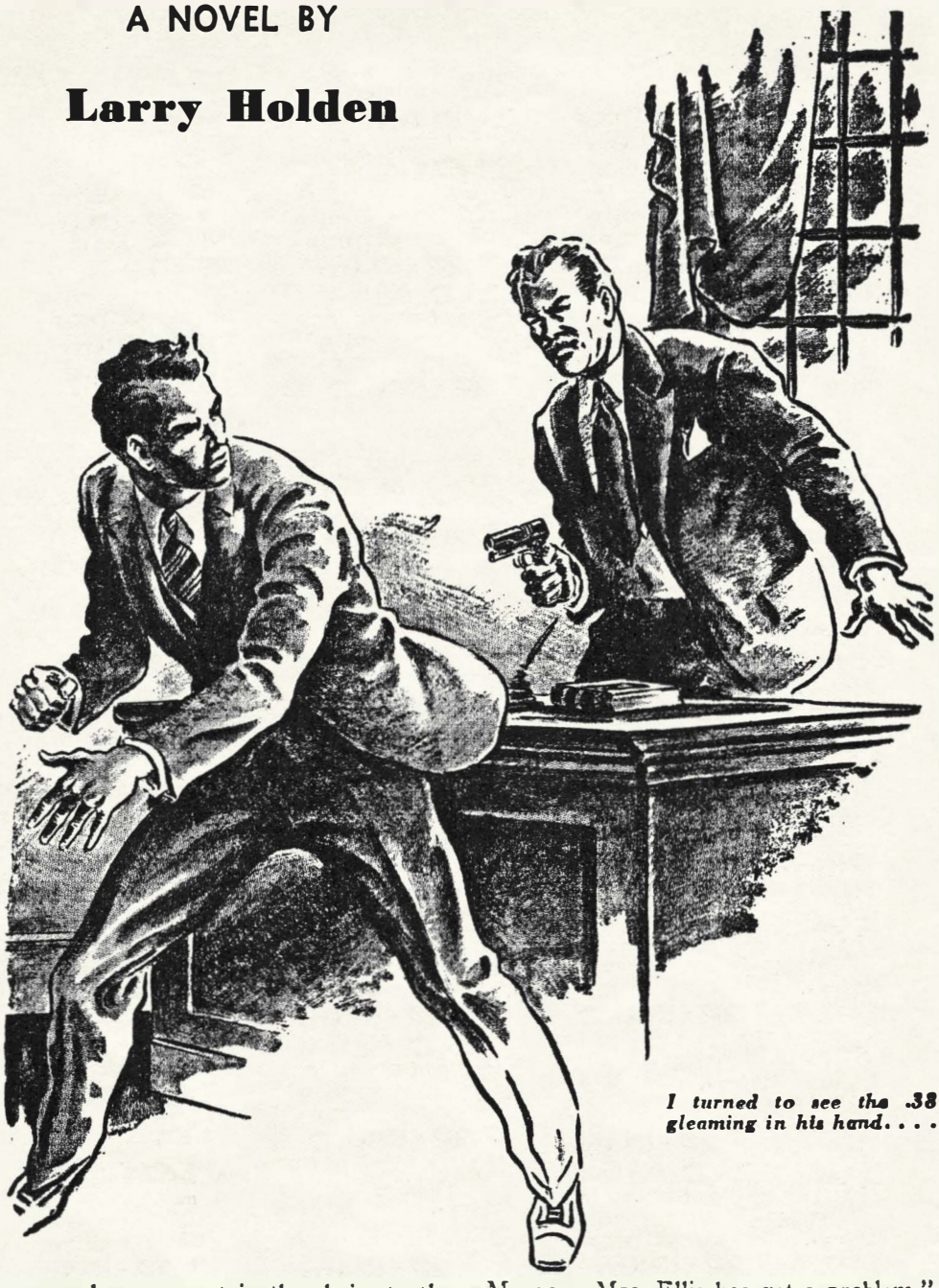
THE intercom box squeaked in that Mickey Mouse voice it always has. Lula looked at me and said, "boss wants you, Al."

I grumbled, "About time." I'd been sitting around for two days, waiting for an assignment.

I put down the newspaper, straightened my tie, and went into the private office. The boss was behind his desk, looking, as usual, like a fat and sleepy bullfrog. Curiously, it made him look like the grandfather of all the wisdom in the world. A

A NOVEL BY

Larry Holden



I turned to see the .38 gleaming in his hand. . . .

man and woman sat in the chairs to the right of his desk, their backs to me.

As I walked across the room, the boss looked at the woman and mumbled, "This is Mr. Morgan. He'll be in charge of the investigation. This is Mrs. Ellis, Mr. Morgan. Mrs. Ellis has got a problem."

That was just words and, as I rounded the end of his desk, I wondered what he was stalling around for, and why he had called me in. I figured maybe he wanted me to take a good look at this pair.

I gave them a crisp, professional smile, then my eyes spread as they touched the woman. She was a girl, really; no more than twenty-two or three—but beautiful enough to be damned for, achingly beautiful. Blonde hair feather-cut; blue eyes a little on the credulous side; and even sitting, her figure was a living dream.

The man was something different. He was tall, lithely muscular, but his face and hands had that kind of oily tan that looked as if they had been French fried. His name—I knew him—was Marius, just Marius, and he was a dancer at Leo Barr's Lido Club. Hardly the kind of playmate you'd expect a girl like Mrs. Ellis to pick for herself.

The boss waited until I had looked my fill, then mumbled, "Briefly, this is the problem. Four days ago, Mrs. Ellis and—uh—this gentleman were on their way home from the Lido Club at three-thirty A.M. They were held up, and Mrs. Ellis' emerald bracelet was taken. The thief called the next day and told her she could have the bracelet back for five thousand dollars, providing she did not notify the police."

I nodded. It was a familiar setup.

The boss mumbled on, "Mrs. Ellis went to the Murdoch Agency. She gave Mr. Murdoch and an operative named Cross the five thousand dollars, and they were to have made the payoff last night in Secaucus."

The girl broke in petulantly, "Yeah, and I wanna know what happened. Him not showing up, and me waiting in his office till all hours. I want my bracelet!"

I winced. The body was Park Avenue, but the voice was Brooklyn. And then I noticed another thing—she was scared to death.

The boss gave her a heavy-lidded stare. "Mr. Murdoch's reputation for honesty is beyond question."

"*You* say!" the girl cried shrilly. "All I want is my bracelet."

The boss pursed his lips with distaste. "Murdoch and Cross," he said to me, "went to keep the rendezvous on schedule. However, they did not return. Mrs. Ellis is offering us five hundred dollars to find them. That's correct, is it not, Mrs. Ellis?"

"I said so, didn't I?"

"We are not obligating ourselves to find your bracelet for you, you know, Mrs. Ellis."

"You just find Murdoch and forget the doubletalk."

I stared at her. What doubletalk? Then I did a quick take at the boss, for I just remembered something I had read in the paper, but I kept my mouth shut while he took Mrs. Ellis' five hundred and put it in his desk drawer.

He dismissed them. "We'll go right to work on it, Mrs. Ellis," he assured her.

Marius jumped up, impatient to leave. He hadn't said a word all this time, but had just sat there scowling at his shoes and looking as if he wished he were someplace else.

Mrs. Ellis was reluctant to leave. "I gotta get my bracelet," she said a little plaintively. "I gotta get it by Saddy. I'm going out Saddy."

Marius grabbed her arm and seemed to raise her from the chair by sheer strength. "Come on," he muttered. "They said they're going to work on it, didn't they? The longer you hang around, the longer it's going to take. Come on."

He got her as far as the doorway before she twisted and said back over her shoulder, "I just gotta get it by Saddy." He gave her arm an angry tug, and she went out with him.

The boss tilted his chin, and I crossed the office in four strides and closed the door. I went back to his desk and leaned both hands on it.

"Murdoch's dead," I said. "They found him at the dead end of the old Plank Road in Secaucus with four bullets in him. It

was in the paper this morning. There was no mention of five thousand dollars or an emerald bracelet. And especially there was no mention of a guy named Cross. Double-Cross?"

The boss frowned. He didn't like puns. He drummed on the blotter with his fingers, making up his mind about something. He looked up at me.

"Murdoch was honest," he said. "Cross was honest. I knew him. Something must have gone wrong at the payoff. Murdoch was an old hand. He wouldn't try any monkey business. Something obviously went wrong."

I nodded. I had met Murdoch a few times, and he had struck me that way too. He was a lean man, as tall and dark as Marius—one of the black Highland Scotch, and as honest as only a Highland Scotch Presbyterian conscience can make you. Granite-bottom honest. I didn't know Cross, but if the boss said he was honest, he was honest.

The boss creaked back in his swivel chair and dangled his hands over the ends of the arms.

"Now," he said, "tell me about those two." He pointed his chin at the two empty chairs.

I ticked Marius off fast. A dancer at the Lido Club with a partner named Sonia. A good dancer if you like the slinky, prowling kind of dance.

I ground my brains over Mrs. Ellis for a minute, and then it came to me. I've got that kind of mind—card index. I laid it out.

Married millionaire Ellis E. Ellis a year ago. At that time she was the hatcheck girl in the Lido Club.

"And there was a rumor around," I said, "that she was Leo Barr's girl, and it could be, because Leo likes them beautiful but dumb. On the other hand, Leo's not the kind of guy to give up a woman without a squawk, even to millionaires. And I don't remember mention of any squawk."

The boss' chin settled into his heavy neck, and he looked more froglike than ever. And grim. He rocked forward in his chair, clenching his hands on the edge of the desk.

"Find Cross," he said. He paused. "Then we'll see what we want to do about the rest of it."

I started to go and turned back. "Wait a minute," I said. "Wasn't that bracelet insured at all?"

"It was covered for twenty thousand dollars."

"And she shelled out her own five thousand! I don't get it."

The boss said drily, "Mrs. Ellis doesn't trust insurance companies. To quote, 'They don't do nothing but try and make trouble and ask questions.' "

"Ah, wait a minute now," I said. "Something stinks here. If she doesn't—"

THE boss held up his hand. "Don't beat your brains against it, Al. If you can manage to get inside that head of hers, everything she says and does is perfectly logical—from her point of view. And her point of view is that of a backward eight-year-old child. In short, she's a moron. She's afraid of the dark, and she's afraid of bogeymen, and she believes in Santa Claus."

I said, "Oh. Then, who's the bogeyman in the case, her husband?"

"In a complicated way. She doesn't think of him as a husband. She thinks of him as a tyrannical father, and she's continually afraid of him. Dammit, she's a moron. Morons shouldn't be permitted to marry."

"She's scared of her husband, but still she runs around with a creep like Marius!" I shook my head. "Maybe I don't understand morons."

The boss was slipping, but he took one more grip on it.

"Listen," he said. "If she thinks of her husband as her father, that, in her simple, unaffected way, makes it okay for her to have a boyfriend. Do you get it now? However, I made her promise to give Marius the boot."

"So that's why he was sore."

His patience exploded. "Get out of here and get to work," he flapped his hand irritably at me. "Find Cross."

I walked to the door with a faked air of injured dignity, saying over my shoulder, "I was just trying to get the picture, that's all."

I closed the door softly and grinned at Lula. She shook her head.

"Don't rib him, Al," she said.

"Me?" I said. "Me?"

"I'm warning you, he won't take it. He and Murdoch were like this. They bowled on the same team every Monday night, played pinochle together, and bent their elbows at the same bar. Don't make yourself unpopular."

That damned up the wisecracks. I said soberly, "Thanks, Lula. Sometimes I'm a little too full of escaping gas. Give me twenty from petty cash for expenses."

She took the green steel box from the bottom drawer of her desk, gave me four fives, and had me sign a receipt.

I looked up Cross in the phone book, but he wasn't listed. I told Lula to call Murdoch's office and see if she could wheedle it for me. I could tell from the conversation that Murdoch's office girl was all broken up, but Lula got the address for me—217 Park Place, Apartment 3-C.

"Remember what I told you," she warned darkly as I went out.

I nodded. It didn't need any more answer than that. I pushed the button for the elevator, and while I was waiting, I tried to organize things in my mind. I couldn't hope for much at Cross' place—the name of a girl friend or a relative maybe, an address, a phone number, the name of his bank if he had one. A point to start from.

As I walked out of the building, I saw this robin's egg blue convertible Caddy. You couldn't miss it. It was about seven yards long and it was parked directly in front of the entrance. I wouldn't have looked twice, but sitting there at the wheel was Mrs. Ellis, and beside her, arguing fiercely, was Marius. Her face was all screwed up, and she couldn't have looked unhappier if he'd been sticking burning splinters under her fingernails. She needed help.

I walked over to the car and, ignoring Marius, said reproachfully, "Shame on you, Mrs. Ellis. You promised faithfully that you'd give this heel the air. What would the boss say if he found out?"

Her beautiful jaw sagged, and she made an unhappy, helpless gesture. "He keeps talking," she said. "Don't blame me. I told him to get out, but he just keeps talking." She started to cry.

Marius said furiously to me, "Keep your nose out of this, wise guy."

I opened the door beside him. "The least you can do," I said with one eye on Mrs. Ellis, "is act like a gentleman. Haven't you made enough trouble for this lovely lady?"

She pounced on that. "He sure has," she said. She looked happier. At last she had someone to blame.

Marius' eyes clotted with venom. He darted an appraising glance at the girl, saw that he was over the barrel, then slid stiffly out of the car. His fist shot out so swiftly that I didn't have time to get anything in front of it but my head. He could really move fast, but luckily he was a dancer, not a boxer. His knuckles bounced off my forehead, but he hadn't put any shoulder, leg or body behind it, and I just blinked. I grabbed his arm and spun him around. I held his wrist in my left hand and clamped my right around his elbow. I marched him to the corner, and he marched with me, because if he didn't, a shove with my right and a jerk with my left would break his arm.

"When you get a tough steak," I said mildly, "you hit it with a mallet, and that softens it up. Hard boiled eggs end up at picnics with ants running all over them. Leave the lady alone. She's not in your league."

He didn't say a word. He stared straight ahead, his face wooden. I left him at the corner. I slapped his shoulder and said pleasantly, "I'll have to catch your act at the Lido some night." I walked away from him. Not too fast. Not too slowly, either. Like everybody else, I have a vulnerable spot right between the shoulder blades.

Back at the car, I said to Mrs. Ellis, "Now be a good girl and go home and stay there. Get yourself a nice picture book or a yo-yo or something, but keep out of trouble.

She pouted. "Ain't you going to take me home?" she asked archly, fluttering her eyelids.

"No, You're a big girl now and—"

"Just part of the way?"

"No. I've got work to do."

"How about lunch?"

"Listen, sweetheart," I said patiently. "You're a married woman, and you're running around asking for trouble."

"That's silly. You said you're gonna get me out of trouble. How about a drink this afternoon?"

"All right. You win. I'll have a drink with you this afternoon. Maybe I can drum some of the facts of life into that head of yours."

She giggled. "I'll see you at five at Peri's."

"All right, but if you change your mind, it'll be okay with me."

"Y'know," she said thoughtfully, "you got Cary Grant's eyes."

I walked away. She was a menace. The hell with her, I thought. That date at Peri's was one date I wasn't going to keep.

Ha, ha, ha.

I got my car from the lot and drove out Washington toward the Forest Hill section. My mind was a jumble, and I had to sort it out all over again. That dame should have been kept in a rubber, shockproof drum, like nitro-glycerine.

CHAPTER TWO

Sap Twice Over

PARK Place, where Cross lived, was one of those shabby little streets that stand so meekly and wistfully at the edges of fashionable neighborhoods. The houses were all a little too close together and, though kept neatly enough, they were just coops when compared to the opulent residences up on the Parkway. Cross' apartment was a five-story, yellow brick structure with a grocery store built into

the corner of it. That kind of a dump.

I opened the downstairs door with one of the three gimmicks carried on my key ring. There were two baby carriages standing in the hall, and I had to walk around them to get to the stairs. Cross' apartment was at the end of the hall. I was feeling for my key ring when I heard him moving around inside. His footsteps were hurried and nervous, and they diminished and grew louder as he walked from one room to another—and it seemed to me that he was doing a lot of walking between rooms. Too fast for worried pacing.

I pushed the doorbell and heard it buzz inside. The footsteps stopped dead. There wasn't a sound. I didn't have to read it in the paper to know he wasn't coming to open the door for me. I knocked.

"Don't play dead, Cross," I said. "You're there, and I know it."

No answer. Nothing.

"I can call the cops and get in that way," I said in a friendly voice. "But I don't want to. I'm Al Morgan from the Seaboard Agency. I want to talk over last night with you, that's all."

Sure. That was all. Nothing to it. Just—did you shoot your boss? Did you grab the bracelet? Or the five thousand? Just casual conversation.

No answer. But I was sure I could hear him breathing hard.

"The cops don't know about you—yet," I pointed out. I waited. Nothing happened. "Okay," I said, "if that's the way you want it, the cops'll be here in five minutes."

His muffled voice came quickly, "Wait a minute. What do you want to know?"

"What happened last night?"

"If I tell you, will you go away and leave me alone?"

"Sure," I lied. "But let me in. We can't yell through the door at one another."

"Okay," I eased the key ring of gim-micks out of my pocket. "What happened last night?"

"I don't know."

I said, "Huh?" Who'd he think he was kidding?

"I mean," he said hurriedly, "I was in the car when it happened. Mr. Murdoch took the path that goes down into the reeds, into the swamp. He had the money with him. He didn't seem worried, but he told me to keep the motor running."

That sounded logical and ordinary.

"The next thing I knew," Cross muffled on, "there were some shots, and Mr. Murdoch came staggering out of the reeds. He fell and started to crawl. I jumped out of the car to help him, and a man appeared in the bend of the path and started to shoot at me. I ran back to the car and got out of there."

"Just—left him there?"

"What else could I do?" he said defensively. "They were shooting at me, weren't they?"

"They? Whattaya mean, 'they?' You just got finished telling me *one* man appeared in the bend of the path."

I was working in furious silence trying to get the gimmick to unlock the door.

"Well, more men showed up after him," said Cross.

"How many—six, seven?"

"About that."

I tried gimmick number two, but it stuck and I had to jerk it out. I was sure he had heard it scrape, but I started talking right away to cover it.

"And they were all shooting at you? It must have been a regular barrage."

"I don't know if they were all shooting, but there was shooting, and I didn't feel like getting a bullet in me, so I got out of there. That's all I know. Beat it. Leave me alone. I don't want to talk about it any more."

Who would? How fantastic can you get?

"Just one more question," I said. The

third gimmick slid into the lock as sweet as sugar into coffee.

He didn't answer, and I heard him walk away. That was okay with me. I preferred to have him in another room when I walked in. It took me a full minute to get the gimmick lined up right, and I opened the door without a creak. It opened into the living room, which was about twelve by fifteen. To my right, about half way along the wall, was an open door, and on either side of it stood a pigskin suitcase, tightly packed and ready to go. That door must have led to the bedroom.

I tiptoed toward it, just like they do in the movies, thinking whimsically to myself what a surprise Mr. Cross was going to get.

Then—whammo! The ceiling fell in. I went down and ground my nose into the rug. The ceiling fell again. It might have fallen again after that, but by that time I didn't care.

According to what you read, there are all kinds of fancy ways of recovering consciousness—wading up a sand dune, swimming in crude oil. To me, it was just like waking up with a hangover, headache and all, and I had the same heavy five minutes trying to acclimate myself, and it was a shock when I did. My ankles were tied together, my wrists were tied to my ankles, there was a dishrag in my mouth, and I was all wrapped up in a blanket like a bundle of laundry. I could tell it was a blanket by the smell and feel of it.

What a surprise I had given Mr. Cross! I'll bet he damn near died laughing when I started to prowl across the room like Bela Lugosi doing Dracula. He must have been waiting behind the open door with a bowling pin, but it was a wonder he had been able to hit me at all, doubled over as he must have been with hilarity. But that's me, all right; Al Morgan, the life of the party. Anything for a laugh. Wait till I told this to the boss. It should be worth a five buck raise, at the very least. Or a good swift kick.

I gritted my teeth and tugged at my wrists. I tried to sit up, and my head banged against something. I didn't have to be told I was under the bed. This was getting better all the time. I tried to work the gag out of my mouth with my tongue. Not only wouldn't it work out, but I started to get that rare old dishpan flavor to add to the ignominy.

I TRIED to hammer on the floor with my heels, and found out that Cross had thought of that, too. My feet were securely tied to the bed rail. How long, I wondered, did it take to starve to death? Of course, I could always eat the dishrag and prolong it. The flavor was a little high, but it was undoutedly full of nourishment. Charley Chaplin ate his shoe in *The Gold Rush*, so why couldn't I eat a dishrag?

Just to keep from making any mistakes, none of this was very funny to me. Backfiring into wisecracks was just my way of keeping up my morale.

Then, after awhile, the wisecracks stopped coming. I lay there swearing and yanking futilely at the ropes that tied me. That phase passed, too, and I just lay there, dully listening to the muffled noises coming from the room below me. The radio was babbling away, a baby was crying, then I heard a woman's voice laughing. The baby stopped crying. The radio burst into music, and it was *Dear Hearts And Gentle People*. I strained at the ropes again, though I should have known better by that time.

"Now come on, Morgan," I muttered, "use your head."

The baby was quiet; the radio was turned off in the middle of the chorus. The baby was asleep. I thought of banging my head on the floor, just to make a noise, any kind of noise, but you can imagine

how far I got with that idea. Smart boy.

Then it came to me, and it was so simple that not having thought of it before put me in Beautiful's class. The bed. It wasn't set in cement, and neither was it screwed to the floor. I jerked and grunted myself over on my back, then, straining, I lifted with my arms and legs.

The rail cut cruelly into my shin bone, but I managed to get it, I judged, about eight inches off the floor. I let it down with a crash that would have brought joy to the hearts of the plasterers' Union. I listened for a moment, and downstairs the baby began to scream at the top of very healthy lungs. I clamped my jaw, lifted the bed again, and whammed it down. On the third try, it felt as if the sharp edge of the bed rail had cut clear through to the marrow of my shinbone, but I lifted and bounced it again. Below, the baby was screaming. Then I had another idea. All I had to do now was to keep up a steady thumping, and it didn't have to be so painful. I stretched out flat on my back and managed to get my shoulder under the opposite rail of the bed. I turned on my side, lifted, let it down—thump. Now it was easy. Turn—thump; turn—thump; turn—thump . . . steady as a bass drum.

I was almost sorry when the building superintendent burst in. I was developing quite a talent for bed thumping.

I heard him say, "Holy cow!" I felt a knife against the ropes, and my legs fell away from the bed rail. He hauled me out from under.

"I'll have this off in a minute, Mr. Cross," he said soothingly.

Was he going to be surprised!

He was. He pulled off the blanket and said, "Holy cow!" again. He pulled the dishrag out of my mouth and demanded, "Who're you?"

I said, "Cut me loose, and I'll show you my badge." I scowled. "Come on, come on, I'm not Houdini."

He said hastily, "Yessir. . . ." and my arms dropped heavily from my ankles.

I looked down. It hadn't been ropes. It had been neckties, and Sulka ties as that. Mr. Cross had tied me handsomely. I groaned and staggered as I tried to stand, but after a few more tries it was all right, and I stood up, rubbing my wrists. The super backed off two steps, suspicion growling in him again.

"Let's see that badge you were talking about," he demanded.

He was a short, stocky man, his red, veined face stubbled with gray and black, giving him the air of a truculent wire-haired terrier. "You're not a cop," he said. He reached suddenly behind him and came out with a claw hammer that had been hanging on the back of his overalls. "Now," he hefted the hammer, "let's see that badge."

I threw the blanket at him, and while he was fighting it, I darted through the doorway, ran down the stairs, jumped into the car and gave it the gun. I turned south on Prospect and stopped three blocks later in front of a drug store. I called the boss and told him what had happened.

I wound up, "And that super's probably called the cops by now. Maybe I made a bum play, running out like that, but if I'd waited for the Gestapo, they'd have hung on to me the rest of the day, while I went over and over it in quadruplicate. Of course, I could have wrapped the super in that blanket and tied on a little card with Don't Open Till Christmas, but—"

The boss said, "Shut up. I'm thinking."

"Yessir. But during the past few hours, I've had a lot of experience along those lines myself, and I—"

"SHUT UP, DAMMIT!"

I suddenly remembered Lula's warning, and I shut up without even a meek "yessir."

There was a long, hard silence, then the

phone rattled a little as he leaned over it again.

"What'd you think of Cross' explanation?" he asked abruptly.

"It stinks. In the first place, when he heard the shots, he'd have pulled his own gun before jumping out to help Murdoch, and when the guy levelled off on him, he'd have fired back at them, if only to cover himself."

"He may, as he said, have been frightened."

"Yessir, but this is as good a city as any to be frightened in, and by running for a better hole, he's just piling up the frights, and that includes the Gestapo. His bags were all packed and he was ready to go."

The boss grunted. He didn't answer right away, and I could almost see him gnawing his upper lip. I could almost hear him, in fact.

"How long ago was that?" he rapped out suddenly.

"It was exactly eleven twenty-five when I knocked on his door. And now it's—" I glanced at my watch and my eyes popped like bubbles. It was four-forty. Five hours! It had seemed like years under the bed, of course, but five hours in black and white is something different. That's really a hunk of time. Allowing, say, a half hour for the kayo, that left—no, it couldn't be. The watch was running away with itse—

I was brought back by a roar in my ear, "Dammit, Morgan, why don't you answer me?"

I said, "Yessir!"

He went on crisply, "Take the angle that maybe there was a tieup between that Marius and Cross. I'll phone the police about Cross in the meanwhile. They're going to be sore at you, Al, so I'd suggest if you see a policeman walking toward you that you duck into a dark doorway until he passes. Now get to work, and stay out from under beds!"

HE HUNG UP—*bang!* I bared my teeth at the phone, then walked back to the car and drove straight to Peri's, on Field Street, just off Washington. There were two entrances. I took the side one, because my car was parked there.

She was sitting at the bar, sucking at a drink that looked a foot tall. I slid up on the stool beside her, wrinkled my nose at her glass and demanded, "What do they call that thing?"

"It's a Karloff. Supposed to be better'n a Zombie. Try it."

She shoved it in my face like a kid offering a lick on a lollypop. I pushed it away.

"Why do you drink things like that?" I asked. "Don't you know you'll get sick? Didn't your mother ever tell you they weren't good for you?"

She looked at me with those big blue eyes. "You don't like me," she whimpered. "You wouldn't talk like that if you did."

"I do like you," I was begining to feel eight years old myself. "But I'm talking like that for your own good."

"Oh," she said, "that."

"I want to talk to you about Marius."

"That subject," she said primly, "is closed."

"Fine. That's just the way it should be. The Boss'll be proud of you, keeping your promise like that. But there's just one question—"

"We won't discuss it, if you don't mind."

"We're not going to discuss it. I just want to ask about him—not about him and you."

"There's nothing to ask, thank you, and if it's not too much, I don't want to keep it in mind."

Did you ever butt your head against—no, it wasn't like that. Did you ever fight your way out of a roomful of feathers? That was her—a featherweight, but I

couldn't get past her. I tried to pry her loose, but she kept coming back with those dopey answers.

"Look, sweetheart," I said in desperation, "all I'm trying to find out is this—was there a connection between Marius and Cross?"

She shook her shoulders and made a face at me. "Well, whyn't you say so? Sure there was."

"My love. My dove. My duck!" I beamed on her. "Tell Papa Morgan all about it."

She thought hard, then came up with a doubtful, "But whattaya mean, a connection?"

I gripped the bar. Here we went again. How can you carry on a conversation in words of less than one syllable?

"Did Marius know Cross?" I asked slowly, enunciating each word carefully.

She knitted her eyebrows at me. "You must be dumb or something," she said irritably. "Sure he did."

"That's all I want to know. But you're certain, aren't you?

"Certainly I'm certain. Marius was with me when I went up to see Mr. Cross and Mr. Murdoch. He knew him. He was introduced."

Come on, Morgan, I groaned to myself, *you're on the ropes, but you're not down; rally, boy, rally; punch your way out.*

"Let's take it this way, Honeybun," I said, trying another tack. "How did you come to pick Murdoch's outfit?"

"To get my bracelet back, silly."

"No. I mean why Murdoch rather than anyone else?"

"Because it's his business to get bracelets and things back, ain't it?"

I didn't want to put words in her mouth. That's the reason I was going at it obliquely. She was the kind of dame who'd say yes to anything, if she got the idea that yes was what you wanted to hear. But there's a limit to everything.

"Did Marius suggest that you hire Murdoch to find it?" I asked her bluntly.

She looked earnestly into my face, searching—just as I had expected—for the answer there. I kept as still as the Great Stone Face. If Marius hadn't suggested Murdoch, I didn't want her to say he did. Believe me, brother, smart women may be dangerous, but they're not half so dangerous as the dumb ones.

"He looked it up in the book," she said finally.

She was irritable because I had made her think, so I knew it was the truth. But it didn't give me anything. He might have picked it at random from the phone directory, or he might just have made a pretense at looking it up. I was almost back where I started, except for the 'maybe'. I tried one more shot at it.

"Now listen carefully," I said. "When you and Marius walked into Murdoch's office, did it seem to you that Marius knew either Murdoch or—ah, the hell with it!"

She was staring at me with eyes that kept getting bigger and bigger, and from that dim look in them, I could tell she was a million miles away.

"You know," she said seriously, "when you get mad, your face gets littler. Did you know that?"

"Sure," I growled. "And I got President Truman's eyes, too."

"No," she considered me critically. "Gregory Peck's. Deep, soulful, mysterious."

For a flickering red moment, I felt like showing her that I had Dracula's teeth, too.

She put her hand on my arm and gave me a smile. "And I'll bet," she breathed, leaning over, "that Gregory Peck ain't got nothing on you—"

Her hand tightened convulsively on my arm, and her face became a tight, strained mask. Her eyes darted frantically from side to side, and she began to shake.

Alarmed, I started, "For the love of—"

A pleasant voice broke in, and I felt

a light touch on my left shoulder. "Ah, so here you are, Gwendolyn! I wondered what had happened to you. And I was worried, too. You haven't been yourself these past few days. What on earth is that concoction you're drinking?"

I KNEW, even before I turned, that it was Ellis. He was about sixty and looked like a page out of Esquire—black homburg, a stiff-bosomed shirt with horizontal bars, a burgundy bow tie and a small burgundy flower to match in his buttonhole, an erect military posture, and a grey British mustache, like the one Lewis Stone used to wear. His eyes were as cold and grey as a moving glacier.

"You might introduce your husband to your friend, Gwendolyn, unless—" he tucked a little smile into the corner of his lipless mouth—"its not being done this year."

At that moment, Gwendolyn couldn't have introduced ham to eggs. I took pity on her.

"Morgan's the name," I said. "Al Morgan." I gave him a rueful grin. "I'm poaching, I guess. I mean, I didn't know—"

"It's perfectly all right, Mr. Morgan," he said coldly. "This little contretemps is nothing unusual, I assure you. A Manhattan, Peter." He smiled briefly at the barkeep.

Beautiful was sitting rigidly on her stool, staring unseeingly into the mirror over the back bar. Her hands looked as if they had been sculptured in ice. No one said a word. Ellis sat frowning and tapping his forefinger on the edge of the bar until the barkeep placed the Manhattan in front of him. He looked at the glass, and his frown deepened. He gave the glass a little poke with his forefinger. The barkeep's face turned pink, then red.

"Tell me," said Ellis frigidly, "what is that object floating in there like a diseased kidney?"

"It's a cherry, Mr. Ellis," said the barkeep in a muffled voice.

"Indeed. And exactly what is the purpose of it, if I may ask?"

"We always put cherries in Manhattans, Mr. Ellis."

"Do you, now? But tell me, Peter, what do you *always* put in *my* Manhattans?"

The barkeep's face clotted. He was taking a beating, and I felt sorry for him. "Lemon peel, Mr. Ellis," he said heavily. "I always put lemon peel in, and I always make your Manhattan with French vermouth."

"Exactly. Now suppose you remove this—ah—potion, and make me a proper Manhattan."

He hadn't raised his voice and he hadn't sworn at the barkeep, as some of the gentlemen of our better families love to do. It was quiet, polite torture, and he did it without batting an eye. I couldn't

tell from his frozen face if he enjoyed it or not, but he probably did, or he wouldn't have done it.

Having disposed of the barkeep, he turned to me. He gave me a long, impersonal stare. I stared back belligerently, but I had the uneasy feeling that I had seen him somewhere before, and that it hadn't been pleasant. Or perhaps that was a premonition of what was coming. He took off without any preliminaries.

"If my wife has invited you to our home this Saturday evening, Mr. Morgan," he said crisply, "please disregard it. She is not only impulsive, but she has no judgement. It will be our wedding anniversary, and only my family and friends will be present. You would be most uncomfortable, I assure you. My wife makes friends much too casually for my taste and, as you may have gathered, I don't altogether approve."

If I'd been there for any other reason but the one I was, I'd have felt small enough to walk under a dime. Instead, I said to myself, *Morgan, you've been a ba-a-a-ad boy, and that's the reason Papa took you to the woodshed,* but for Beautiful's sake, I kept it to myself. She was suffering enough as it was.

"And," he added gratuitously, in case I didn't understand him. "I don't approve of you, Mr. Morgan."

All this in that offhand British voice of his that raised insults to an art.

It went against the grain, but I said, "Sure, Chief. I know what you mean. Sorry to of butted in," I slid off my bar stool. "No offense."

I walked toward the front door, grinding teeth. He was a sweetheart, all right, and leaving Beautiful in his hands affected me exactly the same as if I had thrown a fluffy little white Angora kitten into a dog pound. Poor, stupid little goon. She was on the rack, and I'd have given a month's pay to help her, but there wasn't a thing I could do, except leave her to her torment and refined torture. A hell of a husband.

As I walked out to the sidewalk, a heavy-shouldered character stepped up to me, said, "Here's something from a friend, Morgan," and hit me heavily in the stomach.

The breath went out of me as if it were life itself. I doubled over and fell against him. He held me up and hit me twice again under the heart. The first blow had paralyzed me, but the next two were stabs of white hot iron. Through the red veil of agony, I could see and I could hear. There was a car at the curb, and the rear door was open. He dragged me to it and shoved me in, giving me a vicious kick to make sure I went all the way in. My head hit the opposite door and I sprawled limply on the floor.

And, for the second time that day, I passed out cold.

When I came to, I wasn't in the car. I was sitting, or sprawled, in a chair somewhere, and there were three voices around me. I had enough sense to keep my eyes shut until I found out why, where and who.

A very tough voice was saying coldly, "Where'd you clowns get the idea you had to work over him?"

A bitter voice jeered, "He done it for a friend. Yeah. Twinkletoes slipped him a twenty, that's what."

My friend, the messenger boy, the one who socked me, was coming apart in all departments; his voice was thick and greasy with fear. "Hones', I'm telling you, he must be weak or something, 'cause all I done was give him a little tap, and—"

"Shut up!" that was the tough voice again. "Now beat it, the pair of you. You're finished, washed up. Now get the hell out of here before Leo has other ideas."

They got out so fast that I could hear them falling all over themselves to get through the door before one of Leo's ideas caught up with them.

So that's where I was—Leo Barr's Lido Club.

CHAPTER THREE

Die, Sucker

I OPENED my eyes. I was in the plushy men's lounge. Over in one corner was a tiny chromium bar for the convenience of the guys who liked a quick one between drinks, and reaching over it for a bottle was a little sandy-haired Irishman in a dinner jacket. He saw me with my eyes open, and he grinned.

"You can call it my fault for using cheap help," he said. "If it'll make you feel any better, you can hang one on my chin."

"Someday. When I'm feeling stronger."

"Sure. Buy yourself some tonic." He tucked a C-note into my breast pocket. "Drink?" Friendly as a politician on election day.

I took the bill from my pocket, wadded it up and snapped it at him with my thumb. "And the same goes for the drink, and the same goes for you, and the same goes for Leo, so don't make me any madder, or I'll stick out my tongue at you."

He gave me a hard, clinical glance, then said tentatively, "You can make it pretty tough for me upstairs."

"So I'm going upstairs to see Leo himself? Isn't that nice. You'll have to give me a minute to primp up a little, I know I must look simply awful."

He said sadly, "If they're not too dumb, they're too wise. Okay, let's get it over with."

Someone knocked impatiently on the door of the lounge. The little guy unlocked it. A tall, gray-haired man walked in giving us a quick, narrow glance.

"Do you always lock the door?" he asked suspiciously.

The Irishman said smoothly, "There was something wrong with the water, sir," and jerked his head for me to follow him.

We sure must have looked like a hard-working pair of plumbers.

Leo's apartment was on the second floor. It was not what you'd have expected. Downstairs was all plexiglass and chrome—the apartment was straight Grand Rapids, even to the reproduction of The Old Homestead In Winter that hung on the wall over the overstuffed sofa.

There was a tall, dark man standing in the middle of the room with his back to us when we walked in, and my heart did a tight little turn at the sight of him, because for a minute I thought it was Murdoch, and Murdoch was supposed to be dead. But then he turned, and it was only Marius, the dancer—Twinkletoes himself. His eyes flickered over me, smugly gloating. I took a long, fast step and heaved my fist right into the middle of his face. He went flailing and back-heeling across the floor, did a flip across the arms of a low lounge chair and crashed against the wall.

The little guy said solidly, "He had it coming."

Until he spoke, I hadn't realized that there was another man in the room. He was sitting in the chair that matched the sofa. I didn't peg him for Leo Barr, because he didn't look like my preconception of Leo. He looked like a Swedish carpenter who had once made a bookcase for me—the same patient, square face, the same transparent blue eyes, the same thick, blunt-fingered hands. He looked at me, then at the Irishman.

"I'll talk to him later," he said in a slow, heavy voice. "If his nose is broke, you better call the agency for another dancer for the floor show. Take him out of here."

Marius was sitting glassily against the wall, holding a no longer snowy handkerchief to his nose. The Irishman was only about two thirds his size, but he hustled

Marius out of there like an irate father taking Junior to the woodshed. Maybe he was, at that. He was one tough little guy.

Barr pushed himself up from his chair and held out his hand. "My name is Barr," he said. "I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. Morgan." He gave my hand a quick awkward shake and let go. He was getting more like my Swedish carpenter every minute. He even looked ill at ease, though he probably wasn't.

"And I'm pleased to meet you," I said inanely.

"Will you have some refreshments, maybe?"

"No. But thanks just the same."

"A cigar?" he hurriedly produced a cigar from his vest pocket and stabbed it at me.

I put it in my vest pocket. "I'll smoke it after dinner."

We stood there awkwardly, looking at one another like a pair of strangers meeting at the funeral of a common friend. Then—it was no more than a flicker of an eyelid over those pale blue eyes—the picture changed. He wasn't awkward, embarrassed or ill at ease, and he was a long way from being a facsimile of my Swedish carpenter. He was sizing me up and his appraisal couldn't have been more coldly dispassionate if he'd done it with a pair of calipers and a slide rule. He nodded once, and I had the uneasy feeling that now he knew why I ticked, how I ticked, and exactly where I ticked.

"It would be foolish to waste time," he said in that heavy, plodding voice of his. "I'll come right to the point, Mr. Morgan. You have interfered with my business, and it might cost me some money. I don't like that."

I said politely, "You have interfered with mine, and I don't like *that*."

He frowned. "I have interfered with you?"

"I didn't exactly walk into your club under my own power, if you know what I mean."

He put his digestive juices to work on that. "So that's what that Marius had coming to him." His lips thinned with annoyance.

"And don't offer me a C-note to plaster on my bruises," I said nastily. "I make my own price—if and when."

He looked surprised. "Of course."

"Now what business of yours have I stuck my nose in?" I asked drily.

"Mrs. Ellis."

It was my turn to be surprised. I said incredulously, "The bracelet?"

"The bracelet? What bracelet?"

I TOLD him about Beautiful's emerald bracelet and Marius. He glanced toward the door, his eyes getting smaller and meaner. His lips were a knife edge of suppressed anger. He shoved his thick hands into his pocket.

"This bracelet is something I did not know about," he said. "I was not talking about the bracelet. I was talking about something else. I was talking about Mrs. Ellis. Mrs. Ellis likes to gamble."

Remembering Mr. Ellis' icy sadism, I said, "I'll say!"

"I want Mrs. Ellis to gamble here, at my tables," Barr said shortly. "Why do you object to that? My tables are honest. If she does not gamble here, she will gamble somewhere else, and maybe where the tables not not honest. Do you think you can stop her from gambling by forbidding her to come here?"

I was beginning to get it, but I said, "What's the point?"

He said impatiently, "That is a silly question."

I grinned. "Marius is your shill. Marius steered her here, Right?"

"And you, Mr. Morgan, have persuaded her not to go anywhere with Marius any more, so naturally he would not be able to bring her here. But she

will go elsewhere. That is money out of my pocket. My tables are honest, but Mrs. Ellis is a very foolish gambler. She loses, always. Her husband denies her nothing, even money. He is crazy in love with her. Do you have something against me, personally, to keep her away from my tables? For instance, in one night alone, last month, she lost over seven thousand dollars at roulette. That is not an insignificant amount of money, Mr. Morgan. I would not willingly permit it to go to a competitor."

Now I was getting tired of him—tired of the honest, hard-working impression he was trying to make; tired of the heavy-handed threat implied.

I said angrily, "I don't give a damn if Mrs. Ellis gives a million bucks to the Prohibition Party. I don't care what she does with her money. But this is what I do care about—she's a poor little lamebrain who sees bogeymen in the dark, and I think that creep of yours, Marius, is giving her a bad time. And if there's anything I can do about it, I'll damn well do it if I catch him nosing around her again. I don't like him."

He looked at me as if I were a species of halfwit myself, and he was sorry for me. "Consider Marius out of the picture," he said.

"Nuts. With Marius out, you'd just sic some other jerk on her. Nuts. I've seen her husband, and he's no fun. Nuts to you and your creeps."

He breathed heavily, trying to hold his patience.

"Would you object," he asked woodenly, "If I, myself, took Marius' place?"

"She was your girl before she married Ellis," I jeered.

He gave me an iron smile. He didn't answer. He didn't have to. I believed him. Beautiful had never been his girl. No girl had ever been his girl. He had been born on an iceberg. Business before pleasure.

"I introduced Ellis to her," he said, and that ended it. He pulled his hands out of his pockets and frowned down at his thick fingers. "Your interest is in regaining the bracelet. So?"

"So," I agreed.

"All right. If I regain the bracelet for you, will you promise to stop interfering with me?"

"You know who has it?"

He gave me that pitying look again, but all he said was, "Maybe I can find out."

"You find that out," I said truthfully, "and I'll probably never see Beautiful again." If that was a promise, let him make the most of it.

We shook hands again, and he gave me that same awkward, embarrassed squeeze-and-drop, and put his hands behind him. I had the uncomfortable feeling that here was a guy who had the knack of analyzing you in a flicker and never liked what he saw. He didn't like people, and didn't even like touching them. A guy who put his faith in things—things like money, for instance. That made us even. I didn't like him either.

I asked, "Mind if I use your phone?" and picked it up to show him I didn't care if he minded it or not.

He waved his hand indifferently. He plodded back to his chair, took out a small book and scowled over it. His bank book, probably.

I called the Boss. He said carefully, "I didn't catch the name. Would you mind repeating it?"

That was the tipoff that someone was in the office with him.

I said softly, "PD?" meaning police department.

"Oh, yes."

I thought, *Uh-uh, now the cops are mad at me too.*

I said, "I'm going home, take a nice hot shower, have a couple drinks and go to bed. I'll see you in the morning. It's

dark outside." I started to hang up.

"Wait a moment, Mister—uh—Underwood . . . about this matter in hand. . . ."

"It's a stiff proposition," I said, "but if I get beaten up once more today, I'll be dictating my reports out of an Iron Lung. Anything on the rabbit the beagles have been after?" Meaning Brother Cross, the one who had socked me when I pussyfooted into his apartment like an amateur.

The Boss said angrily, "No!" and hung up.

I held the receiver away from my ear and, grinning, shook my head. I put it back in its cradle.

"If you don't mind, sir," I said politely to Barr, "I should like transportation back to my vehicle, which is now parked outside Peri's Bar, and which probably has a motor vehicle violation ticket on it right this moment, and for which I shall hold you responsible. The police and I don't get along."

He did not have a sense of humor. Without looking up from his bank book, he said irritably, "See Moynihan. If there's a ticket, mail it to me."

The kiss-off. I was heartbroken.

Moynihan was the sandy-haired little guy, and he grinned his thanks at me for not implicating him in the going-over I'd had at Marius' order. As I left, he slipped me a bottle of old Mr. Bushmill's best.

"That's to give you strength for that poke in the jaw yer going to give me, Bucky," he grinned.

A gift like that, now, I'm not too proud to accept.

I was transported to my car in a Caddy driven by a sulky, sultry kind of browless hanger-on, who looked a little like Richard Dix, except that he was just about one-one-hundredth as articulate. The best word I could get out of him, after twenty minutes of very smart prying and pumping, was "Uh."

I DROVE straight back to my apartment on Prospect, and parked the car in the lot behind. It was always full, and I had to park on the far side. I had walked back to a line of ashcans when a gun went off so close that I could almost see the hammer fall on the rim of the cartridge. I dived over the cans and spread myself as thin as margarine. The gun hammered five times, and I could hear each one of them hit the cans. Something dropped on the back of my hand, and if it had been a scorpion I couldn't have jerked away faster. A spent bullet. It had pierced the thin side of the can, the ashes, and the other shell of the can. Realizing what it was, I frantically patted the cement around the base of the can. I found it, still hot. I dropped it into my pocket. This was all pure reflex, because I didn't have a gun on me, and brother, I was scared witless. All the guy had to do was walk around the barricade of ashcans, and I'd have been a sitting pigeon.

I burrowed my face into the concrete and waited—an hour, a year, a lifetime. And, at that point, a lifetime looked pretty short. After awhile, a long while, it came to me that the only sounds I could hear were the sounds I could hear any evening of the week—a lonely tug hooting out on the Passaic River, the impatient honking of an impatient motorist, a dog or two, an amorous Tomcat. I sprinted for the house as if the whole Notre Dame line were at my heels. There were no more shots.

Upstairs, in my apartment, I set Mr. Bushmill's bottle of Irish on the kitchen table, sat down in front of it, and thought things over. And the more I thought about it, the more it smelled. If I'd been a foxhound, I'd have been able to tell from which quarter the smell came. I tapped the bottle for a teaser. I had another teaser, then a couple of man-sized drinks. My mind wouldn't work. I had a couple

more drinks, a hot shower, a ham steak and eggs, and went to bed.

If you want, you can say for the third time that day I passed out, but this one I didn't count.

It couldn't have been any more than nine o'clock.

I was in the office the next morning, bright and early—nine o'clock. With a cheery good morning at Lulu, I reached for the Boss' door. She stabbed out her hand and stopped me.

"He's got customers," she said. "Mr. and Mrs. Ellis."

I said, "Dig me."

She shrugged, reached out and flipped up the lever on her intercom box.

"Mr. Morgan is here now," she said into it.

The boss squeaked back out of it, "Send him in, please."

I went in.

The boss was sitting lumpishly behind his desk with about as much expression on his face as an unfried doughnut. Beautiful was sitting in the big leather chair, facing him, and Ellis stood at her shoulder, holding her hand. All the puckered, baby lines of worry were gone from her face, and her eyes had that pellucid glow you see so often in the eyes of happy young children.

Ellis, on the other hand, in the candid light of morning, looked older, looked sixty. He stood stiff and erect, but the hand that held hers moved hungrily over her lax fingers, caressing the texture of her skin, almost tasting the youngness of her.

The boss looked up at me. "Mrs. Ellis has her bracelet back," he said in a muddy voice.

She laughed happily. She held up her right arm and her wrist flashed with expensive green fire. "See?" she cried.

"Very pretty," I said woodenly, and raised my eyebrows at the boss.

"It was returned either late last night or early this morning," he mumbled. "It was in a Tiffany jewel box—"

"Cartier," said Ellis stiffly, as if it mattered.

"—Cartier jewel box, and it was found in the mailbox by the maid. It was accompanied by no note or any explanation whatever, but," the Boss took a heavy breath, "the interior of the box was covered with blood."

Beautiful's hand tightened on Ellis'. "It didn't look like blood at all," she said uneasily. "It was just brown."

I whistled. "That doesn't make sense," I said. "But it makes the kind of nonsense I don't like. Somebody is pretty bloody minded."

"I don't think it was blood at all," said Beautiful petulantly. "You're just saying that . . . and anyway, I don't see what the fuss is about. I got my bracelet back, and I don't want to hear any more about it. That was all you were supposed to do."

Her voice trailed off and she looked away, avoiding the boss' steady stare.

"A man has been killed because of that bracelet, Mrs. Ellis," he said sharply, "and you might as well make up your mind that you're going to hear much more about it."

Ellis' chin jerked up. "A man killed! I—" he compressed his lips thread-thin. "I'm certain," he said coldly, "that my wife is implicated in no way whatever."

"Yessir," I said promptly. "And that's exactly our thought in the matter, and that's a fact. If you don't mind my saying so, your wife is just about the most innocent woman we've ever met in all departments."

He looked icy daggers at me.

"But there's something else," I went on with a sunny smile. "Suppose the joker who smeared blood inside that jewel case wasn't fooling? Suppose he meant something by it? He could be sore. He could be sore because the bracelet got too hot to handle. He could be sore at

your wife because she hired a flock of private eyes and made the bracelet too hot to handle. If you look at it that way, he had to get rid of the bracelet, and the blood in the box was just another way of saying, 'You're next, sister.' "

Ellis said, "Rubbish!"

Beautiful looked up at him and whimpered softly, "Daddy, I want to go home. They're just talking a lot and trying to make trouble. I want to go home." That scared pucker was beginning to gather in her face again.

She jumped up and he took her arm in that hungry, possessive, old-man way. His fingers moved restlessly on the smooth, elastic skin of her bare forearm as he walked to the door with her.

He murmured, "Excuse me a moment, my dear," left her there and walked back to the desk. His face was grey and a little despairing. "If . . . if there is a grain of possibility in your suspicions, gentlemen, I . . . I would be very grateful if you investigated them thoroughly."

He wanted to say more. It was there in his face, struggling to break through his frigid reserve, but there had been too many years of habit, and he clamped his lips together. He gave us a curt, military nod and marched out, taking Beautiful with him.

Leo Barr had been right. The old ramrod was crazy in love with his great big beautiful moron.

CHAPTER FOUR

Here's the Pitch

THE moment the door closed, I turned on the boss and said angrily, "I don't like this, I'm over my head. There isn't any pattern. Look. First Murdoch is killed at the payoff," I held up one finger. "Second, Murdoch's op, Cross, disappears, socks me over the head, then disappears again. You haven't found any whisper or smell of him, I suppose?"

The boss shook his head, watching me beadily.

"I didn't think so. So, third, Leo Barr makes me a proposition to have the bracelet returned and—bang—the bracelet is returned. If Leo had anything to do with that, there wouldn't have been any Fu Manchu gook like blood in the box. Fooey. And, fourth, some comedian took six shots at me last night."

Suddenly remembering, I dug in my pocket and brought up the slug that had pierced the ashcan and dropped on the back of my hand. I tossed it on the blotter in front of the boss.

"And that," I said, "was one of them."

He poked it curiously with the end of his pencil. Then he made what sounded like a classic understatement, but really wasn't.

"Something's bothering you," he said, staring at the slug.

"Yessir," I said, "it sure is. It's the pattern. A guy steals a bracelet, but he doesn't steal it. A guy runs away, but he doesn't run away. Cross, I mean. His bags were all packed to go, but he hung around till last night to take six shots at me. I'm standing with my nose against a wall, and I don't like it. I don't want to go forward any more, because if I do they'll be after me. I want to go back to the beginning and start all over again. I want to go back to where Murdoch was shot, and I want lots of cops all around me, fully equipped, and I want you to arrange it with the Secaucus Chief of Police."

He blinked once, then patiently reached for the phone. He had weight he could throw around, and when the time came, he wasn't afraid to throw it.

You never saw a more perfect spot for a payoff. The street dead-ended at a wall of salt marsh reeds ten feet high. A skinny path wound into it from the right,

and it looked like the entrance to one of those mazes in which you can starve to death unless you take along a Seeing Eye dog. It was a jungle.

One of the Secaucus cops pointed out to me the spot on the macadam where Murdoch had been found with four bullets in him. It looked a little darker than the other spots around, but I didn't have any morbid interest.

There were five of us—three Secaucus cops—including the chief—the boss, and me. We single-filed into that narrow path, and two minutes off the macadam we were in a closed-off world of drily whispering reeds that towered four feet over our heads. The path squooshed soggily under our feet. All sounds seemed muted, even our own voices. The path ended abruptly at what looked to me like a ditch.

The lean police chief flapped a hand at it, said, "Duck Creek," and looked inquiringly at the boss.

The sun slanted through the reeds and striped us like tigers. Sweating, the second cop brought up the rear, carrying the grapple.

I said nervously, "This should be the spot."

"We should have a boat," the chief grumbled.

"Nossir," I said. "If it isn't right here, it won't be anywhere, and personally I'd rather go boating on the Shrewsbury."

The chief nodded at the second cop, and the cop threw the grapple into the creek, shattering the iridescent, oily film into a thousand glittering shards.

Their grapple was a frame of jointed iron pipe, about six feet long and four wide, set with shark hooks. The theory was to drag it across the bottom and the hooks would catch whatever there was to catch. They had fifty feet of clothesline tied through an eye at one end. It took both cops to drag it ashore after the cast.

The boss stood beside me. He came barely to my shoulder. He wasn't fat, but he was incredibly thick and stocky. He had a bone-crushing wallop, old as he was. He stood with his hands dug into his pants pockets and his chins folded down over his breastbone, phlegmatic and froglike. His eyes were hard and bright. Compared to him, the chief and I were jittering like a pair of bobbysoxers.

Grunting, the cops hauled the grapple through the water, and when it broke the surface, we could see that there wasn't anything but a muck of tangled, decaying vegetation, a streamer of old canvas and a terribly stench. They looked pleadingly at the Chief, but he waved them to make another cast. They dragged it in again, and the sweat began to pour off them. It wasn't until the sixth cast, about ten feet downstream, that anything happened.

It was an arm, caught in the sleeve by two hooks and sticking up sharply between the bars of the grapple. The cops panted and pulled harder. A pair of shoulders, the head dangling between, slowly rolled up through the oily skin of the creek.

Even before we washed the dead, bloated, muddy face, we knew who it was—the missing op. Cross. Tied around his waist was a burlap bag of car tools to hold him down. His wallet was gone, but in his coat pocket were enough letters and bills to prove his identity conclusively.

The guy who'd beat me over the head in his own apartment yesterday morning; the guy who'd taken six shots at me the evening before.

The only catch was—he'd been in that ooze for about thirty-six hours.

It took us three hours to get through the triplicate at Secaucus Headquarters.

The boss took the wheel on the way back to the office. He never liked the way I drove. I never drove above a conservative sixty.

"Well," I said brightly, "we've got a clue."

"What's that?" he grunted.

"It's that bullet. Yessir, that slug that pierced the ashcan instead of me. That's a clue. A real detective can do miracles with a clue like that."

"Shut up."

"Yessir. What I always say is, when you don't have anything to say, the best thing to do is talk it over."

"Talk sense, then!"

"I agree with you. You're absolutely right, sir. But I want to talk about this case, and you're making it very hard for me to do both. I—"

I stopped with my mouth wide open. He shot me a suspicious glance.

"Well?" he demanded.

"HOW dumb can you get?" I asked slowly. "How dumb can you actually be? Is the part that shows only one tenth, like an iceberg? Is it more, or is it less? Is Morgan making himself clear?"

He said hastily, "No!"

"I didn't think so. I want to talk to Beautiful. Mrs. Ellis. When you stop to consider that wherever you turn in this case, she rears her lovely head. *She* hired Murdoch and Cross; it was *her* bracelet that was stolen, and it was returned to *her;* Leo Barr wants *her* patronage at his club; and, judging from what I heard at the Lido Club, Marius is getting the boot because of her. In a few well chosen words, it takes a stupid woman to make a smart one look like a chump, as far as actual destruction is concerned. I want to talk to her, and this time I think I can make sense."

The boss grunted, hunched down in his seat and peered through the spokes of the wheel at the road ahead. It wasn't until he turned off at Pomander Way that I had any indication of how he had taken my little speech. The turnoff for our office was River Road. Pomander Way led to the Ellis house.

We stopped in front of the house, and I jumped out. I said, "Thanks, boss," and started up the path leading to the front door, leaving him there, poisoned with curiosity. I knew just about how long he'd stay there, too, but I didn't want him on my neck in the meantime.

It was Ellis himself who opened the front door to my ring. He looked tired. He said wearily, "Yes. Mr. Morgan?"

"I want to talk to Beauti—your wife."

"I'm sorry, but—"

"I'm sorry, too," I said roughly, pushing past him. "But I want to talk to your wife."

He closed his eyes and opened them as if the weight of the world hung on his lids.

"We're in the living room," he said dully, "looking at television."

"Howdy Doody?"

"I know you're trying to be amusing, Mr. Morgan, but, as a matter of fact, we are looking at Howdy Doody. I enjoy it. This way, please."

He walked stiffly ahead of me. Not military stiff, but old-stiff.

It was a huge living room—about forty-five feet long and twenty-five wide. To the left, about three quarters of the way down, was a bank of six French doors that opened on a wide, flagged terrace. In front of these doors stood an ornate desk of Chippendale's Chinese period, all black and red lacquer. There was an open book on it. Beyond the desk was a large television set. Beautiful sat cross-legged on the floor, staring up at it, giggling. It was Howdy Doody all right.

Ellis stopped at the desk and hovered over his open book, but I strode down the room and turned off the television set. Beautiful sat up straight and gave an outraged cry.

"You might as well forget about television, Mrs. Ellis," I said harshly, "because where you're going, there won't be any."

She looked up at me, her jaw dropping. "But I'm not going anyplace," she said. "I'm staying right here, and I want to see the rest of the show!"

"You are going someplace, Mrs. Ellis. You're going to jail. You might get out of it. I don't know. Your husband will probably hire some very expensive legal talent, but it's going to be a hard rap to beat. Two murders—Murdoch and Cross. We just found Cross' body in a muddy ditch in Secaucus."

She looked up at me as if she'd never heard either of those names before. Her eyes were spreading like spilled syrup.

"That faked holdup," I said. "That was a good gag, but it backfired, didn't it? Was Murdoch too honest? Was that why you shot him? But that's something I don't have to worry about. The D.A.'ll get that part of it out of you. I've got the reason why, and that's enough to be important. You've been gambling at Leo Barr's Lido Club, and you've lost plenty. Right?"

She shot a frightened glance at her husband, standing rigidly at the desk, silhouetted by the French doors behind him. Her tongue flickered out over her full lips.

"But, I . . . they said, the next time. . . ." she stammered. "I . . . it was honest. They didn't cheat."

"But Leo holds some notes of yours, doesn't he?" I purred. "You signed some papers."

"Only two!"

"Sure, but Leo's a boy who likes to be paid. He was pressing you. You were afraid to go to your husband for the money, so you got the idea of faking the robbery of your bracelet," I forced a grin up into my cheeks. "It's no good, Beautiful. You're coming along with me, and now. Get up."

I held out my hand.

Ellis said sharply, "Just a moment, Mr. Morgan."

I raised my eyebrows at him, ironically.

"You'll never be able to substantiate that charge," he said.

"No?" I showed my teeth at him. "So what? It doesn't happen to be my worry. The Secaucus police are convinced, and so are the police here, and the rest of it's down in black and white, including those two notes she signed to Leo Barr. Only one thing I held out on the police—your wife's name. But don't try to pay me off I don't want the dough. I want the publicity. I'm taking her in myself. The newspaper boys will be waiting for me and with the spread I'll get, I'll be able to open my own Agency and name my own price. Sorry, brother, but that's the way it is. Get up, Beautiful, we're on our way."

Ellis said softly, "No you're not, Mr Morgan." A .38 gleamed in his hand

"Put it down, stupid," I said.

"It's too late for that, Mr. Morgan, and, whether you like it or not, I'm going to pay you off." A convulsive little smile tugged at the corners of his mouth.

"No you're not, sweetheart," I said. I took a slow step toward him. "That gun isn't loaded."

"No?"

"No," I took another step. "I happen to know—because you fired all six shots at me last night, Mr. Ellis! I've got one of the slugs to prove it. There are other slugs that have been dug out of the bodies of Murdoch and Cross. And they'll match, won't they, Mr. Ellis? That gun isn't loaded."

"You're mistaken, Mr. Morgan," he laughed softly. "I reloaded it last night after I missed you. This time, I assure you, I won't miss. The light, for one thing, is better."

THE sweat felt as if it were breaking the skin in breaking out on my face.

"Your wife," I croaked. "She's a witness." She looked up, amazed.

"How reliable a witness does a child make?" he asked, amused.

I looked down at her. I couldn't help it. She was sitting there, completely bewildered, her jaw sagged. Beautiful—but, oh Lord, how dumb! He was right. I looked back at him.

"You see, Mr. Morgan?" Ellis laughed silently, then tilted his gun toward the door. "Walk ahead of me."

I turned. There was a crash of glass. I whirled and there was Ellis sprawled across the top of the desk, his head dangling over the edge. The boss was astride him, the heel of his hand on the back of Ellis' head. Ellis' face was turning purple as the edge of the desk bit sharply into his throat.

The gun roared once, then fell from his convulsive fingers. I jumped the boss and dragged him back. His face, too, was clotted, but from fury. Murdoch had been his friend, and Ellis had killed Murdoch. Ellis staggered back from the desk, lurched to his feet and swayed, holding his crushed throat. Then, catching us flatfooted, he dived head first over the desk, scrabbling for the gun on the floor. He had it in his hand and was squirming upon one hip when I recovered from my astonishment, roared and fell on him, flattening him against the rug. I clubbed the gun out of his hand and, for good measure, clubbed him on the back of the neck. He sank into the rug. He was out. He looked out, but all the same, I rose warily. He had more energy than a cat in a canvas bag.

I tenderly slid a pencil into the barrel of the gun, so as not to spoil all those nice Ellis prints on it, dropped it into the open book on the desk and closed the book on it. It could be carried that way without ruining anything. It was only going to take one shot from that gun in the police lab and a simple test to hang Ellis higher than Judas.

I felt a little sorry for him, but not too sorry, because nobody has to kill. He had killed because of an old man's vanity and an old man's jealousy.

I hadn't had much of a tipoff, but it had added up. The holdup and snatching of the bracelet had been conducted without words—just a significant pointing of the gun. Why? Those boys usually say, "This is a stickup" or "Hand it over, Baby. The bracelet, I mean." But this one had been engineered in absolute silence.

Why? Because he was afraid that distinctive, clipped British voice of his would be recognized. That was a thin lead for me, but it was a lead.

Then the bracelet had been returned. No professional would ever return anything without a little gain on the deal.

He'd sell it for five bucks; he'd throw it in the river, but he'd never return it. That was an amateurish touch. A gentleman's touch, if you're silly enough to put it that way.

Then there was the killing of Murdoch. That was another tipoff. There was no reason to have killed Murdoch, and no jewel thief would have tried. But there was a guy who resembled Murdoch in silhouette—tall, dark, broad shouldered. Marius. Marius, whom Ellis suspected of being his wife's boy-friend. Marius, whom Ellis thought would bring the money to that Secaucus rendezvous, because he thought his wife would never dare tell either the police or the insurance people.

He had killed Murdoch. Then, at the sound of the shots, Cross had come charging in, and Ellis had killed him, too, out of desperation. It had all looked foolproof beforehand, for who'd suspect a husband of stealing his own wife's bracelet? And the killing of Marius would have looked like nothing more than a thieves' killing. And, by stealing the bracelet, he wanted to make his wife suffer a little as she had made him suffer. He was a jealous, vicious old man.

I looked at Beautiful and started to grin, but the grin froze. She was looking down at Ellis with blazing hatred in her eyes. She looked up at me.

"He'll fry?" she asked tightly.

I said, "Can't miss."

Her lips pressed back against her teeth, and for a minute I didn't know whether or not she was going to cry or laugh. She did neither. She just looked down at him. She closed her eyes, took a breath, walked over to the sofa and dropped into it.

"I never cheated on him," she said dully. "Before we were married, he told me I could go out with anybody I wanted. He said he realized the difference in our ages. He knew I liked to throw the dice at the Lido Club. Then . . . why?" she stared down at him. "Why'd he do this? I don't understand why!"

The boss and I just stood there, gaping at her. She looked up and at once caught the significance of our sagging jaws and our amazed eyes.

"Yeah," she said wearily. "I'm a phony. I married the guy for his money. I put on an act. He liked them dumb, and the dumber the better. To keep him happy, I was as dumb as they came. It made him feel big and virile or something. My fault?" her eyes stared between us, then she burst out angrily, "I tried to keep him happy, didn't I? I tried to give him what he wanted. All my life I never had a dime I didn't have to claw somebody's eyes out for, then he came along. A million bucks worth of him. What'd you expect me to do? He wanted something young and—" her mouth twisted bitterly— "dumb. All right, I was dumb, wasn't I? And I didn't cheat on him. I tried to give him what he wanted. It was my chance. It was—"

She broke. Her head went down and she covered her face with her hands. Tearless sobs came out of her like something scraped off armor plate with a sharp file.

I looked at the boss. I looked down at Ellis. I looked over at her, dragging up those hard, dry sobs from the bottom of her soul. I turned on my heel and walked out, swearing under my breath and wondering about people.

How dumb can you get?

THIS ONE WILL KILL YOU

By John D. MacDonald

He had been a long time working out the idea, but now he was ready . . .

He made her his puppet in a play of silent death, with a curtain call at kill-time and a corpse to take the bows—but whose?

HE HELD the magazine up as though he were still reading it, but he watched her across the top of it, ready to drop his eyes to the story again should she look up.

For the moment the excitement, the carefully concealed anticipation, of the past month faded and he wondered, quite blankly, why he was going to kill his wife. Myra had no major faults. In the eight years of their marriage, they had had no serious quarrels.

Peter Kallon looked across the small one-room apartment at her and slowly the dislike and the determination built up again in equal quantity. It had started about six months before, and then it was only an intellectual game. How would a man kill his wife without fear of discovery? And, in the midst of the game, he had looked at Myra with the cold objectivity of a stranger and found that the eight years had changed her.

Eight years had thickened her figure, put a roll of soft tissue under her chin, but the years had done nothing to alter that basic untidy trait which he had once found so entrancing.

Peter Kallon was a very tidy man. By day he entered neat columns of figures on pale yellow work sheets. His linen was always fresh, his razor in the exact same spot on the bathroom shelf, trees inserted in his shoes each night.

But Myra, even though childless, seemed to find it impossible to handle the housekeeping details of an efficiency apartment with its miniscule bath, cubbbyhole kitchen, murphy bed. Eight years of litter had worn away his quite impressive patience with the monotony of water dripping on sandstone.

The thought of being a widower was quite engaging. Peter Kallon had a passion for puzzles. Crosswords, cryptograms, contests. He attacked all with equal dry ardor. Murder became a puzzle.

And a month ago he had arrived at the final, detailed answer.

He looked across at her. An untidy strand of greying brown hair hung down her cheek. She sat with one leg tucked under her, an unlaced shoe on the swinging foot. She was reading a novel, and as she came to the end of each page she licked the middle finger of her right hand before turning the next page. That little, innocuous habit annoyed him. Long ago he had given up trying to read any book that Myra had finished.

It would be such a pity to have the answer and not put it into effect.

Lately he had been looking at the young girls on the street and in the office. There was the clean line of youth about them.

Myra set the book aside, smiled over at him, and scuffed her way into the kitchenette. He heard her fill a glass with water from the faucet, heard the small familiar sound she made in her throat as she drank. He knew that as she came back into the room she would be wiping her mouth with the back of her right hand. She was.

It would never do, he thought, to say, "Myra, I'm tired of being married. I want to stop being married." Poor Myra. She would never be able to support herself. That would mean quite a drain on him, supporting two establishments. No, murder would be tidy. Myra could die without knowing that he had grown to hate her and her ways with all the dry passion of a careful, fastidious man.

She turned on the table radio, spun the dial to a station. The radio warmed up. Myra continued to read.

"You've got two stations there," he said.

She cocked her head on one side, listening. "But you can hardly hear that other one."

He came angrily across the room and reset the dial. She never did anything crisply and purposefully. Never on time, never able to move fast.

Most murders were too hasty. The motive was too clear. Their few friends would never suspect him of having a motive to kill Myra. He knew that their friends considered them to be beautifully adjusted.

When murders weren't too hasty, they were too contrived, too full of details that the murderer was incapable of handling neatly.

The perfect murder, he had decided, would be quite detailed, but the details would be handled by a man competent to

do so. A man like Peter Kallon. He was the sort of man that no one had ever called Pete. Not even his mother or his sister.

He looked over at her again and he saw that the book had sagged down onto her heavy thigh. Her head was tilted over onto her shoulder and she breathed audibly through her open mouth. Each night they stayed home it was the same. She would expect him to awaken her when he was ready to go to bed. Now there was no need to discipline his expression. While she slept he could look at her with all the naked, helpless fury at his command.

In that moment he made up his mind, finally and completely, with no possibility of changing it. Peter Kallon decided to make himself a widower and put into effect the plan he had worked out.

Friday he made her write the note.

He sat at the small desk, scribbling. He made frequent grunts of disgust, crumpling what he had written. She asked him what the trouble was.

"Nothing, nothing," he said impatiently.

He wrote for a long time, then said irritably, "The hell with it," crumpling what he had written.

"What *is* the trouble, darling?" she asked.

"Maybe you could help me. You see, I've got one account, a garage, that's giving me a bad time. The man won't keep the books the way I tell him to. We've quarreled about it. I'm trying to write a letter to him, but I can't seem to get it right. If I could dictate it to you and you write it down. . . . I always think better on my feet somehow."

"Of course, darling," she said.

He laid out a fresh sheet of her notepaper and put his fountain pen beside it. She took his place at the small desk.

"What's his name?"

"Don't bother with that, Myra. I'll copy it over. Let me see now. First paragraph. 'You know how hard I've tried to make everything work out. But there is no use trying any more.' New paragraph. 'Please don't condemn me too much for taking this step. I am certain that you will be happier in the future because of it.' There! That ought to do it."

He leaned over her shoulder and read the words she had written in her childish scrawl. The words, as usual, slanted uphill to the right edge of the paper.

"Like that pen?" he asked casually. There was the coldness of sweat against his ribs.

"I like a heavier point," she said. "You know that."

"Just a habit. A fine point makes better looking writing. Here, sign your name on that sheet. For my file."

She obediently wrote 'Myra'. He took the pen from her hand before she could write the last name. "Wait a minute," he said. "Let me look at this. I think you were bearing down too hard on it." He examined the point, holding it under the lamp light. "Get up a minute, dear. I want to try it."

He sat down and wrote on another sheet. "No, I guess it's okay. Thanks, dear. I'll recopy this letter and send it to the man. I think it'll be all right."

"You're welcome," she said. For a long time he did not risk looking at her. When he did he saw that she was engrossed in the novel again, without suspicion. Just to be certain, he copied the letter, using the actual name of one of his clients, making the contents a bit more business-like. He showed it to her. She said that she guessed it sounded all right.

After she had fallen asleep he read the note over. Fingerprints on it were quite all right. He would just make certain that he found the note first.

You know how hard I've tried to make everything work out. But there is no use trying any more.

Please don't condemn me too much for taking this step. But I am certain that you will be happier in the future because of it.

Myra

A bit stilted, perhaps, but the intent was unmistakable. It was on her grey monogrammed note paper. He put it with his business papers, knowing that she never looked at them. He wanted to take a long walk to get the tension out of him. But that might look a bit odd and his plan didn't call for it.

Instead he took out the manila folder containing the contest puzzles he was currently working on. Within fifteen minutes he was so deeply engrossed in the puzzle that he had actually forgotten his plan. The deadline on this one was near. It was a puzzle that assigned numerical values to letters of the alphabet, and the object was to fill out a grid with words in such a way that the highest possible total was reached.

At midnight he put his solution into the envelope and addressed it. Myra awakened by herself, yawned and smiled sleepily at him. Trusting Myra! For a moment his resolve was weakened by pity. He thought of the envelope in his hand. The first prize was fifty thousand dollars. With fifty thousand dollars, life could be made bearable, even with Myra. Money would buy a certain amount of liberty from the married state.

But, as a winner of many very small prizes, he knew how remote his chances were.

He smiled back at her and they went to bed.

On Saturday afternoon he had, as he expected, an hour alone in the apartment. It was a ground floor apartment in the back of the building, the windows half shadowed by cedars. That was an integral part of the plan. He took the fishline from the closet shelf, cut off a ten foot length and tied a loop in the end, made a slip knot. The windows were of the sort with a permanent screen, and they could be opened or closed by inside cranks. Each movement had been planned. The handles on the small gas stove pointed straight down. They turned in the right direction for his purposes. He slipped the noose over one handle, pulled it tight, ran the other end of the string to the window and poked it through one of the meshes of the screen. The window was open a few inches. Then, carrying a screwdriver for the sake of appearances, he went outside and around the building to the window. He found the end of the string, pulled it slowly and firmly. It gave slightly and then came free. He pulled it all the way out through the mesh, forcing the knot through, then pushed firmly against the window. As he had expected, the crank made a half turn and it closed.

He hurried back into the apartment and found that the kitchenette was filled with the stink of gas. The burner, unlighted, was on full. He turned it off, opened the window to air the place.

The stove had four burners. He made three more lengths of string, with the slip knots at the end, knots that would slip off when the handles pointed directly at the window. He put the four lengths of string on the closet shelf.

When Myra returned from the store, he was working on a new puzzle which had just come out.

THAT was on Saturday. He gave himself Sunday as a breathing space and then began the second part of the campaign. Myra was a person who needed a great deal of sleep. Peter decided to see that she would become starved for sleep.

Monday night he talked her into a late movie. After they got back to the apartment he talked long and animatedly about the picture they had seen, ignoring her yawns and sighs. They were in bed by two thirty. He set the alarm for seven

and saw that she got up when he did. On Tuesday he phoned her four times during the day, knowing from the drugged sound of her voice that he was awakening her each time. Tuesday night he took her out to dinner and then to another movie. He watched her in the movie and awakened her the two times she fell asleep. He insisted on seeing part of the picture over, and afterward invented an excuse to call on friends.

They were in bed by midnight, but Peter lay in the darkness for a time and then awakened her to tell her that he was ill. Her concern for him kept her from getting very much sleep that night. And on Wednesday morning Peter phoned the office and said that he was not well. He demanded copious attention all through the day. Myra cared for him and dragged about with the drugged look of a sleepwalker.

It was hard for him to conceal his excitement and anticipation. At five o'clock he got up and dressed, declaring that he felt much better. In fact, he said, he was famished.

At seven o'clock, with the dishes washed, Myra sat across the room from him and fell asleep, making no attempt to read.

"Myra!" he said, quite loudly. "Myra!"

She didn't stir. Everything up to this point had been preparation. And now he realized that the actual commission of the deed required no particular call on his strength and determination. Actually it was as though she were already dead. He opened the kitchenette window several inches, took the four strings, fastened them to the handles, careful not to touch the handles with his fingers. Myra was snoring throatily.

He poked the strings through the screen knowing that she had no more reason to use the stove, knowing that in the semi-darkened kitchenette, the dark strings would be invisible. He took his keys out of his pocket and put them on the desk. He took the note from among his business papers, folded it once and played it on the desk, an ash tray on top of it, in a conspicuous spot. It was important that he be without keys and that the note be out in the open for anyone to find. It would be best if someone else should find it. Then he could snatch it away and handle it.

Everything was ready. He spoke to her sharply, went over and shook her.

"Myra!"

She smiled blearily up at him. "Gee, I'm so tired I could die!"

That startled him for a moment, and then he felt a deep ironic amusement at her choice of words.

"Honey, I feel guilty not working today. I'm going down to Benninger's Drug Store. They're a client and I can do a little checking. I'll be back in an hour or so."

"Maybe I'll go to bed."

"No. Don't do that. It's only a little after seven. You go to bed now and you'll wake up before dawn."

"Okay," she said dreamily. "I'll wait until you come back."

He opened the door, looked back at her and said, "Good-by, honey."

She yawned. "'By, Peter."

He shut the door, heard the latch click. Now came the period of most danger. The night was very dark. The apartment house was on a quiet street. When he was certain that he was unobserved, he went quickly along the dark line of cedars. He looked cautiously through the windows of the living room. He could see the back of the wing chair in which she sat, her hand slack on the arm of the chair, the edge of one shoe. She did not move. Every object in the room stood out with a strange clarity, as though he were seeing the room for the first time, and had been asked to memorize the contents and the position of each item.

Cedar brushed his cheek as he moved back to the kitchenette window. He found the four strands, conquering panic as, for a moment, it appeared that one had slipped back through the screen. He pulled slowly and steadily. The four strings pulled free and he yanked them through the screen, balled them in his hand. Then he pressed the window shut, walked out to the edge of the building, looked up and down the deserted sidewalk, then hurried across to the walk and went south with long strides to the Benninger Drug Store.

The younger brother was behind the counter. Peter's lips felt stiff as he smiled. It seemed to him that in some secret place in his mind he could hear the whisper of escaping gas. A good thing the stove was a cheap one without a pilot light.

"Thought I'd stop by and see how the new register tape is working."

"It seems to be going okay, Mr. Kallon. It slowed us up the first week getting used to it, but now it's second nature. I like the way it keeps all the sales separated by department."

"Sure," Peter said. "It gives you a check on how you're doing."

"There's a couple of new books of cross-words in since you were here a couple days ago."

"Are there? Good." He went casually over to the rack, picked out the new ones, put them on the counter and slid up onto a stool. "I'd like a root beer, please."

"Sure thing," Benninger said. Charged water hissed into the glass. It also sounded like gas escaping. "How's the missus?"

"What? Oh, she's fine. Say, you don't mind if I sit here and work one of these puzzles, do you?"

"Goodness, no! You go right ahead, Mr. Kallon."

The puzzle he picked was based on names of cities and states. He glanced at the clock as he took his pencil out of his pocket. Ten of eight. He started the puzzle, lettering neatly and quickly. The Christmas city. Ah, that would be Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Number ten down bothered him. Six letters. The only all-rock town in the U.S. He worked on the surrounding words and finally the stubborn one turned out to be Ingram. He felt a glow of satisfaction as he filled it in.

But he couldn't quite forget the hollow feeling in his middle, the flutter that was partly excitement, partly worry. What

was going on at the apartment? Had she been awakened by the smell?

He finished the puzzle and looked at the clock. Nine fifteen. Later than he had dared believe.

"Finished it off?" Benninger asked.

"I got it."

Benninger laughed. "You sure are one for the puzzles and contests. Remember that contest blank I give you and you won a fifty dollar government bond with it?"

"Of course I remember it. Well, time to get home. I've been a little worried about Mrs. Kallon lately. She acts depressed."

"It's this changeable weather. Gets all of us down."

"Well, be sure you get those tapes and your check stubs down to the office on Friday, Harry. 'Night."

"Good night, Mr. Kallon. We'll have 'em there on time."

Peter let the door swing shut behind him. He felt that he had handled it exactly as planned. Nothing crude like calling attention to the time. His hand hadn't shook as he'd picked up the change from his dollar. No, it had gone quite well. That's what came of understanding details and knowing how to handle them from a purely objective viewpoint.

He found himself walking too fast and forced himself to slow down. The night air was cool on his face. Breathable air. Fresh, life-giving air. His heels struck firmly and crisply and tidily against the sidewalk. He passed a neighborhood couple by a streetlight. He knew them by sight. That was lucky.

"Good evening," he said cheerfully.

"Hello, Kallon," the man said. Better and better. He hadn't realized that the neighbor knew his name.

He pushed the front door open and walked down the long corridor, past the elevators, down to the corner and then turned left and went to his own door. He took a deep breath, knocked and called gaily, "Myra! Myra! Open up. I forgot to take my keys with me."

He could smell it then, the faint odor of gas. He waited to make certain that he actually smelled it before simulating panic. "Myra!" he yelled, hammering on the door. In a few moments now, other doors would open. "Myra!"

He was rattling the doorknob helplessly, kicking at the bottom of the door, calling to his dead wife when it happened. In the last fractional second of life that was left to him it was as though the door had curiously pulled loose in his hand. It smashed against him with a white hot, blasting flare, the heavy panel smashing him against the opposite wall of the corridor. . . .

BECAUSE the girl was very upset and because she looked a little like his daughter, the police lieutenant was very gentle.

"You had no way of knowing," he said.

"I still don't understand how it happened."

He shrugged his heavy shoulders. "There was a heavy concentration of gas in the apartment. When a phone rings it makes a little spark inside it between the magnet and the arm on the clapper. So of course, after you dialed and got the connection, the line went dead at the first ring. You had no way of knowing."

There was a striken look in her eyes. "I . . . I was so anxious to make that call. One of the other girls wanted to, but it had to be me.

"I thought it would be exciting telling somebody that they'd won a fifty thousand dollar prize."

The lieutenant reached over and clumsily patted the girl's shoulder as she buried her face in her hands. "You had no way of knowing," he said. A nearby machine began to clack out a telegram, imprinting the words on the long paper tape. The lieutenant turned and walked stolidly out of the Western Union office.

There was just one thing Daisy wouldn't be caught dead in, the man who came to kill her found, and that was —

A SHROUD WITH A SILVER LINING

By Marion Lineaweaver

She had the gun in her hand when the police broke in. . . .

DAISY BALDWIN was a typical chorus girl, only more so. Her hair was blonder, her skin whiter, her mouth riper, her curves curvier. Underneath she was as tough as nails and, true to the romantic notion about her profession, pure as the driven snow.

"Be good," her father had told her when she decided to make use of her looks, "but don't broadcast it."

"Men are suckers for flattery," added her mother. "You can bank on that."

Such parental advice had brought her far—on this particular evening to the snow-banked entrance of a very secret little chalet in the Adirondacks. Daisy had just skied four miles, and she was tired.

"Where have you been?" The door was flung open by the chalet's owner, whose unwinking black eyes, and the mustache inadequately hiding a long razor scar made him look more like a gangster than a sportsman.

"Oh, I've just been trying to ski on a hill back there," Daisy gestured vaguely. "Gee! I could hardly stand up. I'll disgrace you at White Peak Lodge tomorrow, Louis—that is, if you get the car fixed."

"Stop kidding. There's nothing wrong with the car and you know it. You're not so dumb!"

Daisy pouted as they entered the firelit, pine-paneled room. "A girl shouldn't be alone with a man overnight. Her reputation—"

"We won't be alone. The gang's coming at seven. Put on something fancy, baby. I like to show you off."

Daisy's room was mirrored and chintzy, designed to please any female who might inhabit it, but Daisy was not concerned with interior decoration. While she insinuated herself into a black velvet skirt and a pink satin excuse for a blouse, she could hear Louis playing darts in the next room. Louis was good at darts; he could throw them almost as well as knives. Thoughtfully, Daisy completed her dressing by placing in her pink satin bag a tiny mother-of-pearl-handled revolver.

"Your twenty-first birthday present, my dear," her father had said. "You're a big girl now."

But her mother had admonished her, "Use your brains instead. They'll keep you out of trouble."

Daisy was trying to use her brains. With the graceful walk that was second nature to her, and a feature of her job in the Palace Hotel floor show, she sauntered to the closet and took from her coat pocket a newspaper photograph.

It showed an assortment of diamonds: rings, bracelets, earrings, and a necklace of startling magnificence. The caption read: *Wealthy socialite robbed at her Palace Hotel apartment. Police baffled—* Daisy felt that pricking of the scalp that told her she was not alone, and turned. Louis had come into the room as quietly as a snake, and was watching her as a snake watches its prey. She was petrified for just a second, then she asked coolly, "Do you like my dress?" She paraded before him with one hand on her hip, the other swishing the clipping through the air.

"I like it fine," Louis said, not moving.

Daisy sank languidly down at the dressing table and began to comb her golden hair. She stuck the clipping in the mirror and studied it. "Diamonds would go fine with this dress, Louis."

He strode over to her and clasped his flexible hands tentatively around her neck. "Pretty baby. It would be a shame if anything happened to you."

She leaned back against him and gazed up at his expressionless face in the mirror with her beautiful violet eyes. "You're wonderful, Louis. How did you get away with it?"

"It was simple."

"You're a brain, Louis. You can get anything you want."

"If you meant that, you'd let me off the string." His eyelids flickered. "I want you, baby." He leaned down and rubbed his cheek against hers. It was hard and dry, rather like snakeskin, Daisy reflected, but she didn't draw away.

"You're handsome, Louis."

"Think so?"

"I know so." Her rosy lips parted in a

dreamy smile. "We'd go well together."

"You can say that again."

Gently she pushed back the sleeve of his coat. "Your watch says ten of seven, Louis, or I would say it again, and then some."

"Kiss me, baby."

She fluttered her long lashes demurely. "A girl likes to wear a piece of jewelry from her boy friend, especially in front of his gang."

Louis laughed outright. "I said you weren't so dumb! Here." He pulled a handful of rings and bracelets out of his inside pocket and arranged them in front of her. "Try one for size—one of the bracelets."

He leaned over her again, but she whispered, "Listen! Don't you hear something?"

"It's them." Louis thrust the jewels back, all except one, the most spectacular of the bracelets. "I'll take my cut now," he said. "For you."

DAISY had met the gang before, two nights ago at the Palace Hotel, when three of them had walked out on the party for a whole hour. Now they sat before the fire at a round table laden with sandwiches and the mixings for a large supply of drinks.

"Relax, everybody," said their host. "Have a drink. We're miles from nowhere."

"Let's get down to business first," muttered somebody.

"Yeah," agreed another, "excluding the ice on baby-doll's arm."

"My cut," said Louis shortly. "Any reason I can't give it to my girl?"

"No, but let's get the business over, then worry about the babe."

They looked strangely alike to Daisy, hard, evil, nervous. Louis put the jewelery in the center of the table, then his gun, and the others followed suit. Daisy helped herself to a chicken sandwich with one hand; with the other she opened her pink satin bag and withdrew the revolver.

"Mine too?" she asked seriously.

A burst of astonished laughter and various comments resulted. "You got her trained, Louis!" "Can she use it?"

"But natch." Daisy tossed her golden curls. "Want to see?"

"Why not?" Louis leaned back in his chair, proud of her. "Show us, baby. Shoot at the darts target." They all laughed at the idea.

Daisy wiped her red mouth daintily and rose, swinging her skirt like a velvet bell. Then she pushed up the diamond bracelet so it wouldn't dangle, took aim, and hit the bull's eye three times. In the silence that followed she heard what she wanted to hear—men running in answer to her shots, and she said quickly, "My Dad gave me that and he taught me how to shoot it. It helps me in vaudeville. I do an act. My Dad says a girl should be ready for anything—"

Louis interrupted. "Your old man must be in some tough racket."

"Oh, he is," Daisy assured him, as the door burst open to admit a large detachment of the constabulary, "Chief of Police James Baldwin—sometimes I help him and the boys out."

Five minutes later, Louis, sullen and handcuffed, addressed himself to Daisy as she lounged before the fire in her velvet and satin, the picture of feminine helplessness.

"Just one thing I want to know: the nearest phone is two miles away and you can't ski."

"Oh, but I can. I learned on that borax slide at Macy's."

Louis' voice rasped with irritation. "But why? Why does a dame like you want to ski for?"

"Because," Daisy explained, widening her limpid eyes, "my mother told me if a girl wants to get around, she ought to learn sports."

Between Big Mike and me, death was a macabre toss-up — heads he lived . . . tails I died!

Hugging the wall of the cabin we slid around to the front. . . .

JUST A BULLET BETWEEN FRIENDS

By Wallace Umphrey

WE HAPPENED to ride the elevator down together in the Public Safety Building. Detective Lieutenant O'Gar was wearing a shabby, rumpled suit and a sweat-stained felt hat. "You still with World-Wide, Baxter?" he asked me, looking derisive as always.

I nodded and said, "Hello, O'Gar."

"Hullo, boy," he said, his tone patronizing. "You heard the news yet?"

The elevator grounded in the lobby. O'Gar got out first. He waited for me,

his feet planted solidly on the marble floor. People brushed past him, but he stood as firm and aloof as a rock washed by the surf. He was short and chunky and had ice water in his veins. His black hair, growing low on his forehead, was streaked with grey.

We headed for the street.

"What news?" I asked him.

"Big Mike Warsaw crushed out of jail."

"So Big Mike made it." My mouth was full of cotton. "How about a beer and a sandwich at the Greek's?"

We got our beer and ham on rye, and I thought about Big Mike Warsaw. Both O'Gar and I had helped send him up, but it was Dolly Harper who had really put him there for good by turning him into the law. O'Gar and I had just helped.

In court Big Mike had sworn to get us all.

Now O'Gar gave me a hard grin. "Is World-Wide still good for the ten grand he heisted?"

I nodded. "Why?"

"Some day," O'Gar said, "I'll have a piece of that." Then he stopped smiling. "Big Mike will bring them stones into the open now. He'll have to. A guy on the lam needs dough." O'Gar shook his graying head. "He'll have to fence the stuff."

Again I nodded. There was nothing for me to say. O'Gar wasn't worried. He was a guy with a lot of pride. And plenty tough. He was always walking into a nest of crooks and knocking them down and getting his name in the papers. I'd always wished I was more like him.

"It's a toss-up whether he digs up the loot first," O'Gar said suddenly, "or strangles Dolly."

"What about you and me?"

"Dolly first. I can take care of myself."

"You hate her, don't you?" I asked.

"Hate her?" O'Gar laughed deeply. "She doesn't mean a thing to me any more."

My office at World-Wide Indemnity was no bigger than a cell. It made me feel like a poor relation. Kincaid, the district manager, breezed in. He was a big guy with a lot of fat at both ends. He parked a large hip on the edge of my desk.

"Dolly Harper's outside," he told me. "She wants to see you."

"Is she scared?"

"Scared? I don't know. Should she be?"

"Big Mike Warsaw broke out of jail."

Kincaid gave me a studied look. "It's not in the papers."

"O'Gar told me," I said.

"I'll be damned!" Kincaid was looking at me and laughing. "You must believe the threat he made in court."

"Listen. Go ahead and laugh." I was a little sore. "You weren't included in Big Mike's threat."

"I'll bet O'Gar isn't sweating."

"No," I said. "He's hard and tough. I wish I were like him."

"O'Gar's the kind of guy who always has to win," Kincaid said. "To be really tough you've got to know how to lose too. Now let me tell you—"

"Send Dolly in." I cut him off wearily. "Write me a letter. Big Mike never swore to get you."

Dolly Harper was a well preserved woman of about forty, a natural blonde with blue eyes that were hard and shrewd. She seemed as brittle as glass. She could still pour herself into a size twelve dress with little trouble. She didn't look scared.

"Is World-Wide still good for the ten grand reward on the ice Big Mike lifted that time?" she asked me.

I was surprised. Her question matched O'Gar's. She should have been scared of what Big Mike was going to do now. Instead she was worrying about the reward on the diamonds we'd never been able to turn up.

"Stop staring at me," she said. "I

know I look like hell. I just got out of the hospital after having my insides scrambled around. I need money."

Maybe she hadn't heard about the jailbreak.

"The reward's still open," I said. "Sit down, Dolly."

She slid into a chair. "Mike heisted the stones. It was lucky for him the messenger didn't die. Mike got life for being a habitual. After heisting the stones, he left town for a couple of days. Then he blew in again."

"To be with you."

She flushed. "Don't do that to me, Baxter."

I shrugged. "Then you turned him in to the cops."

"Okay," she said wearily. "I'm a heel. But it was the only way to get him out of my hair. And you can forget your ideas about loyalty. Big Mike was only loyal to himself."

I leaned back. "Big Mike heisted the stones. Then he lammed for a couple of days. The cops picked him up when you tipped them off. But no stones. What happened to the loot?"

She lit a cigarette. "Mike was a funny guy. He grew up in the hill country, and maybe it was in his blood. He never forgot the mountains. Nobody knew about the little fishing shack he owned, tucked away in the hills. Maybe he went up there. He was just a country boy at heart."

"This never came out before."

"Why should I have spilled it?" she asked. "You know how I feel. I've always kept my mouth shut."

I grinned. "So you never found the stones."

She blew out a cloud of smoke. "I went up there," she said quietly. "I just about tore the damned place apart. Mike had been there all right. But no sign of the stones. I don't know where he hid the stuff."

"Two years," I said. "That's a long time. So you want me to go up there now and try my hand at searching the place."

She picked a flake of tobacco off her lip. "I need dough now. I'm getting out of this damned town. If you find the diamonds, will I get part of the reward?"

"Didn't you ever tell O'Gar?"

She laughed harshly. "I never trusted the cops. After being married to O'Gar, I trust them even less. I wouldn't be here now if I didn't need money. Eight months of being married to O'Gar—" She shook her head. "I thought he loved me. I've needed love. But he only loved himself."

"Maybe you didn't let him love you."

She thought about it. "No. I was a challenge. He didn't want me. He only wanted to prove he could get me."

"O'Gar's a good cop," I said.

"Maybe I'm hard," she said. "I gave Big Mike a rough deal—and maybe I've always been a little sorry about it. But that's done now. Now I need money and maybe you can help me get it. I want you to go up there with me." She tamped out her cigarette and stood up. "I trust you."

"There's something I've got to tell you," I said. "Big Mike has broken out."

She put a hand on the edge of my desk to steady herself. The skin on the back looked dry and wrinkled.

"Maybe he'll get me like he said," she whispered. "Maybe the cops will get him first. And maybe I've got it coming. Well, I figure you pay for your own mistakes."

"You still want me to go up there with you?"

"Sure. I need money, don't I?"

"I'll let you know," I said.

She went out and I could hear her heels clicking along the hall. I sat there thinking about a lot of things. I liked Dolly Harper. I knew what she was, but I couldn't help liking her.

Kincaid came in looking a little eager. He said, "Did you get a lead on the stones?"

I looked at him. "I don't want anything to do with Big Mike."

"Look here," Kincaid said easily. "You haven't done much lately to earn your check. The front office would like it if you turned up those stones. There might be a bonus in it."

I called O'Gar at the Central Station. He had more details on the break now. Big Mike Warsaw had made it the hard way—over the wall. Guards had blazed away, but they hadn't stopped him. A motorist had picked him up and Big Mike had slugged him and taken his car. Nobody knew if he had a gun. Big Mike ran into a roadblock, where he abandoned the car and took off through the woods.

That had been last night. It was the last seen of him.

"He'll hit town tonight," O'Gar said over the wire. "Unless he's picked up first."

"Was he hit?"

"Nobody knows."

I said, "What about Dolly?"

O'Gar said, "We'll stake out a couple of men. Big Mike is tough, but he won't get past them."

"Dolly just left here."

O'Gar sounded cautious. "What'd she want?"

"Not much."

"Well, see you later," he said, and hung up.

I diddled away the rest of the afternoon. After dinner I went home to my apartment. I sat around and listened to the radio and had a couple of drinks. The ten o'clock newscast mentioned that the drag-net was closing in and Big Mike would be picked up very soon. I wasn't convinced.

My .38 was under my pillow when I went to bed.

I dreamed Big Mike was strangling me. I dreamed he was putting a noose around my neck and pulling it tight. I awoke early, feeling I hadn't rested at all.

It was still early when I went down to the street. The early fog hadn't yet lifted. The street was quiet. Then out in the alley somebody began rattling some ashcans.

The shot seemed pretty loud. I plowed the sidewalk with my chin. It had been close. The ashcans were quiet now and I could hear feet running away.

I had breakfast in a little coffee shop around the corner. It was while I was working on my second cup of coffee that a newsboy came in. The paper told me that Dolly Harper had been strangled.

For a long time I sat in my office, doing nothing. Kincaid came in, wanting to know about the loot. I brushed him off. Dolly Harper was dead. That left O'Gar and me. I knew what I had to do, but I didn't want to get started on it. I wished I had O'Gar's guts.

The door opened and O'Gar came in.

"Hullo, boy," he said heavily. "Hear Mike almost got you."

"The fog was still too thick. What about Dolly?"

"We thought we had her covered," O'Gar said. "Mike got past the stakeout. Lousy men we got on the force these days. I should've requested the detail myself." He was looking at me from under his heavy brows. "I've been thinking, boy. About that visit of Dolly's yesterday. It wasn't just a social call."

I didn't say anything.

"She needed money," O'Gar said. "I've always figured Mike had a hideout someplace out of town. It's always added up to that."

"All right," I told him. "Mike had a fishing shack up in the mountains. Dolly thought maybe the diamonds were planted there. She wanted me to have a look."

O'Gar grunted. "Maybe Mike will head up there again."

"That's what's been worrying me," I said.

"He's not so tough. He puts on his

pants just like anybody else, one leg at a time." O'Gar gave me a tough grin. "Come on, boy. What are we waiting for?"

We left the city behind. I was driving. O'Gar lounged on the seat beside me, a man with strange prides. You never knew what he was thinking. He yawned and stretched suddenly. His elbow hit my .38 in its shoulder rig.

"Boy," he said, "maybe I don't blame you for worrying. You never were much good with that thing."

It was true. O'Gar leaned back and jerked his hat down over his forehead. His eyes were closed. The highway stretched out and the foothills moved steadily closer.

"You don't understand me, boy," O'Gar said suddenly, his eyes closed. "Nobody does. Dolly never did." He sat up a little, but his eyes stayed closed. "I don't follow the pattern. I don't act and feel like other people."

He sat up a little more. "It hurt me when Dolly left me. I loved her. In my own way, maybe—but I loved her. Now she's gone. Yesterday I told you she didn't mean a thing to me any more. It's what I've told myself all along. Now I know it's different."

I glanced at him. He was sitting bolt upright now. His eyes were wide open. One big hand was clenched on his knee.

"I hope Mike is there," he said through his teeth. "I want to get him myself."

"It doesn't sound like O'Gar talking," I said.

"To hell with you," he said.

I drove for a while in silence. The next time I looked at him, he was slumped back in the seat, his hat shading his eyes. The road was winding upward now through heavy timber. The mountains were close.

I stopped for gas. It was a dusty little mountain town. A truck and trailer loaded with giant fir logs rumbled past, shaking the earth. I drove around the town and then stopped.

"What's up?" O'Gar asked.

"I'll talk to the local law," I said. "This is their territory."

"Hell with 'em."

"I'd better stop anyway."

"Tell 'em you and me can handle it," O'Gar muttered. "I want Mike myself."

A tall, lean, middle-aged man wearing a sheriff's uniform was behind the counter. We shook hands. He told me his name was Payson. I told him what we were after.

"Heard about it over the radio," he said. "And O'Gar is with you? I've read about him in the paper. I'll be glad to tag along, if you need some help."

I looked through the window. O'Gar was sitting in the car, looking straight ahead. Nothing ever worried him. I wished again I was more like O'Gar. Payson and I talked a while longer and then I climbed back into the car and headed out of town.

The mountain cabin wasn't hard to find. Dolly Harper had given me a good description. It was about two in the afternoon when we neared it. O'Gar was wide awake now.

Only the stone chimney was visible from the highway. A short dirt road, steep and rutted, sloped down to the back of the cabin. I parked at the edge of the highway and we walked down the dirt road. No smoke was coming from the chimney.

A car with eastern county plates was parked behind the cabin.

"He's here," O'Gar said.

Filling the air with deep thunder, a turbulent mountain stream ran close to the front of the cabin. Brush lined its banks. The cabin was built of peeled logs with a shake roof. There were only a couple of small windows at the back and they were covered with thick dust.

"I'll take him," O'Gar said.

We both had our guns out. O'Gar was packing a big service .45, while I had my .38. We hit the back of the cabin. Then, hugging the wall, we slid toward the front. O'Gar, steady as a rock, was in the lead. There was sweat at the roots of my hair.

The door was of heavy, whipsawed fir planks. There was no sound beyond the deep roar of the mountain stream. O'Gar and I mounted the wide front veranda.

O'Gar touched the door and it swung open. It was dim inside. A gun thundered, louder than the thunder of the water.

I dove flat. O'Gar just stood there in the doorway, his legs spread. The gun sounded again. Then O'Gar's .45 pitched and bucked in his fist.

"Dig yourself out, boy," he told me calmly. He was still standing as quiet as a statue. "It's over."

There was blood on his face.

"You okay?" I asked him.

He nodded. "A splinter cut me."

Big Mike Warsaw was sitting in a chair against the wall. A table was in front of him. He was a big man with a craggy face and pale hair. A leather pouch was on the table in front of him. His eyes were unseeing, dead.

The sound of the river filled the room. Gunsmoke coiled out of the open door. Mike's body tilted slowly and then slid off the chair and under the table.

"There's the diamonds," O'Gar said. "He dug 'em out."

He was still holding his gun. I watched him holster it. My own .38 was still in my hand. It was unfired.

"I'll take half the reward, boy," O'Gar said. "That's most likely the deal you made with Dolly."

I rolled Big Mike's body out from under the table. He had been shot three times in the chest. There was a crude and bloody bandage around one leg. The leg was crooked.

I went outside for a look at the car Big Mike had stolen. There was more blood in the seat and floor.

When I returned to the cabin. O'Gar was holding the pouch of diamonds in one hand. He held a single diamond between the thumb and forefinger of the other hand. He squinted through it at the light.

"Kind of pretty," he said.

There was cotton in my mouth. "Big Mike never killed Dolly," I said. "And he never took a shot at me."

O'Gar looked at me. "So?"

"Big Mike was hit," I said. "Either when he went over the wall or when he crashed the road block. He could never have taken a shot at me and then run away."

"You talk crazy, boy," O'Gar said calmly. "It must be the shock after all this shooting."

I shook my head. "Maybe you really loved Dolly. It doesn't matter. What matters is that she left you. You always have to win, O'Gar. Alive, Dolly was a constant reminder of the one time you lost."

O'Gar put away the solitary diamond. "You're playing this all wrong, boy. Ten percent of a hundred grand is five grand apiece. Big Mike Warsaw was wanted for crushing out of jail. What do you care if he's dead now?"

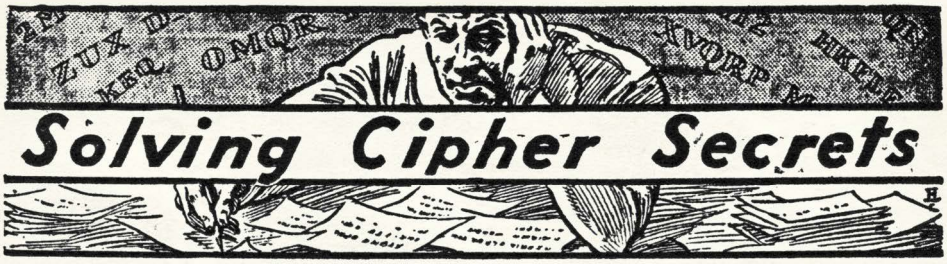
"I don't know," I said. "You had to kill him before he could talk. It just seems to matter a lot."

"I should have shot to kill this morning." O'Gar shook his graying head. "But I only wanted to scare you, boy. Scare you and make it look like Big Mike's work."

I didn't say anything. Maybe my mouth was too dry. And maybe there wasn't anything to say.

"Five grand," O'Gar said, looking at my .38 in my hand. "I'm not hoggish. We'll return the stones to your boss."

(Continued on page 128)



Founded in 1924 **Article No. 849**

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. 5307—Red-Letter Days. By °Wm. G. Ringer. Beginners, try one-letter word P as "a," with pattern GXPG (--a-) thus suggesting "that." Next, singleton U will help with UG UF.

UG UF PSAPNF AUGX JRRT RTCZNYRTG GXPG U ARSBZYR RPBX UFFKR ZV *TRA *LRGRBGUOR *YPHPMUTR, GZ FDRTL P VRA VSRRGUTH XZKEF FZSOUTH BENDGZHEPYF.

No. 5308—Unlucky Cards. By Rambler. Try a common connective for ZSV, joining the longer words, then substitute in quoted words "VTZV FZS'B AZSV," and fill in. Next, VDTZVTV.

GHN EZODB, ZXTB ZSV TOPAGB, FZLT RE GAT VDTZVTV "VTZV FZS'B AZSV" OS GAT PZFT NU ENLTD. *HOKV *YOKK *AOXLNL HZB ANKVOSP OG HATS AT HZB BANG!

No. 5309—Cooperative Request. By †Rebbina. Start with short words H and YF, noting affixes PF- and -PFZ. Then turn to KHZBHFS and AYSSHZU; also SNPO and ONPBS, noting letters in common.

ONHEEL KHZBHFS, HDDBYHANPFZ AYSSHZU SNBUONYVG, NYDUTXVVL PFCXPBUO YT LYXFZ NYXOURPTU: "RYXVG LYX MPFGVL OUR H ONPBS YF SNPO EXSSYF?"

No. 5310—Old-Time Cut-Up. By Londoner. Identify OLY and OTT by comparison. Substitute letters thus obtained in *HLVTUFP, checking with PUF, POF, and UL.

*MORS *SHARP, LKAKGUKEF *HLVTUFP HCHREAUKLHG, ZEARPHGHY NOLQ ZGODH OLY LKZTH DURAUNF. XKG ABK

RHLAEGUHF PUF LONH POF ZHHL DETVOGTQ VUDHL AK OTT BPK FERRHHYHY PUN UL PUF KYUKEF KXXURH.

No. 5311—Double Deception. By Dr. G. Kiln. For quick entry, try GUS, GA, and GUADVUG. Note also KR and ending -KRV. Then substitute in ARTS, DRKTAER, and AE, and fill in.

UAER AX GUS XZYOSC DRKTAER LZH ARTS GUADVUG GA UZQS NKEZTDOADH FALSE KR TADRGSEZTGKRV FAKHARH. YDG FKSTSH AX UAER HAOC TANNSETKZOOB KR SZEOB TSRGDEKSH LSES ZTGDZOOB AX RAELUZO AE SOSFUZRG.

No. 5312—Initial Typing. By †Acahti. Two-letter-word AZ will unlock terminal -SAUZL. Next, substitute in *YARQSYYZ and fill in missing letters, checking with SQY.

"*SUB *LOKPYT," COGUTASY VYLS LYNNYT SKU RYZYTOSAUZL ORU, ETUXDFYX VP *BOTH *SKOAZ AZ *YARQSYYZ *LYGYZSP-*CAGY, KOL ONNYRYXNP SQY CATLS SPEYKTASSYZ NASYTOTP BOZDLFTAES.

No. 5313—Under the Hammer. By *S. A. L. Guess PUU, noting exclamation mark. UC and CUT will then follow, also EUPPU, ending -POBP, OPPABLE, and so on.

THEPNG VHGSEPAT OPPABLE RUBY-OFONPAL OBBHOR OHGPNUB. XNLE CUT NDKTAEENZA. NDKUTPOBP KNAGA UC GVNBO. EUPPU ZUNGA HBVAOTL XQ OHGPNUBAAT. TNZOR GUDKAPNPUT UZATPOSAE XNL. PUU XOL!

No. 5314—Ferocious Females. By †Diana Forrest. Note BZG, three-letter connective in word series, and RPQ following comma. Next, IHEHRVBQHG; etc.

*FHZYRNB, *KBZQANXXH, BZG *DPGNQA, IHEHRVBQHG ONVBCYHU YT BZQNWPNQJ, MHVH ZYQ DPUQ IYYLU, RPQ HKIHXQNYZBE MYSHZ YT WPHHZEJ WPBENQNHU.

No. 5315—Adult Abecedary. By °Engineer III. Connective ZKR and phrase PG PRR will start you with this catalogic or list crypt. Follow up with ZKFHZEU and ZENLZOAD; etc.

ZENLZOAD PG PRR ZKFHZEU BPTER FKBETRA: ZSA-ZSA, RTXPKX, XTAIACZ, VAIOPZ, YFKYZVPT, HZKXZOAS, KFEXLZF, NPDDP, WTZXXZ, IZDAE, UZFXZ, DAEART, TZYZIF, JBFTKZ, MPHOZD, QAITU, SZNPY, ZKR CAOT.

No. 5316—Tavern Nights. By °LeRoy A. Guidry. All 5-letter words in this message! Does alliterative initial symbol B represent a vowel or consonant?

BHOPE BHEVP BKXGA BKYRA. BGKDF BGGZF BULGY, BKYSF BKCGY, BPHNN BHYGA, BPUUZ, BKSET, BKAEG BKOGA. BHAGD BHXGA BKEVP BGHDR BGKAF BPHDS.

ALL GROUPS are represented in the accompanying tabulation of NDM cryptographers who qualified for Cipher Club memberships during 1948. And to these latest entrants we extend our heartiest congratulations! °LeRoy A. Guidry acquires the coveted °ICC degree, for a score of 1,000 correct solutions! Five more cryptofans will now be marked with the star, for making the *FHC, with 500 answers each! And three new †HC'ers will henceforth carry their daggers, awarded for submitting answers to 100 of our ciphers!

CIPHER SOLVERS' CLUB
NEW MEMBERS, JAN.-NOV., 1949

°Inner Circle Club

No. 300	°LeRoy A. Guidry	Nov.	1,005

**Five Hundred Club*

No. 485	*Alphamega	Jan.	509
No. 486	*S. A. L.	Jan.	500
No. 487	*U. Solv'm	May	502
No. 488	*Bret Harte Whitman, Jr.	Sept.	510
No. 489	*Arthur Whitfield	Nov.	500

†Hundred Club

No. 1212	†Diana Forrest	Jan.	108
No. 1213	†Rebbina	Jan.	101
No. 1214	†Gum Miner	Sept.	103

Four of these new members are celebrating their memberships by contributing ciphers. Thus, †Rebbina's No. 5309, †Diana Forrest's No. 5314, *S. A. L.'s No. 5313, and °LeRoy A. Guidry's No. 5316. Solve these crypts, fans, and the other fine current offerings. Roster numbers, names or cryptonyms, entrance dates and scores of the new members are given herewith. Incidentally, the answer to °Volund's No. X-5306 in last issue is: *The bird flew ten feet upward from the top of the pole, or forty feet from the ground.* And here's a new "extra," Zadig's multiplication problem, enciphered with an appropriate key-phrase, numbered thus: 0123 456789. Can you get it?

No. X-5318. Cryptic Multiplication. By Zadig.

```
          J J J B B B U U U
                      J B U
          E E E I I I J J J
      L B B U R R R I I I
  L N N N B B U E E E
  L R L R O L R O L R C J
```

Newcomers to our cryptic fold, and absentees again getting into the game, continue to swell our ranks! Amongst old-time fans, †Wes returns, taking up with 172 solutions, where he left off in Nov., 1948. And †Tot, score 279 in Nov., 1946, sends in current sols, and promises answers every month. °Marcia and °Jaybee send along the first sols from their young son Joe. "intrigued by our changing letters into sentences, and who, for some strange reason, wants to be called 'Zig-Zag.'"

W. Hawthorn sends in his initial solutions with these words: "I have long been a SCS fan, although I have never before submitted any answers." And in like vein, Doc V (Donald Raff) comments: "I have worked your cryptograms for a long time but have never before sent them in." Welcome solutions and letters also from these newcomers: Les Noyse, Contortion, Ach Dublu, Mazy Masker, and Gerhard Gross. Remember, fans, every answer submitted counts in your total score! Answers to current puzzles will appear in next issue.

No. 5317—Cryptic Division. By †Jayemen. Two five-letter words, numbered 01234 56789, in the key. Note 3rd subtraction for value of G. Then try for symbol S.

```
L A D ) A G R E E S ( A D S
       R T D L
         N Y R E
         N A E T
           D A N S
           D R A G
             R R S
```

ANSWERS FOR LAST ISSUE

5295—Student to parachute instructor: "What happens when the rip cord doesn't work?" Witty answer: "That, son, is known as jumping to a conclusion!"

5296—Dreams express the subconsciously suppressed wishes or needs of the dreamer, in the form of fables or fantasies, using a variety of symbols repeated again and again with the same meanings.

5297—Paper tape, given half-twist, then joined at ends into belt, forms mysterious Mobius sheet. Cut lengthwise through center to make, not two rings, but just one, twice as long as original!

5298—If done in good faith and with honest intent, anyone in the United States may change his name, wholly or in part, without legal process.

5299—The ears are least sensitive to letters "S" and "F," and these carry poorest and are the most difficult to understand over telephone.

5300—Current calendar no longer indicates seasons of year. Last year, summer heat came in May, and winter frost was forecast for early September. Few years hence, Christmas in spring?

5301—Peculiar linguistic distortion involves using "shelled" for nuts with shells removed, while "unshelled" designates those retaining shells.

5302—Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogogoch, fifty-eight-letter word, full name of Llanfair, small town in Wales, means: "St. Mary's Church by the white hazel pool."

5303—Turf history lists phenomenal long-shot race when upstart colt yclept Upset upset hitherto unbeaten Man-of-War's complete record.

5304—Adorn prosaic gallows! Build from rare wood, skillfully fashioned, with exotic trappings. Use silken hangman's noose, embroidered death robe, betasseled black-hood. Glorify murder!

5305—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
G U N P O W D E R S

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.

(Cipher Solvers' Club on pages 126-7)

Redmond slapped Cartwright's guard down and brought his right over. . . .

With the face of a killer and the heart of a cop, Redmond prowled his final beat in that hell-begotten hour — an hour that damned him the devil's own pawn in a game of greed — and murder!

COME DIE WITH ME

By Charles Larson

REDMOND looked up when the bartender approached him, and said, "Scotch. Double," and then lowered his eyes again to his square, clasped hands.

"Well, Lieutenant!" the bartender said. "Been a long time since—"

Once more Redmond raised his eyes. They were ugly eyes, chill and remote and grey, set far apart in his ugly face. They watched the bartender without friendship, like two bits of grey glass.

Clearing his throat, the bartender said, "Scotch. Double." He wiped the bar and turned to the rack of bottles behind him.

On the other side of the room, someone had put a nickel in the juke. A record dropped, and a tune began . . . a sad and foolish song, sung by a girl with a voice as soft as smoke. Redmond hunched his

head deeply into his big shoulders, listening, his face expressionless.

There was a tinkle of ice as the bartender set a glass before him. Automatically, Redmond picked it up, touched it to his lips. Over the rim of the glass, he could see himself reflected in the mirror behind the bar. His coat had slipped back, and light glistened on the dull metal of his service automatic.

He made no move to cover it. His eyes had shifted to the bartender, who was frowning absently at the gun.

Stolidly, Redmond said, "They call 'em pistols, Buster. They go bang-bang. Anything else about me that confuses you?"

Flushing, the bartender jerked his gaze down. "No, Lieutenant. Not a thing." He wiped the bar busily, and smiled a little, and drifted away.

Redmond followed his progress in the mirror. Without surprise, he saw the other stop before a small, dark man at the end of the bar, speak quietly to him. Redmond continued to sip slowly at his drink, waiting.

Presently the small man rose, snuffed out his cigarette, and walked with elaborate unconcern toward Redmond. Sighing, Redmond put down his glass.

He was rubbing the bridge of his broken nose when the dark man slid onto the stool beside him. "Ah, Mr. Redmond," the dark man said, "they told me you were here, and I thought surely I must speak to my old friend, who—"

"What the hell do you sell in this hole, Peretti," Redmond murmured. "Whiskey or conversation?"

"Why, both, my friend, both!" Peretti exclaimed. "Whiskey, conversation, conviviality." He stopped, and let his glance flick toward the gun outlined beneath Redmond's coat. "Possibly the one thing we do not sell is worry. And, Lieutenant, you have worried my bartender."

"Well, damn me," Redmond said.

"Yes, you have," Peretti said. "You have worried him sick. He has said to himself, 'Ah, here is a Lieutenant of Detectives, a policeman, come into our club with something on his mind and a gun below his shoulder. He has chosen a seat near the door, and he looks at the clock much too often. Possibly he is expecting someone to enter through that door. Possibly he will feel impelled to use that gun. And then, when the bullets fly about, someone, possibly, may get hurt.' You see how you have upset him?"

"I'm a beast," Redmond said.

"Oh, you are too hard on yourself, my friend. Besides, I have already calmed him somewhat. I pointed out how silly it was to think that a criminal would ever show himself in the family atmosphere of Peretti's Club, how absolutely absurd that—"

"Sure," Redmond said. He got out a cigarette, and then nodded at the clock over the bar. "Is that thing right?"

Peretti glanced at the other thoughtfully. "Yes," he said. "To the second. Eleven twenty."

Redmond nodded again, and struck a match. The fitful glow in his cupped hands disturbed the shadows beneath his cheekbones and under his eyes. He blew out the match and tossed it into a metal ashtray near by. Then, impassively, he turned his head toward the door.

"Yes," Peretti murmured. "Well . . ." He tapped the bar lightly with his closed fist. After a time he rose. He hesitated momentarily. Then, shrugging, he wandered away into the dimness.

Unblinking, Redmond continued to watch the door. Behind him, the music from the juke sang softly through the club. The girl with the smoky voice whispered her words of love, and despair, and loneliness, and little by little the walls of the club began to dissolve, and Redmond remembered another girl with a voice like smoke. A girl with tilted eyes **and slim fingers and dark, dark hair. . . .**

She had come to his office on the hottest day of the year, when the blistered city lay panting like a spent dog, and newspaper photographers took the usual pictures of the usual eggs frying on the sidewalks. Redmond had been in his shirtsleeves, standing before an open window in search of a breath of fresh air, his squat body dripping with perspiration.

With the first timid knock, he had snapped, "Yeah. Come in, come in," and had wandered wearily back to his desk.

And then the door had swung inward and Julie had entered.

Redmond had recognized her at once. She was a bit taller than he remembered, a little more solemn, a good deal lovelier. But the essentials were there. The turned-up nose, the clear, wide eyes, the slender coolness of her.

Redmond had risen from his desk, struck anew with the incredible sight they must have made together. His own grim ugliness contrasted sharply with the grave beauty of the girl, and he drew far into himself, quiet and ashamed.

And then the girl was walking toward him, and there was no revulsion in her eyes at all. She held out one gloved hand. "Frank. . . ."

He took her hand, wondering at the smallness of it in his own huge palm. "Well, Julie," he murmured. "Julie, Julie, Julie. . . ."

They were both silent for a time, remembering. They had been born in the same neighborhood, an ancient, sullen district of cheap flophouses, airless streets and dull-faced humanity. They had gone to the same public school, lived with the same smouldering resentment, dreamed the same wondrous dreams. Julie had wanted to be rich and beautiful; Redmond had sought power and authority. Each of them had determined to escape, but Julie had made it first. She had danced away on the stage of a touring musical comedy, second from the left, and with her going, Redmond had died a little. She had never drawn away from his grotesqueness, the way other girls had. She had never loved him, but neither had she loathed him, and that was a great deal.

He shook his head. Julie, at least, had reached her goal. Beauty she had always had, and now the cut of her grey suit, and the hard, shining light of the diamond on her finger were signs of her wealth.

HE REMEMBERED the amenities suddenly, and released her hand. Awkwardly he pulled a chair out. "What the devil's the matter with me?" he said. "Sit down, Julie. Sit down. It's been so long, I—"

He lumbered about her like a great bear, getting her settled. "How have you been? What have you been doing? When did you get in town?"

Julie had lowered her eyes to her lap, and was frowning a little at her clasped hands.

Puzzled, Redmond stopped.

After a moment, the girl lifted her head. "I'm sorry. What did you say?"

For the first time Redmond noticed the worry in her eyes, the nervousness in her fingers. He sat on the edge of his desk, wondering. "It was nothing, kid," he said. "Small talk." For a while longer he continued to watch her silently. Then, abruptly, he asked, "What's the trouble, Julie?"

The girl straightened. "Have you a cigarette, please? I seem to have forgotten mine."

She drew off one glove as Redmond offered her his case. Her head trembled slightly as she leaned forward for the light.

"Listen," Redmond said, "whatever it is, it can't be as bad as you think. What happened? Somebody give you a ticket for speeding? Did you park in a loading zone? Let's get this out of the way and then we can—"

Slowly the girl sat back in her chair. She closed her eyes and rubbed her fingers across her forehead. "I'm afraid you don't understand. I'm afraid this is something that can't be fixed. You see, I've just killed a man."

Redmond was aware of many small, unrelated things. The haunting odor of the girl's perfume. The somnolent sounds of the street below. The irritating moisture on his hands. He wet his lips. "You've what?"

"Killed a man," the girl repeated.

"You mean—" Redmond moved his hand vaguely— "in an accident . . . in . . . ."

"I mean deliberately," the girl said. "I mean in cold blood, if that's the phrase you want." Her head was steady now, but her voice had risen sharply, "I stabbed him in the back. I wanted to kill him. It happened about an hour ago."

Slowly Redmond walked to the window, and then turned as the girl continued.

"My brother had told me once that you were a policeman," she said. "I thought of calling, but I—couldn't stand to stay in the house with—"

"Who was it?" Redmond whispered.

"My father-in-law."

"You're married?"

Julie nodded. "Two years ago."

"And you came to me instead of to your husband?"

"My husband," Julie said. Her voice was stiff with contempt. "I couldn't go to my husband with anything. He's—oh, it isn't important." She ground out her cigarette in the ashtray. "But don't misunderstand. I didn't come here, Frank, for help. I'm not afraid. I expect to be punished. I have no intention of running away from it."

Redmond jerked the knot of his tie into place, and picked up his coat from the back of his chair. "All right," he said. "Let's take a look."

Shrugging, the girl rose. "Whatever you want."

"Do you have your own car?"

"It's parked opposite the station."

Nodding, Redmond held the door open for her, and then followed her out of the office.

The car was further sleek testimony to Julie's rise in the world. It was long and low and blue, and it responded to Redmond like something intelligent. During the drive, neither Redmond nor the girl spoke, except for the asking and receiving of directions. Julie sat far over in the seat, smoking. her exquisite dancer's body rigid and distant. It was impossible for Redmond to think of her as a murderess. He was too close to her. He could see nothing beyond the immediacy of her loveliness.

Julie's home was a sweeping, two-storied mansion fronting on a lawn the

size of a city block. Redmond parked in the drive, and they mounted the broad steps of the veranda side by side.

"It's the servants' day off," Julie explained as she opened the door. She laughed, and her voice grew mocking. "On Thursdays, Hal and I rough it."

Redmond followed her into the great, hushed hallway. A library, rich in mahogany, stood at his left. On his right, a curved marble stairway wound majestically to the second floor.

"Not quite like the tenements on Third Avenue, is it, Lieutenant?" Julie asked. Again the mocking note had come into her voice. And yet, Redmond thought, there was, at the same time, an unavoidable touch of pride in her tone.

"Of course," Julie continued, "it doesn't really belong to Hal and me." She paused and looked up the stairs. "Or rather, it didn't. Hal's father insisted we move in with him when we were married. I suppose it's ours now. . . ." Her voice trailed off, and Redmond saw the fine shudder go through her once again.

Quietly Redmond said, "You told me the servants were away. Does that mean that no one saw the . . . accident?"

"It does," Julie said. She faced him, her chin up. "And I've also told you that it wasn't an accident."

"Where is he?" Redmond murmured.

"Upstairs. I'll show you."

Redmond's feet sank into the deep-piled luxury of the carpeting as they climbed the stairs. At the top, Julie motioned toward a closed door half way down the hall. "In there," she said. "If you don't mind, I think I'll wait here."

Without a word, Redmond walked to the door, opened it.

He saw a bright, high-ceilinged bedroom, lined with closets and aired by two full length windows which opened onto a small white balcony. A private bathroom adjoined it, and Redmond could hear the steady tick-tick of water dropping into the washbowl. His gaze took in the bed.

He moved slowly toward the bed. A man seemed to be kneeling there, his hands grasping the covers in mute supplication. Redmond squatted down, silently examined the wound in the man's back. There had been only one knife thrust, although the cloth of the dead man's suit had been ripped in a jagged circle, as though the knife had been twisted on its way out. Whistling absently, Redmond rose, walked to the open window. Below the balcony, the gnarled limbs of an oak stretched upward. Redmond leaned far over the balcony, still whistling. A spot on the outside of the railing caught his eye, and he ran his hand over it softly. It was rough, where someone had scraped a bit of white paint away.

Thoughtfully he turned, wandered back into the room. The annoying drip-drip of the water in the bathroom drew his attention, and he made his way toward it.

THE wash basin, he saw, was nearly spilling over. He turned off the faucet. In the bottom of the basin lay an ordinary kitchen knife. The water itself was stained a rust-red. There would, he knew, be no fingerprints left.

He was still staring into the basin when the sounds of conversation in the hallway came to his ears. Slowly he reentered the bedroom. One of the voices was Julie's. The other was high, querulous, drunken and male.

Redmond sat down in one of the chairs near the bed, waiting. Presently the bedroom door was flung open, and a man of thirty or thirty-five stumbled in. He caught himself when he saw Redmond, and straightened slowly. He was short, dark, unprepossessing. The smell of good whiskey came into the room with him.

"Well," he said. "Well." He held tightly onto the door knob. "And what's your name, little boy?" He swayed,

caught himself. "I must say, Julie, your taste in men is atrocious. This one's even uglier than I am. Next I suppose you'll be taking up with the Hunchback of Notre Dame. Or can this be he?"

Redmond lowered his eyes as a dog brushed past the man's legs. Powerful, big-chested, it stood alertly, its muzzle pointed toward the bed. Redmond could see the short hairs on its back bristle and rise. It moved forward on stiffened legs, moaning deep in its throat.

"Shut up, Biff!" the man snapped. Again he focused his puffy eyes on Redmond. "What did you say your name was, little boy?"

Julie moved past him, into the room. "And you wondered why I didn't go to my husband?" she asked. "Look at him, Frank. Mr. Hal Cartwright. My lord and master. Pretty, isn't it?"

The dog had crept to within an inch of the kneeling corpse. Whining, its ears flat, it turned finally and slunk back toward Julie.

"Biff!" Cartwright shot out, "I thought I told—" He broke off suddenly, peering at the figure beside the bed. He frowned, and then glanced blankly at Julie. "What's that?" he said.

Redmond noticed the whiteness of Julie's face, the trembling in her that spoke of near hysteria, and he got to his feet. "Cartwright," he said, "look at me." He paused, calculating the effect of the liquor on the other's emotional reactions. Then, steadily, he said, "There's been an accident. Can you understand? Your father—"

"Accident?" Cartwright interrupted. "What are you talking about? What kind of an accident?"

"A bad one," Redmond said. "A very bad one." He took a deep breath. "I'm afraid your father's dead, Cartwright."

"Dead?" Cartwright repeated stupidly. He shifted his dull eyes again to the kneeling figure. "But how can he be dead? He was all right when I left him this morning. I don't understand—"

"Oh, why do we have to go on with this silly farce?" Julie interrupted. Her voice was ragged, broken. "You heard what he said, Hal. Your father's dead. And I killed him! Can you understand that?"

"You killed him?" Cartwright mumbled. He shook his head uncomprehendingly, and approached the corpse. For a time, he was silent, his lips moving soundlessly. Then he raised his eyes, and Redmond moved toward him.

"Maybe you'd better sit down, son," he began. "I think—"

"Let me alone!" Cartwright's face was working like a child's, but his speech was sharp and steady. "I'm all right. I'm perfectly all right." He brushed Redmond's extended arm aside. "Just let me alone."

He turned to face Julie. Licking his lips, he whispered. "You never liked him, did you?"

"I loathed him! I despised the—"

"But you didn't kill him."

Julie's head snapped back as though she had been slapped.

Cartwright's mouth twisted into a crooked, humorless smile. He looked at Redmond. "You know she didn't kill him, don't you?"

"What's the matter with you two!" Julie screamed. "How many times—"

Cartwright moved swiftly toward a framed animal print on the wall beside the bed, pushed it aside to reveal a small safe. He fumbled with the dial, pulled it open, and peered inside. The safe, Redmond could see, was empty.

"Yes, I thought so," Cartwright whispered. "I thought so. . . ."

"Hal," Julie said, "listen—"

But Cartwright paid no attention. He swung around to Redmond. "Who are you, mister? Police?"

Redmond nodded.

"Oh, you ought to love this, then," Cartwright said.

"Ha!" Julie screamed.

Brushing her off, Cartwright continued, "Did you know, Mister, that my lovely wife has a brother? Lindstrom, his name is. Johnny Lindstrom. And did you know that the dear lad has spent half his life in prisons? He can't stay away from baubles. They stick to his hands. But Julie still loves him. Julie says he's not a bad boy. He's just ill." His voice crawled with contempt. "The last time he was paroled, Julie insisted we send him to a rest home. So we did. Green Meadows. Maybe you've heard of it. But there weren't any pretty baubles at Green Meadows, and the boy grew restless. Last night he showed up here, asking for money enough to get to South America. Julie obliged him. Dad, however, happened to be wearing his ring, his watch, his cuff-links, and the boy was drooling when he left. I imagine he came back. By confessing, my darling wife apparently thought that she could hold off the police long enough for her wayward waif to make his escape." He jerked his head toward Julie. "Isn't that right, angel?"

Without a word, Julie stepped back and slapped her husband viciously across the face.

Cartwright drew in his breath. Then, grabbing Julie's wrist, he grated, "Well, aren't we playing rough lately!"

"Hold it, Cartwright!" Redmond snapped.

"Stay out of this, Hawkshaw!"

Julie was sobbing under the pain of Cartwright's grip.

Redmond grasped the other man by the shoulder and spun him around. "Let her go!"

Breathing raggedly, Cartwright dropped his wife's arm. He stared up at Redmond. "So everybody's playing rough today?" he murmured. For a long moment he remained motionless, his head lowered, his chest rising and falling with his uneven breathing. Then without warning, he leaped.

Redmond rolled with the punch, and it grazed his cheek harmlessly. He slapped Cartwright's guard down, brought his right hand over in a chopping jab. Crying, Cartwright waded in, and Redmond bent him double with a blow to the stomach. He measured the conveniently lowered chin, and swung his right fist from the floor.

Cartwright slumped into his arms without a sound.

REDMOND located the chair behind him, and dragged the unconcious man to it. He dropped him, and then straightened, looking at Julie. "Is there a phone up here?"

"Frank," Julie said, "you can't believe the ravings of a drunken—"

She broke off, hurrying toward him as he spotted the extension beside the bed. "Frank, listen to me. . . ."

Redmond picked up the phone, dialed the operator.

"Frank!" Julie said.

Into the phone, Redmond said: "I want to talk to the sanitarium at Green Meadows. Yeah. This number?" He glanced at the base of the phone. "It's—Cleveland 9-1414. Right." He waited, his eyes blank. When the sanitarium answered, he said, "Redmond, Bay View Police. I'd like some information. I wanted to know if you have a patient there named Lindstrom. John Lindstrom." He listened for a time. Then, "How long ago? Last night? And he hasn't come back? Yeah. . . no. . . no. Just checking. Right . . . Thanks very much."

He let the receiver down onto the hook.

Julie was standing in the middle of the room, staring at him. "All right," she said. "So I was lying to you. What are

you going to do about it now, Frank?"

Redmond turned toward the door. "Pick up Johnny Lindstrom," he said quietly.

Julie took a deep breath. "I don't want you to, Frank. I don't want you to do that."

Redmond paused, puzzled by the tone of her voice.

"He's never had a chance, Frank," Julie whispered. "He wasn't like you and me. He never knew what he wanted. And when he thought he knew, it turned out to be the wrong thing."

"He's a murderer," Redmond said. "That's all of it. That's the end."

Julie glanced at the bed and at the broken, kneeling figure. "No one ever deserved murder more," she whispered. "Can't you see that?" She moved close to Redmond, and her perfume spun in his head. "Don't report it yet, Frank. Give him a chance. Give him a week. One week."

Redmond shook his head. "No."

"For me," Julie whispered. "Please. One week."

"Julie. . . "

"For me, Frank?"

Her voice was soft in his ear. The world was drunken, and evil, and bright in his eyes. And her soft lips pressed against the ugliness of his face, and inside he was handsome. He was the handsomest man that ever lived. . . .

By the time he got back to his office, the day was cooling. In the West, a blood-red sunset hung at the edge of the earth. He cleared the body with Cartwright's funeral parlor, and then he sat at his desk and stared silently down at the busy street beneath his window.

He was a simple man, with the simple man's sense of right and wrong. As a policeman, he had thought very little of the laws themselves. His job had been to enforce the laws that existed, and he was a man in love with his job. It was not in him to take the law into his own hands. Not even, he thought, for a week.

And yet . . .

At five minutes to six, he flipped the switch on the intercom box near his hand, and when McCreary, in the outer office, answered, he said, "I want a stop-fugitive warrant made out. I want it sent to every ship, air, and bus terminal in the area. Got that?"

"Yes, sir. What's the name?"

"The name?" Redmond stared at the blank wall opposite him. The memory of a haunting perfume remained in his mind. He rubbed his hand across his eyes. "The name is Johnny. . . ."

After a moment, McCreary said, "Yeah? Johnny what?"

Redmond closed his eyes, bent his head forward. "Cancel it," he said.

"What was that?"

"I said cancel it! Are you deaf?"

He snapped the switch off, and put his head in his hands. The blood of the sunset colored his windows and glared on his desk. Viciously he jerked the blind down.

Then he sat in the semi-darkness, and tried not to think.

The ringing of the phone jarred him into wakefulness. His office was cold and dark. The reflection of flashing neon signs beat against his window blind like silent, colored moths. He groped for the receiver, lifted it. "Redmond," he said.

At first he could understand nothing. The girl on the other end of the line was sobbing, hysterical.

He snapped to attention. "Julie?" he said. "Talk slower. I can't understand! What is it? What happened?"

And then the words came. "Frank, please hurry! He came back. Johnny came back! Hal—"

There was a click, and the line went dead.

Swearing, Redmond jumped up. He

stumbled against the edge of his desk on the way to the door, and waves of agony rolled upward from his shin. Limping, he ran out of the office.

The mansion beyond the great lawn was alive with lights when he got to it. Redmond leaped up the broad steps, his gun drawn, and hurried through the open front door. "Julie" he called. "Julie!"

A low moan came from the library on his left. At the same time the shape of the dog appeared in the doorway. Two sharp, low barks drew Redmond forward, and it retreated into the library, obviously requesting Redmond to follow.

He ran on, and then stopped dead at the sight that met his eyes. At the foot of a leather sofa, Hal Cartwright lay curled upon himself like a wounded caterpiller. He had been stabbed through the throat. The dog had crouched down beside the piano, muzzling the crumpled form of Julie.

Quickly Redmond knelt beside the girl. She had apparently fainted while telephoning him. Her wrist lay inertly over the bar of the telephone base. She was unharmed, although her mouth still bore the red marks of a gag. Two strands of clothesline cord were next to her. Redmond lifted her head, slapped her cheeks lightly. "Julie," he whispered. "Julie. . . ."

Whimpering, the dog licked the girl's face. Her eyelids flickered, rose. Dully, she stared up at Redmond. "Frank?" she murmured.

"Yes, Julie. It's all right now. Everything's all right."

"I didn't know," she murmured. "I tried to hold on. I wanted to make you understand. . . ."

"I came as fast as I could," Redmond whispered back.

Inquisitively the dog pushed a wet nose into the girl's face. Smiling, she raised one hand to his ears. "Biff. Darling Biff. You came too, didn't you?" She glanced at Redmond. "He got my hands free, Frank. He bit through the rope and—"

Redmond picked up one of the clothesline strands. It had been gnawed almost through.

"Can you get up, Julie?"

"I—think so. I'm all right, really."

With Redmond helping her, she got to her feet, stood leaning against the piano for a moment, and then walked slowly to a chair. "My knees feel so weak."

The dog followed her, lay down at her feet, his head between his paws, his back to Redmond.

Redmond stared at the body of Cartwright. "How did it happen?" he asked.

"It was like a nightmare." The girl covered her eyes and shook her head. "Hal and I were in here, talking. We thought we heard a noise in the study, and Hal went to see about it. We have the big safe in there."

SHE drew a deep, shuddering breath. "It was Johnny. He'd come back. He had a knife. He forced Hal in here ahead of him, and started to tie and gag me. Hal jumped on him, and Johnny stabbed him. I think he tried the safe again after that, but he couldn't get it open. And then he left."

Redmond's face was mask-like as he listened.

"I knew I had to get to the phone," the girl continued. "I crawled over between the piano and the writing desk. But the phone was too high to reach. And then I thought of Biff." She glanced up. "Johnny had left the front door open when he ran out. I knew that Biff could get to me if he could hear me. But I couldn't call to him with the gag in my mouth. I tried pounding on the floor with my feet. It was no good because the rug muffled the sound almost completely. Finally I remembered the piano."

She nodded toward it, and Redmond followed her eyes. "I pulled myself up as

far as I could," she went on. "I could just barely reach the last, lowest note on the keyboard. But I did reach it, and that was enough. Biff heard me. I had to pretend to be playing with him before he would pull at the rope on my wrist, but once he started, I found they had become loose enough for me to get out of them. After that I untied the gag and called you." She stopped, shrugging. "And that's it."

Redmond was staring at her oddly. He sat down on the piano bench, frowning at the keyboard. Slowly he raised one hand, rubbed his forehead.

The girl put her head on one side. "Frank," she asked, "What is it? What's the matter?"

Redmond let his breath out quietly. "Julie," he said softly. Then, "Julie, Julie. . . ."

He looked at the dog, who was still lying at the girl's feet. Presently he hit the lowest note on the piano. The dog continued to gaze up at Julie. Again Redmond hit the note, and again and again. Sleepily, the dog scratched at a flea on its belly.

Julie started to rise.

"Sit down," Redmond said.

Silently the girl relaxed again in the chair. Her eyes were wide, frightened.

Redmond moved his hand to the upper notes on the keyboard. Lightly he struck one of them.

Instantly the dog raised its head, turned toward him.

Redmond dropped his hands wearily.

"Frank. . . ." the girl began.

"Stay there, Julie!" Redmond snapped.

"But—" the girl glanced at the dog—"What are you trying to prove? Why didn't he hear you?" Her voice rose. "It's some kind of trick!"

"There's no trick. Don't you understand? Don't you get it, Julie? He couldn't hear the low notes. He couldn't hear a thing! Only the high notes. That's all." White-faced, Redmond got to his feet, walked to the girl. "Don't you know about vibrations, Julie? They're the whole basis of sound. A man can hear sounds ranging up to 14,000 vibrations a second. A dog can go farther. You've seen silent dog whistles. We can't hear them, because their sound waves vibrate 25,000 times a second, but a dog can hear. The only trouble is that it works both ways. You and I can hear those low piano notes, but a dog can't. They vibrate too slowly for him, Julie. Now do you see? You couldn't have called Biff, because he couldn't have heard you."

The girl's breath was coming faster. "Frank, listen—"

"So if you lied about that," Redmond went on, "you weren't tied. And if you weren't tied, the rest wasn't true either. Right, Julie?"

"No!"

"Yes, Julie. You killed your husband yourself, didn't you? You arranged the whole thing, and then called me, and pretended to faint, didn't you?"

"No! No! Frank, please—"

"And where do the lies end, Julie? What if we go back farther. Maybe it was all a setup. Maybe you killed the old man and fixed it so that I would think your confession was a lie when I examined the room. What about it, Julie?"

Sobbing incoherently, the girl shook her head.

"When your brother came by last night for money, you jumped at the chance to make him the fall guy. Everybody would suspect him. Nobody would suspect you once your 'confession' was shown to be merely an attempt to protect Johnny. Would they, Julie?

"But what about motive? You married Cartwright for his money, didn't you? You couldn't have loved him. But you hadn't believed that you could have grown to hate him so much. You might have

divorced him, but then you might have lost the money. Because it really wasn't Hal's money. Not while his father was alive. But with the old man dead, Hal was the only heir. And with Hal dead, the money would all come to you. Right, Julie?"

"Yes!" the girl screamed. "All right! It's true!" She buried her face in her hands, crying uncontrollably.

Redmond stopped. He looked down at her for a moment, his eyes blank with pain, and then he turned to the phone.

Before he could begin dialing, the girl was beside him, pulling his arm back. "Frank, wait! Listen to me. You love me. I know you do. Think what I have now. This house. Money. No one knows about Hal and his father except us. No one! It could be ours, darling. We could go away. To Paris maybe. To Italy. Anywhere you want. There'd be nothing more to worry about, ever!"

Redmond hesitated, his finger poised over the dial. His face was tortured.

The girl lowered her voice to a whisper. "Please, darling. Don't let them kill me. Put the phone down, darling. Put it down. Listen, we could be together as soon as the funerals are over. It wouldn't look good for us to be seen in public. But we could meet when everything is settled. When the wills are probated. And then we could leave. Just you and I."

Redmond closed his eyes, listening.

"Do you know Peretti's Club?" the girl continued in her soft whisper. "It's small, and quiet, and dark. Why couldn't we meet there? Please, Frank. Please, darling. It's up to you. All up to you."

Redmond looked at her, at the tilted eyes and the dark, dark hair, and he continued to listen. . . .

The music of the juke rose and fell, soft as a sigh, sweet as a dream. At the end of the bar, Peretti was still watching the ugly face of Redmond as he sipped at his drink. Behind him, the door to his club opened, and he shifted around, following Redmond's eyes.

But it was only the newsboy from the corner outside with his midnight editions. Peretti relaxed again.

The newsboy tossed a paper on the bar in front of him. "Hi, Mr. Peretti. How's business?"

"Terrible," Peretti said. The boy grinned and moved on.

Redmond, Peretti saw, had bought a paper too. He had risen, with the paper tucked under his arm, and was heading for the door.

"Lieutenant," Peretti called, "you leaving us so soon?"

"That's right."

"And no bullets flying about?"

"No bullets, Peretti." Turning, Redmond pushed through the door into the dark street. But not before Peretti had seen the curious shine and wetness in his ugly eyes.

Bewildered, Peretti shook his head. Then, shrugging, he picked up the paper. It was the same old news. A war scare in the Balkans, a flood on the West Coast. Always the same.

Bored, Peretti picked out the lead story, and began reading:

> At eleven fifty-five tonight, the first woman to be executed in the history of the State died in the electric chair at Ronwick prison. Mrs. Julia Cartwright, 28, murderer of. . . .

The story failed to hold Peretti's interest.

Yawning, he turned to the sports pages for the result of the eighth race at Hialeah.

AS LATE as 1827, it was highly advantageous for a criminal to know how to read the Bible—or, at least, part of it. Until that year, an English law breaker who succeeded in reading a few verses of Scripture was entitled to trial in an ecclesiastical, rather than a civil court.

(Continued from page 41)

now on the sofa daubing at some blood on his face where the lug wrench had roughed him.

"Mac, for cripesake," Shannon gasped. He got his feet on the floor. Both feet. "I'm all right, Mac. Just let me alone. And call Sam Kerestes."

MAC stepped back. Shannon could see around MacIrath now. There was the room, slowly revolving. There were Rose Dayan and Johnny the Artist, linked together with Moracci's handcuffs. There was Mr. Harris gleefully washing his hands. And not long after that, there was Lieutenant Kerestes, sallow-faced, dour, but willing to look at the gimmicked skylight; willing to listen to Shannon's story.

And when Shannon was through with the tale, Sam Kerestes said merely, "Thanks." But it meant a good deal. It meant Kerestes was acknowledging a mistake. It meant Stanley George would go free. It meant Sally could have what she wanted—a home and a job as a housewife instead of a short order cook for a bum. He wasn't sore about anything. He only wanted—well, he guessed what he wanted was to go somewhere and hang one on that would lose a couple of weekends. There was Delange's just across Pennsylvania Street, the old place where he always took Sally.

So he went into Delange's and Mike, behind the bar, said, "How're you this evening, Mr. Shannon?" As though he'd seen Shannon not later than that afternoon. And, "What do you think of this snow?"

"A double bourbon," Shannon said, "That's what I think of it."

So he had his double bourbon, and he thought that wasn't the way either. That was being chicken. More ostrich than chicken, with your head in a bottle. He said goodnight to Mike, almost pleasantly. And then he went home, if you could call it that. And you could if you wanted to. He stomped snow off his shoes on the first flight of stairs. He got halfway up the second before he saw Sally. She was sitting on the top step, her eyes very wide, as though his tramping had startled her out of a doze that might have come from sheer exhaustion. Waiting to thank him, no doubt, and he'd say, *My dear, you don't have to mention it. I'd do the same for any woman I loved.*

He actually got as far as, "My dear—" No farther than that, and no sarcasm, as he got his hands under her elbows and helped her to her feet.

"Pete, I couldn't—"

You couldn't just go away with him without saying thanks?

"I couldn't get in," Sally concluded. "You've got the door locked, and—" She snuggled the collar of the rabbit-fur jacket up to her chin, which was trembling. It was cold in the corridor. He stared at her, his eyes wary, but he was watching himself.

He said, "All right, Sally. I'll let you in." He went on ahead, leading the way. He got out his key and unlocked the door. He turned on the central polychrome fixture with its three naked bulbs—harsh light matching his mood. "I'll fix you a drink," he said, his back to her as he took off his coat. It'll keep you from chilling on the way back."

"Pete, I'm not going back. That is, if—"

Shannon swung around, noticing that Sally had taken off her hat and jacket.

"Not like this," he said flatly. "No, Sally. No bargain, you said."

"No bargain, Pete. I'm no bargain. But don't tell me that, Pete. Don't make me more ashamed than I am. I never realized how important it was—the meals you kept waiting, the money that trickled away, your knowing more wrong people than right."

"So I guess I'm pretty wonderful," he said acidly.

"Pete, you're wonderful." Her eyes shimmering.

"Now you've said it." His voice was dry. He reached for her jacket. That was as good a way as any when he couldn't say anything—just reach for her jacket and hold it for her.

"Pete, can you get the old job back? The police beat on the *Telegram?* Anybody can rehash old crimes and write articles. Put my jacket on a hanger, will you, Pete? It still looks good, doesn't it? I ought to be able to wear it for a couple more years."

He couldn't say anything, couldn't look at her. He stood, holding the jacket in his two hands.

"Pete, the phone is ringing," she told him.

It was, now that she mentioned it. He moved over to it, toward her but not looking at her, her white blouse and her face a blur before his eyes. He hung onto the jacket with one hand and picked up the phone. He made a sound into it.

"It's Mac, Pete," said MacIlrath worriedly. "I just called home to tell Sally the news, and Ruth says Sally went out about eight o'clock and she hasn't showed up."

"About eight o'clock," Shannon repeated slowly, like a moron. Just like a moron. Sally was very close to him, trying to listen to what came out of the phone. He got a cameo closeup of her face against the painted wall. Green calsomine that was harsh and ugly and yet seemed to soften magically into a background for loveliness.

"Pete, are you still on the line?"

"Yes, Mac." But he was having a time with the phone—getting it over into his left hand without dropping Sally's jacket. Doing that so that he could put his left arm around Sally's slim waist. "Yes, Mac, I've got a pretty good idea where she is. I can reach out and touch her, you might say . . . yes, Mac, I'll tell her."

"Tell me what?" Sally whispered up close to his ear.

"About Stanley George," Shannon said. And from the phone Mac was asking, "how's that, Pete?"

"Stanley George is a free man." Shannon to Sally.

"Well, good," Sally said with the right amount of enthusiasm—no more and no less. "He was a nice boy."

The past tense for Stanley George, Shannon noticed happily. "But I'm still a bum."

"You're a bum and I love you."

"Who's a bum?" Mac sang out from the receiver.

"Oh, hang up, Mac."

"Yes, stop eavesdropping," Sally shouted at Mac. "The bum wants to kiss his wife hello."

IN AT least one instance, a private manufacturer of U. S. currency has been cleared of the charge of counterfeiting. Josiah Sprinkle, a silver miner, issued his own silver dollars. Arrested and brought into court, he proved that his coins were of pure silver and worth somewhat more than a dollar. The jury promptly acquitted him!

The first counterfeit paper money in the United States was in imitation of the $10 issue of 1862. Preoccupied with the Civil War, officials of the Treasury did not detect the bogus currency until more than $100,000 worth was in circulation.

—*Barney Fletcher*

DEATH'S LITTLE DARLING

By Preston Grady

A scream whipped out of his mouth as he fell. . . .

Three men loved Jenny, each in his own way . . . the first perished screaming, the second went to hell for her, and the third — he lived to love dying even more!

THREE men loved Jenny Jones during her brief span. Through no fault of hers, the first was murdered. The second was executed as her avenger. The third had it hardest of all.

The first was her husband, and his fate was easiest because he was betrayed and dead almost before he knew what was

happening to him. There was no gunfire, no blood-letting knife, no blunt instrument, no poison, no strangling fingers. Just a couple of hands reaching out to push his back.

For the killer it didn't even take much strength. The victim was standing poised there at the edge, unsuspecting, thinking of his wife and kid and hoping to get off soon so he could go home and be with them, when these hands reached out and gave him that almost casual but murderously decisive shove.

He didn't teeter. The shove had been too well calculated. His arms flailed but there was no instant in which he might have regained his balance. He stared into the dark and certain maw of death, his unsupported body arched over it, and plunged.

His thin scream was whipped out of his mouth to be left floating eerily among the cobwebbed rafters and to die in the dusty walls. The trash-littered concrete bottom, unyieldingly receiving the sodden impact of the living human, broke a dozen bones in his body. He was dead within seconds.

The big wharf rats which had scampered away from this strange missile hurtling upon them returned to regard the limp, twisted and slowly bleeding form with unblinking, beady and speculative eyes.

DETECTIVE Lieutenant Johnny Hanrahan turned out of the bustle and clang of Trade Street into a shadowy and empty alley which bisected the short block. He was lean, rangy, a shade under six feet, agile and always balanced, with an angular blue jaw.

Those who knew him, or thought they did, said he was strictly for Johnny Hanrahan. They were right, at this time. This is not to say that he did not have a strongly developed sense of justice as a policeman, within the practicalities of a municipal system; he did. But his main concern was with himself. How else could a slum-spawned orphan have attained his rank at thirty-two?

Midway in the alley was an entry barely wider or deeper than the width of its single door. The door, oddly enough, had fancy scrollwork, and at eye level in it was set a small mirror, apparently an ornament. Johnny paused, pushed a button, and regarded his sharp chin in the mirror.

It was not quite dark but he figured Lee Valdini would be in the office. He could picture him now, rising from behind the big desk and sauntering over to glance through the glass, which was transparent from the inside. Lee Valdini spurned the mumbo-jumbo of a personal guard or doorman. He kept a stubby-nosed Banker's Special in his desk and he didn't let everybody in this way.

The door opened. Johnny stepped in and closed it behind him with a clearly audible click. The office was small, expensively and simply furnished. Valdini did not speak as he returned to his desk, but sat down, clasping his hands behind his handsome head, and resumed listening to a news broadcast from a radio built into a high cabinet behind him.

Johnny sat down at the end of a divan, pulled a chair near, put his feet in it and leaned back, rolling the end of a cigarette between thumb and forefinger before meditatively snapping a light to it.

The news broadcast ended, a commercial began and Lee Valdini turned the radio off.

"Well, Johnny?"

"Hot, huh?"

"You come to talk about the weather?"

Lee was smiling his smile that could be charming, friendly without being even slightly obsequious, often devastating to women but as often distasteful to men because Lee was too well dressed, too carefully barbered, too boldly insinuating with

his Latin good looks. Just now the smile was merely a smile.

"About Don Jones," said Johnny. "That driver of yours that stepped into the elevator shaft a few weeks back."

"What about it? I thought you were a homicide man, Johnny."

"I am. But I can't get that case off my mind."

Lee was still smiling. His hands were back behind his head.

"Oh, I suppose you're in the clear," said Johnny. "The man on the beat had just come out of the all-night diner on the corner and saw you roll up in front of the warehouse. He's straight. He has no reason to lie. And I don't think he was bought."

Lee Valdini's amused expression didn't change.

"The beat man saw Don Jones get out of the car and go into the warehouse," Johnny went on. "Ten minutes later he saw you get out of the car, stand on the curb a minute, and then go in. Maybe three minutes later you came out, called the cop, and both of you went in. Don Jones' body was at the bottom of the elevator shaft, four old-fashioned high stories below street level, in the basement at the edge of the dock and the river."

"Why the recitation, Johnny? It was a terrible accident, as the coroner's jury agreed. Don was about the best driver I ever had. I gave him a thousand dollar funeral. I'm going to give his widow and kid a couple of grand and make sure she gets a good job. I've asked her to come in to see me. A looker, I hear."

"I figure you killed him," said Johnny.

His feet were still in the chair. The cigarette was in his mouth, smoke curled up past his jutting cheekbones and he squinted at Valdini.

Lee chuckled. "Don's own brother doesn't think so. He's tending bar downstairs right now. Me kill my own driver, Johnny? What have you been taking?"

"I don't know how," Johnny said. "You were there earlier in the day, maybe the last to leave. Maybe you left the elevator on an upper floor, the door barely cracked open on the street level floor, sent Don in with instructions to turn on no lights, so he blundered into the opening and fell."

"He must have blundered, all right," said Lee. "But I had nothing to do with it. I was outside."

"Or maybe you sent him in and told him to wait in there for you. Maybe, after ten minutes, you went in, walked with him to the elevator door, opened it and pushed him in, and then came out and called the cop."

Lee chuckled again, rubbing his precisely trimmed mustache. "But why, Johnny?"

"Neither one of the Jones brothers ever had any business working for you in the first place. They aren't your kind—or my kind."

"Too good for us?"

"Don wanted to quit. His wife probably encouraged him to quit. But you wouldn't let him. He knew too much. You got afraid he might try to quit anyhow, so you killed him."

"The coroner's jury returned a verdict of accidental death. You're a fool, Johnny. Have you been spouting this guff anywhere?"

"No."

"Why tell me about it?"

Johnny mashed out his cigarette in a tray, got up and went over to the desk. He put his knuckles on the desk and leaned toward Valdini.

"I don't think it will ever be proved on you. But murder is a strange thing, Lee. You've probably been patting yourself on the back over getting away with it. Now you know at least one other person knows you killed him and you won't rest so easy—even a guy like you. I just don't want you to have the satisfaction of thinking

you fooled everybody, because you didn't."

Lee rose suddenly with his black eyes snapping and backhanded Johnny across the face, hard. Johnny's head rocked. For an instant he seemed about to explode into action, but his clenching fists stayed on the desk. Muscles rippled under the livid mark on his jaw.

THE moment passed. Lee smiled. He said, "Drink, Johnny?" He turned to the cabinet, opened a door on a refrigerating unit, bottles, glasses.

"I'll get one downstairs," Johnny said.

He crossed to a door, opened it, went along a hall, down a short flight of stairs and emerged at the rear end of the crowded bar. The club fronted on Market; he had come in the back way. The gambling rooms were upstairs, on the same floor as Lee's office.

Frank Jones was serving a girl with chestnut hair who sat on a barstool with her back to Johnny. Frank was grinning and talking and the girl murmured something in reply as Johnny approached. Her voice made something catch in Johnny's throat.

Frank was a contradiction, as his brother had been. Frank didn't drink, gamble, chase, swear or even smoke. He went to business school in the mornings; he hoped to become an accountant. Johnny thought he probably studied too hard. Sometimes Frank didn't look good.

"Hi, Johnny." Frank gave him a glance, poured a shot of rye and set out a glass of water. "Meet my sister-in-law, Jenny. Don's wife. First time she's ever been in here and all she'll let the house buy her is ginger ale."

The girl turned and something hit Johnny in the chest. She was lovely. She had an air of bright expectancy, her blue eyes were luminous and her full lips slightly parted in a smile.

But this was incredible. Don's widow, Johnny knew, had a son nine years old, and this girl seemed scarcely out of her teens.

Frank was jabbering, telling her who he was and him something about her, and Johnny said something but could never remember afterward what it was. What he did remember was that he felt a hand on his shoulder, turned and there stood Lee Valdini staring at Jenny Jones. There was a silence.

"Mr. Valdini, Jenny," said Frank.

Her gaze seemed bound to Lee's. "Don never told me—" she began, and stopped, coloring. Her lips came together and she swallowed.

Lee touched her arm and she slipped off the barstool.

"I've been expecting you, Mrs. Jones," Lee said without taking his eyes from hers. The cruel and petulant look was gone from his face; he wore his mask of charm. "You should have come much sooner." He guided her toward the stairway from which he had come.

Johnny and Frank watched them go. When they faced each other again they did so bleakly.

"Another slug," said Johnny.

"Huh?" said Frank blankly. Johnny never had more than one drink.

But as the detective glared, Frank complied.

Four months went by and Johnny heard that Lee Valdini had discovered Jenny had a voice. It was a small voice, no good without amplification and nothing sensational for the public even then, but Valdini was buying lessons for her, and in a darkened club, with a flattering spot on her slender figure and chestnut hair and round blue eyes and bare smooth shoulders, it would get by.

Jenny moved from her cheap flat to an apartment in one of the most expensive buildings in town. The kid, Mark, was pulled out of P.S. 16 and sent to a prep school in nearby Riverdale, so Jenny's former neighbors no longer needed to

keep an eye on him until Jenny got home from the department store job she had taken after Don's death and which she held less than a month after meeting Lee Valdini.

Johnny often had meals with Frank in a lunchroom near Valdini's club. He picked up many details about Jenny from Frank. That was easy to do because it soon became evident to Johnny that Frank was in love with his brother's widow and maybe had been for a long time.

Frank began to eat less, growing thinner, and to complain of stomach trouble. By accident Johnny learned that Frank wasn't doing too well in his studies any more. Eventually he heard that Frank had dropped out of school, but Frank never mentioned it. Johnny got really worried about Frank's physical condition and urged him to consult a doctor. Frank said half-heartedly that he would.

Only once did Frank ever refer to his brother's death. Johnny had steered clear of the subject. Out of a long silence as they dawdled over coffee one evening Frank said, "You know, Don used to talk to me confidentially about getting into the trucking business. Said he believed he could pay for a couple of tractors in a year if he could drive one of 'em himself."

"That so?" asked Johnny, carefully casual.

Frank nodded. "He was saving to do that. . . . Johnny, you ever think there was anything—fishy—about the way Don died? I mean—"

"No," Johnny lied.

Frank went on day shift, which meant he got off at seven o'clock. But Johnny, dropping in now and then for the club's midnight show, glimpsed Frank standing almost concealed in a far corner, his burning eyes on Jenny as she sang. When Jenny left the floor, Frank's gaze invariably swung to Lee Valdini, if Valdini happened to be around, and followed Valdini as the owner returned to his private stairway. Valdini usually heard her number.

One day Johnny tailed Frank to Riverdale. More easily and naturally he could have suggested going with Frank, since the dead man's brother made no secret of his weekly visits to his nine-year-old nephew, but Johnny was possessed of a deviousness inexplicable even to himself. He waited on the last coach of the interurban until he saw Frank leave the train and approach the taxi stand. Then he got off the train just before it started.

He walked to the school grounds, since it was little more than a mile and, unlike Frank, he was in perfect health. Through a high hedge he saw Frank on a bench at the football field, and watched him cheer and shout advice to Mark as the boy scrimmaged with his schoolmates. Mark was a towheaded kid with freckles, and he was going to be taller than his mother in a year or two.

About this time Johnny Hanrahan got a break which had been his goal for several years. He was chosen for a special six-months course at the FBI school in Washington.

Because the course was an exacting one and he had no close relatives at home, no logical reason for the expense of a quick trip, he did not leave Washington during the six months. He wrote Frank. From the beginning the replies were evasive.

In a note from a fellow detective Johnny learned that Jenny Jones was no longer at the club. Lee Valdini had taken up with a redhead. Johnny wrote prudent but persistent letters to others and learned that Jenny no longer occupied the expensive apartment. He guessed that young Mark had been withdrawn from Riverdale.

There was a snowstorm the day before Johnny got home. He strode up through the gloomy concourse of the Union Terminal into the brightness of the vaulted waiting room, and went immediately to a phone booth.

The landlady at Frank's rooming house answered. No, Mr. Jones wasn't in. Did she know where he might be reached. She wasn't sure, but last evening she had heard Mr. Jones say that his sister-in-law was critically ill in Mercy Hospital. Pneumonia.

His heavy bag banging against his knee, Johnny went out into the sunshine and slush and caught a cab.

At the hospital he sprang from the taxi, leaving his bag, told the driver to wait and hurried up the steps. As he reached the top of the steps, Frank emerged from the big revolving doors. Frank's gaze was straight ahead but he gave no sign of recognizing Johnny.

Johnny caught his arm fiercely. "How is she?"

Stopping against his will, Frank turned to Johnny, his eyes wild. A flicker of recognition came into them. "She's dead," he said.

Johnny waited.

"He got tired of her and kicked her out like a tramp," said Frank. "That was months ago, Johnny. He broke her heart. She tried to go back to her department store job, but she had no strength for anything. He broke her, Johnny. If she'd been a tramp she might have been able to take it."

"Where's the kid?"

"With some of the old neighbors on the south side. She'd moved back there."

"Where are you going?"

"To work."

"Are you crazy?"

"If I don't work, if I don't do something, I will be. There's nothing else to do here. A nurse called the undertaker. I can look after the other details from the club."

THEY rode downtown in Johnny's taxi in silence. Frank seemed to get a grip on himself, a resolve. At six o'clock, after visiting headquarters, Johnny went to Valdini's for a drink and Frank served him. He looked all right then. Johnny learned that the funeral would be at three o'clock the next day.

"Meet you for dinner when you get off?" asked Johnny.

"Sure."

Johnny was in the lunchroom at five after seven, waiting over a cup of black coffee. The waitress said, "Glad to see you back, Lieutenant. I hear you been in Washington."

"Training school," said Johnny.

"You gonna wait for Frank Jones?"

"Yeah."

"He ain't been eating right lately, Lieutenant. Oyster stew. That's all he ever has in here."

Johnny was at a window table. He sat staring into Market Street. The afternoon had become cloudy, and in about ten minutes it began to rain.

Frank came along the street from the club, hatless as usual, head down, hands in pockets, the rain peppering his hunched shoulders. He came into the lunchroom, saw Johnny, and came over turning down the lapels of his topcoat. He hung up his coat and sat opposite Johnny. As he picked up the menu his hands were trembling. He ordered oyster stew. Johnny ordered the regular dinner. The oyster stew wasn't ready, had to be made, and it was about twenty minutes before they were served.

They were half through eating when two older detectives who also worked homicide came in and strolled over to their table. They ignored Johnny. One of them reached to Frank's topcoat, rubbed fingertips along the shoulder fabric, then looked thoughtfully at the wetness on his fingers.

The other detective said, "Let's go, Frank." The first held Frank's topcoat open for him.

"What's the beef?" asked Johnny, getting up.

"Stay out of this, Johnny," said the dick holding Frank's coat. "He's a buddy of yours and you got no business having anything to do with this. How long you been here?"

"Since a little after seven. What the hell? Don't you even tell me what the beef is?"

The waitress had come over, and now she said, "That's right. The Lieutenant came in a little after seven and then in about ten minutes Mr. Jones came. What're you two guys up to, anyway?"

"Lee Valdini's been murdered," said one of them.

Johnny's suddenly cold eyes went to Frank. "They're right," Frank said. "You shut up. Stay out of it, Johnny. You hear me? No matter what happens —for now. Stay out of it." He slipped his arms into the coat.

The case against Frank Jones was ironclad. The two dicks who had picked him up went to town on it because it was seldom they could break a case as fast as they broke this one and the evidence dovetailed into a prosecutor's dream. It was that tight.

Getting off duty at seven, Frank had gotten his street jacket and topcoat from a closet. No one remembered whether he had gone out the front or whether he had climbed the stairs to Valdini's office, but that was unimportant.

A telegram had been delivered to the club about that time. The messenger didn't use Valdini's private entrance on the alley—he had come around to the front—but his route from the telegraph office was through the alley and he was quickly found at the telegraph office. He had seen Frank Jones emerge from the alley doorway just a few minutes after seven.

Lee Valdini had been shot in the face while behind his desk. The body was found in the chair, but he might have fallen into it after being shot. The angle of the bullet indicated Valdini had been standing. The slug was recovered from his head. It was a .32 and might have come from the short-barrelled Banker's Special which Valdini kept in the top drawer of his desk.

The gun was missing. Frank's gun, registered to him, was found in an ashcan between the club and the lunchroom. It had not been fired. The theory was that Frank had pulled his own gun on Valdini, got Valdini's gun from the desk and shot him with it. An intensive search was made for Valdini's gun. It was never found.

The office floor had been waxed—a messy job—that afternoon and at the edge of the carpet, between it and the alley door, pointing toward the door, was found a heelprint which microscopically matched one of Frank's rubber heels. Motive, means and physical presence at the time of the crime were amply clear for conviction.

Long before conviction, however, on Johnny's first visit to Frank alone in his cell, Frank said, "Don't worry about it, I tell you. This is right. If you don't believe me, go ask Dr. Hamlin Johnson in the Professional Building. I took your advice after all, Johnny, but I took it too late."

"What's wrong with you?"

"Cancer of the stomach. I wouldn't live a year. The doc didn't want to tell me, but I knew it was something bad and I put it up to him. I said I had a right to know, and he told me."

Johnny did not doubt him but checked anyhow. The doctor confirmed the diagnosis.

Before and after the trial, Johnny and Frank had long private talks. Johnny, although his every instinct rebelled, was persuaded.

Frank was to go to the chair at six o'clock in the morning. Johnny did not

(Continued on page 129)

Answers to THE THIRD DEGREE

(Questions on page 53)

1. Of the three named, carbolic acid is the most common cause of death.

2. True. To the untrained eye, the symptoms of opium poisoning and apoplexy may appear very similar.

3. If your crook friend told you he had been "given the kick," this would mean he had been given the third degree.

4. True. A "kid glove" is a high class crook.

5. A "shôrt conner" is an underworld character who sells tips and "advance information" on sporting events such as boxing matches, dog races, etc.

6. False. A "shover" is a counterfeiter who makes his living by passing phoney money.

7. True. Poisoning by one of the mineral acids generally quickly brings on observable symptoms.

8. Yes, a person working around vegetable spray would be likely to use arsenic as a murder poison. Many of these sprays contain arsenic, and hence it would be readily available.

9. True. With the aid of a microscope it is often possible to tell freshly cut hair from hair which has not been cut for several days.

10. True. Hair may sometmes appear to grow after death as a result of shrinkage of the skin.

11. False. It is often very difficult to identify specific ski tracks with specific skis. Skis are not necessarily highly individual, and wind and heat may change the formation of the snow. For these and other reasons, ski track identification is sometimes difficult.

12. A "homicide kit" is a kit carried by some detectives when making a homicide investigation. It contains items which are likely to be of help during such an investigation.

13. "Sprung" means either "released from prison," or "acquitted."

14. If a crook acquaintance told you he was going to "square a rap," this would mean he was planning to bribe some politicians.

15. The stool pigeon would mean his friend was engaged in kidnaping.

16. True. It is likely that a person poisoned by mushrooms will display symptoms similar to those of one poisoned by yellow jasmine.

17. One to twenty-four hours is generally considered the fatal time for morphine.

18. A "spill" is a railroad station.

19. A "speed ball" is a shot of dope.

20. "Sour paper" is underworld slang for forged checks.

It's simple, *the voice said.* . . . If you're half the man you pretend to be, why don't you kill him? What have you got to lose — but your life?

Gregg triggered twice and Slim folded. . . .

CRIMSON CARNIVAL

By Johanas L. Bouma

GREGG jumped from the freight before it stopped rolling. He slid down the embankment as the long column of cars shrieked and shook to a stop. A lantern bobbed in the distance and he started away at a fast clip. He didn't want to meet up with a railroad bull. He touched the automatic holstered beneath his left armpit, and his mouth pulled tight. There was only one man he wanted to meet, and that was Hattery.

The scatter of lights over yonder was Desert City, strictly a dump. He stayed with the dark streets. Now he could hear

the sounds of the town, a brassy organ. There was the Main Drag up ahead, lighted up like a Christmas tree. Flags and pennants fluttered in the evening breeze. A wide banner, at the head of the street, had WESTERN DAYS written on it in big block letters. The organ commenced again and he saw the string lights of the carnival at the end of the line. People jostled and whooped along the sidewalk. There wasn't a car on the street, but there were quite a few people on horses and in buggies.

He moved away from the lights, and into a darkened doorway. He was a slim, sandy man, still young, with restless light blue eyes and heavy shoulders. He waited. The local suckers were throwing a party, and he had noticed that most of them were in Western costume, and that the men wore beards. His right hand moved across his three day stubble, and he grinned without mirth. What a break! Making this dump, broke, and nobody to give him that look because he needed a shave.

He didn't have long to wait. A bulky figure, weaving slightly, came towards him. The man was muttering to himself, an early drunk. Gregg stepped clear. In a soft voice he asked, "Got a match, bud?"

"Gotta match," the drunk mumbled. "Sure, gotta match." His hands fumbled at his pockets. Gregg threw a quick glance around. Then he leaned into the punch. His fist cracked against the drunk's jaw and the drunk grunted and sagged. Gregg caught him around the waist, hauled him back to the doorway.

The drunk didn't carry a wallet. There was a wad of crumpled bills in his pants pocket. Gregg straightened and looked around. There was no sign of alarm. He walked quickly to the corner and cut across the residential district to the other side of town.

He had a cheap room now and a shower had washed away the dirt of the freight car. The dime store was still open, and he went in and bought a cheap Western hat, a gaudy vest to go over his blue work shirt and a pair of cowboy pants. He tied it up with a red bandana and took the stuff up to his room. When he came downstairs again, he looked like all the rest of the suckers.

He stood at a bar and had himself a couple of beers, the big hat cocked low. There was no use taking a chance. As far as Hattery knew, he was still serving time, but you could never tell. Hattery had brains. He had used them when he fixed it for Gregg to catch the rap on their last job. The judge had given Gregg three years, but he behaved himself and got out in two. It had taken him six months to get a line on Hattery.

Now he wondered what Hattery was doing in this dump. It had to be pretty big or Hattery would never waste his time. And he wondered if Hattery was playing it alone.

He went outside and let the crowd carry him along. No one was giving him the big eye; there were too many strangers in town. At the end of the Main Drag, he stopped and looked around.

They were holding a square dance on the big open air platform across the way. Beyond, the dozen or so tents housing the carnival faced each other across a stretch of sawdust. The organ music was coming from the merry-go-round. Next to it, the illuminated ferris wheel cut a swinging hole in the night.

He turned away. His knees bumped hard against something and he stumbled and half fell. Without looking around, he growled, "Watch where you're going," and walked on. Laughter caught up with him. spun him around, and his right hand dipped inside his shirt.

A young woman was laughing at him. She was sitting in a wheelchair, wearing a checkered shirt and a white cowboy hat,

with her legs covered by an Indian blanket. She had startling blue eyes and her blonde hair was curly. She said, still laughing, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean—but you turned so abruptly and looked so startled—"

Gregg scowled and muttered something. The crowd had thinned out momentarily, and there was a cleared space between them. But it was her eyes that held him, made a queer tremble run along his spine.

The girl said, "I was looking around for Bob, you see. He was with me a moment ago—" She broke off, glancing across at the carnival.

Gregg said roughly, "You want to go across?"

"Oh, would you?" She was smiling now. "I get along fine by myself except at the curbs."

He couldn't leave her like that, and he pushed the contraption onto the street. A horseman cut in front of them and he called harshly, "Get that nag outa the road!" and the girl laughed again.

She turned her head. "This is fine. I've been wanting to see the carnival at night, but Bob—" she frowned a little—"seems to have disappeared."

"Yeah," Gregg said. He didn't give a damn about Bob. The girl thanked him again with her smile. He watched her roll away, having a tough time of it in the sawdust. He scowled after her.

What if he stuck with her? That would be the smart thing to do, wouldn't it? Hattery wouldn't look twice at a sucker pushing a dame around in a wheelchair.

She had stopped a bit up ahead and was looking around. Then she saw him come up behind and she said, "My goodness. You again?" but there was only friendliness in her eyes.

"Yeah," Gregg said. "I figure to see the sights so I might as well shove you along the same route."

She searched his face, serious now. "All right," she said finally. "But you don't have to, you know."

"Yeah," Gregg said again. "I know."

THEY went on for a way in silence. Then she turned her head to say something, and just then three suckers in black cowboy outfits came running. Two of them carried big six-shooters in their hands, the third had hold of a canvas bag, and all three were masked up to their eyebrows.

Gregg made a running jump in front of the girl. What the hell was going on here? Two of the men held their guns on him and the other one stepped forward and held out the open bag. "Okay, mister. It's for a good cause."

Gregg set himself, his knees bending a little. Then he heard the girl laugh. She cried, "It's all right, just a mock holdup! They're collecting money for equipment for the hospital!"

Gregg's stomach loosened slowly, and he had the feeling that he had walked out of a trap. "Why don't you guys speak up?" he growled.

The men laughed. One of them asked, "Enjoying yourself, Miss Elliot?" and the girl laughed with them and said she was.

She had her purse open and Gregg saw her take out a half dollar. There was a clinking sound as it hit the bottom of the bag. The man holding it made a half turn and Gregg pulled out a ten spot and pushed it in the bag. The man looked at him and said, "Say, mister, thanks!" and then they ran off to collect from their next victim.

"Sucker!" Gregg muttered to himself.

"What did you say?" the girl asked.

"Nothing. Only that it's a screwy way to take up a collection."

"Oh, it's just in the spirit of Western Days," she said, laughing. Then, in a softer voice, "It was nice of you to give so generously."

"Easy come, easy go," Gregg muttered.

"You're a stranger in town, aren't you?"

"Yeah. Drove down from L.A. for the celebration. Your name Elliot?"

"Christine Elliot," she said, pausing. "Yours?"

"Gregg. Bill Gregg." He looked at her. "What's this deal on the hospital?"

Her face lighted. "Didn't you know? Now that we have the money, we're going to build a new hospital, and goodness knows we need one."

He thought about it, pushing her along slowly, and then she suddenly exclaimed, "Oh, there's Bob now!"

He gave a quick look where she was pointing. A beefy young man with a black hat on his dark hair was talking to two others, one of them a small, trim man in boots and the black broadcloth suit of a frontier gambler. Gregg started. There was no mistaking the small man, not even after nearly three years. It was Hattery.

The girl called, "Bob!" and Gregg's insides felt like coiled springs. Damn her! She could mess it up good and proper now!

Then a half dozen couples came trooping along, arm in arm. They cut in between him and the three men, yodeling a cowboy song as they went. When he could see them again, Hattery and the other one, tall, thin man, were strolling away. Then he saw the beefy young man leaning over the girl. She said, "Bob Bowers, Bill Gregg."

They shook hands.

"Mr. Gregg has been kind enough to help me around," the girl explained.

"Say, that's fine," the young man said. He had a moon face and rosy cheeks, but his eyes were deep-set, the mouth small. "I've been pretty busy," he said. "One thing and another. Think you can get along without me for an hour or so?"

The girl's shoulders sagged a little, but she said brightly, "Why, of course. I'll be at the platform, watching them dance."

"Fine, fine." The young man bent over quickly and pecked at her forehead. *He's a cheap, pretentious sucker,* Gregg thought. *A small town big shot.* The young man gave him a short nod and hurried away.

Only then did it hit Gregg. He'd given Chris his real name, and now the sucker had it! Suppose he mentioned it to Hattery? But even while that thought was clicking and finding answers, he was thinking about that young punk being with Hattery.

"This guy Bowers," he asked the girl casually. "You engaged to him?"

"Well—" she answered slowly, "not officially. I had the accident, you see, and that—"

"Oh, that's it. What happened? The accident, I mean?"

"I fell from a horse."

"Will you be okay?" he asked bluntly.

A shadow crossed her face. Then she said, "Oh, I think so. In time. I'm having an operation next month—" Suddenly she was looking at a bottle game. Her face lighted again. "Win me a doll, Bill," she exclaimed. "One of those with a cowgirl skirt and the cute hat."

She had him going all right. He couldn't get it. He pulled her in close to the stand and then bought a dime's worth of balls. His arm was still in pretty good shape. He wondered what she'd say if she knew he'd got that arm pitching for the prison team.

He had to spend a dollar before he won the doll. He placed it in her lap, then made her throw a dozen or so balls, just so she'd be in on it. Watching her, he shook his head. She was all worked up, almost jumping out of her chair.

"Come on," he said gruffly. "That's enough of that."

"Isn't the doll beautiful, Bill?" She was holding it, smiling at him across her shoulder.

"Yeah," he said. "This Bowers work in town?"

"Oh, yes. He's in the city administration office. He's been ever so busy since we raised the money for the new hospital."

"We? Raised the money?"

"Well, everyone in the city donated at one time or another. We held dances and raffles—almost everything you can think of to raise the fifty thousand dollars. It took five years, but we finally did it."

"I get it. That's the reason for the celebration, eh?"

"That's right. And also to take in enough money to buy equipment." She sighed. "Tomorrow's the final day. I'll hate to see it end. Will you be here, Bill?"

"Oh, I might stick around. What happens tomorrow?"

"Well, there'll be foot races in the morning, then a ball game during the afternoon, and the mock stage holdup later on in the evening. You won't want to miss that. They'll clear Main Street, and the stage, carrying the money, will be held up by bandits right in the middle of town."

"No kidding! What bandits?"

She laughed. "You're joking, Bill. Not real bandits, of course. The same ones who held us up tonight. Chief of Police Sterling and his men."

HE WAS beginning to line it up. He said, "You mean to tell me they'll really have that fifty grand—fifty thousand—on the stage?"

"Of course not. The money is in the safe at City Hall. They're just doing it to put a show on for the people."

The merry-go-round was straight ahead. He said, "Does it hurt you to be lifted?"

She shook her head, smiling. The smile was getting to him. He wanted suddenly to tear himself away from it, to think. *Fifty grand!* But she had hold of his arm and was looking up at him and saying, "Why did you ask me that, Bill?"

"I'll show you," he said.

The organ was dying, the platform coming to a stop. A dozen kids scampered off, yelling. The horses on their posts were gaudy and looked almost alive.

Gregg scooped the girl out of the chair. Her body was warm in his arms. He stepped onto the platform and lowered her gently into a golden chariot drawn by four white horses.

She looked at him, her face flushed. She looked eighteen. In a breathless voice she said, "Now I'm the queen, aren't I, Bill?"

"Yeah," he said, and he wasn't certain of what he was saying. "And you're going to the ball."

He stepped down as the merry-go-round started up. He had the straight of it now. Hattery had heard about the fifty grand and had hooked himself a sucker. And while the Law was playing tag on the Main Drag tomorrow night, Hattery and Slim would be prying open City Hall and latching onto fifty grand.

Not if he got there first.

The longer he thought about it, the sweeter it looked.

The merry-go-round came to a stop, and he tossed the attendant another quarter. Chris waved at him and he grinned in answer. Her face was bright with excitement.

She was some kid all right. And that lousy sneaking punk of a Bowers in with Hattery to rob his own town of fifty grand! Probably figuring on how to break it off with the girl, too. Sure, he was in it all right. Hattery wasn't one to make up to a guy unless he figured to use him. The punk probably knew the whole setup. And he'd be getting his cut.

If Hattery paid off, that is, and Gregg had that all figured.

The thing to do now was to get rid of the dame. Hell, you couldn't call a kid

like that a dame. This was the kind that got under your skin.

She was surely something, though. Never a word of complaint. Trusting as a little kid. Imagine, picking her up just like that.

The two old crows came waddling across the sawdust, chattering away. One was scrawny, with a sharp beak and bird eyes, the other nothing but corset and bulges. Chris waved to them as the merry-go-round wheezed to a stop. Corset smirked and Bird Eyes bobbed her head.

Gregg lifted the beaming girl from the chariot. "Hello, princess," he said.

"Oh, Bill, it was wonderful!" He lowered her in the chair. Her arms came slowly away from around his neck.

"Isn't it too bad? They say she'll never walk again. And so young—" It was Corset, her mouth prim and tight.

The hands that slid from Gregg's shoulders suddenly became rigid, then dropped as if all the strength had gone from them. An awful rage welled up inside him and he whirled, wanting to smash the words down the woman's throat. His fists clenched. "Beat it!" he said. "Get the hell away from here!" and the women cringed but held firm.

"Well, it's true!" Bird Eyes blurted. "We heard it said—"

He started toward them.

"Bill! Oh, please, Bill!"

He stopped. "Beat it," he whispered, and the women stumbled against each other in getting away.

He turned back to the girl, and he couldn't look at her. Now the poor kid's evening was all loused up. "It's all right," she said. "It's just something that comes with—this—"

"Damn them to hell!" he said.

"Don't say that, Bill! They didn't mean—"

"They meant it all right. They meant for you to hear. But don't you believe them. Don't even listen to that kind of talk." He grabbed her shoulders and shook her roughly. "It's not true! You've got to believe that it's not true!"

She searched his eyes. After a moment she said quietly, "I believe it, Bill. Will you please take me home now? I don't think I want to watch the dancing tonight."

She lived nearby, in a white cottage. A greying, friendly looking man rose from the porch to greet them. She introduced her father and they talked for a few minutes. Then Gregg excused himself and went away. There were other things he needed to think about.

Morning sunlight stabbed past the curtains, flattened in broad streaks across the faded rug. It was hot in the room, even with the curtains open, and he couldn't get that girl out of his head.

He got up and reached the holstered automatic from beneath the pillow and strapped it on. Then he washed and dressed and went downstairs to have breakfast at that joint around the corner.

Eating, he planned the day. There was the City Hall to get straight in his mind. It would be easy to case the building while this *fiesta* was going on. And he'd have to figure some way of getting out of this town.

HE GOT up and reached for the money to pay his bill. Next to the cash register was a poster with the day's events listed. The mock stage holdup was scheduled for eight P.M. It would be a good idea to check on a freight going out about that time.

He'd have to keep out of sight today as much as possible, though. If Hattery knew he was around, it would queer everything. And suppose that punk Bowers had mentioned his name! But all that punk had been thinking of was getting away from the girl. He wondered what she was doing right now, right this minute.

He stood in the doorway of the joint, the taste of coffee thick in his mouth. Then he pulled his hat down a little and moved unhurriedly along the sidewalk.

It was getting close to seven o'clock in the evening, and he hadn't once caught sight of Hattery or Slim. But he'd seen plenty of the town. It wasn't so much the dump he'd first figured it to be, especially where they had the residential streets shaded with big trees.

Out where they had the carnival now was where they were planning to build the big hospital. The one they had now was nothing much. Like Chris had said, they sure needed a new one.

But now, with evening on him, he could feel what lay ahead working around inside him. He could feel it tightening up to a knot in his head, pushing hard against his other thoughts. They had the Main Drag roped off now along both sides and the sidewalks were filling rapidly for the big event. Everybody was happy, and it felt as if they were reaching out to draw him into it. Something old was going out of him and something new was coming in, and he couldn't get the straight of it.

Maybe a couple of fast drinks would fix him. Maybe seeing that girl once more would make him laugh at himself, but he hadn't even had a glimpse of her. Just let him get his hands on that fifty grand! That would tear this hunger out of him.

That rattler was coming into the yards at ten past eight. He had the schedule fixed in his head. If everything went, he'd be on it for sure. That was the thing to keep uppermost in his mind.

Still, though, looking at all this swirling happiness, he wanted to get in on it. Just like Chris in her wheelchair.

He turned abruptly, his head lowered, and pushed through the crowd. The sound of it diminished behind him. A chill touched the emptiness inside his stomach. Two blocks, three blocks, and the streets grew deserted, only a last few hurrying towards the center of activity. City Hall rose out of the night, an ugly brick building with a half moon dome. He approached warily across the lawn, remembering how the grass was faded and worn in spots, like an old rug. To one side a huge pepper tree grew, and he settled himself against it and waited. A cat scooted by, its tail pointed at the sky.

There was a sudden flash of dull light from a second floor window. Then there sounded the almost inaudible report of a shot. *You're late, sucker! They got here ahead of you. . . .*

Gregg moved like a shadow to the back door, set high at the top of cement steps. He remembered the plank floors and the wooden stairs inside, and he bent and pulled off his shoes, leaving them on the grass, next to the steps. The door was unlocked. He slid inside, moved on silent stocking feet down the dark, musty hallway.

Going up the stairs, he could hear the sound of ripping metal. To his right, a door was ajar, and in the faint light that came from inside he saw the body slumped against it, and his hand reached for the automatic. The body had been a punk named Bob Bowers. Now he was a dead punk. Gregg held the automatic flat against his middle, bending over a little as he advanced on the door.

Suddenly there was a great relief in him, and he knew why. It was as if the things that had been holding him together all of his life had dropped away, and even with them gone he was still his own man. He didn't know how it had happened, but he did know that he was not going in there to kill Hattery, but only to stop him from taking the money.

Behind him the voice said, "Hold it right there," and something jabbed hard against his spine. His nerves leaped but he didn't move until the hand flattened against his back and pushed him into the

room. And then at last he saw Hattery.

THE ROOM was an office, with an old fashioned roll-top desk and rows of leatherbound books behind glass doors. The safe in the corner was open, there was a tin box on the desk, and the cutters that had torn its top off lay next to the flashlight that was partially shielded by an open book standing on its edge. Hattery had his head turned, a tight smile on his face. But his light blue eyes were cold and calculating, and not in the least surprised to see Gregg. He said, "I expected you sooner, Bill."

Gregg just looked at him. Slim stepped across the Punk's body, a gun in his hand. Hattery finished taking packaged paper money from the box, transferring it to his pockets. Then he turned to face Gregg. "You're not very bright," he said, "which was the reason I thought it best to get rid of you once before. I suppose it never occurred to you that I might have had ways of finding out when you got out. You wouldn't, you're not very bright. Ten minutes after you registered at that hotel, I knew about it. You've been watched ever since."

"Since you're that good," Gregg said softly, "maybe you can read my thoughts."

"That's easy. Get rid of us and take the money. Well, it won't go like that. You're going to stay here, like Bowers—just like Bowers."

"Good, but not good enough," Gregg said. The slim man was on his left, some six feet away. Gregg still had the automatic pressed against his middle, pointing at Slim. He triggered twice, whirled and pointed the gun at Hattery as Slim crumpled and slid to the floor. For a moment, Hattery stared at the tall man. Then he made an awkward dive behind the desk, one hand fumbling inside his coat. Gregg's shot caught him in back of the ear, and as Hattery fell, there sounded the hoot of a locomotive.

Fifty grand. The bulging pockets of Hattery's coat. Gregg looked down at him. He was dead, sure enough. *Fifty grand.*

Slim had that look too. *I got to get out of here,* Gregg thought. He looked at the automatic, tore off his neckerchief and wiped it clean. Then he tossed it next to the punk's body.

That would fix it just right. Bowers had wanted to be a hero. Now he was one—a dead hero. That's what the town would think.

Gregg went outside, got his shoes and put them on. There was no sign of alarm, and now he understood why. There were shots coming from the center of town, part of the mock stage holdup. He headed in that direction.

It was just ending when he got there, the people moving away from the Main Drag. The wheelchair rolled to a stop at the curb, and Gregg got there before anyone could turn to help. Without a word he eased the girl across the street, she turning her head and said, "Bill! It's so nice to see you again."

"I thought you'd be with this Bowers guy," he said carefully.

She shook her head, and something caught at his heart. She said, "He came by last night. I guess we both knew it wouldn't work, so I broke it off. I think he was kind of relieved." She was silent for a moment. Then, "I—kept thinking about what you said last night, and I saw the doctor today."

He didn't speak. He thought, *It doesn't make any difference how it comes out. I want you to be better, but it will never make any difference in how I feel.* But he didn't speak.

She said, "It's going to be all right. He showed me x-rays. He's certain everything will turn out all right."

There was a cry on the corner behind them. People were running that way. Somebody must have found out about

City Hall. Let the suckers figure it.

Christine said, "What is it, Bill? What do you suppose has happened?"

"I'll find out," he said, "if you'll promise to stay right here."

"I promise," she said. "And, Bill—you'll be back?"

"Yes," he said, "I'll be back."

A little wind sprang up, seeming to rush the crowd along. They had found out at City Hall all right. He felt no regret. *She won't take it too hard about the punk,* he thought. Anyway, he'd be around to make her forget. There should be plenty of jobs for a man in this ranch country. Some day he would tell her that he had served time. But that could wait for a bit.

The thoughts kept rushing around in his head. After a while he turned back, and when he saw her, still waiting, he waved and broke into a run.

Cipher Solvers' Club for May, 1949

Current Grand Total: 904,471 Answers

Eleven Answers—°Aachen, 3377; °Case Ace, 1253; †John Aitken, 233; °Alphamega, 533; °Amoroj, 543; °Attempt, 846; °S. H. Berwald, 1071; °Alpha Bet, 1864; °Florence B. Boulton, 539; °Gold Bug, 1735; °Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 4015; °Carso, 1996; °Bessie Casey, 692; °Ciphermit, 3659; °R. C. C., 650; Eleanor Curran, 11; °M. E. Cutcomb, 571; °Kay Dee, 743; †Honey Dew, 163; °Drol, 2205; °M. E., 3853; °Eve Eden, 1385; °Efdee, 1452; °Engineer 111, 1886; °Arty Ess, 4009; °Estece, 1910; †Evie, 461; °Femo, 800; °LeRoy A. Guidry, 970; †Gyrene, 429; °Henry J. Hacwecker, 2004; °Hayrake, 1484; °T. Hegarty, 3578; °Jack-Hi, 1194; °Hopado, 1531; °H. H., 2118; °Jayel, 4128; °June, 586; °Kate, 2965; °Betty Kelly, 628; °S. A. L., 522; M. J. Martinson, 44; °Theodore W. Midlam, 3369; °Lee A. Miller, 1923; Gum Miner, 81; °Mossback, 2578; †Pablo, 266; °W. F. P., 3153; °Kee Pon, 1193; °Ray F. Richer, 1522; °Wm. G. Ringer, 1515; °Ty Roe, 1559; °Alice Routh, 3935; †Rush, 404; °Mrs. H. A. Seals, 3103; °Kay Vee See, 1733; °R. B. Shrewsbury, 1675; †L. Silverman, 222; °Sam Spiegel, 2790; °M. G. S., 1927; °Jack-Stay, 3838; †Clement E. Taylor, 402; †Miss Tick, 353; °Valkyrie, 1239; †Arline F. Vaughn, 301; °Volund, 1991; †Arthur Whitfield, 467; Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 487; °James H. Williams, 890; °Wilray, 1559; °Ike N. Wynne, 3561; °Doctor X, 4052; °Zizi, 601.

Ten Answers—Alchemnrg, 53; °P. W. B., 1390; †Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 418; †Ray Boyd, 163; †Canco, 163; †Diana Forrest, 119; °Marguerite Gleason, 604; George Hein, Jr., 29; Helcrypt, 33; °Henty, 1074; †Ian, 364; Grace Knapp, 10; °Pearl Knowler, 2476; †J. E. L., 429; °Lucille E. Little, 2162; Ella Nohr, 76; †H. F. Pool, 264; †C. Retherford, 237; °U. Solv'm, 502; †Sourdough, 266; °Nick Spar, 3332; °N. Dak. Ump, 749; °Yarbic, 1076.

Nine Answers—A. E. Cusick, 9.

Eight Answers—Virginia Hawkins, 8.

One Answer—Deer Park, 1; R. Van Trump, 1.

Corrections—†Arline F. Vaughn, 10 answers for Mar., 1949; °E. H. Werner, 9 answers for Mar., 1949; °T. Hegarty, 11 answers for Sept., 1948, not previously credited.

Solving Cipher Secrets

CIPHER SOLVERS' CLUB for JULY, 1949

Eleven Answers—°Aachen, 3388; °Case Ace, 1264; †John Aitken, 244; Alchemurg, 64; °Alphamega, 545; °Amoroj, 555; †Anudem, 415; °Attempt, 857; °See Bee Bee, 2805; °Alpha Bet, 1875; °Florence B. Boulton, 550; °Gold Bug, 1746; °Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 4026; °Carso, 2097; °Bessie Casey, 703; °Ciphermit, 3671; °R. C. C., 661; A. E. Cusick, 20; °M. E. Cutcomb, 582; °Kay Dee, 755; †Honey Dew, 174; °Drol, 2216; °M. E., 3864; °Eve Eden, 1398; °Arty Ess, 4020; °Estece, 1921; †Evie, 472; °Femo, 411; °Clarence P. Greene, 1372; °LeRoy A. Guidry, 982; †Gyrene, 440; °Henry J. Haewecker, 2015; °Hayrake, 1496; °T. Hegarty, 3589; °Jack-Hi, 1205; °Hopado, 1543; °Jaybee, 1125; °Javel, 4139; Jim, 67; °June, 697; °Kate, 2976; °Betty Kelly, 640; †J. E. L., 440; °S. A. L., 533; Sport La. 46; °Marcia, 1230; M. J. Martinson, 55; °Theodore W. Midlam, 3380; °Lee A. Miller, 1934; Gum Miner, 92; °Mossbaek, 2589; †Pablo, 277; °W. F. P., 3164; °Kee Pon, 1204; °B. E. R., 1284; °Ray F. Richer, 1533; °Wm. G. Ringer, 1527; °Alice Routh, 3946; †Rush, 415; °Mrs. H. A. Seals, 3114; °Kay Vee See, 1745; °R. B. Shrewsbury, 1686; †L. Silverman, 233; †Sourdough, 278; °Sam Spiegel, 2801; °M. G. S., 1939; °Statist, 518; °Jack-Stay, 3850; Geraldine Taber, 11; †Clement E. Taylor, 413; †Miss Tick, 364; °Valkyrie, 1251; †Arline F. Vaughn, 312; °Volund, 2003; Leona Watts, 57; †Ruth E. Weiss, 414; †Arthur Whitfield, 478; †Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 499; °James H. Williams, 901; °Ike N. Wynne, 3572; °Doctor X, 4063; °Yarbie, 1087; °Zizi, 615.

Ten Answers—°P. W. B., 1400; †Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 428; †Ray Boyd, 173; °Engineer III, 1896; †Diana Forrest, 129; George Hein, Jr., 40; Helcrypt, 43; °Henty, 1084; †Ian, 374; °Jesse C. Leach, 1215; °Lucille E. Little, 2172; †H. Pool, 274; †C. Retherford, 247; Harold R. Smith, 10; °U. Solv'm, 512; °Nick Spar, 3342; °N. Dak. Ump, 759.

Eight Answers—Mrs. J. D. Hawkins, 16.

Seven Answers—†Zirvab, 187.

Two Answers—Merlin Shute, 2.

One Answer—Rocky, 1.

Corrections—†Ruth E. Weiss, 11 answers for May, 1949. °Marcia and °Jaybee, 11 answers each for Jan., Mar., and May, 1949, not previously credited.

Cipher Solvers' Club for Sept., 1949

Current Grand Total: 906,829 Answers

Eleven Answers—°Aachen, 3399; °Case Ace, 1276; †John Aitken, 255; °Amoroj, 567; °Attempt, 868; †Mrs. H. H. Bailey, 282; °See Bee Bee, 2816; °Alpha Bet, 1886; °Florence B. Boulton, 562; °Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 4038; °Carso, 2018; °Bessie Casey, 714; °Ciphermit, 3683; °R. C. C., 672; °Floyd E. Coss, 1768; °M. E. Cutcomb, 594; °Kay Dee, 767; °Drol, 2227; °M. E., 3875; °Eve Eden, 1408; °Engineer III, 1908; °Arty Ess, 4031; °Estece, 1932; †Evie, 483; °Femo, 822; †Diana Forrest, 140; °LeRoy A. Guidry, 994; †Gyrene, 452; °Henry J. Haewecker, 2026; °Hayrake, 1508; °T. Hegarty, 3600; Helcrypt, 55; °Jack-Hi, 1217; °Hopado, 1555; °Jaybee, 1437; °Javel, 4150; †Jayemen, 294; Jim, 78; °June, 608; °Kate, 2987; °Betty Kelly, 652; Sport La, 57; †J. E. L., 451; °S. A. L., 544; °Marcia, 1242; °Theodore W. Midlam, 3391; °Lee A. Miller, 1945; †Gum Miner, 103; °Mossback, 2600; Muchacho, 35; †Pablo, 289; °W. F. P., 3175; °Kee Pon, 1216; °B. E. R., 1296; †Robbina, 113; °Ray F. Richer, 1544; °Wm. G. Ringer, 1539; °Alice Routh, 3975; †Rush, 427; °Mrs. H. A. Seals, 3125; °Kay Vee See, 1757; °R. B. Shrewsbury, 1697; †L. Silverman, 244; Harold R. Smith, 22; †Sourdough, 290; °Sam Spiegel, 2812; °M. G. S., 1950; °Statist, 530; °Jack-Stay, 3862; †Clement E. Taylor, 424; †Miss Tick, 375; °N. Dak. Ump, 770; °Valkyrie, 1263; †Arline F. Vaughn, 323; °Volund, 2015; Leona Watts, 69; †Ruth E. Weiss, 426; °Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 510; †Arthur Whitfield, 489; °James H. Williams, 912; °Ike N. Wynne, 3583; °Doctor X, 4074; †Zirvab, 198; °Zizi, 625.

Ten Answers—Arale, 20; †Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 438; †Ray Boyd, 183; A. E. Cusick, 30; °Marguerite Gleason, 614; °Henty, 1094; °Pearl Knowler, 2486; °Lucille E. Little, 2182; M. J. Martinson, 65; °Nick Spar, 3352; °Yarbie, 1097.

Nine Answers—°Alphamega, 554; †H. F. Pool, 283; †C. Retherford, 256.

Eight Answers—°Gold Bug, 1754; †Honey Dew, 182; †Wes, 180.

Seven Answers—Contortion, 7. Doc V (Donald Raff), 7.

Six Answers—Mrs. J. D. Hawkins, 22.

Four Answers—Zig-Zag, 4.

Correction—°B. E. R., 11 Answers for Mar., '49, not previously credited.

New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 93)

I felt as if I was being pulled by wires. O'Gar was still looking at the gun which was gripped tightly in my hand.

"Sorry, boy," he said. "You ain't much good with that."

His hand drove for his .45. I'd been watching him. Even with the drop on him I didn't bother with my gun. My hands went under the edge of the table and I tilted it on top of him. It hit him just as his gun came clear and he fell back, cursing.

It staggered him, but he didn't go down. I clipped him on the jaw. He went down now and I jerked his gun away and tossed it into the corner.

He arose slowly, rubbing his jaw. He grinned.

"You fooled me," he said.

Then he was gone, sprinting out of the door. I could hear the sound of the river. I ran to the veranda and he was running down toward the river and the thick covering of underbrush. My first shot sang out and clipped off a twig ahead of him.

Payson stepped around a corner of the cabin. The stock of a Winchester was against his shoulder.

"Hold it!" I said sharply. "I've got to do it."

It was important. I'd always wanted to be like him. Now it was almost as if I were turning the gun on myself. O'Gar was a moving target. But my next shot got him square. I felt suddenly like a complete man.

"Nice shooting," Payson said.

"Best I've ever done," I said. "You heard?"

"Some," he said. "Enough. I trailed along behind like you suggested. Plenty tough, wasn't he? He looked after O'Gar. Well, we'd better go down and pick him up."

Death's Little Darling

(Continued from page 116)

sleep at all that night. He had slept little since the murder, none whatever lately, and he refused to take sedatives when they were suggested.

At five o'clock he rose from his rumpled bed and made coffee in his bachelor apartment. He would be leaving it soon, for a suburban cottage, with an elderly housekeeper. He could afford that now. He had been promoted since his special training.

He drank three cupfuls and sat at a window, smoking endlessly and watching the clock. He was not an overly imaginative man, but he had seen executions. He could picture each step of the preparation. Later he learned that Frank had refused to see a priest.

"I've got nothing to confess," Frank had said.

At five after six Johnny Hanrahan stubbed a cigarette into the full tray beside him and rose. The apartment was cool, but great globules of sweat stood out on his face. He crossed to a dresser, reached under a pile of clean shirts and got the Banker's Special. He left the apartment and walked through the sunrise to the river bridge. He threw the murder gun in the river.

He had already taken out adoption papers. The kid wouldn't have to grow up as an orphan, as Johnny had, now. That was the bargain with Frank, the terrible bargain with the man who also argued that he deserved the death penalty since he had gone to Valdini's office intending to kill him.

Of the three men who loved Jenny Jones, Johnny Hanrahan did it the hardest way. She never knew he loved her. A good man otherwise, he lived with the fact that he was a double murderer. The state killed Frank, but Johnny could have saved him. Frank's visit to Valdini had been a few minutes too late.

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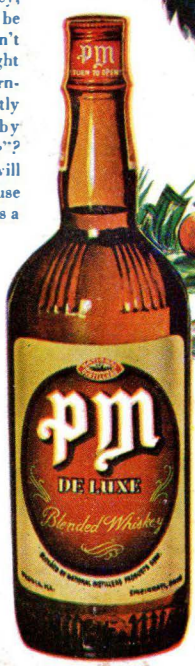

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